

THE PASSING~ OF THE FLAGSHIP



BY
MAJOR
W.P.DRURY

**THE PASSING OF THE FLAGSHIP
AND OTHER STORIES**

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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BY

MAJOR W. P. DRURY

ROYAL MARINE LIGHT INFANTRY

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE PASSING OF THE FLAGSHIP	3
THE DRAGON OF PYRAMID HILL	23
ACELDAMA	51
THE BLANK FILE	75
AN AUDIENCE OF HIS MAJESTY	105
CASSERBANKER THE SECOND	131
CONCERNING A TREATY WITH FRANCE	155
THE STRANGER WITHIN THE GATES	191
THE RISING OF JOGA	213
THAT WHICH WAS LOST	233

THE PASSING OF THE FLAGSHIP



THE PASSING OF THE FLAGSHIP

“THE best man at a funeral,” I observed pessimistically, the wind being E. by N., “is the man in the box.”

In the little grey hamlet, tucked away under a fold of the great granite tor, a burial had followed closely upon the heels of a wedding, and from the moss-grown churchyard wall Mr. Pagett (late private of Marines) and I had moralised on both. As in the big world beyond the purple shadow, the echoes of the bridal peal had mingled with the boom of the passing bell; and not a spade's length from the blossom-strewn path, along which the newly-made bride had tripped but an hour since, the white-headed sexton was stamping down the mould above a dear brother departed.

Mr. Pagett indicated the bent figure with his pipe-stem.

4 THE PASSING OF THE FLAGSHIP

"To my mind," said he sententiously, "a gravedigger in his boots is better than an Admiral o' the Fleet in his cawfin any day o' the week. No, sir; you may lay to it that the best man at a funeral is not so much the man in the box as the man who shovels the mud on to it."

I considered the philosopher's proposition with the attention it deserved, while the philosopher, with characteristic absent-mindedness, refilled his pipe from the pouch I had laid beside me for a moment on the wall.

"Besides," he presently resumed, with an air of clinching the argument, "it sometimes 'appens that there's nobody—best man or otherwise—in the bloomin' box at all. I could show you a cemet'ry, for instance, consecrated by a Greek bishop, with mortuairry, dead'ouse, or whatnot, all complete, and with three-an'-twenty British graves in its nor'-west-by-westerly corner. Yet, unless my senses played 'anky-panky with my reason one midsummer night—— By-the-bye, what's the day o' the month, sir?"

"The twenty-first—as you were—the twenty-second of June."

"It sounds like a coincidence out o' *Bow Bells*," ruminated the ex-private, "but that's not my fault, and I'd kiss the Book to what I'm goin' to tell you. Eight years ago come to-night I saw things that I won't forget to my dyin' day. Mind you, I don't say that they 'appened; I saw them, and that as plain as I see you now. I never talk about that night, because the only time I ever did—which was nex' mornin'—I was sent by the skipper's orders to the sick bay, and kep' under observation for a month as a suspected loonatic. At the end o' that time they had to return me to dooty; though, since a post-cap'n must never be in the wrong, the staff surjin scrawled 'Alloocination' in red ink on my medical 'istory sheet. It is some consolation to think that he was court-martialed six months later for seein' lilac rats on the quarter-deck—but that's neither here nor there. What I want you to onderstand is that the 'alloocination,' if you like to call it so, was as plain to my eyes as Farmer Pearse's funeral was to yours 'alf an hour ago. Besides, it stands to reason that I shouldn't be telling you silly fairy tales on the spot where I was christened, an

6 THE PASSING OF THE FLAGSHIP

married, and where I shall some day be clapped under 'atches for my long watch below."

To do him justice I did not suppose he would, though Mr. Pagett in serious vein was an entirely new departure. In the sanded bar of the "Coach and Horses" in the little village below us, my sea-soldier friend had indeed unfolded to me much unwritten naval and military history. But, despite his pointed and frequent reference to sceptics as "lop-eared lepers," I do not think that till now he had ever expected or even desired to be taken seriously. On this occasion, however, his *bona fides* was unmistakable. Whether the extraordinary phenomenon which he described to me so vividly that afternoon in the little moorland churchyard actually occurred, I leave you to judge. That he himself believed so I have not the slightest doubt.

* * * *

"I was in trouble," he began sheepishly, "and the cause o' the trouble was a—well, a Turkish girl at Marmarice."

I shook my head in reproof.

"If a sailor's allowed to have a wife in every port," he retorted, "why not his ship-mate, the Marine? 'Owever, the Mediterranean Squadron continued its cruise short of a private, who afterwards lost three good-conduc' badges for 'avin' been fooled into breakin' his leave by a woman!"

"'And the man said, the woman——'"

"I know," interrupted Mr. Pagett. "It's always the same, isn't it, whether they wear aprons o' sewn fig-leaves, or petticoats, or baggy trousers? Any'ow, the fact remains that there was I, up a blind alley of the Asia Minor coast, in a manner of speakin', with the kit I stood up in, and with no possible means of gettin' back to my ship. As the lady knew no English it didn't matter much what I said, and you can lay to it that I said it!

"Now Marmarice, as you may know, is a large circular bay, all but landlocked, and shut in by pine-covered mountains. At its head, opposite the invisible entrance, is a stinkin' little Turkish town, with the usual crumblin' castle and ramshackle 'ouses behind a lattice-work o' feluccas' masts an' yards. My

8 THE PASSING OF THE FLAGSHIP

pockets bein' empty (the lady 'ad seen to that), the honest Turks treated me like a brother, instead of cuttin' my throat, as they would probably otherwise 'ave done; and the Governor promised to send me to Beyrout, or some other Syrian port, where I might pick up the fleet by the first vessel goin' in that direction. But Turkish ships always seem to be lollin' against crazy piers, and the few Greeks that called in at Marmarice—to ask the time apparently—were all bound the other way. I was pretty sorry for myself, you may be certain—especially as every hour's absence meant so much more o' that ridic'ulous Adm'rality scale on my return. But the man I was still sorrier for was the major commandin' my detachment, who, I knew, would sorely miss my valuable corporation an' advice.

“How I dragged through those two or three endless midsummer days I 'ardly know. I borrowed a rusty flintlock and shot cockiolly birds in the woods; I went out fishin' in a boat that leaked like a sieve, and every evenin' the whole bloomin' town turned up to see me bathe from the end o' the gimcrack pier. At

night I smoked cigarettes with the ragged garrison o' the castle, or strolled under the stars with the lady in the baggy trousers; and it was durin' the last o' these walks that I saw the onaccountable thing that I'm goin' to tell you of.

"We'd wandered, me and her, half a mile or so along the foreshore to the left o' the town, until we'd come to what I took to be a private garden belongin' to some pasha or, maybe, the Governor himself. It was within a stone's-throw o' the water's edge, and was surrounded by a trim lime-washed wall, which made the foliage of the cypress trees overtoppin' it seem gloomier than ever. At the far end o' the wall, thirty or forty yards away, I could just make out the bars of a neat wooden gate—in fact, the entire place was so shipshape and 'omelike, after the ramshackle town, that I sat down with my back against the stonework, and lugged out my pipe for a smoke.

"The girl seated herself beside me, and, conversation between us bein' impossible, amused herself by throwin' pebbles at the reflections of the stars in the sea. The stars

themselves looked more like the little fire-balloons of the southern 'emisphere than 'oles pricked in the sky, and I never remember seein' such a brilliant moonless night anywhere's north o' the equator. The wavy lines o' reflections bordered by the inky mountain shadow 'minded me of a letter wrote on black-edged paper looked at sideways; and I some'ow began to hanker for a companion who could talk sense instead of silly Turkish gibberish.

"Now, as I was wishin' (and I've wished it all over the world) that I could 'ave banged the thick skulls of them bickerin' Babel builders together, I chanced to look towards the mountain which masked the harbour entrance, and—the pipe fell from my open mouth. For there, picked out on the velvet shadow, were the electric lights of a great ship, and from the lamp in her fightin'-top I knew her for the flagship. The position-light on her jack-staff showed her to be at anchor; yet, although she was no more than a mile away, and the night was as still as death, I'd heard neither the splash of the big bower nor the tearin' rattle o' the cable

through the hawsepipe. Where had my blessed eyes been, I wondered, not to have seen her enter the bay and pick up her present billet!

"None knew better than me the loss I was to my own ship. But I'm nat'rally a modest man, and I must confess that I was a little surprised at the adm'ral himself comin' back for a mere private o' Marines. I should have taken it as a compliment—though a thoroughly well-deserved one, mind you—if he'd sent a destroyer, or even a first-class torpedo-boat. But the flagship! It was the proudest moment of a long an' stainless career."

For a moment the figure on the churchyard wall became Mr. Pagett, "our respected fellow-townsmen," vicar's warden, and husband of the buxom Mrs. P. It became, in a word, the cardinal virtues amalgamated and personified. With the striking of a match, however, it was again the laggard private of Marines dallying with Delilah under the eastern stars.

"I turned to see what the girl made of it, but she was still chuckin' pebbles into the sea, and didn't seem to take the least interest in the flagship's onexpected return. I pointed across

12 THE PASSING OF THE FLAGSHIP

the bay, but she only smiled vacantly, and went on with her stone-throwin'. All her interest in the British Fleet was centred (not onnat'rally) in the fine figger of a man at her side.

"The electric light shinin' through the long row of messdeck an' cabin scuttles made ragged strokes on the water like a lot of dotted i's scrawled across a slate in quicksilver. From the dots in the ship's hull to the wrigglin' tails within a few yards of us, the sea was one big shiverin' fit, and I presently became aware that mixed up with the shivers was a movin' black speck growin' gradually bigger an' bigger. After a bit I discovered what it was, namely, one of the flagship's boats. She was headin' directly for us.

"Now, how in the name o' fortune, I wondered, could the boat's crew have known that I was sittin' in that identical place on the dark beach? But as they got closer in I saw that they were makin' for a spot some forty yards to the left. Then the oars were tossed, and a few seconds later the big boat—the pinnace she was—ran her blunt nose noiselessly into the shingle, right opposite the wooden gate in the whitewashed garden wall.

“Whether the girl ’ad grown tired by this time of playin’ ducks an’ drakes in silence, or whether it was nat’ral feminine curiosity, I didn’t know; anyway, she suddenly got up, and strolled along the beach in the direction of the boat. Then I saw a most wonderful thing. I saw a woman pass within a couple o’ yards of a boatful o’ British sailors without so much as turnin’ her ’ead to look at them!

“But if she took no notice of the men, the men—sailors, too, of all people in the world!—certainly paid no ’eed to her. It puzzled me why they expected to find me in a lonely garden at that time o’ night, but every mother’s son of them was starin’ at the gate as if he thought I might slip through the bars like a rat without bein’ seen.

“Standin’ up in the bows o’ the boat was a drummer of the Marines, and presently—by order, I suppose, of the orf’cer in command—he raised his bugle to his lips and sounded the long ‘Last Post.’ It’s a dismal call at the best o’ times, even in the barrick square, with a hundred lighted windows all around you; but, allowin’ for the depressin’ effect o’ that silent bay among the gloomy mountains, there was a

14 THE PASSING OF THE FLAGSHIP

wail in the boy's music that I never 'eard before or since, and never want to again. It was like an icy finger reckonin' up the knobs upon your spine.

"I stood up and shook myself to make sure that I wasn't dreamin'. Why on earth had the flagship herself come to fetch me? Why had the pinnace been sent ashore for me instead of a dinghy or skiff? What was the meanin' of that cryin' 'Last Post of Tattoo' on the lonely beach? And then, for the first time, I realised that it wasn't for me that the silent boat's crew were waitin'.

"The gate in the wall had swung open, and from the deep shadows o' the garden a little party in fours marched down the beach to the boat. A few paces in rear came another and smaller party, and from the rollin' lurch of the first and the erect 'eads of the second I knew them for bluejackets an' Marines respectively. It was the only diff'rence between them, though; for—what was most extr'ordin'ry—every blessed man was dressed in an 'ospital bedgown!

"I was in the act of countin' them—twenty-three they were, all told—when I perceived the girl comin' back over the shingle. I nat'rally

expected to see her stop, for the men were right across her path, the first party at the water's edge, the second still marchin' down the beach. Without hesitatin' for a moment, without a glance at either, the girl walked slap between them !

" The mysterious men in the bedgown things havin' been helped over the bows o' the pinnace by their comrades, the entire party set to work with oars and boat'ooks to float her again ; and so interested was I in watchin' their efforts that I forgot all about myself till they had pulled a dozen strokes or more from the beach. Then I ran down to the water's edge and hailed them with the full power o' my lungs ; but although I continued to shout till I was hoarse and the woods be'ind me were full o' mockin' echoes, the only effect it had was to frighten my Turkish companion, who set off for home as fast as her baggy trousers would let her.

" Mechanic'lly fillin' my pipe, I watched the pinnace till she again dwindled to a black speck among the dancin' reflections ; and as I watched I began to ponder on the remarkable silence with which she'd come an' gone. The oars, for some reason or other, must 'ave been muffled,

16 THE PASSING OF THE FLAGSHIP

since I'd certainly never 'eard them, nor had I noticed the gratin' of the keel upon the shingle. The men, moreover, as far as I was aware, hadn't spoken a syllable, and though I knew that silence was one of the adm'ral's 'obbies, I'd never dreamt that it could 'ave been brought to such a pitch o' deadliness. If it hadn't been for that hauntin' bugle call, which was still ringin' in my ears, and for the brilliant lights over yonder against the 'ill, I would have said that I'd been dreamin'.

"How long does it take a man to light a well-drawin' pipe—ten or a dozen seconds? As I threw down the match I resoomed my gaze across the bay, and—you might have knocked me down with the proverbial feather. Every vestige of electric light and its reflection had vanished! The flagship had left the anchorage as swiftly and silently as she had entered it.

* * * * *

"The next day a Turkish gunboat looked in at Marmarice on her way to the Syrian ports, and the Governor, true to his promise, ordered me a passage in her. Twenty hours later we sighted the British Fleet in Tripoli

roads, and by seven bells in the forenoon watch I was on board my own ship again.

“The skipper was weighin’ off defaulters on the quarterdeck when I come over the side, and I was marched straight aft and fallen in on the left o’ the line. When he’d heard the charge against me, he asked what I had to say, and I told him that, although I’d no excuse for breakin’ my leafe, I had at all events done my best to get on board the flagship when she had come two nights before into Marmarice.

“The defaulters’ book fell with a crash from the colour-sergeant’s ’ands to the deck, the major jumped as though he’d been shot, and the skipper looked like a man that sees a ghost.

“Everyone, in fact, within hearin’ seemed to ’ave had an electric shock.

“‘You are quite sure you don’t mean the *Royal George*, my lad?’ says the skipper kindly, when he’d recovered himself; and then he give orders, as I’ve already told you, that I was to be taken to the sick bay and kep’ under the observation o’ the doctor. I began to think that I really was mad.

18 THE PASSING OF THE FLAGSHIP

"On our way for'ard I asked a question. 'I'm noo to the station, as you know, colour-sergeant,' says I, 'and there's things what even I don't savvy. What has the flagship to do with that there garden on the beach at Marmarice,' I says, 'the one to the right o' the town as you face it, with the whitewashed wall and the big wooden gateway?'

"'Garden?' says the colour-sergeant, lookin' me 'ard in the face. 'Well, I suppose you could call it a garden, in a manner o' speakin'. It's the Greek cemet'ry,' he says, 'where three-an'-twenty o' the flagship's comp'ny were buried after the fever epidemic last summer.'

"It was my turn to 'ave electric shocks now.

"'There's three-an'-twenty empty cawfins in that garden,' I says, more to myself than to 'im. 'By-the-bye, colour-sergeant, now I come to think of it, I misremember seeing the flagship when we come into the roads this mornin'. Where's she gone to?'

"'It's 'igh time, my lad,' returns the colour-sergeant solemnlike, 'that you *was* took to the sick bay. The flagship was sent to the bottom in seventy-five fathom o' water by the *Ram-*

THE PASSING OF THE FLAGSHIP 19

herdown on Thursday afternoon, six bloomin' hours before you saw her in Marmarice Bay!'"

* * * * *

Mr. Pagett thoughtfully knocked the ashes from his pipe against the churchyard wall.

"It's my belief," he concluded impressively, "that she returned to Marmarice to complete her complement before settlin' down to her last long commission under the shadow o' Mount Lebanon."



THE DRAGON OF PYRAMID HILL

THE DRAGON OF PYRAMID HILL

"A LIZARD in a patch o' sunlight," mused Mr. Pagett, indicating with his pipe-stem the little green and yellow creature on the garden wall, "always 'minds me of a dragon in the glare of a gunboat's searchlight."

"I cannot honestly say," I confessed, after considering the statement for some moments with the attention it deserved, "that the resemblance has ever struck me."

"Because," retorted Mr. Pagett witheringly, "you've only seen the insect'. But you may take it from me that, when you've allowed for the difference in size between a lizard an' a dragon, an' the difference between sunshine an' electric light, there's—well, there ain't no difference left."

I took it from Mr. Pagett—as I had ever been accustomed to take that artist's utterances—without question, while the artist absent-

24 THE DRAGON OF PYRAMID HILL

mindedly helped himself to a generous pipeful of tobacco from my pouch, which lay between us on the bench. For I had again foregathered with this time-expired private of Marines turned landlord of a Dartmoor hostelry, and in the old-world garden in the shadow of the everlasting tor—where I had learnt of the train-sailing in Venezuela, the bringing of the Brisbane flood, the sea-fight of the Three Bad Hats, the introduction of piano wire into naval surgery, and other shamefully neglected services of the narrator—I once more sat at the feet of my maritime Gamaliel.

“The fleet was lyin’ in ‘Ong Kong,” he went on, plunging at once *in medias res*, “when noos come down that there was trouble, mission’ry trouble, at Ichang on the Yangtse. Now, I don’t want to ‘urt the feelin’s of old ladies at Exeter ‘All, but there’s no gettin’ away from the fact that, whatever blessin’ mission’ries may be to the ‘eathen, they’re a first-class noosance all the world over to Her Majesty’s Consular Service and Navy. Ain’t they?”

I expressed regret at hearing so unorthodox

a sentiment from the lips of a vicar's churchwarden.

"They were a first-class noosance to *us*," he continued, ignoring my protest, "from me an' the admiral downwards, as you shall 'ear. The only available craft that could get up the river as far as Ichang was a round-sterned, pot-bellied, twin-screw, third-class bugtrap rustin' in the steam reserve. She was like a flat-iron to look at, drew seven foot o' water, rolled like a dyin' 'umming-top, steered like a makee-learn's bicycle, and was as chockful o' cockroaches as a ripe Gorgonzola is o' mites. Her tally was the *Sneeze*."

He paused—presumably for breath.

"Sister to the *Sniff*, the *Snort* and the *Snuffle*—know the class well," I observed genially.

Mr. Pagett regarded me out of the tail of his eye. I was much interested in the lizard.

"It so 'appens," he rejoined with dignity, "that she's the only one of her type in the Navy List. 'Owever, into this dainty little pleasure yacht they pitched the first lot o' dockyard mess traps that came to 'and, and a scratch crew of orf'cers an' men—me among

26 THE DRAGON OF PYRAMID HILL

them—was chucked in on top o' the crockery. The orf'cers didn't match any more than the wardroom cups an' saucers did, but I'm comin' to that later on. We was commissioned for partic'lar service by the gun'ry lootenant o' the flagship, and, after provisionin' and 'oisting in powder and ammunition, we started off at midnight on a nineteen-'undred-mile trip to dry nurse the Christian Church of the Upper Yangtse Kiang.

"Outside the 'arbour we picked up the tail o' the north-east monsoon, and before daylight we 'eartily wished every mission'ry in China at the bottom o' the Yellow Sea. For the *Sneeze* 'ad a chronic cold in her 'ead in the shape of a sixty-four pounder tucked under the t'gallant fo'c'sle, and it gave her a feelin' of 'eaviness and made her as contrairy to manage as a woman a bit out o' sorts. She lay down in the smotherin' seas, like a child at a Sunday-school treat that sulks when she's rolled by her playmates in the glebe field 'aycocks; and, in spite of our bein' battened down, even the wardroom right aft was very soon flooded. Of all the ships I've soldiered in, and they've been a good few, as you know,

she was the wettest and cussedest; and you may lay to it that, after those drenchin' green-backs, the muddy wash of the Yangtse was a blessed sight for sore eyes.

"It 'ad taken us the best part of a week to get there, 'owever, and by that time none of the orf'cers were on speakin' terms. There were three o' them aft—the skipper, a red-headed surjin, and a Lootenant Jannaway of the Marines; and there was a gunner for'ard, who messed by himself, but was a hon'ry member of the others' smokin'-place. The skipper, as I've already said, was the gun'ry lootenant o' the flagship; and one o' the many things wrong with the *Sneeze* was—she'd a dam' sight too much o' the gun'ry department aboard.

