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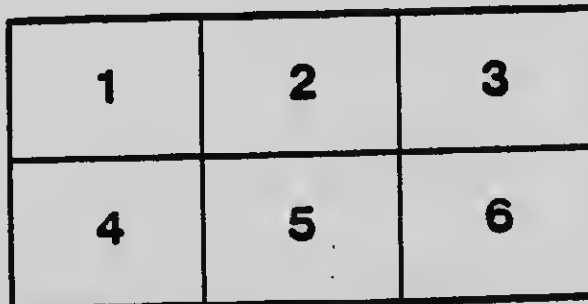
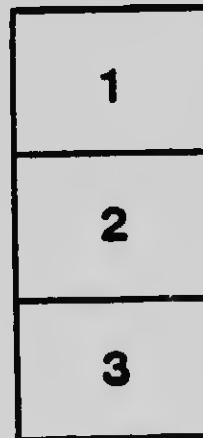
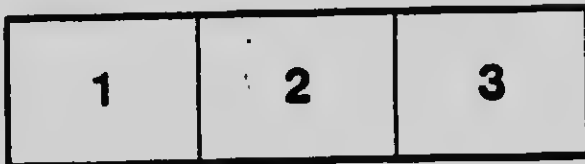
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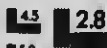
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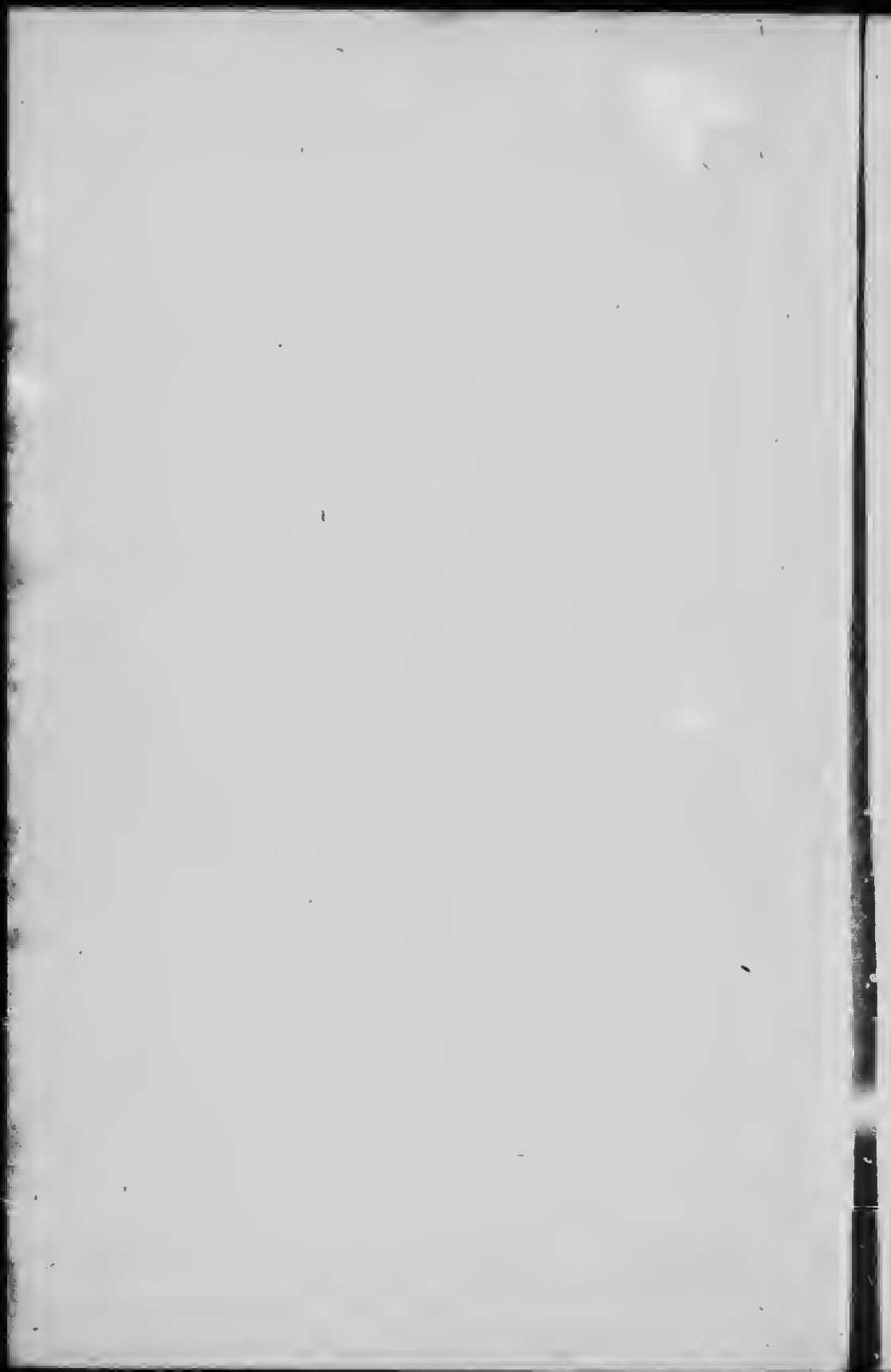
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*The Edge of Circumstance*

"A Tramp is a queer confection, of all that's nasty an' cheap,  
Put up for an Owner's delection while the Boord o' Trade's asleep;  
She's a kind o' chatt'rin' conundrum, run by the Firm for Self,  
Men, ye ken, wha'll never look glum, so long as she brings in the pelf.

She's a feckless sort o' coffin, danbed deep wi' putty an' paint,  
A thing, ye ken, men sin in, an' bring on their sons a taint.  
A bet'rodox kind of a packet, set on the seas ta grin,  
Carryin' men's lives in her pocket, as handy ta work as a bin."

- *Songs of M'Grabbut, the Engineer.*



*The Edge  
of Circumstance*

*A STORY OF THE SEA*

BY

EDWARD NOBLE

THIRD IMPRESSION

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WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS  
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1905

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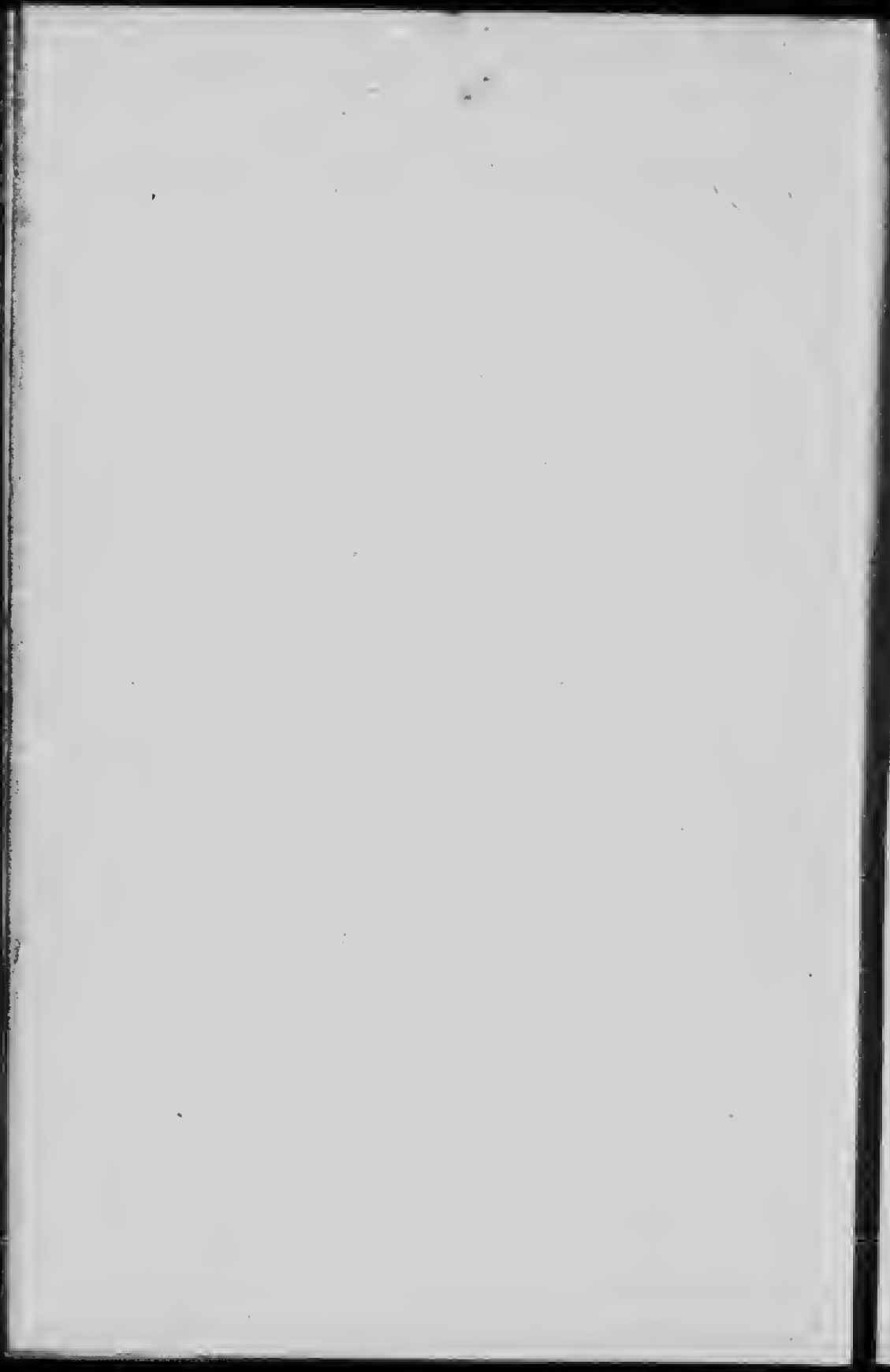
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*TO THE MEMORY OF THAT BRAVE  
HEART WHO READ THESE PAGES  
IN MANUSCRIPT BUT WILL NEVER  
READ THEM IN THE BOOK.*



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THE EDGE OF CIRCUMSTANCE.

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PART I.—THE MASTERPIECE.

CHAPTER I.

THE BIRTH OF THE *TITAN*.

IN scandalous disregard of her mundane employment, Arun's pretty daughter christened her the *Titan*; but the dock people, when first she came round to Cardiff, pronounced it differently. They suggested, in deference to the owner's announcement that the vessel was practically unsinkable, that she should be called the *Tite 'un*; and, until a "Dutch" crew handed her down, after some experiment, as the *Schweinigel*, the *Tite 'un* sufficed for all who saw her strange shape in the docks.

She was the latest addition to the fleet of Messrs Joseffs, Arun, & Schlange, and was the outcome solely of the managing owner's scientific attainments,—at least that is what that gentleman more than hinted; but there were others, captious persons prone to criti-

## 2 The Edge of Circumstance.

cism, who said she was the outcome rather of Arun's love of gold, and of his desire to emulate the position of those who shine as millionaire beacons in the social columns of modern newspapers.

Arun affirmed, so said his friends, that ships should be constructed in such a fashion as to render them practically unsinkable, as far as the "Act of God" was concerned. Of course he was prepared to admit that nothing could save a vessel driven full speed on the rocks: but that was the work of a fool or a madman, and he took care he had none of that breed in his employment. They said, too, that he was tired of interviewing the widows and orphans of drowned sailor-men, and that if he had his way, he would cause a revolution in the shipbuilding trade.

Joseffs and Schlange agreed that, on the whole, some sort of upheaval was necessary; but they stipulated that the revolution should take the form of increased carrying power, diminished "portage bills," greater speed, and smaller coal consumption.

"In point of fact," said Joseffs, as they discussed the matter finally, "I see no reason why, in the near future, with our scientific knowledge, a vessel should not be run by half a dozen men, or less. Mind," he went on impressively, "I don't say we have arrived at that stage of perfection yet—indeed I think that perhaps you are unduly sanguine; still, I conceive that we are approaching it, and that you, with your practical knowledge of displacements, gravities, and what not, are the very man to build the ship you suggest. With the aid of experts you should be able to double the profits of the firm; double them



## The Birth of the *Titan*.

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by all means, my friend—you will not find me growl." And the big man, converted against his wisdom, smiled leniently on the enthusiast.

There were three partners in this business—Joseffs, the financier; Arun, the managing owner; and Schlange, the linguist and foreign correspondent, a man recently admitted into the firm, who visited all the ports of Europe and saved the house much from the hands of peculant agencies. But of these three the senior alone had an assured position. Joseffs was an able man, drawing a very considerable revenue from the business which he himself had founded; Arun and Schlange, on the other hand, were in receipt of smaller portions, and each considered the other superfluous.

Thus it was a battle between the juniors which should oust the other. Arun, who had brains, strove to find the capital necessary to remove Schlange; and Schlange, endowed by the gods chiefly with a large private fortune, aimed at the more definite problem of cutting the ground from under Arun's feet.

Two men more in opposition could not easily be discovered. Arun, the enthusiast, the visionary, subtle, nervous, shrewd,—a man who would hesitate at nothing, who could argue himself into any belief; and Schlange, the phlegmatic, level-headed German, whose analysis of the firm's difficulties was comprehended in the phrase, "We suffer from misapplied energy; we lack the direction of a master hand: I, myself, am prepared to be that master." And again, when contemplating Arun's manner after the argument which brought him to vote for the new ship's

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construction, he put it in the way of a suggestion: "Nerves are ze devil's condribution to God's handivork. A child vith nerves should be soffocate by ze parson at ze fondt, as a brotest against ze devil's bower." But to Joseffs he said, "Nerves and pizness are not in sympathy," then sat back to watch.

It is dne to him to say that from the onset Schlange had no misconception of the result. He believed the *Titan* would be a failure; but, for the same reason, he seconded Arun's scheme so vigorously that Joseffs found himself drawn from his usual conservatism, and the plan was accepted. Thus to Arun alone belongs the distinction of having suggested the *Titan*, and, with her advent, the notion that she should be worked on co-operative principles—a system he desired presently to introduce into the whole fleet.

He was a dapper little man with a big head, well-padded shoulders, a long thin nose with a heavy tip, twinkling black eyes, and a stiletto-ended moustache. His friend said that he was a scientist, and he carried his head high in the knowledge; but at this time, and in his heart, Arun, the sorrower over the woes of widows and orphans, knew of only one science—the science of money-getting, the science of unseating Schlange and placing himself on the double pedestal. He was, in point of fact, a shrewd business man who held a theory that it would be quite possible to lessen the cost of working steamships; and it was with no notion of reducing the firm's profits that he asked for a free hand, but to augment them. Hidden behind the phrases with which he covered his argu-

ments was the keynote to his character—he believed in patents. Next to himself—placed, as one might say, *pari passu* with his egoism—was this dominating creed, this child-like faith in patents. He was no scientist; he was a visionary. And when a system was placed before him which common-sense and practical illustration vouched for in the laboratory, he adopted it—provided always that it was a labour-saving, economising machine, and that the Board of Trade would pass it.

His partners listened. Indeed they could do no less, for the man's energy was unflagging, his will unbending, his resourcefulness a thing at which they marvelled; besides, the man's genius for cutting expenses was a matter in which they secretly revelled.

By the more discriminating dock people, the *Titan's* birth was explained by a simpler theory. They pointed with a finger of scorn to the *Strongbow*, a steamer owned by the firm which had collided and sunk under suspicious circumstances, and suggested that Joseffs, Arun, & Schlange had burned their fingers over this business, and now strove, by the innovation of untried formulæ, to enhance their profits at the risk of men's lives. But this was obviously distorted opinion: the opinion of malcontents; unworthy a second thought. The firm knew nothing of formulæ; they put it in the pigeon-hole with last year's disaster, and Arun fitted to and fro between the office and shipyard like a man with a bee in his bonnet.

Thus, after twelve months' attention to details they did not comprehend, the firm was saddled with a

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steamship of a new type—the *Titan*,—a cargo-wallah that registered less and would carry more than any known species of tramp afloat; a vessel that could, in consequence, be worked by fewer hands, and on a smaller coal consumption, than any other of her tonnage sailing out of the port of Cardiff.

A boat which would require less stores, less food, fewer sailors and firemen,—less, indeed, of everything costing money,—was of necessity a blessing in disguise at this juncture, an invention to be proud of; and Arun's partners clapped him heartily on the back—Josefis in good faith, Schlange wit' nis tongue in his cheek; while, outside, the chorue of praise waxed jubilant: "science," it reiterated, "can do all things."

The vessel had been built with an eye on the letter of the Plimsoil law. She had beam, she had length, she had many water-tight bulkheads; but her hold was shallow, and the resultant free-board<sup>1</sup> a matter of inches. She was a cross between the wall-sided tramp of everyday life and a fighting ship of the *Trafalgar* class. She had patent steel houses amidships, patent wing hatches on the "fighting deck," and patent derrioke to feed them. She carried twin patent telescopic masts, patent stockless anchors, patent windlass, patent winches, patent steering-gear; and, as Tallat said, her engine-room was a working model of all the patents extant,—“you touch the button, we do the rest; a man and a good fat boy could work her.”

Now Tallat was the genius who, under Arun's

<sup>1</sup> Space between deck line and water line.

guidance, had been in charge of the *Titan*, during the process of building, as the firm's representative. It was understood, also, that he would sign articles as chief engineer of that box of puzzles when the vessel was ready to sail; and there is no doubt but that he intended to carry out his promise when he undertook the vessel's supervision. But when he saw her afloat, and remembered the circumstances of her construction, he felt a certain disinclination to carry out this portion of his agreement. He discovered, quite suddenly, that he was no longer young; that life is short; that a married man's place is by his wife; that, without adequate recompense, an engineer has no inducement to hasten his end by "sky'ooting around on the face of the waters in a bathing-machine." Ten pounds a-month, even with a prospective share, did not seem to him to be adequate recompense.

These views coincided with the announcement Arun made one day shortly after lunch. The *Titan*, he explained, was not only a novel vessel, but she would be worked on a novel principle—the principle of Co-operation. Tallat listened. He agreed that the theory was beautiful. He went further, and hoped that soon the matter would be recognised more widely. He said that he considered it the only just way in which a man should work; but, when it became necessary to engage the crew, Tallat was taken ill. His doctor wrote that he suffered from influenza; but Arun scouted the idea. "Who," he asked, "ever heard of a <sup>1</sup> *Engage* engineer being

<sup>1</sup> Engage

## 8 The Edge of Circumstance.

troubled with influenza?" Schlange made no remark. He dispatched a clerk to make inquiries, and Tallat's wife sent word that her husband was light-headed. Then Arun swore.

But the dock folk had taken the engineer's measure together with the *Titan's*, and declared that he was only "long-headed," and, curiously, found no reason for blame. Indeed, they went much further. They said that Tallat never intended to engineer the *Titan*,—that he was only bent on engineering certain payments which a judicious firm of shipbuilders considered the just "emolument" of a gentleman who "passed" their handiwork without protest; they added, that the pay Messrs Joseffs & Co. had considered sufficient for Tallat's sustenance had been quadrupled by the "emoluments" in question, and promise to drink his health when "the *Tite 'un* had sailed."

Putting this aside as the unconsidered gossip of individuals jealous of a shipowner's status, the result to Arun was a position of some difficulty at the precise moment when it was essential there should be no hitch. Give a man a bad name and he is hanged already; give a ship a bad name and she will not readily find a crew. The notion runs on parallel lines; Arun knew it, but he considered it necessary that the engineer who had helped him so efficiently hitherto should take the ship to sea and prove her. He sent, therefore, a messenger to Tallat telling him that the berth should be kept vacant for him until the day of sailing; he might sign on at home. Then the engineer became very ill. Complications were feared; pneumonia, heart disease, mental collapse

## The Birth of the *Titan*. 9

were hinted at, and a doctor's certificate rendered it hopeless to wait,—and again Arun swore.

It now became necessary to seek a new chief engineer in addition to a competent commander—a matter which had already been found difficult in view of the vessel's curious appearance, but perhaps more especially because of the unusual terms.

Any number of supremely confident men applied, but on investigation they always seemed unfit for the positions. Good men stared hard at her and passed by with a wan smile. Hungry men looked at her twice, then decided to tighten their belts. The firm's engineers and captains expressed their inability to grasp so many new points at once. They said she was the sort of thing a man needed to grow up with, in a manner of speaking, and that, in their opinion, only young and acrobatic officers were designed by Providence to take her seaward. If the firm had no distinct objection, they would prefer to retain their old ships.

The firm had an objection. It tried coercion; but the coerced men fell ill, or sent in their resignations, and Arun had no wish to unpeople the fleet; so after a while he gave it up, and it became necessary to advertise. This was done warily, without any hint of the vessel's name, and in due course the office was flooded with applicants. But they departed with a tired expression, one after another, on learning what they were to command, and Arun was in despair.

Matters had reached an acute stage when, on the morning of the day on which the *Titan* was to leave the tips, a man stepped into the office and asked to

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see the managing owner. He was a seaman, and obviously a stranger to Cardiff. The clerk decided these points off-hand, and hurried him in. Arun, too, met him with marked cordiality, motioning him to a seat.

"You are Captain Robert Shirwill, of Liverpool," he remarked, glancing at the card. "What can I do for you?"

"I came, sir," said the skipper, speaking in short gusty sentences and with marked eagerness, "in reference to an advertisement I saw in the papers. I was at home—in Liverpool. I came at once. I understand you require—a captain and a chief engineer. I beg to put in my papers and those of my friend, M'Grabbut. Till lately he was chief of one of Cotton's boats,—Liverpool to West Coast,—and I was in command of another."

Arun made a gesture of assent and turned to examine the papers. "I see," he said, "that you have been captain for some while?"

"Twelve years, sir. Most of them spent in Cotton's boats."

"Why did you leave?"

"Because they passed a man over my head."

Arun glanced up quickly and his eyes sparkled; but he only said, "Ah! I see. And now I suppose you regret it."

"In a way I do, sir," said Shirwill boldly. "And that way lies difficulty."

"Married, I suppose?" Arun questioned again.

"Yes, sir—and a family."

"I see. H-m-m-m-m." The owner's eyes looked



over the edge of the papers; they travelled slowly up and down the applicant. A man of medium height sat before him; square-shouldered, strong, with a clean-shaven face, firm mouth, and determined chin,—evidently a man of some character. Arun decided to engage him. Their eyes met, and the owner's fell. "H-m-m-m!" he said. "Yes—I see." He added, "I think perhaps I may be able to assist you. No—not at all; your papers are excellent, so also are your friend's."

Shirwill murmured a fitting response and Arun resumed: "Indeed, I think, if we can arrange terms, I shall be able to engage you off-hand."

"Those," said the skipper, as he faced him with squared shoulders and resolute face, "should not be impossible, provided you don't require me to invest. I tell you at once that I can't do that."

"I don't ask it, sir."

Shirwill did not wince. He looked up with the remark, "It is so usual for a captain to hold a share that I think my remark needs no apology."

"Precisely. I quite agree with you; but that is not our method. It is, perhaps, scarcely the method of the future; still, I don't think a mere question of terms should form an obstacle."

Shirwill bowed and Arun went on: "They should not form an obstacle, but—first I should premise, that we do not pay our captains as some firms do. We are believers in co-operation,—in the mutual interests system; a system which one day, I make no doubt, will be much more widely adopted than it is at present.

"We pay," said Arun, taking up a blue pencil and

making notes as he spoke, "a small retaining salary, —£10 a-month to be precise,—and give the captain a share in the net profits of the voyage—the net profits, you understand?"

"Quite so, after allowing working expenses—I see. And what, may I ask, is the share worth?"

Arun watched him over folded arms. "That," he said, "is a matter we leave entirely to our captains. The more the ship earns, the more they gain. The wealthier you grow, captain, the wealthier I expect to grow. You see the principle?"

Shirwill squared his wrists on his knees, sitting bolt upright. "I do," he said. "It sounds very comfortable. But, if I may ask the question, what do you tally the share to be worth on an average voyage?"

Arun shrugged his shoulders. "I can scarcely give you figures," he remarked. "You see she is a new ship,—on her first voyage, in fact, and stands entirely on the debit side of the ledger. But I can guide you so far: we allow the captain two per cent on the net profits of each voyage. The ship will be employed regularly, and will average four trips in the year. Suppose we say she clears £3000 a voyage,—a very fair assumption,—then your share would be worth £60 a trip; or in the year, £240. What do you say, captain?"

Shirwill rose to his feet. "I say, sir, that it is a very fair offer, and if it works out like that you'll find me satisfied. And the engineer—does his pay run on the same lines?"

"With certain modifications, which we are bound to make in view of the fact that an engineer belongs

to a society which prohibits him from accepting less than a certain sum per month. Thus his wages will be £12 a-month, and his share one per cent instead of two—figures which, run out on the same basis as in your case, show a salary, all told, of £264 per annum."

"That will be about £22 a-month?"

"Precisely."

"Then, I think, sir," Shirwill returned, "that I may promise he'll join. Where is the ship lying?"

"First," Arun remarked with a deprecatory inflection, "I think I had better see him; then, if we come to terms, I shall require him to sign a short document at the same time that you do. You have no objection, I presume?"

Captain Shirwill looked a trifle nonplussed. The suggestion was new to him; but he quickly remembered his position and assented.

"I make none, sir," he replied; "and I don't suppose M'Grabbut will either."

"Good. When can you fetch him?"

The skipper consulted his watch. "He can be here," he returned, "in half an hour, if his train's punctual."

"Very well. I will make a point of being in."

Captain Shirwill immediately left the office, and, shortly after the time specified, re-entered with his friend.

M'Grabbut was a tall, big-boned Scotsman, with a full red beard, horny hands, and a heavy bass voice. He acknowledged Arun's salutation with a stiff grace, stroking his beard cautiously. Arun eyed him a

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while in silence, then came to the point without circumlocution.

"Captain Shirwill tells me he has known you for some years, and has every confidence in you," he said. "Your papers speak for themselves."

The engineer passed his hand down his beard and looked at the skipper. He said very slowly, "It's varra gude o' ye, Bob Shirwill, an' I'll no forget it."

Arun quickly broke in on his thanks. "Your papers," he insisted, "speak for themselves and for you. They are excellent; and coming, as you do, from a firm of such standing as Cotton's, is sufficient guarantee of your ability."

"Now it is only by chance that I have a vacancy. The engineer who supervised my vessel's construction, and who was to have remained in charge of her, has been taken seriously ill. Hence at the last moment I am obliged to find a new man."

"I need not disguise from you," Arun continued as he turned over a bundle of papers, "that I have had shoals of applications. But I desire, if possible, that my captain and chief engineer should be on speaking terms. I wish them to know each other in order that we may avoid the frequent friction that is, as you know, so painfully pronounced between the two departments. And for that reason, Mr M'Grabbut, I am disposed to accept your application—provided always that we can come to terms."

M'Grabbut looked extremely interested. "On that point, sir," he said, "there should be but little difficulty."

Arun waited. Shirwill had made precisely the

same remark. It seemed possible the engineer would desire to add something. But he only stroked his beard in thoughtful fashion and waited also. Arun resumed.

"Captain Shirwill has doubtless explained our system. Co-operation; community of interests; labour and capital working hand in hand for their mutual advantage."

"It's a grund preinciple, sir," said M'Grabbut, and again fell into silence.

Arun watched his man—but he was expressionless; a sphinx; a sealed book; he could not read him. He threw out a suggestion, tentatively: "Then I presume I may understand that you are willing to sign the document to which Captain Shirwill agrees?"

"I shall want," said M'Grabbut from behind his mask, "feefteen pounds a-month. On those tairms I'm your man, sir."

"But that is far less than you will gain by our co-operative system."

"Against coo-operation as an eexperiment in the way o' practical philanthropy," said M'Grabbut with precision, "I hae nothin' ta urge. But if ye ask me ta forego cairtain pounds stairling, in view of a probe-lematical share, then I canna follow your lead."

Arun looked annoyed; but in his heart he knew that he must accept this man on his own terms, or consent to acknowledge himself beaten at the very oute. The *Titan* required an engineer. Time was edingly precious; hitherto, he remembered that he had scarcely been able to get within speaking

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distance of a competent man; still, he decided to temporise. Again he urged his theory. "But surely you do not mean to infer that your share, if you took one, would be valueless?"

"I infair nothing, sir," said M'Grabbut, "for I know nothing o' coo-operation as applied to steamships. I seemly state my position. For feefteen pounds a-month I am willin' ta join yooour ship, and ta work her eeconomically. For less, I do not put foot on board. Bnt ta show ye I hae no avairsion ta shares 'on preinciple, I'll agree ta sign the document for feefteen pounds per month, an' ye can gie me the share as 'comshaw.'"<sup>1</sup>

Arun stared. The man's audacity puzzled him. He was inclined to fancy that already some one had warned him against the ship.

M'Grabbut proceeded cautiously. "Ye'll no be forgettin', Mr Arun, that men do not hanker after 'new jobs,'<sup>2</sup> the mair especially when the eengineer wha has sae far 'passed' her is taken seek sae opportunely."

"No, no!" cried Arun; "that is not a fair remark. The man is ill."

"I withdraw it," said M'Grabbut, "uncondeetionally. It was no induced by any knowledge I have o' the pairson in question, but on general preinciples—an' fra my ain obsairvation."

Arun sat in silence. The man had him in a forked stick. He argued that it might be due simply to

<sup>1</sup> Chinese term for a gift thrown in as an inducement to clinch a bargain.

<sup>2</sup> Engineering term for new engines.

## The Birth of the *Titan*. 17

the natural caution of a Scots man, and again that it might not. He remained uncertain, and decided to waive the point.

"Very well," he said; "I accept your explanation, and engage you on your own terms. But remember, Mr M'Grabbut, I am going some distance to meet you, and I shall look for corresponding assiduity on your part."

Thus the *Titan* obtained her two senior officers, and Captain Shirwill, with his friend M'Grabbut, went down to take a hasty view of their new home, after having bound themselves to Joseffs, Arun, & Schlange for a period of three years, subject to six months' notice on either side.

They came to the Bute Docks, and found their way, towards evening, to tip No 20. The *Titan* lay there waiting in the twilight, her hatches crammed, her decks and houses groaning beneath a coating of dust many inches thick,—a lead-coloured monstrosity, with a pale buff funnel picked out with a cynical device in hearts and crosses on a flaming ground. The two men halted near her bow and stood to examine her.

"Lordy!" groaned the skipper; "what have I brought you to, M'Grabbut. That's no cargo-wallah . . . she's . . . dash my buttons! what the devil is she?"

The engineer eyed her a moment in silence, then he turned to his friend. "What is she?" he repeated. "Losh! man, hoo can ye ask? She's the meesing link—an' a pairfect specimen o' her kind."

He twisted on his heel without further remark,

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and, climbing on board, vanished through the engine-room door. Half an hour later he again made his appearance, and joined Shirwill on the bridge. The skipper watched him with a dull smile.

"What do you make of her?" he questioned.

M'Grabbut stroked his beard and stared into the growing twilight. "Eigh!" he remarked, "but yon's a downy lad. He did weel ta be seek. 'Deed, Bob Shirwill, he did weel ta be seek."



## CHAPTER II.

### THE PRINCIPLE OF CO-OPERATION.

"Wi' all deeference to yoor opinion, sir," said M'Grahbut, as he stood in Arun's room early the following day, "I shall want an extra eengineer, an' twa firemen ower an' above those ye've allowed me."

The managing owner fidgetted in his chair and tugged viciously at the points of his well-waxed moustache.

"It cannot be done," he replied after a moment's consideration. "The thing strikes at the root of the whole system of co-operation."

"It's temptin' Proveedence to sail in sio a vessel at ony time," the engineer persisted, gravely stroking his beard. "I doot ye'd no rest quiet in yoor bed, Mr Arun, if ye knew what like are some o' the feetin's yon shiphuilder fairm conseedered eefficient."

Arun twisted his swivel-chair to face the speaker, and the diamonds on his white hands gleamed.

"I dialike the notion, Mr M'Grahbut," he interrupted; "it creates a precedent. I don't suppose my partners would sanction such a proceeding."

"Wi' bearin's rough-cast an' no so weel trued," M'Grabbut pursued without remorse; "wi' a thrust

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block the like o' which no man has ever seen—held down by bolts that are eennocent o' feetin'——”

“The ship has cost us a heap of money, sir,” Arun interrupted. “We have given her every labour-saving appliance that could be suggested, and she must be worked by the crew we have provided. That was an essential item in our specification. So many engineers, so many mates, so many crew and firemen.”

“Wi' patents in the eengine room,” M'Grabbut continued unabashed, “wi'oot number, or meanin'; wi' patents on deck; wi' patents ower side whose pairts, I obsairve, are mainly in the rough,—the eengineer an' twa firemen are an essential factor if she is to be presairved fra breakdown.”

Arun smiled. He had completely mastered his annoyance. The man spoke so earnestly, so confidentially, and with such evident belief in the firm's *bona fides*, that his persistence struck the owner as something too funny for words. He leaned forward in his chair, and became confidential also.

“Do you know, Mr M'Grabbut,” he questioned, “how your request appears to me?”

The engineer watched him keenly, and stroked his beard.

“Docendo deescimus,” he replied, “there's no sayin'; oor eyes are set to look at things from opposite poles.”

Again Arun smiled genially.

“You are a philosopher, M'Grabbut,” he said, “and something of a scholar. Sit down, and I will tell you. It appears to me that long service in Cotton's boats has unfitted you to tackle a cargo vessel run on co-operative principles. You have been accustomed to

## The Principle of Co-operation. 21

four or five engineers under you, and now you find only two——”

“One and a boilermaker,” said M'Grabbut.

“Who is competent to stand his watch, don't forget that.”

“An' keep me on the mouch day an' night while he's there.”

“Who holds certificates under the Board of Trade for competency.”

“An' has yet to lairn its meanin', sir.”

“If,” said Arun, finding the Scotsman with all the points of the game at his finger's end,—“if you persist in making the worst of everything, I shall be sorry I accepted your papers so readily. I tell you, honestly, I don't wish to gather that impression, for I like you, and think you are losing sight of the most essential point in our arrangement.”

M'Grabbut certainly looked intensely dull as he put the required question. “An' what, sir, might that be?”

“Economy, M'Grabbut.”

The engineer passed his hand down his beard and looked up gravely.

“I'm no varra weel vairsed in the preinciples o' coo-operation,” he remarked, “but I'll pairfect mysel', I make no doot, durin' the run o' oor agreement.”

“But surely even you can see that if we load our venture too heavily with working expenses there will be a very meagre dividend at the end of a twelvemonth. Steamers don't pay as they did, Mr M'Grabbut,” Arun continued with some heat; “but I have given both you and the captain shares in the

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concern, and I am sorry to see you so anxious to spoil your chance of profits."

M'Grahut's hand travelled solemnly down his beard three times before he spoke. He was not a humourist, but the thing tickled his risible faculties immensely. He had much ado to keep a steady eye before the dapper Jew.

"Conseedered from a pairsonal point o' view," he remarked, "I p'fer a modicum o' safety to a hypothetical profit."

"Unless the ship is worked economically, the profits will be nil."

"An engineer at £10, an' twa firemen at £3, 10s. a-month for the trip—say a sum equivalent to £51 stairlin'—will no eat all the profits, sir. It's ta save expense I ask it," he persisted. "We shall be stopped before we're clear o' the Channel, Mr Arun, an' wi'oot goin' into details incriminatin' to yon seek eengineer, 'twill save ye money."

Arun twirled on his chair and struck the gong standing on his writing-table.

"I must consult my partners," he remarked brusquely, and sat waiting until the door opened to admit a clerk.

"See if Mr Joseffs and Mr Schlange are disengaged, Williams," he cried, "and ask them if they will oblige me by stepping here a moment."

The lad departed, and in the course of five minutes the two gentlemen appeared. They crossed to the hearth and stood solemnly warming their backs. Joseffs, tall and fat, with a red face, portentous nose, and full black beard; Schlange, of middle height and

## The Principle of Co-operation. 23

lithe frame, with a moustache trimmed after the fashion of the German emperor, and a tilt of the head on the same model.

Arun turned his chair to face his partners, and a quick glance passed between them.

"I have ventured to trouble you, gentlemen," he remarked in his suavest manner, "on a question to which I have already given an answer, but Mr M'Grabbut does not appear inclined to accept it. This," said Arun, with a wave of his diamonds towards M'Grabbut, "is the engineer we have engaged to take charge of the *Titan*."

Both men regarded the Scotsman as a visitor from some unknown sphere.

"Ah," said Joseffs.

"So," said Schlange.

M'Grabbut bowed, so did Joseffs, so also did Schlange; then all three bent their attention on the managing owner, who resumed with precise diction. "Mr M'Grabbut requires more help in the engine-room than I feel justified in giving. He requires an engineer and two firemen in addition to those we have allowed, and which are certified as sufficient by the Board of Trade."

Joseffs put up his pince-nez.

"On what grounds?" he questioned, with a heavy puckering at the base of his nose.

"Shust so," Schlange repeated; "on vat groundt?"

"Surmise," said Arun with a deprecatory flourish of the diamonds.

"We don't know the word here, sir," Joseffs remarked with monstrous dignity.

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Schlange drew himself to his full height, and his head assumed the emperor tilt.

"Suremise?" he questioned. "A dictionaire in this caze iss vot I vant."

"Wi' yooour permeesion, gentlemen," M'Grabbut interposed, "not surmise, but plain ocular deemonstration, an' the tap o' my hammer."

"Allow Mr Arun to finish, sir, if you please," said Joseffs, with frigid politeness.

"Shust so," Schlange echoed; "von side at ze time iss pest."

"The truth is," Arun resumed with an explanatory wave, "Mr M'Grabbut has been accustomed to have many more men under his command,—a very good fault."

"None petter," Schlange interjected suddenly, "Hein! Ze more ze petter iss goodt. It ze cababilities of ze man brooves."

"You see," said Joseffs, speaking now in more conciliatory tones, "what Mr Arun says. He makes no complaint; indeed the thing is altogether complimentary. It is not every man who can command many."

"Ounless," said Schlange, "zay haf accoustomed to de-cepline been."

"You seem to forget, Mr M'Grabbut," Joseffs resumed with his most portentous frown, "that it is to your interest also to keep down expenses."

"It ze most essential factor of co-operation iss," Schlange remarked with decision, as he eyed the silent engineer with the emperor gaze.

"I have already explained to Mr M'Grabbut," Arun

## The Principle of Co-operation. 25

suggested parenthetically, "that view of the case, but it does not appear to affect the issue."

"It is difficult," said Joseffs, with a sad inflection, "to educate men to the principles of co-operation. Ours has been a hard battle, but we will win in the long-run; we will certainly win."

There was silence after this for some minutes. M'Grabbut felt they were waiting for his reply, so he stroked his beard and became explanatory.

"Gentlemen," he returned, "ye can easily guess I hae no desire to quarrel wi' my bread-an'-butter, but I thought it my duty to lay the matter before ye. If ye are detairmined to reesk what I've pointed oot, why, ye must reesk it. But, in my honest opinion, she will no run forty-eight hours wi'oot a breakdown. I hae no mair to urge."

"Her trials were excellent—never a hitch," said Arun.

"For twa hours at maist," replied M'Grabbut; "an' her eengine-room fu' o' arteeficers an' mechanics guidin' her the while."

"Of that," said Joseffs, "I know nothing."

"It is a matter o' deefinite knowledge, sir," M'Grabbut returned with a bow.

Schlange passed over to the managing owner and spoke to him quietly; then they conferred with Joseffs, who, after many frowns and much head-shaking, turned to the engineer.

"Mr Schlange," he remarked, "has suggested a compromise to which I have given my consent. He has drawn my attention to the fact that, under the terms of our contract, the builders are bound to

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supply an engineer and one assistant to supervise their work during the first six months. We were prepared to waive that clause," Joseffs continued, with a portentous inflation of his big chest, "because we considered it wise to avoid all chance of friction in the engine-room, but, if you insist,—and I cannot help thinking, now that I have heard your reasons, that it may be a wise plan,—I have decided to wire for the men to be sent."

M'Grabbut rose from his chair and faced the partners. In his heart there lurked a strong desire to kick them, individually and collectively, but his eyes showed no sign and his manner was wholly orthodox.

"Gentlemen," he remarked, "the game is yours. I'll do wi'oot a dual control. It's a seestem I don't hanker after."

"I entirely agree with you," said Arun heartily.

"I admire your resolution, Mr M'Grabbut," added Joseffs with a deep inflation; "it does you credit."

"Shust so," Schlange coincided. "I no other zolution bossible could see."

M'Grabbut made no reply. He bowed to the room generally, picked up his cap, and departed to join his vessel.

"I don't like them," said Arun when they were again alone; "but they are good men for all that."

"Zen why you don't like zem?" Schlange questioned in surprise.

"Because they have too much brain—and will give trouble. Fancy an engineer quoting Latin against you," Arun went on as the others remained silent.



## The Principle of Co-operation. 27

"He's a well-read chap: not our sort at all—nor is Shirwill. They are both too brainy."

Schlange took the cigarette from his lips and looked across in wonderment.

"Is it possible," he exclaimed, "zat one too mouch of brain can haff? In Shermany ve etucate, hein! Ve etucate, look you, ontill no more can be possible."

"In Germany," Arun returned with a sarcastic inflection, "you do many things we dare not attempt. You have laws for *lese majesté*; your Emperor's uniform is a thing to bow before; you are ruled and ordered and tucked into your little beds like children,—but it is all done without much turmoil, for your people, despite their education, are slow, amenable to discipline, willing to acknowledge the wisdom of their superiors, and things run as we see.

"Now the educated Anglo-Saxon is a very different kind of beast: you can't mould him and twist him to your liking. If he thinks you are trying to 'do him,' as he calls it, he gets up and talks fight; appeals to his lawyer, and you must alter your tactics or consent to take a drubbing. A sailor with a brain must inevitably become a nuisance to his employer—be he skipper, bo'sun, or merely one of the crew. We don't want thinking men to run ships; we want a man who will take orders, who will make a smart passage, and who will not object to doctor the log-book if the cargo happens to break out damaged."

"But surely," Schlange interrupted, "education is for zese sings more zan necessary?"

"To a certain degree, yes; beyond it, no," Arun

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replied with a snap. "Educate a man to understand who is his superior, that he must obey that superior and never question him, and you have a good type sailor; educate him beyond that point, let him behind the scenes, teach him to reason, and you have a man who will never obey you blindly. That's the point. We require blind obedience. Brains are never blind, and a sailor-man with brains is like a sailor with a wife—handicapped by an encumbrance for which he has no use."

Joseffs laughed aloud, for Schlange showed by his manner that he scarcely appreciated the remark.

"A sailor with brains," he cried, "is like a man with three legs; his habitat demands the use of two only, and the third is always tripping him up."

"We require puppets to run ships," Arun asserted in his most dogmatic fashion. "A man who argues is no use to us; but Captain Shirwill is hungry, and M'Grabbut is his chun. on those strings we can play until they break. By that time, I prophesy, the *Titan* will have proved herself, and we can dispense with them. Otherwise I would never have shipped them."

Late that afternoon they brought the strange steamer to the dock-gates, and discovered a crowd assembled to bid her farewell.

All Cardiff had thronged to see her exit. Merchants, ladies, brokers, dock officials, and the scum of the four continents. Sailors of every nationality were there, — "Dutchmen," Lascars, Dagos, Americans. They stood in solid phalanx to see her pass, shouting words of warning, jeering at her oddity, and cracking

## The Principle of Co-operation. 29

jokes in many languages. But the "Dutch" crew had been taken on board, sober, some hours before, and no lengthy pause was necessary in the basin.

She slid through the open gates with a clatter of winches and a roar of steam, and the Channel opened its mouth to receive her.

"Indeed and indeed she's a beauty," sighed a dock-gateman as he pressed the hydraulic lever.

"Without paint, Mr Williams," returned his subordinate.

"Makes a man's eyes watter to watch her, John Jones."

"Indeed I should not wonder at annything we hear of her, Mr Williams."

"You will nefer hear of her, look you," said Mr Williams. "When she goes it will be sudden—plop! and no stain left to mark the spot."

But the dock men were wrong. The vessel sailed, and after many stoppages reached Malta, where she disgorged into a battleship's bunkers, and the "Dutch" crew fled. Then Shirwill caught a new crowd, and ferried them, blind drunk, to their home while the anchor was apeak and the ship under steam. So they started for the Black Sea in ballast; but even in this trim the *Titan* was an unknown beast. She rolled, plunged, and got rid of her appendages with scientific precision; but she reached her destination, and again her crew fled, leaving their pay behind. This time the second mate accompanied them.

At Sulina, on the Danube, they loaded grain in bulk, and got horribly bitten by a race of giant mosquitoes.

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Then they turned tail and wallowed to Antwerp; thence, again in ballast, to Cardiff, and the dock people rubbed their eyes.

She came in surreptitiously, in the dead of night, with the loss of three of her hands and all her boats, and slunk shamedly to her berth under the tips.

The second voyage was a repetition of the first, with a difference worth consideration. In the space of something less than three months she had again disposed of her boats, five hands, and broken the limbs of two others, including the mate, who had ventured a second trip on a losing hazard.

The Cardiff shipping-master stared when Shirwill and M'Grabbut appeared again to "sign on"; but he made no remark, for his attention was rapidly engrossed by the character of the crew they had engaged. Every man was drunk. Every man was a foreigner,—a Dago to be precise,—and not one understood or spoke a word of English. They would have signed articles as readily on a voyage to hell as in the unknown and unseen tramp.

They sailed for Constantinople with a bellyful of coal and longer davits, in the hope of retaining the boats. But the Maltese Channel took offence as they approached, and whirled up a sea which leaped on board and smashed the boats methodically in sections.

The officials at different ports smiled and said it was evident the vessel considered the presence of boats in the light of an insult; but M'Grabbut stroked his beard and replied that the same remark might in justice be applied to the crews, for she had a way of dispensing with their services also.

## The Principle of Co-operation. 31

The third voyage was a record performance in this way. Seven men took the plunge at different intervals, and four were left in hospital with broken limbs. Then, to make matters worse, at the end of the voyage, when the vessel was on her way from London to Cardiff in ballast, the patent thrust began to wobble. M'Grabbut said it had grown weary of the interminable pitching, and off Lundy several sections lay down quietly and went to sleep.

So Shirwill bargained with a hard-hearted Bristolian who spied her distress and brought his tug alongside. £700 was the cost of the short pleasure-trip between the island and Cardiff docks, and Arun grew white to the tips of his ears when the skipper's order was presented.

Again the dock men stared and prophesied concerning her fate when luck should put her in touch with a gale of wind.

"A gale, look you, John Jones,—not a splutter that a *wholesome* boat would grin at, but a gale, with a sea running that will make her kick the rump off her, look you."

And John Jones reiterated his formula, "Indeed and indeed she iss a peauty, Mr Williams; a peauty without paint."

After this mishap duplicate castings were put on board, and the thrust repaired "by contract." M'Grabbut shook his head, and Arun put a cheque for £10 in his hand on account of his share to date,—a thing which made the Scotsman swear in his beard and consult with Shirwill on the profits of the voyage.

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The two men had studied co-operation for some ten months, and were growing weary of the smallness of their dividends. Their agreements alone prevented them leaving; for it appeared, when at length they succeeded in obtaining copies of these precious documents, that a penalty was attached to any infringement of the contract to which both parties had not agreed,—a penalty which in their case would swallow a voyage's pay and share.

They decided, therefore, that it would be wise to take advice, and with that end in view spent several hours with a solicitor.

This gentleman's opinion was concise. In effect it contained two words only—"Rile him." Then the men went away in peace, for they knew Arun by this time quite as well as that dapper Jew knew himself.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE PARTNERS.

THAT Arun's daughter intended this vessel to be known as the *Titan* is undoubted, for she pronounced the name clearly, and a half-guinea bottle of champagne was broken over the stem in assertion of the fact; but the "Dutch" crew first shipped speedily dubbed her *Schweinigel*, and the sobriquet stuck.

Captain Shirwill vowed it was the only thing that had stuck; but M'Grabbut, the horny-handed engineer, stated roundly that everything stuck—from the patent spring piston-rings and damnable bearings to the new-fangled winches and monstrous thrust. But Shirwill was thinking of the mates who had left her; of the crews who always ran; of the boats, the men, and "fixtnres" on the "fighting deck" which had floated away in the hrine; and of many other matters of which only a shipmaster has cognisance.

Arun, however, attributed the trouble to other causes, chiefly to incapacity; still, until the affair of the tug-boat he had been careful to keep his views from his partners, or only to hint at them in case of eventually being compelled to disclose his mind. And as those gentlemen were each engaged in pro-

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secuting their own designs, and had a distinct recollection of the difficulty they had experienced in securing competent officers, the captain remained.

The Board of Trade officials looked on the vessel askance, it is true; but she conformed gracefully to the letter of all the Acts, and her owners gave lunches which can only be termed munificent. Besides, in spite of all adverse criticism, they could point to her records. A ship that has made three voyages and has sailed successfully in many waters for a space of ten months, can scarcely be termed unseaworthy because she is constructed on novel lines and has a confirmed habit of jettisoning her crews. She may be termed unlucky, but that is no reason for interference.

That the captain and engineer, to say nothing of the men, lived alternately in a salt-water bath and a sweat-box is a matter of small moment. Indeed when this aspect of the case was put before Arun, he went out of his way to defend it. "For," he questioned, "are not our bluejackets in a similar plight? do not they live a sort of submarine existence, and are they any the less hardy for it? As an instance, Joseffs, look at the chaps in the torpedo boats and destroyers: what do you make of them?"

"Sardines," said the senior partner laconically, and turned to enjoy his joke with Schlange.

But Arun was in no humour for frivolity; he knit his brows and warmed his back before the fire in his luxurious room. "I t." you what it is," he said, "sailors are not what tney were. They are getting soft; getting imbued with the spirit of the confounded



age. A pampering legislature has patted them on the back so often and so vigorously, that they are beginning to think they are indispensable,—to dream of combination and all the rest of it. That is a bad sign. It will be the ruin of our race, as it was the ruin of others who have gone before us."

Joseffs' great nose wrinkled at the base, and he laughed sardonically. "To which race are you alluding, my friend," he questioned between the gusts; "to ours—or to Schlange here?"

Arun took no heed of the big man's jest; he continued with his accustomed vigour, "When men begin to think they are indispensable, it is time to put one's foot down. The working men of the present day have too much damned education,—for which, by the way, we pay; they lose their heads in consequence. Now there is Captain Shirwill as a case in point. At first he was quite satisfied with the cheque he received on account of his share; but now he hints that he would like to see our accounts—our accounts, Joseffs,—and wishes to check the disbursements. A man with no education," Arun pursued, with frowning brows and lifted shoulders, "would never dream of that kind of thing; he would be satisfied with your word. But now, the next thing we shall hear is that they require a separate auditor and the Lord alone knows what all."

"And that," said Joseffs, "is the man we rescued from starvation."

"Himmel!" cried Schlange, not to be outdone, "dere iss now no sort of dankfulness for mercies shown. Dere iss only one vay open. Ve moust sack zis

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schipper ant his pig friendt, and choose ourselves mit ozzers in dere plaze."

Joseffs immediately became the head of the firm. "Nay, nay, gentlemen," he suggested, "the men are good in their way; there are others worse. And, between ourselves, we must not forget that the *Titan* is not quite a favourite—yet. Of course," he continued, bowing blandly to the other men, "if Mr Arun finds he is confronted with any sort of insolence, we shall be prepared to back what action he may consider it necessary to take."

"Zat," said Schlange with an emphatic gesture, "goes mit-out zaying."

The senior partner crossed over and took the firm's vantage-ground for argument, standing with his back to the fire, while Arun, annoyed at the turn conversation had taken, flung carelessly into a swivel-chair and faced him. Joseffs resumed at once.

"Besides," he said, "I do not think the men are wholly to blame. They have had a great deal of trouble, and the ship certainly appears to have a rather pronounced appetite for sailor-men; reminds me somewhat of the old Greek legend—or was it Roman, by the way?—of the monster who expected a maiden for his breakfast each Sunday morning, and kicked up no end of a fuss if she didn't turn up."

The man's mythology was all awry, but there was a substratum of truth, and Arun was not in the humour for putting it right, or, indeed, for any kind of explanation. He went straight to the point. "If men will play the fool when a vessel is driving into a seaway, they must take the consequences," he snapped.

"You mean that we must take the consequences?" Joseffs suggested with a tinge of sarcasm.

Arun looked up at the change of tone, and a smile lurked behind his well-groomed moustache. "I don't know," he said, "that they weigh very heavily on either of us, eh, Joseffs?"

"And yet one is sorry—one can't help being sorry," the senior asserted, shaking his massive head. "But," and he brisked up markedly, "but there is no use disguising the fact that we have suffered infinitely more; and, as we are on the subject, I think perhaps it will be well to come to some decision in the matter.

"Now I consider it serious—extremely serious, and I venture to think Schlango will support me. Very well; we are all here, and the *Titan* is about to sail on her fourth trip. The voyages she has already made have been disastrous. Since her launch she has cut capers, and we have been face to face with a money-swallower. We did not bargain for anything of the kind. . . . We asked for a money-spinner, and, I need hardly add, if we find she continues as she has begun, there is only one further caper that I hope to see her perform."

He paused with some abruptness, and stood watching the managing owner's face. Arun looked up, twisting viciously at his moustache. "And that?" he questioned.

Joseffs bent over and stirred the fire. "Her exit, my friend," he said with a frown.

Arun rose and took a dozen turns up and down the room. Schlange looked on, undecided, as yet, whether to side with Joseffs or to allow Arun a further coil of

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rope. It seemed, judging from that gentleman's face, as though the additional line would not be thrown away; indeed the nerves were evidently working comfortably; he could do nothing by interference. As he came to this decision, Arun paused in his walk.

"I think," he said with that dogmatic inflection his partners found so annoying, "you are jumping at conclusions. I suggest that we shall be wise if we suspend judgment a while."

"If we experiment much longer," Joseffs retorted, "the thing will suspend our dividends."