"Now, a red flag is far less exarsperatin' to a bull than a Red Marine orf'cer to the av'rage gun'ry lootenant. Before we'd been an hour at sea the skipper an' Mr. Jannaway 'ad the doose of a row as to whether the sixty-four pounder should be manned by the tars or Marines. The skipper wanted to know what was wrong with the rest o' the armament, the bloomin' machine guns, that they

28 THE DRAGON OF PYRAMID HILL

weren't good enough for a parcel o' piratical, pot-bellied, pipeclayed popinjays on stilts, and Jannaway said it was croolty to make pore afflicted dwarfs work the 'eaviest gun in the ship. With that, the skipper, who could stand bolt upright underneath Jannaway's armpit, began to talk big of court-martials, and Jannaway said he'd report him when they got back to 'Ong Kong for grossly insulting his regiment. The end o' the business was, the skipper removed his kit bag and mess traps to his cabin under the poop, the gunner smoked for the future on the starboard side o' the fo'c'sle, and the sixty-four pounder was manned by a mixed crew o' tars and Marines.

"This left the red-'eaded surjin an' Jannaway 'teet-a-teet' in the wardroom, and for some days the pair were as thick as thieves. But as soon as we got into smooth water the skylight trouble began. It's bound to come, sooner or later, in every mess with a skylight, and it lasts, as you know, till the mornin' the ship pays off. Jannaway wanted it opened, and the surjin wouldn't 'ave it at no price. Too much ozone, he said, was a vi'lent and irritant poison, and if Mr. Jannaway liked it,

he could go on the poop and get some. To which Mr. Jannaway replied that he'd rather be killed by ozone than die in a seagoin' 'ot-ouse from the 'eat o' the surjin's 'ead. With that they parted brassrags, 'avin' breakfast and lunch separate, and meetin' only at dinner. But as at that meal the surjin studied back numbers o' the *Lancet*, while Jannaway read *Soldiers Three* from the opposite side of the cruet-stand, each of them dined alone as much as the skipper and gunner, who had a ship's length between them.

"After runnin' up the Woosung to Shang'ai, for the purpose of coalin' and pickin' up a Yangtse pilot, we began the thousand-mile crawl to Ichang. And then we found out what a cussedly feminine thing a ship really is. She was treated at first like a lady, bein' given, in a manner o' speakin', the run of the blessed pavement. Waivin' the rule of the road, every craft made way for her, while the pilot, the skipper, and the artif'cer ('chief engineer' he called himself) respected her feelin's as gentlemen. But some ships are like certain women—in spite of the carefulest trainin' they seem foredoomed to go wrong;

30 THE DRAGON OF PYRAMID HILL

and of all those immoral vessels the *Sneeze* was the most abandoned. We tried to consult her wishes in workin' the screws and head sails, even double-mannin' the wheel under the break o' the poop. But the ship was a downright bad un, possessed of a devil, and 'opeless; for what can you do with a craft whose 'elm is jammed amidships, yet suddenly wheels at right angles to flirt underneath the bows of 'ighly respectable tea junks?

"There was trouble enough, Lord knows, in the first bloomin' six 'undred miles, but after we passed 'Ankow the real fun o' the fair began. In the lower reaches o' this tremendous river it was as easy to dodge us as to avoid a drunk and incapable in the middle o' Southsea Common. But, although it was still quite wide enough for a squadron o' first-class cruisers, it was miles too narrow for the third-class gunboat *Sneeze*. Fortunately for commerce, we anchored the beast at night, or tied her safe up to the bank; but from daylight to dusk she completely paralysed the traffic, and we were cursed in every lingo from Chinese to Scandinavian. The *Chung Wo*, a large stern-wheeler carryin' the Ichang

mails, in tryin' to escape a collision, piled herself up on a sandbank—and stopped there; while a bluff-bowed American tea ship, catchin' us broadside on, pushed us in that position a mile or so back on our course before her astonished skipper remembered to stop his injins. So played out were we by our efforts to keep pace with the langwidge o' the Yankee crew, that, when a hundred miles further on the skipper of a stinkin' little junk called us 'Yang-kweitze!' ('foreign devil'), not one of us could think of the Chinese for 'You've a rat in your forechains, you lubber!' We were still trying to recollect it when at last we fetched up at Ichang."

Mr. Pagett coughed once or twice, and passed the back of his hand slowly across his mouth. I apologised for my forgetfulness.

"It ain't so much the actooal talkin' that makes one dry," he explained, when the apple-cheeked maid-of-all-work had departed; "it's the crool tax on a man's memory."

"On his what?" I exclaimed involuntarily.

"You 'eard," said Mr. Pagett, setting his empty tankard upon the bench. "'Owever, touchin' this 'eathen city of Ichang. I ain't

32 THE DRAGON OF PYRAMID HILL

goin' to worry you with useless details, but for the proper understandin' of this gawspel-true 'istory there's a few jographical fac's which you must know.

"Ichang is sitooated a few miles below the Yangtse Gorges, through the last o' which—the Tiger's Tooth—the yellow water rushes like pea soup capsized on the mess deck durin' a gale o' wind. Now, in summer, by reason of the meltin' of the snow upon the mountains, the river is in flood; but in winter it falls a good five-an'-thirty feet, so that a ship lyin' near the bank is quite invisible from the back o' the town. It was winter when we arrived, and I'll trouble you to bear this point in mind.

"The surroundin' country is mountainous, with every square yard o' flat soil carefully cultivated. The most prominent objec' in the neighbour'ood is the Dome Mountain, about seven miles inland from the far bank o' the river; and on that bank, right opposite the town, and rising sheer from the water's edge to a height of seven 'undred feet, is a curiously shaped onnat'ral feature called Pyramid 'Ill.

"Anyone who's been in China knows that if there's one thing more'n another a Celestial

can't stand it's a freak o' nature opposite his front door. You mightn't notice anything out o' the common in an area of twenty square miles, but a Chinaman's mind, like most of his 'andiwork, is a curio, and he is continually discoverin' freaks all round him. The heathen of Ichang didn't like that 'ill one little bit, and to counteract the 'Fungshui,' or evil influence, of the dragon supposed to live there, they'd built a temple facin' it at the back o' the town.

"At the time of our visit this temple was bein' used as the British consulate, while a noo bungalow was buildin'; and the other principal 'ouses outside the city walls were a French Roman Carth'lic cathedral, an Eyetalian convent, a Scotch Presbyterian mission, and some Chinese barracks. Inside the city walls there was only one sort of 'ouse, and that was 'uman pigsty.

"As soon as we'd let go the mud'ook, the consul came aboard. The mission'ries, he calc'lated, had shortened his life by ten years, though after the skipper's cocktail he redooced that number to five. The row 'ad arisen, it seemed, over a certain Ah Fat, whom each o' the foreign missions claimed as its lawful

34 THE DRAGON OF PYRAMID HILL

convert, and whose tally 'ad gone 'ome as such to Italy, Scotland, an' France. But the heathen priests, misunderstandin' this zeal o' the foreign devils, began to suspect that Ah Fat possessed a marketable value they'd 'itherto overlooked, and they were therefore beginnin' to clamour for his return to the pagan fold. At present, conclooded the consul, the town was more depressin' than the waitin'-room at a dentist's, but before very long, he thought, there'd be yellin' and 'owlin' enough to turn it into an 'Ades. And that, he explained to the skipper, was the case in a bloomin' nutshell.

“The skipper, who was burstin' to say a few kind words to the mission'ries, promised in case of trouble to receive them aboard the *Sneeze*, and in the meantime to keep his weather eye liftin' for squalls. Whereupon the consul, after another cocktail, which lengthened his life again to the original number o' years, went ashore; and we give him seven rounds o' blank from the *Sneeze's* 'Bone o' Contention,' as we'd nicknamed the sixty-four pounder.”

For the next few moments Mr. Pagett

sucked at his pipe in silence. His expression suggested an actor in need of the prompter's assistance.

"The dragon," I timidly hinted, "I believe you mentioned a dragon?"

"I ain't forgotten him," he retorted, though his face hardly bore out his statement, "and you may lay to it, mister, that the dragon will come into the story when he's wanted, and not before. I was smokin' a pipe on the fo'c'sle, thinkin' over the consul's noos, and starin' at Pyramid 'Ill, when all of a sudden I was struck with a brilliant inspiration. If the skipper 'ad been worth his salt—a man like Pringle, for instance—I'd have made him a present of it, which would cert'nly 'ave worked his promotion. But I wasn't goin' to waste inspirations on a swollen-'eaded gunnery jack; I gave it instead to Jannaway. He thought a lot o' that inspiration, did Jannaway—such a lot, that he came by degrees to imagine the bloomin' idea was his own. But that is the way o' the world, and Lord knows I don't grudge him the credit.

"After layin' our 'eads together, Mr. Jannaway went ashore an' played chess for three

36 THE DRAGON OF PYRAMID HILL

hours with the consul, while I looted a plate o' minced pheasant out o' the wardroom galley and smuggled it for'ard to the gunner. The immediate result o' this Christian charity was—the consul allowed Mr. Jannaway the use of an empty orfice on the temple verandah, while the gunner give me the run o' the bo'sun's an' carpenter's stores and the paint-room, which were all under his charge. To get what you bloomin' well want you should always humour the 'obbies of the man that's got it to give.

“For the nex' five days me an' Jannaway spent all our spare time at the consulate. Our shipmates, and especially the skipper, would 'ave given their 'eads to know why; but we didn't see fit to enlighten 'em, and they presently got something else much more excitin' to think about.

“On the fift' day I'd been after dusk on business to Pyramid 'Ill—which the heathen, even in daylight, shunned like the bubonic plague—and on my return the skipper was addressin' a mission'ry meetin' in his cabin under the poop.

“He was talkin' in three diff'rent lingoes, and although from the poop after skylight I

could 'ear all he said distinctly, I couldn't quite get the hang of it. Mr. Jannaway told me afterwards that it mainly consisted of swear words, picked up at night in the back streets of Greenock, Marseilles and Spezzia, which fully accounted, of course, for the scrubbed-'ammick looks of his audience. But the tail of his speech was in English, and it had, like a wasp's, a sting in it.

“ ‘I'd 'ave you to know,’ he says, ‘that Her Britannic Majesty’s cruisers ain’t maintained as arks o’ refuge for bickerin’ ecclesiasticks who find theirselves in the soup. You’ve shook up that 'ornets’ nest’—he paused for a moment to listen to the angry 'um of the city—‘by snarlin’ over a bone like dogs in a village street. Consequently,’ he says, ‘I shall confiscate this partic’lar bone o’ contention—I’ve got one aboard already,’ he says, lookin’ 'ard at Mr. Jannaway, ‘and another more or less won’t make no diff’rence—and, since he’s willin’, I shall enter Ah Fat on the ship’s books as wardroom cook’s mate. In the meantime,’ he says, speakin’ as big as if he commanded a squadron o’ first-class battleships, ‘I shall land my troops for the protection of your places o’ worship. Mr.

38 THE DRAGON OF PYRAMID HILL

Jannaway, I shall put the Marines ashore 'alf a mile below the town; you will then make a deetour through the paddy fields, extendin' by sections from the left——'

“‘I don't want no naval orf'cer,' says Jannaway, standin' up, 'gun'ry lootenant or otherwise, to teach *me* minor tattics. Every man to his trade,' he says; 'I didn't dictate to you in the matter o' that there collision. The Queen's work 'as to be done, and our private diff'rences must be sunk while we do it; but the Marines will do their share,' he says, 'like soldiers, and not like a young ladies' seminary out for a afternoon ramble.'

“‘So long as it's done,' says the skipper, 'do it your own way, an' be damned to you.' At which the Presbyterian gave a deep groan.

“‘I'm not only goin' to do it my own way,' returns Jannaway, 'but I want you to corporate with me. I shall fire three rockets,' he says, 'from the British consulate verandah. On the first o' these signals I'll trouble you to switch the electric searchlight full at Pyramid 'Ill, keepin' it steady a bit on somethin' you'll see on the summit. With the second rocket,' he

says, 'train the ray over the zenith and focus the front o' the consulate. At the third, turn it back on to the 'ill, lettin' it stop there a minute, and then switch it off altogether.'

"'And after that?' says the skipper.

"'Nothin',' says Mr. Jannaway, puttin' on his foragin' 'at. 'You may lay to it, after that, there'll be no more trouble with the heathen.'

"The skipper agreein' to this, the Marines shoved off in the dark, takin' with them a bundle o' rockets and the 'bone o' contention,' Ah Fat, who'd been brought aboard by the mission'ries. Disembarkin' below the town, they marched by a roundabout route to the back o' the British consulate, while Jannaway crossed the river in the dinghy and landed at Pyramid 'Ill. Now, mark 'ow a private Marine circumvented a city o' cut-throats."

Mr. Pagett removed the pipe from his mouth and laid it upon the bench. Then, crossing his slippered feet and thrusting his thumbs through the armholes of his waistcoat, he dreamily gazed at the towering cromlech before us. For the moment, no doubt, Yes Tor was the Pyramid Hill of his tale.

“The night was as dense as black powder, so that the little consulate garrison could see nothin’ of the devil’s army corps that was advancin’ to the attack. There was no difficulty in hearin’, ’owever. For fear, I suppose, of drawin’ the defenders’ fire, they’d left their lanterns at ’ome, and to keep up their peckers in the dark, they were screechin’ worse than a Crystal Palaceful o’ startled cockatoos. The resident population, which might have been anything under a million, was reinforced by thousands o’ students up for the local exams; and as every mother’s son of them was tryin’ to scream down his neighbours, the din would ’ave drowned a steam injin’s whistle within a yard o’ you. And then, in a single instant, came a silence like that o’ the tomb.

“From the region in front o’ the mob a thin streak o’ orange fire hissed through the inky night, and broke in fallin’ stars high over their upraised faces. The nex’ moment a broad beam o’ blindin’ light licked out from the bed o’ the river, and showed up Pyramid ’Ill as clear as at midday, and the crowd, turnin’ to watch this noo wonder, gave a low moan of terror. For there on the very summit, as

plain as the 'ill itself, was—what do you think, sir?”

I discreetly pretended my utter inability to guess.

“Why, nothin’ more or less than that there dragon you were worryin’ about just now. He was flappin’ his wings like a game cock, and bellowin’ like a bull, and, though he was some distance off, his eyes could be seen distinctly, flashin’ with ’orrible rage. The pigtail of every spectator stiffened with fear at these portents, for dreadful indeed, you may lay to it, were the signs o’ the deity’s anger.

“But while the heathen were no doubt congratulatin’ themselves that the river was between them an’ the dragon, a second rocket shot upwards, and the broad beam o’ light from the river, shiftin’ off Pyramid ’Ill, swept a great arc on the sky, an’ lit up the face o’ the consulate. Fallin’ flat on their ugly faces, they wept and ’owled for mercy.

“On the top o’ Pyramid ’Ill the dragon ’ad seemed fairly small, but on the consulate verandah, where he now was, he looked as large as life an’ twice as nat’ral. He was covered with shinin’ scales, and was picked

out with 'alf the colours o' the rainbow, and his great flamin' eyes were winkin' that 'ard you actooally could 'ear the lids clickin'. By his side stood Mr. Ah Fat, with his 'ands on the balcony rail and no more expression on his face than there is on an aft-deck clock's.

"By-and-bye, one o' the bolder spirits, findin' himself, much to his surprise, still on the outside o' the dragon's stummick, began to address the meetin'. Bein' totally incapable, 'owever, of facin' those blinkin' eyes, he still kep' his face in the mud, so that the snortin' dragon, unable to catch a word, commanded Ah Fat to enlighten him.

"'Ichang Chinaman velly muchee flightened,' explained the firebrand plucked by three nations from the burnin'. 'He speakee—s'pose ddragon go back Pylamidillside chop chop, then Ichang people catchee plenty firestick an' makee finish fungshui temple and foleign devil joss-pidgin allee same time.'

"'Tell the silly swabs,' replied the 'ollow voice in the dragon's stummick, 'that I no wantchee temple burnt, nor mission'ry joss-'ouses neither. You talkee to them that they've made so muchee bloomin' bobbery

that the dragon no can catchee sleep in his 'ammick in the 'ill over yonder. And you can tell them further, my son, that if they don't get 'ome to their own flea-bags in a brace o' shakes, and give the Foreign Concession a wide berth for the term of their natural, the nex' time I 'ave to cross the water I'll bring Pyramid 'Ill with me an' make a pancake of their stinkin' city.'

"Whatever gain Ah Fat 'as been to British naval cookery, he's an undoubted loss to the mission'ry platform of three nations. From the temple balcony, in an 'igh falsetto voice, and addin' much embroidery of his own, he chanted to the mob the god's decree. The effec' was almost magical. To see him chosen 'igh priest of a dragon proved he'd discovered the error of his ways. Besides, did he not tell them that he was bidden to take a journey on the dragon's business, an' that neither his fellow-townsmen nor the foreign joss-men would see his face for many moons to come? Liftin' their yellow faces from the mud, and rising to their feet, they made a final obeisance to the dragon, an' turned to go.

"Even as they did so, a third streak of

44 THE DRAGON OF PYRAMID HILL

orange fire cut its way to the zenith, and a couple o' seconds later the whitewashed front o' the consulate was once more plunged in darkness.

"The brilliant shaft of light, slewin' across the sky, again bridged the inky river to the summit o' Pyramid 'Ill, and again the dragon was seen there, roarin' an' crowin' alternate, an' winkin' his eyes like 'eliographs. Then the great light went out, an' the night seemed blacker than ever.

"With a gasp like a cat'spaw o' wind, the mob scrambled 'ome to their flea-bags.

* * * * *

"We were a couple of 'undred miles below 'Ankow on the return trip when the skipper sent for me one evenin' in his cabin.

"'I've been given to onderstand,' he says, 'that you were the leadin' 'and in that Ichang pantomime. Un'appily,' he says, 'I ain't on speakin' terms with Mr. Jannaway, and that's why I've sent for you. Now, about that defence o' the consulate?'

"'There wasn't no defence,' says I, not

feelin' called upon to explain infantry tattics to an amatoor.

" 'Well, touchin' that there dragon, then?' says he.

" 'There was two of them,' says I.

" 'Damme!' he shouts, 'I know that as well as you do.'

" '*I* didn't know that you did,' I replies; 'the pore benighted 'eathen didn't, any'ow. You might 'ave thought with them that there was only one dragon, and that he crossed an' recrossed the river on the search ray.'

" With that, the skipper looked 'ard at me for a minute and a quarter by the cabin clock. But he couldn't see nothin' to lay 'old of, my innocent face, as the sayin' is, bein' my fortune, sir.

" 'I misremember,' he says at last, takin' out his keys, 'whether you belong to the temperance brigade or no?'

" Then all of a sudden my conscience told me that I'd no right to with'old information from my commandin' orf'cer.

" 'My best respec's, sir,' says I, settin' the empty glass upon the table. 'Well, as I was about to tell you, *I* was the life an' soul (in

a manner o' speakin') of the dragon up to the consulate, while Lootenant Jannaway worked the dooplicate over on Pyramid 'Ill.'

"'It sounded,' says the skipper thoughtfully, 'like a menagerie and poultry show combined. Where the doose did they dragons come from?'

"'Mainly,' says I, 'out of the back of my 'ead, but partly out of the bo'sun's and carpenter's storerooms. When you've spent hours in temples studyin' a dragon's anatomy, it's wonderful what you can do with battens an' painted canvas, six fathoms o' copper wire, a few sheets o' tin, and some gold leaf.'

"'It was the flashin' eyes, though,' laughs the skipper, 'what really did the trick.'

"'Which reminds, me, sir,' says I, 'that I've not yet returned them four lamps to the signalman.' And with that I wishes him good-night.

"Three months after we'd paid off the *Sneeze* and rejoined our respective vessels, the gun'ry lootenant o' the flagship was specially promoted and given the D.S.O. for preventin' a massacre of Europeans by a mob of armed fanatics at Ichang."

Mr. Pagett rose from the bench.

"And what did you and Mr. Jannaway get out of it?" I asked, following his example.

"You seem to 'ave forgot," he answered with surprise, "that him and me were Marines!"

ACELDAMA

ACELDAMA

"Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood."—ACTS i. 19.

IT is barely ten years since his name first appeared in the Navy List as that of a *Britannia* cadet. In the blue-covered, anchor-stamped issue of the current month you will find it under the heading in small capitals of "LIEUTENANTS." "This," in playbill jargon, "is positively the last appearance." The mummer has made his bow, danced his ten minutes (or years—what matter?) across the stage, and vanished for ever behind the great Back Cloth. In appropriate black letter above the small capitals—how petty seems the rank beneath its shadow!—stands the grim word "OBITUARY."

In the eyes of the gentle women in the Devonshire vicarage, who tearfully marked his linen and packed his sea-chest, their idol was second only to the immortal boy who more

than a century before had set out from a Norfolk rectory on a similar errand. He was to be the other Nelson, the twentieth-century saviour of his country in her hour of need. Alack, alack! One can but hope that the manner of his latter days and of his end was mercifully kept from the knowledge of the heartbroken womenfolk. "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity!"

In fairness to the sinner it must be admitted that from the beginning he had been unfairly dealt with by Nature in the matter of a nose. It was of the most aggressively Hebraic cast. By those familiar with Service prejudices the severity of this handicap will be perfectly appreciated. In sheer wantonness, too, had the Jade played this prank; for—on the testimony of a messmate, who once spent his leave at the vicarage—neither the nose of the reverend vicar nor that of the vicaress was aquiline, while those of the sinner's sisters, indeed, were charmingly *retroussés*.

In so mongrel a race as the great Anglo-Saxon this eccentricity might well have passed without comment. But when—on the sworn evidence of the same snake in the grass—it

transpired that o' Sundays the sinner was wont to carry the money-bag at his father's church, the putting together of two and two was inevitable. Outside the covers of the Navy List and the vicarage walls he was thenceforward Judas Iscariot the Second.

I have before had occasion to remark that in the bestowal of nicknames they who go down to the sea in warships are, as a rule, far more prodigal than apt. This name, which stuck to its victim with the pertinacity of a Maltese beggar long after he had passed out of the *Britannia*, was, as you will have observed, based on the flimsiest of pretexts. Nevertheless, by a series of extraordinary coincidences which the youthful godfathers could not possibly have foreseen, the dreadful end completely justified the christening.

His messmates in the gunroom of his first seagoing ship knew as little of his antecedents as they did of the man in the moon's—or of each other's. But, his nickname having accompanied him thither as surely as though it had been painted in white letters upon his sea-chest, he presently suffered many stripes from the dirk scabbard for the alleged crime of being

a Jew. As a middy he was repeatedly tried by mock courts-martial on the same grave charge, and condemned to eat, in the presence of the righteously indignant members, more Navy pork than was entirely good for his digestion. On the occasion of a cruise along the Syrian coast he had obtained forty-eight hours' leave to visit Jerusalem—for the purpose, it was whispered, of keeping the feast of the Passover with his brother Shylocks. By this time he had become the senior sub, and correction, either by dirk scabbard or by flesh of the unclean pig, was out of the question. Nevertheless, so effectually did the young Gentiles contrive to assert their Gentility, it was indeed a red-letter day for the unhappy Judas when he presently attained his second stripe and entered the wardroom a full-fledged lieutenant.

In the senior mess the crude hostilities of the gunroom were, of course, impossible. Yet Judas was not long in discovering that at the back of their minds the old prejudice against him existed among the elders also. Why this should have been I know not. He was generally admitted to be a good officer and

the most inoffensive of messmates ; he was the possessor of many virtues ; as far as one could see, he had no vices. It was, in point of fact, the old, old story of giving a dog a bad name and hanging him.

Now, in the beginning Judas Iscariot the Second had taken these badgerings very greatly to heart. In his hammock on board the Dartmouth training-ship he had wept over them. As a midshipman—and man of the world—in the Mediterranean he had sworn at them. As a sub-lieutenant—and latter-day Gallio—he had learned to care for none of these things.

For, truth to tell, long before he had ceased to be an infant in the eye of the law, he had made the great discovery. He had found, as he fondly imagined, the panacea for all worry, the sovereign remedy for every conceivable trouble to which mankind is heir. It was true that the joys derived therefrom were not wholly unalloyed. Nausea, reaction, remorse were ever the secondary effects of this great discovery. But as for the primary—well, after all, it is, as the saying goes, a matter of fancy waistcoats. In their dark hour some men are

wont to turn for consolation to woman ; others to work ; others, again, to drink. The prescription affected by Judas Iscariot the Second was—Drink.

You are not to suppose that the antagonism of his fellows was the sole cause of the sinner's downfall. When a youth of eighteen summers turns to alcohol for solace as naturally as a duckling seeks the water, men wag their heads and whisper of heredity. It would appear that the silver-haired clergyman of the Devon coombe had ever been the most saintly and temperate of men. Yet there were rumours—how they arose none knew—of a rakehell grandfather of the Regency, whose dying request had been for a gun to shoot a crimson rat upon his bedpost. It was, in short, the not unusual case of the sins of the fathers skipping one generation to be visited with redoubled vigour upon the children of the third. Nevertheless, although the fatal seed may have been sown before his birth, one cannot but fear that the dreadful reaping was hastened by those who might altogether have averted it.

The pace adown that easy cinder track to

black Avernus grew swifter day by day. It is true that, in accordance with the regulations, several successive captains had testified on flimsy paper to Judas' sobriety, which, as all men know, meant neither more nor less than that he had never been conspicuously intemperate. It is also true that neither in gunroom nor in wardroom had his monthly wine bill ever exceeded the prescribed limits. Yet there are more ways of killing a dog than by hanging him, and other methods of procuring liquor exist besides that of the day-book and the wine steward.

In harbour there were rumours of strange returnings from the shore in the middle and early morning watches. At sea there were whispers concerning certain bottles of "photographic chemicals" on his cabin shelves. With these murmurs there presently mingled *sotto voce* talk of a court-martial; for it became plainer every day that Judas Iscariot the Second had betaken himself to the last and most pernicious of all the vices. I mean the continual nipping of strong waters in secret.

And then, lo! a miracle. At the eleventh hour, and perilously near the end of the cinder

track, the scorcher put on the brake, and—for the moment, at least—cheated the devil of his due. The photographic bottles with their lying labels were one by one pitched through the cabin scuttle into the sea; and from that day forward (until the beginning of the dreadful end) neither in public nor in secret did a single drop of alcohol pass the Betrayer's lips.

Now, when a confirmed and hereditary dipsomaniac compasses so miraculous a feat it is obvious that magic is at work somewhere. What this magic was, and who the wizard, was a problem which for many days exercised men's brains. And this is the point where I come into the story. For I it was who by the merest accident happened upon the key to the riddle.

It so befell that the ship had lain for a season in a certain unfrequented harbour of the Ægean Sea. Many hard things have been said of Byron by luckless naval officers exiled to the Isles of Greece. For, whatever it may have been in his day, it must be confessed that in ours the Archipelago is, for the most part, the abomination of desolation. But the particular isle of which I speak is yet unmarred

by the fire and axe of wanton men and the cropping of greedy goats. It still stands as its Creator designed that it should—an emerald set in a sapphire sea. It is full of sweet legends; it possesses Delectable Mountains; it is, in short, an enchanted isle whose every prospect pleases. Even the poet's cynical exception does not apply here. For all the island folk are kinsmen, and what man could be vile who was the father, or the brother, or even the sixth cousin twice removed of the Lady Daphne?

One drowsy summer's afternoon I chanced to be wandering with sketch-book and colours through the glades of this magic isle. The air was filled with the scent of the pines and the matchless music of nature. For him who had ears to hear there were the sighing chant in the tree-tops, the tuneful twitter of bird talk, the bagpipe drone of a bee, the harpsichord tinkle of water deep in the green of the woods. From the invisible beach came the ripple of soft sea-laughter; from a neighbouring castle-farmhouse the silvery chime of goat bells. A sweet chord of half a dozen notes at least. And then from a thicket before

me my ear caught the Dominant Seventh—the murmuring voices of lovers.

One knew that they were lovers even before one saw them. Ah me! One hesitates even to whisper of this idyll in the heart of the summer woods. For instinctively one divined that no vulgar *liaison* was here; and that other way of a man with a maid should not be written of lightly.

My first glimpse of her through the great sheltering leaves of a fig tree almost took my breath away. In the beginning, we are told, gods walked with men. From all that one knows of their characters one cannot but think that they neglected few opportunities of walking with women also. And well assured am I that the Lady Daphne was a nineteenth-century result of one of those godly strolls. The gnarled and knotted olive tree against which she was leaning, and which must have been bearing fruit in the days when Christ walked the earth, served as an admirable foil to her youth and divine beauty. To attempt a catalogue of her charms would be little short of sacrilege. Never before had I seen, never again can I hope to see, so

exquisite a specimen of the Creator's masterpiece.

Half seated on one of the tree roots, half kneeling at her feet, was a man ; and the man was Judas Iscariot the Second. Here, then, was the magic, here the witch who had lured him from the claws of Hereditary Vice. Of a truth had poor Judas made the greater discovery—nay, the greatest and most blessed discovery a man may make in the whole course of his life.

“Daphne—*carissima*,” he was saying, and the tears stood in his eyes as he spoke, “you can have no conception how hard a thing it is! Oh! my dear, my dear. When I can look into your sweet face, when I can touch you”—he was clinging to her as a child clings to its mother's skirts—“I am safe. But when I am away from you, when I can no longer hear your dear voice—oh! my God.” He buried his face in his hands, and his body shook with a tempest of sobs.

After a moment's hesitation the girl stood upright and hastily unclasped a fine gold chain which lay about her neck. Then from the bosom of her dress she drew forth a small

coin or token to which the chain was attached, and thrust it into her lover's hands.

"See, sweetheart!" said she with a pretty gesture, and I perceived that her eyes also were filled with tears, "already I give you a part of myself."

Never before had my robust mother-tongue seemed so musical as when it tinkled from the lips of this daughter of the old Greek gods. "This charm," she went on, "was hung round my neck as I lay in my cradle, and it has preserved me from evil ever since. In my family it has been for hundreds and hundreds of years—how many hundreds who can say?—and no harm has ever befallen him who wore it. Take it, my lord, my life; never for one moment allow it to pass out of thy keeping until thy hands chain it once more around my neck. And thus, oh! my love, shalt thou surely prevail in thy dark hour against the Tempter."

She knelt beside him under the ancient tree, and, folding her arms about him, drew his head downward until it rested upon her bosom. Then she kissed him softly upon the forehead.

And I, perceiving that the place whereon

I stood was holy ground, noiselessly retraced my steps through the dim summer woods.

* * * * *

One evening a month later Judas and I chanced to pass the open door of a gambling casino at Smyrna. The chink of coin arrested our footsteps, and, much against my inclination, we presently allowed ourselves to be enticed within. For some time we were content to merely watch the play ; but in an evil moment Judas staked a coin on the zero. It turned up, and as he cleared the cloth of his winnings I happened to glance at his face. Upon it was stamped the unmistakable expression of the born gambler.

Ever since our visit to the enchanted isle, and greatly to the wonderment of all in the ship but myself, not once had Judas looked upon the wine—either when it was red or any other colour of the rainbow. Yet now it seemed as though that erring sheep had but conquered one vice to fall an easy victim to another. Again the baneful fire inherited from the Regency rakehell glowed in his veins ; again astride the wheel of destiny he started down the facile cinder track. As with his love-

making and his wonderful reformation, so with this new vice Judas knew no half measures. By midnight he had lost, not only his winnings, but every other penny in his pockets, together with all that he could succeed in borrowing from me.

In spite of every effort on my part to prevent it, the following night the green cloth drew him out of the ship like a magnet; and, after some hours of varying luck, he left the casino completely cleaned out of all his available capital.

Now, throughout the evening I had been irritably conscious that we were a source of special interest to a certain evil-looking night-hawk peering in at the doorway. No sooner were we outside than this man accosted us. He was evidently one of those Spanish Jews who infest the Levantine littoral, and in his hands he softly chinked a greasy bag of coins.

"The señor has been unfortunate," he cringingly purred in his native tongue, "yet—how say the noble English?—'while there is life there is hope.' The most illustrious, I perceive, still possesses one little coin."

Most naval officers have a smattering of

Spanish. In spite of his aversion, Judas instinctively ran his fingers through his pockets.

"I'm damned if he has," he rejoined in hearty Anglo-Saxon.

The hawk shot out a yellow talon and touched a trinket on my comrade's watchchain.

"It is, of course, quite worthless," he croaked, though the glitter in his beady eyes betrayed the lie, "yet to help a noble Englishman win back his money from those Greek dogs, I would advance——"

"Oh, go to blazes out of it!" shouted Judas, roughly thrusting the creature from his path; and we walked on towards our boat. But the Jew still stuck to our heels, and presently from behind our backs came the rustle of a note.

"After so long a run of ill luck," whispered the Tempter, "with five English pounds the señor might win a fortune!"

The pace of the victim insensibly slackened. At length he halted and turned about.

"Make it ten," he said irresolutely in Spanish.

A swift look of triumph came into the eyes of the Jew as he softly rubbed his dirty palms together.

"It would be robbery," he whined, "cruel

robbery! Nevertheless, to oblige one of the illustrious protectors of my poor race, I will—how say you, señor?—‘split the difference.’ With seven and a half pounds sterling your excellency will of a certainty break the bank.”

With trembling fingers Judas hurriedly disengaged the thin, twisted chain of gold from his waistcoat buttonhole. The watch, to which it had originally been attached, had already gone the way of most gambler’s watches; and when I perceived that the token was about to follow, I resolved to make an effort to save it. For I knew that it was no other than the charm sweet Daphne had given him beneath the ancient olive tree, and my soul revolted at the sacrilege.

“Let me look at it for a moment,” I said, and Judas placed it in my hands. Then, under a lamp upon the deserted quay, and with the sobbing of the waves in my ears, I examined this talisman that had preserved for so many centuries man and maid from evil.

Worn and battered as it was, it still bore signs of exquisite workmanship. Upon the obverse were clearly visible the outlines of a head of rare and tender beauty. The straight

nose and long waving hair gave the face an almost womanly expression. Yet there was a look of manly will, of majesty, of infinite benevolence that entirely redeemed it from effeminacy. The "ΒΑΣ—" in ancient Greek characters—the only decipherable portion of the legend on the reverse—showed plainly that the coin had borne the image and superscription of some king. Who was this king of the divine countenance who looked at one out of the distant past?

I returned the token to its owner. "For Christ's sake," I said, surprised at my own earnestness, "don't do this thing."

Astonishment, resentment, obstinacy were expressed in turn in the eyes of my companion, and the Jew was quick to note it. Swiftly counting out the money from the greasy bag, he thrust it into Judas' hands. "It is but a trifling loan," he muttered, "which the illustrious señor will doubtless soon be able to pay back—with the usual interest—out of his winnings. This trinket, rest assured"—he took it deftly from the gambler's fingers—"will not long remain in my possession." And with a cunning leer the reptile vanished into the night.

A few minutes later Judas was back again at the tables. But this time he neither lost nor won. The Jew had paid him in crowns; for the cartwheel is ever an unpopular coin with foreigners, who seek to rid themselves of it on the first opportunity. The bank, for the same reason, paid him back his winnings in his own coin; and, when the casino closed, Judas still retained his thirty pieces of silver.

Then of a sudden there fell upon him an exceeding great remorse, so that he presently raved in my ear like a madman. He had lost what was of more value than life itself! He had broken faith with the sweetest woman on God's earth! At all costs he would find that accursed Jew and, having recovered the token, wring his scraggy neck! All night long he dragged me up and down the empty, evil-smelling streets of Smyrna, until the red dawn found us still engaged upon our fruitless quest.

The following day I was unable to leave the ship, and the nearly frantic Judas continued the hopeless search alone. Alas! it would seem that Jew and priceless talisman alike had vanished in thin air. That night, for the first time in many weeks, Judas Iscariot

the Second was drunk. It was the beginning of the dreadful end. For when, after a month or so, we again dropped anchor in the harbour of the enchanted isle, he was on the borderland of delirium tremens.

A mail was awaiting us, and before long everyone in the wardroom was absorbed in his letters or papers. Presently a deep groan from Judas startled us. With pitifully trembling fingers he drew my attention to a certain paragraph in the *Times*. It was the description of a remarkable gold coin which had been recently presented to the British Museum by a noted collector, who had purchased it at the ridiculously low figure of £80 from a Spanish Jew in Smyrna. "For it is considered by expert numismatists," continued the paragraph, "to be absolutely unique. It is, in all probability, one of the secret tokens used by the early Christians; and from the three decipherable characters upon the reverse it is conjectured that the original inscription in ancient Greek was 'King of the Jews.' In short, there is every reason to suppose that this priceless coin not only dates back to the time of Christ, but that it bears a con-

temporary and authentic likeness of our Lord Himself."

At that moment the local contractor entered the wardroom, and, seizing the opportunity to divert the thoughts of the unhappy Judas into pleasanter channels, I asked the island news.

The visitor hesitated. "There is none," he said at length—"at least, none that would interest any of you. As for us"—here he sighed—"well, we have no heart for news of any kind."

"What's up?" asked someone carelessly, deep in last week's *Punch*.

"The island has suffered an irreparable loss. To most of us it will never again be the same enchanted spot. For our beautiful queen, the daughter of the lord proprietor, the Lady Daphne——"

"Yes?" The hoarse whisper came from Judas. His shaking fingers were beating a horrible devil's tattoo upon the *Times*.

"The Lady Daphne—is dead."

* * * * *

That the sweet-sounding name of the dead girl should be upon the lips of the shouting maniac the livelong night was a matter of wonderment to the wakeful wardroom mess.

Nevertheless it marvelled in silence. For, when a man is delirious, as like as not a woman's name goes trippingly upon his tongue, and they who chance to hear it, if they be gentlemen, will ever after hold their peace.

But when anon that dreadful voice from the sentry-guarded cabin raved of the betrayal of the Most High for thirty pieces of silver, their wonderment found words. "See," said they, "how D.T. turns a man's brain to porridge! Judas Iscariot the Second—poor devil!—imagines himself to be Judas Iscariot the First." For they knew not what I knew—oh! the pity of it, the pity of it!

Among the water-colour sketches in my portfolio is one which I never look upon without a gripping at the throat and a dimness about the eyes. It is a study of solemn cypress trees faintly illumined by the newly risen moon. Between the sombre foliage one catches the last red gleam of the dying day; beneath it lie the green resting-places of men and women departed. Above the newest of these stands a gleaming marble cross, on which is cut in clear Greek capitals the simple legend—**DAPHNE.**

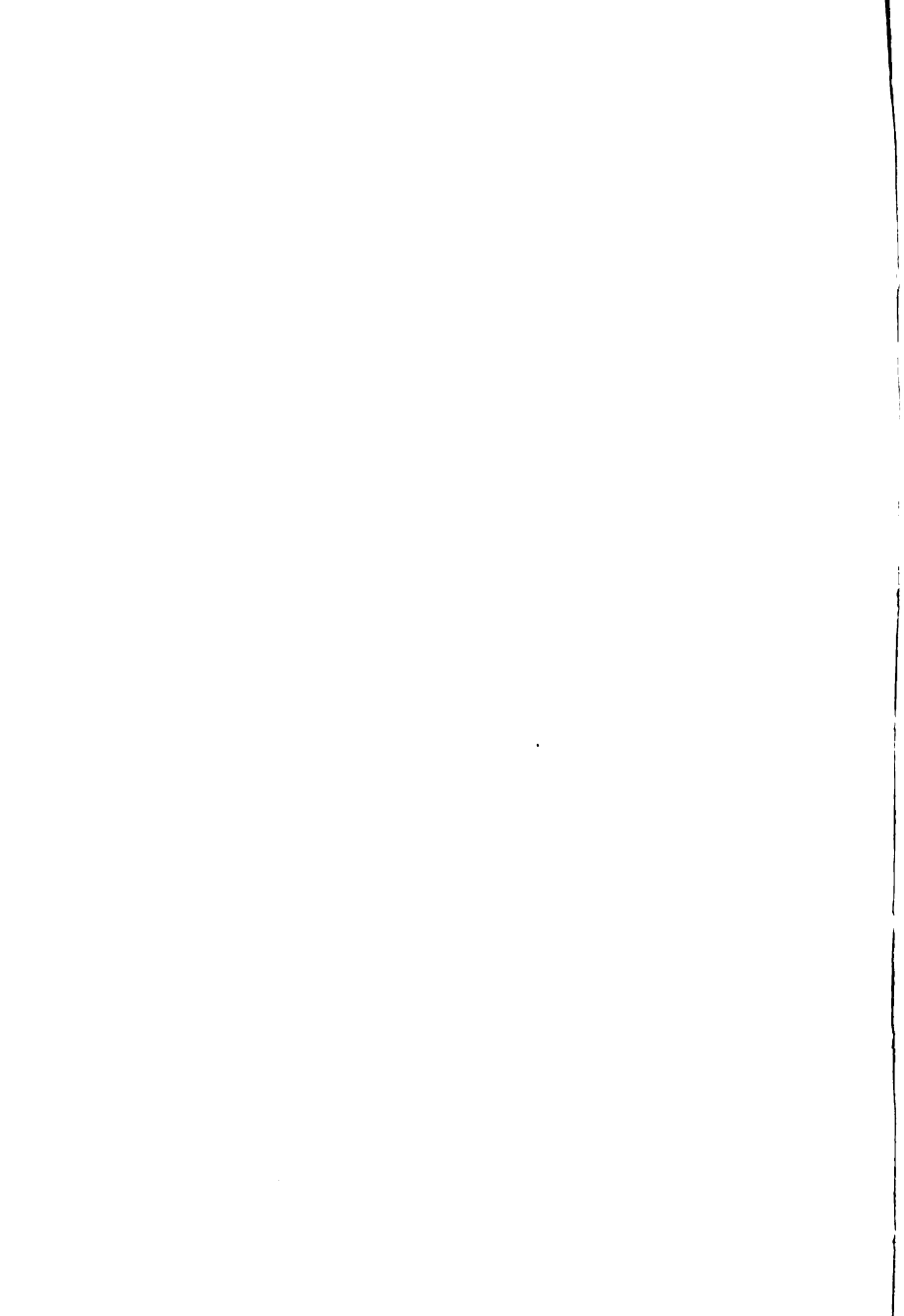
Although this sketch of mine is little more than an impression, it is, in one respect, pre-Raphaelite ; for, scattered up and down the moonlit foreground are many cumbrous coins of shining silver, and he who takes the trouble will discover that the tale thereof is thirty. Who is the wanton that has sown among the graves these thirty bits of silver ?

Look at yon tree beneath whose shadow sleeps the dear maid of yesterday's sweet idyll. Its branches are splashed as though with blood by blossom of deepest crimson. It is the flowering Judas tree of eastern lands, and from its lowest bough hangs the dim outline of a human form.