"A sing," Schlange interjected with tragic intonation, "I for von could not afford."

"Better dividends and no ship, than ship and no dividends," Joseffs added, showing a touch of annoyance.

Arun looked from one to another. It dawned upon him that already he must begin to acknowledge failure; that already Tallat had shown his wisdom by falling ill; that the seed he had so liberally sown was already sprouting. Still he was not prepared to throw up the sponge: he applied himself to win his partners over.

"I venture to think," he remarked in a more conciliatory tone, "that if you follow my advice, you will presently be quite satisfied with the *Titan's* behaviour. I admit that, so far, her crews do not stay by her, and that she has lost a certain number; but that is no argument against her as a paying vessel. Sailors don't cost us anything. We are sorry to lose them, but it is a risk they take with their pay, and does not cost us a farthing."

"Still," said Joseffs, "the thing is annoying to a degree. One hears of it on 'Change."

"Shust so. Ze impression is badt—badt."

Arun frowned and continued. "Very well, I go to your second point. The *Titan*, yon say, does not pay. I admit it; but we must not forget that she is a new ship, with several points about her that will add considerably to our revenues when she settles down to work. She has taken a long while to do this; and for that, I think, we must blame Tallat. The man seems to me to have used his opportunities well—for himself, and the result, as far as we are concerned, has been disastrous. Bnt we have no remedy against Tallat: we could not touch him, nor have we any proof that the builders got at him; we know it, but that is insufficient, as you are aware. In point of fact, Tallat is perfectly safe: he is not worth our powder and shot, and we must make good the deficiencies. We can't talk of throwing up the sponge already. It is absurd."

"The vessel has been running ten months," Joseffs asserted. "She should be earning money, not sinking it."

"In that I quite agree."

"The aim and object of all enterprise is money," said Joseffs from his vantage-ground. "We don't propose to run the *Titan* for philanthropy."

Arun remained silent, and the senior partner resumed—

"You must cut down expenses. If she is to continue running, she must be made to pay. What do you propose?"

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"I propose," Arun flashed angrily, "an increased expenditure—for this voyage. I require your assent to three additional hands."

Joseffs moved heavily on the rug, staring at his feet.

"My dear fellow," he said at length, "you must be mad. The thing is absurd."

"Nevertheless it is necessary."

Then, as neither of his companions seemed prepared with an alternative, and would not take upon themselves to pronounce against him, Arun proceeded—

"I see my way farther than you do, if you will allow me to say so. I am looking to the results a few years hence, when we shall have adapted and built other vessels on the same plan, extended our system of co-operation, and established a control. Speed, economy, heavy carrying capacity, and small crews will establish that control. We shall be the first in the field; there is no doubt in my mind. Remember what the China boats have done; recollect how they were laughed at—and then acknowledge the fact as I do; acknowledge that we have only gone some few paces farther along the road, and you will admit that we must succeed.

"No," he went on with enthusiasm, "we are only on the verge of success. We have not tapped it yet; and because we have been the victims of questionable workmanship and scandalous jobbery, is no reason why we should throw up the sponge and vote the ship for sale, or jettison.

"Depend upon it, there is nothing wrong with the vessel. She may shoot her crews—pish! what of that—there are plenty more. Leave it to me. With

the additional help I suggest the engineers can make good many small defects,—defects which should not have existed, but which do exist owing to Tallat,—and you will see . . . the *Titan* will pay. Allow me to get matters levelled out in my own fashion; give me a free hand, and you shall see your dividends—and so shall I."

Joseffs stood with his shoulders lifted, his coat-tails over his arm and his gaze on the ceiling.

"And after this voyage," he said, "we return to the *status quo*?"

"Precisely."

"On no ozzer terms would my conzent be giffen," said Schlange, with a smile of philosophic resignation. "It good not be expected."

Arun had carried his point,—he now moved more easily.

"And, as I said just now," he resumed, "I think our troubles have been accentuated by the wrong type of officers. Shirwill and M'Grabbut are good men, but they are not our sort, and they will have to go. First, I shall let them straighten matters up. They can do it. They are capable enough, and will do it if I give them the additional help. Then, when they return, we can make a clean sweep of it, unless, of course, they are disposed to run quietly in harness."

Again Joseffs intervened suavely, but with decision. "I don't agree with you there, Arun. However, if you insist on the point, I cancel my opinion—get others. Do as you wish; I shall not object, provided you make her pay."

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Arun rose from his chair and turned towards the door. "Very well," he said, "I will make her pay—or——" he paused significantly on the threshold, and Joseffs caught his eye.

"Carry out the 'or,' my friend," he cried with a laugh. "The other is a white elephant—a figure from your imagination. You have too much imagination. There is no money in it—carry out the 'or.'"

He laughed heartily, enjoying his joke with Schlange, and Arun passed to his room to consider the position in the light of the suggestion which had flashed upon him.



## CHAPTER IV.

### ARUN OPENS HIS MIND.

Now the *Schweinigel* had returned from her third trip, and had gotten herself uncomfortably to the tips to receive her quantum of Cardiff coal. Three thousand five hundred tons had found sanctuary somewhere within her rusty partitions, twenty or thirty tons visibly sprawled about the decks, and the hatches yawned shockingly with their mouths full. But she was loaded and ready for sea; and now, in the dreary half-light of a sullen November morning, she crept towards the Basin to find her crew and proceed.

In truth she was an uncanny beast to watch. Any one with an eye for possibilities could tell you hers. The tip-men loathed her presence, the trimmers cursed her volubly in Welsh, and the dock-gate men sneered without shame. Cardiff had no welcome for her.

Flopping in dismal servitude on the grimy half-round was her country's flag, the Red Ensign, looking draggle-tailed and ashamed, like a naughty child perched on a stool for penance. The crews of steamers lying in the docks jeered openly as she sagged past. Cardiff was sick of her. The Sailors' Home officials regarded her as a certain coffin, and the shipping

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master, seeing Shirwill and M'Grabhut the only stickers, concluded they were especially hard up.

Men the *Schweinigel* could not get; for, as Joseffa admitted, she had an ugly record for "missings." Even the "Dutchmen" looked higher, and so, as M'Grabhut said with his cheerful smile, "We just hae ta he content wi' organ-grinders."

Matters these at which a hungry shipowner can afford to smile also.

The organ-grinders were waiting at the pier head, waiting with their new straw heds, their bright tin pannikins, and their debauch-washed faces—ten frowsy, devil-me-care *dagos* and four forlorn Englishmen in charge of the crimps who had sold them. Some were drunk, others merely boisterous; but all wore the dogged look of men who recognised, in some degree, what fate had in store for them.

Arun, the managing owner, was there also. The chill wind had nipped his vitals, and the recollection of his partners' stinging criticisms had so pointed his temper that he had several remarks to make on the scandalous progress his ship had made to the Basin. He objected to the jeering, considered the crew encouraged it, and said so; hut turned on his heel and talked loudly at a clerk when Captain Shirwill became explanatory. This seemed advisahle, for that official's remarks involved details in which a discreet owner has no interest,—remarks which a cautious skipper usually keeps in his throat, or, at all events, does not shout across the dock-gates; hut Shirwill had lost all sense of prudence under the strain of his command, and was chafing considerably at the tactics

in which this firm of co-operative saints indulged. The lawyer's advice, too, rankled in his memory; and as it had become apparent that no other out-at-elbows skipper envied him his post, and that it would be correspondingly difficult to "rile" his owner, Shirwill had become bold to the verge of idiocy.

Arun made no immediate response, but stepped on board as the boat grated beside the dock sill, and turned to face the engineer.

"Well, Mister M'Grabbut," he remarked with special accent on the prefix, and a cross between a sneer and a smile working in his narrow-set eyes, "I trust you are satisfied now we've granted you the extra trimmers, and," here his manner became pointedly offensive, "and that we shall see a distinct saving effected in the coal consumption—an item of expenditure, you'll observe, that has grown with your voyages."

M'Grabbut looked him squarely in the face, and his heart leaped at the opportunity of bandying words.

"In aa' consairns," he remarked, "where coo-operation is a factor, ye'll ken it's ta the employee's beenifit to be carefu' for his ain sake."

Arun waved his hand. "I am speaking of the trimmers I have allowed you over and above the number arranged for in the specifications."

"Treemers!" cried M'Grabbut; "treemers ye ca' 'em. Sir, the rakin's o' Bedlam would no' gie 'em sic a name."

"They cost me two-pun-ten per month apiece, Mister M'Grabbut, and I'll thank you to be less jocular in your remarks."

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"Jo-cular!" groaned the engineer. "Nay, Mr Arun, I doot if it's a matter on which a man has occasion for jo-cularity at aa'. Look at yonder sun, an' tell me what like ye think are oor prospects wi' treemers sic as them?"

Arun shuffled angrily with his feet on the coal-strewn deck. He did not appreciate the man's manner, bnt he recognised that if any one could work those engines, M'Grabbut was the magician. He decided to let it pass; still, his temper could not also concede grace. He turned on him with a touch of hauteur—

"I have nothing to do with the sun, my good man, or the weather. I don't make the weatner. I run ships, Mr M'Grabbnt, and am disinclined to argue."

"Yoonr gude man!" cried M'Grabbut, with his eyes ablaze. "Losh! ta hear ye talk one would think ye'd bought me body an' soul. Mr Arun," he continued impressively, "d'ye ken what like a man is when ye see him? D'ye ken what like is an eengineer when ye see him? I varra much doot it. Treemers! Profits! Coo-operation! Let me by to see ta my wark, or some o' the tousley patents in yon sweat-box will be singin' oot pen an' ink when we get into the teeth o' what's rollin' up Channel."

He brushed past and walked stolidly to the engine-room, where, a moment later, vigorous expostulations from the organ-grinders proved that he was taking them in hand.

Arun did not follow him. He deemed it wiser to interview the captain first. He strayed to the bridge, where Shirwill was examining the danger signals hanging in the eye of the sickly sun.

"Your papers, Captain," he remarked brusquely, "and a record trip to you."

The skipper looked up with a sensible disregard for the conventions. He stood on the dust-strewn deck in garments liberally smudged with coal. His face and hands suggested that he had been engaged in trimming; but this was not the fact,—he had been struggling with the dirt in the chart-room and taking azimuths of the standard.

"A record trip!" he reiterated sorrowfully. "Oh Lord! and that sky blinking a warning in our faces. Sir, I'm thinking you'll not hear of any record this run. Look at the sun."

The engineer had already drawn his attention to what stood in place of that luminary, and Arun resented a second infliction—it annoyed him.

"Damn the sun," he retorted brusquely.

"That won't hinder obvious fact," said the skipper.

"You're a pessimist, captain," Arun returned with a gust of annoyance; "I dislike pessimists. I don't want 'em in my ships. What on earth have I to do with the sun? I don't run it."

Shirwill nursed his anger. It was evident from the man's pinched face that he was suffering from what Schlangé called nerves, but what is more generally known as liver. He should have seen a doctor before he came to interview men ripe for a revolt. The quarrel was very much to Shirwill's liking; he squared his shoulders and stared at the dapper Jew.

"No," he said distinctly; "but from what I've seen and heard, I should say it's about the only thing you don't run."

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Arun stamped on the bridge and advanced a step nearer his subordinate. The tip of his nose worked ominously and his eyes flashed.

"Look here, captain," he cried, "it seems to me you're not satisfied with your job. You're feeling a step above it. You've too much damned education, and fancy you are the only man with a certificate who is capable of navigating my ship. M'Grabbut seems of the same opinion in his department. Very well; if you feel like that you can take six months' notice—or your discharge on your return, and I will forego the notice. I require no half-hearted service. The pair of you can clear out and be hung to you."

The words poured out in a quick torrent; the man danced with annoyance. But Shirwill heard him to the end, then replied—

"That's cleared the air. Now perhaps you'll be good enough to put that release you make of in writing?"

"At once—if you desire it."

"I do desire it. M'Grabbut can speak for himself."

There is little doubt but that Arun had allowed his wrath to get the better of his wisdom. He had scarcely intended to push matters to this sudden crisis on sailing-day; but the habit of bully-ragging is an essential part of the creed of a certain class of capitalists, and Arun had been brought up in a school where a skipper, or any other known species of sailor, is held in supreme contempt. These men were expected to be the owner's obedient and servile money-getters; to own no opinion but the owner's opinion, and to knuckle down and kow-tow before their over-

lords, as men of humble rank should knuckle down and kow-tow before their superiors.

Still, the thing was done, and Arun was not the man to admit he had made a mistake. He followed the skipper into the cabin and sat down to write the firm's release. This he handed to Shirwill, who signed it also. Then M'Grabbut appeared at the table and requested, tersely, a like favour for himself.

Again Arun put pen to paper, and the two men signed their names in the presence of the steward.

"Now," said the captain, as the little man rose and buttoned his coat, "I have just two words to say, and then this matter will be done with until our return. We two will do our duty, and work the ship till then, as well as though nothing had occurred.

"But," and the skipper became intensely earnest in his enunciation, "you twitted me with having too much education. If by that you mean I have been able to read your methods a trifle too clearly for your comfort, you have yourself to blame.

"When you explained to us—I speak for M'Grabbut also—your principles of co-operation, I took it that you were in earnest and would give us fair-play. But you have not given us fair-play; you have done your best to blind us, instead. You have given us a paltry ten-pound note at the end of the voyage and intimated that covered our percentage. And when I suggested we should be allowed some means of testing the position, you tell me that I am sick of my job, that I have too much damned education, and the like.

"Now, sir, I have nothing more to add, except that

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since we have been in this bathing-machine of yours, both M'Grabbut and I have worked like niggers. We have done our best, and you have done your best to best us. Right! We part when the *Schweinigel* returns. And now, as we are ready to get away and face what's staring us in the eyes, I'll wish you good day, sir."

With that Shirwill gathered his papers and left the cabin. He stepped to the ship's side and beckoned to a custom house official, who immediately climbed to the rail.

"Look here, M'Carthy," said the captain as he sealed an envelope containing the two releases, "I want you to do a favour for me. Will you send these papers to Somerset House, and get them stamped and returned to yourself?"

"I will. Anything to oblige you."

"Right. They are important. Keep them safely till I come back. So long."

He ran up the bridge ladder and came upon the owner. Arun had observed the whole transaction, and his face flamed.

"What is that you have given to the surveyor?" he questioned.

"That is my business, sir."

"Devil take you, it is my business also, captain."

Shirwill made no immediate response. He stepped across to the telegraph and rang the engines, "Stand by!" Then he returned to the angry Jew.

"Look here, sir," he remarked with stern emphasis; "I don't allow any man to damn me on my bridge. I command here, and unless you want a passage to



test our sea-going capabilities, step ashore. Slow ahead there, mister!"

The latter remark was addressed to the 100 sun-lamp-trimmer, an amalgam of officerdom doing duty as Third, standing wide-eyed by the telegraph. Shirwill continued to give instructions briskly—

"Let go for'ad! Ease away aft! Cork fender there, Larry."

Arun gasped. The man's audacity mastered him. He looked at the moving dock-wall and rushed aft at speed. Here, with the aid of a sailor, he climbed ashore and turned to shout, "I'll not forget this! . . . I'll not . . ."

But the engines were in motion, groaning and spluttering like giants in pain, and a calm voice came from the bridge—

"Let go all! Full speed."

The noises redoubled. A shriek of defiance broke from the bell-mouthed siren, and in a few minutes the *Schweinigel* had started on her caper towards Alexandria.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE FÜRST BISMARCK EXAMINES HER.

FROM Cardiff to Lundy Island they crept through mud-coloured air and water. A stagnant, breathless mist filled all space, and the Channel resounded with the weird voices of many fog-horns. But at Lundy the weather changed, and the organ-grinders gleaned a foretaste of the qualities of their home.

A sou'-west gale met them and quickly stove the starboard lifeboat. The seas rolled out of the thin white rain with a whelming rush that swallowed her to the bridge. The frowsy *dagos* looked unhappy, and the forlorn Englishmen swore; but the skipper and M'Grabbut set their teeth, and screwed and caulked their ventilators.

The ship put her nose down and burrowed like a mole through the grey-green slopes, and the slopes spluttered about her heels in sheer joy, as a thing they had discovered to toy with.

Off Scilly a second boat was discovered in the grey of dawn, resting in fragments on the fiddleys. The organ-grinders reported the fo'c'sle full of water, and M'Grabbut came up to the bridge swearing at the

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inadequacy of the joints in the cover of the high-pressure cylinder.

Shirwill pointed to the bent and vacant davits.

"You've got your life-belt handy, M'Grabbut," he suggested. "If the cylinder gives out, you'll want it."

"The ceelinder will no give oot, Bob Shirwill," said the engineer with grim emphasis, "while I can wield my hammer. If yon skinfleent Jew had listened ta me there would hae been no trouble wi' the ceelinder. It's aa' on a par wi' his eeconomy, cheese-parin', an' money-grubbin'. I hae no patience wi' it; it's sheer improveedence."

He descended the bridge ladder, and the engines were stopped. They lay wallowing in the lap of a cosmopolitan sea until a liner, racing from the westward, spied their perilous situation, and swerved wide on her helm to view them.

A fluttering string of flags went up as she approached, and the funnels ceased to throw out volumes of smoke. Shirwill examined the colours with his glasses.

"HF,"<sup>1</sup> he growled. "More urgent signals. Thinks we're broken down and he's in for a comfortable thing in the salvage line, I dare swear."

He twisted on his heel and shouted to the second mate—

"Hoist RSJ,<sup>2</sup> . . . then go down and tell M'Grabbut there's a liner here wanting to know if we're dead. Ask him to step up."

The engineer appeared as the ships drew together. He was clad in brown combination overalls, adorned

<sup>1</sup> We are coming to your assistance.

<sup>2</sup> Thanks.

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by an elaborate pattern in oil and grime, and was sweating freely. The skipper jerked his thumb at the approaching steamer—

“She wants to know whether we require assistance,” he remarked laconically.

“Assistance!” cried M’Grabbut. “Wha the deil asked him for assistance? Not oor skeeper, I’ll take oath.”

Captain Shirwill made no direct response.

“How’s the high-press cylinder?” he questioned.

“Blowin’ like a grampus.”

“And the thrust?”

“Seek,” said the engineer, “an’ be damned to ye.”

“Will she stay?”

“I’ll make her stay,” said M’Grabbut, “or I’ll eat her.”

“Good. How long will it take?”

“An hoor—maybe twa.”

The skipper cast his eye towards the islands lying in the haze to leeward, and made a rapid calculation.

“Right!” he replied. “Then we’ll send her about her business.”

“Bide a wee,” said M’Grabbut. “Losh! but ye’d no let her awa empty-handed?”

“What do you mean?”

The engineer looked slyly across at the ruined davits, and, putting his hand to his mouth, whispered, “Cannot we do wi’ a boat or twa at Arun’s eexpense? A liner’s boats cost money when—we’re oot in Channel.”

Shirwill laughed aloud. “Gad!” he cried, “but you’ve a head, M’Grabbut. A head for several kinds of engineering. We’ll do it.”

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"It would be sheer improveedence to let sic an opportunity by," said M'Grabbut.

The mail-boat foamed in the near distance, obviously slowing down in response to the delicate reply fluttering on the tramp's halliards. She drew slowly across their weather beam and was within easy hail, then her name appeared, written in gold letters on the bow—*Fürst Bismark*.

"A countryman o' oors," said M'Grabbut, as he stood watching the huge ship's manœuvres, in his greasy boiler suit.

"North German Lloyd," returned the skipper; "Hamburg to New York *via* Southampton; and under subsidy from their Government to cut out our passenger lines."

The great ship swooped down upon them, her decks were alive with people searching with their glasses this most interesting wreck. An officer in resplendent uniform appeared at the wing of the bridge and waved his cap.

"Vat sheep is dat?" he shouted.

M'Grabbu' raised his cap also. "*Schweinigel!*" he roared.

"Vat?"

"*Schweinigel!*"

The officer was evidently nonplussed; he took up a pair of glasses and searched the steamer's bows.

"Dat is ondrne," he cried; "I can read mit mine eyes. It es *Titan*."

M'Grabbut was about to respond when the skipper cut him short.

"Good Lord!" he growled, "how are we going to

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get a boat out of 'em, if we rag 'em that fashion? It's a dead insult to a 'Dutchman.' Stand hack!" Then he turned to the expectant German.

"*Titan* is our name, sir," he cried; "hut to us she is *Schweinigel*. It's not shorter, hut it hits her square in the face."

The officer translated to his friends on the bridge, and a roar of laughter rippled across the spume. Then he waved his hand once more to the lurching tramp.

"Ha!" he cried. "Ver goot! It es a sohriquet speaking mouch—hein! She es schweinitch! Vere you from?"

"Cardiff."

"You are watter-log. You vant asseestance?"

M'Grahhut picked up his parable and replied. "We've had a sair buffetin'," he cried in his great hass voice, "an' oor thrust is a merricle o' eengineerin' skill; hut we're no watter-logged."

"Vat?"

"Stand' aside, M'Grahhut, he doesn't savvy Sassenach," said the skipper again, pushing to the front. "Leave it to me."

"We've lost our boats, sir. If you could spare us a couple they'd be some sort of stand-by."

"Zen you no vant to be daken off?"

"No. We will get her in somewhere. But if you can let us have the hoats, we'll be thankful."

This announcement was received with some disappointment on the liner's bridge. It was evident they had made certain that the case was one of salvage, which, seeing their proximity to Falmouth, would not have been a difficult nor a time-harred task. A lengthy

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consultation ensued, then the pipes sounded shrilly on the big ship's deck, and ten minutes later the Germans were ferrying a boat across the tumbling sea.

The officer climbed on board and approached the skipper. "Ve can spare you zese," he remarked, pointing to where the men were hoisting a pair of folded canvas boats up the side; "no ozzer es bossible."

M'Grabbut leaned over and glanced at them with a groan. "Losh!" he cried; "mair patents! Man, man! could ye no spare us the loan o' yoor eelectric launch whiles ye were aboot it?"

The officer eyed him in some astonishment. "Zay are goot. Ve haf none petter. Hein! you to please are hardt."

M'Grabbut put his hands in the plackets of his suit and strolled towards the engine-room, singing blithely—

"A patent ship an' a patent crew,  
Leave her, Johnny, leave her;  
A patent thrust an' a patent screw,  
O! it's time for us to leave her."

His voice broke into sterner tones when he reached the engine-room, and the sound of hammering was redoubled. The German turned to the skipper and tapped his forehead.

"He es strange,—loco. Ver dangerous on boar' esteamer."

Captain Shirwill made no audible reply. He entered the combined chart-room and wheel-house and wrote an acknowledgment of the transaction, together with an order on his owners for the value of the boats. The

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officer took it, and stepped to the ladder just as M'Grabbut emerged from the stoke-hold.

"Anysings you vish to report?" he questioned.

"Ay," said M'Grabbut with decision, "a message to Lloyds. Say that the s.s. *Schweinigel*——"

"By which he means *Titan*," the skipper interjected.

"Was reported off Scilly, wi' loss of aa' her boats, decks swept, damaged crank-shaft, high-press ceelinder whimperin' sair, an' a thrust block that combined Proveedence an' eengineerin' skill has sae far kept fra returnin' to its eelementary condection——"

The officer waved his hand in despair. "Write it," he cried. "I cannot of myself remember."

So they wrote it in precise English, and signed their names at the foot of the wire——

ROBERT SHIRWILL, *Master.*

HUGH M'GRAB BUT, *Engineer.*

The officer departed with many kind wishes; then they hoisted a signal conveying their thanks, and the *Fürst Bismark* disappeared in the haze up Channel.

"Twill make Arun seek when he reads yon," said M'Grabbut.

"Ay, and the insurance premiums will be a thing to remember," the skipper replied. "Get along below, M'Grabbut, and fettle up your mill, or we shall be testing the temper of our plates on Bishop Rock before we've done."

The engineer departed without a word, and for two hours the *Schweinigel* lurched merrily in the foam, sagging bodily towards the fringe of rocks lying sou'-west of Scilly.

During this time the boats were taken from their



The *Fürst Bismark* examines her. 59

perilous position on the bridge and lashed securely in the rigging, one forward, the other aft, high out of reach of the combing seas. Then the crew were set to render everything secure about the decks, a precaution Shirwill considered necessary, seeing the barometer had fallen to 29°, and apparently had no intention of rising.

Towards noon M'Grabbut sent word that he was ready to start, and shortly after the *Schweinigel* resumed her passage, and Scilly, with its ugly teeth, vanished in the mists astern.

## CHAPTER VI.

### IN THE BAY.

FOR thirty-six hours the burrowing tactics continued without intermission. The *Schweinigel* cut capers through a heavy sea and under a solemn and lowering sky. There was no wind; but she made up for the omission by flicking the swell with her tail and revelling in the spray. She rolled, kicked, plunged, and smacked the seas with the airy freedom of a sportive whale blowing and gambolling before his mate, and the *dagos* watched askance.

Meanwhile, as the barometer continued to fall steadily, Shirwill gave instructions to prepare for eventualities. Life-lines were brought from their dingy lair and stretched along the decks leading to the men's quarters, also in transverse fashion, about the bridge and wheelhouse, until the vessel had assumed the appearance of a gigantic spider's web wherein some new specimens of fly were netted. The *dagos* looked into the gathering gloom and shrugged their shoulders. They talked and gesticulated, reminding each other of what they would do when they reached Alexandria; but they continued to stretch lines, to secure hatchways, and to double the tarpaulins

till out of the mnrk there arrived a foretaste of sweets to come. The messenger spoke in the language of tears, with a thin driving rain—a rain that wet; and the *dagos* required coercion.

About this time, too, M'Grabbut reported that the high-pressure cylinder was cured of its blowing, but admitted that other trifles occupied him almost unceasingly. The bearings, it appeared, were a continued source of anxiety, and the patent governor, an invention supposed automatically to control the steam and prevent the propeller "racing," refused to act.

He stated these difficulties with the air of one to whom obstacles are set in order merely that they may be overcome, and towards noon decided to uncouple the valves to seek a reason for the stoppage. Shirwill heard him in silence. The glass had fallen to 28·60, and the weather promised several things in italics. An overheated bearing or any complication of the villainously fitted parts below meant danger—perhaps even a permanent breakdown. Shirwill knew it; M'Grabbut knew it; the men more than guessed it. The position was one to induce the officers never again to take charge of a vessel run by philanthropic owners, or to tamper in any sense with that unknown science—co-operation. For out of it there looked some puzzling results. Co-operation! To the captain it meant that his crew must consist of six men, four of whom were *dagos*; to M'Grabbut it meant that he had eight firemen and trimmers, only two of whom were English; to the owners it meant diminished porterage bills; to the crew, slavery; and to those navigators who happened to come across them in their travels, peril.

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It is impossible to run ships in safety if they are manned by machines, patents, and labour-saving appliances which take the place of the crew; nor can you run them without hazard when the crew speaks in a tongue of which the officers know nothing. Shirwill and M'Grabbut acknowledged, shamedly, that if they would make themselves understood they must speak Spanish—speak it, and they could only swear. It was nnutterahle. The captain considered it a handicap, hut M'Grabbut smiled grimly. "Ye'll just hae ta take lessons, Bob, an' so will I." Lessons! and already there was occasion for fluency.

The advent of bad weather brought things to a speedy head. The *dagos* had manifested signs of the white feather, and Shirwill was uncertain how they would comport themselves in a gale. It was a problem neither could solve. As a rule they play the mule and get out of hand; hut Shirwill was hardly the man to permit unlimited fooling; M'Grabbut questioned it—indeed he questioned the whole problem.

They were in the heart of the Bay and heading straight for Finisterre when the gale broke. The sun had set, and the sky was painted lavishly—green, yellow, mauve, with purple clouds and fire-like wisps that flared to the zenith. The wind had not yet come; but as far as the sea was concerned the gale was a gale already, and the *Schweinigel* floundered through it with the remorseless thump of a punching machine. Bing! whirr! rattle! A thud, a squeal, a scrape,—that was the chorus at sundown. At midnight the rattle alone remained, hut it was continuous; it

shouted viciously through the squalls; rain and hail could not silence it—it grew with the wind.

Shirwill, clad in gleaming oilskins, his face whipped red by the driving spray, remained on guard. He paced the bridge without intermission; staggering from point to point, from vantage to vantage, gripping the life-lines. The engines had been slowed. Soon after eight that had become necessary, and now the sullen hull had only comfortable steerage way. Three thousand five hundred tons of coal encased in brittle steel, heralded by dim lights and lacking the buoyancy an honest freeboard provides, plunged through the foam-stretches with the rattle of a steam-roller ponderously grinding flints into mother earth—but here, the flints moved.

A grey-green monster rushed out of the void: the *Schweinigel* climbed dizzily to the summit and floundered over bridge-deep in the brine. A white-crested mountain appeared on her bow, hissing, spluttering, threatening annihilation: she met it with a sulky lurch and rolled sidelong down with all her rivets chattering. A sea smacked her in the face: she reeled instantly through a bath of spray; another caught her before she could rise and struck her a cowardly blow under the ribs; then a counter-wave, recoiling in sheer malice, leaped the taffrail and stove the cabin skylights.

Her decks ran white; her scuppers were gargoyles spouting brine from a cathedral roof; the winches and companions stood like sentinel-rocks amidst the surf of an iron-bound coast. She never rose briskly to meet the seas; she reeled at them as a drunken man reels

## 64 The Edge of Circumstance.

at the walls spanning his path, and they smote her wicked blows that echoed with the sound of a monstrous drum.

And all the time a thick-set man in shining oilskins crept carefully up and down the bridge giving his orders without noise; and a bearded giant, standing on the starting platform, watched the flurried pistons with his hand on the throttle, shouting stern orders in an amalgam of broad Scotch and perilous Spanish at the sweating organ-grinders below.

Towards morning a rasping squeal raised voice above the clamour, and M'Grabbut's heart leaped. "Losh!" he roared, "it's the thrust. It canna hold."

He surrendered the valves and levers to the second engineer and hastened down the ladders. A bolt had started in one of the centre sections of the thrust, and the part had got "out of line." The chief seized a bar and instantly weighed on the fracture, then he turned to a fireman standing open-mouthed beside him.

"Quick!" he shouted. "Spanner, my son. . . . Eevans!" this to the engineer on the platform, "keep her goin' just dead slow, . . . dinna let her race, man, as ye value yoor soul. Hi, you there! Traigame<sup>1</sup> ze damned ratchet brace—a plenty mouch presto,—savvy?"

A *dago*, stripped to the waist and sweating black rivulets down his grimy torso, dashed the hair from his eyes and savvied. He returned after some minutes and tendered a flogging hammer. "Ze racha," he cried and watched intent.

M'Grabbut looked at him a moment in silence, then his wrath leaped forth. "Quos deus vult perdere preeus

<sup>1</sup> Fetch.

## In the Bay.

dementat. . . . Anda-la-merida ye faluta. Organ-grinder!" he added, vainly searching for words, "are ye daft an' blind an' silly all-ee same-ee time-a? Hola! Ze ratchet brace-a, . . . ze clickitee clickitee clickit, —savvy? Zo sing for makee ze hola."

Again the *dago* savvied and fled.

The big engineer, sitting amidst the oil and splutter of the damaged thrust, looked so wicked that he had a notion it would be well to hasten. Indeed M'Grabbut's cosmopolitan dialect, though as difficult of comprehension as his Scotch, had such vigour shot into it, and the great man was so powerful, that his hands had a knack of moving at these times in a manner which would have appealed to the Yankee mate who required his watch to "pick up their gol-dol wings an' fly."

The organ-griuder returned in triumph with "ze clickitee click," and M'Grabbut rose from his lever. "Hang on there!" he cried. Then for a space the ratchet ticked gamely amid sudden shouts for oil and strange invectives from the engineer. The broken bolt was drilled out, a new one fitted, and the section again screwed into place. This done, M'Grabbut wiped the sweat from his brow, crept up the extemporised exit through the fiddleys, and appeared before the skipper.

The rain met him. He advanced no farther than the ventilator; here he took shelter and waved his hand. "What cheer, Bob?" he cried.

Shirwill looked round quickly. "What ho! Mac. How're things?"

"Things," said the engineer with an eye on the crew stowed beside the funnel out of reach of the seas; "things are doin' grund."

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"Good. I wouldn't be without ye now, M'Grabbut—not for the worth of her. See that?" He pointed across the western turmoil to a black and ragged smudge which leaped at intervals upon the higher seas and showed her form against the light.

"I do," said M'Grabbut. "Some kind o' sailin' vessel, . . . what of it?"

"Derelict," Shirwill retorted concisely.

"Eigh, man! Are ye sure? . . . are ye sure?"

"Unless my wits are playing the fool, M'Grabbut, I'll swear it. Get you below and keep her going."

A sea smote the bridge and the engineer dived quickly to his lair. "Eigh!" he growled, "why should I tell him? He's got his ain worries—a pairfeet skeenfu' ta be precise. An' noo there's a deerelict—a deerelict, an' we canna touch her. Lord, gie me patience, . . . a cool thousand slippin' oot o' haund because o' these measly patents!" He came to the foot of the ladder, and his voice mingled with the rasp and rattle of the machinery far in the bowels of the ship as he hastened the *dugo* greaser.

Day broke fully at nine o'clock. A sickly gleam of light pierced the harried clouds, and the watchers saw, as Shirwill had suggested earlier, that the vessel was derelict. She lurched amidst the rollers perhaps two miles distant; her sails were gone; there was no sign of life on board; she sagged as only a vessel that is unmanned can sag. After a further examination Shirwill crossed into the chart-room to consult the barometer. There were signs in the sky he did not like; he closed the door and watched.

Little sparks were leaping over the mercury within



the tube. The glass had risen two-tenths during the last hour. The captain knew instinctively what was impending. The gleam of yellow light staring through a ragged slit in the sky; the sailless barque, driving, unmanageable; the convex mercury; the leaping glass,—all were signals a sailor may read foretelling an imminent change of weather. A change for what? Better it might easily be. Worse? That, too, was possible. Shirwill left the room, and came again to the life-lines on the short promenade.

The minutes lagged horribly. The gale fell, and a smoke-like scud drove under the higher banks of cloud streaming swiftly from the nor'-west. He examined the signals afresh, and, in the light of that leaping glass, acknowledged that he might expect the worst—the very worst. The *Schweinigel* would be tried at last, . . . the *Schweinigel*. He held his breath to watch.

She climbed the seas, plunged headlong over; wallowed, rose, shook herself and faced it again with the steady persistence of a machine—a machine intended by her makers to flatten obstructions, to crush them, and in which there was no life, no spring. She moved through the spume grumbling, chattering, with her steam-roller-like gait; intent on levelling; oblivious of the fact that seas also move and are inelastic.

Eight bells sounded on the bridge; a drenched figure crawled from the fiddleys and came to the wheel; another drenched figure sought sanctuary down the fiddley exit. The mate had gone to his room; the second mate was on deck—a new watch had commenced; but the sodden crew remained as they had

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remained all night, smoking pipes, chewing, grumbling, clutching at the funnel guys and waiting for breakfast. Shirwill, too, stood amidst the spume at his post waiting for breakfast; but he was silent, stern, absorbed in the sky signals; and M'Grabbut stuck to his levers below.

Again the bell. Ten o'clock now, and with it a furious squall of rain and hail—a thing to cut men's faces and to tear their hands. The *Schweinigel* moaned and swerved from the track, as a heavily-thrashed horse swerves from the lash falling on his neck. The wind and sea joined hands and shouted in her ears. She rose on the crest of a monster, staggered over with a roar, and lay wallowing in the trough like a sow in a new-strewn litter.

Shirwill, standing gripping the life-lines, passed the end of a rope about his middle and instantly edged his vessel to the nor'-west. He desired to face the changing gale. The evolution was imperative.

A sullen pause ensued. A space of infinite uncertainty. A space wherein the wind raised no voice and the seas crashed with hollow cadence; then a bright arch rolled up from the western horizon, and the men craned their necks to watch.

Swish-h-h-h! A breath passed over them and the spray whirled criss-cross, high above the seas, like smoke caught in an unkind eddy.

Wh-h-hir-r-r-r! Another breath; then a stinging fall of hail and the arch was at the zenith. The brief lull was dead; a thing of dim remembrance, killed by the new-sprung gale.

The vessel they had sighted now loomed darkly on

the horizon, a mere cluster of poles and ragged canvas lolling inevitably no-whither. The skipper stood with raised glasses watching her movements,—absorbed until the *dago* helmsman lost his head and appeared at the wheelhouse door. The man touched his elbow, pointing to the starboard bow, his teeth chattering.

"S-s-sare!" he cried, "louke, . . . louke to ze sea-a-Carrajc! he will . . ."

Captain Shirwill caught him by the collar and the words died. "Back to the wheel, fool," he shouted. "Eyes on the compass! Steady port, . . . steady, I tell you."

The man jerked the helm down swiftly. He was afraid; his knees shook under him; he had lost all self-control, and self-preservation appealed to him in gusts as riotous as those heralding the gale.

Shirwill crossed with him to the wheelhouse and stood a moment reiterating his instructions—emphasising them. "Awanta! Go easy. Never mind the sea. Do what I tell you, or, by the Lord, I'll kill you—savvy?"

The *dago* acknowledged the order. He replied in a scared voice, "Señor, I do it." The wheel span round, and the commander made his way to the life-lines.

A glacier-like mountain was advancing upon them. Its side sloped far into the clouds, smooth and slippery as a sheet of oil; its crest towered above them, snow-white, roaring. It moved onward by precise intervals, lapsing and growing until the *Schweinigel* dipped shuddering at its foot; then Shirwill signalled with his hand. "Ease the helm!" he cried, and turned to

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see the order obeyed. But the wheel-house was empty.

Again Shirwill faced about and shouted instructions to the men crouching on the fiddleys. "A hand to the wheel there—quick!" He moved to his station as he spoke, slipped a life-line about him, and gripped the rail.

The mountain was upon them. It leaped out of space, green, foaming at the summit, and struck them full. The *Schweinigel* groaned, buried her nose in the brine, and struggled to mount. She made a supreme effort; but the helm was unceasing, the angle too sudden, the rush of solid water a wall no steam-roller could mount. She buried her nose, swerved, kicked, dived, and her propeller wriggled idiotically in mid-air.

The water whelmed her. It crashed upon the decks, levelled the bulwarks, twisted the rails, and passed foaming to leeward.

She stood a moment at pause, silent, quivering, with the hand of the gale at her throat. Her star-board side was awash to the hatchways, the wheel-house a thing of the past, the funnel gone. She lay over, full of strange thrills, and stared vacantly at the sea. The sea lapped at her sides, laughed in her ears, drummed on her decks. It was crammed with oddments: casks, iron-work, buckets—men. They bobbed in the cauldron, flourishing arms with menacing gestures; giving vent to squeals, cries, groans. Who ordered them? Not the *Schweinigel*, mounting dizzily to a new eminence; not Shirwill, dangling at the end of his life-line like a float; not the mate of the

watch, for he, too, was of those who flung menacing gestures. Why did they shout? The *Schweinigel* threw up her heels and capered in a bath of spray. She suggested by her action that she neither knew nor cared. Did they require a boat? The *Schweinigel* had no boats; hated the sight of them; abhorred the whole business, and would gladly be quit of it. The propeller flopped amidst the atoms who shouted, the atoms who gesticulated, and the atoms sank.

The engines huzzed into silence. The *Schweinigel* was weary. She had "hroached to" and given up the whole problem of reaching Alexandria dry-shod or wet-shod. She had no intention to hurry any-whither. She was tired. She lay like a huge log stranded in a tide-way; aslant, and the waters swept across her. Still she lay more quietly; took up a position with her quarter to the seas, and kept it as though she had been riding at anchor.

Shirwill struggled up his life-line and reached the hridge. He was wet to the eyes, and hruised, but he came to his hold-fast and shouted instructions. The mate, too, had arrived. They spoke together, searching the sea to leeward. But the voices were silent; the arms which had wriggled and flung menacing gestures were still. They had vanished utterly, and only the pounding waves had life.

For a space the two stood thus, waiting; staring into the void; hoping. Then the mate crept along the derricks and prepared the after-wheel for service, and Shirwill found his way to the fiddleys to look below.

The place was filled with steam, and the hreath

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of the boilers roared past him. He cried out—"Below there! M'Grabbut!" and waited.

The engineer appeared at the grating drenched with oil and water. He mopped himself with a sweat-rag. "Just oot o' my bath," he gasped. "Eigh, what—are ye there, man?"

"Aye," said the skipper; "but six of them are gone."

M'Grabbut's face changed; he said in an awed whisper, "Eigh! the pair laddies." Then after a minute, "Hoo did it happen?"

"The beast that was steering cleared from the wheel, and she broached to."

"A *dago*? A chap wi' black eyes an' a pair o' earrings—Salamanca Joe?"

"The same. What of him?"

"Crawled doon through the stoke-hole door a while ago an' is sheeverin' before the furnace. I took pity on him an' let him stay."

"Send him up to me," said Shirwill; "send him up and I'll make mince-meat of him. Stay—what's wrong below?"

M'Grabbut climbed through the grating and gave his news concisely. "Oor thrust's gone. A valve has crumpled up an' the crank-shaft's twisted sair. There's no movin' her."

"And the wells?"

"Stoke-hole plates are awash, lad—awash; but the boiler-maker's busy puttin' the pumps on her."

Captain Shirwill drew breath quickly. "Then she's done," he remarked.

"Aye, she's done, . . . unless—mind ye, I'm no as-

sertin' the preinciple,—unless Arun's theory should turn out ta be mair than a dream."

Shirwill started at the word. The Jewish shipowner had vanished from his memory in the stress through which he had come; but now, the knowledge that it was to Arun's cheeseparing, to Arun's unutterable policy of economy and sweating, that their disaster was due, struck him in the face and his anger flared.

"By God!" he cried, "we'll make it fact. We'll fight it out. Keep you the pumps going, M'Grabbut. Shoot any damned skunk that attempts to shirk his duty. Keep the water under . . . and we'll ride it out."

M'Grabbut gripped him by the hand. "We'll do it lad. Wi' God's help we'll do it."

"God helps those who help themselves, M'Grabbut, and don't you forget it. See yonder?"

Again he stood pointing across the waste at the derelict, and the engineer followed his finger.

"Aye," he said with a touch of grim humour, "a dead loss ta a pair o' most desairvin' seamen. Weel, weel, we canna be expectin' aa' the gude luck." He added after a pause, "Oot o' the meesin' link, too!"

Shirwill touched him on the shoulder. "No," he said; "but a modicum we may?"

"Right. I'll no gainsay it."

"Good. Then get you below and keep her free, my friend. Our luck's on the horizon."

"Visionary," said M'Grabbut softly, "visionary!"

Nevertheless he hastened into the engine-room.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE METHODS OF THE ORGAN-GRINDERS.

THE voices of the engines were silent, the pistons no longer slid smoothly in the cylinders, the propeller was still; but under the platform a three-inch pipe spouted steam into the engine-room, and the scalding breath of the boilers, leaping through torn escapes, mingled with the drone and flurry of the gale.

The engineers, with their firemen helpers, were busy fighting the peril. They turned valves, looked to the pumps, and strained the starting-gear; the men striving to reduce the boiler pressure and discover the extent of their malady, the organ-grinders chattering and shaking their fists in impotent scare.

The place was fogged with escaping steam, the stokehold a fiery pandemonium crammed with vapour and echoing with the cries of the frightened *dagos*. The finniky languages of Southern Europe mingled with the Levanter's doggerel; the babel of strange tongues brayed in the sodden atmosphere like the discordant pipes of a reedy organ, until M'Grabbut descended to strike life and action into the jibbering crew with his great Scotch bass.

He stood on the foot of the ladder and surveyed



## Methods of the Organ-Grinders. 75

the scene in anger. "Howd yoor spleeny cackle!" he roared, "an' get ta wark. Grey! start you the pumps. Andree! mont arriva . . . up top, an' lightee ze donkay boiler for makee vapor. Hola! qneek as smoke!"

He turned to a group of chattering Spaniards. "Voiga muchachos, . . . it's weel I ken some o' yoor lingo. Into ze store-room. Ketchee piecee waste, piecee canvass, piecee streeng, an' tie oop ze pipa de vapor avvaco,—savvy?"

He stood pointing through the gratings at the broken steam-pipe and illustrating his meaning by signs and gesticulations that would have been funny but for the grim peril of the situation. The *dago* warriors stared wide-eyed.

"Abajo, Señor?" they questioned.

"Si . . . avvaco."

"No caree, señor, . . . plenty too mouch vapor."

"Lord God o' my fathers!" groaned the engineer in sudden desperation. "Gie me men, O God! Gie me some men."

He faced about and his eye fell on the second engineer struggling, all black with oil, from the crank pit.

"Coom up here, Ecvans!" he cried. "Get these pulin' scavengers along wi' ye, an' stop the mouth o' yon." He caught a *dago* by the scruff and helped him to the ladder.

The man writhed from his grip and made for the deck with his companions. They shouted as much with anger as in terror, and brushed the chief aside. "Arriba!" they cried; "Arriba! Andar a las botes."

M'Grabbut recovered balance and drew his revolver. A shot reverberated above the clamour, and a bullet flattened over the men's heads on the farther bulkhead.

"Awanta! Stand still, ye sheeverin' monkeys!" he roared, "or I'll shoot every mother's son o' ye. Avvaco!"

The men halted at the sound of this new and unthought-of danger; they remained hesitating. M'Grabbut instantly pursued his advantage.

"Avvaco!" he cried, and again gripping his man, forced him to the ladder leading below. "Doon wi' ye, . . . Mestair Eevans will show ye ze way-a."

The men turned and fled quickly out of reach of the terrible chief with the red beard and groped a passage through the steam. M'Grabbut continued his instructions.

"Cook! Broad! Doon below, my sons; shut off yoour draught an' thin yoour fires. Dinna draw them till I gie the word,—an' send yon pulin' deck-band up ta the skipper."

Salamanca Joe, the helmsman, still crouched shivering in a corner of the stoke-hold. His face was drawn with fright and his fingers plucked nervously at the sheath knife in his belt. He had heard the order, and seen the melee on the gratings overhead; now, as the two leading firemen approached, he surveyed them with eyes that twitched.

At no time is the love of a deck-hand for the "black watch"<sup>1</sup> a thing of passionate tenderness. One turns a contemptuous nose in the air; the other launches into profanity. It is asserted on the authority of those who know both castes, that St Peter will never allow

<sup>1</sup> Stokers.

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the two to mingle within the Gates; but which will be admitted and which shut out, is a problem philosophers have not yet solved.

But in the firemen's eyes there existed an additional reason for annoyance. Here stood the man to whose ignominious flight their present position was due. Had he obeyed orders the ship would never have broached-to; the engines would not be a helpless mass of iron; the danger, now looming so perilously before them, might never have been. And here was the author of their calamity: a snivelling heap of decadent humanity, warming himself in the domain of the firemen — warming himself! and the engineers and other fighters were stripped to the waist and reeking with sweat.

Broad, the Cockney stoker, nudged his mate and crossed the plates. He lurched against the Spaniard with an oath.

"Out o' me bloomin' road, parlee-vu!" he cried. "Up on deck. Capitan wantee pulee them curles o' yours. Out of it!"

The sailor shook back his hair and his eyes flashed. "Me no parley-vous," he snarled; "mc José . . . Chileno. No parloy-vous."

"Wot the hell's that to me? 'Oo in flimes wants you 'ere?"

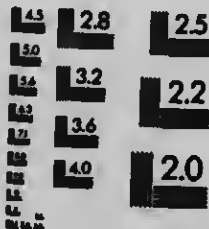
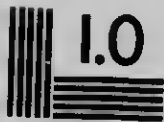
"'Ee's Salamanca Joe," cried Cook, with visible and intentional sarcasm, "an' don't you call 'im aat of his name. 'Ees a bloomin' *dago* gent, . . . one o' the sort as eats our grub an' kadgees our pay. Chuck 'im aat of it, matey, an' let me gct at them dampers."

Broad turned on the interloper. "Get out!" he



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shouted, and pushed him to the foot of the ladder. "You're the bloke as cleared from the wheel an' drowned the chaps. Now you've got to die. Clear out!"

The Spaniard's knife was drawn on the instant of his release. He drew back his arm to strike, but Cook was too quick for him, and in a moment he lay stunned and bleeding amidst the coal at the entrance to the bunkers.

"Gawd!" cried the fireman, as he stooped to pick up the weapon, "you'd stick us, would yer! I'll give ye knife—stand up!"

But Salamanca Joe lay silent, his eyes closed and blood trickling slowly from his bruised face.

Cook turned to his mate. "Another minute, chum, an' 'ee'd a ripped the liver out o' yer. Sling 'im aat of it, an' lend me a 'and."

They lifted the unconscious man with contemptuous gesture, and, carrying him by feet and shoulders, placed him in a corner to revive.

An hour later M'Grabbut climbed again to the fiddley grating to report progress. Shirwill still crouched there in his oilskins, a rope about his waist and gripping with his hands at the bars. A squall of hail and rain drove furiously across the disabled steamer. The mate was visible aft, lashed near the wheel, in a halo of flying spray.

"Well?" said Shirwill.

"The odds are wi' us," returned the engineer; "she's doin' graund."

"How's the water?"

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"It's no gainin'. Wi' a little less strainin' we'd master it. What about the weather?"

"It will be worse yet, M'Grabbut. We must get some oil-bags and trail 'em aft."

"I thought o' that, an' am busy feetin' a pipe wi' holes. We'll fix it across the quarter when ye say the word."

"Send me a couple of hands, Mac; I'll fix it."

"Right! Ye'll hae it wi' ye in no time."

Shirwill cast his eyes across the slanting decks.

"We'll have to trim her, Mac, if we're to live it out. When can you spare some hands?"

"I'll hae a gang o' *dagos* free in a hoor."

"Set 'em at it then—forehold, Mac. I'll put the mate in charge. Flavour 'em with our own men. There's the bos'un and mate only left to the deck; take them, and put a couple of Britishers to keep 'em at it."

"Leave it ta me, Bob; I'll flavour them," said M'Grabbut.

A giant sea rose out of the spume on the quarter and rushed down upon them with a roar. It hissed angrily as it approached, and broke in torrents across the labouring steamer. The mate, standing near the wheel, crouched low, in a heap, and the water flattened him to the deck.

Shirwill rose out of the spluttering deluge and beckoned him to come forward. "You can do no good there!" he shouted. "Watch your chance and get up here." Then he turned to M'Grabbut. "Where's that *dago* of mine?" he questioned.

"Salamanca Joe?"

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"Aye."

"I sent him up an hoor ago. Did he no come?"

"I haven't seen him."

M'Grabbut crept down the ladder and came to the stoke-hold, where Cook and Broad still laboured in the gloom. They told the engineer what had happened, and searched with him in every hiding-place of which they knew. But Salamanca Joe had disappeared.

"Swept overboard likely as not," Broad suggested at the end of their search.

"Nay," said M'Grabbut, "I doot it. It's the nature o' beasties, sic as them, to hide their heads in time o' trouble. Let him lie. When he cooms oot we'll make a lighthouse of him,<sup>1</sup> as a warnin' to ither mariners."

<sup>1</sup> Enter him on the official log.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### VOICES IN THE NIGHT.

NIGHT had fallen, and a furious gale raged over the torn *Schweinigel*. Snow and hail drove out of the blackness and laboured hard to clothe the skeleton houses, the masts, and bridge supports with shceny garments; then came a sea more gigantic than its fellows, and swept them naked in a splutter of foam.

The vessel lay a-drowse on an unkind bed, weeping oily tears and trembling in all her limbs. Great rollers rose out of chaos and dashed growling to blot her from remembrance; but the sting died as they approached, their strength was lost in vapid fluster amidst the succulent oil-lsbbing in her path.

She rose and fell in ponderous lurches, groaning with the agony of her unutterable travail. She writhed amidst the spume with the gestures of a spent swimmer seeking the breath which alone could give her huoyancy. The rasp and rattle of her inadequate frames, the chattering deck-fastenings, the clicking rivets, proclaimed the extremity of her anguish. She mounted the seas at hideous angles; she lurched, plunged, shook herself and stood on end in the darkness; but the

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wrath of the ocean was overcome by the trickling weight of the oil.

Two strong Britishers, aided by a leavening of their countrymen, had put the fear of God into the *dagos'* hearts, and kept them working with scandalous disregard for the measure as qualms of decadent manhood.

"Do it—or die trying," was Shirwill's dictum, given sometimes from behind the level barrel of his revolver.

"The Laird in maircy help ye if ye canna do what ye shippit ta do," came from M'Grabbut's great beard with all the energy of which he was capable.

Thus an oil-cask had been fitted, during such time as they could safely steal from the thraldom of the seas, and a pipe led aft to spray upon the waters. The thing was rapidly fixed, and nearly complete, when a *dago* turned sick at the sight of a monster, and Wallace, the mate, dashed to his succour. A mass of water leaped upon them; then the *dago* disappeared in the spume, and Wallace was dragged back with a broken arm.

Shirwill stepped into the gap; the pipe was fastened, the "feeder" secured, and the men sent to rest while the skipper and engineer climbed into the engine-room and turned their attention to surgery. "A thing, ye ken," said M'Grabbut as he stood in the dim light fashioning splints, "to gie a man mair heart-burnin's than aa' the broken crank-shafts ye can mention."

But Shirwill viewed the matter with less concern; his extended sea-service in vessels where no surgeon is carried had brought him to regard simple fractures with almost professional sangfroid. This case, he saw,

presented no unusual features: the bone was set, put in splints, and placed in an extempore sling; then again their boisterous duties claimed them.

The hour was strewn with peril. Torn hatches, strained decks, gutted houses, confronted them on every hand. The main boilers had commenced to leak, and a funnel was necessary before they could be taken off, in order that the donkey should do its work efficiently.

The men laboured in sudden bursts of energy, with an eye on Sbirwill, who watched the combing seas. Tarpaulins were fixed anew, mats fastened over broken doors and windows, and every precaution adopted to hold the water in check.