How he contrived to leave the ship unseen none knew. Yet so we found him ; and presently, with funeral volleys and mournful bugle wail of *The Last Post*, we laid him beside his love—the peerless daughter of the ancient gods of Greece.

Though few know the wherefore, that cypress-shadowed field of sleep at the foot of the Delectable Mountains is known to many British seamen as ACELDAMA.

THE BLANK FILE



THE BLANK FILE

A ZIGZAG of steel-blue fire licked out from the inky cloud above Yes Tor, and Mr. Pagett and I involuntarily withdrew from the red-curtained lattice whence we had been watching the storm's approach.

"A flash o' lightnin'," he began, "always 'minds me——"

It was the formula with which my host, the ex-private of Marines, invariably began the narration of his very moving experiences by flood and field, though in this instance its conclusion was lost in the thunderclap which shook the "Coach and Horses" to its ancient granite foundations. As the muttering echoes died among the Dartmoor gorges I called to mind the tattered *Pilgrim's Progress* on the best parlour table, the green and yellow lizard on the sunlit garden wall, the village doctor at his surgery door, and a dozen unconsidered trifles

which had furnished a great artist with material for his finest masterpieces. Thrusting my tobacco pouch into the artist's hands, I drew a couple of high-backed chairs before the fire, and—with reference to certain arrangements upon the table—requested him to say “when.”

He said it on the instant, and before the golden fluid in the lower half of the tumbler had grown appreciably paler. Then, having assured himself that the blessed miller, as he expressed it, had not been drowned, he plunged with military directness into the strange narrative which it is my privilege to make public.

“It so ‘appened,” he began, “that on a certain red-‘ot night, about ‘alf a dozen years back, I was employed by Her Majesty on ‘ighly responsible and very ‘arassin’ dooty at a spot some ten thousand miles south-east o’ Plymouth Sound. The spot was the ‘arbour of Batavia in the great Dutch island o’ Java, and the dooty—which was that of cabin-door sentry aboard the second-class cruiser *Dook o’ York*—was ‘arassin’ by reason o’ the heat, and more than usually responsible on account of the Dutch adm’ral dinin’ that evenin’ with our skipper. Ever since I first saw Queen Willy-

minor's pretty face on a ha'penny box o' matches I've always thought that, next to bein' a British Marine, I'd like to be a Dutch one; and it pleased me to think that one of her adm'rals was, in a manner o' speakin', eatin' his dinner under the charge of Private Pagett."

My gallant host glanced sentimentally at a coloured print of the young Queen of Holland which, in company with one of his lawful Sovereign, adorned the overmantel of the best parlour. But a buxom lady in the bar happening at that moment to glance through the glass partition in our direction, he hastily shifted his gaze to the fire and continued the story.

"Although the conversation at the dinner-table was in English, for the first hour or so I could pick up nothing worth repeatin' on the lower deck. In spite o' the champagne wine they were strikin' down by the quart, the talk was as 'eavy to listen to as the *Times* noos-paper is to read. But no sooner 'ad the Dutch adm'ral got a cigar between his teeth than he began to grow confidential, and after a bit he told our skipper a piece o' noos that I'll lay to it he'd 'ave given a year's sea wages in the

mornin' to recall. As for me, I knocked off that ridic'lous farce of walkin' my post in a soldierlike manner, and stood stric'ly at ease as near the open cabin door as possible, in order that when I was relieved my messmates might 'ave the benefit o' the noos as well.

" 'Latitood nine thirteen south,' the adm'ral was sayin', 'and longitood one 'undred an' four east. It was reborted to me this morgen by the captain of a—how say you?—*ja*, tramp. Four 'undred miles sou'-west of Sunda Straits he was when he passed the islant. Yet no islant at all, my frient, is shown in that bart o' the ocean on your Adm'ralty jarts!'

" 'I'll back our Adm'ralty charts, all the same,' says the skipper 'uffylike, 'against the diseased imagination of a tipsy-maniac master of a tramp! I don't believe in that there island,' he says, 'no more than I believe in the man in the moon.'

" 'Nevertheless,' says the Dutchman, risin' with onsteady dignity from the table, 'tomorrow I go to annegs it in the name o' Willyminor, by the grace of God Queen o' the Netherlands.'

" 'I wish Her Majesty joy of her noo

possession,' says our skipper sarcastically, bowin' his guest up the after ladder. 'By the way, what did you say its position was on the chart?'"

"'My dear frient,' says the adm'ral, steppin' into his barge, 'what can it madder, since it only exists in the deceased imagination of a dibsymaniac?' At which the skipper swore very softly to hisself.

"A few minutes after returnin' to his cabin, 'owever, he rang the bell.

"'Sir?' says I, answerin' it.

"'Take these orders,' says he, 'to the first lieutenant and chief engineer'; and with that he turns in.

"Then there was more soft swearin'—from the wardroom an' lower-deck messes this time. For the orders to the first lieutenant were to unmoor and be ready for sea by daylight, while the chief engineer was to 'ave steam for ten knots by the same hour. Which meant that at least two-thirds o' the ship's comp'ny 'ad to put off their Toosday night's rest till the followin' Sunday afternoon.

"Under the mistaken impression that we were 'omeward bound, the band o' the Dutch

flagship played us out of 'arbour next mornin' to the toon of 'Beautiful Isle o' the Sea.' But it was a younger isle than old England we were bound for; and as soon as we 'ad crawled out o' sight, instead of keepin' on our course for Singapore the 'elm was jammed 'ard a-starboard, the injin-room telegraph set at 'full speed ahead,' and in a few hours we were racin' at ten an' a quarter knots through the Straits o' Sunda towards the Indian Ocean. When we reached the open the skipper put the ship on a sou'-westerly course, and—sent for me."

"For you?"

"Not for the First Lord o' the Adm'ralty," explained Mr. Pagett wearily, "but for me. 'You 'ad the first watch on the cabin door last night?' says the skipper. 'I 'ad,' says I. 'I misremember,' he says, lookin' me 'ard in the face, 'the exac' longitood and latitood o' that there island.' 'Nine thirteen south,' says I, 'by one 'undred and four east.' 'Ow do you know?' he asks. 'I wrote it down on the aft-deck paintwork,' I says, 'with my trigger finger,' I says, 'dipped in some corfy your stooard was carryin' into the cabin at the

time.' 'Then you'll probably get fourteen days from the first lootenant,' he says 'for spoilin' his paint, and fourteen more from me for listenin' to international conf'rences. Now you can go.'

"But when in the dawn two days afterwards the island lay right athwart our course, the skipper sends for me on the fore bridge and gives me the lance stripe instead. It was afterwards took from me, you may recollect', for lettin' the jib sheet jam, when Lootenant Pringle was sailin' that there train across the Isthmus o' Paria in Venezuela.

"Now, if the Dutch adm'ral 'ad seen that forsaken island, maybe he wouldn't 'ave talked so big about annexin' it for Queen Willyminor, God bless her! It was no sort of present for a lady—let alone a Queen, bein' nothin' but a flat, irreg'lar patch of rock an' shingle about 'alf a mile long, and lookin' like an inkstain in the middle of a blue silk tablecloth."

"I suppose you went back again," I hazarded, seeing that he paused.

"If you suppose the ship and everybody in her but the Marines," rejoined Mr. Pagett moodily, "you suppose right. In order to

make the Dutch adm'ral swear on his arrival, the skipper caused the entire detachment, from me an' Lootenant Jannaway down to the drummer, to parade in our best scarlet toonics, and then landed us as a 'garrison of occupation.' We took with us a large mining marquee for the men, a couple o' bell tents for Lootenant Jannaway an' the colour-sergeant, our arms an' accoutrements, a week's rations, and the tallest spar and biggest Union Jack we 'ad in the ship. After hoistin' the colours with his own 'and an' proclaimin' the island part o' the British Empire, the Marines presented arms, and the skipper returned on board: and an hour later the *Dook o' York* was 'ull down on the north-eastern 'orizon.

"We pitched the tents, laid out our beddin', cleaned our arms an' accoutrements, cooked and 'ad our dinners, lit our pipes, and lay down in the shade till evenin'. Then Jannaway, who was a born Marine and would 'ave 'arassed pore castaways upon a raft, ordered us to fall in for drill.

"The ground mightn't 'ave been as smooth as the parade in Plymouth barricks, but it was certainly roomier than the *Dook's* quarter-

deck. Besides, Marines ain't like common soldiers. It makes no difference to them whether they drill in a stonemason's yard or in a gale o' wind at sea. Therefore there seemed no sort of excuse for the shufflin' and jostlin' that went on in the ranks as soon as we were on the move. Presently Jannaway 'alts us.

"'What the blazes is the matter with you?' he says. 'One would think you were a pack of infants out of a kindergarten, instead of long-service infantry o' the line. The left 'alf comp'ny's disgraceful,' he says, 'and I b'lieve the fourth section's drunk. The comp'ny will advance—by the left—quick march!'

"'The nex' minute the left-'and man but two trips, and the 'ole of the fourth section loses the step.

"'Take that man's name, colour-sergeant,' says Jannaway.

"'Beg pardon, sir,' says the indignant soldier, 'but my rear-rank man's done nothin' but tread on my 'eels ever since the blessed drill began.'

"'Don't talk to me, sir!' roars Jannaway. 'You can check him as well, colour-sergeant,

for tellin' me a lie. It's the first time,' he says sarcastically, 'that I've 'eard of a rear-rank man in a blank file!'

"Now, as everyone knows, when there's an odd number o' men in a comp'ny, the left-'and file but two is called the blank file, because there's a gap at that point in the rear rank. In other words, the front-rank man has got no one be'ind him. The comp'ny sniggered, and the man himself looked foolish; so Jannaway, to give him a chance, shifted him to the right o' the rear rank, and the drill continued.

"Three minutes later the noo front-rank man, with a scared look on his face, steps out o' the ranks and requests to be made a pris'ner.

"'What the devil for?' asks Jannaway.

"'Because,' says the man through his chatterin' teeth, 'it gives me the 'orrors every time I turn about to run agin *somebody I can't see!*'

"'I'll have a double sentry posted on the rum cask,' says Jannaway, always suspicious of us pore soldiers. 'The nex' man as says the blank file's complete will 'ave a crime made out against him.'

"He broke up the detachment, re-formed and

numbered it, and went on with the drill. But it wasn't a bit o' good. In spite of Mr. Jannaway the blank file *was* complete. There was always Someone marchin' in that vacant place in the left 'alf comp'ny, and the left 'alf comp'ny didn't like it. After a bit they began to panic, and the panic spread to the right 'alf, so that Jannaway, with many crool words, was presently forced to dismiss us.

"The records of the great Sea Regiment," continued Mr. Pagett, with apparent irrelevance, "go back, as you well know, more than two 'undred and thirty years, and they form an unbroken tale of the most splendid valour in every quarter o' the globe. Not even a loss of fifty per cent. o' their numbers 'ave stopped the Marines from capturin' a position, and they 'ave gone to the bottom standin' with unbroken ranks upon the quarter-deck. But even Marines are sometimes seized with panic, and after that drill we raced back to the minin' tent as though the devil himself 'ad been at our 'eels. We would 'ave fought a dozen Dutch flagships with pleasure, but that bloomin' blank file was a bit too much for our nerves."

So shattered were Mr. Pagett's nerves, even after the lapse of six years, that for several minutes he was entirely unconscious that the tumbler he held midway to his mouth was empty: nor, on my hastening to atone for my forgetfulness, did he remember to say "when" until the whisky had reached the top of the pretty. His omission to add any water was possibly but another proof that the great man's thoughts were ten thousand miles away from his beloved "Coach and Horses."

"I ask you," he resumed, after staring at the fire in silence for several minutes, "to consider the sitooation. Three-an'-thirty pore marooned soldiers—countin' me, an' Jannaway, an' the colour-sergeant—jostlin' each other on a pin's 'ead of rock in the most deserted part o' the Indian Ocean. Night comin' on, and in our ranks a blank file there was no accountin' for, and which, by all the rules o' squad drill, didn't ought to 'ave been there. And now, in the wake o' the blank file, 'ad come another 'orror called blue funk; and all this, if you please, in order to make a Dutch adm'ral swear! It made *us* swear, and you may lay to it, for it was 'ard, crool 'ard, on the most

deservin' body o' men in Her Majesty's reg'lar forces."

Mr. Pagett passed his left hand over his eyes while his right sought the newly replenished tumbler. After a gallant effort to control his emotion, he set the glass resolutely upon the table, and continued—

"At two bells in the first watch Mr. Jannaway, who would 'ave carried out routine if he'd been Robinson Crusoe, ordered the bugler to sound 'Out lights!' and after we'd all turned in he went the rounds with the colour-sergeant. Everything bein' correct, they also retired to their respective tents; and for some time nothin' broke the oppressive silence but the footsteps o' the sentry outside.

"The first thing that 'appened was the rattle of his rifle an' baynit as he come down to the charge, and his challenge, 'Alt! Who goes there?' Now, seein' that every soul on the island but the sentry himself was in bed, we all sat up on our blankets to 'ear the reply. But none came; so after a minute or more the sentry resoomed his walk, and we in the minin' tent lay down again.

"Before long the thing was repeated, after

which it went on at intervals of about two minutes, but with never a reply to the challenges. The fifth brought Mr. Jannaway to the door of his tent, and he was in a doose of a rage, you may lay to it.

“ ‘When that militiaman’s finished challengin’ his own shadow,’ he sings out, ‘p’r’aps he’ll recollect’ that all the in’abitants of this pop’lous island are in bed, and want to go to sleep!’

“ ‘Then for the first time in our joint existence,’ says the sentry, his voice shakin’ with the tropical cold, ‘me and my shadow ’ave parted comp’ny. *It’s just gone into the minin’ tent!*’ he says.

“ ‘In less than a brace o’ shakes the ’ole thirty of us were outside the tent in our shirts, which so upset the sentry that he drops his rifle and starts shinnin’ up the jackstaff, great coat an’ all.

“ ‘Come down out o’ that, you grey ape,’ roars Jannaway, ‘before I bring you down with my revolver. As for the rest o’ you,’ he says, ‘if you ain’t back in your beds in one minute, I’ll ’ave you all tried for mutiny as soon as we get back to the ship. To think,’ he says, ‘that a detachment o’ Royal Marines should

be turned into a flock o' silly sheep by a sentry with a touch o' sunstroke!'

"Then he orders the man to be relieved and kep' under observation in the colour-sergeant's tent as a criminal loonatic; and we guessed that the colour-sergeant would prefer the comp'ny of a criminal loonatic to bein' left by hisself in the dark."

"Durin' the next hour nothin' seemed to be stirrin' under the Southern Cross. The noo sentry either didn't see anything to challenge, or didn't want to, and some o' the men had even begun to snore. I was just droppin' off to sleep myself, when a snorer at the other end of the tent suddenly raps out an oath, and his boot comes whizzin' down the gangway.

"'The next swab as plays me that trick,' he grumbles, 'will 'ave to take off his toonik to me in the mornin'.'

"'What trick, chum?' I asks, chuckin' him back his boot.

"'Putting his icy cold foot on my face,' he says, indignant.

"It didn't sound nice, some'ow, and my 'eart commenced to beat a devil's tatoo under

the blankets. But nobody said nothin', and if it 'adn't been for the thumpin' of a dozen gallant 'earts besides mine you might 'ave 'eard a pin drop.

"Presently, 'owever, the drummer, who slep' next to the corpril, calls out somethin' beneath his bedclothes.

"'What is "Sticks" a-sayin'?' asked one o' the men anxiously.

"'He's only talkin' in his sleep,' says the corpril.

"'No he ain't,' pipes the boy in his 'igh treble, '*but somebody's a-walkin' in his !*'

"This statement was received with a most uncomfortable silence of several minutes. Then the man next to me begins 'urriedly to scramble into his trousers.

"'The kid's quite right,' he says, 'and I know bloomin' well who the sleep-walker is.'

"'Who?' inquires a dozen voices at once.

"'The Blank File,' says the man, 'and he's lookin' for a sleepin' billet, that's what he's a-doin' of. But he ain't goin' to doss next to me,' he says, and with that he bolts out o' the tent.

"In another minute there was nobody—so

far as we knew—left inside it. We all wanted to keep the sentry comp'ny till daylight."

Mr. Pagett paused to refill his pipe, an operation he effected with characteristic absent-mindedness from my pouch. I feigned to be pondering his last words.

"After such a night of horror," I hazarded, "the daylight must indeed have been a welcome relief."

He slipped the pouch, with charming *naïveté*, into his pocket. "You mark time a bit," he said; "I 'aven't finished with that night of 'orror yet."

I murmured an apology.

"No," he continued. "Before the sun rose we were destined to 'ave another scare, compared with which the others were child's play. It was this way, look.

"The corpril was explainin' to Mr. Jannaway, who 'ad come out of his quarters in his pyjammers, that the men couldn't sleep in the minin' tent on account of the heat, and Jannaway was just beginning to talk sarcastic about a girls' school afraid o' the dark, when the sentry drops his rifle with a clatter that brings all our gallant 'earts into

our necks. His teeth were rattlin' in his 'ead like a boxful o' dice, you could have 'ung up your coat and 'at on his eyes, and he was pointin' to his front like a sign-post shook by the wind. At first we thought it was an applepetic fit, but after a bit we discovered that he was wishful for us to look at the jackstaff.

"The first glimmer o' dawn was whitenin' the eastern 'orizon, and there was just light enough for us to see an extr'ordin'ry phenomenon that made even a detachment o' Marines stare. There wasn't air enough to chill your wetted finger ; it was a dead tropical calm ; the great jack and its 'alliards lay alongside the staff as if they were glued to it. Yet all of a sudden the long fold of bunting stirred, and the double lines twanged against the pole like a plucked 'arpstring !

"Five seconds later the thing 'appened again, and then continued at perfectly reg'lar intervals. Not a soul, as far as we could see, was within ten yards of that bewitched spar. Yet one thing was quite plain. *Someone* was fingerin' the 'alliards before our very eyes !

"Presently Jannaway clears his throat.

“‘Am I goin’ stark starin’ mad like the rest o’ you,’ he asks ‘uskily, ‘or is there a bell ringin’ somewhere?’

“You might ‘ave stabbed the silence which followed with a baynit.

“‘There *is* a bell, sir,’ says one o’ the men at length, ‘a big bell a-tolling. I should judge it to be as far away as Batavia, or p’r’aps Plymouth,’ he says; ‘but in either case you may lay to it that it’s no earthly bell——’

“‘That’s enough,’ says Jannaway, stampin’ his foot. ‘I won’t ‘ave no more of it. Colour-sergeant,’ he says, ‘as soon as it’s daylight fall the men in for bathin’ parade. There’s nothin’ like a sea dip to steady the nerves.’ And with that he walks off into the middle o’ the island.

“The detachment strolled down to the water’s edge, while I, disbelievin’ in ghosts now that the daylight was comin’, sat down and lit my pipe. At first I watched the sunrise, and it seemed to me that the day was gettin’ up with a most disreputable black eye. Across the red, an’ green, an’ orange inflammation of the dawn was stuck a dark patch, that in the case of a pore soldier would

'ave got him confined to barricks for a fortnight. But after a bit my attention was attracted to Lootenant Jannaway, who was peerin' under a great ledge o' rock a couple of 'undred yards away. Presently he stood up, and beckoned to me.

"'Tell me what you see in there,' he says, when I reached him.

"'You ought to know,' I says, moppin' my face, after I'd looked into the 'ole; 'you've been starin' at it for the last five minutes.'

"'But I want to make sure, you insolent vagabone,' he says. 'Our nerves are all end-ways, and p'r'aps I've been mistook.'

"'Very well, then,' says I, 'it's a rusted round shot mixed up with a 'uman skeleton.'

"'I thought so,' he returns, with a sigh of relief. 'But since this island is a noo-born baby, in a manner o' speakin', it licks me 'ow them things come there.'

"'P'r'aps,' says I, after thinkin' 'ard for some moments, 'they were born with the bloomin' baby.'

"'You're a fool, Pagett,' says he, 'and you'd better go an' fall in with the rest.'

"Now, as I was carryin' my wounded

feelin's back to my comrades, it suddenly struck me that the dawn wasn't breakin' as quickly as it usually does in those latitoods. The black patch over the day's eye had covered the entire face of the eastern sky, and was spreadin' to the zenith faster than the daylight itself. It was plain, from the incessant twinklin', that a tropical thunderstorm was comin' up with the sun, and you may take my word for it that a bare rock in mid-ocean ain't the safest place to see one from.

"The detachment 'ad already undressed, and were bein' mustered by the colour-sergeant, so I slipped off my clothes and joined them.

"Before the muster was over, the mornin' 'ad grown much darker than the night had ever been, and the sky above us was like a great velvet pall with its borders trailin' in the sea. Long zigzag rents were torn in the pall about once every second, nor was there any interval in the 'orrible din o' the thunder. Luckily we escaped the rainfall, but we could 'ear it hiss'n' on the sea a mile away, like forty thousand locomotives blowin' off steam.

"As it was too dark to bathe, and too dangerous to go into the tent where the arms were, Jannaway fell us in two deep in rear of it. Before very long, 'owever, the eastern edge o' the pall began to lift, and a streak of crimson sky appeared beneath it. Then the streak widened ; orange showed above the red, primrose above the orange, till presently we could see the bright blue o' the zenith. The velvet pall had rolled away as quickly as it 'ad spread."

Mr. Pagett removed the pipe from his mouth and laid it upon the table.

"You've been in the tropics yourself, sir?" he observed, looking into the fire.

I nodded.

"Did you ever see one o' them lightnin' photograpths?"

"I've heard of them," I admitted cautiously. "It is said that they cannot yet be accounted for by science, though they are undoubtedly electrical."

"I saw one that mornin' on the island," he mused ; "the flash over the Tor just now 'minded me of it.

"The first thing we noticed after Jannaway

dismissed us, and we'd moved away from the tent, was the double line of our shadows still fixed upon the curtain, where it 'ad been thrown by the lightnin'."

"Yes," I admitted, "that was quite possible."

"Quite possible. But 'ow about this? The drummer, who was starin' at the phenomenon from the front o' the group, suddenly turns round.

"‘I thought,’ he squeaked, ‘that, countin’ Mr. Jannaway, we were thirty-three all told.’

"‘Then, for once in your sinful young life,’ says the corpril, ‘you thought right, my son.’

"‘Well,’ says the boy, edgin’ into the middle o’ the crowd, ‘ow do you account for there bein’ thirty-*four* shadows on the bloomin’ tent?’

"Nobody attempted to account for it; nobody even wanted to account for it. What everybody did want, 'owever, was to get off that cursed island without another minute's delay. Like one man the detachment turned and bolted for the pinnace in which we 'ad landed, and which was moored a few yards from the beach. It was the stampede of the previous afternoon over again, with the

diff'rence that this time me, an' the colour-sergeant, an' Jannaway were in it as well.

"We splashed through the water, shinned over the gunnel o' the big boat, got out the oars, and gave way like a crew possessed. But we'd barely put a hundred yards between us and the Blank File's shadow on the tent, before the sea began to bubble about the pinnace like water round an egg in a saucepan.

"'For the Lord's sake,' cries one o' the men, layin' on his oar, 'look at the bloomin' island!'

"Then we saw a most curious thing. The island was gradually growin' smaller—in other words, it was sinkin' before our eyes! Presently only the tops o' the tents and the jackstaff were visible above the water, and then only the Union Jack itself. When that 'omely bit o' buntin' 'ad gone too, the drummer burst out a-cryin'.

"'Any'ow,' says the corpril cheerily, 'that exarsperatin' Blank File's gone with it.'

"'Aye,' chimes in the 'Dismal Jimmy' of the detachment, 'but we shall be under stop-pages o' pay until them arms and accoutrements are made good. I said at the time,'

he continued, 'that it was no earthly bell a-tollin'——'

"'Take that man's name for disobedience of orders,' roars out Jannaway. 'Ow dare you make my flesh creep,' he says, 'when I 'aven't got a stitch o' clothin' on?'

"'There's the Dutch flagship in the offing just off the port beam, sir,' sings out another.

"'Then I 'ope to goodness,' says Jannaway, casting an anxious eye over the naked forms before him, 'that the adm'ral 'asn't brought no ladies with him to see the noo island!'

"An hour later we clambered one by one up the steep sides o' the Dutchman, and were served out with a pair o' baggy trousers apiece. If there were any ladies on board they must 'ave been sent below before we got alongside, and the orf'cers and men didn't matter. Mr. Jannaway told the adm'ral that we were pore castaways from a wrecked emigrant ship, and the adm'ral, with one eye cocked on me, said he'd had the pleasure of meetin' one at least of the pore emigrants before. Then, with a chronic twinkle in the same eye, he carried us back to Batavia, and put us on board our own ship.

"Before reportin' ourselves, 'owever, Mr. Jannaway addressed us in a few kind words.

"'If you mention that there Blank File,' he says, 'you will get the credit of bein' bigger liars than what you really are. Therefore,' he says, 'I shouldn't.'

"And you may lay to it that we didn't!"

From a battered Service ditty-box on the mantelpiece Mr. Pagett produced a crumpled half-sheet of notepaper.

"That inscription," said he, "was sent me by Lootenant Jannaway a year after we paid off. He copied it off an old brass in the tower of a church at Sandwich."

I refrained from commenting on the remarkable resemblance of the writing to Mr. Pagett's own cramped calligraphy, and read it aloud.

"Sacred to the Memory," it ran, "of Belti-shazzar Farwig, Private in the Marines, and sometime a Bellringer of this Church. Who died on the 29th Dec., 1770, on board His Majesty's ship *Endeavour* (commanded by the famous Navigator, Captain James Cook), and was buried at sea in Lat. 9° 13' S. and Long. 104° E."

"Wasn't it a most extr'ordin'ry thing," asked Mr. Pagett, regarding me out of the tail of his eye, "that the pore feller should 'ave come to the surface again on the middle of a volcanic island?"

"Most extraordinary!" I murmured.

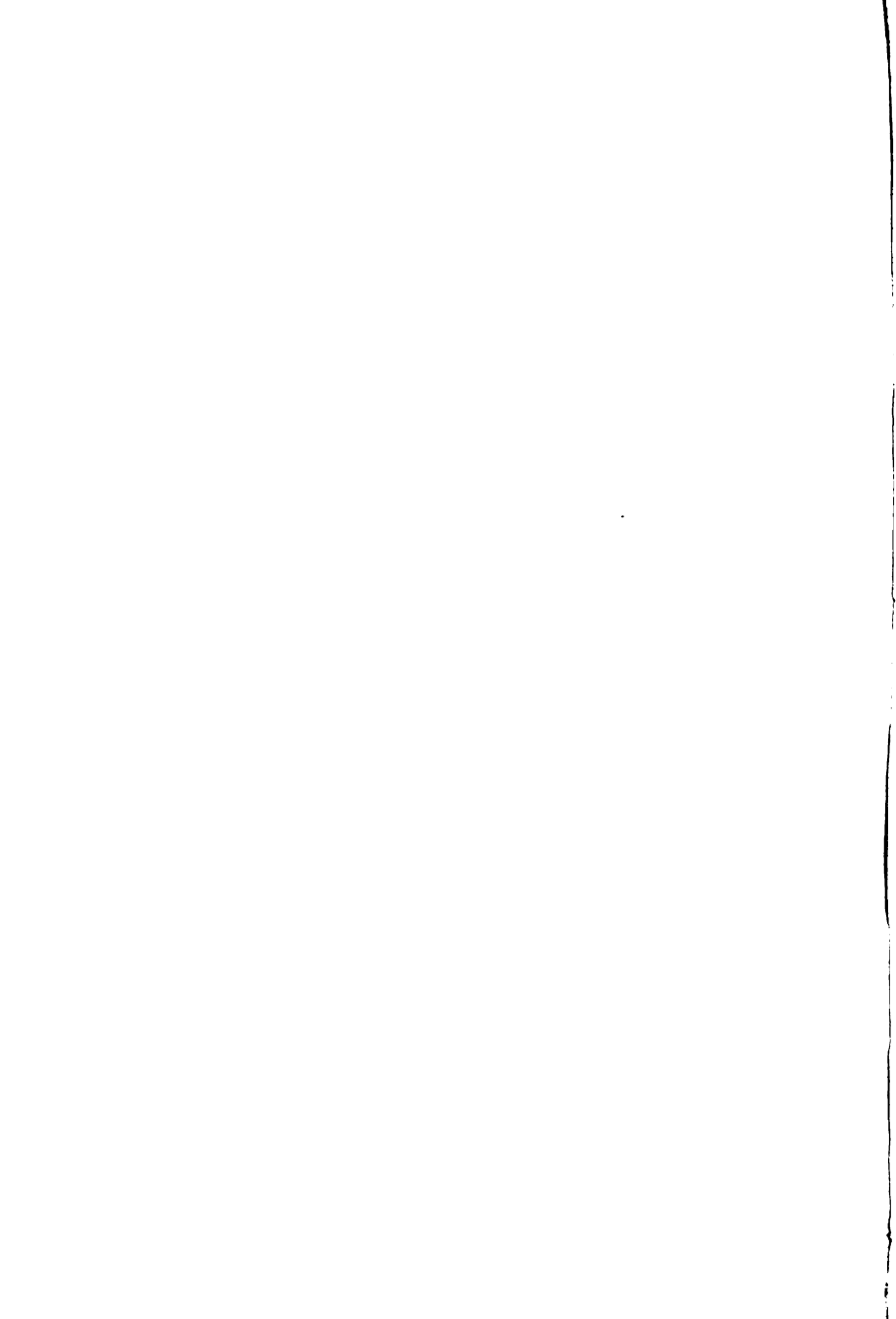
"And that, after all them years, he should 'ave drilled once more with his old regiment and been photographed with them by lightnin'?"

"I never heard anything like it before," said I.

"And that he should 'ave tolled that on-earthly bell to warn them that the island was goin' to sink?"

"Wonderful indeed! Yet to me, Mr. Pagett, the most wonderful thing of all is your own marvellous power of inven—of memory, I mean."

Mr. Pagett stared at me in pained surprise. "I was afraid," he said reproachfully, "that you were goin' to use another word. In which case, mister, me an' you would 'ave 'ad to part brassrags!"



AN AUDIENCE OF HIS MAJESTY

AN AUDIENCE OF HIS MAJESTY

CAPTAIN James Grandidier Fulljames, C.B., C.M.G., R.N., had won his spurs (or whatever their maritime equivalent may be) upon the tented field. His loyal substitution on that occasion of naval for military tactics eventually gained him the C.B., though it is perhaps to be regretted that the immediate result should have been the stampeding and wiping out of an entire naval brigade. His well-known invention for overcoming hitherto insuperable difficulties had already been suitably rewarded with a Companionship of the Most Noble Order of St. Michael and St. George. Yet it was certainly unfortunate that a ribbonless assistant engineer (now in Yarmouth Asylum) should have unhinged his mind by a succession of tropical nights spent in working out the specifications necessary to render the invention practicable.

With the exception of one extraordinary kink in an otherwise normal naval brain, Captain James Grandidier Fulljames (alphabet as before) differed in no essential feature from the other hundred and ninety-nine just persons on the post-captains' list. He invariably alluded to his command, with her thirteen-thousand-horse-power engines and her company of six hundred souls, by the comprehensive pronoun "I," and when cruising independently of the admiral deemed himself to rank junior only to the Omnipotent. Nevertheless, remembering how short a span is life, and how great a leveller Death, he would occasionally anticipate a democratic eternity by stooping from his splendid isolation to walk with wardroom clay upon the quarterdeck ; and once a month, by the mouth of the gentleman known in lower-deck circles as the *valley*, he would bid a trio of his officers sit with him at meat. In which connection (and in conclusion) it may be related how, on hoisting his pennant, he had publicly announced (with one eye on the first lieutenant, in whom he smelt an obstructionist) that anyone who failed to get on with his cook would have to leave his ship.

The monthly banquet was over, and the chaplain and chief engineer, their seafaring complexions accentuated by the final whisky and soda, had bowed themselves out of the Presence and descended, by the aft-deck ladder, to the wardroom and to that state of life to which it had pleased God to call them. The third guest, Shelmerdine, first and gunnery lieutenant and born obstructionist, having lingered behind to receive instructions for the morrow, the skipper had graciously motioned him back to his chair and commanded him to replenish his empty tumbler.

"Yes," said the great man, lighting another cigar, "there is plenty of sea room hereabouts; I shall expend the whole of the quarter's ammunition to-morrow, Shelmerdine. You had better see that the carpenter has the targets ready for dropping immediately after prayers."

"They're on the quarterdeck now, sir. By the way, will you fire the heavy guns in the morning or in the afternoon?"

Captain James Grandidier Fulljames, C.B., C.M.G., R.N., was at the time a thousand miles from the nearest naval port, and untrammelled by the presence of an admiral. Yet even

under these conditions he gracefully admitted the existence of a power greater than his own.

"It depends on the state of the sea and the weather. If it is blowing in the morning I shall fire them in the afternoon. But if it is blowing in the afternoon"—the autocrat gazed resignedly at the beams overhead—"I shall fire them in the morning."

The first lieutenant, seeing an opportunity for quibbling, cleared his throat preparatory to availing himself thereof. But, not liking the expression on the captain's face, he made pretence of a cough, and took a pull at his whisky and soda instead.

"I don't know whether you have forgotten, sir," he said at length, and with a glance at the captain out of the tail of his eye, "that tomorrow will be Thursday."

To a stranger the change wrought in his superior by this simple reminder would have appeared remarkable. The big, pompous, autocratic post-captain seemed of a sudden to shrivel into the most ordinary of mortals—a mortal, too, whose restless fingers, haggard features, and nervous, furtive glances round

the cabin proclaimed him to be under the spell of fear. But to the first lieutenant these symptoms, though incomprehensible, were familiar enough ; for, in common with the rest of the officers and ship's company, he had observed them every Thursday afternoon throughout the commission.

The most temperate of men ordinarily, the captain poured himself out and drank a measure of whisky that would have put the average seasoned toper completely off his balance. In his case, however, it merely served to steady his trembling hands and fix his rambling gaze upon a rare old print hanging on the bulkhead of his sleeping-cabin. Its subject was the fight between Apollyon and Christian.

"I *had* forgotten it, Shelmerdine," he said huskily. "Under no conditions will I have the men's 'make-and-mend-clothes' afternoon interfered with. You may take some of the watch for tube-cannon or machine-gun practice, if you like, but I'll have no heavier gun fired after the ship's company's dinner-hour to-morrow."

"Then I shall have to turn the hands out at daybreak. How early would it be con-

venient, sir, to send the carpenters and galley's crew to dismantle your cabin?"

"It is a good hour's job—you had better start them at it as soon as they have had their breakfast."

"Aye, aye, sir! I suppose—that is to say, of course, you would like the—the—glass to be reshipped immediately after the firing. I mean you wouldn't care to wait until the men have had their 'make-and-mend'?"

"Mr. Shelmerdine!" The captain rose from his chair, and sternly confronted his second in command. "If I did not know you to be an inveterate obstructionist, I should characterise your last remark as a piece of gross impertinence. You have served with me now for upwards of three years, and you know perfectly well that, fair weather or foul, *nothing has remained unshipped in this cabin on a Thursday afternoon*. You will please order the carpenter to have everything back in its place to-morrow by two p.m. at the latest. Good-night, er—Shelmerdine!"

It was not, on the face of it, very obvious why the services of half a dozen carpenters and a boat's crew should be necessary to dis-

mantle the captain's after cabin. It contained neither pictures nor bric-à-brac, nor were there apparently any fixtures to be wrecked by the tremendous concussion of the guns. Round the top of the three bulkheads and ship's side, which formed the four boundaries of the cabin, ran a series of brass rods; and from the rods, like the arras of a mediæval castle, and without a break, hung curtains of art serge. This scheme of decoration was part of the kink in the Grandidier-Jacobean brain to which I have already referred.

But a part of it only. For a proper understanding of the kink *in toto* it is necessary to recall an incident which occurred several years before the date of this story.

The sudden and very tragic death of Rear-Admiral Queripel-Uff, C.B., when Commander-in-Chief on the Cape Horn and south-west coast of America station, will be fresh in the recollection of many. Startling as was the mystery surrounding his end, it was assuredly of a piece with certain inexplicable passages of his life—passages of which only the faintest rumours occasionally reached the ear of the man in the street at home. For, able

administrator, brilliant tactician, accomplished gentleman as the Commander-in-Chief was universally admitted to be, it was an undeniable fact that in one respect no incurable in the Naval Asylum at Yarmouth could have been madder.

In a secluded part of the grounds at Admiralty House he had built a hut of peculiar design, a hut which contained neither windows nor skylight, but which was completely lined from floor to ceiling with mirrors. Into this retreat the admiral, during his long spells on shore, would lock himself, with unfailing regularity, from two o'clock to five every Thursday afternoon. To his household and staff he issued the most stringent injunctions respecting his privacy on those occasions. No matter how urgent the business might seem, the penalty for disturbing him would be instant dismissal. Instructions to the same effect were placed upon the sentries' order boards; the dockyard police were similarly advised; every reasonable precaution, in a word, was taken to ensure the sanctity of those mysterious Thursday afternoons.

Yet the very man to disregard the admiral's

wishes and disobey his orders was, in the end, his own flag-captain. There had arrived from England on the proscribed afternoon a cablegram of such grave political import that the junior deemed it to be unjustifiable any longer to humour the crank of his senior officer. Bursting through the (for once) unlocked door of the garden hut, he had seen—what?

On his recovery from the long spell of brain fever which followed, the flag-captain learned, through the medium of an indiscreet sick-berth attendant, that the admiral had been buried the day after the catastrophe, and that the hut had been razed to the ground. The admiral, recollected the patient, had been alive at the moment of the opening of the door. What, then, had caused his death? This, too, the patient presently remembered, and, remembering, promptly fell into a relapse, from which he was pulled, after a second long tale of delirious weeks, by the skin of his teeth only.

The name of the patient, of course, was James Grandidier Fulljames, and the kink in his brain, which furnished so fruitful a topic for discussion in the wardroom and lower-deck

messes of the cruiser under his command was, strangely enough, identical with that of the late Rear-Admiral Queripel-Uff, C.B. Behind the art serge curtains of his after cabin were four walls of mirrors, which differed only from those of the garden hut in that they were adapted to the exigencies of the sea by the provision of rubber cushions and by being designed to unship at short notice. Like his deceased patron, he would enter his room of mirrors every Thursday afternoon at two o'clock—gloomy and apprehensive, it is true, but none the less a moderately hale and robust seaman. And, like the dead admiral, he would stagger out at five, driven forth, apparently, by some unseen power against which he was wholly impotent, his post-captain's coat awry, his haggard face and shaking limbs giving colour to the sailors' fixed belief that their skipper spent his weekly "make-and-mend" in hell.

Very betimes on the morning after the dinner-party the carpenters and the galley's crew were sent by the first lieutenant to unship and stow face downwards between cotton waste, blankets, and sawdust the great

mirrors with which the captain's inner cabin was lined. It was a task to which the men had been accustomed for more than three years, and they had long ceased to speculate on the skipper's craze for looking-glass. Much as they may have done so in the past, much as they might still desire to fathom the weekly mystery in their midst, the fact remained that of the six hundred souls in the ship none save the skipper himself had penetrated the darkened cabin on a Thursday afternoon between the hours of two and five. The captain's orders were as imperative as the deceased admiral's had been, and were as loyally respected. On the very eve of paying off it was certain that the officers and ship's company understood the nature of the curse which lay upon their captain no whit more than they had understood it that first Thursday afternoon of the commission, when he had electrified them by his strange conduct and still stranger appearance.

Their work finished, the party left the cabin and proceeded to their respective stations for "General Quarters." The coxswain of the galley, as petty officer in charge, locked the

door, according to routine, and placed the key, bluejacket fashion and for greater safety, in the lining of his cap. Then he, too, went to his appointed place.

All that morning and forenoon the cruiser steamed continually and at ever-varying ranges round the dancing targets, belching flame and smoke and screaming projectiles, until there was no gun-jacket fore and aft the ship on which one could lay the bare hand without blistering it. And all the while—now high on the charthouse roof, surrounded by his satellites, and watching the targets through his glass, now testing the encircling hedge of voice-tubes in the armoured conning-tower—the captain clenched his teeth and dug his nails into his palms, bracing himself for the afternoon, and steeling his nerves for—he alone knew what.

It was one bell in the afternoon watch before the "Cease fire!" and "Return stores!" sounded and the coxswain of the galley was able to unlock the door of the after cabin. When, a few minutes later, his boat's crew and the carpenters arrived from their quarters to replace the mirrors, they found him thought-

fully scratching the back of his head and staring at the sawdust they had spilled that morning on the carpet-covered deck.

"P'raps some o' you blokes can put a name to it," he said, turning to the others; "I'm blessed if *I* can."

With their hands on their own bent knees or on their shipmates' shoulders, according to the point of view, the group peered intently at the spot indicated by the coxswain.

"Rats," hazarded one of the carpenter's crew at length, though without conviction.

The coxswain regarded him with pity.

"There ain't a bleeding rat in this part of the ship at midnight," he retorted, "let alone the forenoon watch. But supposin' for the sake of argyment it were a rat, then all I 'ave to say is as the perisher must 'ave been"—again he stooped to examine the sawdust—"nine feet 'igh by——"

A suggestion by the bow oar of the galley that the impressions might have been caused by the concussion of the nine-point-two overhead was received with ironical cheers.

"The next time you're in the report, Ginger, for makin' dirty fingermarks on the paintwork,"

grinned the wag of the party, "you'd better tell the first lieutenant they were the result o' firin' 'Barkin' Billy'! The one thing's quite as probable as the other."

"There's one thing, any'ow, as plain as the ugly nose upon your face," said the coxswain, using the singular number, but diplomatically embracing the entire party in the remark. "Something or"—here he lowered his voice—"maybe, someone 'as been 'oppin' about in the blessed cabin since I locked it up this mornin'."

"Whichever it was," observed another man thoughtfully, "it must 'ave 'ad the devil's own stride."

"Like the bloke in the picture yonder," added the coxswain, indicating the print in the sleeping-cabin. "It says underneath as he straddled right across the bloomin' road."

A shadow fell upon the party, and the captain stood before them. His eyes blazed out of a white, careworn face, his bloodless lips were pegged down at the corners, his fingers gripped his telescope as though it were a weapon on which his very life depended. How much of their conversation he had over-

heard no one could say, though, unless he had been stone deaf, it seemed improbable that he could have failed to catch the last two remarks at least. In a voice that sounded as strange to himself as to his hearers he rated them soundly for a pack of skulking, prying, gossiping Queen's-hard-bargains, and, bidding them finish their job and begone, he passed through their midst and locked himself into his sleeping-cabin.