By nightfall a great deal had been accomplished; then the engineers arrived with a rude funnel, fashioned of thin sheet steel, which they riveted to the torn elbow; and presently a trail of smoke, pouring lustily overboard, strove hard to blacken the surrounding darkness. This task completed, the main boilers were blown down (emptied), and the crew sent into the hold to trim cargo.

Two men only were left on deck,—the mate, crouching on the fiddleys to give alarm in case of need; Evans, the second engineer, in charge of the clattering pumps and donkey. The others, under the watchful eyes of Sbirwill and M'Grabbut, delved for their lives in a bala of coal dust. All were accounted for except Salamanca Joe, and he, it was generally admitted, had been drowned.

But at two o'clock, while a howling wilderness of snow tore through the night without, a man crept

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stealthily from behind a stack of coal deep in the forward bunker. He came towards the engine-room, not walking straight, but lurching, dizzy with the weight of liquor he had stolen during the day to give him courage. He moved with a gait similar to that of the *Schweinigel*, whose extremity was all too apparent even to his muddled senses. The man's eyes were blackened, and an ugly cut lay across his cheek bone. He advanced cautiously to the stoke-hold and looked about him.

The pumps held carnival, and the water surged in sullen rushes from side to side with each movement of the vessel. But no men were visible. No men. No damnable Englishmen or strong engineers; no unspeakable stokers; no sharp-voiced skippers waiting to kill him. The place was vacant, the engine-room deserted—but, far in the darkness overhead, a puny donkey drove the pumps with ceaseless chatter. He knew that men still remained in charge.

He looked about him and shook back his glossy ringlets. "Maldito!" he hissed, "it is empty, . . . but ze men work, . . . work in ze hold. I know. I hear. Capitan will kill! Bueno, I come to be kill, . . . me, José. Carrajo! Pig Inglesos."<sup>1</sup>

A sound disturbed him.

He came to the foot of the iron ladder leading to the starting platform and peered through the grating. A man was approaching, coming from the donkey-room to see to the pumps. He carried a long-spou oil-feeder and a sweat-rag; otherwise his hands were empty.

The helmsman watched with semi-drunken cunning.

<sup>1</sup> Englishmen.

This, he said, was Mestair Evans, one of the engineers under whose orders he and the other *dagos* slaved. An officer. A pig Ingleso, . . . a poltroon whose strength required the backing of a revolver with which to urge his authority. Bueno! But the revolver was laid aside; the workers were sufficiently terrorised. They slaved like Chulos, shovelling coal in the blackness of the hold, and dared not effect their safety. Bueno! He, José, the Chileno,—the admired of women of the streets of Cardiff, the lover of a score of soft-eyed damsels in Lisbon, Salamanca, Marseilles,—he would free his compatriots and aid them to the boats for which they hungered.

The engineer halted in the gloom above, oiling a screeching bilge-pump. He stood feeling the brasses, touching the cross-heads and regulating the "throw." Five minutes he remained unconcerned amidst the clatter—then, "Pest!"

Suddenly he lurched against the bulkhead and fell to the platform without a groan.

José, the *dago* helmsman, stood over him with a long knife blurred at the point. "Pig Ingleso!" he cried, spurning him with his foot. "Tonto cochina carrajo! Hola! no líz zere all-ee day-a. More better below. Rompe la cabeza abajo!" (Break your head below.)

The man leaned over, gesticulating and rubbing his knife in the other's clothes, chattering aloud his catalogue of vengeful epithets and mouthing with savage scorn. Then, replacing the weapon, he seized the body by the legs, and, dragging it to the verge of the platform, pushed it under the guard.

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He leaned forward with a grin, watching and craning his neck to see it fall.

It crashed on the gratings, head first, like a sack of coal, and remained inert amidst the silent machinery at the edge of the crank-pit.

The *dago* spat into the void. "Pig Ingleso!" he gibbered with a sudden spleenish outburst, "go to sleep in hell-a."

He rose from his crouching posture and replaced the knife in its sheath. He took a final sip from the bottle he carried, then stole cautiously along the platform, crossed the donkey-room, and stared through the fiddley gratings.

The snow filtered softly from the blackness, and drifted, hissing and spluttering, against the hot bulk-head. The man drew back with an oath. He had not bargained for this; he was a lover of ease, of warmth, cold was anathema; but—behind him lay the beginning of his compatriots' freedom; a thing that moved no more, but lay still, inert. He must go on: he must finish what he had begun; that was an essential—then, *mas-tarde* (by-and-by), it will wait. The ship also will wait. Bueno! I come, . . . I come.

Again he looked out, measuring the chances; and the snow, mingled with rain and the oily smuts from the wrecked funnel, fell upon him. He stood in vague alarm—listening, uncertain, faltering, and straining his eyes to see.

Crash! A sea had boarded them; the water swirled high and drove, with the snow, through the open

gratings. Pi-n-n-g! The straining plates creaked at the butts as the vessel lurches to windward, and all her cordage shrieked in fear. B-o-o-m-m-m! A hollow, drum-like sound; the drone of a tank torn from its fastenings and thumping to leeward.

The voices of the night mingled with the cries of the straining steamer, and the listening man knew their meaning. He read them in the light of his coward nature, and found in all this tattered circumstance still further argument for vengeance.

The same heart that strove to terrorise Columbus into return, the same heart that died with fright at the sight of Howard's sturdy fleet, that cringed before the gales on British coasts and scuttled like wild ducks from the fire-ships in Calais Harbour, beat in the *dago*, Salamanca Joe. Pride, fear, revenge—an unutterable medley, lacking restraint and fired by imaginary wrongs, drove him on. The pig Inglesos had struck him. The poltroon maquinista (engineer) had fired at his compatriots. The capitan, who had driven him to the wheel and threatened to kill him, was waiting now to carry out the threat. Buezo! I come. Me—José, the liberator.

He sucked back his lips and snarled in silent self-communion, then crept softly up the ladder and crouched on the miserable gratings to search the darkness.

A man sat to leeward of the extempore funnel, gripping the life-line. Far overhead, three red lamps swung on a stay. The snow, drifting silently out of the night, came within the lighted arc and turned

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blood red. The Spaniard watched and drew conclusions; he fell upon his knees and crossed himself.

"It is a sign," he muttered; "the sky rains blood. Santa Maria! it is a sign."

He turned instantly and crept to gain a vantage on the watching mate. And as he came, a torn piece of ironwork gouged his knee and he swore horribly. Wallace was immediately on the alert.

"Who's there?" he cried.

The Spaniard took a firmer grip of the irons and moved on. "Sare," he replied, "it eis me."

"Who the devil's 'me'?"

"Antonio, sare. Capin lettin' me coom oop get drink of ze watter. Abajo it eis caliente, . . . hote . . . Maldito! and I thirst."

The mate watched him without suspicion until he observed his gradual and snake-like approach; then his anger rose.

"Hot be damned!" he cried. "Get your drink and sling yourself along, . . . do you hear?"

The Spaniard halted, whimpering. "Sare," he begged, "ze maquinista leave his zwear-rag on ze vunnel guy. He tell-a me, 'bring ze damn zwear-rag below or I kill-a you dead.' For zat I come."

Again he moved nearer, approaching the officer from the rear and making a serious pretence at search. But Wallace had learned the lesson of hatred for all *dago* humanity during a long series of voyages, and viewed the snivelling wretch with annoyance.

"If you want anything," he shouted, "get on your pins and find it like a man. There's no zwear-rag here."

"Maquinista speak it here-a."



The mate rose to his feet and came towards him, gripping the life-line with his uninjured hand.

"It's a lie!" he cried. "You're loafing on your shipmates. Get out of this. Down into the hold with you." Then he paused, staring into the man's eyes. "Good God! S-s-s-t! . . . Salamanca Joe . . ."

He seized the whistle cord as he spoke and gave a sharp pull. A low, hoarse gasp issued from the throat of the newly fitted siren; the water gurgled, but no sound came.

The Spaniard climbed to his feet at this. He had lifted his knife, and stood ready to strike, when his eye fell on the mate's bandages; when he paused, leached up, and cut the cord instead. The opportunity for a lengthy revenge was too alluring; he sucked back his lips and his teeth gleamed.

"Piloto (the mate) seek?" he grinned; "plenty mouch sorry for piloto."

He dodged round the funnel and came upon the officer from behind; then, in a second, the knife flashed, and Wallace sank to his knees on the bars.

"Hola!" cried the *dago*, grinning, playful. "Stan' oup. No sit down allee samee dead mule. Stan' oup!"

The mate struggled to rise, to call for assistance, but fell back groaning. The knife had cut through the tendons of his knee, and he was helpless.

"You damned cur!" he cried, "you'll swing for t'his. Ahoy there! Evans! Shirwill! M'Grabbut!" He fumbled in his pocket and discovered his "call," and in an instant had thrown a shrill blast into the engine-room. The sound wavered in the quiet space, and,

striking the bulkheads, echoed far in the bowels of the ship.

Again the *dago* approached and struck the defenceless man, this time in the shoulder. "No makee noise," he hissed, "an' wake-a bay-bee. Stan' oup! I stan' oup, . . . why you no stan' oup?"

He retired to a safe distance and stood clutching the funnel guy. Wallace put his whistle to his lips and again blew a shrill call. The Spaniard came close beside him and stabbed him through the arm.

"Put whiss' away!" he ordered. "No good blow—more better keep ze breath for live. Maquinista morto—dead, allee same as piecee mutton. No ozzer can hear—all busy work-a cargo. Coome! you an' me haff talk."

He sat down beyond his opponent's reach and watched the writhing form in ecstasy.

"Capin say he kill-a me," he explained. "Pig Ingleso no can kill-a José. José kill instead, . . . allee same in a eend, . . . changee for changee, black-a dog for ze whide mongay . . . no mas (more)." He paused to enjoy the man's agony.

"Ze stoka," he went on argumentatively, "strike me in-a faze. Louke—savvy? Plenty mouch malo (bad), but José get hide. . . . Zen when he coome out, effreybody away. Bueno! José kill ze maquinista. Now he kill-a you. Byenby he kill-a ozzer damn pig Inglesos, zen ve go-way in-a boatee. Hola! Savvy, Señor Piloto?"

A sound fell on his ear and he leaned forward to listen; but the roar of the sea and the shriek of the gale whistling in the rigging effectually baffled his

hearing. He turned once more and resumed in playful accents—

“Why you no speak-a José, Señor Piloto? Carrajo! no good keep quiet. Debbil coome an’ makee bobbery—what you tink?”

For answer, a bar of iron, which Wallace had drawn with pain and infinite stealth from its place, struck the grinning *dago* full on the face. But the mate was weak from loss of blood; the iron did not fall true, or heavily enough for permanent injury; it only drew blood and increased the Spaniard’s fury. He sprang forward and struck quickly with his knife, and the life torrent spirted out upon him.

“Die, pig Ingleso!” he yelled, dancing savagely. “Pig! Tonto cochina! Phit-o-o-o!” He wiped his eyes and lunged with deadly skill. “Grandissima raja de poota! Die goddam Eenglishman an’ go to hell-a.”

He leaned forward in a mad paroxysm of rage, spitting and growling like a tiger. He had no eyes for anything but the insensate body lying all unmoved at his feet until a cry came from the forward end of the fiddleys, and he slipped to his knees, alert, watchful, staring into the darkness.

“What ho! Wallace. Did you call, man, . . . did you call?”

Wallace had called, but now he was silent. Wallace had watched, but now he was watched. An undreamed-of stillness met the skipper as he advanced half blind from the lighted hold. The mate had surely given a signal; yet, if that were so, why did he not answer? Shirwell crept on slowly, moving with a sense of the danger that shadowed him.

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"Wallace!" he shouted again. "Wallace! Are you there, man?"

Wallace was there, but he would never answer his chief in future; a dozen gaping wounds barred the road to speech. He lay motionless, silent as the stealthy figure waiting with lifted knife to meet the searcher.

"Maldito! El capitan."

A low sibilant whisper crossed on the wings of the wind and touched the captain's ears. "Maldito, el capitan," nothing more—then with a swift leap the *dago* was upon him.

"Pig Ingleso!" he hissed, "die an' go to hell-a."

But the slipped words had been sufficient. Shirwill was on his guard, and as the man came he threw up his arm and caught the knife point-blank on the wrist. A sudden spurt of flame split the darkness, and the warrior helmsman reeled back, staggering across the gratings.

He fell as the ship lurched over and instantly vanished from sight. Shirwill wrenched the blade from his arm and hurried on without a word. He came to the huddled bundle by the stoke-hold exit and kneeled down.

"Wallace! O my God, Wallace! . . . What ho! M'Grabbut."

"I'm no far awa," came a voice from the rim of a ventilator; then the engineer climbed warily to the fiddleys and blundered towards him.

"Eigh, man, what was that pistol? Eigh! but I thought ye were deed," he cried.

Silence met him, and he crept onward.

Voices in the Night.

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"Bob Shirwill! Losh, man, what ails ye? Shirwill! . . . Eigh, laddie, . . . laddie!"

He had come to the prostrate forms and learned the truth.

The black night covered them like a pall.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE TOLL OF THE *SCHWEINIGEL*.

MORNING dawned at length. A sickly, yellow-green gleam pierced the harried clouds and proclaimed the birth of day. The light glanced through the mists and fell with delicate finger on the banks of grey-piled fury; on the grey mountains, foam-capped and rolling; on the two vessels lurching deep in the heart of the bay; and, touching all with a fleeting glory, passed, and left the grey untinged.

The light stole over the waters, and, filtering through the chinks in the engine-room skylight, looked down on M'Grabbit as he stood on the upper platform beside the silent pistons. Shirwill lay on a mattress near him, sleeping; two others slept eternally, close wrapped in sacking—Wallace and Evans, resting for ever from their labours, their forms outlined by the stealing shadows.

A silent death-chamber couched in the eye of the sun, chill with the draughts of heaven, dank with the sweat of iron. A chamber given over to rest, to the new-formed rust and to drifting heaps of powdered snow. A pulseless and uncanny space wherein were crammed wrecked engines, wrecked hopes, wrecked

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lives. The toll of the *Schweinigel*, Arun's masterpiece, again full to overflowing.

For some hours busy hands had been at work sewing up the bodies and assisting the engineer in his task of surgery. Shirwill had been "doctored," his wounded arm made easy, and now M'Grabbut was alone, pondering on what lay before him.

At nine o'clock there was to be a funeral. The captain, weak from loss of blood, slept like a tired child and could not officiate. The affair therefore devolved on M'Grabbut; and M'Grabbut stroked his beard with a hand that was new to indecision.

"Wi'oot Bible or prayer-book," he said, glancing across at the silent bundles, "a man may well gae wrang. I shall gae wrang—but I doot they'll gang the richt way forby my blunders. It's a matter on which the Lord is no punctilious."

A lurch of the ship threw Shirwill on his wounded arm, and he stirred uneasily in his sleep. M'Grabbut crossed to settle the pillows with which he had fenced him, and the movement aroused the skipper. He opened his eyes and looked about with the dulled vision of semi-consciousness.

"Mac," he whispered. Then aloud, "Good Lord! what's come to us, . . . I . . ."

The engineer leaned over and strove to soothe him with commonplace expressions of confidence. "Lie ye still, Bob Shirwill," he replied, "and ask no questions. Ye're safe, . . . let that suffice."

The sick man raised himself with an effort and leaned on his elbow. "Mac," he entreated, "what's gone wrong? You know me. Let me have it."

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M'Grabbut stood holding his friend's wrist with all the gravity of a Harley Street physician. "I do that," he answered; "an' so I'll tell ye what's ta do. Ye've had a narrow squeak, my son. Mind I'm no sayin' ye're safe yet; but for the sake o' the bairnies, I'm thinkin' Proveedence will no let ye gae oot o' collar the while."

Shirwill's face flushed; he drew breath quickly. "Good," he returned; "let me have it."

"Wi' a pulse barely touchin' forty-five, it's the sheerest madness."

"Never mind the pulse, Mac; go on."

The engineer sighed. "Ta begin wi', there's Wallace," he remarked, then halted, twisting the manner of speech in his mind.

"What about Wallace? I remember, he was on the fiddleys. What more?"

"Ye hae a notion, I can see," M'Grabbut replied slowly, shuffling so that he might effectually screen the bodies from his friend's gaze. "Ye will be better knowin' than seemply giein' rein to your imagination."

"Yes—go on."

"Wallace is deed," said the engineer solemnly.

Shirwill buried his face and lay quite still.

"An' anither wi' him. Nay, dinna start an' greet. They deed like men, facin' the iueevitable wi' uncon-sairn, . . . as ye would hae done, Bob, had Proveedence no been ower kind ta me an' spared ye."

Shirwill reached out his uni-jured hand and pressed the hard palm resting on the blankets. "Aye," he said; "who is it?"

"One o' my ain childer, . . . an eengineer laddie—



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Evans, wha's busy, ye'll mind, tendin' the pumps an' keepin' us aa' frae Keengdom Come."

Shirwill remained silent; his eye fell on the motionless pistons, on the heaps of drift snow piled in the crannies of the engine-room.

"Aye!" he cried, with a grim attempt at laughter, "the *Schweinigel* has broken her record once more. Good old *Schweinigel*! . . . My God! M'Grabbut, have you no good news to give me?"

"Oor skipper's safe," said the engineer quietly, "an' the decrelict sits on the spume in the nor'-west . . . waitin' for her master. What more can ye ask?"

Shirwill turned away, and for a space the two men remained in silence, watching the light as it rushed in patches about the dank hulkhead.

Far away, beyond the iron partition, the crew still delved in a halo of coal dust. The bos'un and his British backers kept the *dagos* in check at the revolver's end. They worked, and the clamour of it filtered through to where M'Grabbut stood shielding his patient from sight of the dead. Far away, too, like the roar of a distant flood, the voice of the storm raged without pause; for the snow-laden skylight deadened the sound, as a tunnel stills the roar of an express it swallows. But close at hand, within that dreary engine-room, the rapid cluck-cluck of the pumps and the swirl of water gurgling lustily amid the limbers sang in their ears, and brought to Shirwill's memory a recollection of the hazards through which they had passed. He glanced quickly at the lamp swinging in the skylight above the engines.

"The list is less heavy, Mac?" he questioned.

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M'Grabbut came back from his reverie at the sound. "A trife ower feefteen degrees yet ta come," he replied.

"And the weather?"

The engineer looked steadfastly at his commander, and perceived in his eyes a gleam of unrest. He instantly came to the point.

"The weather's no better an' it's no worse," he said. "But it's no the weather that'e troublin' you. What is it?"

"What came of the *dago*?"

"Salamanca Joe?"

"Aye."

"Deed, an' be damned ta him

"Then I shot him," Shirwill interjected.

"I'm no sayin' so. Indeed there's nas occasion for tronble. The Courts will'na hae the richt ta pester ye wi' that. The man leaped at the flash an' fell."

Shirwill turned to him eagerly. "Not overboard, Mac?"

"Nay, lad, not overboard, but into his ain peculiar place. A hell, ye ken, preparit by Proveedence ta keep him fra doin' further hairm. We found him," M'Grabbut continued, with a stern note in his deep bass voice, "lyin' in a heap on the floore o' the smoke-box."

## CHAPTER X.

"NON EST QUALIS ERAT."

GREY air, grey sea, grey sky, and in the midst of the greyness the *Schweinigel* rolling horribly in the lap of seas, half curtained in mist and flying spume.

Nine o'clock, and M'Grabbut sitting on the fiddley hatchway smoking and watching the scene in awe. A sense of his new and unaccustomed duties weighed him down. The engine-room no longer held his chief attention; the care he had so freely lavished on the machines was divided now between thoughts of his own and his comrades' certain peril and the imminent funeral service. For once he held supreme command, and the knowledge sobered him as it has sobered others, and as other cares could not.

Far in the distance—a mile, perhaps two—he could see the outline of the barque on which Shirwill's hopes were set. She rose and fell on the troubled waters as they rose and fell, and with equal monotony. Sometimes she remained poised and visible for minutes together; sometimes stayed hidden for even longer periods, and the engineer caught himself wondering whether she would again appear.

The matter crossed his mind in many forms. Was

Shirwill right in his surmise? If he was right, would a vessel already abandoned by her crew prove of any value as a means of succour? Again, supposing she weathered the gale, how could he, alone and unaided by Shirwill's knowledge, work her to port? And with such a crew!—a mutinous, half-savage crowd, bent out of sheer cowardice on throwing up the sponge and leaving the steamer to her fate. Could he do it? Was it possible for any man to accomplish so heavy a task?

The suggestion aroused all his dogged strength and pertinacity. He felt his pulses thrill at the notion of further battle. With Shirwill he acknowledged that he could do it; without—well, he would make a good fight. But he was reckoning on Shirwill's demise when all his instinct told him he would live. He threw his fears to the winds; he was convinced that his friend would recover, if only because of that unconvincing reason he had given when tending him in the engine-room—"God will no let ye oot o' collar, if only for the sake o' the bairnies."

A heavy lurch set the bell on the forecastle clanging dully, and M'Grabbut looked up from his reverie.

"Losh!" he whispered, "it has a dree soound yon. Almost as though it kenned what's waitin' ta be done. I mind hearin' it ringin' the night. It's a clang I would stop but for the reesk o' goin' for'ud, . . . an' that, wi' only one officer left, is no a thing ta hanker after. Eigh! Bob Shirwill, I wish ye weel oot o' yoor bed an' ready ta affeciate the morn instead o' me."

A shuffling noise on the gratings beneath attracted his attention, and he looked down. The men had

finished their makeshift breakfast and were coming from the donkey-room to be present at the funeral.

M'Grabbut stepped out of the hatchway to allow them to pass.

Five grimy *dagos*, sunburned and coal-stained, crawled in single file from the depths and paused in turn to gaze upon the scene. They came out blustering and in compact with each other to follow the plan for which, unknown to them, their comrade José had died. But a glance into the eye of the hurricane sea, with its savage crests hissing and foaming in the distance, made them sick at heart. They saw that an immediate release was impossible, and the word came from the shock-head Spaniard who led, and passed from mouth to mouth among the shaggy band, "Avanta! mas tarde," they said; "by-and-by, when more smoothness come—then we go. Hola! muchachos."

A great sea smashed against the side and smothered them in spray. The muchachos shivered, and recognised the value of the argument as a Spaniard always recognises the value of an order which bids him "wait a bit." They crept past the maquinista muttering, sullen with hate. A certain air of untamed fear marked their progression; they clambered from holdfast to holdfast with slow precision, eyeing the turmoil with frightened gaze, and congregated in a group to leeward. Then again a word was sent the rounds: "Mira! See, it is the body."

The men stared as the blood-stained package was lifted from the hatch. They remained motionless and in awe. They knew that some one had been killed, that a funeral was in progress, but knew nothing of

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the facts of the case, and, to speak the truth, cared less.

The bo'sun and two Cockney firemen came forward carrying the body. Each was armed visibly with the weapon with which he had overawed the *dagos* in the hold, and each was prepared, if occasion offered, again to do the bidding of the grim maquinista. The engineer stood before them with his red beard parted and wind-tied like a muffler about his neck. He watched the movements of the little band, and gave orders in a queer jumble of Scotch and doggerel Spanish, with all the staid indifference of a sea-lord.

The dead engineer lay on a sloped plankway facing the greyness. Silence reigned, or what stood for silence in that twisting mass of steel, when the bell on the forecastle clanged dully, and the men faced about to see what came. By long experience they knew without looking what was presaged. A sea moved upon them more gigantic than the rest; the bell war tolled by its advent. No one stood to ring it, and the sea was acting sexton now, as it had acted spasmodically all through the dreary night. The roller reared high abeam, and M'Grabbut shouted to the *dagos* for assistance.

"Voiga muchachos! Vinde peca, . . . queek!"

No one moved. The engineer stood alone by the side of his comrade; the bo'sun, with his two helpers, had gone to fetch the other body; only the *dagos* could assist—still none stirred. They stared at the sea and made haste to secure themselves. M'Grabbut slid to his knees and grasped the canvas package.

"Is there a man amang ye?" he roared. "Are ye

men, or only monkeys? *Hola! passa ze eend of ze ropa—queek.*”

His appeal remained unanswered. The men crouched together, gripping the bars. They stared at the coming sea, called words of warning one to another, and set their feet against the inevitable crash.

M'Grabbut glanced around. He recognised that he could expect no aid from these shivering organ-grinders, and himself hastened to fetch the rope. The delay sufficed. Before he could return the bell clanged importunately, a dense mass leaped out of the greyness, and the *Schweinigel* lay down in the trough,—lay down, trembling like an overpressed horse, calling aloud of the pain she endured; but she staggered through, dizzily, with chattering rivets and olanging gear, and when M'Grabbut ventured from his holdfast he saw that half his task was accomplished.

But the canvas had ripped open under the strain: so hasty a jettison, and the dead engineer, defrauded of his weighty firebars, remained in sight; afloat, and staring as though he would reproach his shipmates for their lack of care. The *dagos* shivered and crossed themselves.

M'Grabbut stood gripping with one hand the lifeline which supported him—the vessel lying over at a hideous angle. One moment he paused thus, gazing to leeward. His eyes blazed; he plucked the cap from his head and remained uncovered.

“Lord God o' my fathers!” he cried; then his glance fell on the wondering crew and his voice leaped into a new key. “Sacka la sombreros,<sup>1</sup> ye damned hoonds. . . . Say your prayers—savvy?”

<sup>1</sup> Take off your hats!

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The men hastily uncovered ; they would as readily have torn their shirts from their backs, for the engineer's revolver was out, and in his voice was that ring of anger they had learned to respect.

"Ye saw him?" cried M'Grabbut, still pausing to mark the passing of his shipmate. "Ye saw him? Deed by your hands. Deed—morto, savvy? Killed by yon drunken scoondrel, José, . . . your brither an' compatriot. Stabbed in ze back-a, . . . hear me? Say your prayers. . . . Follow me. . . ."

"Lor! God o' my fathers . . ."

A muttered drone in doggerel English strayed into the gap, then M'Grabbut lowered his revolver and looked at his men.

"Awanta!" he cried. "Howd your deen, . . . sic sickly cattle hae no God. It's sheer profanity ta suggest it."

The voices died as suddenly as they had grown, and the ragged batch climbed to their feet in obedience to a sign from the chief.

"Wrang," he cried, as he noted their hurried acquiescence—"wrang. They hae a God, . . . but they never knew Him. Their teachin' has tweested them so that stabbin' wi' knives an' murder in cold bluid are fairness an' no sin. Fashions," M'Grabbut concluded with grim accentuation, "I doot they're ower old ta unlairn."

A noise on the ladder behind him brought him round. The bo'sun and his helpers were standing beside the second body, bare-head and waiting instructions.

At a signal from the engineer they carried Wallace



forward and laid him, too, on the plankway. One end of it still rested beside the torn davits, the other was raised amidships. The two firemen remained, one on either side, the bo'sun at the head.

A pause had fallen upon the vessel, one of those hushes which usually come after a violent effort even during the heaviest gales. The *Schweinigel* slobbered along with the gait of a wounded hare, her scuppers spouting brine, her upper-works throwing countless misty streamlets into the greyness, her decks aslant, and the noise of her own unordered plight clanging in the stillness.

M'Grabbut stood erect. No trace of anger lurked in his manner. He stared at the grey-green slopes; opened his lips and essayed to speak, but no word fell. Some minutes he stood thus; then looked up, and his voice fell with stern emotion.

"O Lord God," he cried, "I am no fit ta do this task. My heart is sair for the lads ye've taen. . . . I doot Thy weesdom; but the words halt; I canna explain, . . . the words halt when maist I want them.

"O Lord God, I pray ye gie this laddie rest, . . . an' remember not the sins o' the man wha prays it. His way was hard—but he faced it like a man. His pay was poor—poor, but he took it wi'oot grumblin'. Gie him rest, O God! Gie him rest for the sake o' the mither wha bare him."

He turned about suddenly and gazed at the sea to windward. It was broken, misty, a turmoil; but the pause still held. The wind droned in the rigging and the water rushed with a gurgling noise into the scuppers' throat. For the moment there was peace.

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M'Grabbut faced his task. He pointed with his hand to the grim and blood-stained canvas, and his voice quivered with the sound of tears—

“Non est qualis eerat. . . . A man lies there, O God! A man jagged ta death an' bluidy fra the strife. . . . He was a man, . . . noo he is dead. Broken an' weak wi' pain, he sat his watch unmindfu' o' the eend. . . . Ye took him frae us, O God. . . . The toll o' the *Schweinigel* is fu', an' we are sad at heart.

“I kened his wife, . . . I kened his bairns—twa winsome lasses wi' golden hair an' een like the sea. . . . I kened them aa'. Noo they are fatherless, an' their mither is robbed o' her lad. . . . My God! hae pity on them, . . . hae pity on them.”

He signed to the bo'sun to tilt the plank, and the body moved down. Then, in a voice scarcely audible above the clamour—

“Ta the deep we commit this man, oor brither. Ta the stillness o' the unfathomed sea, . . . ta the solitude o' the great waters, . . . till that day when ye coom again, O God, ta judge us aa' . . .”

A sudden rush; a sudden pause; a sudden splash,—then the waters leaped high and the grey gates closed.

## PART II.—TWIN DERELICTS.

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Leaching through the flying spume, lonely, watching death ;  
Reeling down the gray-green slopes, striving still for breath ;  
Decked high and low with ragged pennons, pointing out her fears—  
A ship in rags, her yards awry, her crew the dust of years.

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### CHAPTER XI.

#### DAGOS TO THE FRONT.

THE back of the gale was broken, but for three days the *Schweinigel* drove boisterously before seas deep in the heart of the bay. Sometimes she wallowed breast-high in the rollers which moved so interminably out of that vast and seething horizon by which she was hemmed; sometimes leaned on a summit to mark the noise of her own unending travail; clad now in snowy garments, and again in tints that matched the night—grey, cold, black. She lived amidst the giant seas as a tank or barrel would live, and seemed as indifferent to the matter of balance,—as though she cared not a whit whether she turned turtle or remained with her keel beneath her.

But she did not succumb; she struck attitudes,

admired her own dexterity, jerked, rattled, lurched with pride, and appeared scandalously intent on emulating the scaup and ridding herself of that remnant of her crew which still stuck to her like barnacles.

The Englishmen smiled and said she was an untold bathing machine; that they desired above all things the privilege of showing Arun her paces; and M'Grabbut waxed eloquent on the appearance of that small dandy "after an hoor spent on her promenade." They had passed the worst—that was evident to every one who could read; they had righted the ship, they had kept her afloat, and now were able to pay exclusive attention to that other and more vexatious element, the *dagos*.

During the first twenty-four hours M'Grabbut continued to test the blessings of autocracy. He gave orders, quoted authorities and Latin with equal indifference, and shouted instructions in doggerel Spanish with the air of one born to inevitable command; but on the night succeeding the funeral Shirwill had so far recovered that he was able to share the watch. Thereafter the two men took turns on the fiddley gratings, a thing of holts and hars most unkindly adapted to long periods of sitting. The crew lived in the upper reaches of the engine-room. By night three red lamps hung vertically on the signal halliards; by day, three black balls. For the rest they took turns before the donkey-boiler, smoked, laughed, and watched the *dagos*.

In the early hours of their disaster it had been found necessary to cut a way through the engine-room

bulkhead sufficiently large to admit the passage of a man. From thence, safety-lamp in hand, the French cook-steward crawled over the cargo and forced an entrance into the lazarette. He returned daily, laden in such lavish fashion as no Act contemplates.

Tea, milk, biscuits, tinned meats, and a side of bacon arrived as an instalment, but M'Grabbit was unsatisfied and sent him for more. Thus potted fish, marmalade, butter, and bottled beer all found their way into the donkey-room, where the boiler warmed the food and the furnace cooked great rashers in a thing no stretch of imagination could term a frying pan. But, as the engineer improviser remarked, "a chunk o' bacon fried in a shovel is partridge on toast wi' sauce thrown in when conseedered from a hungry man's horizon." So they ate—the *dagos* in dogged silence and to keep their strength for possible efforts; the others, perhaps, especially because it was necessary.

On the third day, during the afternoon watch, a Pacific mail-ship crossing the bay from Pauillac to Finisterre sighted the signal of a broken-down steamer and hurried across to interview them. Shirwill, noting her sudden change of course, instantly called the engineer, and the two held conference on the fiddleys.

The crew were all in the donkey-room: the *dagos* huddled in a group beside the furnace, the others watching their movements. It had become so evident, as the weather improved, that these men only waited an opportunity to make some further effort to secure their liberty, that they were never allowed to remain alone. Man for man they numbered precisely an

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equivalent of the five English, but man for man they were the inferior coalition—the less robust; and it was to guard against cut-throat methods, which are the supreme element in *dago* tactics, that Shirwill and his side went armed.

True, there was in addition a lost and half-dazed soul, the French cook-steward, François, a sort of friendly lickspittle belonging to neither camp, but ready without doubt to join the stronger. The position was intolerable. Given fine weather, there was no question in the officers' minds but that they would see sights, and, in consequence, it was with evident relief that Shirwill and his friend discussed the advancing mail-boat.

"A godsend," was the engineer's dictum, given through teeth tightly gripping his pipe. "Twill enable us ta get shot of oor troubles. What say ye, Bob?"

Shirwill lowered his telescope and turned to his companion. "What are our chances here?" he questioned. "Will you be able to keep the water under?"

"What's the glass doin'?"

"Rising steadily. The gale's done, . . . twenty-four hours will see us in fine weather."

M'Grabbit stared in turn at the steamer and the more distant barque. "I'll no disguise frae ye," he remarked after a considerable pause, "that I conseeder oor position varra precarious. A profane pairson might gae sae far as ta ca' it damned precarious,—but that is a word, ye ken, I hold for the extreme leemit o' danger; an' I think, wi' ye, that point is passed. . . ."

"Wi' less wind an' sea," he continued with a sidelong glance to the westward, "she'll do. Wi' mair tweestin' an' twirlin' in mid-air, the coal in her belly will make her retch, an' she'll be varra seek. That's my opinion, if it's any good ta ye."

"Then we'll risk it, M'Grabbut," said the skipper. "We'll get rid of the *dagos* and risk it, . . . at least I will. You speak for yourself."

"Ye ken I'm no the man ta deesert ye, Bob," cried the engineer, with a tinge of scorn.

"Of course. Therefore I say nothing. Take your own way. . . . This is a business where a man must choose for himself."

"Losh! an' you wi' a stickit arm," said M'Grabbut. "Skeeper, I stay by ye—an' there's my haund on it."

Shirwill gripped his friend's outstretched palm and immediately went into the question of possibilities. "I calculate," he said, "that there's five, maybe ten thousand pounds lying at the back of success. . . . What d'you think of it?"

"Oot o' which ye'll handle a cool hunnard, . . . say twa."

"Nonsense."

"An' if ye're lucky, an' hae friends at Coourt, a chronometer balance watch fra the Boord o' Trade tae mark your country's admiration o' your heeroism. . . . It's a dazzin' prospect."

"I'll run the risk of that. But remember, if we chuck our chances and go home by boat, we get our pay to date. That, too, is a dazzin' prospect."

"On the basis o' coo-operation," M'Grabbut added parenthetically through pursed lips.

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"And in a month will be on the broad of our backs looking for a ship, eh, M'Grabbut?"

"Wi' no reference fra the last employ."

"And Arun's knife stuck deep between our shoulders," the captain concluded.

M'Grabbut stroked his beard and stared thoughtfully at the labouring tramp. "I agree," he said at length; "we're both agreed. It's a prospect that makes me blind." He added after a minute, "I'm for salvage, . . . boatin', . . . anythin'—say the word."

"Then we'll ca' the crew and let them choose."

"Stay! What's ta prevent yon steamer takin' a look at the deerelict also?"

"She may look," said the skipper with decision, "but she won't tow. She has the mails on board."

M'Grabbut made no direct response: he put his head down the grating and roared aloud, "All haunds on deck!"

The *dagos* came up with a rush; they tumbled over each other, swearing euphonious Levanter oaths, and climbed through the fiddley hatch. The others followed more soberly, and grouped about the officers.

Shirwill pointed to the approaching steamer. "Lads," he cried, "those who are for getting south dry-foot, speak the word. Yonder is a Pacific boat. She will take you off if you wish to go. Mr M'Grabbut and I have decided to remain,—but that need not prevent you leaving. Speak up those who have an eye for soft beds."

The *dagos* scarcely heard him; they were standing together gesticulating and jabbering to each other in wild excitement. They spat in their hands and



rubbed their grimy fists one in the other. They shrugged their shoulders and extended their palms outward, they took off their caps and dashed them on the gratings. "Anda!" they cried. "Mira muchachos! El vapor! Anda . . . vamos."

The running fire of comment died as Captain Shirwill ceased speaking, and the answer came in the voice of one man—

"Sare! Me, . . . me no stay, . . . no caree stay, . . . plenty mouch bad. Pish! ailee vamos togezzer. Hola! muchachos."

The *dago* warriors had forgotten their planned intentions, their means of succour by the carefully guarded boats, their resentment, their hatred of the pig Inglesos. They had forgotten all at sight of the approaching help, and clamoured for release.

M'Grabbut eyed them grimly. "Fine weather shell-backs aa'," he cried with pointed sarcasm. "Graund sailors on a parade wi' a lass under either weeng. Losh! they're aa' hankerin' tae spin their yarns o' heeroism. Puir beasties."

Shirwill raised a warning hand. "Lads," he cried, "I don't want any one here who wishes to leave. But I tell you plainly, I have a plan in view, and those who care to stand by us will share in the plunder. Those who go, won't. That's clear, isn't it?"

"Clear as a bell, sir," said the bo'sun. "I stay for one."

"Good, . . . who else?"

But the *dagos* held their breath. Before them, foaming at the bows, was a giant no gale could harm; a giant with ample crew and food of the best; a giant

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who would carry them to a place of safety. She was on her way, they knew, to Corunna, Carril, Vigo, and, last of all, Lisbon—Lisbon, the beautiful sepulchre, the holy city of all *dago* seamen. They grouped together, resolutely shouting for freedom.

"Right!" cried Shirwill. "Vamose while you have the chance—and my blessing go with you."

He turned to the Britishers standing at hand. "Cook! Broad! what do you say?"

"If bo'sun stops," said Cook, "there's so'thin' in it. I stop too, sir." And Broad echoed a similar decision; so also did the boiler-maker.

"Right!" The captain turned to the steward. "Hey you, François—what you wantee do, eh?"

"No compreneny, sare," said the Frenchman, with a blank and scared look at the sea.

The question was put in another form, and for a moment the man's eyes twinkled; then a weary expression gave place.

"How ve go zare, m'sieu'?" he questioned.

"S'zem," said M'Grabbut with an eye to the possible loss of their cook.

The Frenchman lifted his shoulders and extended his hands. "No possible, m'sieu'," he objected.

"In a boat, fool," cried Shirwill. "Quick, make up your mind."

The steward paled visibly. He threw a hasty glance over his shoulder and turned to creep down the hatchway. "I, too, veel stay, m'sieu'," he whispered.

Five minutes later a string of flags were fluttering on the signal halliards—NG,<sup>1</sup> JBT.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I am unmanageable.

<sup>2</sup> Send a boat.

The mail-ship's reply presently climbed from the bridge in a ball; then a single white pennant, with a circular red disc, flew to encourage them.

"She will take you off," cried Shirwill, abruptly shutting his glass. "Get ready—savvy?"

"An' noo," said M'Grabbut as he turned to go below, "we'll away an' write our letters."

He climbed into the engine-room, and returned thence carrying his log-book. From this they tore some sheets and set their minds to composition. Shirwill's note was brief and to the point; it was addressed to his home.

"A passing mail-boat," he wrote, "gives me the chance of a line to my wife. A hurried one, but sufficient to tell you of our safety. Take no notice of what you may see in the papers; we are safe and well. But the *Schweinigel* has broken down. Don't be alarmed. In a month or so we shall be at home, and we shall bring her in.—Ever your loving  
BOB."

M'Grabbut's effort cost him several sheets, for he wrote large and illegibly, as befitted one more accustomed to the use of a hammer than a pen.

"A man's thoughts," he wrote, "in times of adversity turn homewards. It is a dispensation of Providence for which our mothers may be thankful. We have struck oil; and inside a month, perhaps two, we shall be back in the land of cakes and ale, with pockets well lined for the winter, and Arun will be sick. That's not adversity; but never mind, it brings you

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this note. Take no heed of what the papers say. We are all right, and, despite the struggles of a steamer unduly handicapped, we are well and happy. Tell the boys.—Your affectionate son,           HUGH M'GRABUT."

These letters accomplished, they prepared a note for Arun,—“an indent” M'Grabbut called it as he glanced it over afterwards, “plus a trifle in the way of casualty lists—a thing Arun has grown to look for.” In truth, the names of those who were drowned, together with those who were leaving, made a distinctly novel appendix; but the two officers checked them, sealed the envelope, and turned their attention to the mail-ship.

A black-and-white monster of exceeding grace and power loomed in the near distance; her twin funnels were crusted with brine on the weather side and her name showed large on the bow—*Britannia*.

She drew across in a bath of spray. She laughed at the great seas, and the noisy gale had no terrors for her. Her strong propeller clapped its hands and smote the waves, which parted in clouds of foam. Her overhanging bow dipped deep in the spindriff, her broadside turned sheer from the waters, but she climbed again with conscious might—erect, proud, the direct antithesis of the handicapped tramp lying all bruised and bleeding at her feet.

The sbrill cry of the bo'sun's pipes came down the wind, and Shirwill gripped his life-line, shivering.

This was the *Britannia* of Liverpool. Once he had commanded a similar vessel; once, too, he had walked the bridge gratings in comfort, heedless of mere gales,

and had given his orders unabashed. Now he was skipper of a heart-breaking tramp, manned by *dagos*, whom even the "Dutchmen" despised,—a tramp of the sort no man not a fool should put foot on. But, because of his indiscretion, she was his command, and the grip of a rascally owner had him in a vice.

Again the pipes, rising and falling rhythmically. He looked up. The mail-boat was close at hand; her promenade was crowded with people—women and children, old men and maidens, all dry-shod, and pitying the melancholy wreck. Dry-shod! and he sat on the fiddley gratings, nursing a wounded arm, fast to a life-line, with half his crew drowned and the rest leaving him. The position was insufferable.

The ports and brass fittings gleamed in the fitful sunlight; the hull showed recurrent flashes of emerald as it rolled steadily in the swell. There was no discomfort there; no sign of the effects of a hurricane; no snapped shafting or bulged decks,—yet they had been through the same gale. It was a travesty of terms—there had been no hurricane. Shirwill raised his hand and wiped the sweat from his brow.

Before him lay comfort, a speedy passage to his home and loved ones; before him, too, was plenty, an easy spring-mattress, a sympathetic people,—but that way also lay difficulty. A short run, luxurious living, then the struggle to find a new vessel; the struggle and misery of an English seaport in winter. He saw the matter from every point of view; he had placed himself in this position recklessly; he was now as other English sailors are—without influence, and "must stand the racket." He vowed he would stand the

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racket if it were only to save himself from the troubles of those "dock-whallopers"<sup>1</sup> who see the bread taken from their mouths on every hand by foreigners.

His recent spell of tramping had taught him several things. Among them, a legend in bold print, nailed on the gangway of a ship, remained in his memory. It said, concisely, "Here no English need apply." In other instances the matter had been less crudely put, but the substance remained. "Dutch" mates, he was aware, cost fewer pounds sterling; "Dutch" skippers ran their ships more economically, and were gifted liberally, as all sailors know, with the art of kow-tow; "Dutch" crews were more subservient and quite innocent of combination—there was no Union behind them, no agitator to teach them how they should act; and so, the "Dutchmen" obtained the berths.

M'Grabbut crawled warily across the gratings and crouched beside his friend. "Ye're thinkin', Bob," he whispered. "Nay, dinnot start an' swear, . . . I ken it by yooour face."

"It's the wife, Mac, . . . the wife, and be hung to you."

"Aye! It's a'ways the wife—the wife an' the bairnies. I hae none. Say the word, my son. An open sea-cock will feenish her in an hoor."

Shirwill instantly perceived the drift of his argument, and turned round with a gust of anger. "Never, Mac. Man, that would mean Arun's gain, not ours. Arun's pockets would be lined, not ours. Hold up, chief—don't let me forget."

M'Grabbut whistled softly and looked towards the

<sup>1</sup> Men who tramp the docks in search of employment.

*Britannia*. "Eigh, but she's a bonny sight, yon," he whispered.

The giant ship lay near at hand now, a cloud of steam roaring through her escapes. A boat, on the side nearest the *Schweinigel*, swung level with the rail, and the crew, clothed in cork jackets, sat in their places with oars on end. It was plain they waited a "smooth," and when presently it came, slipped swiftly down till they touched the water; then, amidst a storm of cheering, cast off and started on their journey.

The *dagos*, noting the manner of that crew's approach, grew white and red by turns. They stood in a cluster, five swarthy, black-curled, and oily Levanters, on the farthest edge of the fiddleys, gesticulating and calling to their saints for aid. Shirwill and M'Grabbut, with those who had cast their lot to remain, watched with scorn in their eyes. "Reeskin' the lives o' gude sailor-men," cried the engineer, "ta pick up scum like yon!"

"Some day," Shirwill replied, "the lords that be will hear a tale of cowardice to make them sick; then, maybe, we shall have an Act."

"Men, they ca' them!" said M'Grabbut, and paused, pointing seaward. "Eigh, look at that!" he shouted.

Shirwill had already seen; his teeth were clenched, his eyes sparkling. The life-boat, with its stern reared high on the crest of a monster, slid back as the foam roared past. She hung poised on the slope and her nose ascended; then, with her oars wriggling and the gait of a centipede climbing a slippery track, she came onward in a splutter of foam.

Shirwill drew a long breath. "God be good to

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them!" he cried. "See that, Mac? Watch 'em, and joy for your countrymen. Not a man moved, . . . not a man moved."

M'Grabbut passed his hand down his beard, and his eyes gleamed. "Steady as if they waur at inspection on the Mersey," he growled. "An' noo, balein' like mad. Gude, men!"

He waved his cap, and the watchers broke into a husky cheer. Only the *dagos* held breath and stared with white, set faces.

"A move, a trip of an oar," Shirwill emphasised, "and they'd have been capsized. Gad! I'm proud of you, *Britannia*."

And as the boat came towards them the mail-ship manœuvred to shelter her children. She hung to windward, and the seas were bereft of their sting. She crouched over them as a sea-bird crouches over her young on the edge of a cliff, and the frail white craft swept on with all her antennæ waving. The steady discipline of a well-drilled crew told. They crossed the bow, flung a line, and dropped to leeward with as much precision as was possible where nature held so supreme a revel. Then the *dagos* mustered courage and jabbered together, explaining how they would embark.

A clean-shaved Englishman stood in the stern with his hand on the steering oar. He saw the gesticulating crew, and, pointing to his vessel, ordered them to wait. "She's coming round!" he roared.

Shirwill climbed to the nearest vantage-ground and waved his cap. "Congratulations!" he cried. "You worked her well."



The officer raised his hand and shouted. "That's all right. What's adrift?"

"Adreeft!" cried M'Grabbut in his great bass voice; "everything. Thrust torn oot of her, crank-shaft buckled, boilers leakin', an' decks like the slopes o' the Grampians in a drought—cracked an' tweested sair."

"Jove!" said the officer, with a laugh, "you seem to have got it pretty thick. What are you going to do, captain?"

"Five of my men have decided to leave," Shirwill answered. "Can you take them at one trip?"

"Easily—but what about yourselves?"

"We remain."

"It's the sheerest madness, sir. What good can you do?"

"We intend to try, sir."

The officer shrugged his shoulders. "I like your grit," he shouted; "but if the old man had known that, I guess he wouldn't have stopped. What's wrong with your hands? If it's good enough for you, it's good enough for them."

"You don't know 'em," Shirwill replied. "They're dagos."

The boat's crew grinned broadly, and the officer laughed aloud.

"I take it you're British, sir," he cried between the gusts, "although your ship might be *dago* too. Gad! she's the ugliest swine I ever clapped eyes on."

M'Grabbut moved to the front. "Ye've hit it," he shouted. "*Schweinigel's* her name. . . . Christened by 'Dutchmen,' run by 'Dutchmen'; an' noo the

'Dutchmen' hae forsaken their bairn, sune's pinin' tae be oot o' the warld."

Again a roar of laughter mingled with the crashing seas; then the officer waved his hand.

"Right," he cried; "I'll take the *dagos*. Let 'em get ready, sir. Put them in a life-belt and sling them over one at a time."

A blast on the *Britannia's* fog-horn took their attention, and the officer waved his signal flags. The mail-ship had steamed round, and now approached to pick up the boat. The propeller lashed furiously in the spume, then the great ship lay motionless a'most within hail.

M'Grabbut, who had slipped away at the signal, now returned, carrying the letters in an air-tight case. He paused beside his friend.

"Wha'll take them?" he questioned. "Me, or the *dagos*?"

"The *dagos* don't touch my letters. Give them here."

"A married man, an' wi' that haund!" cried M'Grabbut. Then he swung quickly down from the fiddleys and stood among his scavengers. They were parleying violently, with the life-belt for a subject. Each man had a separate and unique method of using it, and their tongues tripped with explanation. The engineer stuffed the case in his pocket and caught the circular cork-belt from them.

"Ziss way-a, ye jabberin' cocoons!" he shouted. "Plantee over ze head-a—allee samee skip-a-rope; stickee avvaco ze arma; zen, tieray le diablo par la coo<sup>1</sup> an' sweem like ze poota—savvy?"

<sup>1</sup> Tirer le diable par la queue.

He fitted his words with actions, and, watching an opportunity, slid clear of the steamer's side and took to the water.

The life-boat's crew plucked him quickly through the foam, and lifted him, spluttering, on board. He wrung the salt from his eyes and approached the officer standing aft.

"I'm the chief engineer o' yonder box o' puzzles," he remarked with a grave smile, "an' my name's M'Grabbut."

The officer laughed, and took his outstretched hand as the other continued—

"I ask ye ta take stock o' my men, for my heart is sair at partin'. They ca' 'em treemers, Mr Mate—treemers at twa-pun-ten per month; but I tell ye, it's the streets o' Lunnon they're hankerin' for, wi' an organ, an' a monkey, an' a moke."

The boat's crew ducked their faces and chuckled, but the officer gave full swing to his merriment.

"I'll bet you're glad to get quit of them," he cried, "though the Lord knows we don't want 'em on the *Britannia*."

M'Grabbut struck an attitude in the plunging boat and became poetical. "Ye ken what like are *dagos*?" he questioned; "but these will best ye. I ask ye ta

Take them in geengerly,  
Think o' them mournfu'ly,  
As warriors eempotent  
Savvyng no eementent,  
Wisely quite eenocent  
Of aa' that makes man.

But," and here he relapsed into sober prose, "Captain

Shirwill didna send me here ta sing a panegeric on oor organ-grinders, but ta haund ye these letters an' a message for Lloyds'. We hae no stamps; an' money, ye'll gather, is a proheebitive commodity on the *Schweinigel*. But if your purser will frank them, he may look ta find the money on his return ta Liverpool."

"Never mind the stamps, old chap. I'll see to that. Are you going to stay, or what?"

"Nay, I'm goin' back the way I came. Ocular deemonstration is the only kind ta move my men. So long, Mr Mate."

"So long, Mac. And when you're sick of the *Schweinigel*, put in your papers with us. We want your sort on the *Britannia*."

"You make me proud," said M'Grabbut, and instantly slipped over the bows. The *dagos* hanled him back, and he climbed again to his ship.

"Noo, then!" he shouted, "all togezzer, one after ze other-a. Hola muchachos! an' the deil rin awa wi' the man wha keeps a limp haund on the line."

He passed them the life-buoy, and, mounting the fiddley, sat watching while they were hauled through the spume.

When all was ready the officer again made signals; the *Britannia* crept slowly ahead, the boat cast off, and, pulling swiftly across the bows, vanished behind the motionless hull.

In ten minutes the big ship again moved, and, steaming to her course, plunged to the knight-heads in the brine. A storm of cheering broke upon the gale as they came abreast the *Schweinigel*, and the scanty crew

responded feebly. The bo'sun's pipes smote their ears, a noisy winch sent down its clatter—then the *Britannia* passed into the foam-clouds; passed, and in an hour the *Schweinigel* once more rolled in solitary state—alone amidst the greyness.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE CAPTAIN EXPLAINS.

A PURPLE sea lay in the eye of the setting sun. The western heavens were ablaze with daffodil and rose, and a blood-red moon dozed in the haze low in the east.

After so heavy a gale it goes without saying that a swell still lingered in the storm-tossed bay: but its sting was gone; it no longer broke on board and smote the decks with drum-like blows, nor hissed and spluttered in the van. A mild and inoffensive swing moved where, for days, all had been chaos, and the lumbering tramp ambled down the slopes with a lurch that was indicative of laughter. She might, as Arun said, be dangerous for her crew; she might, in times of strenuous peril, even sweep them from her decks; but, if they kept her off the rocks, then she would never sink. Apparently, M'Grabbut admitted, Arun was right; apparently, too, the dock-men's sobriquet was sufficient—the *Tite 'un!* The word carried him back to Cardiff; to the early stages of this business, to the sick engineer superintendent. It carried him through interminable twistings, all showing the devious ways of co-operation; but it was pass-

ing, as the *Schweinigel* was passing, and nothing would entice him to face further experiments. He lived now, with the rest, on the brink of adventures. A storm-tossed sailing vessel had entered on their path. She stood out there boldly silhouetted against the paling sky—a derelict barque with ragged sails; and on her, it seemed, Shirwill had pinned his faith. M'Grabbut knew nothing of barques: a boat he could handle with the best; a yacht, at a pinch,—but a barque! He cast his eyes to the west and saw her rolling solemnly in the swell; saw her passive, picturesque, a thing of ideal beauty, scarcely harmed by the ordeal through which they each had struggled, and recognised anew the possibilities on the side of a vessel whose first characteristic is buoyancy—life.