Never again did they—or anyone else save one man—see Captain James Grandidier Full-james, C.B., C.M.G., R.N., alive.

* * * * *

At two o'clock the sentry on the cabin door betook himself to the foremost end of his post, the farther end, that is, from the door. Across the quarterdeck above, from rail to rail, was stretched a barrier rope, the signal that the captain's dark hour was on him, and no man might venture near. From the cruiser's nethermost depths, through the gratings of successive engine-room hatchways to the distant upper deck, went the sound of Titanic heartbeats and the occasional hiss of steam. Deep set under

each counter the twin screws throbbed and churned, while somewhere amidships a quicker pulse and ever-vibrating deck proclaimed the existence of the dynamo. At the close of the dinner-hour the hands, in accordance with the world-wide routine of the British Navy on Thursday afternoons, had been piped to "make and mend clothes," and, with the exception of the sentries and the watch on deck and in the engine-room, the ship was given over to slumber.

Five bells, six bells, seven bells were struck each succeeding half-hour by the sentry, and at eight bells the sentries and watch were relieved. Then, having stirred in her sleep, as it were, and as "Evening quarters!" would not sound off for another hour or more, the cruiser lay down again and snored.

One bell in the first dog! A brief half-hour and, whatever might happen elsewhere, the last of the long series of weekly mysteries in that particular ship would come to an end. Not a soul on board, from first lieutenant to gunroom cook's mate, but had cast about, and cudgelled his brains, and prayed the gods every Thursday afternoon during the past

three years for a pretext of sufficient gravity to warrant his disobeying the captain's orders and entering the after cabin between the hours of two and five. But in this respect, at all events, the gods had favoured the captain. No day of the week had been so uniformly eventless as Thursday, and now, though as far as ever from its solution, they had come to the conclusion of the whole matter.

The next time the bell struck they would watch their captain, as they had watched him at least a hundred and fifty times before, emerge from the after hatchway with disordered hair and dress and the expression of one who sees things over the rim of the horizon. They would behold him pacing the quarterdeck beyond the barrier rope—wildly at first, and with every symptom of extreme agitation; afterwards with the tripping, shuffling steps born of reaction and collapse. Late in the first watch he would return to the cabin, and before another Thursday dawned the ship would be paid off “all standing,” and her company scattered to the four winds with their three years' curiosity still ungratified.

“Fire in the fore magazine!” In an instant

the drowsy ship was galvanised into the most intense wakefulness. For in these days of high explosives and sensitively fused shell the occasion brooks not a moment's delay. Even before the fire bell began to clang out its brazen alarm there came a rush and patter of near a thousand bare feet, as the rudely awakened but perfectly disciplined men leaped to their appointed stations. As if by magic sentries with ball cartridge and fixed bayonets took possession of the boats on deck and the spirit-room below. Watertight doors banged to in the flats in obedience to the hooting of the foghorn along the maindeck overhead. Hatchway and skylight covers were lowered, ports and scuttles closed, branch pipes screwed home, hoses unreeled and joined up, and the pumps rigged and manned—some by seamen, others by the Royal Marines. But despite the general din—the clink of spanners, deck plates, hose nozzles and a hundred other metallic objects, the hoarse words of command, the shrill pipes, and the dominating clatter of the steam boat-hoist—the men themselves were silent. Their silence, however, was a deeper silence than that imposed by discipline. It

was the silence of men who stand in the chill shadow of death.

Long before the startling tocsin of the fire bell ceased, the thought flashed through Shelmerdine's brain that his opportunity had come at last. Even the possibility of a terrible disaster was forgotten in the certainty of solving at the eleventh hour the great riddle of their long commission. "In case of fire—the captain is—to be informed—immediately." The clapper continued to hammer the reminder into his head until the sentry ceased ringing, and by that time the first lieutenant was at the captain's cabin door.

What exactly happened will never be known. It may be as well, however, to state at once that the extraordinary occurrence which followed had no connection whatever with the fire. The origin of the latter was found upon investigation to be insignificant, and, the magazine being promptly flooded and all danger from that source consequently at an end, public curiosity was speedily diverted from the fore to the after portion of the ship.

Not until their ears are stopped by Death's fingers will the hearers entirely lose the echoes of those appalling screams which followed the lieutenant's entry into the captain's cabin. The first object which arrested their attention as they rushed aft was the sentry. He was staggering up and down his post like a drunken man, his hands clapped to his face, and moaning piteously. His statement, as far as it went, was perfectly coherent. Impelled by his three years' curiosity, he had peered after the first lieutenant through the door, which the latter had left ajar. Instantly, before he had had time to note anything within, a dazzling, scorching light had hurled him backwards along the deck with seared and aching eyeballs. The man was subsequently discovered to be stone blind.

Who shall explain the scene inside the cabin, a scene that can be attested to-day by a hundred witnesses at least? There is little enough to tell, God knows! An overturned table and chair. In one corner a crouching, cowering figure with its sleeve (it bore a lieutenant's stripes) before its face, and shrieking upon its Maker to be merciful and

intervene. In the centre by the fallen table, stretched upon his back, with staring eyes that seemed to be looking through the deck above into space, and having upon the forehead one of those faint but curious impressions that had been previously noticed on the sawdust—the captain of the cruiser, stiff in death. As if this scene were not sufficiently awe-inspiring and dreadful in itself, it was repeated, till lost in perspective, in the now curtainless and reflecting sides of the cabin ; and herein, perhaps, lay the not least strange feature of the whole occurrence.

For the great mirrors, with a hundred grotesque and fantastic markings, were cracked from corner to corner.

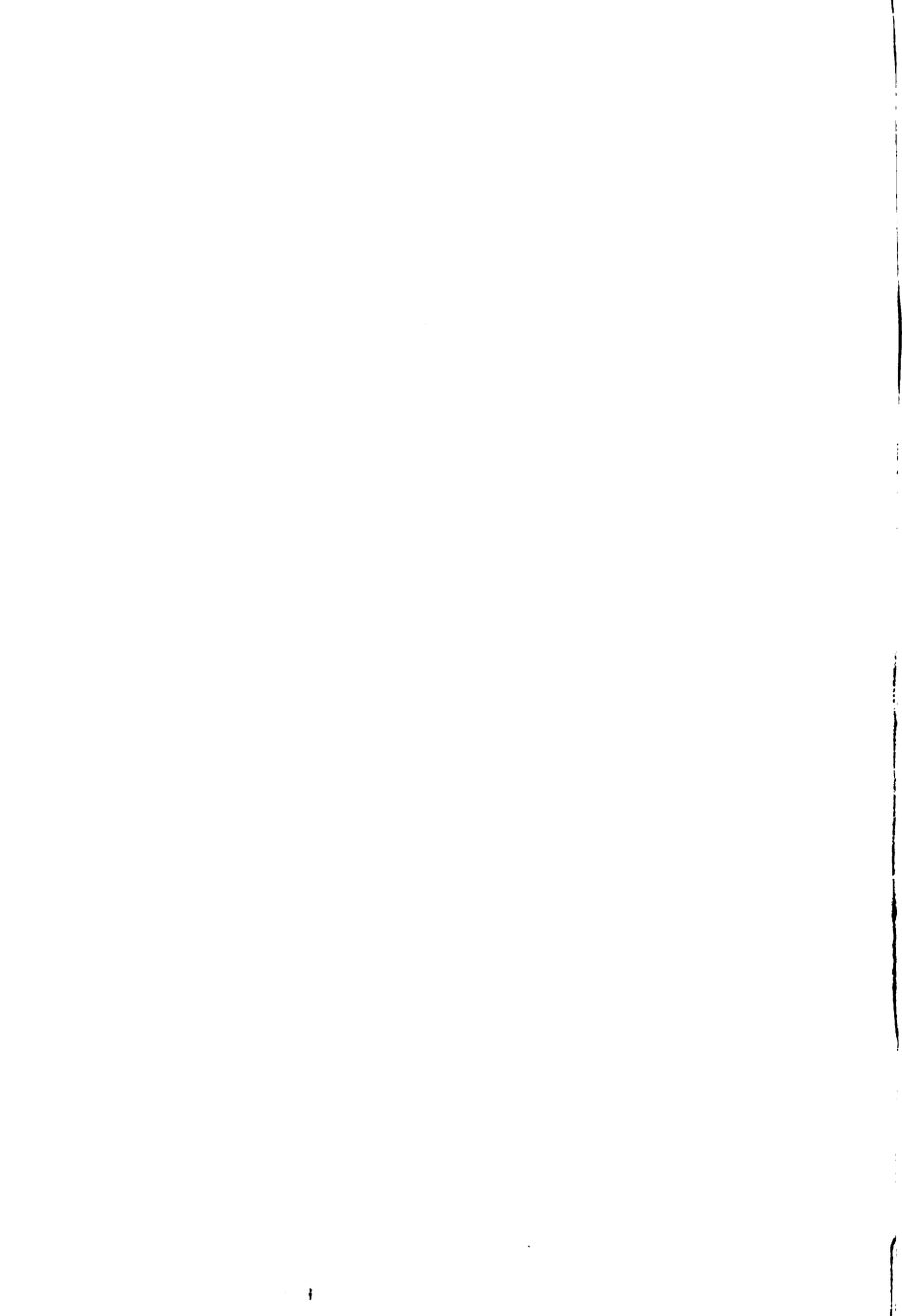
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Everyone who has visited an institution for the mentally afflicted has encountered one or more patients of whose insanity he has found it difficult to assure himself. In the Royal Naval Asylum at Yarmouth is an officer concerning whose alleged madness the very doctors (as I have reason to believe) are doubtful. For a hundred and sixty-five hours

of the week he is unquestionably as sane as the majority of mankind beyond the Asylum walls ; it is during the remaining three that the doubt creeps in. He has been permitted to furnish his room in his own way, a somewhat peculiar way that has led him to cover the walls from floor to ceiling with great plate-glass mirrors ; and into this crystal retreat he is in the habit of locking himself every Thursday afternoon at two o'clock, issuing thence at five in a state of complete prostration. It is worthy of remark (and this is why I think his story is not altogether regarded as a delusion by the doctors) that, although the patient has been some years in the Asylum, neither medical officer nor attendant has ever ventured near the mirrored room between the hours of two and five on a Thursday afternoon. The patient's story—his name, of course, is Shelmerdine—is that he is burdened with a very dreadful and lifelong curse, imposed upon him for having once gratified his curiosity at the cost of another man's life. Since the Asylum authorities are fully acquainted with the strange cases of Rear-Admiral Queripel-Uff and Captain Grandidier Fulljames, it is con-

ceivable that, though burning with curiosity concerning the weekly séances in their midst, no one is desirous of allaying it at the price of the patient's death and of becoming in consequence the fourth bearer of the curse.

It may be reasonably hoped, therefore, that with the natural death of the present victim (who is mercifully in an enfeebled state of health) the curse will work itself out, and that no other unhappy mortal will suffer the pains of hell by an enforced attendance at a weekly audience of "His Majesty."



CASSERBANKER THE SECOND

CASSERBANKER THE SECOND

MR. PAGETT, late private (and distinguished ornament) of the Royal Marine Light Infantry, leaned his arms on the top of the five-barred gate and moodily regarded the gang of convicts in the quarry below us. When the great are in contemplative vein it ill becomes the lesser ones of the earth to chatter, and I was careful not to disturb a silence that was intensified rather than broken by the cries of the moor fowl and the picks of the distant lawbreakers.

For deep thinkers (and certain railway companies) time still waits as it once did for Joshua in the past. The rest of the world had moved on twenty minutes ere Mr. Pagett shifted the position of his legs, cleared his throat, and jerked his thumb in the direction of the quarry.

"I suppose," he ruminated, "you don't

'appen to have any—acquaintances down yonder?"

I informed him that, as far as I knew, I could not lay claim to that distinction.

"I thought as much," he sniffed. "I can, though—as regards one of 'em, that is to say."

I expressed my concern that even one of Mr. Pagett's select circle of acquaintance should have been brought to such a pass, and inquired the nature of the misfortune which had occasioned it.

He dropped his chin upon the back of his hands.

"We've heard a lot lately," he returned, with gloom, "of the 'Andy Man o' the Navy. The pore devil in canvas knickerpants and a tea-cosy 'at somewhere down yonder, as I used to be acquainted with, was, in his own partic'lar line, the 'andiest man in the 'ole of the British Fleet. So 'andy was he, in fact, that, instead o' bein' by this time a eminent parish councillor and vicar's churchwarden (same as someone else I might mention, but am too modest to), he's nothing but a barrow-trundlin', mud-coloured, arrow-stamped Number, with no more identity than the fid o' ship's biscuit his

blessed back looks like. For the power an' the glory 'ave departed, and that there Ichabod o' the Prayer-book was a fool to him!"

"Everyone knows," I murmured vaguely, "that poor Ichabod was a fool. But what was the particular line in which your unfortunate friend excelled?"

"'Andwriting. Even when he couldn't on-derstand it he would imitate it like a bloomin' liter'y parrot, in a manner o' speakin', till the writer o' the original couldn't swear to his own work. He began by copyin' the commander's tally on to a liberty ticket, and ended by signing the adm'ral's to a cheque. His pen played him false that time, 'owever, since when—as the advertisement says—he's used no other."

Mr. Pagett glanced significantly in the direction of the quarry.

"He did a lot o' fancy writin', though, before he fell foul o' the law; and I could tell you a many—there's the Casserbanker story, f'rinstance. You'll mind who Casserbanker was, of course?"

"If it were not for the seeming irrelevance," I slowly hazarded, "I should say you were

referring to the immortal boy who stood on the burn——”

“Then you’d say right—though I fail to see where the irrev’rence comes in,” growled Mr. Pagett defiantly. “’Owever, that’s neither here nor there. What I’m goin’ to tell you is the story of Casserbanker the Second.”

He clambered to the top of the gate and seated himself where his chin had rested a moment before. After much ostentatious fumbling in his pockets he expressed the conviction that “it” had been left at home on the grand pyanner; but, the omission being repaired in the usual way by the loan of *my* pouch—which, equally as usual, he retained in his possession until reminded of the fact at our parting—he lit his pipe and continued.

“One afternoon at the time o’ the last Russian scare but seven—the big one in the middle ’eighties, I mean—I was at sea in the China squadron, and the squadron was in a fog you could ’ave carved chunks out of with a cutlass. So thick was it that, during my trick on the lifebuoy (which was right aft on the quarter-deck), I could ’ardly make out the cocked-up muzzles of the after barbette guns, while the

maintopmast was completely lost in the great rollin' cloud o' vapour. The ships were shriekin' and moanin' their numbers to each other on their sirens, like giant souls adrift in 'Ades, and every 'arf-hour the flagship boomed out her whereabouts at the top o' the line with a blank charge from a six-pounder gun.

"If I were a bishop instead of a vicar's churchwarden I should appoint a 'prayer for sea room in thick weather' to be used on such occasions, though—the age o' miracles bein' past—it might not have inspired much confidence that partic'lar afternoon. The injins were movin' dead slow, both leadsmen were in the chains, and all the navigatin' talent in the ship was bickerin' on the chart'ouse roof. For no one could prick off our position on the chart, and, in addition to the chance of collision, there was every likeli'ood of our rammin' the Russian Tartary coast, towards which we were headin'.

"Men in a tight place nat'rally look to their commandin' orf'cer to pull them through. But, when I tell you ours was no other than Rear-Adm'ral Telfer-Bagge, you will onderstand that we might 'ave looked with equal

confidence to the gilded figger'ead on the bows of his flagship. For, although upon the quarterdeck he deemed himself to rank 'with—but after' the Almighty, every cook's mate in the fleet knew him for the maddest seaman outside Yarmouth Asylum, which is sayin' a good deal. And this reputation, as you may recollect, he sustained to his dyin' day. For he was the same Bagge who, afterwards in Madagascar, had himself rigged with wings and fired from a torpedo toober in the fightin'-top, in order that he might cut out the French adm'ral on a political mission to Antananarivo. In doin' which he broke his silly neck.

"When, therefore, the flagship's guns presently signalled 'stop injins' and 'prepare to anchor instantly,' the stoker off watch standin' next to me said he would be struck dead if Telfer-Bagge wasn't takin' the fleet into 'ell. Two minutes later he added that he would even go to the extreme length of bettin' sixpence on it. For, when the splash o' the adm'ral's great bower had been followed by the splashin' of eleven other anchors and by the tearin', raspin' rattle o' chain-cable through a dozen hawsepipes, there rose out o' the fog

all round us a fiendish din as terrifyin' as it was unexpected. It was made up of on-familiar drum beats an' bugle calls, of clangin' church bells, and the 'um of a startled town. Then the fog lifted, and oh, my sainted aunt in tights! we knew that Telfer-Bagge had blundered a British fleet in scare time bang into the middle of the Russian port of Vladivostock!

"The panic of the garrison at our sudden appearance 'minded me of a handful o' steel chips dropped into a nest o' soldier ants. With our glasses we could see the troops runnin' up against each other as they manned the forts, and bein' kicked by their orf'cers in the right direction and into a proper state o' zeal for their chilly and godforsaken country. Sema-phores were jerkin' gibberish that utterly defeated our signalmen, and flagwaggers on bastion corners sent silly messages to each other what even I, who'd been through the Aldershot course, couldn't make 'ead or tail of. One by one the great guns o' the forts were brought to bear on the fleet, and Telfer-Bagge, who maybe was not such a fool as we thought, cleared the ships for action, and

trained his guns on the forts. But though we knew by the last mail that relations between our respectful Gover'nments were strained almost to breakin' point, neither side was certain whether war 'ad actooally been declared. And neither side, it seemed, was wishful for to bring it about by firin' the first shot.

"As soon as the anchor 'ad been let go I had left the lifebuoy accordin' to routine (bein' no longer wanted there), fetched my rifle and baynit from below, and gone on to the fore bridge, which was my usual post in 'arbour. But soon after I got there the buglers sounded off 'Action!' and I was just about to shift again to my station at the nine-point-seven when a quartermaster runs up the bridge-ladder and gives a letter to the captain. What boat brought it alongside, or why it come to us instead of to the flagship, I know no more than the blessed sabbath-breaker in the moon. But I do know that the skipper 'ad no sooner read it than he dropped it like a red-'ot penny, and roared to the bo'sun's mate to pipe 'Abandon ship!'

"Only persons like me an' you, what have served in men-o'-war, can imagine the din that

followed. The pipin' and cryin' of the order along the decks, the rush of the guns' crews to man the falls of the smaller boats and the guys of the big ones, the deafenin' rattle of the steam hoist, the clatter of stores dragged up ladders and flung upon the upper deck, the shoutin' of orf'cers and petty orf'cers, the echoin' squeaks o' the midshipmen, the barkin' o' the first lieutenant, and, above all the rest, the yellin' of the commander to the master-at-arms to take the name of that son of a rotten-faced onion who'd put his dirty fingers on the paintwork.

"But if we are noisier than is allowed in some navies, it's the noise of good 'omely langwidge, not the gibber of seagoin' apes; and the partic'lar job in 'and is always finished 'while you wait,' as the sayin' goes. In ten minutes each boat had her lamps and compass aboard, her spare gear and tools, her water an' provisions, her full complement of orf'cers and men, and was pullin' towards the adm'ral like a all-comers' race at a regatta. Every mother's son (excep' one 'umble 'ero) had obeyed that panickin' pipe and abandoned Her Majesty's ship to the dreadful fate

which, by that time, was known to threaten her."

Mr. Pagett gazed abstractedly at the convicts, who were being marshalled by warders for the nightly shuffle back to prison.

"And the exception?" I presently murmured, realising what was expected of me.

"When the boats were a couple of 'undred yards or so from the ship," he resumed, "the major of Marines suddenly sings out from the pinnacle that he must go back, as the most valuable man in the 'ole of his detachment had been left be'ind. The skipper, not knowin' who the absentee was, very nat'rally replied from his galley that he would not 'ave the lives of seventy 'ighly trained soldiers risked for the sake of one. But when, in common with all the ship's comp'ny, he saw who it was, he covered his face with his 'ands and burst into tears.

"For there, 'igh up on the fore bridge, his buttons, 'elmet spike, and baynit glistenin' like gold an' silver in the sunshine which 'ad dispelled the fog, was the brave fellow that everyone, fore and aft, loved. He was walkin' his post, as laid down on his order board, 'in a

smart and soldierlike manner,' and a signalman with a glass reported that the 'ero's face was as 'appy as though he was listenin' to the chapling on a Sunday mornin'. Yet none knew better than him the dreadful danger he was in. For he'd picked up the letter the skipper had dropped on the bridge, and which turned out to be a message scribbled in pencil by the British consul ashore. 'Your ship,' it ran, 'is anchored right atop o' the Russian mine field, though the rest o' the fleet is clear. The authorities have wired St. Petersburg to know whether war is declared. If answer is in the affirmative, they will press button and blow you all to 'Alifax.' Yet, in spite of knowin' this, in spite of the tears an' entreaties of orf'cers and ship's comp'ny combined, that lion-'earted soldier refused to leave the deck, same as Casserbanker refused in the poet laureate's well-known Christmas 'ymn."