It was the interval of the first dog-watch, and nearly five o'clock. Since daybreak all hands had been busily engaged in preparations which only Shirwill fully understood. With the exit of the *dagos* a new régime had taken the place of that armed tension which they had found so wearisome. Men no longer carried revolvers; sentries no longer stood to watch more sullen comrades; each individual had worked at the tasks made possible by the return of placid weather. Two stokers, the bo'sun, boiler-maker, steward, M'Grabbut, and Shirwill—seven grimy souls, had battened the broken skylights and sea-swept ventilators, and had rendered secure all those stop-gaps which had been extemporised during the gale.

The men stared when first the orders were given; it seemed, on the face of it, unnecessary labour. But they wrought with a will, despite their astonishment.

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"An open sea-cock," said the boiler-maker as he bent over a lashing, "would do the trick cleanest—so far as I can make out."

"Lyin' around in 'he traffic," Cook, the fireman, asserted, "don't seem fair doos when you remember the liners buzzin' along wi' open throttles an' the blokes stokin' bare-buff to break the record. I can't mike it aat."

Nevertheless they continued zealously attentive to the captain's instructions, and now, at five o'clock, when everything was in readiness for a start, they lounged beside the rail smoking, and waiting in silence for the "gong."

The two officers remained apart. The situation was one which demanded careful thought, and Shirwill's suggestion, told now for the first time, was so novel that even M'Grabbut stood in doubt. He looked up after a pause and said—

"Let's understand ye, Bob. In plain English, ye propose to disairt the *Schweinigel*, board the ship ower yonder, an' tow the *Schweinigel* home?"

"Put crudely, that's what it comes to," Shirwill admitted. "You see, my argument is this. With or without a crew the steamer is useless; without a crew the barque is useless also. But, if we board her, we shall not only be able to salve her, but in all probability we shall be able to salve the *Schweinigel* as well. . . . Don't you see it?"

"It's a case wi'oot a precedent," M'Grabbut decided. "That's bad, . . . it meeletates against success from the start."

"Still, surely you consider it worth the attempt?"



M'Grabbut stroked his beard, weighing his words. "It's a graund notion," he said; "but ta be plain wi' ye, I don't want ta reesk anything."

"Still," Shirwill persisted, "we might attempt it?"

"Granted."

"Legally," the captain resumed, "I admit that a crew cannot salve their own vessel. But if we board the derelict we shall not be the *Schweinigel's* crew, and, in common equity, we should stand in the same position as the crew of any other vessel who picked up an abandoned ship and towed her home."

M'Grabbut removed his pipe. "In equity," he said, "I grant ye we should recover. But when was law an' eequity synonymous?"

"Oh, don't ask me. Send it to 'The Times,'" Shirwill jerked out between the puffs.

"If they were synonymous," the engineer persisted, "Joseffs, Arun, & Schlange would no be free men the day. They would be doin' time at Portland for sins that hae made them fat an' reduced ither folk ta skeen-an'-bone an' salt-water burials.

"No, my son, they're not synonymous, an' they never will be sae long as each man has his ain patent vairsion o' the law an' each vairsion is the antepodes o' the last. It reminds me of a question I had ta answer when I'm up passin' for chief.

"'What would ye do,' says the examiner, 'if an order came fra the bridge for "Full astairn" while you're goin' full speed ahead in a seaway?'

"I looked at my joker, an' says I ta mysel', 'M'Andrews' touchstone! weel, weel, an' tae put it ta me o' all men!' For ye'll mind, Bob Shirwill, that

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the answer M'Andrews wanted will no do for Salter, the other examiner; an' ye'll mind I happened ta ken the pairsonal predilections of baith. So I said, 'I should stop, sir, an' conseed'er the strain on my eengines before revairsin'.'

"He looked at me a wee bit wi' his keen eye, an' says he, 'Right! an' eengineer should aye keep mindfu' o' the machinery ower which he has fu' control.'

"Sae I passed. But conseederin' the necessities o' the situation, ye ken weel that had I happened ta get before Salter, I should hae perjured my soul for his beenifit an' gone astairn instanter—if the engines had jumped oot o' their bed-plates wi' the strain."

Shirwill laughed aloud. "Pandering to the personal equation," he cried. "Gad! I'm ashamed of you."

"I'm ashamed o' mysel'," said M'Grabbut. But his face belied the statement.

"Still, you won't go against my proposal?" Shirwill persisted.

"It would look weel for me ta go against my keeper, Bob, wouldn't it? Hoot, man, I'll spare your blushes; still, ta be plain wi' ye, I prefer the beatin' method."

"But consider the risk. We are four hundred miles from the nearest seaport we care about—Falmouth. Four hundred miles! With this arm I can't attempt it. It would mean, . . . Lord knows what it might not mean."

"I'm thinkin' it wouldn't be weel for ye ta try it—while ye hae your present medical adviser."

"Nonsense, M'Grabbut; there are more ways than one of curing haddock."

"But only one that's worth the salt an' labour," the engineer insisted. "Listen ta me. Put me in charge o' the boat; gie me oars, sails, an' compass, together wi' one man; gie me the coourse fra here ta yonder, an' I'll do it, as the old lady told the beak, on my head."

Shirwill moved up and down the deck. He was anxious, disturbed, half afraid of giving in to this friend of his who acted so masterfully in his capacity of doctor. Besides, as he said, it was four hundred miles, and M'Grabbut was no navigator. The engineer came upon him and took him by the arm—

"Ye don't want ta lose me," he said more softly; "I ken it as I ken the dangers an' yocour fears. But I hae none. I'm hearty; yocour seek. I've got baith arms, an' a braw muscle on top of either. Good. I can use them. Gie me the boat an' let me awa."

"I can't do it."

"Varra weel; then I'll just be forced to disairt."

"Mac!"

"I mean it. D'ye think I'm goin' ta let that gold-mine by wi'oot a trial ta fetch her in? Man! is it every day we fa' across a deerelict, an' hae the chance o' handlin' currency? Hoot! I'm surprised at ye, Bob—I am indeed. Ye say yocoursel she's a gold-mine. . . . Varra weel, what's four hundred miles? It's a bag o' shakin's in a glib boat, . . . three days, four at the most, an' wi' the fair breeze ye're prophesying, less. Besides, look at the chance I run o' bein' picked up on the road."

It was useless to argue against such optimism. The man had no fear; he believed in himself, and had but

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small opinion of the alternative already discussed. Shirwill had, to say the truth, very little faith in it either; but he was confronted with the impossibility of taking charge himself, and feared to give an order which might easily lose him his friend. He decided to hedge, and broke in with a new proposition—

“I suggest that at all events we go over and look at the derelict first,” he said; “then, if we find she is fit, we’ll shackle her ahead of us and see what she’ll do. If she has decent sails in the locker and we get the wind I expect, she’ll tow us a bit. If she doesn’t, then it will be time enough to go for losing hazards. What d’yon say?”

“Say? That Bob Shirwill’s talkin’ sense at last—an’ I’m with him.”

“Good.”

“An’ so we’ll just conseeder the meetin’ adjourned *sine die*, as they say in the papers when they gie directors *carte blanche* to gae side-long ta the deil. Between coorsel’s, too, I admit that ye’ve proved yoonr case ta my entire satisfaction. One way or ither it will be done; but ta the men we’ll say nothin’ o’ law an’ eeqnity an’ the pairsonal equation, for that would be throwin’ pearls before swine—a luxury I for one could not afford. Come, let us awa below. I’m sair hnngrny, an’ so are yon if I’m any judge o’ pinched noses.”

The daylight was nearly gone when the two moved away from the rail. The crew had already departed in answer to the imperions clattering of a shovel,—a sign on steamships that a furnace has been pricked and fed, but adopted by François as a signal for meal-times.

Shirwill and his friend entered the alleyway. From the darkness beyond came the sound of frying, the savoury odour of cooked bacon, and the risqué song of the Frenchman bending over his stove—the furnace of the donkey boiler. The man was jubilant now, jubilant and boisterously intent on advertising his prowess before the knot of hungry Britishers.

M'Grabbut halted in the gloom. "Hear him!" he whispered; "wi' fine weather he's a new man."

"Wonze," said the voice with an ineffable drawl, "I wass chef in ze Messageries Maritimes; now I fry pakin in ze shoffel of a tramp. Ah, le bon Dieu!—ze fall, . . . ze fall. Allons! M'sieu' Couke—vare your plate, . . . your deesh for eat? Allons! ze pakin is fry, . . . it spoil, . . . vy you no come?"

"Put it there," came in deeper tones; "put it there, an' less talk, my son."

The Frenchman took no notice; he continued to remember the scenes through which he had passed.

"Ozzer time," he said, "two, three year gone away, I ze chef of Galliards' voz. Galliards, m'sieu's. Bien! now I pass ze pakin to ze vaurien of ze tramp. . . . But I laugh, . . . I sing, . . . I danze, . . . pecause I leeve ze life I loove. Ozzers go away. Ozzers 'fraid . . . me no 'fraid. So I stay—stay to couke ze pakin for ze vaurien of ze tramp. Allons! pass ze . . ."

His voice sank to a whisper, and he turned from the grinning crew to acknowledge the entrance of the two officers.

M'Grabbut took him up at once. "Vaurien?" he questioned. "Kees-que-say, zat, eh?"

"Shentlemans, m'sieu'," said the cook dejectedly.

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"Eigh!" M'Grabbut announced, "but it's weel ye've got the geeft o' lyin' amang yoor other accomplishments, Mounseer le Chef. Bueno! donney nous le soup-pair, . . . je bien famme, maw—savvy?"

The cook smiled; he lifted his shoulders and hands, and hazarded the opinion that m'sieu's accent was indubitably of Paris. But M'Grabbut cut him short—

"Pass along the tommy an' look smilin'," he said: "otherwise we shall be compelled ta apply an eepithet ta yoor starn about which there will be no question o' accent."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE DERELICT.

SILENCE reigned on the face of the waters; the monotonous click of oars, the swirl of the sea lapping curiously about the soft canvas boats, and an occasional twang of the towline, were the only sounds to break the stillness.

The moon swam in cold blue heavens, and its light fell on the small band of adventurers in bold white tonches. The boats moved slowly in procession, one behind the other. Shirwill and M'Grabbut, with the two firemen, manned the first; the second, which carried the stores, they towed. The Frenchman steered here, sitting gravely placid amidst the provisions which he himself would cook. Behind them was the *Schweinigel*, with the bo'sun and boiler-maker leaning over the rail to watch; in front the barque, half-curtained in shadow,—a derelict to some, a myth, a thing of mystery to others,—lolling casually in the lap of the swell she had conquered.

The frigid moon, sailing high in the chill air, looked down on the sleeping sea, and the sea glanced up and smiled upon the moon; the one so fair and silent,

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the other with a lurking hint of its infinite power drowsily revealed in the rippling swell; a shadow of its immensity in the hollows, a taste of its might in the serried lines always advancing from the west.

A shoal of porpoise charged into the sheen coming towards the boats. They leaped, played at cross-tongh, took headers, and gambolled until their leaders perceived the moving procession, then, signalling to their fellows, sounded with a flash and a hiss of foam, and again silence lay in the eye of the moon.

The boats were light and wonderfully buoyant; the hinged thwarts rigid, the tension of the indiarubber and canvas hulls a thing to make tramp sailors envious. The men moved on springs. In half an hour they would be on board the derelict, the myth: searching out her history and peering into her cabins for signs of her crew. M'Grabbut acknowledged, as he swung the stroke oar, that it was "an experience, perhaps even an experiment—a thing ca'd by some life, by others purgatory." But he did not state to which category he belonged, and his companions offered no opinion.

They crept onward and came within fifty yards, then Shirwill's voice awoke the echoes. "Barque ahoy—ahoy!" They sat to listen, and the answer came with the rush and flurry of a giant cormorant rising in their path, and paddling with noisy feet and dipping wings to gain an altitude. It swooped above their heads, staring at the novel picture; then, satisfied it was of a kind harmful to his species, uttered a cry, and the sea flashed white as a scared flock rose from their rest.



"The ghosts of her crew," said Shirwill softly; "so says the legend."

"A sign, at aa' events," M'Grabbut replied, "the vessel is abandoned. Give way."

They responded with a will until they came into the shade of the bulwarks, and rested on their oars while Shirwill searched for a convenient holdfast. He shouted again, and M'Grabbut joined voice; but no answer came to them except the skirl of the birds calling aloud their fears, the hiss and bubble of the sea lapping the boats' sides, and the pendulous thud of broken spars.

The vessel lay before them with a small list to port, ambling sleepily in the swell. Grass and weeds trailed from her sheathing like hair—hair that wrapped her close, and formed a succulent coat of slim tentacles through which small fishes darted, sea-slugs crawled, and shell-fish spluttered with every undulation of the swell.

She slept in a girdle of phosphorescent light, which flashed and died with each pulsation of her unstable bed. Great blobs of dim fire writhe to the surface, stared, and disappeared; meteor-like gleams leaped from the depths, paused, and instantly flicked out of sight. A gaunt spar, hanging perilously from the rail and matted with ropes and twisted ribbons of canvas, formed a shelter for countless finny savages; long strings of Sargasso weed, alive with crustaceans and pulsing light at every bead, trailed in luminous strips about the frayed ropes; and from each beam and holdfast, from every clanking yard swinging nebulously in space, from all the tangled sagging rigging,

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from the jingling song of the cable, still shackled to the anchors forward, came the signal of quiet disruption, stealthy somnolence, and uncomplaining death.

"Derelict," said M'Grabbut in his friend's ear; "ye're richt about the currency."

"Twelve months in the Gulf Stream hasn't helped us," Shirwill replied; "it will take two days to scrape her. Come."

And above their heads the birds swept in swift circles, shonting their troubles in the pale moonlight. Some one laughed. Then into the noise there came a new sound—a long faint howl, like the cry of a jackal fighting for food.

M'Grabbut looked up with a frown at this. "I can ceel my opinion," he said. "That's a new factor."

The boat floated amidst the weeds with the fussy hiss of soap-bubbles seething in a bath of water. The men sat very still. A species of awe had fallen upon them, and they leaned towards each other, questioning in whispers the meaning of what they had heard. Was it the cry of a man or a bird? Nay, it was no species of bird cry; nor was it the cry of a brute. In that case, then, the barque was not derelict. Derelict? Who knows?

And as they hung together the Frenchman drew up beside them and lifted a finger to beg for silence—

"Zat is bad—zat. Ciel! it eis . . . vat you ca' heems . . .?"

"Ghosts," said a fireman, and an audible titter ran between them.

"Sacre nom! You laugh—you. It eis not for

laugh—zat. I like it not. Allons! let us go away, . . . it eis not good. . . .”

François gesticulated, and his voice took an imploring inflection as he pointed out his view of the situation. “It eis bad, . . . bad,” he urged. “Allons! m’sieu’—let us go away.”

Shirwill, whose attention had been divided between the sound and the vista of barren deck, caught the final sentence and turned round. “What’s that you say?” he questioned.

“M’sieu’—je tremble. . . .”

“I know you do—you’re shaking the boat. Sit tight.”

“M’sieu’!”

“Go to the devil! Pull port, back starboard—one stroke. So! way enough.” He turned to the engineer. “I agree,” he said; “the currency looks shaky. Come on.”

The men took in their oars with a grin of satisfaction. The voice had appealed to them; they had felt a thrill of awe, of apprehension, but the steward’s quavering accent, combined with Shirwill’s prompt rejoinder, was sufficient to steady them. They stood up, gripping the derelict’s side and holding her so that the skipper could climb. Shirwill halted with one foot raised on the gunwale.

“Any one that feels bad can stay here with Frenchy,” he said. “There may be some one on board. If not, the barque’s ours. François! gardez le boat. No rumpey le boat—gardez. Savvy?”

“Oui, m’sieu’.”

The answer came faintly, almost in protest, and as

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an audible recognition of forces against which it was impossible to fight. Shirwill accepted it. He climbed the rail; M'Grabbut and Cook followed. Then, as the bow oarsman stood up to mount, the voice rang out again—a curious, wailing, insistent cry that echoed mournfully about the silent decks, and gripped the man's imagination despite his efforts to appear unconcerned.

Shirwill recognised the look, and ordered him to remain in the boat, a provision that seemed wise in view of his obvious trepidation. M'Grabbut crossed over and halted beside his friend.

"It's human," he said. "See anything, . . . anybody?"

"Devil the see. . . . Can you?"

The engineer lifted his voice and shouted, "Wha spoke? . . . wha's there?" and remained staring.

They stood on the edge of the water-ways just abaft the main rigging. Ropes swung idly above their heads, slatting against the shrouds; blocks flicked at the mast and top; the scream of the birds whirling high in space,—all came to their ears, but no answer to their question.

They moved in a body, very close set, towards the poop, and everywhere discovered the tokens of a tenantless ship. The skidders held no boats, and their grips swung limp in mid-air. The strops which had secured the teakwood harness-casks beneath now trailed aimlessly towards the scuppers. Ringbolts stood out amidst a rusty environment without the lashings which once secured the quarter-hatch; tasselled ropes, dangling cordage, a battered capstan-bar, scraps of jingling

chain and empty racks confronted them on every hand. The ship was silent, deserted, void—but for the cry that had fallen.

They came at length to the break of the poop, and halted to stare at the doors and windows. They were locked and shuttered—barricaded, in point of fact, as though to withstand a siege.

A heavy teak grating ran the breadth of the ship here: apparently it had been screwed to the deck. Two carved stanchions, green and slimy with the wash, stood opposite the main entrance to the cabin. A fixed venetian screen had once been here,—now a few twisted nails and verdigris-coated screws alone remained to tell its history, while outside, stout planks were lashed and bolted to protect the double doors beyond.

Except by the use of force it was evident they could not enter here, so Shirwill turned his attention to the steps which lay in either wing, semi-circular flights leading through gaps in the overhanging poop, by which access to the upper deck is obtained. The front of the cabin, the doors, and all the wood-work was painted white; but a coating of slime and rust marred its purity, high-water marks sullied its surface, and from the panelled ceiling slim pendants swayed and dripped unheeded.

Shirwill raised his cap and mopped his brow. "She's derelict," he reiterated. "To all intents she's derelict."

"Forby the voice, that's true," M'Grabbut agreed. Then he paused, staring up the ladder. "Whisht!" he cried, "what's that?"

Again the cry fell upon their ears—the long mournful note of a dog rattling with his chain and scraping

at the end of his tether. The two friends halted at the foot of the ladder.

"Losh!" said M'Grabbut; "an' I believe ye war scared, Bob Shirwill."

"I war," said the skipper concisely.

"Man," M'Grabbut added, "an' so was I. . . . Come on."

They passed up at a bound and emerged side by side on the poop. The deck lay before them, bare, sea-swept, white,—white ruled with a network of black lines and the shadows of swaying ropes. But no living thing appeared, no sound nor sign of life until they reached the wheel-gratings, and a dog crawled to the end of its chain, striving to reach them. It did not howl, bark, or attempt to show fight; it wagged its small stump and pricked its ears with every suggestion of delight.

Shirwill approached and took it by the collar. "Fox terrier, . . . poor little devil," he said. "Chained up to starve. Mac, that doesn't look like a sailor's action—eh, what?"

"Nay," said M'Grabbut, "but it points ta somethin' havin' gone astray wi' the sailor. Loose her, . . . puir lassie. . . . Whaur's yooour master, eh? Go find him, . . . find him."

The dog, weak and thin as it was, made directly for the chart-room entrance and halted, pawing the wood, whining, obviously distressed. The two men followed and threw wide the door. The dog disappeared like a flash.

Shirwill and his friend stepped over the sill and immediately fell back holding breath.

"Losh," said M'Grabbnt, snorting vigorously, "what a stench! That's no the cargo, . . . nor——"

"You're right. Open the other door—phew!"

They gave the air some minutes' passage, then entered again.

The place was a combination of chart-room—or monkey-house as it is called in American ships—and resting-place for the skipper's use in narrow waters. It was furnished, as are ten out of every dozen chart-rooms, with a couch, a table, a revolving chair, and swinging tray. On the walls were racks to carry books, charts, and telescopes; a pair of cross swords dangled rustily from a hook; a couple of mnskets, a rifle, and a stack of boarding-pikes completed the equipment.

Across the floor of the room was a string of flags, connected, ready to hoist. Shirwill stooped over them and looked at his friend. "HVC," he said. "Urgent signal. A thing we're used to, eh, Mac?" He glanced about and discovered the code-book, and turned up the signification. "I thought so . . . hum!—'Send immediate assistance.' Send! Who signalled? . . . When? . . . Who to?"

"God knows," said M'Grabbnt solemnly. "What next?"

Snatches of incident, suggestions of action, lay before them to read. A chart, pinned to the table, was stained with blood; on it rested compasses, parallel rulers, a nautical almanac, and a spilled case of revolver cartridges,—these things pointed definitely to the presence of men. They pointed, indeed, somewhat farther, but there was no time now to make an examin-

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ation in detail; a cursory glance was sufficient—more than sufficient. "Send immediate assistance!" The stench, the dog pawing and starved at the end of a chain, and now whining at some door in the cabin, all called for instant movement.

Shirwill made haste to unhook a globe-lamp which swung from the upper deck, and struck a light, while M'Grabbut filched a candle from the "spring" hanging above the sofa head. They descended cautiously, searching the steps as they went, and came into the passages. Here the smell was horrible. In the room above it had been bad, but here, as M'Grabbut said, it met them in solid chunks.

They passed down the alleyway at the foot of the stairs; there was nothing to see. They examined the pantry and came to the saloon door, swinging their lights; it stood wide. Then, as they entered, the dog ran to them, shaking its head and sneezing; it leaped upon them, pointing to the door it had left, with the knowledge and prescience of a sentient being. It sprang forward as they moved to obey; turned aside, sniffed at a dark heap lying beneath the edge of the table, whined, and ran on. It stood up, pawing upon the door, then glanced back to see why the men did not follow.

They, too, were sniffing over the dark bundle—sniffing as men sniff, with the hands feeling for a pulse, for a heart-beat, listening for breath. They rose after a minute, and passed on as the dog had passed on, giving their verdict much as the dog had given hers—

"Stone cold. . . . Ugh!"



"Aye, an' shoutin' for burial."

They came to where the terrier scratched, and she leaped upon them, giving tongue joyously, and wagging her stump; but they could not open at once. The place was barricaded. Planks covered the door, and again were shored by other planks reaching from the table legs. In one of the panels close at hand Shirwill noted a narrow slit, perhaps a foot long. Above, beneath, on every side were the marks of bullets, and midway between the dead man and the loophole a revolver lying in a pool—congealed, brown, like glue.

The skipper lifted a plank and placed it against the hole. "One never knows," he said; "anything is possible." They fixed it with a spare timber end, then approached to drum on the panel. "Who ever happens to be alive," he said again, "is in there—the whole thing points to it." He added in a shout, "What ho! Within there! . . ." and after a moment, "Who's there? . . . Who's there?"

A cry came through the partition—a muffled, heart-shaking sound that might have been a groan, and the two fell upon the wood-work and commenced to tear it down. The dog gave tongue with delight. She quivered with excitement as plank followed plank; she quivered with an appalling wisdom as, the shores removed, the whole collapsed like a house of cards from which the key is drawn.

They unlocked the door, turned the handle, and looked within.

A man leaned with his elbow on the conch. He glanced up as they entered. In his hand was a revolver—pointed; but the barrel fell as the dog leaped

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upon him, nuzzling him and uttering exuberant cries of delight. The man leaned over, touched her, spoke to her, and she lay still beside him, licking his hands. He turned heavily towards Shirwill.

"So?" he said with a small nasal inflection, "yew've come . . . at last. I thought it was Baltimore. . . . You mind Baltimore? No. Wall, then, it seems to me yew'll not hev that pleasure—now. He's carrion, . . . stinks. Call your men, mister, an' pass him along. . . ."

He broke off suddenly, to mop with a towel at his mouth. His face was white, blanched, drawn; the towel he used was stained, dark. In the pale lamp-light it seemed as though they spoke with a corpse. Shirwill moved forward and touched him on the shoulder, asking where he might find linen and water.

The terrier growled now and showed her teeth until the man's hand fell upon her caressingly. He looked down smiling, and nodded towards a chest of drawers standing beneath the chronometer case. Then the mop went up to his lips and he said, "I shouldn't hev let her out. That did it. Give me a drink."

They brought him water, and he drank greedily.

"That's good," he acknowledged. And after some thought, "Guess you're too late, . . . I'm done."

Shirwill gave him a fresh towel, and found a basin, which he placed beside him. The man looked up with his quizzical inflection—

"Say," he remarked; "why were you so long?"

"Long?"

"You're from the new-fangled steamboat, . . . fell together just prior to the gale—that so?"

"Yes."

"Then yew didn't . . . get my signal . . . ?"

This was so obvious that neither heeded the question; they fancied, at the moment, that the man rambled, and M'Grabbut crossed over and sat beside him.

"Rest ye, my son, rest ye," he said in his deep thrilled bass. "Lie ye back against yoor cushions an' let us do for ye. We're expairt surgeons fra the steamboat, as ye ca' her. Lie back."

"Scotch," said the man, with a flicker of amusement.

"Mac something or other, I . . ."

"M'Grabbut, . . . Glasgie," said the engineer.

"So? I'm proud . . ."

"Engineer o' yonder box o' puzzles, an' vairsed in more things than I'm passed for. Rest ye, . . . an' hold yoor dog quiet."

"Too late, Mac," the voice reiterated. "Get out the twine an' a bit of No. 1. . . . He drew a bead on me while I lit a chee-root," he explained as they stared in awe. "The Skunk! Darned gun threw high, . . . one of them all-fired top vee-locity weapons, . . . make a hole like a pin an' do the rest inside. Know them?"

He spoke as though he were introducing them to some discovery, to some new fact in which he had a latent interest; yet it was easy to see that he was bleeding to death—dying by inches, and that there was no hope for him. They persuaded him to allow them to examine his hurt, and he leaned without comment against the pillows while they cut open his shirt and bared a small blue mark just under the breast-bone. It had bled but little. It looked more like a bruise

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than a gunshot wound. Neither Shirwill nor M'Grabbut had voice to say much. They bathed him, bound him with lint and linen, and fastened his clothes. It was all they could do.

"Guess I feel good," said the man; "real good. . . . I'll take a spell."

He closed his eyes, remaining for some minutes quite still, then glanced up and suggested in his placid drawl, "Yew'll get shot of the Skunk, eh, mister?"

He dabbled with the towel at his mouth, leaned back, fondling the dog, and the dog snuggled down with a sigh to lick his hand.

"Poor little bitch!" said the man.

Outside the door was the foetid carcass of the Skunk, who had drawn the bead.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### UNDER THE STARS.

SHIRWILL made no comment. He left the room with his friend, and, calling the men from the boats, unbarred the cabin entrance, opened the skylights, and found a piece of canvas. For their own sakes, as well as to humour the wounded man, it seemed advisable to get rid of "the Skunk" before the sun rose. The dim light would act as a screen. Investigation was unnecessary, and few of us have any desire for a close acquaintance with the processes through which the dead again live in the flesh. We are content to take it on trust.

They carried the canvas within, spread it upon the deck, and turned the body until it lay in the middle. Like his namesake, the man stank abominably. He was riddled, too, with bullets. It was evident that if he had caught his enemy napping, he had presently received a full magazine as equivoise.

They bound the canvas about him with a rope, weighted and carried him to the ship's side. No one questioned the necessity; no prayers were said; no eyes were dim. The thing was too horrible; the manner in which he had come upon them too scandalous,

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too reminiscent of the trouble from which they had so lately emerged.

An order fell—two words, "Let go!" The sea splashed about him, closed over him, rippled with phosphorescence, with blobs of fire, rocket-like gleams; then the eddies died, the fires died. Like those put away in the dungeons of the Inquisition, he was forgotten.

Shirwill and M'Grabbut returned to the cabin, and the mate looked up to greet them.

"Good business," he said; and added after a pause, "my turn presently, eh, mister?"

He made an effort to change his position, to lean back, but the blood choked him, and again he sat erect. "Caan't rest," he gurgled; "gol-dol tired of sittin' up. . . . Two days, Mac, . . . perhaps three, . . . a month—God knows."

The two men were beside him, bending over to arrange the cushions and prop him more comfortably.

"Take it easy, lad," said M'Grabbut; "take it easy, an' ye'll make bones as old as me."

"So?" he questioned with a dim sarcastic inflection.

"We're in the track of steamers," Shirwill asserted mendaciously; "we can get a surgeon off to look to you if you'll only . . ."

The man glanced up with a note of petulance. He put the suggestion from him as one will who has sat still and alone for weary days watching the inevitable approach of death. He said in his queer down-east twang—

"Guess yew reckon to be in for a decent thing in the sal-vage linc, eh, mister? Waall—you air, an' I

don't mind goin' so fur as tew say I wish it was me.

"She's worth," he went on, his tongue giving a friendly and lingering twist to the words, "a hundred thousand dollars, . . . an' her cargo is good for a hundred an' fifty thousand dollars atop of that. . . . Tew hundred an' fifty thousand dollars. . . . Mister, that's an all-fired pile."

He stayed to dabble with the towel at his mouth, ruminating, staring, mentally hugging the ring of the words. His lips moved. They said again and again, "Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars." It was grotesque, unthinkable. Shirwill tried to interfere, to persuade him to rest, but he raised his hand.

"There's no imped-iment," he explained. "I'm done. Ef yew had come along when I signalled things mought hev panned out diff-erent. Naow it's tew late, . . . I've sprung a leak in the inter-ime, . . . caan't get it plugged. . . . So—give me a chee-root."

He glanced up at the two men waiting beside him, but they shook their heads, urging him to rest. He put out his hand and fondled the dog.

"Guess yew air su-preme," he acknowledged.

His head drooped forward until his chin rested. Blood trickled from the corner of his mouth in a thin dark line. He made no attempt to remove it. He sat quite motionless, inert, breathing heavily and with an air of intense weariness. From outside came the noise of men moving stores into the pantry, the click of knives, the thud of boxes, and the rhythmical drum of swaying spars. A light breeze crooned in the rigging high aloft, and the swell slobbered up the

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ports with a dab and gurgle of undriven seas. On deck some one sang a snatch in minor cadence, and the rill of it echoed mournfully in the cabin—

“‘Good mornin’, Mister Tapacott.’ ‘Good mornin’, mam,’  
says he;  
And away my bully boys, we’re all bound to go.”

The dog pricked her ears and growled until the man’s hand went out to soothe her.

“Poor little bitch!” he said again. Then with an effort, “Aye . . . that’s so. We’re all bound tew go, . . . Mister, I’m goin’, . . . give me a chee-root.”

“Man, it will choke ye,” said M’Grabbut.

“Guess I’ll choke anyway,” he replied, and waited. No one spoke, and he resumed in a new key: “I’m mate of this-yere packet, . . . hev bin mate of her for seven years. There’s nothin’ yew can teach me about gunshot wounds.”

The inference was sublime: it pointed to the whole business of the tragedy they watched. Yet neither spoke, and the mate went on arrogantly: “There’s nothin’ any all-fired Limejuicer<sup>1</sup> can teach a citi-zen of the U-nited States—savvy? Nothin’, . . . yew can bet your bottom dollar on that. . . . Quiet? What in hell would I be quiet for, . . . eh?” His voice rose. He rolled on his seat and struggled to sit erect, but collapsed instantly like a sack, and reiterated his desire with an inane and helpless air that was terrible to see. He mouthed the words, “Give me that chee-root,” accompanied the request with a supine gesture,

<sup>1</sup> British sailor; nicknamed in sarcastic allusion to the Act which compels limejuice to be served out daily on British ships.



and added, "or I'll shout, . . . an' that's death, . . . yew bet high."

M'Grahut knew it; Shirwill knew it. They knew, moreover, that neither smoking nor shouting would make any appreciable difference to the race for which this man was entered and upon which he was engaged. Either might bring him more quickly to the post; either might hasten the moment when the roar of the applauding hosts would sound in his ears; but nothing could hinder it. He was doomed to finish that race; and the end would come by asphyxiation, a length of canvas, the profound and restless sea. Neither Shirwill nor M'Grabbut could do anything to prevent it; and seeing this was indubitably true, they decided to humour him and give him his desire.

Shirwill crossed over and found a box of Manillas, proffered it, and held a light. "Take it easy and don't inhale," he said; "then it won't hurt."

"Naow yew're talkin'," said the mate. He smiled, drew in a long hreath, and blew a cloud. His eyes twinkled. He looked up with a sigh. "Guess I fetched yew," he added.

For an hour he smoked in silence. The two friends took turns beside him. Now Shirwill went out to see to the work on deck, now M'Grabbut. The man smoked stolidly; he took no notice, and the dog lay in a ball on the couch beside him. Once, remembering her famished condition, M'Grahut searched in the pantry and found a biscnit. He broke one and offered it, but the dog sniffed, turned about on the cushion, and settled down as before. She continued to lick the man's hand.

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Once, too, when Shirwill came in and the engineer had retired, the sick man looked up with his questioning drawl, speaking slowly, faintly—

“Say, mister, . . . where d’yew hail from?”

Shirwill could have found it in him to laugh; but he responded as though the matter were relevant, “Liverpool.”

“So?” said the other. “A Limejuicer.”

“In your eyes.”

The man ruminated, sucking at his cigar, twirling it in his lips and biting at fragments of leaf. “Mate?” he questioned at length.

“Captain,” Shirwill announced.

“That so?” He paused, withdrew the cigar, blew a cloud of smoke, and added, “Yew don’t say.” Then after a minute, “When d’yew cal-kilate tew begin towing?”

“We can’t tow,” Shirwill acknowledged.

The man held his cigar poised, resting on the head of the settee. He looked up, expectorated, and said in his quizzical drawl, “Caan’t, . . . that so?”

“We are broken down. We are going to make you do the towing. Take it easy; you’ll see.”

The mate’s lips twitched, his eyes wrinkled, and his face drew the lines for laughter; but no sound came. He sat bent forward, intensely amused, alert, full of the suggestion that had fallen upon him.

“I want tew laaff,” he said in a dry hard voice. “Lord! I would like tew laaff, . . . yew bet.”

Still, he did not laugh; he leaned back upon the cushions, dabbling with the towel and puffing at his cigar. Shirwill sat opposite. He found the sight of

that grim mirth repugnant, and allowed his eyes to wander about the cabin. Everywhere were the signs of battle. He noted the murk and smudge of the once clean paint, the begrimed bed linen, furniture, carpet; he saw the marks of bullets, the huddled dog—and again the sick man's gaze held him. It was horrible.

Neither spoke. They watched each other in silence, —the one amused, on the verge of death, and grimly stifling merriment; the other a trifle solemn, pre-occupied and full of anxiety. Six feet separated them in actual measurement; a hundred years in education, breeding, and all the conventions of modern life: yet the one faced oblivion with twitching muscles, and the other stared with eyes that were round with awe.

To-morrow would not exist for the man on the couch; to-morrow, as his instinct told him, he would be with "the Skunk," "feeding the fishes," and, as he advised his audience jocularly, "the taste" would not be dissimilar. To-morrow, for Shirwill, meant the beginning of a new fight; a supreme and unheard-of attempt to tow a broken-down steamer by the aid of a winged barque; an attempt, at all events, to hold together and manage two ships with part of the crew of one until help could be obtained.

It meant the commencement of further toil, perhaps even peril—yet now the two men sat together watching each other's eyes; the sick, occupied with that ridiculous picture of salvage; the sound, thinking of death, of the dismemberment of that Force he saw before him, and of its dispersal at the door of the Hall of Shadows.

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From the couch came a gurgle of merriment, very quickly suppressed, and the faint echo of an assertion, "Lord, I could laaff!"

Shirwill raised his voice to plead, but the man made no sign. He was staring at the dog, fondling her, sucking at his blood-stained cheroot. And again Shirwill shifted his gaze.

It fell on the panel which held the loophole, and he discovered that it was jagged, torn, and had evidently been cut from the inside with a knife,—a rough and stealthily accomplished task, through which the two men had afterwards been able to take pot-shots one at the other. It drew Shirwill's mind from contemplating the tragedy on the sofa to a vista of the tragedy of those days when first he had sighted the barque. He remembered very distinctly her appearance: a purple blotch against the flaming sky; a blotch that lurched, plunged, rose, and had no controlling will to guide her. She had seemed to be derelict; yet in her cabin were two savages, one on either side of a bulkhead, waiting to slaughter each other with "top vee-locity" weapons, "guns" which threw high and made pin-holes in a man's carcass and "did the rest inside." Who were these men? What was their feud? Why were they alone in the ship? One, obviously, and from his own showing, was the mate; the other might have been a member of the crew—the bo'sun perhaps, or even the steward. In fact, when the question presented itself, Shirwill recollected that he had observed certain signs which seemed to point to the latter conclusion. The "Skunk" had been dressed in a white shirt and

dark trousers; there was a suggestion of the Creole in his ghastly upturned face, in his black and straggly goatee beard; he wore braces and a "long-sleeve"<sup>1</sup> silk cap; his hands, too, were hands accustomed to dabble in hot water. The signs were very distinct—as distinct as were the signs by which, before the mate declared himself, Shirwill knew that he was the mate.

He let his eye fall upon the bulkhead above the sofa, and saw again the marks of bullets. One had pierced a picture of the ship, painted by a Chinese artist with elaborate and microscopic attention to details, and showing a glimpse of the land about the entrance to the Ly-ee-moon Pass, and some purple junks lurching on a sea more terrible than that through which they had come. Another had splintered a glass bottle standing in the rack above the washstand, and the marks of others showed plainly, some embedded in the panels of bird's-eye maple, others where they had ricocheted about the cabin.

The room had the appearance of having stood a siege, the signals of storm and battle were everywhere. Yet the living actor, the man who had come through it, was content to sit and smoke and ask questions; to sit without fear, or the smallest approximation to it, and watch the fires die; to "sizzle" out, with a cheroot in his mouth, growing darker at every exhalation. It was revolting, but it was magnificent; and Shirwill owned to its fascination. It thrust him off at a

<sup>1</sup> A peaked cap, made of black silk, and something the shape of a jockey cap, but higher in the crown; worn by officers in American sailing-vessels.

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tangent, bid him seek the fresh air to stare at the pale stars shimmering in the frost of it, yet held him by its brutal aloofness, its callous disregard of attachment.

The man was dying: he cared not a whit. He was but thirty, and the end drew near: he faced it without complaint, without whimpering. He might have friends—a wife, perhaps: he had already resented the suggestion that any message was necessary or expected. His owners, maybe? He took no heed, but when the oheroot was burning low and saturated beyond redemption, he asked for another, and held it with a steady hand while Shirwill struck a match. His owners? No. He guessed his owners "had no call" to look after their mates, . . . they weren't "Real Estate, . . . no." But, O Lord! he desired above all things the privilege of a five minutes' "laaff."

The man chuckled grimly between the puffs, and instantly set his face. The night moved on apace. Stars waned, others rose; they threw long tracks that wavered in the mirror at their feet; they rose ruddy, flushed, like children after sleep, and advancing, paled, grew white. A silent brooding night, with the ghost of a breeze sighing mournfully in the rigging; the shipboard noises subdued, hushed; the solemn ocean drowsy from long travail, its face veiled, its claws drawn in—waiting; and in the cabin a blood-stained couch, with a dog lapping hungrily at a man's hand.

A footstep sounded without, and some one halted at the end of the alleyway whispering the captain's name. Shirwill rose at once to answer and went on deck; the silence of the cabin oppressed him; the

## Under the Stars.

apathy of the man was a thing at which he marvelled. He looked out upon the stars and found relief.

A steamer was approaching. The blaze from countless lighted ports proclaimed the fact that she was a mail-boat, and M'Grabbut desired urgently to communicate. "If we can attract her," he said, "maybe she'll lie to and send a surgeon."

"If," Shirwill responded, "precisely. . . . But it's night, and we are dumb."

He turned to the fireman and directed him to fetch a globe-lamp from the cabin, then climbed the poop and disentangled the signal-halliards. "If ships were equipped as they should be," he said, "we could talk with that lamp. . . . But they aren't, and so it's chance. Get your pistol ready, Mac. . . . Bend on there, Cook."

They fastened the lamp to the thin halliards and hoisted it slowly until it was level with the top; there were no blue lights, no rockets, so they lowered and raised the light at intervals. They took it on to the rail and showed recurrent and somewhat unequal flashes; they held it above their heads; but the vessel took no heed. She drew up with them, came abreast, perhaps half a mile distant, and settled down on her course for the Garonne. The drone of her fires reached their ears, the propeller throbbed a drum-like accompaniment; already she was beginning to pass into that darkness from which she had sprung; but she did not see, could scarcely be expected to see, at so great a distance that a dim globe-lamp was not always at one elevation, nor always visible. That a ship was near them they undoubtedly discovered. That she was not

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lighted as vessels are usually lighted must have been equally apparent. Doubtless she was cursed for her neglect, sent to the devil—for navigators who are without the means of communication have only one end to accomplish; they cannot talk, they are dumb, so they desire to get past without collision, with the smallest possible risk—to themselves.

Shirwill ran the lamp more swiftly up and down, and called to M'Grabbut to fire a shot. The engineer complied. He emptied the revolver. They shouted in unison, but the thud grew fainter; the drone died away, and the lights grew into one confused blur, passed, and they were alone.

A faint cry came up to them where they stood shaking angry words into the darkness, and Shirwill hastened to the chart-room entrance.

"Quick!" he cried to M'Grabbut, "it's the mate."

The cry was now a gurgle, a long and painful effort to recover breath; and as they entered the cabin the sick man lurched forward. He leaned on one elbow, staring; his eyes round, distended; his mouth open. He motioned Shirwill to draw near.

"Why did yew . . . tell me?" he questioned with a pathetic, upward twist. Then after a pause, and very faintly, the words punctuated by gasps, "I . . . had tew . . . laaff. . . ."

The dog looked up with a snarl as they caught him; she faced her master, whined, and fell to licking a hand that twitched.

The dawn peeped out upon a ship that was derelict at last.



## CHAPTER XV.

### M'GRABTUT LOOKS IT IN THE FACE.

A BREEZE from the sou'-west. A clear day, vivid and sparkling beneath a sky whipped with fleecy runners, foretelling, to those who can read, the approach of wind, and possibly rain. A day for hope, joy, and laughter on a breezy headland facing the salt air; a day for silent questionings to a crew newly delivered from an incubus, a tramp, considered by wiseacres as a certain coffin, and staring the signals in the eye. It was an opportunity, said the skipper, for the *General Cyrus P. Tompkins* to assert herself and prove to the world what can be accomplished by a ship ordered by men who were untroubled by feuds or top-vee-locity guns, who would pull together and assert their dominance.

For months the vessel had done nothing. She had lolled, ambled; listened to the gales with folded wings, and made no use of her powors. Now she was clad to the swinging breeze, and her white canvas billowed from tall spars, swelling, sail above sail, in rounded shapes that whanged and panted in the freshness. They vied with each other which should pull most strenuously, and, looking down at the slow-moving

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hull, acknowledged that individually or collectively they appeared to do but little.

With trimmed yards and bellying canvas the ship still lagged. The sails were impotent to move her. Reef-points rippled with the music of small-shot, blocks clanged; there was action, strenuousness, life—she pulsed with it; yet there was something wrong with the *General*, something unusual. She glanced at a swaying black line that left her quarter to dally with the yeast-like wake, and decided the thing was an encumbrance. She strained heroically to free herself from the grip of it,—but it held her, kept her chained, to ascend again and again the same slope, in precisely the same water, like an idiotic Medusa struggling through surf for the beach. The encumbrance did more; it drew her back and attempted throttlement.

She stood up to look upon it, panting as a hound pants when it sees its comrade slipped for a race in which it cannot run, and acknowledged she was held by a leash she could not break. The leash kept her to that lead-coloured drab astern; it groaned on bollards unaccustomed to so heavy a strain, and the drab nuzzled the waves, lolled in them, tubwise.

The ship lifted her nose to stare, and the wire cut a line of foam between them. The *General* shook her head. She flounced sulkily in a bath of spray. The wind hummed.

“By herself she would spin,” said a voice on the poop.

“With less grass on her sides she’d spin now, M’Grabbut. . . . Wait till there’s a breeze,” Shirwill protested.

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He stood straddle-legged beside the weather-rigging, eyeing the strife; but the engineer shook his head.

"Gie me the boat an' let me awa whiles it's soft," he pleaded.

Shirwill glanced him over and nodded. "With the wind that's coming," he asserted, "we can drift there, sidle there, fetch there stern-wise. . . . Two hundred and fifty miles? Tcha! she will do it broadside, or to the track of shipping—why, it's nothing."

"It's eighty odd miles. You said it. An' it's oot to the westward, to windward. . . . Tell me, hoo far are we goin' to lug yon harn to windward? Take it as it fsces ye, Boh, . . . hoo far?"

Shirwill dropped his gaze, and replied, without touching the question, doggedly, "We'll have a go for it, . . . anyhow."

The *General* slid back on a slope, her sails clanging sharply ahack; they thrashed the masts and rigging with a roar of petulance, impotently. The ship had danced to the end of her tether and the black line twanged. She shook under the douthlo strain, acknowledged she was handicapped—on the verge of despair. M'Grahbut pointed the suggestion—

"Ye see?" he cried. "It's like pluckin' at a mountain wi' a fiddle-string. Ye'll only tear the gut."

Shirwill's face fell into line. "Then we must double the string," he decided.

"Gie me the boat," M'Grahbut urged; "let me awa."

"And send you after the rest, Mac? Not much. I want your muscle."

The engineer took his friend by the arm, saying persuasively, "Listen ta me, Boh. With the wind that's

comin' ye'll fetch, maybe, as far as Penmarch grille or the Saints,<sup>1</sup>—cold-blooded damsels we'll find them too,—or the iron Pinnacles about Ushant. . . . We'll never get her into Channel, we'll . . .”

“You, turned pessimist?”

“There's times when pessimism's wisdom. There's times when it's essential ta look facts in the eye, pessimist or no pessimist,” the engineer growled.

“Well, if you like it better, I think just now you are scarcely doing yourself, or us, justice. We've come thirty miles this twenty-four hours. . . .”

“Sidelong—like a crab,” M'Grabbut ejaculated.

“Twenty the day before,” Shirwill proceeded, “and ten the day before that. . . .”

“Good—I admit it. Sixty off our total of three hun'ard—barrel-wise! It's amazin'. Ye say there's a current. . . . Weel, wi'oot one, an' givin' us another fortnight o' fine weather an' fair wind, we'll do it graund. But does it look like fine weather? Face it, Bob, . . . face it an' throw up the sponge.”

Shirwill stared into the violet haze, noted the croon and swish of the breeze, the heavy air, the whip-like cirri, and acknowledged that he was facing it—taking tremendous odds without hedging. Yet he turned to M'Grabbut and said, “We shall do it, Mac, . . . don't get jumpy—it's fatal.”

He left the poop with the words, and the engineer was in charge, free to do as he listed. He came to the forward rail and stood leaning over it, looking across the decks. He was not a sailor-man, he was an engineer; but he had lived long enough to understand

<sup>1</sup> Rocks off Brittany, south of Ushant.

that trades are difficult only in proportion to the ineptitude of the pupil; that only those who are too lazy or too rich can afford to tackle them and fail; that competence in any of them is to be acquired by the man endowed with pluck—will. He knew, too, that Shirwill's open-mouthed confidence in the ship's abilities was but wordiness, thrown off to prevent him starting on "that wild-goose proposition of his, to find aid"—he, who could not navigate! M'Grabbut admitted that he had but little faith in yards, masts, sails. "As well be in a balloon, an' an eend to't," he protested, gazing aloft. He laughed, too, at the detailed intricacies of navigation, and had no faith in the stability of winds regnant in the fading months of the year. "Gie me a compass, the coourse, an' a gude boat, an' I'll do it wi'oot strainin';" that he prophesied.

The winds might remain steady; true, he admitted it. They might, also, back; again he found himself agreeing with Shirwill. But, on the other hand, the probability was that they would leap away into the tricky west—nor'-west even; and then, without steam, the pair of them would be blown on to the Pinnacles. Forefend the day! The notion thrilled. He could not shake it off.

Shirwill feared to lose him, that was plain; he feared to give an order that might send him to his death; feared, and he was supreme! M'Grabbut half turned from the rail to express his views when the ship dropped her stern to a backward tug, the sails clamoured, and the chain growled on the great iron bollards. He looked over his shoulder and caught Shirwill's eye, as he lounged, smoking, in the companion.

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"Pessimist or no pessimist," he shouted out, "she'll no stand mnch o' yon, . . . you'll rip the deck-beams out of her. . . . Eigh!" he added as the captain held up a hand for silence, "get awa below an' go ta sleep."

Shirwill langhingly signalled assent, and for an hour thereafter M'Grabhut paced the deck with the precision of a guardsman on sentry-go, but with hands in pockets and chin sunk.

He flourished now as chief officer of the *General*, and inhabited the dead mate's room. Shirwill and he took watch and watch on the poop, as, in the old days, they had taken watch and watch on the fiddleys. After their early experience, M'Grahhut considered the present a holiday; and, had it not been for the surging chains, the topline that twanged and the difficulty of getting to the westward, he would have fattened. These things together inspired him with fear. He knew that the Pinnacles were to leeward; that Shirwill was aware of their prodigious drift, of the unseen force that set them daily farther from the line of safety; and he had taken his measures accordingly. At odd moments, day or night, when no one was about, he had paid visits to the lazarette, and the lower hunk in the dead mate's room groaned under a litter of flags that mounted steadily. Biscuits, meat in tins, hutter, rolls, and some oddments picked up at the cahin table were there, wrapped ready for transfer; and now, at two o'clock, after peering down the cabin skylight and listening to the stertorous hreathing of his friend, he slipped down the ladder and entered the saloon.

On the table lay a chart outspread and marked with the ship's position at noon. Shirwill and he had

pricked it after sights<sup>1</sup> had been taken; and since then they had come two miles, perhaps three, sidelong. He stared at the small round circle indicating their position. So far they had crawled; the line of unaccomplished travel trailed off to a point some few miles west of Ushant. Shirwill had measured the distance—136 miles; and to it they might add the distance to Falmouth—110. Together they comprised a total of 240 miles over a sea of noteworthy danger, studded with a bewildering maze of figures, dots, letters; past a coast bristling with pinnacles and sentinelled by *chevaux-de-frise* of yellow blotches, all representing lights, signal-stations, warnings.

M'Grabbit waved the thing aside. Under his breath he acknowledged he could tackle a buckled crank-shaft, even a wobbly thrust, in the dark, and with equanimity if necessary; but this business of dots and measurements, rocks and currents, things unknown, unseen, at which men must guess, set him fuming. He found Shirwill's remarks, and took them down for reference—

“To Ushant—N.  $\frac{1}{2}$  W. . . . 136 miles.

“To track of ships—N.W. . . . 80 or 90 miles.

“To track of copper-ore-men—W. . . . 25 or 30 miles.”

All west; all towards that arc of the circle whence the wind blew—west, nor'-west, sou'-west.

For three days they had been struggling under favourable conditions towards that goal; and the net result, as Shirwill's track admonished him, placed them still farther from the line of traffic, deeper in the heart

<sup>1</sup> A ship's position is marked on the chart after noonday observations—or sights taken for latitude.

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of the Bay, nearer that appalling labyrinth of dots and splashes, more remote from all chance of assistance. M'Grabbut picked up his notes and passed hot to his room. He pushed the flags into a corner and carried the stores on deck. The boat already contained oars, sails, rowlocks, and kegs of water for ballast. M'Grabbut sampled the latter and found it excellent. He lighted his pipe and stood on the rail to stow the provisions, then, drawing the sails from their cases and unlashng the mast, he signalled to the men doing calashe watch forward. The bo'sun stepped out in answer, mustering his hands. They came aft, rubbing their eyes with sleep and wonderment.

"Anythin' wrong, sir?" their leader questioned, looking about him.

"Nothin'. . . . Stand by ta lower twa men. Gently does it! There's no need ta haze the skipper out of his berth wi' your clatter—go easy. So! Hold fast a wee."

He climbed the rail, and, standing in the stern-sheets, addressed the bo'sun—

"Jones, my lad, ye'll take on the watch while I'm awa. I'm thinkin' it'll be wise ta take a spier at the *Schweinigel*. Tell Captain Shirwill I thought it weel ta get awa in daylight, an' gie him this note—he'll understand. . . . So . . . lower awa, . . . an' watch your chance ta let go."

He waved his hand as the boat slid smoothly down, and a moment later cried out, "Now, now!" and took the water. The bo'sun leaned over at this and questioned whom he should send to join him, and M'Grabbut replied, "What for, . . . ta fetch the *Schweinigel*? Man, she's at anchor. I could do it swimmin'."



M'Grabbut looks it in the Face. 169

He unhooked the tackles, pushed off, and put an oar in the sculling-chock aft. The men stared. They openly questioned whether the great engineer was mad; but they consoled themselves with the reflection that in that case he was better in the boat than on board.

M'Grabbut crept out of the ship's lee and hoisted sail—a mainsail and foresail, both very small and full of wrinkles. They hung like a pair of cracked table-flaps until the wind caught them, then in an instant grew shapely. The soft canvas boat bent over to the breeze and a green line boiled up from her keel. M'Grabbut waved his hand. "She's a beauty," he cried. "I'll just take a run oot ta windward ta stretch the sails."

For an hour he continued on his course, dead to the westward, and for that time the men leaned over the rail, watching. Three o'clock passed, still he headed west; four, he made no sign. The sun sank through a bank of clouds that presently flamed to the zenith; M'Grabbut held onward. Captain Shirwill came on deck, and the bo'sun approached him with the letter.

"Gone! Speak up, man, . . . who's gone?"

"Mr M'Grabbut, sir. . . . He said you'd know. . . ."

"I? What fool's work have you allowed? Where is he?"

From the ship's deck the boat and her solitary occupant looked like the shadow of the three who walked in the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Gleams leaped about them. The water blazed.

Out of the sizzling west there came presently a breath that darkened the flaming sea.

## PART III.—THE OUTCOME.

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"The business faculty can be enhanced by education up to a certain point; but no amount of education can generate it. It does not necessarily mean a high type of mind, but a common-sense sort of debit and credit way of looking at things; a sticking to what is meum while annexing something of what is tuum."—*Vide Trade Journal.*

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### CHAPTER XVI.

#### THE SENIOR PARTNER'S POLICY.

CARDIFF lay under a wintry sky. Mud churned through the wheels of passing cabs, thin mud-streams spirted from the trollies of the faster trams; the people, hurrying down sodden pavements, were clad in mackintosh and oilskin, and carried dripping umbrellas as a further protection against the weather.

Rain drove up from the distant Channel, falling gustily, with blackened fingers, on the stucco-fronted offices, on the plate-glass windows of the merchant, and on the barrows of itinerant vendors noisily patrolling the gutters.

Outside, a gale moaned across the sea; the wind blew in frequent squalls; Lundy, the Steep and Flat

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Holmes, were curtained in mist; Penarth Roads were a blur, indistinct with falling rain. In town men faced the downpour at all points. It rushed slanting across the docks, swept up St Mary's Street, down Duke Street—a hurtling, angry, smut-laden blast. There was no escape from it.

Arun was on the pier-head, afoot early to see gutter-deep collier away for the Black Sea. His mood was sombre, as was the setting; no whit more cheerful than on that morning when he had seen the *Schweinigel* slide out into the teeth of a gale.

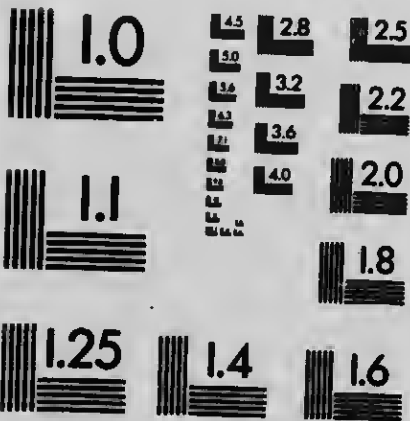
Not only had the unpronounceable weather ruffled him,—although that was sufficient, as he called men and gods to witness,—but there were other incidents, a whole medley of untoward happenings, which had conspired of late to wreck his peace of mind. The *Fürst Bismark* began it. She had sent in a report that had played havoc with the insurance premiums, and Shirwill's order, demanding payment for the boats, had come to hand. This thing the firm resented as unnecessary expenditure, and the price they considered exorbitant. Indeed, they would have disputed it but for the fact that it is unwise for a small man to play at fisticuffs with one who has power to crush him to mother-earth; so Schlange, the German, had gone post-haste to Hamburg to settle matters, and his report was even more disquieting than were the ominous quotations at Lloyd's.

Of late, Arun's theory on the wisdom of making ships unsinkable had received a blow. He admitted, when the mail-ship's story had come to hand, that sometimes, from an owner's point of view, it would



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he better that vessels should retain their old-time qualification and means of exit. Indeed, despite the fact of her recent appearance on the world's register, and the flourish of trumpets with which the firm had greeted her, Arun had come by slow stages to think that it would be well if the *Schweinigel* could disappear. In many ways she was unutterably a failure. She had cost him much in prestige; his character for sbrewd far-sightedness had almost vanished; she had dipped deep into the pockets of her owners, and Joseffs broadly hinted that he was sick of her.

Following in quick succession came Schlange's remarks, gained from an interview with the officers of the mail-ship. They said the *Schweinigel* was well named, that she was an untold beast, that no crew could live on her decks in a seaway; but that, from what they had heard and seen of Shirwill and M'Grahbut, it was abundantly certain they would fight her to some port and bring her home, without regard to the costs which must follow. Arun acknowledged the position was monstrous.

The ship on which he had built so much,—which was to reduce expenses to a minimum; which was to carry more, cheat the dues, and be the first to waft his name and fame abroad,—was now a laughing-stock, a signal for derision and jocularitv among his confrères at the exchange.

The thing rankled in his mind. Better far, he remarked when reading the news in the privacy of his room, if they had allowed her to break up on the rocks about Scilly. This he had considered advisable when first the information came. But since that time

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matters had moved apace; they had learned, at irregular intervals, of the final breakdown; how the *Britannia* had borne off certain members of her crew, and how they were now on their way from Plymouth to gather their wages—and compensation.

A lawyer had their case in hand, and, unless they could be bluffed, it was certain the firm would again be compelled to face the music. The firm was tired of facing the music; they said it definitely, looking into each other's eyes from different positions in the senior partner's room. And it was at that time that Arun came to the final stage of his mental argument, and vowed there are occasions when it is best for all that a vessel may, at least, have the option of foundering in peace. The opinion he had flung broadcast, as a sop to hide the parsimony of his designs, had come home, to his intense disgust. Apparently the *Schweinigel* was unsinkable. Apparently no accumulation of handicaps could wreck her. Apparently her people had not the gumption to know who buttered their bread, and had no intention of opening a sea-cock and so ending the situation.

For no fault of his own, Arun found he had indeed constructed an unsinkable craft; and it seemed that, if she were unaided, she would be like the dock dues, or the tax-collector, always looking in with an increased demand. The position was no longer simply monstrous, it was untenable.

An angry spirt of rain and spray drove over the pier-head and flicked the man between the eyes. He turned from watching the gambols of his departing vessel, his mind bent on the difficulties of money-

getting in an age when ships refuse to recover their insurance, and skippers have been educated to see the enormity of a hasty burial by aid of an open sea-cock, and sailors—the scum of the whole brood, as Arun could testify—were able to harry, through lawyers, reputable shipowners for compensation!

The rain had unsealed the tips of Arun's monstache; the cosmetic was an abomination; the hairs drooped wet on his pallid cheeks, accentuating the angry lines showing so deeply above. He came down the pier and approached a gang of men engaged, with the hydraulic levers, in opening the farther gates for a steamer whistling horribly near by. And as he passed, a word fell on his ears—"The *Tite 'un's* signalled."

It was the dock-people's sobriquet for the *Schweinigel*, Arun's masterpiece, and her maker knew it. He paused to hail the men.

"What's that yon say?" he cried.

William Williams, the head man, cast his eyes over the chaffing group and came to intercept him. He touched his cap, and his hand went out to meet the owner's.

"There's news of the *Titan*, sir," he said. "the *Strathmore* brought it in with her when she docked last night, whateffer."

He gave his answer brusquely, feeling the coin. A shilling rested in his palm, and Williams had expected half-a-crown.

"The *Strathmore*," Arun questioned. "What does she say?"

A gurgling sound broke from a pier-man's throat, and Williams shouted orders which sent him to the engine-house.



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"She passed the *Titan*, sir," he replied, looking at the owner, "somewhere at the edge of the Channel. They are bringing her home."

"They . . . they . . . Who are they?"

The sentence fell abruptly, for visions of salvage had leaped into Arun's mind, salvage that would have to be met if, by chance, the *Titan* had been picked up.

"Captain Shirwill and the engineer, sir."

"Ah, they have repaired the thrust, then. I am glad to hear it."

"What I said, sir," Williams returned with a hint at departure. "Indeed it does them credit."

Arun viewed the incident from another standpoint; but he was not prepared to hand talk on the subject. He wanted further information, and transferred a second shilling. The dock-gate man looked mollified, and proceeded with newly oiled wheels—

"They came across them just towards dusk, sir, towing . . ."

Arun interrupted with a wave of the hand. "Towing?"

"In a way, sir, towing. Indeed I neffer heard of such a case. It is wonderful; none of my men have effer heard of such a case. The steamer is towed by a sailing-ship, look you! A thing one neffer thought of. It has set my men on the talk, sir, and nothing can I do withh them whateffer. A tall barque she is that has hold of her, and the *Strathmore* did say how far they had come, and where they were bound, and all—hut . . ."

He paused abruptly, for Arun had turned on his heel and was splashing down the wet pavement to-

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wards the dock office. He entered the swing-doors and approached the desk.

"Has the *Strathmore* entered yet?" he questioned.

"An hour ago, sir. Her captain has just gone over to Lloyd's. Some report about your vessel, sir,—the *Titan*."

"So I hear. Who is captain of the *Strathmore*?"

"Ogilvy, sir."

"Frank?"

"Yes, sir, Frank Ogilvy."

Arun turned to leave. "Thanks," he said; "I will see him."

But he did not see him. Indeed he had no intention of seeing him, for Captain Frank Ogilvy was one of the men whom Arun had dismissed because he objected to being transferred to the *Schweinigel*. Altogether, Arun considered, the matter could not have come into more competent hands, for Captain Ogilvy would, he was certain, lose no opportunity of painting the *Schweinigel's* owners a comfortable carmine. The whole incident was annoying to the last degree; it was on a par with the untenable position in which he found himself. He called a cab, and, entering, drove noisily to the office.

The senior partner was in his room, and, said the clerk in answer to his inquiries, "Will be glad to see Mr Arun directly he arrives." Arun transferred his dripping umbrella to the stand and took off his mackintosh. The linoleum ran with trickling rivulets. Arun stamped with his wet boots, blotting them into one, and said something which the clerk did not understand. He ushered him to the chief's room and closed the door.

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Joseffs looked worried. The crease above his great nose was as deep as were the creases beside Arun's; the movement of his sloe-black eyes a trifle restless, even furtive; the pucker underlying his heavy jaw compressed and white from the stiffness of his pose. He stood with his back to the fire, his coat-tails drawn over his arms, and his fat stomach in bold outline against the farther window. Arun glanced up and saw that he had been forestalled.

"You have heard the news?" he remarked, taking a seat on the verge of the writing-table and swinging one leg negligently.

Joseffs looked at the younger man, and a suspicion of sarcasm rang in his voice. "All the world, apparently, has heard it—except ourselves."

"I don't know that I deserve that," Arun writhed.

"My dear Arun, pray don't mistake me. I said ourselves. It is our misfortune."

The big man bowed slightly, but the crease had taken others to bear it company. Arun glanced up and made a mental note of the fact.

"Ogilvy has been here," he said. "Kind of him, wasn't it? The sort of thing you might expect from present-day skippers. They know too much; education has given them the whip-hand."

"I always considered that you were a trifle hard on Ogilvy," said Joseffs; "you may remember the fact. Nowadays, and with things as they are, it is wise to—to nurse one's men. You, I am sure, will admit it—now."

"Admit it? Gad! I do nothing of the kind. If men won't obey orders it is necessary to dismiss them."

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Joseffs looked under his heavy brow and caught his partner's gaze. On the whole he considered it unwise to press the question at this juncture; several matters were still in abeyance. He withdrew the remark, pleading the grim outlook as his excuse. Arun was quickly mollified.

"At all events," he said, "I think Ogilvy should have rung us up instead of Lloyd's; it would have been some assistance."

"Ah," said Joseffs, "he has done that, has he? Well, in justice to Captain Ogilvy, I must say that he tried to communicate first with us, but he was unable to gain any response."

"How was that?"

"Well, Schlange is away, you were at the pier, I had an appointment with the hank people which you are aware I could not postpone, and Ogilvy would not give his message to the head clerk. A chapter of accidents, you observe, which could not easily be foreseen."

Arun tugged viciously at his moustache. "And now that you have seen him, . . . what had he to say?"

"Pardon—I presumed you knew."

"I know nothing definitely. I have heard scraps out on the pier, and am wet to my knees."

"Better go and change."

"Afterwards. Pray tell me."

"As you will."

Joseffs crossed the room, took a sheet of paper from the table and returned to his former position.

"Captain Ogilvy advises me," he resumed, "that when outside the Channel, perhaps two hundred and

fifty miles south of Scilly, he overhauled two vessels—the *Titan* in tow of a barque with a round-about name, the *General Cyrus P. Tompkins*."

"An American," Arun groaned. "Lord help us!"

"As you say," Joseffs replied in his most ponderous manner, "an American. Ogilvy ran close alongside and offered assistance, but Shirwill, who is navigating the barque . . ."

"Shirwill navigating the barque!" Arun interjected.

"What fool's talk is this. Ogilvy must be mad."

"I doubt it."

"Pardon—go on. The thing seems ridiculous."

"It is ridiculous, Arun. More, it will cost us a pretty penny before we have done with it."

"I don't follow you," said Arun. "There must be some mistake."

"Again, I doubt it. Ogilvy's statement is too circumstantial. I had it taken down, . . . here it is," and he commenced to read from the paper—

"I ran alongside the barque and hailed to know if I could render assistance, and Shirwill came to the break of the poop and told me to see his owners and tell them to arrange to meet him. He said: After we broke down, and the *Britannia* took off our *dagos*, we boarded a barque that was derelict, bent some new canvas, and took the *Titan* in tow. We have towed her now for the best part of a week, and, if the wind holds, shall be off Lundy on the fifteenth."

"And to-day is the tenth," Arun interjected.

The senior partner raised his eyes. He seemed perturbed, on the verge of annoyance, but he only said "Precisely," and went on reading—

"Shirwill further said: You can inform Messrs Joseffs, Arun, & Schlange that we are now the crew of the *General Cyrus P. Tompkins*, and have salvaged the *Titan*."

"Pish!" said Arun, "it won't hold."

Joseffs lifted his brows, but otherwise took no heed. He resumed with his board-room intonation—

"Night was coming on," said Ogilvy, "I could do no good standing by, for Captain Shirwill swore he would bring the pair home in his own way; so I came away, and would have notified you earlier had it been possible."

"You see," Joseffs remarked as he closed the paper, "that as, for certain reasons, I do not agree with your remark as to the validity of their position, there is little chance of our escaping the results. It is a nasty position, and if Shirwill sticks to his guns he can damage us very considerably. Indeed, to be plain with you, I may as well say at once that unless something happens we shall be in a very tight place."

Arun looked across in anger. "The man is our servant," he announced; "if he kicks up rough we must fight him."

"You forget," Joseffs remarked; "the man is no longer our servant. I gather that he has abandoned the *Titan*. The only thing that would have held him to us was his agreement, which you cancelled before he sailed. . . . It was a pity, a great pity."

"Still—we must fight."

"Impossible. We must not fight."

"Pray, why?"

"Because," said Joseffs, standing warming his back

and doubling the creases over his portentous nose, "because there are meddling personages—personages who are jealous of our success—who say our record is not over-clean. To you I admit it: they say our name is not what it might be, and we can't afford to ignore their statements."

Arun squirmed on his seat. "You speak," he cried hotly, "as though we were a set of scoundrels; as though, by defending ourselves from what is downright sharp practice, we should be in the wrong. The proposition is absurd."

"I speak, my friend," Joseffs returned with marked emphasis; "from my knowledge of what is being said, and for no other cause. There are times when it is wise for men to recognise the drift of circumstance, and in my opinion we have arrived at that stage. You remember the *Strongbow's* collision?"

The managing partner signalled his recollection.

"Well, we gained our case, as you know, but—we lost position. There are men to-day on 'Change who know precisely what happened; how it was the *Strongbow* sank, and all the bag-o'-tricks. Lloyd's, too, have an inkling. We gained our case, but our position was seriously damaged. The firm's credit suffered also—you know it. It suffered again when the *Titan* had to be towed home. A thousand pounds did not cover that affair, and our name suffered even more.

"No, Arun, it is no use talking fight. We can't fight these men; they know too much. They must be squared. The *Titan* has hit us very heavily. Ever since she was launched she has cost us money.

She is a failure. And now, if Shirwill succeeds in bringing her home, there will be a matter of salvage to settle—£1500, £2000, perhaps even £3000 will be awarded to the owners and crew of the *General*; and supposing we can legally claim to recover salvage on the barque, which I doubt, that salvage would not compensate us for the losses incurred by our own vessel."

Arun had slid from his seat on the table and was walking slowly up and down the room, his head bent, an obstinate, even mulish expression about his close-set jaw and puckered eyes; then, as Joseffs paused, he came to a standstill.

"I grant there is a good deal of truth in what you say," he remarked; "but I do not agree with your policy. It is not wise to conciliate sailor-men: they don't understand it. You must fight them, or they will turn the tables on you. And, with all due deference to your opinion, unless Schlange objects, I shall propose to fight."

"But Schlange does object. See, here is his letter."

Arun glanced over the contents and again looked up. "I see," he said, "he agrees that a policy of conciliation might pay us better. Asinine! Well, what do you propose?"

"If the *Titan* comes home," said Joseffs, "she must be laid up, and, if possible, sold."

"Ha!"

"It is the only thing to do. She loses money eternally. If Shirwill brings her in, we must compromise the matter and sell her. But—she may not come in."



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"No," said Arun, standing very still, his eyes bent on some distant object, "she may not come in."

"A gale of wind might materially affect the issue." Josephs stood peering under his heavy brows, his back to the fire, warming and squaring his shoulders.

"True—it might."

"I could almost find it in my heart to wish for a gale of wind," said the senior partner, straddling the hearth and lifting his coat-tails.

"So could I."

The two men remained facing each other some minutes in silence,—the one ponderous, with puckered brow, and steadfast eyes gazing at the picture of a lead-coloured steamer, with vermilion ventilators and curling smoke, paddling across an azure background; the other, lithe, erect, staring through narrow-set eyes at the *Titan*, laid up, waiting, with a notice-board across her gangway, for a purchaser.

"The thing must be got over," Josephs insisted after a while; "the vessel would break a bank."

"It can be got over," Arun admitted, "providing——"

The senior partner interrupted him with a gust of annoyance. "There is no proviso in such a case. She must go. I leave it to you." Then, as Arun watched in some astonishment at the unwonted plainness of this speech, he continued in milder tones: "Our position is seriously damaged, my friend. Unwittingly, with this vessel, you have hurt us. I need not go into details. Schlange has his cure, I have mine—and I think mine and yours coincide. Very well, take the matter in hand and . . . score."

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Arun's eyes flashed, but he made no response, and Joseffs continued in mildly argumentative tones—

“By the way, it is a pity you two can't foot it a little better. It doesn't do, when three men are partners, for two of them to be fighting. . . . Nay! I don't say it offensively. You both have ambitions; you are both young. But Schlange has the pull—he has more money.

“It is a nuisance. I recognise the fact plainly, and, because I know you better than I know Schlange, I almost wish you had it in your power to increase your holding—even at Schlange's expense. Still, that is a matter over which I have no jurisdiction. I can only regret it, and hope you will come through . . . un-singed.”

He paused, frowning at Arun's continued silence. It was obvious he invited a reply; it was equally obvious that Arun had no in' ion of satisfying him. He remained lifting his shoulders and staring intently at nothing, with eyes that watered under the strain.

Again Joseffs spoke. “Well,” he questioned, “what do *you* propose?”

Arun came back with a snap. The absurd picture faded from his mind and he faced his colleague with brusque speech.

“I have no proposal. I must think it out,” he admitted.

The door closed behind him as he left the room.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### ARUN GOES OUT TO SEE.

THE gale came, but it was not precisely the gale for which the partners prayed.

During the first day they could not have ordered events more comfortably; Arun stared through the office windows and consulted the barometer with certain triumph; the thing was done; the two ships must of necessity be separated; it was the beginning of the end. But on the night of December 12 the wind backed steadily until it touched south, then blew hard, with abundant squalls of driving rain.

The pier-men prophesied a sneezer. They said, in Arun's hearing, that when the wind hacks against the sun, things happen to time-worn coasters hugging too closely our rock-hound shores; but, between each other, they regarded the fact as a sign that the *Schweinigel* would reach.

"For, look you," said William Williams, checking off with a forensic finger the points of his argument, "with the wind at south, Captain Shirwill will find but little sea in Channel; he will have passed Scilly; and the more hardt it plows the better will he be pleased. For an honest man I should be sorry; but

for Arun, for Joseffs, and for Schlange—pouf! I haff no pity whateffer.”

All day Arun was afoot, walking the pier-head with scandalous disregard for creature comfort; paying visits to the signal station, to Lloyd's, to the tug office, and consulting with the skipper of his boat, the *Pride of Wales*. For Arun had no misconception on this point: despite the pier-men's eloquence, he knew precisely what gale hit hardest in the Bristol Channel, when the sea ran highest and when vessels were most in danger; he knew, too, that the pier-men had no love for him, and that they looked upon the *Schweinigel* as a certain coffin for some one or other of her crews.

Indeed the whole current of opinion was against him. His partners recognised only the reduced profits; the shippers, the extreme uncertainty of the vessel's movements; the insurance people, the necessity for enhanced rates. The position was untenable. Since last night it had become more—unbearable. The invulnerability of the *Schweinigel* had grown to be a positive terror, and—Arun had been thinking.

All day he had been thinking. In the office, on the pier, on board the *Pride of Wales*, the problem had crossed his mind in a dozen different forms, and out of them all he had thrashed but one solution—intervention. Intervention by the Act of God; intervention by the hand of man. Originally it had seemed possible that the Act of God would prevail. A sou'-west gale, a crazy steamer towed by a still more crazy derelict and crossing the path of the Channel traffic,—anything might happen. They must run the gauntlet of a thousand perils. He noted the fact that the Cornish

coast lay before them, curtained in mist, fog; the greyhounds, passing east and west, dashed out of space, bent only on breaking the record; lumbering tramps and half-manned colliers, with crews asleep and untrimmed lights, crawled the water-way in blotches of smoke. Anything might happen. The Act of God would surely intervene, and Arun would be saved from the obloquy his cowardice, his terror of failure, foresaw. But with the new day came the changed wind, the knowledge that nothing had transpired, and the certitude, now so visible, that the southerly gale would bring matters to a head.

True, the Channel was still hazy; a sombro blot lay over sea and sky alike, and through it drove the heavy air, wet, penetrating, stinging. It fell on the man's face like the lash of a whip as he stood staring into the greyness; it smote him pitilessly, took a mean advantage of an unbuttoned coat-collar and searched his linen. But it failed to rouse him, it availed nothing; for Arun's supreme ill-luck warned him the *Schweinigel* was still afloat, that the ridiculous barque still towed her, that Shirwill, M'Grabbut, and all the crew of fighters were coming home to accentuate his failure, to put the last word of ignominy to his threatened prestige.

Again he returned to the office, remaining alone, staring at papers, going over details of his vessel's unwholesome record, and again, towards evening, made his way to the pier. Rain and wind still drove across the town; the sea was still asmother with spume, smoke, mist; but nothing had happened, no report had come to hand, despite the urgent messages he had despatched requesting isolated lighthousemen to mark the

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progress of his ship. He noted the fact with a new-born anger, and until day dawned on the thirteenth, remained pondering the issues.

Then, while the pier-men shivered in the half-light, taking shelter behind their watch-house, Arun went to the landing-stage, called a boat, and boarded the *Pride of Wales*. The tug cast off her moorings, the smoke streamed in thin lines from her funnel, the decks trembled with hidden power, and a stretch of foam rushed out from the quarter as she plunged into the mistiness, heading down Channel.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE ISLAND WATCH.

THE tug dashed into the spume beyond the roads like a sea-bird bent on washing her plumes; the dust from Cardiff tips spouted from her scuppers, mingled with the brine, and left her clean; the black-and-red funnel took a speedy coat of white on its windward side; and Arun, clad in mackintosh, long hoots, and a borrowed sou'-wester, looked over the dodger in grim contemplation.

The turmoil through which they moved matched his mood. The fighting muddy wavelets, the panting engines, the rush of wind and swift leap of the tug, all served to nerve him for the ordeal through which he must pass. Intervention by the Act of God he still prayed for; lacking that, by the hand of man. By himself he would do it. The stress of the past twenty-four hours should never be repeated; the ignominy, the jeering laugh, should never again assail his ears. No silent promptings, no halting questions of right or wrong; no man, if it came to that, should be able to say that he, Arun the shipowner, faltered when the inevitable faced him.

The attitude of his partners, of men he had met on

'Change, told him that if the *Schweinigel* came home the inevitable would face him. He must then own that he was beaten; he must submit to the decisions of others in matters where hitherto he had ruled supreme. The thing meant moral degradation, a living death to one for whom the sole zest of living was success; who had no God but money; who had no code of honour, and dreamed of no power but that purchased by gold. The inborn habits of the money-getter swayed him as no opinions of his fellow-man could. At this distance, he perceived nothing criminal in the course his pride and self-love suggested: an open sea-cock—pish! The *Schweinigel* was a steady drain on the firm's finances; she had plucked at her originator's revenue and had brought him to the knees of his colleagues. Why not? The *Schweinigel* was his. She bade fair to strangle him, —the *Schweinigel*, therefore, must go. It had often been done before—often; in some way or another it would be done again. The crew could be saved; that, in his mind, he made a *sine qua non*. What, then, stood in his path? Sentiment? Asinine! Sentiment can never be admitted in business. Arun, of all men, would never allow lodgment to so paltry an argument.

He turned from watching a ragged coaster scudding for a haven, and saw the forward deck was empty. The incident jarred on his nerves, as minor details will when the mind is at labour with circumstance. He scented the beginning of a series of snubs in which even his hands would take part, and challenged at once.

“What has come of the man I stationed on the look-out?” he questioned with a snarl.



The skipper glanced round with indifference and replied, "It's not safe for'ud, sir."

"Bosh! I expect my men to obey orders."

The words fell sharply as they slid into a grey slope advancing to meet them, and the skipper gave his answer through a mist of spray—

"I'll tell him what you say, sir, but—I doubt if he'll go. It's suicide."

"Suicide—how?"

Again the skipper looked up from his bath and wrung his beard. "He'd get his brains bashed out agenst the bitts fust time she dips. We've opened the land."

The owner stood in the captain's sanctum, behind the dodger on the weather side of the bridge. It was the one dry spot on the tug, and Jenks commented on the fact without words. Arun noted the change of key and his annoyance increased; but this was no time to quarrel. He allowed it to pass.

"Well, well, I leave it to you. But we must pick up these vessels. No one else may have a hand in it. God alone knows what an outsider would charge to pluck them to the roads."

"As you say, sir, an outsider would open his mouth."

The captain closed his, and his eyes gleamed, for he knew that with Arun on board there would be scant opportunity for recompense. The whole business was anathema; he liked it as well as he liked his owner's presence. But Arun was not a man to be trifled with; indeed he turned on him with renewed emphasis—

"An outsider must not get hold of them—understand that, my lad. I am serious."

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"Not a doubt," said the skipper, and again faced the spray with stolid unconcern.

The water had by some means come behind the dodger, and Arun was no longer dry. "You know where to look for homeward bounders?" he resumed, mopping his face. "Very well; find these, and it shall be worth a sovereign to you on Saturday."

The captain turned a wet eye on the little dandy cowering under the screen. "It'll be wo'th it, sir, an' thankee," he replied, wiping the salt from his face with a hand like a steak.

Arun discovered no enthusiasm in this rejoinder; but, as he had already decided, this was no time for enforcing gratitude. He returned, therefore, to his former point, as was his pleasant fashion.

"It appears to me," he cried almost querulously, "there is no one on the look-out! Put a man on the look-out."

Captain Jenks motioned with his hand, altering the course. "I'm on the look-out," he said; "there's no need of anythink more, sir."

"Are you omnipotent?"

The skipper looked very dense. "I'm a'most wet through," he returned.

"Do you never make mistakes?" Arun cried, with a gust of anger. "Do you never miss anything?"

"W'en my owner's aboard, sir?—never."

The man spoke solemnly, without a smile. His face showed no emotion; it was blank, stolid, expressionless. To Arun it was a moot point whether the fellow laughed at him or spoke seriously. Only one thing troubled him more than his anxiety—he felt most horribly sick.

It was a new experience, engendered by the rapid lurching that had lately come upon them. Arun was unused to this mode of progression. On large vessels he had often jeered at the notion; but here—bah! the whole thing reeked of the position into which he had fallen. He crossed over and stood a moment beside the skipper, leaning back against the wind.

"If I were in your place, Jenks," he said icily, and shaking a pallid finger in the breeze, "I should have all hands on the look-out, and I would find those vessels. Mind—I expect you to find them; and if they are not found . . ." Arun paused to glance at a sea that came rolling down upon them.

"And if they are not found, sir?" The skipper gave the question with sturdy independence as the spray slashed over the bridge and drenched them where they stood.

"Why, . . . in that case . . . they will not be found, . . . and be damned to it."

The words came through clenched teeth as Arun hurried towards the chart-room. He came to the door and leaned there, spread-eagled, like a paper man, by the force of the wind. The skipper watched him with a tinge of merriment, but made no move until the door opened and Arun disappeared; then he came to the dodger and opened his lips in final judgment—

"Chap's dotty," he said; "clean off his tater. But I've shunted him, so we'll go easy."

They went easy, therefore, all day amidst the driving spume, and before night fell had searched the Holmes, questioned Breaksea lightship, and run into smoother waters to examine the coast anchorages as far as Bull Point.

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This lighthouse was equally barren of news; the stereotyped reply had but one addition—no vessels had passed answering to the description. Jenks swept the horizon with his glass and came back to the boat, while Arun, recovered in a measure from his indisposition, crossed to the side with unslaked energy to hear the report. Then, with the darkness newly come, they lurched again into the open, heading towards Lundy.

All night they cruised zigzag athwart the Channel traffic, steering now nor'-west, now south-east, passing and repassing the island towards which all homeward vessels direct their course; but no *Schweinigel* in tow of a paltry barque loomed on their horizon: indeed very few vessels appeared, for the wind was heavy and the coasters had received long warning.

Daylight saw them at anchor in Lundy Roads, sheltered from the sea by the island hills, and Arun rowing shoreward. He was pallid still, with eyes that were red from watching; but no note of distress appeared, no hint that he looked upon his cause as lost. He had come out to intercept the *Schweinigel*, and, as he had told the skipper, to tow her home, and no questions of mere creature comfort could turn him from his purpose.

The two men landed and climbed the path leading to the lighthouse on the southern point. The boat Arun sent back with orders to be ready at any moment, and to watch for signals; Jenks he kept to aid him while he remained on shore.

A sickly gleam of light broke through the misty cloud-bank as they reached the hill-top. The grey sea

lay heaving beneath them. The birds, driven inland by stress of weather, rose from the track as they moved, and swept about calling aloud their warning. Far down, nestling beside the rocky promontory, was the lighthouse whither they journeyed. The lamp flashed pale across the grey waters, peering out to discover what moved; but no sail appeared. The sea was barren of her children; it leaped at the island rocks and rolled back, pulsating, lonely, a-fleck with curly wavelets. Arun, marching in silence down the winding track, had no eye for the joy of the morning; he saw only a commonplace sea-scape, with a light shimmering in the near distance, and thought again of that prayer of his—intervention by the Act of God.

They came to the signal-station and stood knocking until the watch admitted them. A big west-country man—bearded, grey, with the thoughtful gaze of men who have lived their lives on the great waters—confronted them in the doorway, and Arun addressed him without pause.

"I want your assistance, Pengelly," he remarked shortly.

The man stared. "You know me better 'n I know you, sir," he said. "But you'm main early afoot an' the mornin's raw—come in."

"Business," said Arun, complying, "frequently demands more of men of my standing than eight-hour logic admits."

"Aye, sir, that's true—that's true. An' what might her do for you?"

Arun unhutted his coat and produced a card. "My name is Arun," he remarked, "and that is my

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firm's address. I am the managing owner. You have heard of us, perhaps?"

The lighthouse-keeper examined the pasteboard carefully. "For sure," he said, "we had a message from you two days ago—for sure."

Arun took up the thread with his precise snap. "Quite so. I wired, but I could not wait. One is anxious, in these cases, to do all one can; I could not sleep, so I came away. See here, I have received news that one of my vessels, the *Titan*, has broken down. Her captain sent me a message asking me to arrange to meet him off Lundy on the fifteenth, but, so far, I have not found him. Has the *Titor*, by any chance, passed?"

"Towing, sir, or under steam?"

"Towing, . . . e . . . in point of fact, in tow of a barque which I understand is partially dismantled—an American barque called the *General Cyrus P. Tompkins*."

"Her haven't gone past in daylight, sir—for sure."

"How do you know that?"

Pengelly smiled. "A thing like that don't cross a man's path all days," he said. "Lord bless you, sir, ber'd bring the w'ole colony out wi' telescopes. Her couldn't go by, wi'out I knowing it, no more than Barnum's could. But," he went on more soberly, "you'm looking for her main early. This is only the fourteenth yet, an' barques don't keep time like liners, specially when they's gone into the towing business. It's likely we shall see her diddlin' along in a day or so—for sure."

Arun boped so too supposing she intended to come.

But he did not give voice to the proviso; he bargained instead to stay in the neighbourhood, and spoke airily of the sovereigns he would dispense to the man who first sighted his ship. Pengelly listened. He said that it was not every day he saw so much anxiety about a missing vessel; but he would willingly aid the shipowner to the best of his ability; and would Mr Arun turn in and take some rest while he and the others kept watch.

But Arun had no stomach for sleep; he lived on wires, and had the jerkiness of his habitat. Anxiety, he said, kept him awake; he could not sleep if he lay down, and in proof of the assertion, spent the morning frisking from place to place, using his telescope with the customary indiscretion of a landsman. He had no patience with Pengelly's theory that a man can "pick up" a distant vessel better without. He saw laziness, apathy, lurking in the method advocated by his skipper and the lighthouseman with equal zest, and determined to trust no one—only his own perception.

Noon came, and with it the dinner hour. Arun ate sparingly in the dim parlour he had hired; and, sitting on the horse-hair sofa to smoke a cigarette, presently relapsed into a species of doze. He was very weary; his eyes ached from the unaccustomed strain; he forgot his troubles, fell back into oblivion and slept noisily, with his mouth open, until Pengelly came to rouse him. Then, instantly, he sprang to his feet.

"What time is it?"

"Nigh five o'clock, sir; an' here's a cup of tea."

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"Then I have slept. Why the devil didn't you wake me? What of the ships?"

"Nothin' in sight, sir. Take your tea, it'll freshen yon, for sure."

Arun obeyed. Indeed his drowsy faculties demanded it. He drank slowly, put on his heavy coat, and followed once more to the look-out.

The sun had set. From behind a bank of clouds, towering midway to the zenith, it threw a brilliant glow. The sea lay like a purple shield, scintillating to the base of the cliffs and flashing with the light of the flaming sky. One vessel stood out far on the horizon—a mere speck of darker purple wedged upon the gold; but for that small dot the pulsing ocean, gleaming so wistfully in the pure air, looked as lonely as was the little island nestling in its bosom.

Arun turned from watching. He felt rested, invigorated, ready for fresh battle if necessary; for was not the sea still bare of the *Schweinigel*? was it not already the night of the fourteenth, and might it not easily be—that the Act of God had intervened?

He looked across at Jenks, waiting near at hand, and gave his orders with a new zest. "We will get down on board at once," he cried; "Pengelly, here, will do all that can be done by man. . . . I know that, and we will cruise to intercept them. Good night, Pengelly; good night, and luck to your watch."

He turned away with almost boyish ease and continued his remarks to the skipper, plodding heavily at heel. "I often think," he said, "that if outsiders knew what anxiety rests on shipowners, what anguish touches them when they hear of possible losses, and



what expense they are frequently put to in the vain hope that something may be done to save life, they would be much more lenient in their judgment.

"Shipowners are human, just as other folk are human: they can't know of trouble without feeling sorrow too; they can't hear of accidents without desiring to do something to aid those who are left, . . . it is not in reason. The responsibility is awful. You can scarcely understand it, nor could Captain Shirwill. Indeed, if Shirwill had guessed to what pains we would be put to answer his message, I venture to think he would never have sent it."

The skipper eyed him with open confidence. "I'm sure of it, sir," he said. "No man would."

Arun glanced at the stolid face beside him and quickened his pace. They reached the hill-top, crossed the grass-land, and came to the landing, but he had no additional remarks to offer on the subject of a shipowner's trials. His lips were sealed by the untold enthusiasm of the skipper's reply. Anything might lie behind such an answer, and Arun knew it.

The boat awaited them, and as they prepared to take their places a shout came from the hills behind, and, turning, they saw the lighthouse-keeper racing down the track. He waved a handkerchief; seemed wild, excited.

Arun gave orders directing the men to remain, and himself climbed ashore. His lips were set, his face white, stern. He advanced without haste and said, "Well, . . . any news?" But his voice lacked snap; he appeared suddenly to have grown cold, indifferent.

"They'm wiring up from Falmouth!" Pengelly

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gasped. "There's news, . . . for sure. News, . . ." He paused, panting, then jerked out, "They want Mr Arun, . . . they hope Mr . . ."

"They? Who? Be precise."

The lighthouse-keeper stared, but he gave the information. "They? Why, Falmouth. Harbour-master's office, . . . for sure."

"Ha! But the ship? Pish! for the moment I hoped . . . hoped . . ."

Pengelly caught his breath to say, "It may be. We'm never certain—never can't be certain not before the divers have found her, . . . seen her bare ribs."

"True—and so they want me. Hum, yes, . . . wire I will be down by the first train from— Hey, you, Jenks! How long will it take you to run me over to Padstow? Give me that bag."

His colour had returned. His attention was riveted. He put the query with his old precision, took the valise, unlocked it, and turned up Bradshaw on the Cornish railways.

Jenks cast his eye seaward, scratched his head, and said, "Five hours, . . . like this."

Arun made a rapid calculation and came round to face Pengelly. "Wire," he ordered, "that I shall be down by the first train. Say that I leave here at once, and ask them to send telegraphic details to await me at the pier office, Padstow."

He moved away; his face said nothing; it was the face of a sphinx—white, calm. He regained the boat, stepped on board, and the men ferried him to the tug.

So they passed throbbing into the night—Arun stern, expressionless; the men nonchalant, bending to the oars.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE "CHARLEY-BANK."

AUTHORITY met the tug in the guise of an ancient seaman as she sidled panting to her berth at the edge of the stage. He gave instructions in the voice of a man docking an ironclad, then came forward, holding a lantern and a telegram, to ask noisily "Whether the *Pride o' Wales* happened to have a gent aboard, . . . name of Arun? Because, if so, an' he'd . . ."

The owner answered in person by springing from the sponson to confront the oracle. "My name," he said. "Give me the message."

The pier-man lifted the lamp to make an examination, but the voice sounded so masterful, the small dandy was so unquestionably present, that he dispensed with the ceremony. Arun tore the envelope apart and stood to read in the glare—

"Have news of a broken-down steamer, *Schweinigel* (?), not in list. Scotsman here seeking assistance. Mentioned your name, hence former wire. No tug sufficient power at home. Suggest send Plymouth.

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Better come down. Question of salvage. Difficult  
arrange telegram. HARBOUR-MASTER, Falmouth."

"*Schweinigel!* A Scotsman seeking assistance! Impossible. What had come of Shirwill? Still . . . it was stated. Ha! the thing was not yet accomplished, . . . found it difficult apparently. Gad! if it might be . . . if it . . . M'Grabbut a navigator!" Arun frowned as the new thought struck him—what was there the man was not?

Outwardly, the owner stood scanning the orange form, reading it methodically, while Authority gazed with raised lamp. Outwardly he was calm, cool, nonchalant; inwardly his pulses throbbed, the blood leaped in his veins, and words trembled, half said, on lips that twitched. "That Scotsman, . . . the schwein. . . . Still, if one could see him—perhaps . . ." Arun's mouth grew firm; he straightened his trim, lithe frame and looked up with his old precise diction.

"Any way of getting to Falmouth to-night?"

The man gaped. He knew of none. "You'm late," he said; "last train's gone, . . . hours," he added as an afterthought.

Arun broke in with a suggestion prefaced by the passing of a coin. "I know it. I refer to cabs, horses, motors. Any one who lets out that sort of thing hereabouts?"

The pier-tender thawed visibly. "Harses? Yes, zurr. There's Josiah Stokes, him as keeps the Red Cow, he do let out harses—car'ges too, so fur as that goes. A can't say nought about motors,—never heerd tell of 'em,—but there's the charley-bank wot's c d

by Mr Watchet, an engineer chap uz seems dead on breakin' 'is bones. W'eazy beast she is, too, zurr, . . . all spirts an' kicks an' stink,—but she do go! Lard knows, she do go. . . ."

"Can you find this man?" Arun questioned, breaking the thread. "Will you take me to him?"

"Wull I? A course—an' proud. But I doubt he'm gone to bed b' this. Still, if you'm game to chance it, zurr, why . . ."

Arun pointed to the fact that he waited, and they left the pier together, the man chattering volubly and confidentially of the tricks of "that there beast of a charley-bank," which, it appeared, was doing its best to "fright the harses an' sour the milk" with its abnormal and maladroit tactics. But it was evident that Watchet throve on the process, for, by the time they obtained view of the house, the pier-man had confided the intelligence that "Watchet wasn't the chap to turn out of his bed fur a sneeze, . . . hadn't any occasion, thank the Lard," but he expected "he'd open his mouth like a barn" at that hour.

Arun, pacing gingerly at his side, admitted the possibility, adding as a rider, the thought that was his credo, "You see, my friend, all men have their price. It is only a question whether one can reach it."

Authority winked into the night and smote its thigh with a confirmatory sentence. "Aye, zure, . . . that be it, zurr,—danged if 'tain't, . . . pat."

He busied himself with the bell, chuckling and laughing until a face, like a newly risen moon at the full, appeared at an upper window; then he desisted to offer an apology.

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"You'm to bed, Mr Watchet?" he said.

Mr Watchet admitted the fact in a condemnatory phrase.

The pier-man seemed mollified, and resumed. "An' asleep?" he cried. "Well, zure, . . . an' here's a gent wantin' that blousy charley-bank of yourn . . . fur a trip."

"For a trip, . . . where?" cried the face.

"Falmouth," said Arun. "Can you come down?"

"Question of price," said the face; "an' it's dark."

"Starlight," Arun interjected.

"Comes to the same thing, . . . an' I've been up all day."

"So, too, have I."

"It's farty mile if it's a rod," the face asserted dejectedly.

"Thirty. . . . Come down. I shan't haggle if you know the road."

"If," said the face with a note of disdain, and the window slammed.

Arun stood in some doubt, but his guide reassured him with the words, "You'm nz good as there, zurr, . . . if so be you've got the brass."

Five minutes later the man stood in the doorway, holding a lantern. It struck Arun that people moved about in those parts armed with lanterns as in others they carry sticks. But he waited, saying nothing, until the magician of the "charley-bank" reopened the conference.

"My price," he said, "for the run you speak of, is ten pound—there an' back. If you like to give it, I'm your man; if not, I don't stir."

Arun waived the question, and asked, "How long before we can start?"

"Ten minutes."

"Very well. Here's five. The other five you shall receive either at Falmouth or on our return. Does that suit you?"

"It's business," said the man. "Sit you down in the parlour while I get out the machine."

In less than the specified time Arun was standing armed with a bundle of rugs, ready to mount, and listening to the explanations of Watchet as he moved about his steed. The thing buzzed. From somewhere at the back of it came a whirr that stank; and from the front near wheel, Watchet's voice droned complacently on the virtue of being ready and "always on the spot."

He reappeared presently and assisted Arun to a seat, which, he informed him, "would likely serve as a bed if the passenger cared to take advantage of the cushions he had placed on the floor." Arun acknowledged the desirability, and wrapped himself warmly amidst the wraps. He was weary. He admitted that he could sleep, as hardier men have done, sitting on a fence; and, as he sought a comfortable head-rest, the "charley-bank" thrilled.

They woke the echoes in the sleeping town with a series of hoots that brought folk to their windows to anathematise "thick-thur Watchet." They looked like ghosts, standing glowering behind the frills, and the "charley-bank" revelled in the notion—kicking, spitting, emitting a ghastly stench, and peering into the distance with its two gleaming eyes as though it, too,

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were the ghost of a long-dead chariot, heralded by an owl and freighted with souls for the depths.

Arun did not see the thing from this point of view; he recognised that he was on his way to Falmouth, that by great good luck he had secured a means of meeting that Scotsman, perhaps even of coming to terms with him for the abandonment of the *Titan*,—the *Schweinigel*, as they called her,—and . . . the rest was clear—clear. He called God to witness that it was absolutely the only way; that he was forced, driven; that although it might be difficult, ever hazardous, the attempt must be made.

Schlange stood in the path against him, like the angel before Balaam, and Arun was afflicted with an infirmity akin to Balaam's—he was morally blind; deaf too, and as to his shrewd far-sightedness, paralysed. The climax at which he had arrived was the result of greed—he did not acknowledge it. The suggestion never stirred. It was the result of Schlange's action. The hit was in his mouth; Schlange held the reins; he drove with a hit that threatened to break his jaw. Schlange had embittered Joseffs; Arun was the sufferer. "There is hut one way out of it," Joseffs asserted; "the ship must go." "True," Schlange threw out, "there is hut one, . . . still, he will not carry it out." He prophesied! He, the German, the tinkerer, the spoiler of E. . . , dared to prophesy concerning a man with nerves, a man with a will. That was what Arun read. The thing had never been spoken, hut it was there. Schlange prognosticated in broken sentences; without words he pointed derisively to the climax—"I, myself, tink she will come in."



Well, it might be. But it is not wise at all junctures to drive a man with blows; there are, confessedly, occasions when it is better to use the knife—or retire from the contest. Schlange apparently had not learned this; and so Arun had come out to see, and now was journeying in a machine that buzzed and thumped and racked his nerves, towards Falmouth.

They came out of the streets and emerged upon the highroad. The "charley-bank" hummed at the freedom. It appeared to delight also in presaging its advent by a series of hoots. Shadowy flocks of sheep and herds of cattle rose and stampeded to the right and left across fields, dim in the starlight; ghostly carters stood by the roadside holding their teams and swearing at animals legitimately scared; but Watchet sat in the fore-front, with his hand on the brakes, steering, and gazing from beneath a drawn-down cap into the darkness. "Thirty mile," he said in his teeth. "We could do it in an hour, if there was light. A record."

The bumping increased.

They mounted a hill and descended rasping into the valley; Arun grinned at the shock. A piece of uneven ground lay in their track; they passed it at speed. They rattled over the cobbles of a village street, twanging the horn and scaring the sleepers; Watchet never blinked. A policeman waved mistily from the side-walk; the machine throbbled again into the country and silence, and Arun struggled with sleep.

He had a sense of being hemmed by culminating forces; of strangling in the grip of dominant powers.

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He fought with them, dealing blows, and they eluded him, inadequately punished. He sprang on, following with outstretched arms, and clutched them, singly, one by one, and they succumbed. He looked upon the fruits of his first conquest, and out of the ghost of it rose again the same enemy, triumphant, sneering, —a thing that evaded him, receded ever farther and farther into the distance, a thing with a German accent and distorted phraseology. It led him to sea.

He questioned whether it was the sea, and stretched out a hand to feel, and it was gone. The vision faded; there was nothing before him—nothing. Again he was victor. Pride rilled upward, and he gave vent to a bubbling cheer that sounded like a groan. The noise awakened him, and he lifted his head to see what chanced.

It was dark. The machine snorted, its pulse beat; but it lay still, panting. The notion came to him that he was in a grave—it was black; he lay in the bowels of it, sweating. He raised his voice and cried to know what was wrong. He expected no response, yet, when Watchet's answer rose like a laugh from the road, it seemed that he had expected it, waited for it. It said, "You'm all right, . . . never fear. There's a bolt wants tightening, . . . jobbles a bit, . . . go to sleep we're nigh on Ladock."

Ladock? He might with equal relevancy have told him Smith was dead. He questioned again, "Where is Ladock?"

"'Bout six miles narth o' Truro."

Truro? The voice gave no further information: it expended force on the bolt, and Arun decided that it

did not matter much where Ladock was, or Truro either—the point for which he aimed was Falmouth. But before he could awaken his drowsy faculties Watchet had mounted, and the machine buzzed.

Arun decided he could not sleep. Sleep in these conditions was accompanied by a tingling sensation, a nerve irritation which caused a numbness, an apathy that was annoying, even worrying. He propped himself higher and leaned against the seat of the carriage. A low wind rippled over the downs and became a gale under the influence of their speed. It swept towards them, whispering of a coming rain. It spoke also of the *Schweinigel* towed by a paltry barque, and whispered of rocks to be passed; and Arun collected his faculties, resolutely determined to keep awake. They paced down an avenue of stripped elms, and the stars winked from behind the branches. A village rose suddenly before them; they danced its length and coughed again into the long white road—the road which led, like a giant snake, from sleepy Padstow to the southern harbour, where M'Grabbut, the engineer who could navigate, who could fight and quote Latin, awaited assistance.

They skirted an arm of the marvellous harbour, winding miles inland, and came dustily into Truro. A skirl, a rattle, a multiplication of the owl-like cries, and the houses were past; they were amidst the rolling downs, skirting a park and staring at a bluer arm of that Nile-green harbour, the English port of call, and throbbing at last for Falmouth.

Watchet sat like an automaton at the wheel. The bolt was cured of its jobbling; his "cha bank"

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could go like the wind—if he let her out. He acknowledged the fact with a smile of triumph, and gave her, as he said, “gee up.” He admonished Arun, over his shoulder and without moving an eyelid, that there were “No peelers about, an’ dang obstructionist laws. . . . He, at least, was on for a recard, . . . ready for sleep, dog tired.”

They rushed into Falmouth, slackened in the street, and a whiff of the salt came off the bay to greet them. There were ships down there—yards, masts, funnels. Arun sniffed the freshness, and with the breath, it seemed, the brakes buzzed; they drew up before an hotel, and the journey was accomplished.

Watchet descended and came round to liberate his passenger. “Twelve-farty-five,” he said. “It’s a recard . . . for night work,” he added.

“You’re dead-beat,” Arun replied, scanning him. “Knock them up; we must get a sleep.”

“Drink,” Watchet corrected.

“You can have both, . . . I will arrange. But at present my necessity is the harbour.”

Watchet stared. He decided that he might allow Arun to proceed on that errand unaccompanied.

## CHAPTER XX.

### A MESSAGE FROM THE SEA.

A SILVER-THROATED bell, struck with two double strokes, followed after an interval by a resonant tenor, told Arun that it was six o'clock, and that shipping lay close at hand. The sound scarcely wakened him. He heard it from that borderland of sleep in which no faculty is alert and wonder the only sensation aroused. He marvelled at its clarity, at its propinquity, and, turning on his side, fell again into a doze, hearing nothing, dreaming nothing, in spite of the iterated warnings falling so regularly in the silence. Five bells, six, seven—dawn broke over a world of tears; the wind had risen, and with it had come the rain.

A soft patter drove against the windows in gusts, and a shoot, somewhere outside, gurgled sleepily, spouting water. The sound was redolent of ease, soporific. Arun slept until a bugle, blown lustily and apparently close at hand, brought him to his elbow counting the bell strokes—eight o'clock. The guardship announced the fact with a flourish, as her small storm-ensign fluttered to the peak.

Eight o'clock! Arun rose at once and rang the bell.

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A maid appeared in the doorway with hot water and replies to questions brusquely asked. Demurely she announced that she had already knocked twice; she supposed the gentleman had changed his mind and desired to sleep. Arun fumed at the hearing. He said, with that before-breakfast acidity which is the birthright of testy men, that he desired nothing but that his instructions should be carried out without the interpolation of random suppositions; and requested that the manager should be informed that he would be at table in ten minutes, sharp.

The maid left him unperturbed.

Arun made haste to follow her downstairs; then he took a light meal in grim austerity and drove forth on his errand.

Arrived at the sea-front, he discovered that the harbour-master was at breakfast. A big black-bearded West-countryman advised him of the fact, and palliated it by saying that he had left word to be called immediately Mr Arun arrived. The chief understood he was expected at about one o'clock—supposing, of course, he caught the first train.

The leisurely method of the man's speech, his casual intonation, coupled to the indifference and apathy lying behind, went far to put the owner on that high horse of his which had done so much to bring him to the knees of his colleagues. The man's nerves were on edge. He still rode bumpingly in the "charley-bank," felt the thrill of the cushions. He bristled with dignity, his eyes sparkled; but he composed himself to say venomously, from the cover of a set smile, that "time was precious, and he hoped Captain Judd would be

able to favour him with an interview—of course at his convenience.”

The deputy was nettled. Despite his slow vocabulary he perceived sarcasm lurking in the voice of the man of business, and, had not luck intervened, Arun would have certainly paid for his petulance by a further stretch of waiting.

As it happened, however, the harbour-master had noted the arrival of a cab, and now came hurriedly to greet him. Arun lulled at once, and, turning about, remarked—

“My name is Arun—Joseffs, Arun, & Schlange. I am the managing owner. . . . Captain Judd?”

The harbour-master extended his hand. “My unknown correspondent,” he replied. “Yes—but, early as you are, you are too late. Sorry. Couldn’t get a wire through to stop you.”

Arun echoed the phrase as he searched his companion’s face—“Too late?”

Captain Judd explained that the man he wished to see had already decamped, and Arun, in spite of his annoyance, rejoined suavely, “Pardon, I scarcely understood. You see, I got your explanation at ten last night and came here direct—by motor-car. I called at your office at one, or thereabouts, this morning, and heard that he was here—that you had put him up. Awfully good of you, of course, but still . . .”

“Nevertheless,” Captain Judd asserted, “he is not in my house now—nor is his boat in the bay; . . . er . . . have you breakfasted?”

Arun reassured him on this head, and went on to inquire whether by chance the night-watch had seen

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anything of this erratic visitor, adding as an afterthought, "He's the man I want, I suppose? What was he like?"

"Tall, big-boned, reddish beard and blue eyes. A Scotsman, hard as nails and a bit of a character—you could not mistake him."

"No," said Arun, "not easily; besides, you say he made use of my name. Hum! yes, I should say it's M'Grabbut, though why the devil he is nameless, and what the devil he's . . . pish! Can I see this watchman of yours?"

"Surely."

They came to a store-room across the way, and discovered him smoking a pipe on a heap of rolled sails. He was old and bent and garrulous, clean shaven as to his lip and chin, and wearing a heavy grizzled beard which framed his jaw like a fringe. He acknowledged the harbour-master's call with a stiff salute, and turned to Arun on being told what was required.