"But the deck," I feebly objected, "wasn't burning."

Mr. Pagett regarded me with a cold stare of disfavour.

"It was worse," he retorted witheringly, "for at any moment there might 'ave been

no deck at all beneath his pore bloomin' feet. Nat'rally you're burstin' to know his tally. But, like all true 'eroes, he's a very modest man, and I'm sure he would prefer to remain anonycognito."

I expressed my resolve to discover his identity nevertheless at the Admiralty or War Office.

"Then you won't succeed," said Mr. Pagett, with conviction, "since they've no mem'ry for mere Marines and their deeds at either insti-tootion. But I mustn't forget to mention that there is one other brave man in the story besides the gallant 'ero who wishes to be nameless. The other was an ordin'ry seaman, port stroke oar of the second cutter, and a great admirer of mine—of the noble Casser-banker on the bridge, I should have said.

"‘I can't abear it no longer,' he cries, tossin' his oar, and layin' it fore and aft. ‘It's a sweet and gorgeous thing, as Shakespeare says, to be blowed up for one's country, but it's a lonesome death without a pal to 'old one's 'and.' With which he jumps overboard in his white workin' rig, and swims to the starboard gangway.

“In vain did the 'ero on the bridge implore the brave sailor to go back and leave him to his dreadful fate—in vain did he shout that the deck was already rumblin' beneath his pore feet. A few minutes later his galant shipmate was beside him, shakin' sea water all over him like a big St. Laburnum dog.

“Now, the pipe 'Abandon ship!' and the panic-stricken rush of orf'cers and men to the boats had given the rest of the squadron a paralytic stroke, in a manner o' speakin'. Everyone stopped dead in the middle of his partic'lar job, in order to see what was 'appenin', and even the Russian soldiers 'alted without a word of command. Though no one understood exactly what it meant, all knew that the ship must be in some special danger; and when the two 'umble 'eroes were seen facin' that danger 'and in 'and, a deafenin' cheer rose to 'eaven from comrades and enemies alike.

“But—I blush to say it—there was one man out of all those applaudin' thousands who so far forgot hissself as to use words what a Medway bargee would 'ave shuddered at—and

that man was Rear-Adm'ral Telfer-Bagge. The thermometer was eighty-seven in the shade, yet he was stampin' up and down his after bridge as though he'd got frost-bitten toes, and his arms were workin' like those of the semaphore above him. The latter were repeatin' his orders—with the tropical words left out, and the orders were that the cheerin' should stop instantly, that the boats should return more instantly, and that the captain should repair on board the flagship most instantly of all.

“What Telfer-Bagge said to him I never knew, though I afterwards asked the adm'ral's cabin-door sentry—a thoroughly trustworthy man, who could hear further through a bulk-head than most people. But there was no difficulty at all in hearin' what the skipper said to me and the ordin'ry seaman on his return, for it must 'ave been audible in the farthest Russian fort.

“As soon as he comes over the side he has us both on the quarterdeck, and we not onnat'rally supposed that Telfer-Bagge had sent us at least five pounds apiece as an

earnest of bigger rewards to come. But we hadn't allowed for the strange kink in every adm'ral's mind. The number was right enough, but it was five days' cells Bagge had ordered the skipper to give us, not sovereigns—five to me for not obeyin' the pipe, and five to the seaman for leavin' his blessed boat without permission.

“And while two 'umble 'eroes were drinkin' the cold water of affliction, Bagge himself drank champagne wine with the Gov'nor of Vladivostock. For, as you are aware, there was no war between Great Britain an' Russia after all.”

From the outset of Mr. Pagett's very moving narrative I had been vaguely awaiting a certain passage which I knew would prove familiar. But it came not, and the voice of the storyteller had ceased, and his chin again rested upon the topmost bar of the gate, ere the expurgated portion flashed across my mind. It was comprised in a fragment of conversation I had accidentally overheard some months before in the smoking-room of the Royal Naval College, Greenwich,

and, though incomprehensible enough to me at the time, it now threw much light on the case of that cruelly misunderstood hero, Casabianca the Second.

I was sitting one morning, in the interval between two lectures, behind one of the massive columns which support the fine vaulted roof, when the doors swung open, and a couple of post-captains entered. The room being apparently empty, the great men (Heaven knows there are none greater—save admirals—beneath it) fell to badinage in a way that would have seriously jeopardised my future had I been discovered. Wherefore I took thought for the morrow, and breathed discreetly.

“Thank goodness,” said one, falling limply into an armchair, “we’ve come to the end of those infernal ‘stink’ lectures at last! Pumped-out bilge is fragrance compared with what we’ve produced this morning. Ring the bell, Conky, and let’s have a split, for Heaven’s sake!”

From his position on the hearthrug the other reached out and pressed the button. “I once knew a man,” he observed cheer-

fully, "who got typhoid from practical chemistry. He died. Why didn't you take up physics instead, like me?"

"If we are going to 'International Law' at seven bells," said the first, hastily changing the subject, "we shall have to make an evolution of those drinks. It's ten to already, and we've got to fetch over to King William block. A split whisky and soda, waiter, and look alive with it!"

"You used to fancy yourself a bit at evolutions, eh, Nobby?"

Nobby complacently admitted that he had had reason to. "At shifting a topsail yard," he added, "I could wipe the eye of any first lieutenant in the Service. It was sheer downright genius."

"The genius I've always recognised; it was the evolution I seem to have been wrong about."

"How do you mean?"

"I thought it was 'Abandon ship!'"

Nobby slowly drew a cigarette from his case and lit it.

"My dear Conky," said he, throwing the match into the fire, "do not be commonplace.

I have been reminded of that regrettable incident by at least forty thousand persons—mostly fools, as Carlyle would say—since its unfortunate occurrence. I was ‘had,’ I frankly admit. But I’m not the first man who has been let in by a clever forger, nor shall I be the last; and the forger in my case was clever enough to have been Beelzebub’s private secretary. Anyway, here come the drinks. Chin chin, and more originality to you!”

“Thanks, old man; but that way court-martial lies. Well, here’s to the conventional ‘bloody war and sickly season,’ and may the gods ever love flag officers! By the way, you must have had an average *mauvais quart d’heure* with Telfer-Bagge after the er—regrettable incident?”

“Damned rude I thought him, though I believe I forgot to tell him so at the time. However, I smiled a good deal a few months later when the old gentleman was eased of fifty pounds by the same son of Belial who had got me into the soup. There was a sort of poetic justice about it, which appealed to me strongly.”

“Very strongly, no doubt. But what licks

me is where the rascal got his originals from. He couldn't forge without them; yet ordinary seamen don't as a rule correspond with consuls and rear-admirals, do they?"

"He had them, nevertheless. When his ditty-box was searched after the discovery of the forged cheque it was literally bursting with old envelopes and scraps of torn-up letters from half the leading people on the station."

"How in the name of Fortune did he get hold of them?"

Nobby finished his whisky and soda, and rose from the chair.

"My dear fellow," he said, "you probably share with me my profound (though judiciously concealed) admiration for the Corps of Royal Marines; yet I would cheerfully get into full dress this moment to see a certain member of it hanged. When I tell you that he was one of my cabin-door sentries during that summer cruise, and that he and that forging son of Ham were as thick as thieves, you will dimly perceive how it was that my waste-paper basket overflowed into the forger's ditty-box."

Loud and long was the laughter of Conky, the suddenly enlightened. "I ask you," he

cried—appealing to the furniture apparently—
“to look at it! A post-captain, whose leg
had been pulled before a British squadron and
the Russian Empire by an ordinary seaman
and a private of Marines! Good Lord! Why,
the whole business was a put-up job between
them!”

Nobby flicked his cigarette ash into the grate. “Conky,” said he, “you’d be a perfect godsend to the Intelligence Department—your grasp of the obvious is so extraordinary. By the way, I owe the Department that one, for it was the intelligence officer of the flagship (another Marine I have a grievance against) who told the admiral I was anchored at least six cables from the mine field.”

He gathered up his notebooks from the table on which he had flung them.

“My only consolation,” he continued, moving towards the door, “is that one of the pair of rascals is still doing time for forgery.”

“And the other?”

“The other,” returned Nobby with gloom, “was eventually discharged to pension without a scratch on his defaulter sheet, with badges up to the elbow, and wearing the good-conduct

medal. But," he added vindictively, "I still hope for the best!"

Conky paused with his hand on the door.

"In my last junk," he mused, "I had a red-coated pirate who might have been twin brother to that paragon of yours. He was an irreproachable soldier, the parson's leading hand, and the biggest liar in a ship that was packed fore and aft with them."

"What was his tally?"

"Pigott? Pockett? Packer? The name's on the tip of my tongue—anyhow, it began with a P, I'll swear. Oh, of course! How the deuce did I ever forget it? It was——"

The door swung to, and the name died in a murmur along the corridor.

I glanced sorrowfully at the vicar's churchwarden beside me. His face was the face of a philanthropist, and he had just finished stuffing the remainder of my "Gold Flake" into a crevice in the wall.

"They'll be coming back from work soon," he explained, indicating the marshalled gang in the quarry, "and he's always the left 'and man of the rear section of fours. Many's the

plug o' my baccy he's fingered out of that little 'ole by the gate. This isn't the first time by a lot that I've denied myself for the sake of a pal in trouble."

He slipped my empty pouch into his pocket.

"If you have quite done with it——" I murmured.

"Oh! I beg pardon, I'm sure—I was thinking of that pore fellow in the tea-cosy 'at and——"

"By-the-bye," I interrupted, "you haven't yet told me what connection he has with the story."

"I misremember sayin' he ever 'ad none," retorted Mr. Pagett ambiguously.

**CONCERNING
A TREATY WITH FRANCE**



CONCERNING A TREATY WITH FRANCE

PART I.

I DOUBT if even the eternal afternoon of the Lotus Eaters could have been mellow, or drowsier, or altogether more peaceful than that of the 6th of September, 1898, at Candia, in the romantic island of Crete.

The heat haze of a Mediterranean autumn hung over land and water, blurring the rim of the sapphire sea upon the north, wrapping in mystery the purple loom of the Sleeping Turk Mountain in the south, and softening the spikiness of the minaret-studded city itself. Never had a day dawned with more roseate promise or waxed to high noon in more golden assurance of fulfilment. Yet rarely has one

waned and died more dreadfully than this same Bloody Tuesday of the Cretan "September Massacres."

At half-past one, or thereabouts, a piquet of British Highlanders under a subaltern swung unsuspectingly along the sea road from their camp upon the city wall to the watergate which gives upon the quay. The Great Powers, in their collective wisdom, had appointed that hour for the gathering of a tax, a tax that commended itself even less than most imposts to the picturesque and highly emotional people on whom it was levied. So strongly, indeed, did the Bashi-Bazouks feel in the matter that every mother's son of them to the number of twenty or thirty thousand had for days past, and for the purpose of backing his opinion, hugged beneath his rags a gun and a six-inch knife. To ensure the courteous treatment of the taxgatherers by these malcontents, the Powers had despatched a boy with a claymore, a revolver, and a handful of foot-soldiers in trews; and very cross the Powers were next morning at breakfast to learn that the boy, with certain of his men, had been killed at the watergate,

that the remainder had been scattered like leaves before an equinoctial gale, and that six hundred men, women and children of the Christian faith lay stark in the blazing streets.

Other things the Powers presently learned, to wit, the dastardly attack upon the hospital and the penning of the British garrison into an angle of the bastion wall. Then they were angry, and one or two at least, so 'twas whispered, conscience-stricken as well. The needle clicked with righteous indignation in half a dozen Foreign Offices and Admiralties, and the troops and cruisers of as many Christian nations were set in motion towards that smoking shambles in the shadow of the sleeping Turk.

In due course they reached it, the first arrival being, as was only fitting under the circumstances, a British battleship. On the morning of the Bloody Tuesday's morrow a hundred of her redcoats struggled through the raging surf to reinforce their hard-pressed Highland comrades on the wall; and by the end of the week this gallant nucleus had grown into a cosmopolitan army such as had probably never before been brought together within the

confines of one camp. Hard on the heels of the British Marines came their scarcely less famous namesakes of France. Northumberland, Irish, and Welsh Fusiliers from the neighbouring garrisons of Egypt, taciturn sailors from Russia, brisk *bersaglieri* from Italy, tatterdemalions from Turkey—all (except the last-mentioned, who were already on the spot and were credited with more than half the trouble) came flocking with a kaleidoscopic medley of uniforms and a babel of hoarse commands to the international camp upon the wall at Candia.

During the monotonous weeks which elapsed between the assembling of this punitive force and the hangings upon the great gallows which signalled its dispersal, many acquaintances were made and no few friendships formed between comrades of alien races. And of these friendships none, perhaps, was more incongruous at the outset, yet more enduring in its continuance or more solemn in its termination, than that between Lieutenant Allingham-Foote of the Royal Marine Light Infantry, and Sous-Lieutenant Loiserolles, of the *Infanterie de Marine*.

Who can say what strange magnetic influence attracted the pair—till now so widely sundered—towards each other? By heredity, in a family as well as in a national sense, they should have been sworn foes; for—so they learned in one of their early conversations—their grandsires had fallen, the one within, the other without, a British square at Quatre Bras. In creed, political and religious, they were at variance; for, although being boys—their united ages scarce compassing that of a man in his prime—they were not given to the discussion of such matters, each was secretly convinced of the other's heresy. On the more pressing (though less dangerous) questions of art and sport they were equally out of sympathy; for while the British Philistine's ridicule of French impressionism filled the disciple of that school with sorrow, the latter's scheme for the reformation of "socket" drove his shuddering friend to the borders of profanity. It was a question of sport, nevertheless, which first brought them into contact and laid the foundation of the strange alliance I am about to chronicle.

As each of the international detachments arrived, its officers were invited to become

honorary members of the British (and only existing) mess ; and in the matter of language the Feast of Pentecost itself could scarcely have been more cosmopolitan than the nightly dinner at Candia.

One evening the conversation of the Englishmen happened to turn upon their chances of being at Epsom for the next great national event, and Loiserolles, who sat near them, grew interested in the debate.

"But where, then, monsieur," he at length inquired of his neighbour, "is this Epsom?"

The officer appealed to was a naval lieutenant of the school that regards all foreigners as "niggers." Being loftily ignorant, however, of every "nigger" tongue in Europe, he was in the habit of addressing a French count (when he met one) in the same pidgin English with which he bullyragged a Chinese coolie ; and it was an axiom of his that the densest alien could be made to comprehend, provided only one shouted loudly enough.

"Ma tante Maria !" he bawled, aghast at the Frenchman's ignorance ; "you no savvy number one piecee English festa? You no savvy Derby horse race, Johnnie?"

"*Hélas, monsieur !*" returned the other smilingly, "I have the misfortune not to understand your language."

Before Aunt Maria's nephew had finished shrugging his shoulders—an action which fully persuaded him that he had been speaking French—another Englishman quietly leaned across the table and fluently answered his vis-à-vis' question in the latter's own tongue.

Loiserolles bowed.

"I am exceedingly obliged to you," he said courteously. "You must forgive the stupidity of a foreigner in forgetting that your great race is run on Epsom Downs, and not at Derby, as its name would seem to suggest. Thank you for setting me right."

The sailor twisted round in his chair and stared at him in resentful surprise.

"You told me," he said severely, "that you did not understand our language!"

"Pardon me, monsieur," returned the Frenchman, still smiling; "*your* language, I believe I said."

Thus began the brief, yet lifelong, friendship between the two boys, for the speaker in French was Allingham-Foote, passed inter-

preter, and commanding officer of the British Marines at Candia. In the anteroom after dinner Loiserolles elbowed his way through the crowd to compliment the Englishman on his accent and mastery of idiom.

The other laughed pleasantly.

"My dear fellow," said he, "although foreign languages may not be the strong point of our Service, I assure you that the majority of us do get beyond pidgin English."

"But few arrive as far as monsieur. One would say that he was more than half a Frenchman."

Allingham-Foote stiffened into the "correct position of a soldier." "Then I am afraid, monsieur," he said, a trifle coldly, "that one would pay me an undeserved honour, though it is true that most of my childhood was spent in your country. But you? You must have lived at least half your life in England to speak the language as you do."

"Alas!" Loiserolles sighed, "I have never yet crossed La Manche. But my mother was American, so that Anglo-Saxon is literally my mother tongue, you see. Thanks, I have a match; shall we sit down?"

Before the mess closed that evening with the usual clanking and jingling of Europe's departing warriors, England and France, unsuspected by Downing Street or the Quai d'Orsay, had settled the Cretan Question to their entire mutual satisfaction. In the corner where the two had established themselves they had disposed of questions more complex even than that, smoking innumerable cigarettes the while, and setting their forefingers on weak spots in the government of the universe with the cocksureness of healthy youth. The descent from the universal to the personal was effected between the lighting and blowing out of a match. For the universe was left to take care of itself after the discovery that Loiserolles was descended from that gallant old noble—immortalised by Carlyle—who, hoodwinking his gaolers, went to the guillotine in his son's stead, and that one of Allingham-Foote's forbears had been decorated by the Emperor for saving the life of a French officer in the Crimea. The fact of both belonging to the same famous corps of their respective services was no doubt another link of sympathy between them. But I think that the mainspring

of the friendship formed that night lay in the strange coincidence that each was sprung from a line of gallant soldiers whose motto had been "Pro Patria," and that they themselves were alone in the world, the last of their respective races.

The following day Sous-Lieutenant Loise-rolles paid a little visit of ceremony to the officer commanding the British Marines in Candia, and half an hour later, in compliance with the inexorable demands of international etiquette, the call was returned with equal formality by Lieutenant Allingham-Foote. It is true that their united commands fell short of a hundred and seventy souls. Yet each considered this punctilious exchange of compliments due no less to himself than to the great nation he represented, and, the duty discharged, all stiffness between them vanished.

The French camp adjoined the British, and the visits (with the ceremony omitted) were repeated daily. The barrier of language, which restricted the majority of the allies to posturing and the baldest of commonplaces, had no existence for the two Marines; and as

the weeks wore on the friendship between them strengthened and grew apace.

On a certain evening towards the end of the month and of their sojourn in Candia the pair strolled out from the mess hut for a quiet after-dinner smoke upon the bastion edge. Low in the western heavens hung a brilliant three-quarters moon, lining the plain before them with long shadows of windmills, and giving the cemetery wall the appearance of a square ruled on grey paper in Chinese white and ink. On the right the sea, so turbulent by day at this period of the year, was sobbing itself, like a fractious child, to sleep. In the dim distance, cheek by jowl with the moon, rose the classic peak of Ida, while nearer at hand upon the left, outlined on the southern sky, and with its inscrutable face turned towards the zenith, lay the everlasting hill of the Sleeping Turk.

For some time they smoked in silence, the one sucking thoughtfully at a pipe that apparently would not draw, the other puffing dreamily at a cigarette that demanded constant relighting. For the spell of the night was upon them, with its mystery of mountain and

sea ; perhaps, also—who knows?—the spell of another Night, which the moonlight is powerless to illumine, yet whose morrow is endless Day.

Allingham-Foote was the first to speak.

“The worst of the business is over now,” he mused, “and I may be recalled to the ship any day. Well, for some reasons I shall be jolly glad ; for others—one, at all events—I shall, on the contrary, be—— Loiserolles, old man”—he impulsively held out his hand—“we have been good pals, you and I, haven’t we?”

The Frenchman glanced involuntarily at the long line of lights which marked the position of the international squadron in the roadstead.

“The very best,” he returned huskily, gripping the other’s fingers. “I, too, am daily expecting my marching orders—to Canea first ; afterwards—who knows to what distant corner of the globe ? It will be a strange coincidence, *mon ami*, if you and I ever cross each other’s path again.”

The pipe still refusing to draw, its owner spent several moments in probing it with a hairpin he sentimentally kept for that purpose.

"The odds are a thousand to one against it," he admitted, his efforts being crowned at length with indifferent success. "Of course, in the event of war between your country and mine the chances of our meeting might be greater. Even then they would be remote."

Loiserolles lit another cigarette. "So much the better," he returned gravely, "for, good comrades though we are now, our duty in such a deplorable case would require us to be equally good enemies. And neither a Loiserolles nor an Allingham-Foote," he added proudly, "would fail in his duty to his country."

The last remark seemed to the Englishman too obvious to need verbal assent, and several moments elapsed before he spoke again.

"I wonder," he said presently, "what one's sensations would be if in the course of an action one were about to kill a pal on the other side. I mean, which feeling would be uppermost—affection for an old comrade, or love of country, with its consequent hatred of her enemies?"

"Or, to push a highly improbable case a

stage further," rejoined Loiserolles, "one might speculate on the *post-mortem* sentiments of the one killed."

"Speculate—yes. Know—in life, at all events—never."

"I am not so sure of that."

The low, deliberate tones of the speaker caused Allingham-Foote to look up with sudden curiosity. The careless, light-hearted young French officer, to whom his heart had warmed, was gazing dreamily over the plain towards the mountains on the south-western horizon; but even in the fast waning moonlight it was evident that his vision was not bounded by the everlasting hills. Beyond those hills lay the sea, beyond the sea—Africa. . . . What was that whitewashed building, so silent, so deserted, in the glare of an African noon? Whose was that shadow on the verandah, the inexorable shadow creeping towards the window with the broken jalousie? . . .