"Did a zee un?" he reiterated, standing in the gloom before him, straddle-legged. "Ay, zure. Zeven o'clock it were, uz nigh as dammit, an' away off wi' 'is boat a wss, 'fore you could zay so much as knife-it. 'Course her zee'd un."

Arun checked him with—"One minute! Just answer my questions as shortly as maybe. I'm in a hurry—you understand?"

The man grinned. "Ay, zurr," he said, and became mute.

"Have you any notion of this man's name?" Arun asked.

"No more than Adam," came for answer.



"Was he prepared for a trip—dressed for boating when he came to see you?"

"Her'd got on the rig a comed ashore in, zurr; zame as wot a slept in, I racken."

"And he walked straight down to his boat and went away without a word to you—or to . . ."

The old man lifted a palsied hand. "Nay, nay," he cried. "Howld on a bit, zurr. . . . Nay, not he. We 'ad a crack, you may be zure, . . . cowld time o' night—sun-up, an' lonely, too. Darn sight more lonelier than w'en you come down to zee me nigh on half a'ter one. 'Course we 'ad a crack."

Arun despaired of obtaining precision. In this person's mental equipment it was an unknown quantity. He decided to lead. "And if I had been in your place," he hazarded, "I think I should have tapped him for a nip."

The old salt winked monstrously behind his hand, eyeing the harbour-master's back. "That's uz may be," he said huskily. "Anyway, her stood besoide me, smokin' 'is pipe an' lookin' out into the rain,—for it 'ad just turned in wet, zurr,—an' I took the liberty of tellin' him how you were comin' down in the marnin' an' would like to zee un. . . . A gent, I sez, nothin' else."

"And then?" Arun questioned, as the scene flashed luminously in mind. "And then?"

"He turned round an' zaid, 'Ah, oo's that?'"

"'Mr Harun,' I sez; 'your owner, so they do zay,' I sez, 'comin' to make arrangements fer towin' that fersaken wim-wam o' yourn.' I'm tellin' 'ee just as it 'appened, zurr—no more, no less. 'Goin' to zend out

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to pick her up, seemin'ly,' I sez, 'for which I'm zure you'll be mortal thankful.'"

"Umph!" Arun breathed. "Well, and how did he take that?"

"A zaid, 'I wull,' Never a word more; just shut his teeth on the stem of a's pipe an' zaid, 'I wull.'"

"Yes?" Arun commented.

"But, zays I to myself, you'm mighty cool ower't—yet I wouldn't wonner if I could give you the shakes, my zon, fer all your shut teeth. A man uz is goin' about wi' a new-fangled boat an' no name to his starn may be on the square an' may be on the round. Anyway, I sez, I'll give you a look at a card, . . . the card you give me, zurr, an' I showed it."

"Well, what did he say to that?"

"Nothin', zurr, . . . knocked out a's pipe an' filled it."

"Sure?"

"Why would I lie, zurr?"

"True—there is every reason why you would not. Well, and then he went away?"

"Not immediate. We talked a bit more, smoked a bit more, an' then 'ee asks me if anythin's come in durin' the night, an' I sez, 'Yes,' I sez, 'there's a boat in the outer roads, on the smell fer game.'"

"Game?" Arun interjected.

"Trouble, zurr. A tuggie, they do zay, can scent a gale or a wrack if it's tother zide o' Kingdom Come. I don't know about that. Anyway I pintoed to w're she lay, an' 'ee took my glasses to make her out."

"Well, what followed?" Arun asked the question as he stood sunk in thought. He knew precisely what

followed. In his mind he could see M'Grabbut standing there, sucking his pipe and throwing in a sentence as it pleased him, pandering to this cripple's vanity, alert—supremely alert for news of Mr Arun.

The old man looked up at the intonation. To him it seemed that he stood in the way of a decent tip.

"Nothin' followed, zurr. The chap zaid, 'Ho!' 'ee zaid. Reg'lar oyster, 'ee was; an' I sez, 'Just so,' an' we stood smokin' until the light breaks through a bit thicker. Then 'ee ups an' sez—

"Give my compliments to Captain Judd,' 'ee sez, 'an' tell 'im he'll 'ear from me again.'

"Why?' sez I, 'won't you bide an' zay it yourself? He'll be up an' about in a hour or zo.'

"Can't stop, sonny,' a zaid, 'I must be gettin' along.'

"Along?' sez I.

"An' when that gent you spoke of comes down, you can just tell 'un from me,' 'ee sez, 'that it's the y'early bird uz catches the worm.'

"Anythin' else?' I bawled at 'im, fer he'd slipped down into the boat an' was steppin' the mast, an' the flutter o' the zail a-nigh drowned my talk.

"Aye,' he sez, 'you may gie 'im that,' an' a flung thicky package up on the pier, pushed off her nose, up'd his vores'l an' away like a Falmouth huffer barn an' bred. . . .

"Lard!" the old man resumed with a note of admiration, as Arun took the parcel and untied it, "Lard! but thicky chap knew 'ow to 'andle a bo-at—zame uz if a's barn to't, . . . a did that."

Arun scarcely heard; he had no further interest in

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the question of his engineer's prowess; he was reading a pencilled line lying within his hand—

“Docendo discimus.—HUGH M'GRABUT.”

The sentence stung. Arun stared at it; forgot the man waiting, and visibly expectant, close beside him. M'Grabbut had been there, and had left with a sneer on his lips. He had gone out into the dim and misty Channel to avoid his owner, leaving a message that Arun could understand. Insolent! And yet, was it insolence? It verged; that Arun acknowledged with a frown.

Well, the engineer could afford it. He was master of his own destiny. Apparently he intended to fight his owners, to harry them; apparently he chose to run the gauntlet of hazards, while so engaged; apparently the sea had no terrors for him. A small boat! . . . and single-handed. Arun stared into the grey-green depths, noted the curl and splutter of the crests, the sullen wind-note, the grim darkness of the horizon, and admitted, as he moved to rejoin the harbour-master, that whatever else M'Grabbut might be, he was, at all events, no coward.

Captain Judd met him at the door of his home. “Well,” he said, “any success?”

Arun's lips were in line, his eyes piercingly intent on the seascape. He answered thinly, “I can scarcely say, . . . one can learn so little—from that type.”

“Still, he mentioned your firm's name, . . . inadvertently, I believe. I was warranted in supposing . . .”

Arun let the suggestion pass. "At all events," he said, "he has chosen to leave. I can do nothing. . . . Indeed, to tell the truth, I am inclined to think the man was mad."

"Sane as you or I, sir. Still, I agree it looks queer."

"How did he approach you? what was his request?"

Arun threw out.

"As far as that goes, he just wished to get hold of a tug with whom he could bargain. He had a vessel down the bay—gave me the position; said she was broken down, and he would be able to direct the captain to her. But first, he required an agreement. Unfortunately there was nothing at home, as I told you, powerful enough to tackle the job—else . . ." he shrugged his shoulders and extended his hands, adding jocularly, "well, we all know what would have happened."

"Exactly. But I must be getting back. I have a tug at Padstow, waiting. We shall resume our search. It is annoying—yet one cannot forget that you acted for the best. It was the only thing to do. So . . . I may rely on you for news, . . . any sort that may transpire?"

The harbour-master lifted his brows. "But," he objected, "you will send out from Plymouth, . . . or . . ."

"Send . . . where?"

"I have a note of the position. I told you," he paused to turn the leaves of his pocket-book, and read out, "I left the ship in latitude 46° 21' N., longitude 4° 12' W. . . . That's definite, I take it?"

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"Apocryphal. Besides—is it my ship?"

"Of that," the harbour-master replied, "I am sure you are the best judge."

"Just so. And the matter weighs heavily on me. It is an enormous responsibility. Still, I put it to you, can I go on incurring indefinite expenses in such a case? Is it fair to my partners? Is it fair to myself?"

"I admit the difficulty. Still . . ."

"You don't admit it: you are swayed by pity. It is very praiseworthy, of course, but I can't act on those lines. Give me facts and I will act; but without—well, isn't it rather talking in the air?"

The harbour-master had no reply to offer, and Arun continued with his precise snap—

"So you will wire Lundy. I shall be there, or they will know where to find me. Thanks. Good-day, sir. I wish we had had better luck."

He extended his hand, but Captain Judd failed to see it. He said in his throat that the whole business was incomprehensible, fishy in the extreme; he could not understand it; nor did he altogether appreciate the—was it crafty?—look in his companion's eyes. He was a bluff man of the sea, had commanded for Green, and was fair, open, honest. But this. . . . It bothered him.

Arun entered his cab and drove away. Outwardly he was undisturbed, but the annoyance rankled. He had wasted time and money. He had harried his nerves—to what end?

M'Grabbut's challenge faced him. "Docendo dis-

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cimus!" Good! we do. But at present, it seemed, the engineer had not got out of the first four rules.

All through the return journey to Padstow, and thence by the *Pride of Wales* to Lundy, the sentence drummed.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### A LESSON IN ITALICS.

IN Pengelly's phrase and manner when he met Arun on his return from Falmouth there was nothing of indecision. "We'm in for dirt," he announced; "you'm goin' to see sights." And, from a seaman's point of view, both prognostications were literally accomplished. There came wind, rain, combing seas—a gale, in other words; or, as the papers put it for the delectation of persons more interested in the ebb and flow of stocks and shares, "A deep depression making its way from the Atlantic, and, in the course of the next twenty-four hours, will spread generally across these islands. . . . Storm warnings have been issued to all southern and western stations." Lundy was one of the warned.

The lighthouse people seemed to regard the matter with indifference, even with complacency. They hoisted cones and sat down to wait; then, when the rain became a downpour and they were all comfortably wet, they put on oilskins and tied the legs over boots already saturated. And when, at night, in the midst of a howling wilderness of sleet and hail, the fog-signal raised voice on the western side, the community



slept without blinking, like men qualifying for the position of Stoics.

On the first night Arun's tug drowsed under the hills, secure in the knowledge that the *Schweinigel* could not spring three hundred miles north in a day, or, cumbered as she was, even in two. The second and third she lay there because it would have been rash to venture out to fight a sea that ran white-lipped under the lash. Jenks dodged from deck to cabin, grumbling and eyeing the signals. He acknowledged that, for once, it was well his owner was at hand to give orders, otherwise it was possible he might have considered the instructions he had received to cruise and find these vessels imperative, perhaps even detrimental. As it was, the tug nosed the eddies with bowed cordage, staring at a shot-marked sea as she swang to front it over an arc of the compass, wide as the flurried gusts. She searched for a permanent force at which she might offer, boldly, that front; but always it eluded her, swept about in circles, whittled down to a scream and sprang out, booming at right angles. The rigging had a note of hysteria—high, shrill, discordant; the cable was full of strange thrills and groans—it, too, looked for some persistent strain, but found only those jerks and plucks which made life so wearisome for the crew and tore at the subtle mechanism of the windlass. Jenks prowled the decks, scowling.

But on the bill, facing the broad open sea, looking into the teeth of a thin rain that beat at times with the force of hurled shot, the man on the look-out discovered a gale that was steady, forceful, brutal in its antagonism. It desired to overwhelm the island, to brush

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it from its path. The island stood untroubled. Great seas rolled up to the base of it, and smote shuddering blows that towered with spilled energy; foam and laced showers descended slantwise on rocks still placid. Seas which had travelled a thousand miles in triumph, which had passed through day and night, trafficking remorselessly with the life of the depths,—the life that swims and the life that floats,—came with a proud rush, grim, like a moving wall, and hammered. Formless and scattered, the waters stooped, searching amidst the spume for the parts which had made them. The island looked out of its 'spindriff curtain unawed, unamazed; it found nothing unusual in the war, nothing abnormal. It was a gale, perhaps even a cyclone; it mattered nothing. The island smiled.

But to Arun these things spoke another language. He was awed, amazed, confounded at the brute force so ragingly at large. He saw possibilities behind it, and grew pallid at the thought of some, grim at knowledge of others. He set his lips to watch what passed, but across his vision there dawned a recollection of the two derelicts, of their difficult passage, of their handicap. He saw them drifting, mazed, staring at an obvious fate somewhere in the heart of it. The notion went far to make him livid. Again, at sunset on the second night, Shirwill's words droned in his ears annoyingly: "That sky blinking a warning in our faces. Sir, I'm thinking you'll not hear of any record this run." M'Grabbut's, too: "Some o' the towsley patents in yon sweat-box will be singin' oot pen an' ink when we get into the teeth of what's rollin' up Channel."

Patents! Warnings! He anathematised the whole thing. Was it his doing? Had not this vessel cost him thousands—blood and tears, . . . more than he dared express in words? could he be blamed? . . . was it rational?

Memories chased the petulant self-exculpatory questions, and there surged a mental picture of M'Grabbut fighting those seas in a frail boat,—the M'Grabbut who had flouted him! He acknowledged that it was impossible he could live, impossible that any undecked craft could survive it, provided he had not gained shelter; and again, in spite of an anxiety that was very real, M'Grabbut's message came back to sting him—"Docendo discimus!" Insolence! The gage of war lay in it. How could he expect aid? Still, if it were possible, even now he would order it. Could he?

The thing flared in an imagination made vivid by the scenes through which he passed. He saw the tiny craft; discovered a monster crouched in the gloom, felt the boat quiver, stand on end, and hang poised over the abyss—then sprang from his bed to shiver plaintively near a window that screamed.

"What a night! My God! what a night."

It was twelve o'clock. The gale boomed across the island and fell on his ears with the crash of guns continually roaring. The sting and flick of rain and spray drove against panes that danced under the lash, and out of the cosmic uproar came that horrible, passionless detonation, flaring high aloft, as a warning to navigators still steering.

The clamour appalled him. He shrank. It was impossible, he told himself, to sleep longer. He

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questioned whether, indeed, he had slept at all; then dressed, wrapped himself in oilskins, and made his way dizzily to the rocket station.

Two men stood on a platform loading the mortar. As he drew near one touched a lever, and the thing sizzled to an eminence and burst with a crash.

Arun paused, staring into the thick darkness, and from out of the gloom, faint and far away, came a mimicking gleam,—a dim curve, a dim cluster of balls, no sound,—the rocket of a children's *fête* seen from a neighbouring window. The shipowner closed with the man who sponged the mortar, and pointed seaward. "What is it?"

He faced the gale, and the question sounded shrill, infantile; but the man understood. He turned about and threw his voice down wind. "This way," he growled, "to leu'ard! That? A ship in distress—throwin' rockets."

"A ship!" Arun thrilled. "Where?"

"Fast on the Hen an' Chickens, seemin'ly. Goin' to pieces. . . ."

Arun met the reply with a gesture of despair. He shouted, but the words were flung back in his teeth; he turned to reiterate, and his voice rose to a shriek. "A ship! What sort, . . . steam or sail? . . . Good God!"

"Sail, sir, . . . sail right enough. No—your boat ain't this far. Never fear." He bent to clear the triggering line, throwing out consolatory sentences to the small dandy clutching the rail beside him. "Not it. . . . I'd eat my cap but that's sail, . . . some ragged coaster—all belly, rust, an' dry-rot. . . ."

Short-anded, too, I'll lay. Masts gone. Sails gone. Crew dancin' gibbet on the stones. . . . Hen an' Chiokens! . . . God rest 'em!"

"But—but . . . you are doing something, sending assistance, . . . the lifeboat?"

"Impossible, . . . nearest under Hartland, . . . ten mile off. Stand back, sir." He touched the string, and a rocket flared high and burst crashing at the zenith. He resumed in a confidential shout: "Couldn't get here under a day, . . . like this. Besides, there's the men at Narth light."

"Take my tug," Arun persisted; "send her." Then with a touch of passion, "For God'e sake do something!"

The man pulled himself erect and shouted from behind a sheltering hand—"She'e on the Hen an' Chickens! . . . might as well be under a train! I know."

A light streamed in a tremulous arc across the sky, and a flare grew out of the blackness far in the north. It hung there, flickering, misty, like a will-o'-the-wisp, pointing the extremity of men facing death; then a squall swept over the hill, and it was gone.

Arun shivered, and turned to gain the shelter of the lighthouse. A tragedy faced him out there in the blackness; he saw it, recognised its grimness, accepted it as inevitable. He could do nothing. Man's force, man's strength dwindled, in comparieon with the cataclysm he beheld, into something too puny, too idiotic for contemplation. It was a lamb in the jawe of a lion; a worm in the bill of a thrueth,—nothing short of a miracle could save one so placed. A

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miracle! Arun's pulses tingled at the notion, and, as he moved away, a voice from the look-out reached him—a deep, resonant tenor: "It's the last of her. . . . Better keep low, sir. . . . All-fours down that path."

Arun scarcely heard, or, hearing, took no heed. One thought possessed him. He must get over to the signal station and send orders to the Cornish ports to hold tugs in readiness to meet the *Schweinigel*; messages also to Lloyd's, Scilly, the Lizard,—anywhere where it was possible his ship and her consort might appear. He desired to warn them; to advise them where help might be found. He blamed himself for not having done so when in Falmouth—now it might be too late. . . . But it was his duty—obviously it was his duty.

The rollicking violence of the gale, the mad squalls, the unutterable chaos of Nature couched with bared teeth to fight, had gone far to bring him to this mood. The pathetic signals clinched it: he would do his duty, or what was possible, now the extremity was reached.

He came down the path with the wind on his side, pressing against it, fighting inch by inch, resolute to do. Then the squall screamed over the sea, carrying hail, spray, rain, deliriously mingled to lash him. The night glowered upon him, vault-like. He was unversed in the ways of squalls, and strove to reach back from that cliff-edge so threateningly near. He reeled. The wind took him at the waist; it ballooned his short coat, lifted him from his feet, and flung him shuddering on the green. In the mad turmoil, the whirl and eddy of the cliffs, it might reasonably have taken him farther; yet he fell unharmed, and clawed

the grass, waiting for a lull. After a time he essayed to resume his journey, as the man suggested, on all-fours, but he was helpless; the hail cut into his flesh. He lay in a heap to wait.

The gush died; the frozen downpour bit less deep; the water trickling down his face no longer tasted salt. He looked up, climbed to his feet, and moved once more towards the haven. His nerves thrilled at his escape in spite of the uproar. It was magnificent, . . . it was also monstrous, ghoulish. It foreshadowed a superb method, an ordered force, . . . it wrought with hands down, in disorder, confusion, clamour. Over at the back of him men struggled for their lives in a caldron dotted with rocks; an inferno smilingly beautiful, radiantly grim—a place men came to photograph. In comparison, the peril he faced was infantile, amusing. He hugged his fluttering garments, laughing aloud, and was astonished to find no voice. His eyes streamed; they were wet. He questioned gravely why, and laughed again. He prayed that the *Schweinigel* might go—not as that vessel had gone, but with no soul on board; derelict, deserted, anyhow, so that she might no longer be the thing which had forced itself upon him—a man-trap, a monster whose hunger grew, a monster that was insatiable. Why, he shouted into the teeth of the gale, why had they not let her go? It would have been wisdom, . . . it would have saved. . . . God knows what it might have saved in lives and—honour. He recognised in the whirl of that storm what would be the fate of a tank lying nerveless in the teeth of it. . . . She would drive, she would lurch, sag,—and the rocks

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would crunch her. He heard the snapping of her ribs.

He was alone, facing the sea which had tamed him; listening to its voice, marking the thunder of surges that beat so masterfully all things driving in its path. For the moment he was cowed, beaten, a man given over to hysteria. Elsewhere it had been impossible to fashion any addenda to that creed of his which had decided that the *Schweinigel* must go in order that he might live; now he found it necessary to add—and in order that her crews may live. There was nothing heroic in the process by which he had come to this resolve; it grew from the hour the gale broke and Nature's hand loomed big in the process. It hammered.

He arrived panting, wet to the skin, and bruised before Pengelly at the door of the lighthouse, and asked quiveringly for forms.

The lighthouse-keeper looked up in astonishment. "Forms, sir?" he echoed.

"Precisely, . . . telegraphic."

Pengelly found a bundle and handed them, saying, "You'm early afoot for that, . . . still . . ."

Arun took no heed. He wrote half a dozen, sitting in garments that threw off rivulets, and steamed in the sudden warmth. Above and around him was the cylindrical tower, flashing warnings over the turmoil and echoing with the roar of a monstrous drum.



## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE INEVITABLE HAPPENS.

THE gale was spent, but for the following three days it simmered, throwing up its hands in exhaustion. Squalls licked the island hills, whitened them with touches that quickly died under the smile of that dim white sun swimming so mistily in the south. The papers shouted in double-leaded headlines of the havoc wrought by the gale; and men, interested in the fact that they could move about again untroubled by flying bricks and tiles, read of the strenuous fighting of English sailors, of drownings sudden and appalling, of collisions "quite inevitable," and smoked and sipped their tea untouched.

Out on the island, too, one of these men still watched, screening sensations that were new behind the veil drawn by breeding, training, convention.

He paced curiously from look-out to rocket station; stared at the path down which he had screamed, laughed, and fought. He examined the signs of that struggle, and, glancing about him, revelled in the knowledge that at least the secret was his. He spoke with Pengelly and the lighthouse community in tones sad, wistful, but throbbing with hope; and again one

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day drove to the northern station and stood, bare-headed, gazing at the white-limned rocks. The Hen and her Chickens sat pecking the bubbles in peace. The sun smiled mistily, throwing shadows. He returned in time to reach the tug as the disc dipped red in the west.

Each day he wandered from pillar to post, fascinated, unable to tear himself away; each night he cruised as before, searching waters that gave no sign. At every landing he had thrown off something of that sense of impotence which had thrust him to mother earth, and each morning found him with a more erect carriage, a more hopeful gaze, an intonation again becoming assertive. Now it was the morning of the twentieth; the night was spent, the tug at anchor, and Arun crossing briskly to the lighthouse.

They had cruised. He was weary of iterated reports, weary of Jenks and those beef-like hands. He looked to the day when he might return triumphant to face his partners, . . . for it seemed that the Act of God had intervened; that he would be no more troubled by the capers of an incubus; that he had seen the last of men bent on kicking over the traces; and he wondered, with fast-dying thrills, how, when, where the end had come.

Nearly a week had passed in silence, and with its passage hope was born. Seventy odd hours had elapsed since that night when he faced death on the cliffs, and they had left their mark on his demeanour. The weight was gone. He breathed. There were flutterings still, but the facts remained as landmarks on the road he had travelled.

A vessel had appeared far on the horizon, and had been searched eagerly until it was evident she took no part in the tragedy he feared. A report had been handed in by the tug sent racing to intercept a coming steamer: it gave no news, meant nothing. The sea apparently had swallowed the *Schweinigel* and her miserable escort, and kept the secret of their burial as only the sea can. A dozen vessels had been interviewed: they had neither heard nor seen. Arun's prayers, so carefully hidden behind a calm exterior, but nursed, too, by his feverish desire, seemed at length on the point of fruition. The sea was silent. The children of the sea had no tidings. God be thanked!

Again, a message had been flashed from the Lizard, and Arun's hand shook as he read. The Cornish coast, . . . a place that counted victims by the score! The Act of God had intervened. So ran his thoughts under the blind of a solemn visage; but the telegram burned his flesh—

"A dismasted barque has drifted on to the Stags and is breaking up. It may be the vessel for which you look." (It might—easily it might: God help her crew!) "But it is dark. Sea is running fiercely. Life-boats cannot face it. Will send further news as soon as possible. Fear the worst."

That night Arun passed in fitful sleep, in hurried visits to the tug's bridge and equally hurried orders. "What ship is that?" "Sir, she's a coaster." "Have you searched that vessel, passing yonder?" "Aye, but he knows nothin', . . . might a bin asleep from Bilbao, . . . every inch." "Ha! steer to intercept

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that light." Then came morning, and with it the information for which he yearned.

Pengelly gave it with hands that trembled. The man was so anxious, so haggard—he feared for him, seeing how unpleasant was the news. But the owner read with indifferent eyes, without emotion—

"The vessel has broken up. Her crew are drowned to a man. Apparently she was American. A barque."

Another message followed later, this time from Scilly—

"Life-buoy washed ashore showing part name—*General Cyrus* . . . . Rest obliterated."

So—the Act of God had intervened. This must of necessity be the ship Shirwill had salvaged, and if she was lost, then, surely, the *Schweinigel*, no longer aided by man, had found a home on those Cornish rocks—the Stags, the Wolf, the Brisons, . . . any of the score of dangers all ships face as they make for home, and Arun would be free. He shuddered at the knowledge—yet he would be free.

He reviewed the situation in the light of that message as they steamed for the last time for the island after an all-night cruise. The *Schweinigel* was still unheard of, but her consort was gone, and everything pointed to release. The question had solved itself, and now he stood—how?

The drag on the firm's resources would disappear, the more flustering drag on Arun's position would also disappear,—and then? Then no more experiments; no more seeking after impossible profits, no more risky speculation,—nothing in future but the steady shipment of gold-finding fuel from English

ports to England's enemies, where freights were high, despatch prompt, and payment certain. That, and a sleek climb from the management of a small and insecure concern to the control of one whose finger could be felt, whose interests should be advocated in the House, not by an outsider, but by Arun, the eminent shipowner, the man at whose nod thousands moved.

The roseate vision crossed his mind in countless forms as he came springingly over the island hills. He walked with a stride, his eyes leaping; for the sea lay before him, misty, quiet, and bare of sails. In the near distance was a thin rain-squall, driving like smoke across the water. Arun moved more quickly towards shelter. The last report had seemed so conclusive, he had no longer any hope for the *Schweinigel* and her unutterable convoy. The thing was further sealed by news he had gleaned when, yesterday, he ran over to Ilfracombe and despatched his final messages to Cardiff, to Scilly, and the Lizard.

The replies were comfortably negative: the *Titan* had not passed; the *Titan* had not arrived; the *Titan* had not been heard of; and from Cardiff came the additional information that incoming steamers were of opinion that she had foundered in the gale.

To the men Arun rehearsed this verdict with a touch of pathos. He had hoped so much for this vessel. She was his. She had cost him months of anxious thought. He had planned her, built her, watched her. Now she was gone, and the crew who had so gallantly striven to bring her home were gone also.

It was the penalty, he said, exacted of all original minds; the vessel had been built in advance of her

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time. Man had no right to seek after originality; he should be satisfied with old-world patents, with the models which had done service for centuries. Now he saw it, and pointed sorrowfully to the case of the *Great Eastern*.

She, too, had been built in advance of her time. What heartburnings she had caused! what misery! How she had wrecked the lives of those who had planned her! The *Schweinigel* was a similar case. He referred to her by her German sobriquet with a wan smile. He could never forget the misery she had caused—not to him alone, but to the gallant crews who had footed her decks.

Pengelly vowed the man's concern was the realest thing he had seen. For himself, he called Heaven to witness, he desired that he might never be a ship-owner. All the gold of African mines, or Cardiff coal, would never tempt him to run the risk of such anxiety. To endure so bravely, to stand so palpable a strain in the bare hope of being able to render assistance, was a terrible thing to contemplate.

But in his heart of hearts—a region the kindly lighthouse-keeper could not plumb—Arun, the sorrowfully pathetic, rejoiced greatly, and stood often in danger of letting his joy escape. And now he schooled himself with a stern hand as he came towards the white-washed station and perceived Pengelly advancing to greet him.

The two met at the verge of the cliff overlooking the sea, and Pengelly's face beamed.

"Her'e in sight!" he cried; and again with absurd hilarity, "Her's in sight! . . . Hoo-ray!"

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Arun faced him with pallid cheeks. "What's that you say?"

"Her's in sight. You'm goin' to tow her whoam for sure. Sir, it's your ship."

The owner pulled himself together with a supreme effort. "Ha!" he cried, "that's news, . . . great news. . . . But, but we had definite information . . . as to . . . to . . . her loss. I don't understand. Are you certain?"

Pengelly watched him with wide eyes. This coldly still man was surely not the anxious visitor he had known—the man who had prayed for news, who had waited and waited when all hope seemed absurd. He remained silent, digging with his heel in the turf.

"Her's a hull," he said vaguely; "lead colour, . . . two stumpy masts, no funnel, in tow of a big tug, . . . barque under tops'ls draggin' astarn. No t'gall'n'-m'sts—dismasted. . . . Her lies in yonder rain-squall."

Arun had had time to recover, but he only repeated, in his cold thin voice, "Ha! that's news, . . . great news, . . . and the information lied. Ha! who . . . who saw her first?"

"My mate, sir. I had been in to tend the light; grey dawn, it was, and my mate took the glass to search a smndge lyin' against the skyline. If it hadn't been for that light I would have been fust; but Ted, bein' off dooty, had the weather-gage of I."

Arun seemed to listen as the man recounted the minor details of his discovery; but he remained so still, with so set an expression, that Pengelly found it difficult to maintain his delight. He paused abruptly.

In truth, the shipowner's mind was far away,

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pondering anew the position which he thought had passed. The recrudescence of this nightmare, coming so suddenly on the comfortable visions through which he had moved, stuck in his throat, strangling words; and the resentment he felt would have been patent to a companion more versed in the art of reading between the lines than was Pengelly. Arun smiled with his lips; he raised his cap as though he contemplated joining in the lighthouse-keeper's jubilation; but no sound came, and his eyes remained coldly unresponsive until the man's chatter ceased, then he replied softly—

"Yes, . . . I'm glad. Yes, . . . it is a relief. . . . Let me see, what do I owe you?"

"Two sov'rins, sir, . . . but her's not thinkin' o' that. . . . It's . . ."

"Two sovereigns? I remember. Yes, give them to him with my thanks, . . . and, hum, here is one for yourself—you deserve it." He handed the coins with an apathetic gesture, and crossed to where a telescope leaned against the signal-room door.

Daylight had fully come. The squall, which had obscured the horizon during Arun's walk over the hills, slowly lifted, and now the vessels were plainly disclosed moving up Channel. Arun picked up the glass and remained long in examination. At length he stood back.

"You are right," he said; "it certainly is the *Titan*, . . . er . . . Captain Shirwill is as good as his word."

The two men watched him with restraint. Arun was no longer the joyous visitor, smiling at the queer



sayings of the country-folk, but the shipowner, the man of money and influence: stern, impassive, and strangely still; a man with no eyes for the visible perplexity of his companions, with no eyes for the brilliant seascape; a man who turned on his heel brusquely, without further speech, climbed the hilly path, and came to the tug. The skipper met him with the boat. He, too, had seen the ships, but he made no comment. He knew Arun better than did Pengelly. They passed onward to intercept the nightmare.

Over the island lay the silence of a spent storm.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### ARUN SUGGESTS A COMPROMISE.

FOUR vessels moved through the grey seascape: the tug, white to the funnel rings; the *Schweinigel*, lurching sulkily astern; and the barque, flaunting a gay string of flags from beneath her blackened canvas. Approaching them was the *Pride of Wales*, plunging, rolling, a thing of wheezy breath and unstable movements, carrying men to front the inevitable.

When first they opened the point and came in view of the procession, Arun took his binoculars and stood up to search the vessels; but as they drew near and the flags were interpreted, he crept from the bridge and marched without pause to and fro the after-deck—moody, grim, and in silence.

"Report me all well," so ran the signal fluttering in the breeze, and the translation came as an additional affront to fan the owner's wrath. It was as though Shirwill knew that Arun stood there watching, and dangled the colours in sarcasm.

Report me all well! Pish! how could the thing be well while the *Schweinigel* still floated? Had it not been decided that she was essentially a man-trap? Arun turned on his heel as the question smote him,

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How could it be well, . . . how could it? Then he passed on, his swift thoughts punctuated by swifter footsteps, his eyes cold, full of snap.

His prayers had gone awry, his hopes were dashed; he still faced Schlange and all the gibbering crew. Shirwill had saved the *Schweinigel*—saved her in spite of him. The Cornish rocks had left her untouched; the blundering colliers had allowed her to slip, and Shirwill, with all that crowd of men who would fight and who knew too much, was coming back to wreck his master. He desired, especially, to be reported "All well." The thing stank. It stood for insult.

Arun's resentment, so long smouldering and kept in check by the absence of news, was fanned to white heat at the crudity of this message. While grabbing so persistently after *tuum*, he recognised that he had allowed to slip some part of that *meum* which was an essential of his existence. The crew of the *Schweinigel* were all well; the owners of the *Schweinigel* were at loggerheads,—he himself, God knows, perhaps on the borderland of Queer Street. There was only one course possible—the *Schweinigel* must not come home. . . . Even now she must not come home.

He turned and walked swiftly up and down before the engine-room skylight, his brow knit, his head bent, his mind busy with the unutterable sequence of events begun that day, now so remote, when he had relegated to Tallat the supervision of his ship. He comprehended to a nicety how he had been served; how all those who had to do with her construction had feathered their nests and left him to bear the brunt of failure. The

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knowledge stung him as few things could, and he paused near the taffrail, staring into the seething wake.

The water was alive, it throbbed with life—yet it was the medium through which they cut their way. The propeller made mincemeat of all that came within the "race." At each revolution thousands died. They passed into the blue-green yeast in particles, churned, broken. It was the law of being. There was no escape; it was inevitable—inevitable as are all conditions where nature and machinery clash. It was a fight, a survival of the fittest. His also was a fight—had been a fight from the beginning, and, so far, he had been worsted. . . . Now . . . He looked up: a gong, struck by the skipper, sounded in the engine-room.

The drone of hurrying cranks and pistons had perceptibly lessened. The tug moved less swiftly, and Jenks stood asking for instructions.

"What'll I do, sir? . . . Will you board her?"

"Board her?" Arun came to the ladder and saw that the barque lounged close at hand. He noticed that she moved very slowly; that sometimes she moved not at all, or seemed to slide backwards. The small wavelets tumbled past her side and leaped noisily under the counter. What a fuss they all made! Why could they not act without orders? . . . Why did they not open that insignificant . . . Arun cast his eyes forward and saw the *Schweinigel* rolling lazily, like a rusty tank, and plucking at the hawsers which held her. The tug had slowed.

Ha! She was there, then, this ship of his, . . . this ship that he had planned? He turned from

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watching, and gave the skipper orders with a new zest. "Yes, put me on board, and wait."

They ran round to leeward, fell alongside, and Arun climbed the rail. Shirwill advanced to meet him. The surprise he felt showed plainly in his eyes. "Mr Arun!" he exclaimed; but his thoughts ran, "Good Lord! what has brought him here?"

The owner climbed carefully to the vessel's deck and looked about him. "Precisely," he said; "I have been waiting for days. We were anxious, . . . very anxious. I could not rest until I knew."

Shirwill recovered as the other explained, but for the moment he was uncertain how to take him. They had parted with high words. Matters had not run comfortably for the firm since. He temporised—

"Sorry to have kept you waiting, sir. We had a breakdown, or would have been up to time. . . . Had to take steam, too. Still, I admit we have had great luck, . . . uncommon great luck." He spoke freely, with a touch of thankfulness that jarred on the owner's ears.

Arun interrupted with a wave of his hand. "Luck," he questioned, "what do you mean?"

Shirwill caught at the man's humour and answered with similar brevity. "Call it what you like, but the facts remain the same. It began the night the *Strathmore* passed us. It came on to blow. It blew hard, and in the early morning the hawser parted—snapped like a gun. *We* were towing then, and M'Grabbut had not returned. You know what Mac did? . . . Well, as you like. Speaking of this hawser, then, it might have killed all hands, but it didn't; . . . it

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might have happened in the dark, but it didn't. Hung on good till daybreak; then, when we could see, snapped like a carrot. Luck, all sheer luck for us. Hung on good, too, until M'Grabhut was able to round us in with his tug-boat. After that, it didn't matter much what happened, . . . from our point of view, of course."

"Precisely. You're right, it certainly was luck. And now, what do you propose to do?"

The captain felt his way. "That depends, sir, on what view you take."

"What view?"

"Exactly. We abandoned the *Titan*. The vessel was derelict, and we could do nothing with her. Afterwards we boarded this harque. We are her crew, and we have salvaged the *Titan*."

"So I gathered from your message. Yes, that is your claim. Do you propose to substantiate it?"

"Why not? It is what we have fought for."

"It is a difficult position, captain."

"That won't make us funk it, sir."

Arun looked up with a gesture of complaint. "You misunderstand me. I am pointing to the fact that your position is not an easy one; that, as far as I am aware, no decision has ever been made on the point; and—I suppose you know—that fighting a case which has not been legally defined is a very expensive matter. I suggest it for your consideration. I think you will do well to look the thing straight in the face."

"You mean," said Shirwill, still doubtful of his intention, "that if it came to fighting, you would defend, and, if necessary, appeal?"

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"I expressed myself badly, sir, if I conveyed that notion," Arun replied with a touch of hauteur. "I myself have no love for lawyers. I would put you on your guard against them. I think it eminently a case for compromise."

Shirwill stood a moment watching the shifty eyes, searching the mask-like face, and wondering how far he might trust this man who, in the nature of things, must be his enemy. But he could not read him, although for once Arun met his look point-blank.

"If compromise," he blurted, "reads anything like co-operation, I should prefer the risk you speak of."

Arun waved his hand. "The principle of your engagement is right. The ship has been unfortunate. . . . We, too, have suffered."

"That is possible. But, sir, our suffering takes the form of lack of bread-and-butter for the youngsters, no pin-money for the wife, . . . a position of which you can have no knowledge. . . ."

"To come back to the question, captain," Arun intervened, "I suggest there is ground for compromise."

"On what terms, sir?"

"Nay, I can hardly go into that, off-hand. The thing is too complex. It is a matter for pen and ink."

"Still," Shirwill persisted, struggling to keep an even face, "you suggest it, . . . you make the offer?"

"I do. More, I hope you will see your way to accept it. But when you ask me for precise terms, I can only tell you that it is a matter on which I must consult my partners."

Shirwill's hopes fell. He shrugged his shoulders, but Arun intervened.

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"Wait! What I want you to understand is, that although we cannot help thinking you might have done more for us, yet, because of the ill-luck you have experienced and the disappointment you have suffered, we are prepared to meet you in a friendly manner. We will seek to adjust the affair so that you may recoup something of what you have lost, say, by the failure of our co-operative system. I can't speak more fairly, can I?"

Shirwill gazed at the man, and the surprise he felt was very evident. This was so different a meeting, so widely different from anything he had imagined, that for the moment he was at a loss for words. At length he cried out, "No, sir. I admit it. You can't. And, taking that view of it, what do you suggest? . . . How shall we go along?"

Arun warmed in his manner. "The sooner we get in," he said, "the better for all of us, ch, captain?"

"Yes, . . . certainly."

"Very well. I will take hold of the *Titan* and tow her in. You shall keep your own boat. Will that suit you?"

Shirwill still hesitated. "Perhaps," he suggested, 'we should arrange a figure, sir. It would be more regular——"

"Pish! Why make trouble? You have salvaged the *Titan*. We don't dispute it, . . . I say it in the presence of witnesses. Come, time is money."

"As you will, sir."

"Very well. Then I instruct Jenks at once."

He turned, and, approaching the rail, beckoned the



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tug alongside, and having gained her bridge, stood a moment looking down on Shirwill.

"We will take the hawser, and will tell your boat to make the best of his way in. Where is Mr M'Grabbut?"

"On the *Titan*, sir."

"Hum! Any one with him?"

"One hand now. I could spare no more."

"Very good, . . . I will see him. Get along to the roads. What do you think of the weather?"

Shirwill cast his eye over the windward horizon.

"Looks muggy, sir, . . . perhaps fog," he replied.

Arun waved his hand. The words rang on ears attuned to hope.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### FENCING.

THE engineer stood on the after platform, steering with one hand, and counting the hours which must elapse before he set foot on shore. The *Pride of Wales* had taken her place at the end of a hawser she either could not or would not straighten, and the barque, still helped by her sails, drew slowly more distant. M'Grabbut fumed at the knowledge.

He had expected to see Shirwill pass away before him, and had raged at the idiocy which allotted the heaviest ship to the lightest tug; but he had not expected to see so wide a gap in so short an interval. In this, however, Arun was supreme. The *Schweinigel* was his. He had no tremors for the safety or speed of the *General*—she might get to her anchorage when and how she liked; but to himself—he confided the information with a touch of hauteur—he had no desire to face all Cardiff with such a convoy; and as it was impossible to arrive that night, he preferred to delay until after sunset on the following day.

M'Grabbut groaned when this statement was presented to him, and a small passage-of-arms ensued. Arun alluded in a biting sentence to the safe receipt of

the note at Falmonth. "Children and fools run away," he said, "but I thought my engineer was a man." To which the engineer, with eyes ablaze, retorted, "Only a fool chaffers wi' the devil ta whom he is tied." And Arun, white and impassive, turned on his heel with the words, "Pardon, sir; I imagined you claimed to be one of the salvors."

M'Grabbut took refuge behind the wheel. He felt unequal to the strain of keeping calm under such lashing. In truth, he was weary of the hazards through which he had come, and had but little stomach for Arun's insinuations. He was engrossed, too, by the news of the firm's offered compromise; and Shirwill's comment that they would not fight, but rather wished to avoid friction, gave stimulus to his wonderings. The owner's manner did not suggest any desire for compromise; it rang of fight: and M'Grabbut questioned why, if peaceful methods were in the air, did he sting?

That his small lord was dangerous, subtle, unscrupulous, and rampant with egoism M'Grabbut knew to his cost; but that he contemplated a scheme for ridding himself of the *Schweinigel*, even at this hour, was beyond his comprehension. It was too remote a solution—one altogether outside the pale of reasonable surmise. It came nowhere near him; yet he was puzzled.

Meanwhile Arun strolled at leisure about the ship examining the wreckage. To a man but just emerged from scenes which had undeniably shaken him, the picture was instructive; it pointed to perils, to losses, to the thing men call heroism,—but he footed the decks unmoved. With a thrill of pride he recognised that he

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was again master of his own; without a tremor he remembered that it fell to him to complete the tragedy—now, as soon as might be. It was inevitable. To send her forth again meant more loss of life, a greater loss of money. She was a failure—a man-trap. She must go.

The compromise he had suggested contained at the moment no definite aim. It was a random shot out of which he immediately saw that if he boarded the *Schweinigel* at all, it must be with the goodwill of her salvor. Any other method of returning, although he might have claimed it as a right, would have been fraught with peril for his enterprise. Shirwill would have warned his friend, and, lacking that, M'Grabbut's eyes were very keen.

He glanced into the growing mist and saw that the barque was fast disappearing from sight. He was master. The knowledge thrilled him; indeed it had run to seed, for M'Grabbut, as was said, already suspected sarcasm. For the moment his newly gained sovereignty was sunk in the annoyance Arun felt as he climbed from place to place staring at the signals of storm and stress,—the wrecked bridge, the battered houses, twisted rails, torn davits, and, again, the "scrap-iron heap"<sup>1</sup> in the engine-room.

If any argument had weighed with him since that night when he had thrashed the question out on the cliffs, if any vestige of scruple had remained in his distorted vision, the sight of that rusty chamber with its wrenched pistons, twisted cranks, and bent shafting would have decided him. The *Schweinigel* was a

<sup>1</sup> Engineering term for broken machinery.

wreck. Unutterably she was a wreck. To refit her and make her worth a bid from any purchaser would cost not hundreds, but thousands. He knew, as do greater shipowners, the astounding charges of the graving-docks and "repairing-shops"; the result, too, of that abominable "particular average"<sup>1</sup> clause inserted in the vessel's policy, and all the orthodox incidental charges which would come upon them. No, the *Schweinigel* was a wreck. The attempt to salve her was a harebrained solution that should never have been made. No one but a fool, or a sailor, would have tried it, unless, perchance as now, they put life and safety in the balance against danger in order that they might scarify an owner.

He stood in his shirt-sleeves examining a sea-cock placed at the end of the tunnel.<sup>2</sup> The thing was of gun-metal; the arrow showed how accurately it was closed. His hands itched. With his foot he could kick the lever and the water would begin to flow. Easy? God! why had they not done it before? Why had they waited, nursed, and so carefully tended her? For his undoing. To wreck him. Good. He, too, could play at hazards. There were few points in any vessel's construction that he did not understand; but in the *Schweinigel*! Piston! valves, stuffing-boxes, sea-cocks, sluices, . . . exits and entries for water,—he knew them all, had tried them often. A touch, five minutes with a lever or a spanner now, and the thing was done. Still, . . . was it wise—now? The pressure relaxed.

<sup>1</sup> Insurance term.

<sup>2</sup> The trunkway through which the shafting runs.

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He came from the trunkway, bending low to avoid contact with the bearings, closed the door at the end, and donned his coat. Water sloshed beneath the stokehold plates; as the vessel lurched it creamed over them and swept down to leeward, carrying cinders, rubbish, lumps of coal. The pumps clucked. He stood to listen. A touch would do it. Already she carried her hurden with a slovenly gait; ambling lazily in the swell. He glanced upward, and stood preening himself like a hird. He was clean. His moustache stood in needle points. For once he felt he could thank M'Grahbut; the trunkway had been well kept; he had entered it and come out unspotted.

He walked aft, smoking a cigar, and stood beside the engineer. Some time he remained thus. Both men kept silence. Once or twice Arun paced up and down before the hinnacle as though challenging a remark, but it had no effect. He halted and looked up at the grim Scotsman—a sparrow chaffering with a crow.

"I must congratulate you, Mr M'Grahbut," he said, "on the possibility of a very fair indent (requisition). I notice, too, the after sea-cock weeps a bit, . . . nothing much, still it probably accounts for some of the water below."

The engineer had a very fair knowledge of what joints leaked and the reverse; but behind the first remark he perceived that hidden sarcasm he liked so little. It blinded him. He moved the wheel without rejoinder. His eyes were red and tired with watching; his beard twisted, unkempt; his clothes streaked with oil and salt-water. He looked down at the small

dandy enjoying tobacco and prayed that in future he might be delivered from the "breed." Arun misconstrued his silence, and proceeded to comment on the probable costs.

"You see," he explained, "one cannot continue this kind of thing indefinitely. Even shipowners have a limit to their endurance, and the end of their banking account is not unreachable."

The inference was too abominable. M'Grabbut joined issue at once.

"Sir," he cried out, "if ye play fast an' loose wi' a lot o' towsley patents, ye may expect ta keep yoour hand in your pocket. It's the nature o' sic like feegments ta gae wrong."

"Patents do not account for the smash-up I see in the engine-room," Arun asserted.

M'Grabbut watched him, passing one hand slowly down his great beard. "Pochaps," he remarked, "ye'd prefer ta spell it—*d-a-g-o-s*."

Arun blew a ring of smoke and flicked the ash from his cigar. "Nonsense, Mr M'Grabbut," he said. "Nonsense."

"Weel, Mr Arun is free ta ca' it by any name he likes; but whether he ca's it patents, or *dagos*, or a blend o' baith, is immaterial. For mysel', an' speakin' impairsonally, I should ca' it the result o' cheese-parin' an' sheer imbeceelity."

Arun faced him, smiling, imperturbable. "And I," he said, "also speaking, as you say, impersonally, suggest yet another factor—incapacity."

M'Grabbut's eyes blazed, but he kept his grip and replied slowly, "Since we're speakin' oor minds an'

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there's no one ta hear, perhaps ye'll no be surprised if I throw oot still another factor?"

"Not a bit, . . . why should I?"

Again M'Grabbut looked at the little dandy standing beside him, and stroked his beard. Then in a mild voice he uttered one word—"Coo-operation."

Arun glanced up, his face white, an imperceptible twitching of the nostrils oppressing him; but his voice remained under control as he fell back on the time-worn arguments of impecuniosity and greed.

"I am sorry to hear you say that, but I admit my difficulty. It is not easy to educate one's people to look upon co-operation from an unbiassed point of view. I wish it were possible. Still, from a man of your position and thinking capacity, I confess I expected more."

"Sir," M'Grabbut blared, "against coo-operation as an expeeriment in the way o' practical philanthropy I hae no sort o' quarrel; but when a man is asked ta forego cairtain pounds stairling, in view of a probemactical share, he does not expect ta be strangled wi' patents an' *dagos*."

"I think," said Arun, puffing at his cigar and leaning against the binnacle to watch the effect of his words, "I think you lay undue stress on what you term patents. There is nothing new in the ship. Some modifications there may be, but in all essential parts she is old—old as the hills."

M'Grabbut's patience got the better of him. He took his hand from the wheel, and, pointing to the forward wreckage, cried out, "Is it right that she should be like this? Did ye expect her ta collapse first time



she got at loggerheads wi' a gale o' wind? Other ships weathered it. The *First Bismark* lit her pipe an' skeemed away in comfort—her people dry-shod. The *Britannia* looked it in the eye an' bid it whirl its damnest, but she never blinked; the cargo-wallahs that were afloat in the same gale came in unbroken,—cargo-wallahs, Mr Arun, a breed o' tramps in whose defence I hae little consairn,—they came in, but the *Schweinigel* lay doon an' took seek. How many vessels have reported a hurricane? . . . How many were lost in it? . . . Yet your ship met a hurricane an' was seek unto death."

Arun looked up with an indifference that made M'Grabbut rage. "I have suggested my view of the affair," he said. "I do not propose to allow you to warp my judgment."

"If," said M'Grabbut with intense scorn, "I took ye for a crank, I'd say no more, for *they* are aye consairned wi' what they ca' the indefensible. But, I take it, ye can be logical if ye will, an' will not back your opinions against common-sense and ocular demonstration. Noo, we twa are here wi' no one ta listen, an' I ask ye, as man ta man, was yon thrust repaired ta my satisfaction? Did I no tell ye how it would be? . . . An' the ceelinder—was its cover laid by men who knew their wark, or by contractors?"

Arun turned slightly on his heel. "You are hard to please, Mr M'Grabbut," he said; "you are devilish hard to please. You should have been in his Majesty's service."

M'Grabbut leaned towards the little dandy, his face aglow. "His Majesty would hae had an honest

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servant," he cried. "Still, I ask ye—were those jobs done ta my satisfaction?"

Arun hlew a cloud of smoke and the diamonds flashed. "They were passed by the Board of Trade," he insisted.

M'Grahut brought his hands together with a clash. "Passed by the Boord o' Hell!" he shouted, "an' the gude Lord forgie me for swarin'. Still, I ask ye, does that make it a trustworthy consairn? does it make it worthy a place in the stairn of the *Schweinigel*? . . .

"Losh, man!" he resumed in broad disdain as Arun kept silence, "ye ken'weel the Boord o' Trade will pass anything if they're properly handled. Look at Tallat's 'eengineerin'; look what he got passed for ye, an' remember, in future, the possibeelity o' makin' extraneous profits."

Arun took a dozen paces up and down the deck before he responded. M'Grahut had struck him on the raw. To be told that any man knew he had been "bested" was sufficiently annoying; hut to have it hammered in with such brutal vigour was exasperating to a degree. Still, he had no intention of coming to blows, and was too well schooled in the art of self-control to allow his annoyance to appear. He replied, therefore, with an indifference that made the engineer squirm.

"It seems to me," he said, "that both you and Captain Shirwill are out of your sphere. I do not say it with any desire of wounding you, or him; I simply state it as my opinion. For you must be aware that there are thousands of engineers, and captains too, who are in charge of downright rattle-traps; yet they

navigate them, and their owners find they give no trouble, . . . and, above all, they pay."

"Ay," said M'Grabbut, "an' they go the way of the men we hae lost in this packet o' yours, . . . quietly, an' wi'oot a chance."

"That is not the question."

"Sir," said M'Grabbut, his hand lifted to enjoin silence, "you miss my point. Because one poor devil works a rattle-trap, is no reason why I should work a similar consairn on coo-operative preinciples. In your hardest thoughts against the captain an' mysel', did ye think we saw these things happen, watched oor crews swept away piecemeal, an' put oot no haund ta save ye?"

He paused; but Arun made no answer, and the engineer continued with the note of a man whose arguments have prevailed. "I'll no believe it; for I do not think you class laziness or cowardice among oor disabeelities."

Arun still kept silence; but he listened attentively, and the engineer's anger vanished. He went on in a conversational tone. "Not so, for indeed you put me much in mind of the managin' owner of a firm on whose behalf I was once summoned ta give expairt eevidence. He would not see. Ye will not see."

Arun turned with a gleam of interest. M'Grabbut amused him despite his antagonism. He wished to make him talk, and if possible to make himself acquainted with his views. Again, he was one of those characters who never throw away a stray key, lest he should be minus an instrument which some day he might require to open a door.

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"Ha!" he said, "what was that?"

"A trifle, sir, hut pregnant o' the forces that hae conspired ta hring ye ta this pass.

"We'll ca' my gentleman Mr Brown, an' a consultin' eengineer, wha had been subpœnaed in the same defence, we'll ca' Mr Smeeth, . . . it will serve as well as the names their forebears gie'd them.

"There had been a colleesion, an' it was manifest the whole case would turn on expairt eevidence—a thing ye know well one can always tweest into the groove ye want it ta fit. Weel, twa days before the case came on, Mr Brown, the owner, ye'll mind, came ta me an' said, 'M'Grahbut, I have been asked to-day ta do a thing I don't care about. Smeeth, who is subpœnaed for us, you know, called on me yesterday and suggested he would be pleased ta see the colour of oor money.'

"'It's vara like, sir,' I said. 'An' what did ye tell him?'

"'I told him ta go ta the devil, . . . at least, I said I couldn't think of it.'

"'That was unwise o' ye, Mr Brown,' says I, 'for a ten-pun' note will go a long way towards endowin' Mr Smeeth wi' a saircumstantial memory.'

"'Precisely what he said,' says Mr Brown.

"'No,' says I. 'Losh! sir, but did he daur?'

"'He said,' says Mr Brown, 'I own ye can compel me ta gie eevidence; but—what like eevidence will it be?'

"'Sir,' says I, 'ca' that man hack an' gie him what he asks.'

"'I'll see both you an' him farther first,' says Mr Brown in a huff.

"'Then ye'll lose your case,' said I, an' he turned on his heel."

Arun glanced up with a tinge of amusement, for M'Grabbut's voice rang with the note of fulfilled prophecy.

"And what happened?" he questioned.

"We lost—haunds doon."

Arun resumed his promenade to and fro the wheel, then paused to flick the ash from his cigar. "Thanks," he said. "Yes, it proves my contention to a hair. I shall not forget."

M'Grabbut looked his astonishment. "Ay, sir," he said, "an' what's that?"

Arun faced him with a snap. "That all men have their price, . . . a point a shipowner does well to keep in view."

## CHAPTER XXV.

"SATIS VERBORUM."

NOON, and the *Schweinigel* loitering shamefully at the end of a towline that refused to show itself. Before her, half curtained in the growing haze, the small tug lashed the yellow-green water with spasmodic paddles; behind, around, on every hand, the slowly narrowing Channel—dim, misty, threatening. The *General* had disappeared, other vessels had gone the same way; the haze had swallowed them as it had the land.

From the steamer's deck nothing was visible but a rolling mist through which the water leaped, and the far-off tug plunged in incredible silence, splashing without sound.

Arun leaned over the rail watching her capers, and acknowledging that Jenks was making the best, or worst, of his orders. But mainly he recognised that the weather was favouring that altruistic method of his whereby he designed to rid the world of an incubus. Indeed it became increasingly dense; and when presently a small spirt of steam escaped the tug's whistle, and a dull note rolled down to accentuate the signal, it seemed to Arun as though the *Pride of*

*Wales* put out a finger to warn him of the accumulating hazards.

For two hours he had remained alone, staring at the seascape and battling with the problem he had undertaken to solve. He asked himself, at the end of it, whether M'Grahnt had told him that story of Mr Brown and Mr Smeeth with a purpose—to lure him? He shook his head at the waters, . . . he could not say, . . . and in that case—well, two methods faced him out of the dozen bandied to and fro in his brain; one, the obvious and alluring death by aid of an open sea-cock; the other—more subtle, more insidious—a suggestion born of his knowledge of the possibilities. What, for instance, if he waited till another gale broke, waited at the island anchorage, then towed out and permitted the too weak tug to abandon her charge? Simple? Pish! the thing was child's-play. It could be accomplished, and against it no questions could he aimed. It would be accidental; a towline, . . . well, we all know what may be done with a towline—if a man have the will; also what may happen if it be severed near the Devon Rocks, for example. Still, time stood against him in this—courage, too. But the latter qualification scarcely came within Arun's ken; the matter that weighed had to do with the appalling flight of time—that he must wait. Already he had been a long while absent, . . . too long, he argued through clenched teeth.

With some men in charge the thing might have been an affair of simple payment. Nothing definite need he said; a hundle of notes would produce the necessary relaxation of vigilance, and he would be free to act.

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But with M'Grabbit! The impossibility of tampering with the grim Scotsman was obvious. Even Arun, the man who believed that all are to be bought if only the purse-strings are sufficiently elastic, acknowledged this. He admitted it with a dull foreboding,—for one who cannot be bought must of necessity be extremely difficult to hoodwink. But the thing was to be done. Because of Schlange, because of that idiotic rivalry which had come near to strangling the weaker of the two, it must be done—now; and the weather argued in favour of the open sea-cock.

A footstep sounded near at hand, and Arun glanced up to see the engineer approaching. A strong step, firm, without a shuffle. The man towered above—big, square, resolute, good-naturedly buoyant. Again the notion flashed, had M'Grabbit told him that story with a purpose? No, . . . he was not to be bought. Arun put it from him with a word that might have been an oath as the engineer halted near.

"Sir," he said, "I'm wonderin' whether ye'll care ta join me at a bit o' lunch. If ye do, say the word, an' I'll see what I can fettle up."

Arun answered in the brisk tones of one acknowledging a favour at the hand of a servant. "Thanks," he said. "Yes—I shall be glad. Jove! one gets hungry out here, . . . but no cooking, I'll take pot-luck."

"Ye'll be bound to," the engineer acknowledged unawed, "for I doot if I could do much in that way. Still, there's the eend of a ham,—boiled, sir, in an iron bucket o'er the donkey fire,—an' there are spuds an' hard tack, butter an' ale. If that suits ye, we'll get ta wark at once."



"I could eat anything, M'Grabbut," Arun conceded. Then with a burst of geniality, "Jove! I envy you, . . . often I envy you."

M'Grabbut turned a wary eye on his small companion. He had come upon him as he leaned brooding over the rail, and the look he found was not genial. In point of fact the transition was a little abrupt; it sounded forced. But the engineer was not versed in the gradations of cultivated duplicity; he saw that Arun met his glance, and replied with open candour—

"Ay, sir, . . . what for?"

"Your freedom. Your immunity from care. Your healthy open-air life; the pleasure of visiting other countries and seeing new people. Pish! you have no notion of the struggles of a business man, forced by competitive days into cut-and-thrust actions for supremacy."

The engineer stroked his beard as they approached the battered cabin entrance. "It's a new phase," he said. "I own I did not reckon it among your characteristics."

"No," Arun threw in, "men of your stamp rarely glance below the surface. You see good offices, comfortable chairs, the brougham, and the house out of town; but the rush and drive, the sleepless nights, and all the bag-o'-tricks that go to make a business, is out of sight. You know nothing of it."

M'Grabbut produced plates and other essentials from the pantry and passed some to Arun. "Providence," he remarked, "as my dear mither avairs, fits aa men for the nitch in which He places them. I should expect ta find ye equipped against your battle."

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"Nonsense, man. You are like the ostrich, . . . you put your head in a hole and cry out that you are hidden."

M'Grabbut sliced the ham, and, handing the plate, said, "Nay, but I'm like the man wha bought a house an' afterwards discovered the foundations were shaky. I recognise I'm in face of a quandary."

"It's a position I never admit," Arun snapped.

"I believe ye; for, wi'oot offence, there are some men wha never admit a deeficulty,—conceit aye stands in their path against weesdom."

Arun busied himself with the viands. He recognised that the conversation wss getting out of hand, and acknowledged again that it was impossible—impossible. M'Grabbut was not to be cajoled anywhither, . . . still . . .

He reached across, holding his plate. "Thanks," he said, "I will take another cut. The air has made me perfectly wolfish. . . . By the way, I suppose your man is trustworthy? It's getting thicker. I fear it will mean further delay."

"The *Pride o' Wales* should be able to find the docks blindfold," M'Grabbut retorted.

"Oh! she will do her best, I have no doubt of that. You have boats, I suppose?"

"One, . . . ready too, you may be cairtain, after oor experiences."

"Naturally. Is she any good . . . in a sea-way?"

"I came to Falmouth in her," M'Grabbut vouchsafed.

Arun waited, looking for more, and his companion went on—

"She's good enough, . . . one o' the *Fürst Bismark's*,

an' a saint ta guard a man. It's weel she was; for between us, Mr Arun, fra the time I started ta find help until the tug took hold of us, I never knew a minute that might not hae been my last."

"Ha! Then it hasn't been child's-play—this salvage of yours?"

M'Grabbut lashed out at the sneer curtained in words that caressed.

"Child's-play? Losh! but do ye expect me ta bare my soul before ye believe? Sir, I hae told ye somethin'; yoor eyes will doobtless hae told ye more. Let that suffice."

"Pish! you are touchy. The strain has been too mnch for you. For your own sake, I could almost find it in my heart to wish that you had abandoned the *Titan*."

M'Grabbut looked up with a smile of grim meaning. "An' let her lie in the path o' the traffio ta increase the dangers o' the Bay?"

"Was that necessary?" Arun parried.

"Scarcely. Still, I doot if the policy of an open sea-cock would entirely please ye, . . . or yoor partners?"

Arun leaned forward, drumming on the table with his knife. "No," he said. "Despite the fact that she is a wreck and will cost us thousands, I do not think such a conrse would have been just—unless of course, it had been absolutely the only one left."

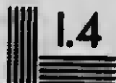
"Which was not the case—as you obsairve."

"But," Arun corrected in an even voice, "had it been the case, and you had done it to prevent adding a further danger to navigation, to prevent further loss of life, . . . why . . ."



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M'Grabbut glanced over his small *vis-à-vis* and filled the pause. "It might have been worth oor while, eh, Mr Arun?"

Arun met his companion's gaze, and a deprecatory inflection crept into his voice. "Pardon. You intentionally misread me; you wilfully . . ."

"Say it oot, sir, . . . say it oot!" cried M'Grabbut, with a burst of strained hilarity. "We are alone. Yoour word is as good as my word, an' *vice versa*."

Arun drew slowly to cover. "Pish!" he said, "one is naturally interested in what has occurred."

"Interested! Losh! I should not hae expected ta find Mr Arun interested in anythin' that didna bring in money."

There was more than a tinge of scorn in the engineer's great voice. But the owner refused to be annoyed; he leaned forward and said in his suavest manner—

"You are brusque, M'Grabbut. I should have expected a man of your attainments to be more politic."

M'Grabbut paused with a fork held midway to his mouth. "It seemed ta me," he said, "that it was but doin' ye justice ta remind ye o' the caractereestic aa men acknowledge. Still, if it appeared unmannerly, I withdraw it."

"Not at all. Persons of education are slow to take offence. I don't take offence. Besides, one can see your nerves are all awry. You have had a long trial, . . . a very long——"

"Nerves?" M'Grabbut interjected, puzzled.

"Precisely. The trouble of the age."

"It's a thing I hae no use for," said the engineer.

"And one," Arun acknowledged with a touch of self-pity, "that with me increases in proportion to the square of my years. Heigho! I feel tired, weary; I shall be glad of a rest." He rose from his seat, and added, "You turn in also, eh? Well, if you will show me where I can lie down I shall be thankful."

M'Grabbut moved towards the door. "Come with me," he said, and led the way to a cabin. Arun paused with his hand on the lock.

"I should like to say," he remarked, "that in spite of your evident . . . what shall I call it—distrust? I bear you no malice. Indeed, I am more than sorry for the misfortunes you have come through, and will do all in my power to recompense you."

He closed the door at once, and M'Grabbut found his way on deck. A moment he stood beside the saoon entrance pondering the owner's final remark, then moved aft to the helmsman.

"He's gone below," he said, "dead tired an' fu' of anguish. Losh, man, keep yoour eyes skcened an' ca' me if ye see snakes. Aboove aa, mind how ye answer him if he speaks. Ye know nothin', . . . let that suffice."

But Arun had no intention of stirring, indeed he slept without interruption till nearly four o'clock, and at that hour came on deck to find the fog more thick, the pace a crawl. The outlook was to his taste. He approached M'Grabbut at the wheel and said cheerily, "Well, where are we? . . . Slow progress, I'm afraid."

"Sir, we might just as well be at anchor," the engineer conceded gruffly.

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Arun rubbed his hands. "Surely not so bad as that. . . . True, the tide has been against us, but now it adds a couple of knots to our speed, eh, M'Grabbut?"

"It's a science I'm no vaired in," said he; "but I'd thank ye ta signal orders ta yoor tug ta move those engines o' his. She's goin' ta sleep, . . . we've no come a dozen miles in as many hoors."

"Tcha, tcha, . . . impossible. What time is it?"

"Four o'clock."

"Then we should be off Ilfracombe—drawing up to Scarweather, . . . capital, when we remember the conditions."

"I ken nothin' o' where ye expected ta be. . . . I only know where we are—scarcely a dozen miles fra the island," M'Grabbut asserted.

Arun turned about, examining the seascape, but he found no landmark, nor any sign of one. They were alone, isolated in a circle so sluggishly heavy with vapours that they might, for all that appeared, have been a thousand miles at sea. He caught M'Grabbut's eye and replied—

"It's absurd. . . . Besides, how is it possible to know?"

"By yonder line, sir,—ae thing I've lairned ta use since I shippit sailor-man." He pointed to a lead-line lying coiled on the wheel-box. "Twenty-seven fathoms," he added; "thirty fathoms, . . . sometimes twenty-eight; gravel an' shell. The chart 'll tell ye the rest."

Arun recognised the argument; and, in spite of his annoyance, answered with an even face, "Well, if



that's so, it's disgraceful. Jenks should have been able to do better. What has come to the man?"

"If ye canna put a rivet in that hole, sir, I doot it's no use me hazardin' guesses."

"Signal him to shorten in the line," Arun snapped. Then after a momentary silence, "I presume he is the best judge of what speed is safe."

He moved away. It was impossible to do anything with this man of suspicion, innuendo, and brusque criticism. He was unworkable; he knew too much. He had, as Arun had said before, "too much damned education"; he was not to be bought or hoodwinked. Arun cursed the day when he first came in contact with him, and, as is the habit of men with his temperament, steeled himself to win despite the towering handicap. The *Schwar'nigel* must go. M'Grabbut, despite his shrewd observation, should never hinder that. He swore it.

The tug backed astern, placidly winding in a length of bawser, and Arun adventured as far as the fore-castle to hail him as  y under the bow.

"What speed are you setting?" he cried. "Can't you do better—or is it unsafe?"

The cue was there, but Jenks would not see it. He stood on the paddle-box, the lugs of his cap flapping about his ears, and raising a hand like a steak to shout, "If it's your wish, sir, to fetch dock-head to-morra night, we'm doing all that's necessary. . . . If you want——"

"The conditions are changed!" Arun raved. "Let her have full speed." And to M'Grabbut, before he left the forward deck, he confided the information,

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"It matters devilish little whether it's day or night in weather like this."

They proceeded after an interval through the gloom, under the eye of three red lights, and heralded by the tootling horn of the *Pride of Wal*. Elsewhere, in the growing darkness, tin bugles braided with infantile gravity. The *Schweinigel* slobbered over the yellow-green waste unheeding, shouting to the Channel of her distress, of her gaping butts and torn rivets; and the pumps clucked and gobbled in the engine-room with the voice of a colony of monstrous turkeys ragingly annoyed by an intruder. Darkness settled down upon them. It echoed with the clamour, but the *Schweinigel* crawled towards Cardiff through a wake that seethed.

Arun went early to bed. He advised M'Grabbut of the fact, prefacing it by telling him of the rigours he had endured while waiting at the island. He was tired, weary. His bones ached. He would be thankful to see home. He came past the binnacle at the word, threw his cigar overboard, stretched, yawned, and went to his room.

At seven o'clock M'Grabbut left the wheel, and, stealing barefoot down the alleyway, peered in and saw that he slept; again, nearly an hour later, he came as before and stared, circumspectly, through a crevice. Arun still slept, calmly, like a child, with one arm thrown over his head. M'Grabbut acknowledged that apparently his words were true—the owner was tired.

But Arun did not sleep. Indeed all thought of sleep was banished by the knowledge that now, if he would come unsinged from the ordeal, the time for action had arrived. His nerves thrilled. He lay in a

bath of sweat, and, as suddenly, shivered. It was cold—it was hot; the tremors ran glibly as his tongue in debate. He shook them off and rose to listen. The noise of the wheel-chains, grinding the quadrant slowly hither and thither, told him M'Grabbut was at his post. For three hours yet he would stand there, staring into the fog, searching it for that small will-o'-the-wisp moving so mistily ahead, by which he steered, . . . for three hours! Well, . . . it might be.

Action was necessary. He had talked, soothed, cajoled; now he must act. Below, in that dark cavern echoing with the voice of the pumps, was a sea-cock he must turn. He acknowledged it, and stood at the door of his room to listen. The gaunt hull lurched drowsily, wrapped in mist and giving vent to cries, groans; but her guardians were silent—M'Grabbut at the wheel, Cook in his bed.

Arun crept to the deck. It was dark, black; the Channel a caldron of fog, smoke, mist. There was a suggestion of rain in the air which struck raw and cold. But movement had brought calm; he no longer thrilled, his hand was steady. He passed along unhindered and came to the engine-room, carrying in one hand a box of vestas and a piece of candle. The place was dark, like a grave; but the doors stood open, and it was a simple matter for a man who knew every inch of the way to find the ladders and descend.

He moved cautiously, holding by the guard-rails, and reached the engine bed-plates. Before him was the entrance to the tunnel. With one hand on the shafting he crept aft, passed the thrust, and entered. Speed now was necessary, and to that end, light. He struck

a match and the candle flamed. Again he moved aft, sheltering it with one hand, and came to the sea-cock. Water rilled about it, trickling in a thin stream down the tunnel. Soon, he laughed, that stream would be swollen, rushing.

He stooped to throw a light, and saw that the lever was not on the square, but lying beside it amidst the water. He paused, searching his memory. This morning he could have sworn it was fitted, ready for use. This morning? Pish! the thing had got on his nerves. He would not have been surprised, after the first shock, if he had seen two levers there—a dozen levers.

He lifted the short iron bar and placed it in position. What did it matter? The thing was to be turned—turned. He pressed. God! it worked stiffly—abominably, damnably it worked.

He leaned with his full weight upon the circular wall, pushing with his foot, and the water flowed. It leaped forth gurgling, and fell in a thick torrent down the vaulted way, waking the echoes with stupid insistence. He lifted his head in alarm and found a plank, which he laid athwart the flow. The noise failed; but in his haste he forgot the candle. It overturned, dying with a splutter amidst the water at his feet. The place was a cave.

Still Arun did not lose grip. He was accustomed to the vagaries of ship construction, and made no hasty dash, but waited, with his hand on the shafting, until his eyes had recovered from their momentary blindness; then stole forward, guided by the iron.

And as he approached the door he became aware of

other sounds than those he made,—steps, a voice, some one shouting. He crept on with a sudden fear, a tremor such as he had never before experienced gripping at his heart.

Some one moved in the upper reaches of the engine-room. The harsh noise of nailed boots scraping on the iron ladders came down to where he clung at the tunnel exit—staring. Two men were descending, one forward, one aft, carrying each of them a lamp.

Arun stood at bay just within the circular door, questioning how he might elude them. He was wet to the knees. He was caught, and would have to buy his freedom,—like a rat he was caught, and like a rat he squirmed to effect his escape. "All men," he argued shivering, "have their price, but M'Grabbut's will be a thing to remember." Then, in a flash, the notion died. Thoughts leaped in his brain. He might escape. To the right was the entrance to a bunker; down there, at his feet, he might worm his way amidst the machinery. In either haven he could wait until they had passed into the tunnel. Impossible. One might stay to watch. The bunkers? Pish! He put it from him with a gush of passion, and sprang boldly from the tunnel, crying out—

"On deck there! On deck! On deck!"

A low growl admonished him that M'Grabbut heard; but he continued to shout information, climbing meanwhile rapidly to the platform. M'Grabbut passed him unheeding. He swung his lamp and leaped downward until he came to the exit, then stood with raised hand to listen. A minute he remained thus, then sprang aft with a cry—

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"Losh! the beast's done it. . . . Stand ye ta guard the exit."

Arun advanced to meet the fireman as M'Grabbut disappeared. He thrilled at the knowledge of how nearly he had sold himself. Now he moved boldly, crying out, "Why don't you help? . . . why don't you help? . . . can't you see there's something wrong?"

The man eyed him up and down, holding the lamp for examination. "I can," he said. "The chief's curin' it."

"Curing it? Good God! I hope he may. . . . I tried. Look, I'm wet—wet to the eyes. . . . Couldn't move it."

"No?" said the man. "So you s'y."

"So I what?"

"S'y, . . . s-a-y, s'y."

"What d'you mean? . . . what the devil do you mean?" Arun moved a menacing arm before him; his eyes leaped in a face puckered, angry, turkey-red. "What, . . . eh? Speak up."

The man stepped back. He knew nothing at the moment, but, like M'Grabbut, had his doubts. He paused, uncertain, wondering in his dull brain how he might evade a question so threateningly direct. He decided, as Arun bristled close before him, that it was beyond him, and replied—

"Mean, . . . oh, notbin', . . . sir."

"Nothing, eh? Then why on earth did you say it? Tell me that."

"Sir, I thought . . ."

"Damn your thoughts! You are of the breed that

obeys, . . . you have no right to think. Let me pass."

"Beg pardon, sir, . . . chief's orders are to keep you."

Arun turned on his heel. "Ha!" he said; "then it is to Mr M'Grabbut I must speak."

He passed down the ladder and came again to the tunnel. Water still rilled at the entrance, rising momentarily higher, and far in the circular cavern he could see the dim form of the engineer—blurred, misty, gigantic—stooping amidst the spoutings like a man in a drain. He struggled with the flow, and Arun questioned—could he stop it? He pushed, swore. . . . Could he? God! there was little the man could not do. Wet, blinded by the rush, he strove in the dimness, and presently straightened his back. Could he? It was done. Arun paled at the knowledge. It was done. . . . and he . . .

The engineer, confident, supremely alert, faced him, swinging his lamp. He moved down the tunnel, and the owner met him.

"So you've managed it?" he said, "Gad! it was more than I could do."

"Ay?" M'Grabbut whispered, lacking breath, "what was?"

"Turn off the water."

M'Grabbut stared in silence. It was incomprehensible, a matter beyond, . . . beyond. He raged out, "Stand oot o' my path, sir, . . . stand oot o' my path;" and again more quietly, "I'm no seekin' contravairsy. . . . The night's black, . . . black. Ye

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might hae feenished us aa. . . . Get on deck, . . . get on deck!" The voice rose as he came threateningly nearer.

Arun faced him, trembling. But words did not fail him, nor did he falter or flinch. "Silence, sir!" he flashed. "How dare you? How can you dream . . ."

"But I saw ye. . . . I saw . . ."

"Saw what?"

"You—comin' oot o' the tunnel, where . . ."

"I had ventured to seek to stop the leak," Arun reiterated undismayed. "Are you maç. Do you think I wish to commit suicide?"

The engineer drew himself upright. He spoke very calmly. "What I think o' ye, an' what I'm likely ta say, now, is a varra different matter. Get up on deck."

"Wait. We must thrash this out. You are wrong. You misjudge me. Such conduct would be unpardonable, . . . infamous . . ."

"Creeminal," M'Grabbut shot out.

"I agree. There would be no palliation, . . . yet, on the merest suspicion, you fasten it on me, . . . me. Is it fair, M'Grabbut? I put it to you—is it fair?"

The engineer was obviously shaken. He lifted his hand and passed it twice down his beard, staring his companion in the eyes. Arun saw that his knuckles bled, that he was wet to the elbow; and the viper that was in him cried out, making the most of the incident.

"I observe," he said, "that even you found it difficult, . . . you, with your strength . . ."



"Enough, sir. Get up on deck before me. No, . . .  
I dinna ken, . . . ta argue further would but show  
my haund, an' yours. I'm no weel vairsed in sub-  
tleties. Come, the ship is lookin' after hersel',— fact  
some blunderin' collier may discover if we linger."

Without further words they mounted to the deck,  
and Arun returned to his room.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

COOK.

ARUN reclined on the couch in his room listening to the heave of the swell as it licked the port, and marking the swift cluck of pumps far below. In that engine-room, which held the record of his attempt, they buzzed, shook the bulkhead with their turkey-like gobblings, and shouted to him of his failure. He had failed. It was checkmate; the throbbing valves declared it with masterful iteration. In any case the *Schweinigel* was to be his ruin—he saw that; in one, the cause, perhaps, of a criminal prosecution. Criminal! The word stank in his nostrils. Criminal—so M'Grabbut had termed it.

A long while he remained thinking, turning the matter in his mind; questioning; this issue, that. The shipboard noises kept pace with him. At intervals the dreary horn, blown by the *Pride of Wales*, echoed in the narrow cabin; at others there was silence: then again more hootings, brayings—as though a band of infants marched sportively behind trumpets on the green before his home. The sounds increased in volume. They apprised him that he drew near that home, and, for the sake of those who awaited him, he must work out a theory—decide, act. But within those

close-set walls, hemmed by monotonous planks and listening to the gobblings, he could not decide—could not think in sequence. The atmosphere oppressed him. His nerves were master.

He rose at length, wrapped a heavy coat about him, and went out. M'Grabbut must be propitiated. How? This thing of which he spoke so scathingly must not transpire. How could it be kept? To bring the *Schweinigel* in after so long an absence meant difficulty, if not ruin; but to come accompanied by the taint of, . . . of . . . God! he could not name it. And yet, he whispered, facing the dead night and gazing into the curling mist, and yet he was justified. Was he not? Was not this vessel his? . . . Had he not bought her, . . . paid the price; and had she not swallowed hopes, money, men—juggled with contracts, wallowed in lives? . . . Was she not his to do with as he listed—and by any method? Ay, was she. Still, it was crude, crude! He should have waited, taken time, danced attendance on the next gale—anything, so that suspicion should not fall athwart him and pin him, as he was pinned if M'Grabbut spoke.

He must plead.

He acknowledged the position was ghastly; yet, in the same breath, admitted it as inevitable. By his idiocy, his reckless haste, his cocksureness, his desire to speedily confront Schlange with the refutation of his prophecy, he had made it so. Now he must pay. The price rolled in his mind like a shadow—black, grim, immense as the sea he faced.

He paced the deck, restless, undecided, and presently came to the stoke-hold entrance. Within a little iron-

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bulkheaded space, Cook stood to tend the donkey-boiler. The gauge showed a full head of steam. The fire roared. Arun watched, revolving unutterable thoughts. This man had suspicions also. He questioned how deep they might be—whether he could shake them; and in a moment moved forward, resolved.

He stepped over the high sill and joined the man before the fire, saying, "It's cold outside. You have the best of it." Then drawing a cigar from his case, lighted it, and stood warming his back.

The fireman replied that it was certainly cold, but he wasn't sure about the best of it—"it depended on wot you call the worst," adding, after some thought, "I was thinkin' o' comin' to see *you* meself."

"Yes?" Arun blew a cloud and looked up. "What for?"

"Oh, about that business—down there." He jerked his thumb in the direction of the tunnel, winking monstrously.

"Well, . . . what about it?"

The man whistled. "Nothin'," he said at length. "Nothin', if you're on the hi-ti, . . . not a bloomin' word."

Arun watched him, but did not flinch.

The man took a short pipe from his waistcoat-pocket, filled it, and aggressively struck a match. He began to smoke, then the owner intervened with his cigar-case. "Try one of these," he suggested; "you will find them fairish, . . . not too full."

The fireman found no meaning in the explanation, but he saw a cigar and accepted the offer, stuck it

between his lips and puffed. "Well, sir," he said, "wot's it to be?"

"I don't quite see what you are driving at," Arun evaded. "Give me a hint. You will find me open to argument,—willing, if it comes to that, to pay for any information you may have, . . . or for any service."

"That's the talk. Now we're comin' to it . . ."

"One moment. What are we coming at?"

Cook withdrew his cigar and blew a cloud. "Bargain, of course. Wot else?"

"I never bargain," Arun asserted bitingly, "without seeing the goods. What have you to sell?"

"This." The man faced him with narrowed eyes. "A engineer doesn't ship a lever wrong side up—never. Why? Because it sweeps the boards an' tears 'is fingers—see?"

Arun failed to understand. "Well?" he said.

"That lever, down aft, was shipped wrong side up. I didn't ship it, chief didn't ship it, . . . then who did?"

"Was it shipped?" Arun questioned, bland, imperturbable, despite the hand of fate so glaringly set across him. "How do you know?"

The fireman was taken with a sudden fit of merriment. "Who shipped it?" he reiterated chuckling, monstrously familiar, "Garn! You whistle—I'll point."

Arun moved up and down the narrow space. He had this man's measure. He held him at arm's-length, his eyes twitching, his brain alert, ready to dart—but there was nothing at which he could thrust; no opponent wit, no shrewd thinker, only the dulled intellect of a weasel-like Cockney, a thing of the slums. He paused, and said very distinctly—

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"We are getting mixed. I confess I don't understand. I recognise that you believe I have done you some harm . . ."

"Me? Not it, . . . the ship."

"I deny it. Chut! man, you are smoking my cigar."

"The first," his opponent sneered. Then, seeing Arun was not to be drawn, he resumed casually, "I 'appened to kick against that lever—eight o'clock lawst night, . . . an' I unshipped it, . . . laid it dahn beside the cock. There was no leak then, only a wimper. . . . The chief didn't put it on again, more didn't I. Then him as did—opened . . ."

Arun recognised the force of the argument. He faced his man with leaping pulses, but with so still a voice, so passionless an air, that the fireman shuffled with his feet amidst the cinders.

"It's a lie," Arun jerked out; "a monstrous lie."

"Alright, . . . say it is."

"But you believe it?" Arun questioned, watching.

"I do."

"And you will swear to it?"

"I will, . . . if you don't play square," he added.

Arun held up his hand. "I see, . . . yes. Well, I acknowledge that to you it seems feasible—a proof. I don't touch that. I say again it is false, absolutely; but that does not weigh with you, and the remaining point is this—you believe what you assert, and I recognise that such an assertion is unpleasant. It means fighting, lawyers, courts of justice. I have no love for them, nor, I anticipate, have you. Very well. You are a poor man; I, by comparison, am rich, and it becør es necessary for me to buy your goods. They

are of no use to you. To me they are of value. I will give you ten pounds if you will keep your teeth shut. Does that suit you?"

The fireman looked up, indeed he smiled. "Chuck it," he said mockingly; "that game's played."

Arun fumbled for his pocket-book and produced twenty pounds in notes, rustling them enticingly full in view. "I will give you these," he said, "if you will promise to know nothing, to hold your tongue."

Still the man drew back. "Cawn't do it, guv'nor," he reiterated; "I'm on the straight."

"Fifty!" Arun sneered, counting the notes with fingers that were cold, damp.

Cook paused. A moment he remained balancing the matter, staring into the red mouth of the furnace and marking the drone of the fire. Then he turned—

"Make it a hun'ard, sir," he urged, "an' I'm your man."

Arun pocketed the notes with a disdainful gesture. "Pardon, my friend," he said, "it seems to me it would be cheaper to fight. You know nothing. Your evidence is no evidence; it is unreliable, circumstantial. I deny the whole thing. Come."

The fireman showed very plainly his disappointment.

He had overshot the mark; he had not anticipated this. His grip of life had taught him little of the subtleties of a man of Arun's character. He saw that he was on the point of losing fifty pounds, when, at the uttermost, he had hoped to handle twenty. Fifty pounds! It was six months' work, sweating beside the furnaces. He held out his hand—

"Sir, I'll tike it," he said.

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"I don't know that I will give it," Arun lashed out. "It's blackmail—a thing I resent, . . . a thing no wise man would attempt. Still, I recognise very plainly that you have suffered; that you have cause for annoyance with me as owner, and I am prepared to meet you—provided you have not mentioned these suspicious of yours to the engineer."

"Not I, sir, . . . as yet," he added.

"You swear it?" Arun insisted, hot with hope.

"S'elp me Gawd, . . . I've not."

"And you will keep your teeth shut even if it comes into Court?"

"I will."

"Swear it."

The formula was repeated, and Arun counted the notes. "Understand," he emphasised, holding them so that the other could see, "understand, if this does by any chance come into Court I shall expect you to tell what I said at the time, and what I say now; that I denied point-blank, in your hearing, when the engineer first suggested it."

"Sir, I'm mum. S'elp me, I ain't a fool."

"That I said then the ship 'ad sprung a leak; that I heard the water and ran from my room to see to it, . . . you comprehend?"

"I'm there, sir."

Arun counted the notes into his outstretched hand and drew back, puffing at his cigar. "I suppose," he said, "you have been some time at sea?"

"Ten year, sir—off an' on."

"Fireman all through?"

"Lawst six, . . . before that, trimmer."



"I see. Slow promotion, eh?"

"Slavery—sheer," the man asserted emphatically.

"And you would not object to climb a bit? . . . would be prepared to work up and pass your examination for engineer, eh?"

"Would I? Sir, you try me."

"I will," said Arun.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### INCIDENTAL FOOTSTEPS.

THE first touch of dawn struggled tenderly with the fog banks brooding over Channel when M'Grabbut approached the cabin where Arun slept. It was eight o'clock; the mist less chokingly full of smoke; more silvery, lined with gradations presaging clearer weather. They were passing the last of the outer lightships. Breaksea swam trembling in an atmosphere that flared past her like steam. She shouted the fact of her presence with appalling vigour on a horn that rushed round like a cowl. Yet Arun slept. M'Grabbut stared through the small window, arguing the impossibility; but it faced him. He flung the door wide and announced the hour, also the ship's position, in the tone of an officer awaiting relief.

Arun moved on his pillow and replied, "Thanks, . . . ha! . . . and still foggy?"

M'Grabbut withdrew. Nor did he offer speech when, ten minutes later, the owner stood sipping a cup of tea and munching a biscuit in full view of the wheel where he steered.

Arun finished his snack, lit a cigarette, and, with his collar turned high, his legs set wide and hands thrust

deep in pocket, watched the passing macks. They drew abreast in sequence—bobbed, lurched, and tumbled rilling into the mists. Across the way was a tramp, spouting viciously black smoke, and making at speed for the gates; on the left the dense pall clouding the town, through which the chimneys jutted, showing no base, no system; to the left again, buoys, coasters, anchored vessels, vessels moving this way, that,—the life-blood of the Collier City, throbbingly alive. A boat drew towards them. She lowered her sail, and a man stood up in the bow ready to hook.

Arun watched. The hook caught in the rigging, the boat swerved, trailed beside them, and a voice inquired in a matter-of-fact tone whether the captain was visible. Would he require a waterman?

Arun looked down with the answer, "I require to be put ashore in a few minutes. Wait." Then crossed to where M'Grabbut stood near the wheel and added, "I think that before I leave, it would be well to understand the position. I presume you are prepared to withdraw . . . your accusation?"

M'Grabbut faced him with a contemptuous gesture. "I hae no desire for words," he replied.

"We need say very little, Mr M'Grabbut. Still, I think it is due to me that I should comprehend precisely what you meant by your mad attack last night—and, if you won't misunderstand me, I should like to think we part as friends."

"Friends!" the engineer blurted. Then in a voice very cold and stern, "Yoour action was like ta lose me my life. Nay, I'll not be friends."

Arun drew back, and his words took a sneering

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inflection. "My action, sir? I don't understand. Pray be precise."

M'Grabbut stared; the man's audacity took his breath. "I thought ta save ye the inflection o' incriminatin' details," he cried, "but it seems we must ca' a spade a spade. Ye songht ta scuttle the *Schweinigel*; ye opened a sea-cock with that in mind. It was an action that might hae cost us oor lives,—is that plain?"

Arun moved over and stood beside the binnacle, searching him through half-closed eyes. "To you it seems obvious," he said, "but to me it is incomprehensible. What are you driving at?"

M'Grabbut stood entranced. Thrice he passed his hand down his beard, suggesting by the movement that he had not heard aright, then the words poured forth—

"Incomprehensible, . . . obvious, . . . what am I drivin' at? Man, do ye know what like is a dirty action when ye've done it? Do ye understand the meanin' o' plain English when ye hear it? Stand aside wi' your obvious an' your incomprehensible. I tell ye I saw the water gurglin' oot o' the tunnel-mouth; I saw the sea-cock open an' turned it back. Look at my haunds! Losh! d'ye think I got that by lickin' them?"

Arun stared contemptuously. "Pish!" he said, "you forget your position, Mr M'Grabbut. It appears to me you forget also that you lack evidence of . . . this incident; forget that I called to you for assistance. . . . Did you see me turn the sea-cock?"

"Did I sec ye? Losh! would I stand bye ta see ye play the fool?"

"Answer my question, sir, . . . did you see me?"

"I did not, but——"

"But be damned! What evidence have you,?"

"Common-sense an' ocular deemonstration o' the runnin' water."

Arun buttoned his coat and stood ready to go. "Talk business, Mr M'Grabbut," he said. "Did any one see me do this thing? . . . Did any one see me in the tunnel? Nonsense. I came down as you came down, because I heard the running water. You accuse me? Pish! I might with equal relevance accuse you. I deny it *in toto*. The whole incident is on a par with other actions I have observed. The strain has been too much for your nerves."

M'Grabbut moved like a man in a dream; he stroked his beard, gazing steadfastly at the small viper in his path.

"Ye deny it!" he cried. "Lorc God o' my fathers! —an' ye aimed ta buy me."

Arun twisted on his heel, facing the man who had read him. "I deny it," he cried. "More, if you press me, you will find I have something to say on the subject that I would gladly leave unsaid. Take my advice, M'Grabbut, accept your compromise; it will pay you much better."

"A compromise, . . . wi' you? Lord, hold my haunds that I do not hit ye! A compromise! Man! I'd as lief seek favour of the devil an' aa' his angels. Get awa into your boat. Never more do I want ta see your crooked face; an' if I catch ye about the ship tryin' ta wark mischief, I'll put the irons on your wrists an' transport ye doon the pier shackled like the

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creeminal ye are. Oot of it, sir, . . . oot of it before I do ye hairm."

Arun paled visibly; still he held his head erect and threw in a further sting. "I suggest for your consideration," he said, "the fact that one man's v is as good as another's in a court of law. It is a question of 'expert evidence,' Mr M'Grabbut; a question of the cred 'lity of a witness—nothing more."

M'Grabbut clenched his teeth. In his mind he acknowledged it.

Arun saw his advantage and followed it by saying, "I must tell you, too, that if you persist in this statement, much as I should regret it after what you have suffered, I shall be compelled, in self-defence, to put the case in the hands of my lawyers."

M'Grabbut made no reply. He saw his difficulty, but he remembered that Arun had, as he said, aimed to buy him, and the knowledge steeled him. It was abominable, . . . as though he were . . . what?—a fireman, a loafer, a man to whom money is first and all other things after. His eyes hardened. The lines about his mouth grew firm. They should see.

Arun came to the ship's side, where a ladder had been slung for him to descend. The boat, with its sails fluttering in the breeze, lay just beneath him, and as he stood on the rail, gripping the life-line, he turned quietly to the engineer. "I bear you no malice," he said, "I advise you to think this matter over, . . . and, should you care to accept my suggestion, am prepared to meet you and discuss the position."

Without waiting for any answer, Arun climbed into

the boat and started through the anchored shipping for the pier-head.

It was nearly nine o'clock when he landed at the steps: yet, despite the hour, it was dark, for the fog still held sway over the town, and the air was black with smuts and smoke. A comfortable twilight wrapped the man as he paused, staring into the mists whence he had come.

Out there, in the indistinct blur of a tardy dawn, lay the *Schweinigel*, the *General*, and the tugs. They were safe now, because no one acquainted with the possibilities of salvage would dream of opening a sea-cock to hasten the passage of an incubus in shallow water. M'Grabbut might rest in comfort. Shirwill might turn in and sleep like the dead. The vessels would come in, and Cardiff would ripple with the news. M'Grabbut crossed over and leaned against a bollard near the pier-end.

Despite the high hand he had taken with M'Grabbut, he was ill at ease; and now, instead of proceeding at once on his way, remained undecided, thoughtful, silent, and the thin sea-fret drove up and licked his face. In the near distance were the boatmen who had brought him ashore, thrashing their frail craft back towards the roadstead. He noticed that they moved in a halo of spray, that their mainsail was close-reefed, that their hands were red--like slabs of beef. They reminded him of his skipper's hands on that day when he had gone out to face the inevitable, and the inevitable had met him instead. Intervention by the Act of God, once apparently so near, had failed him precisely when it had promised most; intervention by

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the hand of man, about which he had bragged so freely in his heart, had failed him also. He stood in face of certain ruin. If his action transpired he was a broken man, and, in his mind, he saw the scandalous episodes through which he had passed; observed that his position was wrecked, his future a blank. Yet hope lingered in his brain; hope, born of the tenacity with which men cling to life, whispered specious comfort, blotting out the blackguardism, the disingenuousness, chicanery, and greed which had prompted all his movements. In spite of all that had happened on the island, he had gone out to wreck this ship because she threatened to wreck him; but he argued applaudingly from the later standpoint—the *Schweinigel* was a swallower of men, . . . he was justified.

Again, there was this business of M'Grabbut. He put it aside. The man was ruffled, annoyed, . . . presently he would have more patience. He was not a fool. When he saw that he stood alone, that Cook knew nothing, he would come to terms; and of Cook Arun felt very sure. Indeed on this man he built the whole edifice he called his defence—a shadow, a reed, caught at hastily, as a drowning man catches at water and floods his lungs in his desire for breath; yet, as he stood on the pier-head, battling with thoughts, he leaned on supports of no greater substance.

Cook had taken his money. Cook lived in the hope of social regeneration. Arun was to stand to him in the way of a foster-father, pass him up the engineering ladder and give him a position of authority over the black brigade among whom, hitherto, he had delved. He had promised it. In the dead of night, while



M'Grabbut slept, he had arranged this matter, and Cook had sworn to abide by the compact.

Arun saw nothing wrong, nothing despicable in this course; indeed he viewed his conduct through the lens of an inverted telescope, and the arguments he culled from the spectacle shouted in his ears for continued effrontery. He must brazen it out. Never would he permit an engineer to shame him with the spread history of his attempt. As he had said, one man's word was as good as another's. He might have gone farther, for in this case his partners were persons who recognised the efficacy of a lie, provided it was told with assurance and properly substantiated. A lie, in such a case, was but a business adjunct to the indefensible, and no sin; a necessity rather, about which some, perhaps, have scruples, but at which Arun would never hesitate. A lie? Pish! the thing meant life, for without it an open rupture must ensue; Joseffs and Schlange would never consent to further patchwork, and he would be outcast—a thing for less scrupulous but more fortunate business men to jeer at. He had already tasted of the cup of unsuccess, and preferred the knowledge that he was acting the knave to the certainty that others would dub him fool if ever the matter leaked. Again, a thousand times, there was nothing else to do—nothing else to say—only to brazen it out.

He moved sharply from his resting-place and discovered that he was wet. Drops ran off his cap, licking his cheeks, ruining his collar, and adding to the discomfort of his sodden boots. He turned with a gust of impatience, and, hastening down the dock wall,

came into the streets. The trams were running, crammed with people; the pavements overflowed with workers, all going to ply their trades. But Arun had no mind for publicity; he was wet, he was thrillingly alive to the fact that his appearance was disreputable. He kept along the dock side until he reached a livery-stable. Here he engaged a cab, and set out at once for the senior partner's residence. It would ease his mind, he told himself, to see Joseffs and discover something of what had happened during his absence; and so in half an hour he was standing at the door knocking for admittance.

A man-servant opened to him and replied to his question in the negative. "No, sir, Mr Joseffs is not down, . . . but——" he paused, glancing at Arun's dripping garments and marking his unkempt appearance, "but I will go up, sir, and say you are here."

Arun pressed a coin into the man's hand and took off his mackintosh. "Thanks, Tompson,—yes, if you will. I have but just come ashore. The weather is dirty outside, and I have been unable to dress." This in explanation of his evident dishabille and to set the man's tongue at rest.

Tompson bowed gravely and led the way to the library, where Arun sat down by the newly lighted fire and again surrendered himself to thought.

A new sensation had come over him, born in equal parts of the shame and fear he so well concealed. His hands were clammy; he might have been cold by the way the tremors ran. In all his experience of unpleasant interviews, he never remembered so strange a feeling. Action seemed necessary. He was on wires

sitting there waiting the convenience of the financier, and rose to pace slowly to and fro the hearth,—yet, despite the tension, his thoughts were clear, his head cool, collected.

The lengthy pause served only to fan his annoyance. He was not accustomed to wait, and forgot the unwonted hour in his search after those snubs which he knew would presently be his lot did he fail to substantiate his position. Again, he had not breakfasted. Indeed, so impatient was he that he had approached the bell, and was fingering the button when the door opened and Joseffs appeared.

The big man was wrapped in a dressing-gown, and wore a look of settled worry; but he crossed to meet his colleague with a smile.

“Sorry to have kept you,” he said; “and glad to see you back, . . . er . . . won’t you sit?”

The inflection was sufficient. Arun recognised his position and declined the offer, pleading his wet condition. The senior partner came over and stood with his back to the fire.

“I gather from the hour,” he remarked, “that you have news, . . . that the *Titan* has been heard of. On Tuesday I feared from your message that all hope of saving her had disappeared.”

“I was misled by a message from Lizard,” Arun replied. “It seemed impossible that she could be brought in. A vessel’s lifebuoy drifted ashore, . . . we knew nothing of the tug at that time, and it pointed to the loss of the *American*—and, as a corollary, to the loss of the *Titan*. But the *American* is still afloat.”

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"Coming in?"

"At anchor in the roads."

"And the *Titan*?"

"She also is at anchor."

"H-m-m-m."

The unquiet look had taken a firmer grip of Joseff's face; he stood gazing at the ceiling and warming his preposterous back.

"There was no possibility," Arun resumed, with that new sensation creeping down his spine and tingling at his finger-ends, "there was no possibility of . . . of doing anything in the way of . . ."

Joseff's wriggled with his finger in one ear, and a look of intense impatience crept into his eyes. "We've had a devil of a time," he interjected; "these sailormen and their lawyer have caused us no end of annoyance, . . . er . . . I beg your pardon, . . . you were saying?"

Arun scanned his face in silence, fashioning his reply. Then with obvious effort, in a voice struggling to be calm—"Ha! I don't know, . . . perhaps it is unimportant."

"Of that," Joseff's bowed, "I am sure you are the best judge."

Silence fell upon them for a minute; then Joseff's resumed, speaking in more cordial tones. "I have been so engrossed," he persisted, "with the financial worries incident on these affairs, that I am overdone, my perception is a bit dulled—it is early, too, one is only half awake. . . . So, the vessels have come in?"

"They have—it increases our difficulties, of course. Do you see your way through?"

"By compromise, yes."

"Even a compromise will cost money."

"Schlange is prepared to find it."

"So, too, am I," Arun flashed.

Joseffs lifted his brows. "I thought, . . ." he commenced, and halted, frowning the conclusion.

"On the same terms," Arun accentuated, "even, if necessary, to buy him out."

"Him?" Joseffs questioned behind the veil.

"Schlange."

Again the senior partner glanced at the ceiling and said, "Precisely." And after a pause, "Hum! . . . yes, it would be advantageous. You know my views, . . . I gave you to understand how I, . . . pity you didn't bring this forward sooner, . . . hum! . . . yes . . ."

Arun broke in with a suggestion. He had no desire to prolong the interview; he saw that Joseffs required to retrace some of his steps, to abate his manner. "Perhaps," he said, buoyantly, "perhaps we had better defer particulars, eh, Joseffs?"

The senior partner visibly thawed. "I think you are wise," he replied. "Yes, without Schlange, you see, we are rather talking in the air."

Arun admitted it, and Joseffs came near and laid his hand on the younger man's back. "Don't misunderstand me, Arun," he insisted, "I prefer to keep business to business hours and to the office. . . . Stay and take breakfast with me."

"Thanks—no, I am wet. I will get home at once."

As you will."

Arun glanced up with "le. "Of course," he said,

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"you will not misunderstand me, Joseffs. I could scarcely appear in this guise even at your table. I hastened up to give you the news—it seemed the wiser course."

"If it has put you to any inconvenience," Joseffs returned, "I am sorry, for, as I think I said just now, I had the . . . news last night."

Arun marvelled at the lack of acumen which permitted so damaging an admission, and questioned whether it would have come had it not been for the shock, the surprise under which he laboured. It was evident that Joseffs had intentionally omitted the information, that he had intentionally drawn him; but Arun only smiled, wondering at the control of the man. He faced him saying, "Did you, . . . last night, . . . how?"

"Captain Shirwill came up and told me that you had boarded the *Titan*. I scarcely anticipated your return so soon. Schlange, however, seemed to think I was wrong, . . . still . . ."

Arun moved towards the door. He had no intention of venturing on further confidences. Joseffs had practically arranged to desert him; Schlange had busied himself with aspersions on his rival, . . . in his absence too, and . . . the senior partner was in the throes of a *volte-face*. Awkward! He glanced up to say—

"In that case it is plain I have given myself, and you, unnecessary trouble. Shall we make it two o'clock, . . . and in my room?"

"It will suit me admirably."

"Thanks; then I will arrange with the hands."

The two men bowed. Joseffs touched a bell, and Arun passed out at the heels of a servant.

Up the hill, beyond the wooded slope, a tall and graceful woman looked from the dining-room window and saw that the town was wrapped in mist. At her side, a young girl stood with twined arms, wondering if "dad would come home to-day."

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### AT BAY.

ARUN had no time to spare for home. The scheme he had thrashed out since landing demanded every moment of the day upon which he had entered. He questioned, indeed, whether it would be possible to accomplish all and yet be at the office at two. But his capacity for work was enormous, his energy unflagging, his determination to prevent Schlange using the lever he had foolishly put in his hand, bristling, vehement. He drove at once to an hotel, despatched a boy for raiment, and breakfasted in the coffee-room, pencil and paper beside him.

A bath, dry clothes, and refreshment served as an additional spur; he faced his difficulties with the alert brain of that marvellous type who, in these days, think, decide, and act at the end of a telephone; who have appropriated electrical science to their necessities; who live two years in the space of one, induce nerves, and die young. He sat down to write notes. The first he sent to Joseffs at the office, confirming in it his offer to take full responsibility and bear all loss in the matter of the *Schweinigel's* salvage, and, if necessary, to buy out Schlange. Two others were



despatched by the Messenger Service,—one to M'Grabbut, on the *Schweinigel*, asking him to meet him at noon, and incidentally giving the captain notice of the meeting; the other to Cook, at the rooms he had directed him to occupy, requesting him to be ready to meet him at twelve-thirty.

Since his interview with Joseffs it had become imperative that he should run no further risk. The senior partner's manner, noticeably at the commencement, had conveyed very distinctly the precipice on which he stood. Schlange had used his absence to foster suspicion in Joseffs' mind; to hint at his own aim; to point sneeringly at Arun's limitations. "I, myself, tink she will come in." The heavy-witted German had read the situation in the light of his desire. As it happened, events had fallen as he prognosticated. The *Schweinigel* had come in.

Arun blamed himself freely now for having attempted to bluff so shrewd an opponent as M'Grabbut. He recognised that through him Schlange had been able to carry his machinations to the edge of success; that he had used his friend's ambition, his desire for fame, as a platform from which he might step out master of the situation; and, by aiding him in his arguments in favour of that new-type steamer, had built the ladder by which he might climb. But he had not reached the platform. Arun was throbbingly aware of the fact that his foot was near; that he was poised there, waiting; that a word from M'Grabbut would place him firmly on it,—but in his heart he knew that Joseffs was ready to back him, ready even to thrust the ladder from under Schlange's feet, if

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only he were prepared to increase his holding. It became therefore increasingly important to come to terms with M'Grabbut, and, as he expressed it, to shut his mouth.

At the last moment Arun had decided to bring in more capital—if pushed, even to buy out the junior partner. It had been possible before—at a price; but he had striven to accomplish it with the *Schweinigel*. Now it was essential, no matter the price, or—his name must come down. Schlange would win—Schlange, the heavy German! The thing stank in his nostrils.

He recognised that if Schlange succeeded, he was a ruined man,—but that it should be said, in addition, that he was a criminal, was more than educated humanity could contemplate with twiddling thumbs. M'Grabbut must be propitiated; he must be brought to side with him: at all costs, at any hazard, nothing of that madners of his must transpire.

His attempt struck him in this light now that Joseffs, who had practically suggested it, had turned on him so pointedly. Before, it had been a business adjunct to the impossible; now it was an impossible adjunct to any sequence of events—not because of the inherent wickedness of the scheme, but because of the consequences running riot in the path of failure. Hence he held out a hand to his backer, and his backer met him, smiling at the fortune which gave him, in these days of beggarly dividends, so safe an investment for idle capital, and so keen a business man to work it.

Eleven o'clock brought Arun a pointedly friendly reply from Joseffs, who congratulated him on his de-

cision and accepted the offer he had made; then, until noon, he was occupied with other matters, noticeably with his backer, the man with unremuneratively invested capital.

As the clock struck, Arun entered the smoking-room and waited, scanning the passers in the vestibule, for a full half-hour. But as M'Grabbut failed to put in an appearance, he started from his seat and drove to the Messenger Office.

The manager confronted him in his small den, asking his errand, and question and answer flowed with precision.

"Has the boy returned from his journey to the ship?" "The boy has." "Can I see him?" "Surely" (the boy was kicking his heels on the floor of the anteroom), . . . "52 there!"

Arun crossed to meet him. "Did you deliver my note?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Where is the answer?"

"Sir, there was no answer. The genelman told me to get to the devil ashore—an' I come."

Arun fumed with annoyance. "Then why on earth didn't you come and say so?"

"Didn't like, sir."

"Didn't like!" And Arun was living on that answer. He turned from the office and drove to his hotel, calling from the cab to the commissionaire, "Has any one asked for me since I left?"

No one had. The commissionaire was very confident, and, in view of the tip he had received, very regardful of the shipowner's anxiety. But Arun took no heed.

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He recognised that his notes were still unanswered; that it was imperative he should see both M'Grabbut and Cook before they arrived at the office, and, as a last resource, ordered the cabman to hasten to the address where the fireman had been installed in comparative luxury.

Here, again, he was foiled. The landlady herself came to the door and explained matters in sing-song Welsh.

"The shentleman hass gone out, whateffer. I hope indeedt that ho will come back sober—for my house is a quiet one, and only for your honour would I haff anything to do withh a sailor who is not an officer."

Arun interrupted with a quick sentence. "Where is ho? . . . Did he receive my message?"

"Sir, he did. But he hass gone out, . . . to the schools, I pelieve, where they learn for the examinations."

Arun sprang into his cab and drove at once to the "coach," who occupied a dingy house in the Bute Dock Road.

In answer to his knock, a small man in grey tweed, with close-cropped hair and nubbly brow, opened the door and advanced to meet him.

"Mr Bruce?" Arun interrogated.

"My name, sir. A word in private? Certainly. Come this way."

Ho led to an adjoining room, and Arun at once attacked his subject—

"Have you had a man here, . . . a new arrival—Cook by name, sent with a letter of introduction, to pass first grade?"

"Cook, . . . William Cook, with a letter from Mr Arun, the shipowner?"

"Precisely—I am Mr Arun."

Bruce bowed. "It is a pleasure," he said, "to do anything to oblige Mr Arun. Yes, Mr Cook has been here, . . . but . . ."

"Well . . . ?"

"I'm sorry, . . . but I fear he was perhaps a trifle under the influence of . . ."

"Drink?"

"I fear so. I regret it, seeing you take an interest in him. I fancy, from what I saw, he is the wrong type. I question much whether he has the ability to study, . . . or the desire to remain steady."

Arun looked up with a touch of annoyance. "Pish! all things are possible, I suppose. You for one will not throw cold water on the suggestion?"

"Why should I?"

"Quite so. Well, to be plain, I desire this man to pass. He is a good man. He was recently in one of my vessels as leading fireman. I wish to push him forward. I have made myself responsible for any expenses he may incur in the way of passing—and I look to you to put him through. It will be a feather in your cap."

Bruce shook his head, as though he already felt the burden of that feather. "It will," he said; "there is no doubt about it."

"Have you any notion where I may find him—now?" Arun interjected.

Bruce gave him the names of several adjacent bars, deprecatingly. He was sorry, he reaffirmed, he could do no more.

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Arun returned to his cab and drove rapidly from place to place, visiting the dens where homeward-bound sailors and firemen congregate in order that Cardiff harpies may relieve them of their too weighty gold, but nowhere was there any sign of the man who had suddenly become so essential a factor in the game. He was gone. The swirling Cardiff sea had swept over him, and he was hidden in waters through which no shipowner may dive and come out unsullied.

Of M'Grabbut, too, Arun could glean no tidings. The pier knew nothing. No one had seen him land, no one had seen him at any of the usual offices; and Arun began to understand that these men would not reply to his notes, were determined to evade him. Still, harassed by his unusual exertions and with nerves thrilling annoyingly, he made his way once more to the hotel, where again his questions received that negation he had grown to expect. There had been no callers.

It was now nearly three o'clock. The hour for the interview was long past; but Arun had decided, mentally, that it was necessary first to see these men, and the time had slipped. He found by a glance at his watch how far it had slipped, and, with a quick oath, bade the man drive at speed to the office. He had not seen M'Grabbut; he was unable to find Cook; he must trust to mother wit to bring him through the ordeal unscathed—unscathed, that is, by the touch of the greater peril; scathed alone by the fact that the *Schweinigel* had returned with a more heart-breaking record than before.

They arrived shortly before three, splashed with mud

and drenched with rain. Arun sprang from his seat, and was on the curb almost before the sweating horse had come to a stand-still.

"How much?" he questioned, fidgeting his purse.

"Fifteen shillings, sir—and thank you."

Arun handed a sovereign, a fact the man pointed out; but the owner had no time to dally with trifles—M'Grabbut, perhaps even Cook, was closeted with Schlange while he meandered about streets. He mounted the steps and walked into the office, sweating as the horse outside sweated, thrilling as the horse thrilled, with a stifling sensation clogging his breath, as the foam on the horse's mouth clogged his. In a moment he had passed the barrier.

"Where are the heads?" he questioned.

"In Mr Schlange's room, sir."

"Any one with them?"

"Mr M'Grabbut and Captain Shirwill, sir."

"No one else?"

"No one."

He came into his own room, considering the information. Cook, it appeared, was unreliable, addicted to drink. Annoying!—so the thought ran. Amazing, too, considering the future dangled for him to grip. Arun removed his coat and wraps and faced the glass.

Trim hair, a trifle damp at the temples; lustreless eyes, heavily underlined; a pulse throbbing fast, and a moustache with ends awry. Remembering the stress he had come through; remembering the unutterable weather, the exasperating sequence of events and the fact that he was an hour late,—he looked fit, very fit, he told himself. Still, as he crossed to the door he

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drew a bottle and small vial from a bureau, poured out a dose, and swallowed it.

The effect was marked. His eyes lost their dulness. A tinge of colour came into his sallow cheeks, and he preened himself before the glass like a bird after a bath in the sun.

"Nerves," he said; "the trouble of the age. I would to God there were no such things as nerves." Then, twisting the needle-points into symmetrical lines, he let himself into the adjoining apartment and faced his enemies.

Once there had been but one—now there were three, possibly four. He smiled as he recognised the obvious increase, and, at Joseffs' glance, saw that indubitably it would be a fight. M'Grabbut had spoken.

"I must apologise," he said stiffly, "for my apparent discourtesy. The fact is, I found so many things requiring attention, that . . . that . . ." He paused, searching for a phrase, an action so unusual with him that Joseffs rose from his seat at the writing-table to intervene.

"Pray don't say a word," he begged. "We waited some time, expecting you momentarily; and now I regret we did not wait longer, for, to speak to the point, we have come across some . . . a . . . very unpleasant details. Indeed I might go farther and call them incriminating details, . . . matters on which I have no doubt you can throw light—made by Mr M'Grabbut."

Arun bowed. The cue was there, but it would be unwise to take it up at once—crude. He remained quite still.

"As far as I can see, Captain Shirwill knows nothing



of all this," Joseffs resumed, "except, of course, from hearsay; but Mr M'Grabbut has, in spite of my caution, thought fit to press the matter, and—you will see, Arun, I could do nothing less—I agreed to confront him with you, in order that you might have the opportunity, I am sure you would desire, of refuting his . . . a . . . statements."

Joseffs paused, tapping the table with his pencil and watching his newly arrived colleague; but no sign lay in the pallid nervous face, no hint of anguish, no signal in these flickering eyes now so unusually steady. The senior partner sank into his chair, accentuating his annoyance by look and gesture. He desired a refutation—prompt, immediate; but Arun did not speak. "It is an accusation," he went on, "which I am sure you will deny, for, on the face of it, it is absurd. I have no wish to cast aspersions on Mr M'Grabbut's perspicacity, but I cannot help thinking there must be some explanation of a charge . . . I may say, I could never have supposed possible . . . in my . . . wildest . . . moments."

Arun stood facing his enemies and twisting the points of his waxed moustache. Outwardly he was calm; inwardly, despite the drug, his veins ran with fire. A touch of giddiness flushed him as he entered; but now he was pale—pale, with gleaming eyes set in a frame of shadow. He moved to a chair as Joseffs concluded, and sank into a comfortable attitude. The cue had been dangled again, crudely dangled. He would not touch it.

"Ha!" he said, "so Mr M'Grabbut has thought it well . . . to revive that legend. I am not astonished."

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Joseffs stared, the tone was conversational, almost lively; he turned from one to the other. "You deny it," he expostulated; "I presume you deny it?"

Arun glanced with sudden spleen at Schlange, standing with his back to the fire, aping the emperor lilt. "Why should I?" he questioned. "If Mr M'Grabbut is pleased to recount legends, he must do so. It amuses him. It is an effect one feared."

Joseffs was obviously puzzled. Arun's behaviour was so strange, his bantering air so palpably assumed to hide anger, that he broke in with some impatience—

"Pardon," he said; "it seems to me that so grave an accusation reflects on us as a firm—and, if you will allow me to say so, requires to be met with some sort of . . . a . . . dignity."

The managing owner smiled. He leaned slightly on the elbow of his chair, watching, then turned to M'Grabbut, saying—

"You think it wise to persist in this fallacy of yours? . . . You think it wise, Mr M'Grabbut?" The man's look betokened refutation, but his voice rang with entreaty. The engineer would have been dense indeed not to observe the divergence; but he was smarting under a sense of the dangers he had come through, and in no mood for forgiveness. He took up the question angrily.

"Do I think it wise? Nay, did ye think o' what I should think when ye opened the sea-cock? Did ye care twa split hairs what I thought or what I did not think? Losh, man, get back ta the question. Do ye deny it? . . . that's what we're all dcein' ta lairn."

Arun's manner changed at once. He sat erect,

scornful, striking his knee to emphasise the words. "I do deny it," he snapped. "The thing is a monstrous lie."

"Lord God o' my fathers!" M'Grabbut groaned. "Hear him . . . hear him!"

Joseffs' face cleared instantly. He cried out in his big voice, "Bosh, Mr M'Grabbut! Speak to the point."

"Ta the point be it," said M'Grabbut, leaping quickly from his wonderment. "I say here—noo, that Mr Arun suggested ta me that the ship had better go. He suggested it, an' found I would not bite. Then, while I watched the steerin', he crept doon an' opened the after-compairtment sea-cock. That I swear, . . . an' that I'll prove."

"Pish!" said Arun, "the man is romancing; the long strain has been too much for his nerves. Still, as Mr M'Grabbut has been circumstantial, I too will endeavor to be circumstantial." He leaned back in his chair, talking easily, enunciating his words, rounding his sentences. "I will explain the position to which the engineer alludes. I was asleep in my room—it may have been nine o'clock, or ten o'clock . . ."

"Ta be precise," M'Grabbut interjected, "we'll ca' it nine-feeften, . . . barely twenty minutes frae the hour when I last looked in on ye."

Arun glanced over with a grim intonation. "You did that?" he remarked. "I must commend your wariness. . . . But, as I was saying, I was asleep, and was awakened by the sound of running water. I sprang up instantly and went to the engine-room, wherc, in a few minutes, I was joined by the engineer and the fireman. Both had heard the noise, as I had

heard it, and they both hastened, as I hastened, to see what was wrong—only, I reached first. Mr M'Grabbut accused me of tampering with the valves, then—and I denied as I deny now. As a matter of fact, I shouted to him for assistance—come, now, did I not? Good! You can't deny it. Very well, what more can I say? Can you point out in what way I may throw more light on the affair?"

Joseffs looked up with a sigh of profound content. After all, it seemed that Arun had not been the consummate ass he had at first anticipated. To succeed in such an attempt would have been one thing; to fail and allow the matter to be blurted abroad, for men and parsons to jeer at, was sheer suicide. He replied, therefore, in those judicial tones he knew so well how to assume—

"At first sight, Mr M'Grabbut, and before I had heard Mr Arun's explanation, I confess, mad as the accusation appeared, I was inclined to believe you had some . . . a . . . grounds for your statement; but after hearing my friend's defence, I can only regret that you should have thought fit to bring a charge of this nature against my firm. In itself, you observe, it is entirely uncorroborated. I tell you, sir, the thing savours of maliciousness, of a spite which I scarcely expected to find in a man of your . . . a . . . parts."

M'Grabbut half rose in his chair. "I'd have ye pause, sir," he cried; but Joseffs continued with raised hand and voice—

"One moment! I will not attempt to silence any defence you may have to offer, but you must allow me to conclude. I have no hesitation in believing," he

went on slowly, "indeed I have not the faintest doubt, but that both of you heard the running water—and, from what I know of the results of excitement, darkness, and danger, I am sure you imagined, on seeing Mr Arun, that he had turned the valve; but it is also apparent to me that Mr Arun might, with equal justice, accuse you. Depend upon it, the whole thing was the result of some accident; the sea-cock must have been turned some time—but to suggest that we should acquiesce, without further evidence, in your view, is scarcely within the bounds of common-sense."

Schlange, who had been standing with his back to the fire the whole time, joined issue at this. "To me, it zeems the result more zan anysings else, of sgarc. I in zat can nussing disgraceful see. You acguse Mr Arun, . . . Mr Arun might also you acguse—but he does not. All sings zen being equal, zere is nussings to devide. He of you suspects; you of him suspects. Vell, ze end eis smoke."

M'Grabbut leaned forward in his chair, a smile lurking on his face despite the gravity of the situation. "I say," he reiterated, "that Mr Arun lies. I say now, in his presence, that he not only tried ta sink the ship, but that he . . ."

Arun held up his hand. "One moment," he begged. "I think there is no occasion for acrimony. The matter is capable of proof. You say I did this thing, —very well, substantiate it."

The engineer stood up, his voice ringing with annoyance. "Substantiate it?" he cried. "Losh! I wish ta God I could. I ken weel hoo yoour partners will judge in this matter, noo that ye've beguiled a fool-

child wi your gould. Tell me hoo much ye gie'd yon fireman ta know nothin'. . . . Tell your firm what it cost ye—an' then maybe we'll get ta business."

Arun shrugged his shoulders. "You see," he remarked acidly, "the strain has been too much for him."

"The strain be damned! Mr Arun—an' God forgie me for swarin'."

Joseffs interposed with a blandly raised hand. "God," he said, "would be better pleased by the omission of such words than by the prayer by which you accompany them."

M'Grabbut bowed. "Ye hae me there," he remarked resignedly, "an' I ask your pardon for the indiscretion. I put it to ye, though, is it no sufficient ta make me forget my catechism ta hear a man lie liko the Shaitan, when I know all the while he's answerable for the dilemma in which I find mysel'? Is it not, I ask . . ."

Again Joseffs interrupted. "Really, really, Mr M'Grabbut, I think you go too far. I can't listen to this kind of thing. Confine yourself to facts. What is it you suggest?"

M'Grabbut faced him with blazing eyes. "I suggest nothin', sir. I say Mr Arun has bought Cook ower ta hold his tongue."

"Couke . . . Couke?" Schlange interjected. "Who in ze name of fortune is Couke?"

"The fireman," Arun threw out jerkily. "The third person who was in the engine-room, you recollect."

"Ha! So."

"On the face of it, it seems absurd," said Joseffs.

'On the face of it, it is absurd," Arun corrected,

"and, if it is of any interest to you, I may as well say that I have grounds for believing that the whole business was the result of an accident. Cook stumbled over the sea-cock at eight o'clock on the night in question. Seek him. Let the matter be proved."

M'Grabbut stared. He commenced a further denunciation, but the senior partner interrupted—

"Nay, nay; if you have any grounds for this second accusation," he insisted, "you must produce your witness. Otherwise I shall unhesitatingly accept Mr Arun's version. It rings true—while yours, I regret to say, rings equally of spite."

M'Grabbut and Shirwill rose together. "It was obvious," said the latter, "how they would side. Birds of a feather, Mac,—you know the rest."

"Ay, lad, I do. An' as they require further evidence, they shall hae it. If Cook is in the flesh they shall see him an' hear him talk." Then, turning to the partners, he continued. "Ye think ye hae me in a hole, gentlemen; ye insinuate I'm no responsible for my actions, that the long strain, as ye ca' it, has affected my head. Good! It has, an', by the Lord! I'll show ye how."

Josephs raised a warning finger. "One moment, Mr M'Grabbut. I think you go too far. I would remind you that it is actionable to defame a man in this fashion. If you have proofs, bring them—but they must be proofs, absolute, unequivocal; or, in sheer self-defence, we shall be compelled to place the matter in the hands of our solicitors."

Arun rose from his seat; his face, as he stood in the light, showed nothing of the suffering he endured,

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and his voice rang with its accustomed vigour as he approached the engineer.

"If you can find Cook, Mr M'Grabbut, I shall be prepared to face him and you together. There need be no recrimination, no solicitors, no argument,—indeed, nothing savouring of fight. I will meet him, and, if he admits your statement, I too must admit it. No other course would be logical."

M'Grabbut bowed stiffly.

"Ye can trust me, sir, ta be circumspect. Outside this . . . an no word passes my lips until I hae my witness,—an' then, wi' the permeesion o' yooour partners, I'll meet ye."

The two men left the office at once and Arun faced his friends. Joseffs was evidently much porturbed. He moved up and down the room, battling with his annoyance. Schlange eyed the ceiling, with his hands under his coat-tails. Joseffs broke the silence that ensued.

"This is most annoying," he said. "If such a story gets about we are ruined."

"I myself tink it vill not get about," Schlange interjected, unconcernedly.

"But if it does?" Joseffs persisted.

"Zen," Schlange concluded, "the deluze."

Joseffs advanced and looked Arun in the face. "You must fight," he cried. "There is no other course."

"Fighting means publicity," Arun smiled. "Leave it to me."

"You must fight, and you must win," Joseffs flared. "You must fight, and there must be no publicity. I leave it to you to arrange. It is possible—otherwise, much as I should regret the necessity, I must with-



draw my assent to your project of this morning, . . . it could not go on. I should be compelled in sheer self-defence to refer you to Clause X. 2 of our Deed of Partnership."

He left the room in obvious heat, and Schlange looked down on his small opponent.

"Vell?" he said.

"Well?" Arun questioned.

"It seems to me, I vin," said Schlange.

Then, for the first time, Arun's temper flared. He sprang a step nearer, his eyes flashing, his nostrils dilated. "Only when I am dead," he hissed, "can you talk of having won."

"So!" cried the German, struck from his stolid unconcern by the intensity of the man's passion. "Zare is no ocgaison for so mouch vordts. I vin because you help me, not because I move. I vin because you play ze fool—hein?"

Arun regarded him with a contemptuous frown. "Pish!" he said. "Let us understand each other. What do you propose to do?"

Schlange viciously lifted his moustache until it bristled at right angles with his mouth. "I inteud," he replied, "now, at length, to move. You this thing did, . . . I know. It is my opperdunity—ze opperdunity that to all men vonce gomes. It to me has gome, and I aaccept it."

Arun came closer, speaking in low quick tones. "You understand what you say, . . . your damnable English does not run away with you?" he whispered.

"Nein. For vordts there is no ocgaison. It eis you or me, mein friendt—you or me, nussing more."

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Arun drew back. He approached the door, opened and stood a moment watching the phlegmatic German he had stung into speech.

"Very good," he said, in that precise diction he knew so well how to assume. "Yes—you are right. I accept your challenge."

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### ARUN'S APOLOGY.

THE *Schweinigel* lay at rest in Penarth Roads, dimly adumbrating her form in waters muddy as her sides.

Night had fallen. A profound and solemn night; sodden, dark, with a soft wind thrilling chantingly through masts and rigging; the sea striking deep bass chords intense and boasting from the Depths; the tide flicking notes with a staccato touch, sharp, shrill, like a woman's laugh. A few blurred lights trembled in the distance, marking the nearer shipping; the rest lay afar off, sunk in shadow, curtained by the drizzle falling so persistently aslant the moaning breeze. Astern was a dim red eye, winking incessantly from Flatholm; ahead a haloed splash of white, staringly announcing the end of the pier. A sea of phosphorescence trailed sparks of fire between.

It was nine o'clock. An uncanny night, too, yet M'Grabbut and Shirwill paced to and fro the vessel's quarter-deck, debating the eternal questions—how, when, where, in which mode and by what process, could they best reap the shekels dangling so promisingly ripe before their eyes? The prospect was alluring. It dazzled. They could not sleep.

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A watchman sat in an extemporised shelter cursing the lack of a galley-stove where he might warm and doze; forgetful of the fact that when the galley vanished, half a crew took the plunge unprepared. Cursing, too, at the vigilance of the men aft, who, apparently, had no use for sleep, and kept him from those restful interludes he had grown to expect as his birthright. Within two cables' length the derelict floated in rain-wrapped solitude; her watch adrowse; her crew ashore reeling from bar to bar, sampling scandalous liquor and clicking glasses with those impossible sirens who aimed at beguiling them of their hard-earned gold. But the derelict was safe, safe as the *Schweinigel*—yet M'Grabbut and his friend were afoot.

Last night they had "reeled off" a whole gamut of arrears—fifteen hours without snoring, without a move. They rose with swelled heads; stared at the sickly image of the sun, and acknowledged that even sleep, after a while, palls. Since breakfast they had been, as M'Grabbut expressed it, "on the etairnal hop," and the process was scarcely concluded by the advent of supper—a supper they required but little, in face of the dinner they had consumed at six—"at the toniest restaurant in Cardiff," M'Grabbut accentuated, "wi' a bottle o' fiz to top off the salt we've absorbed."

"Heidsieck—'96," Shirwill recalled.

"Gude—it was. Man! I feel kind . . . kind, . . . like an alderman wi' a fat belly an' a long purse, . . . ready ta gie gifts ta the poor—provided my name's announced saircumspectly an' wi' due flourish in the papers. 'Deed, but there's truth in yon . . ."

Shirwill laughed. "Ay, . . . in what?"

"A gude dinner makes a man releigious, . . . fou o' consairn, too, lest he should come short to-morrow."

"Chut! you're a glutton, . . . on my word."

"I missed a skeenfu' while I was steerin'. There's a wide bit o' leeway, as ye ca' it, to make up. Losh, man! but that's a braw cigar ye're smokin'. Pass me your case."

Events were running comfortably for these salvors. The barque, without question, was a valuable prize, and already they were in correspondence with her owners; but there were additions. Early in the forenoon a letter had arrived from the office, containing a definite offer for their services to the *Schweinigel*. In it, Messrs Joseffs, Arun, & Schlange expressed their desire, "without prejudice," to compromise the matter, and offered to pay £1000 sterling for those services, provided M'Grabbut and Shirwill bound themselves to take no further steps in the question of foul play, should it by any chance arise. This latter clause ran through circumlocutory legal phrases which said nothing so definitely crude as "foul play," but walked all round it, marking the pains and penalties which the mere mention of it would render a certain person or persons, by with or through themselves, himself, herself, or any other body's self, liable, should they, he, she, or it provokingly and of malice prepense give voice to the said vague intangibility at any future period. As witness whereof, we, the said parties hereto, have set . . .

"Wi'oot prejudice" stuck in M'Grabbut's throat. He said it necessitated the giving of further fees to

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lawyer-men—an expense he resented. Yet it tied them, he was certain of that; and, at the moment, he had no wish to be tied. This in spite of the fact that Arun had produced Cook, who had spoken to the “accident” with vigorous narrative. But M’Grabbut was unappeased. He desired, above all things, to be able to meet “yon snake, doon on the bed-rock o’ things; man ta man an’ wi’oot coats.” But the lawyer and Shirwill prevailed. It was impossible, they said, in face of the evidence, to do anything more. Besides, a thousand pounds is not to be sneezed at even when divided among a crew of seven; but a thousand pounds sans law worries, courts, and dry-as-dust formulæ, plus the salvage of the *General*, which was admittedly theirs, made a sum-total that went far to turn M’Grabbut from thoughts of vengeance to thoughts of dinner.

Arun’s defence had been masterly. The lawyer said he was without doubt impeccable. The engineer must have been mistaken—it would be wise, . . . wise. . . . The lawyer smiled, playing with that vague intangibility. Shirwill, too, was forced to admit that Arun’s case was a good one; that he had won. He acknowledged the fact questioningly, shrugging his shoulders. Cook had substantiated his unaccountable “accident.” It might be a lie; it might be the truth—who could determine? They saw that it stood.

Thus at six o’clock they had taken seats in a “tony” restaurant, and at eight returned smiling, friendly with all the world, to the *Schweinigel*. They had sent telegrams home, and now only awaited the necessary details of Ship and Customs clearance before whirling to their respective families, “men o’ substance!”

They walked the deck now, perhaps for the last time, and jovially admitted the fact of their luck between the puffs. It was the one thought remaining unshaken.

"An' aa' oot o' the Meesin' Leink," M'Grabbut cried out. "Lord! but I'm sair ta leave her."

"Our co-operative spec," Shirwill conceded. "Not so bad. Eigh! where shall we find another?"

"Wi' the 'Dutchmen' rampagin' after berths for the pure love o' sailin', losh! but sailorisin's done—killed. Ye'll no find another, nor will I. Sae I'll just tairn owner an' put ye in as managin' director. . . . One Ship Company, Bob, an' the British public 'll find the bawbees, . . . what d'ye say?"

"Nonsense, Mac. Sell our services to the Yanks. . . . What do the British public care for shipping, or ships?"

"I'm jnst busy thinkin' o' that Yorkshire lad wha trampit ta Lunnon wi' the provairbial half-croon in his pocket," M'Grabbut asserted. "He fell on his feet at shipownin', . . . so I've haird. Then why . . ."

The noise of an approaching steam-vessel broke in upon this roseate vision, and they moved to the ship's side.

Three lights—red, white, green—loomed through the greyness, fixed in a narrow triangle. They indicated the advent of a launch or small tug, heading directly for the *Schweinigel*. The sparks from her funnel trailed in the gloom, and as the two men questioned who it might be, a voice hailed them, asking the position of their ladder. Shirwill crossed over and held a globe-lantern to mark the spot.

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"What boat is that?" he cried, "and what d'you want?"

No answer came. The vessel swept on, slowed, reversed, and lay bubbling under the light; then a man, clad in shining mackintosh and soft hat, climbed the side and stood in the gangway searching for the steps. "Is that M'Grabbut?" he questioned.

The engineer drew near. "Losh!" he whispered, "it's Arun, an' more interludes. What aa's in the wind now? . . ." Then, as they faced each other, and aloud, "Sir, ca' back yoour launch. I want no talk wi' you, . . . an' you can want no talk wi' me—seein', by yoour own showin', I'm daft."

"And yet," said Arun, "it is on that very point I wish to see you."

"It's an eensult," M'Grabbut announced sturdily. "I take the like frae no man."

"I withdraw it," Arun answered.

"Withdraw? Losh! hear him," he turned to Shirwill, with a quizzical expression that was quite his own. "He tells me," he went on, "before his partners, 'the strain has affected yoour mind,' noo, in my hearin', Bob, an' yoours, he withdraws it, . . . , withdraws! Losh! but I'd love ta lairn ye manners, Mr Arun, I would, . . . , I would. But I recognise ye've tied my haunds wi' that compromise o' yoours, . . . an' my jaw aches wi' the strain o' tryin' ta get aside it, . . . an' losh! I'm weary, weary. Gae awa', sir, wi' yoour withdraw. I'm varra seek. I desire ta gae ta my bed."

Arun smiled and stepped from the platform. He was brisk, alert, the points of his moustache astonish-



ingly pin-like. "Come," he said, "we need not quarrel about phrases. In business, when a man makes a misstatement, he withdraws,—some people, I admit, apologise; but, although the two terms are nearly synonymous, I never apologise. . . . You recognise the point?"

"I recognise," said M'Grabbut, leaping at the opportunity, "that it takes a man ta make an apology; but about the other I'm no opeenionated."

"The two are one," Arun snapped.

"I accept the explanation as ye gie it, sir," he said stiffly. "But I'm old-fashioned, an' ye must blame my masters if I prefair ta remember that ae man pays his debts wi'oot eenstitutin' comparative values, a woman when she must, a fool never."

Arun rode the high horse, superciliously triumphant that at length he drew near the goal and Schlange was hopelessly beaten. He rode it in the knowledge that he was owner, and that these persons, apt and above the average as he found them, were his servants—in his pay. His mind failed to grasp the initial truism—that it is not the purse that makes the man of worth, but the man who makes the purse worth recognition. He could see with his eyes; was shrewd and keen; but in this matter of status he was blind and bristly as a mole. He was owner. These persons, who to-morrow would move out into the vast world never to cross his path again, were his servants—yet, the fact that he was driven, unknown to either, to ask a favour of one, made him pause in the midst of his triumph. He turned to Shirwill, saying with a slight accent—

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"Do *you* consider that fair, . . . honestly?"

"A man, sir, has no right to make a statement he knows to be untrue and then withdraw. You owe an apology."

"Apology?" Arun threw out. "Chut! one only apologises to one's friends."

Shirwill faced him, biting sarcasm. "If by friends," he said, "you mean equals, I must remind you that in some things all men are equal."

Arun looked up with a tinge of his old manner. "My dear sir," he sneered, "that is all sheer socialism, . . . the result of spread education."

"Sheer grandmother!" M'Grabbut retorted, bristling, "an' the result o' spread damsons! If my forgiveness is worth a tinker's curse ta ye, ask it fairly, or leave it alone."

The tone of M'Grabbut's reply struck Arun as very inappropriate; but he knew his man. He had studied him for some months, and knew how to retract.

"Tcha, tcha!" he deprecated in a friendly aside, "you are touchy, M'Grabbut. The word is of little importance to me; I apologise if you prefer it."

"Wi'oot prejudice," M'Grabbut laughed. "Ay! my mither!"

"You forget," Arun interrupted, "that in business matters one deprecates excitement—feeling, if you like. There are spheres where one must have no heart . . . No? Very well. On some points, as I perceive, I am in a minority: we must be content to differ. It is immaterial. Come, it isn't very cheerful here; I think we had better go below."

He moved away at once, and, entering the cabin,

seated himself comfortably on one side of the fire. The two officers faced him, standing.

"I have a good deal to say," Arun resumed in his precise diction, "and I will put it with as much directness as I can muster. I premise that I find myself in a dilemma, and I must ask Mr M'Grabbut to aid me. I wish him to withdraw the statement he made the other day, and . . ."

"It's cancelled, . . . we've signed the compromise," M'Grabbut interjected.

"I admit it. But you made it publicly, and I must ask for a similar release," Arun announced. "Sit down, gentlemen; the cabin is yours till noon to-morrow."

"I'd as lief stand," M'Grabbut asserted. "I was feelin' gude, . . . kind, till ye came, sir. Noo, if I sit doon, I'm done."

"As you wish. And now, if you will give me your attention for five minutes, I will explain why I want that withdrawal—why I consider it essential.

"I go to matters of which you know nothing, and in confidence. Two years ago Mr Schlange joined our firm as third partner. I was sorry this had become necessary, for I soon discovered that he and I would not run together easily. He is ambitious—he wishes to supersede me. He has money behind him—at that time I had but little. With Schlange's aid Joseffa proposed to build a big concern—Schlange made the price for a further advance of capital my retirement. You perceive, M'Grabbut, there are wheels within wheels, even in business. Jealousy comes in—spite.

"This vessel," Arun proceeded, tapping the deck with his foot, "was built by me to enhance my position

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and to increase my holding. I believed that she would be one of a new type, patented by me, and the precursor of many others of similar construction,—but the *Schweinigel*, as you call her, has done her best to kill her Master. She landed me at the bottom of the ladder and Schlange at the top. From that position I have extricated myself. The matter now stands equally between us—but Schlange, at the last moment, has seen fit to demand that you, who first made the charge, should withdraw it in our presence, and at our office, to-night. Will you come?”

M'Grabbut glanced at his friend and replied after a moment. “I don't see what it has ta do wi' us. . . . I want no haund in the matte' further.”

“But you are bound in honour to withdraw a statement you acknowledge to be false.”

“I ken no place,” M'Grabbut returned, “where folk are enjoined ta tell lies *viva voce*. . . .”

“Lies?” Arun expostulated very stiffly.

“Ca' them what ye will, sir, . . . but it's bad enough, in my opeenion, ta put them in ink at the eend o' a long rigmarole only a lawyer can understand, . . . but ootright!” M'Grabbut pursed his lips.

“You heard Cook's evidence,” Arun put in suavely, despite the annoying suggestion. “He admitted that he kicked the lever, . . . that he hurt his foot, . . . and all the rest of it. You heard it all.”

“Yes,” said M'Grabbut, “I haired.”

“You infer that . . .”

“I infair nothin'. I've signed yooour paper an', . . . sir, I'm weary, . . . weary. I want ta gae ta my bed.”

Shirwill interposed at this. "Hold on, Mac. I don't think that's quite fair. You have no grounds—nothing definite, you remember."

"I admit it, but . . ."

"Nay, if you admit it there can be no but."

"You turned against me, Bob, . . . weel, weel!"

M'Grabbut laughed, but the laugh was a trifle strained.

"I only wish to see you just," Shirwill returned.

"Am I not, then?"

"You will be. 'No man,' you remember, 'is so merciless as he who, under a strong self-delusion, confounds his antipathies with his duties.'"

"True, . . . ye hae me there. A great man said it."

Arun rose from his chair and stood a moment watching the tightly pursed lips, noting the rugged contour of his opponent's brow, the shaggy reddish beard scarcely hiding the masterful jaw. Then he lifted one hand in semi-appeal. "In spite of your prejudices and your weariness," he said, "I do not think you are the man to connive at injustice—at fraud?"

"Eenjustice, . . . hoo? I see none."

"Your morality runs to seed, my friend," Arun sneered; "but you will not put out your hand to pluck the straw."

"If ye can show me," M'Grabbut broke out. "Eh, Bob, hoo does that strike ye, . . . if he can show us?"

"I agree," Shirwill conceded.

"Go on, sir. If ye can show us, we're with ye—for I hae a sair place on that same subject o' fraud, . . . an' if I could I'd . . ."

"Fish!" Arun repudiated. "There is no surmise

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here. Schlange has bought Cook over to give false evidence against me. We are to meet at the office to-night at twelve. Will you come?"

"It's an impeachment," M'Grabbut announced. "Burke on Warren Hastin's was nothin' to it. Sir, we'll see ye straight."

## CHAPTER XXX.

"ORA PRO NOBIS."

SINCE Arun left the island and had found it possible to throw dust in M'Grabbut's eyes, he had become again the man of business: agile in his dealings, sinuous in argument, subtle, unscrupulous, with one aim set increasingly prominent in his mind—Schlange, at any cost, must be ousted; the *Schweinigel* must be repaired and sent away—with a new crew.

That, of course, was a necessity, and Arun had already drafted the upshot.

Here, in Cardiff, as in all great centres, it was a question of the survival of the fittest. On the island, looking into the teeth of that gale and listening horror-struck to the weird note of distress, Arun had breathed the higher life for some brief seconds, minutes, hours; the tragedy of the Hen and Chickens had appalled him; the helplessness of man fighting forces so ragingly brutal stood out in letters he could not fail to understand. He was crushed by it, hammered back into that world of chimera and illusion where heart holds sway,—and had emerged from it, quivering and upon the threshold of infamy, to find he must fight or succumb.

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In business, the power to fight is of paramount importance. A man who is unable to fight were best resigned—or dead. Arun acknowledged both points as hour after hour passed and Schlange appeared to triumph; he acknowledged it again when, by a subtle move, he had crippled his partner at the expense of a lie—a lie substantially verified, sinuously possible; he acknowledged it again when he boarded the *Schweinigel* and persuaded M'Grabbut and Shirwill to testify once more to his honesty—his! The notion never stirred. It was a question of winning, hands down; of the survival of the fittest: "you or me, mein friendt—you or me." That was the Ultima Thule, the dramatic episode towards which all the rest had simply tended—"you or me," given in ringing tones with a monstrous accent.

Cook, M'Grabbut, Shirwill, the *Schweinigel* and her disgraceful accomplishments, were but episodes in the game; they served at times to enliven matters and had cost money; but the question at issue was—who of us shall win, . . . which of us shall stand down— which survive?

With the advent of a backer, Joseffs let it be seen distinctly how he favoured Arun; with the advent of M'Grabbut's charge, he had shown again—Arun, Arun, clear yourself and the game is yours. He had forsaken Schlange. Schlange had money, but no brains; Arun had brains, and now he had money. How could a senior partner choose otherwise than as he did choose—prefacing his remarks always with the iterated advice to clear yourself! A business man who had acted otherwise would have acted the fool, since the aim and



necessity of business is the acquisition of money, power,—the wherewithal to cut your neighbour's throat; the instrument by which peoples can be squeezed, governments coerced, thrones shaken. If not individually, these things are to be accomplished by alliance; if not by fair means, then by subtlety, disingenuousness, fraud; but there stands the law—written or unwritten it matters little—business is the acquisition of money, power; the aggrandisement of self.

If these arguments ever presented themselves to Arun or to Joseffs, they came in quite another guise. Man aims at the acquisition of money as the squirrel aims at the acquisition of nuts,—in order that he may live fatly through the approaching winter.

Joseffs had a costly establishment. Madame desired to shine as a reigning belle; her horses, her parties, her dresses must be of the actual best—for what other reason does a young and beautiful woman hazard marriage with a man whose waist-girth is enormous, and whose nose is of the order bulbous? Arun, too, although in his case there was no disparity of age and he was certainly foppish himself, still, Madame his wife and Mademoiselle his daughter were accustomed to the fat things of this pilgrimage—diamonds, furs, dresses at forty guineas. Well, the position stands out.

If we desire to philander at the skirt of the thing men call Society, if we desire to emulate our millionaires and see our names in papers given over to the hashed doings of the aristocracy,—money is an essential; to get it is imperative. So it appeared to Arun

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and to Joseffs as they drove nightly in broughams through the hive that made them up to the hills out of the reek of it, holding nicely poised noses.

But to-night, in these unspeakable climatic conditions, Arun had not been able to return in the brougham. Cook had come to see him, flourishing a new bundle of notes, truculent, boasting of his inability to study, of his determination "to take a pub an' chnck all books," of his resolve, in point of fact, to consign Arun to a very obsolete dungeon if he did not fork over a corresponding bundle of notes and allow him to live an honest man—*i.e.*, bought only by one side, a desideratum, apparently, even to a rogue.

Arun considered this new terror with unflagging energy. Schlange had done it. Schlange had discovered Cook and had outbidden him, and Cook, in the hope of still higher bidding, had come to him with the news. There could be but one answer. Arun made only one stipulation—"Take no more liquor until we meet." He made it impossible by sending him in a cab to his coachman's cottage, with a note which kept him; then passed on, hired a launch, and steamed out to see M'Grabbnt.

There was no hesitation in Arun's demeanour. Schlange had his coat off, and Schlange should suffer. It was a blow under the belt. It was villainous strategy—and it should recoil.

Arun, with his two stalwarts, emerged from the cabin, and, boarding the launch, were in ten minutes steaming fast through the drizzle for the Collier City.

The wind drove across dark waters, singing the song of a growing gale; it swept the low decks, swishing spray, and the boat raced onward, girt about by a corona of phosphorescence. Before her was the great pier-light slowly developing a centre; behind, a sinuous and comet-like trail, marvellous to consider. But Arun saw nothing, heard nothing; he stared at the light. It meant Cardiff—the place where a rascally juniór partner had suborned a beast who drank and would not be troubled with books, to impeach him.

They lurched before the wavelets, shimmered up slopes that seemed bent on whelming them, reeled headlong down oily stretches—throbbing, drenched, intent on the light until Cardiff lay twinkling in view, and they moved more soberly towards the landing.

The outworks of the pier stretched forth an arm to shelter them. The wind died. They steamed beside a towering breastwork of slimy masonry up which the swell slobbered and clucked, smacking gigantic lips. Some one spoke. A gong sounded. The launch thrilled, slowed, stopped, and they perceived a ladder, green and slippery to the touch, thrusting out across the cavern where they lurched. At the edge of it was a hand-rail; on every side but one the grim wall, spluttering, cracking, showing points of dim fire.

Again some one spoke. A voice said, "Watch your chance, sirs," then, with sudden energy, "Hold on up there!" Another cry reached the pit—"Right-oh! . . . next time she jumps—now!"

The launch swam level with a stage and two sprang forth—M'Grabbut and Shirwill; on the next dash—

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Arun. The launch toddled complainingly off to her moorings.

As the three men moved up the pier Arun came close to the engineer, saying, "You can hardly realise such devilry, M'Grabbut. The thing rings impossible to you, eh?"

M'Grabbut buttoned a straying flap and acknowledged that it appalled him.

"An equivalent of your incident of Mr Brown and Mr Smith," Arun hazarded.

"Worse, sir; for here it brands some pairson creeminal. Substantiated, it means your partner wins an' you gae ta jail. . . . Sir, there is na words coined ta label it."

"And yet," Arun pursued, "until the day you made your accusation I never had a harsh word with Schlange. He was my partner, my friend. You comprehend now something of the hazard I hinted at out there?"

M'Grabbut was touched by the kindly intonation, the comrade-phrasing the man adopted; flattered, too, without doubt, by the terms of friendly intercourse the shipowner permitted. But there was something, . . . something. Again, Shirwill's pleading remained in his memory. He questioned what was it that tripped him, made it difficult for him to respond? Was he prejudiced? did he confound his antipathies with his duties? The notion thrilled. It was unanswerable. He walked in silence, and Arun once more filled the pause—

"Are you satisfied, M'Grabbut? Do you think I would lie—like this?"

M'Grabbut waived the remark by saying, “Nay, sir. Who am I that I should judge?” And again, “Are we not all prone ta mistakes?”

“We are,” Arun accentuated. “Yours was a mistake. Good Heavens! how could you dream it?”

M'Grabbut was not enthusiastic, and while he fumbled for a reply the owner went on in his dictatorial manner—

“But for one reason,” he said, “I could wish the ship had gone; that she had passed altogether from battle with the forces she finds so difficult. She has lost so many lives, wrecked others. . . . And I saw, while waiting at Lundy, something of the ordeal through which vessels struggle. It was horrible, fascinating. I shall never forget it—never.”

His voice had the intonation M'Grabbut abhorred; it rang as it had rung when he argued out there on the *Schweinigel*. And yet Shirwill's verdict bade him beware—antipathies, . . . prejudices, . . . duties, . . . Which was which? How stood he in relation to either—whichever it was?

He looked up without the ardour Arun had hoped to arouse, and said, “Ay, sir; an' what reason hae ye for wishin' her afloat?”

“Surely you must see that if she had failed to come in you could not have claimed salvage?”

M'Grabbut pursed his lips. He recognised now, if not where he stood, where the owner stood. Arun had gone too far. A short space before he had braggingly asserted that in business there can be no heart, no feeling. Arun's firm was mulct a thousand pounds. Arun was glad. In business there is no

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heart, no feeling; yet Arun smiled! "Losh! it's complex, . . . complex, . . . his dual nature—or is it subtlety alone that spiers . . . ?" M'Grabbut marched in silence, ringing the changes.

They came to the roadway, and Arun hailed a cab. Then for fifteen minutes they jogged over the rough stones and drew up before a great pile of buildings wherein were situated the Company's offices. Neither made any further effort at speech; and as the horse stopped the owner sprang forward, first to descend. "They should be here by this," he said.

The breath of the gale was in the streets. A thin rain trickled from unseen turrets to the pavement pools. Widely separated lamps threw sluggish gleams aslant the heavy air, and everywhere was the solemnity of a city in the arms of night. The broad pavement across the way, where, in daylight, men strive and bargain for mastery, was tenantless. Here and there shuffling figures passed down the distant footway—women of the streets, belated travellers, sailors boisterous from their libations at neighbouring bars; but no sign of the fireman for whose presence Arun searched, no vestige of the support on which he leaned—so he accentuated.

Again turning to M'Grabbut, he added, "Annoying, . . . I hoped to confront him with you; but I must be content. You will withdraw?"

"I'm pledged," M'Grabbut acknowledged. "I can do nothin' less."

Arun crossed over and touched the bell. A caretaker admitted them.

"Has the man, Cook, arrived?" he questioned.

No one had come. The news fell with abrupt inconsequence, and the owner gripped his man by the arm. "Mr Joseffa—Mr Schlange, perhaps?"

Again no, with the additional information that "it wanted fifteen minutes to midnight," and Arun halted, watch in hand. But he saw no pointers, no figures; his gaze was afar off, searching the semi-dark passages, staring into nooks and crannies—alert, suspicious, throbbingly alive to the portents.

"True," he admitted. "True, I had forgotten." Then after a pause, and with a sharp intonation, "It's dark, . . . switch on the lights. Why on earth are they not on?"

He stepped up the wide staircase, and, pausing a moment, cried into the well, "When the man, Cook, comes, bring him at once to my room." The caretaker acknowledged the order, and Arun, with the two officers, passed into the Company's quarters.

For ten minutes they sat waiting. The shipowner tapped the floor with his foot; M'Grabbut stroked his beard with a hand unused to tension or the acknowledgment of it; Shirwill, cool in the recollection that his part was small, infinitesimal. The engineer discovered a moisture and pulled out his handkerchief; Shirwill did the same. One wiped his brow, the other polished his moustache. Arun, leaning on the elbows of his chair, drew his fingers unceasingly down the palm of one hand—now this, now that. No one spoke; they might, as M'Grabbut said afterwards, all have been criminals.

At the end of this time, from somewhere afar off,—leagues distant it appeared,—there came the click of

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a trotting horse. It clattered up the street, its hoofs ringing clack, clack, clack, clack—a horse accustomed to asphalt; it turned the corner and dashed towards the office. Behind it, as it drew near, sounded the squelch of tyres running in water. It stopped. Some one leaped ont, entered, and ascended the stairs—Cook?

Joseffs—in evening dress, a diamond stud with many facets responding to the electric gleam.

“Schlange arrived?” he questioned.

“Not yet.”

“Hum!” Joseffs disappeared within the portal of his room. The three who waited heard him strike a match, and the perfume of a cigar stole through the office.

Again there came a sound from the street. A cab with a vehement driver cracking his whip. It too panted round the corner, drew up with a jerk, and a door slammed—Cook?

M'Grabbut watched the managing owner to see. His glance told nothing; it was the glance of a sphinx.

Schlange, muffled to the eyes, his hat dripping, his dress-boots splashed, muddy, came in breathless. The watchers saw that Schlange, at all events, had not passed the last few hours at his club. For the first time in M'Grabbut's recollection the German's moustache had lost the emperor lilt; it drooped over a mouth correspondingly dismal. Arun, too, noted the fact from the cover of his raised hands. But Cook? M'Grabbut questioned, stroking his beard, . . . no, Arun was not entirely bound up in Cook, or his movements. He rose from his seat, crossed the office, and entered Joseffs' room. “Shall I call them in?” he asked.



Joseffs blew a ring of smoke, standing with his back to the dead ashes in the grate. "If you will," he said. "Ah, Schlange!" as that gentleman came in and passed to a seat, "you look wet, . . . no cabs about?"

Schlange admitted that he had found a difficulty, and lighted a cigarette. He puffed solemnly as the two officers found chairs, but vouchsafed no explanation. A small twinkle escaped Joseffs' fat eyelid. He blew a cloud and stared at the ceiling.

"I should not have consented to come at this hour," he said massively, "but for the fact that I understand it is to decide a bet between you two—and also, perhaps more particularly, because I gather the difference is one of honour. One cannot be too careful in these hypercritical days. You will bear me out, I think, Mr M'Grabbut,—one cannot be too particular when the matter is a question of . . . a . . . honour. It is best to keep it apart from business, . . . and from business hours . . ."

"Pardon," Schlange interrupted, "I cannot without my witness proceed. Couke vas to haff come, . . . I desire graze of ten minute—hein?"

Joseffs cast an interrogatory look at Arun, but the managing partner refused to see it. "It is immaterial," he flashed. "I concede so much."

"Conzede!" Schlange threw out, stung by the tone.

Joseffs waved a benign cigar in the German's direction. "My dear sir," he expostulated, "I hope there is to be no unpleasantness, . . . no bad feeling, . . . a . . . I should deprecate . . ."

"I no conzession require," the other announced.

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"Nevertheless," Joseffs decided, "we will wait." He drew out his watch and glanced at the hour. "Twelve-fifteen," he determined.

The senior partner stood like a statue graven in stone, his prodigious front alarmingly prominent in dress-clothes; he appeared massive, pleased, the embodiment of the art of dinner. Arun lounged in a swivel-chair before a writing-table, the lamps behind him, his face in shadow. M'Grabbut saw that at intervals he half-turned towards the window, that he listened; but he could see no expression, the shadow effectually covered him. Schlange fronted the two with a brow heavily lined; he had not the address of either, nor the control, despite the fact that Arun twitched and Joseffs puffed. A profound silence ensued.

Ten minutes, in such conditions, are a lifetime. In it the tick of a clock sounds like a snapped trigger; the scamper of mice behind a wainscot, the approach of voices, threateningly vehement. The pawing of a cab-horse anxious for the stable came up to them, and the note of the driver urging him to stand still sounded appallingly brutal.

Some one coughed. Joseffs frowned at the interruption, and they sat silent until the voice of the caretaker ran up the stairs giving vent to a yawn—"E-yah!" It echoed in the well, trilled round corners, cannoned off angles. Schlange caught his breath; Arun turned towards the window a quick leaping movement, and fell back to see Joseffs throwing a ring of smoke through one which had taken to itself the contour of Ireland, with bays promontories, inlets. M'Grabbut

and Shirwill glanced at each other. They both yawned, . . . the partners followed suit one after the other, behind sheltering hands.

The minutes passed.

Joseffs announced the fact in a voice grown suddenly fat, adding,—“And now, I presume, we need wait . . . no . . . e-yah! Confound the fellow—yes?”

Schlange was speaking.

“I, myself,” he said, “am plazed, for ze moment, in a bosition of some difficulty. My witness whom I brought, is . . .”

“Bought?” Arun flashed, relentless, cutting.

“Brought, . . . did bring,” Schlange accentuated, white to the ears. “My witness is missing. Somesing has happened. I for an adjournment ask.”

“But,” Joseffs threw out jovially, “I thought it was a bet. One does not postpone debts of . . . a . . . honour.”

“In Shermanny ve pay debts of honour vith ze sword, . . . ze . . .”

“Fish! talk business,” Arun lashed.

Schlange glanced at the senior partner, questioning what he should reply, but the big man's face betokened no sign of having heard, no intention of intervening—unless, perhaps, it was in the direction of hastening matters. It was a handicap. Schlange accepted it, twisting his moustache fiercely, ironically polite.

“Vell,” he said, “I ondertake to accept Mr M'Grab-but's eggsplanation. I nussing else can do.”

Joseffs at once turned to the engineer and said, “Good. And now, sir, may I ask what you have to say?”

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"Ta say?" M'Grabbut blurted. "Nay, what is the situation. I'm in the dark."

Joseffs became increasingly judicial; he waved a fat hand carrying a cigar. "As far as I understand it," he explained, "Mr Schlange asserts that he has proof that my friend, Mr Arun, made the attempt at which you hinted; and I understand, too, that at the moment, he is unable to produce that proof. In these circumstances, I think you will see that we must fall back upon some other method of testing the truth—and I propose to accept your withdrawal, if you are prepared to withdraw."

M'Grabbut passed his hand twice down his beard, then looked up to say, "I should hae preferred ta hear what yon fireman had in his mind . . ."

"I also, my friendt," Schlange acknowledged; "I also."

"But as that seems impossible——"

"Is," Joseffs interrupted.

"I take your correction, sir." M'Grabbut bowed.

"As, then, that is eempossible, an' havin' regard ta the fact that it was I wha fairst made the accusation, I can see yon are within your rights in askin' me ta cancel it. Varra weel, . . . I withdraw my charge. I withdraw it unconditionally."

"Vithdraw?" Schlange sneered. "Zat is goodt—ven I have broof, absolnte broof . . ."

"Pish! talk business," Arun cried again. "Yon are glib enough about this witness of yours—very well, produce him. Yon can't? I know it. And I know, too, that you bought him—that you bought him to swear to a lie; bnt, luckily for me, even a sailor apparently has some sense of honour."

Schlange looked up questioning. "I bought . . .  
I . . ."

"Precisely—yon."

Schlange was unprepared for this sudden attack; he had not approached it from this point of view, and for some moments seemed unable to resent the tone. He twisted his moustache, and stared at the small viper lounging so easily in his chair. Indeed he appeared to be on the point of losing grip, of throwing up the sponge; then a recollection of the manner in which Cook had listened to his overtures, and a glimpse of his condition when he last saw him safely housed and cared for, returned. He could not bring himself to believe that Arun had recovered possession; would not acknowledge that anything kept Cook but the overwhelming effect of his libations. It seemed impossible. He said with a gathering frown and in a very tense voice—

"Zat is a lie. If I have ze time, I it will broove. . . . It is . . ."

Arun rose from his seat, flicking an envelope with his nail. "You give me the lie—you!" he snapped, "while I hold such evidence as this?" He crossed the room and gave the package to Joseffa. "I leave it in your hands," he said, "and I am prepared to abide by your decision."

Joseffa glanced from one to another, frowning, and undisguisedly annoyed. "Nay, gentlemen," he said stiffly. "This is abominable, . . . cha-cha! . . . I am astonished, . . . pouff-pouff. . . . This is very . . . a . . . painful. Surprising! Monstrons!" He had torn the envelope apart and was turning a

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bundle of notes in his fingers, examining them with jerked interjections. He looked up after a minute and said again, "This is abominable. Mr Schlange—what is it? How can you explain it?"

The matter had gone beyond Schlange. He had plotted, and lost. He saw precisely what had happened. He knew that he was at the mercy of his small enemy and must climb down, resign, give up his work, and let Arun take it over. For of that earlier and more masterly move of the managing partner, by which he had captivated Cook, he knew nothing. He saw that by some mischance Arun had been able to catch him red-handed. But he did not flinch. The knowledge that his indiscretion, as far as his partners were concerned, lay entirely in the fact that he had been caught, gave him strength. He answered Joseffs with a touch of hauteur, rolling the gutturals in his throat.

"'Ja und Nein, ist ein langer Streit,' . . . I no egsplanation have. . . . Ze sing stands out—hein?"

"It does," Joseffs admitted. "Your name is here. I presume you will not dispute it?"

"Dispute? Nein—it vas me or him, . . . nussing more. Now it is him, . . . un clou pousse l'autre—n'est-ce-pas?" He crossed the room, and, standing on the threshold twisting his moustache, glanced back upon his friends. "Bien, I vish you joy," he said.

"A pious wish, at all events," Joseffs commented. He turned a trifle awkwardly to M'Grabbut and added, "Eh? how does it strike you?"

The engineer rose. He passed his hand twice down

his beard, regarding the big man with a small twinkle the while. "Nay, sir," he said, "it doesna striks me at aa'. . . . Weel, weel, we canna aa' hae heads; but for the saks o' conteengencies, I wish I had the option o' addin' a phrass ta that withdrawal o' mine."

"What phrase?" Josephs questioned, benignly waving a fat hand.

"Wi'oot prejudice," said M'Grabbut.

Arun twisted in his chair to face him, and said quistly, "Why?"

"Because," said M'Grabbut, "it would appear mair business-likes."

Arun resumed his writing.

Josephs stared at the ceiling and blew a ring—a very perfect ring of smoke. He did not speak.

The two friends crossed the room and passed downstairs in silence. Then, as they faced the wet night, M'Grabbut opened his lips in final judgment.

"Eigh?" he said, "but yon's a downy lad. He'll live in marble yet, . . . you see."

That night Arun did not use his brougham. He took a cab and drove through the drizzle as far as his lodge-gates. Hsrs he descended, and, passing within, paused a moment at the coachman's window.

Cook sat with his back to the door, his head upon his arms. The coachman dozed on a sofa: they both snored. On the table was a bottle half full of whisky, beside it, a dead marine; beside it again, glasses, water, pipes. Arun tapped lightly with his nail, and his servant looked up, touching his forelock, obviously startled.

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Arun nodded, and passed up the drive to his home. He still smiled; but behind the smile were lines, haggard cheeks, heavy eyes. It was two o'clock.

"Seventeen hours!" he jerked out. "Good gracious!—and *they* kick at eight."

THE END