His friend laid his hand on his shoulder. "Well," he admitted half jestingly, "there *are*, no doubt, more things in heaven and earth—you know the quotation, Loiserolles. Come now, let us make a treaty, you and I—the

Anglo-French Treaty of Sleeping Turk Hill, we might call it—something on these lines.” He smoked thoughtfully for some seconds. “Yes. In the event of either of us dying under the improbable circumstances I suggested, he shall return in the spirit to the survivor, as a guarantee that he recognises the exigencies of duty and that he bears his slayer no ill will.”

But Loiserolles slowly shook his head. He was still looking towards the distant mountains, and the cigarette between his lips had gone out.

“I possess what you call in Scotland the ‘gift of second sight,’” he said, “and though I cannot foresee the precise manner of our death, I have a premonition that neither of us will fall in action. Nevertheless, we will have our treaty. Our profession will carry us far asunder and into remote corners of the earth. But wherever, and in whatever form, death may overtake us, of this I am certain, that each of us will strive to make a good end for the honour of his country. Therefore let him who goes first tell the other how he died, so that the survivor,

when his turn comes, may be strengthened by the memory of his friend's example."

"Similar compacts have been made before now," mused Allingham-Foote, knocking the ashes from his pipe, "and in many instances have been carried out. The treaty—who knows?—may not be as chimerical as it appears, and—anyhow, there's my hand on it, Loiserolles."

The Frenchman flung his cigarette over the bastion edge.

"And mine," he said, with a grip like a steel vice; and in the same moment the last gleam of the moon's rim sank behind Ida.

PART II.

Towards the end of September, 1900, a weatherworn, sea-battered tramp steamer rolled dejectedly at her single anchor in the ground swell off Sierra Leone. From her ensign staff drooped the tricolour of France, from her main truck her ragged, smoke-grimed house flag, while the finishing touch to her general appearance of abandonment was supplied by the wisp of yellow bunting which trailed from the fore. Having called at the infected port of St. Louis, the capital of Senegal, the unhappy tramp was now paying for her indiscretion by eating out her heart in the dreary isolation of quarantine.

Besides the captain's wife and child she carried but one passenger, an Englishman of extraordinarily interesting personality. Some twelve years earlier Justican Occleshaw, of Guy's, had qualified with such a string of diplomas that more than one eminent surgeon had endeavoured to dissuade him from his

purpose of entering the naval medical service. The Navy, they insisted, was far too restricted a field for a man of his peculiar energy and talents, a man who might reasonably hope one day to make a name in the arena of research. The laboratory, not a gunboat's sick bay, should be the goal of his ambition, they urged—with much more to the same effect. But to all these counsels of the elders the young man turned an ear deafer than that of old age. The sea was calling to him, and who can listen to aught else when that call, now raised in imperious command, now sunk to an alluring whisper, haunts him day and night?

But although he never wavered in his allegiance to the sea itself, the Service he entered, with its soul-harrying routine and its (from his point of view) tape-strangled, obsolete methods, at first saddened, then sickened him. The death of a distant relative, however, made him unexpectedly a wealthy, independent man. In the West Indies he had devoted himself to the study of tropical diseases; and on quitting the Navy with a gratuity after eight years' service he continued with renewed zest to prosecute his

researches. It was in a Marseilles hospital, where he was observing certain interesting cases, that he heard of the fearful epidemic of yellow fever in the French colony of Senegal. With the greatest difficulty—the Messageries Maritimes having temporarily ceased to call on that coast—he obtained a passage in a tramp bound for St. Louis; and he had now reached Sierra Leone with a largely increased experience of the subject nearest his heart and with material for another of those remarkable monographs which were rapidly establishing his reputation.

In Occleshaw's case the annoyance of quarantine was considerably aggravated by the presence, within a few cables, of a British gunboat. Now, whatever may have been his views on Admiralty methods, the ex-naval surgeon had a warm corner in his heart for old comrades; and the yearning was strong upon him to sit once more in the smoking circle and listen to the familiar Service jargon. For many weeks, too, he had been completely cut off from civilisation and all news of the outer world, and a glimpse of the gunboat's newly arrived mail bags

filled him with the pangs of Tantalus. What wonder, then, that ten minutes after pratique had been granted by the health officer, and the irritating yellow flag had been hauled down, Justican Occleshaw stepped from the tramp's disreputable dinghy on to the bleached and brass-bound accommodation ladder of the British man-of-war?

He was received, as he had well known he would be, with the open-handed hospitality for which the Royal Navy is renowned. The captain placed a spare sleeping-bunk at his disposal; the quintet in the wardroom made him an honorary member of their mess; the surgeon—who felt himself shine with a reflected light from this rising sun of his profession—talked shop with him and lent him the latest *Lancet*. Everyone, in a word, was anxious to do honour to a late brother officer to whom it was becoming the fashion to refer as the “eminent specialist.”

They were amply repaid. At first, it is true, their guest listened and they did all the talking. But after dinner, when they were settled in deck-chairs under the poop awning, and the orange moon of the tropics seemed

to be rising like a gigantic fire-balloon from the heart of the dark continent, it was they who listened while the guest talked. And presently he told them a curious story.

It appeared that on reaching St. Louis he had found the colony—as a hurriedly departing colonel of *Tirailleurs* had informed him—*en pleine épidémie*. In Dakar, Gorée and Rufisque not a single European remained, all who had not died of it having fled from the yellow terror. From St. Louis itself the white exodus was in full swing, though in consequence of the non-arrival of the big Messageries boats the panic-stricken rush of men, women and children was greatly hindered, and many were mowed down by the relentless scythe before they could escape. By means, however, of the half-dozen tramps and coasters which chanced to be in the port (and by payment, doubtless, of exorbitant passage money) even this thinned-out crowd of survivors presently melted away.

With the exception of a forlorn and decimated company of *Tirailleurs*, the garrison, too, had vanished. The majority of those splendid colonial troops, the Marine Infantry,

had been sent home to France, the remainder being distributed in the interior, far from the infected centres. The *Spahis* and the "Guides," with loaded carbines, were cantoned in an isolated camp in the country. Not a soldier was to be seen, not a bugle-call to be heard in the streets and barrack yards of the mourning city; the military glory of St. Louis, like its trade, had departed.

"So at least it seemed to me," continued the narrator, "as I stood in the middle of the deserted Government Square, itself the very centre of the pest-ridden district. The intense glare of dust and whitewash under the midday sun was intermittently toned by clouds of drifting smoke; for at every street corner, piled high with dead men's effects, great bonfires roared and crackled from morning to night. A couple of native carriers with a closely shut litter hurried across the square; the poor mean hearse of a non-commissioned officer of *Tirailleurs* ambled past on its way to the cemetery: everything was suggestive of desolation, terror, and death.

"Yet St. Louis was not the unredeemed Ichabod it seemed to be; the military glory

of France had not all departed. There before me, in the very heart of the stricken and abandoned city, lay an example of heroism and devotion to duty that was little short of sublime.

“One of the sides of Government Square at St. Louis is formed by a large whitewashed barrack, which, as long as it stands, will possess an unenviable notoriety. For here it was that the great yellow fever epidemic originated, three unfortunate soldiers dying on the first day, and a fortnight before my arrival the building had been evacuated by the troops and closed. But while I was thinking how the drooping *jalousie* of one of the windows accentuated its general forlornness, a native orderly hurriedly descended the verandah steps, and I crossed the square to meet him.

“‘Are these barracks, then, reoccupied?’ I asked in French.

“‘*Mais oui, monsieur,*’ he returned, with blanched features, ‘by one man and—the Black Vomit!’

“Five minutes later the great, *jalousie*-darkened rooms and corridors of the empty

building were filled with the echoes of my footsteps, of the footsteps, too—a more imaginative man might have sworn—of men dead and buried a fortnight before.

“It was in a corner of the room with the broken jalousie that I found him—alone and, as was plain at the first glance, already beyond human aid. From the presence of certain remedies and from other signs I gathered that he had been medically treated in an earlier stage of the disease; but, so rapid is the march of events where the Yellow King holds sway, it was more than probable that the doctor had preceded his patient to the grave. The boy—he could have been no more than one- or two-and-twenty—had been left by the terror-stricken attendant to fight the dreadful battle single-handed; and who can say what agony he had suffered—this lad so far from home and on the very threshold of life—as the lonely, stifling hours dragged on, and the grip of the loathsome enemy tightened about his waist?

“After carrying out the few simple measures that were possible for the relief and comfort of the patient, I sat down by the bedside

with notebook and thermometer to watch the case and wait for the inevitable end. From the uniform tumbled about the room, a uniform with which I had been familiar in the streets of Marseilles and Toulon, I knew that the dying boy was a sous-lieutenant in the Marine Infantry ; and I afterwards learnt that he had volunteered to command the last of the troops left in the town—a fever-weakened company of *Tirailleurs*—and that he was the one white officer of that great garrison who had stuck to his deadly post. On a table near the bed lay his open journal, the last entry in which had been made the previous day ; and, knowing that the volume must be subsequently burnt with the remainder of his effects, I hastily made a few extracts to send to his friends in France. I have them with me here, and, since there is nothing in them of a private nature, I will, if you care to hear it, read you one.”

No need to ask the little audience on the gunboat's poop whether they cared to hear it ! As the tale had proceeded every face had been turned towards the speaker, and more than one pipe had been suffered to go

unlighted lest even the striking of a match should break the spell of the story. When Occleshaw produced from his breast-pocket a worn and bulky note-book, someone picked up the Colomb's lantern from the deck, and held it over his shoulder.

The guest thanked him. "The original," he continued, turning over the leaves of the pocket-book, "was, of course, in French. This—ah! here it is—is a translation :—

"'St. Louis, 20th August, 1900. The implacable foe is absolute master, and one lives in the midst of confusion, mourning and death. I have now been over a fortnight in the very centre of the pestilence, and fortunately have so far escaped. But one must not boast! For some months to come Lower Senegal must continue to be the prey of the deadly microbes.

"'To-day the Government cabled us all to come home. But, by an oversight doubtless, they have forgotten to send us the means of transport! In the deserted streets a week ago I met Antoine, weak and terribly shaken after his late attack. He was to go home by the following day's Messagerie. "Only a

few more hours in this inferno!" he whispered gleefully, as we shook hands. I shall always remember those last words of his. Alas! the Messageries have deserted us, and—I have just returned from Antoine's funeral in the vast cemetery, where colonel and private alike have no other tomb than a mound and a piece of board.

" 'Here, then, in the heart of the silent town, I am going to stay till the end—probably, that is to say, till death. The thought of death, however, even in the form of the black vomit, does not trouble me. I am not bragging; I am really proud to remain at this post, and should like to thank the General for giving it to me. I have set my affairs in order; there is nothing more for me to do but to wait the issue of events.'

"I have other extracts here," added Occleshaw, "but the one I have read will show you the manner of soldier France presently lost in this sous-lieutenant of Marines.

"The sweltering, tainted afternoon wore on, and the shadows of the tall buildings on the far side of Government Square lengthened until they began to creep up the barrack

wall beneath the window with the drooping jalousie. In spite of my profession, in spite of the absorbing interest of the case I was watching, the emptiness of the vast building got upon my nerves, and the fancy grew in my brain that there was another shadow advancing along the verandah wall, a shadow cast by no building, the inexorable shadow of death.

"So keenly were my faculties employed in following the progress of the disease that even now I can scarcely bring myself to believe that I really fell asleep. At the utmost my doze could not have lasted more than a couple of minutes. Yet how otherwise could a third person have entered and crossed that huge bare room without my knowledge? The door was twenty yards away, the floor uncarpeted. Nevertheless, through the mosquito curtains I suddenly saw, sitting on the opposite side of the bed, the figure of an English soldier."

As Occleshaw paused abruptly the silence, except for the gentle lapping of the water under the gunboat's counter, was intense.

"I have been some years out of the Service," he went on a moment later, "and I cannot

remember. Tell me, do our Marines ever wear red in the tropics?"

So utterly unexpected was the question that several seconds elapsed before it received an answer. It came at last from the skipper.

"Never to my knowledge," he said. "In this climate a man would sweat a red coat purple before he'd had it on five minutes."

"As this one had—for it was a subaltern of the British Marines who, knowingly or not, had walked straight into the jaws of death. For some reason best known to himself he wore his red serge, and—so bathed in perspiration was he in consequence—his jacket was completely darkened and discoloured by it. Never in all my experience have I seen a man drip with sweat as he did; had he been overboard he could hardly have been wetter. Who was he, I began to wonder, and what was an English officer doing at that awful time in Senegal?"

"A moment later he had passed completely from my mind, for the patient was now happily come to an end of his sufferings, and lay *in articulo mortis*. The odds against which the yellow fever patient has to struggle are in-

deed tremendous, and perhaps no one could appreciate better than I the gallant fight for existence the dying boy had made. He still rambled feebly, his delusion being, I remember, that he was watching from a high wall somewhere near the sea the revolving sails of wind-mills on a moonlit plain below ; but he was rapidly sinking into the merciful anæsthesia which is so often the immediate forerunner of death.

“And then, for a few brief moments, he rallied. Every word he had hitherto uttered—Heaven alone knows how many they were!—had been in his native tongue. To me, therefore, who had listened the livelong afternoon to the shoutings of delirium in a foreign language, it seemed like a gleam of sunset after a stormy day when he suddenly began to speak in coherent and fluent English.

“‘Comrade,’ he said, and there was a tinge of reproach in his voice, ‘I had not forgotten our treaty—the treaty of Sleeping Turk Hill. I was coming. If you had waited—but a few minutes longer—I would have been with you.’

"So clear and deliberate were the words that, had it not been for their utter inconsequence, I should have said that his reason had returned in the last few moments of life. I did not hear the other's answer, it is true. Yet he must have whispered something that was audible to the dying lad, for the latter, with increased difficulty, presently spoke again.

" 'You, too, have done well, my friend,' he gasped. 'But it is hard to die so soon. There were things I wished to do. Ah! yes' (he smiled feebly), 'to reform your "socker" was one. As it is—for a few hours, perhaps, England and France will be proud of Allingham - Foote and Henri Loiserolles. *Eh bien! Je suis fatigué, mon camarade. Allons!*'

"And so he died, the knuckles of his outstretched hand falling with a pathetic rattle on the seat of the empty chair. For, when I peered through the mosquito curtains into the suddenly gathered shadows of the tropical twilight, I saw that his comrade, too, had gone."

It was remarkable that all six smokers should have been in difficulties with their pipes. Yet it was doubtless a sufficient reason for the general silence which prevailed—a silence which was eventually broken by the story-teller himself.

“I was specially glad to see you fellows in here,” he said, “because I wanted to ask a question. There was no ship of ours’ at St. Louis or, as far as I could learn, at any other port in Senegal. How, then, came a subaltern of British Marines to be in the French colony—at the height, too, of the worst yellow fever epidemic in its history?”

The skipper slowly knocked the ashes from his pipe into the brass spitkid.

“Are you sure,” he asked curiously, “about that double tally the poor devil mentioned?”

“‘Allingham-Foote’? Perfectly. The voice was very weak, it is true, but as distinct as mine is now. Besides, I had never in my life heard the name before.”

The other beckoned to the quartermaster of the watch, who was standing by the break of the poop.

“Jump down into my cabin,” he said, “and

bring me up the last mail's *Times*, which you will find on the table."

In a few minutes the petty officer returned, and the skipper handed the paper to Occleshaw.

"Read that," he said gravely, indicating a certain paragraph with his finger. "I think it may help to answer your question."

By the light of the lantern Occleshaw read as follows :—

"The Secretary of the Admiralty regrets to state that a telegram has been received from the captain of H.M.S. *Cornwall*, reporting that on the 21st of August, while on passage from Queenstown to Halifax, No. Chatham 2304 Private John Sixsmith, Royal Marines, was washed overboard when sentry on the lifebuoy. In spite of the tremendously heavy sea which was running, and which rendered the lowering of a boat impossible, Lieutenant Allingham-Foote of the same corps jumped overboard to his rescue. Both officer and man were drowned."

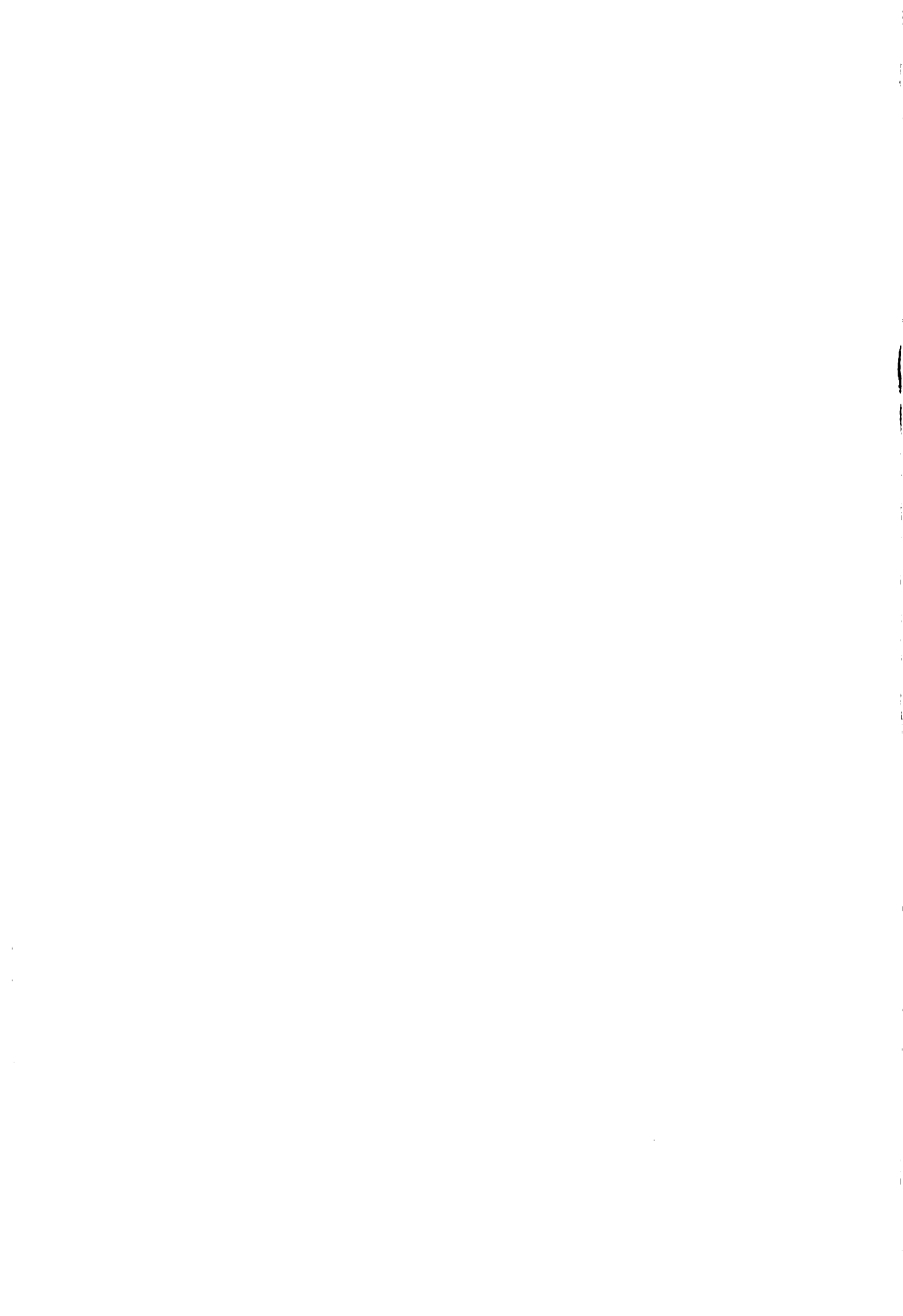
Occleshaw carefully refolded the paper and returned it to its owner.

"The 21st of August was the date of my story."

For some minutes the silence was unbroken. Then the skipper spoke.

"I am glad," he said huskily, "that England kept the treaty."

**THE STRANGER WITHIN THE
GATES**



THE STRANGER WITHIN THE GATES

DESPITE the painful experience of Georgie Washington's emulator after his confession of the apple pilfering, it may be laid down as a general axiom that truthfulness in the long run is no less profitable than moral. Nevertheless there are exceptions. To speak the truth when asked is deemed by many the chiefest of the virtues. To volunteer it is at times the greatest of the follies. Hear, then, and learn wisdom from the foolishness of the stranger who lay for a season within our gates.

On a certain winter's evening in a late year of grace four men were sitting in London chambers over their after-dinner wine. They were, all four, English gentlemen—a fact that a suddenly ushered-in visitor would doubtless have been surprised to learn. For, although two were clad conventionally enough in the

"faultless" evening dress so dear to lady novelists, the attire of their companions—from the Grundian point of view—left much to be desired. It was, in short, no less (or more) than the field service kit of a couple of Zulu warriors. Even those of us who do not know from actual experience what that is can form a fairly accurate conception of what it isn't.

So pleasantly warm was the room that the pair in civilised garb had already begun to show signs of somnolence. The masqueraders, on the other hand, were shivering beneath their tiger-skin karosses. One of them, you may be interested to learn, was a lieutenant in the Royal Navy and a torpedo enthusiast of the deepest dye. He has since been improved (on the strength of his scientific knowledge and for the good of his country) into a commander, and is now the greatest authority of his rank on carriage varnish and polishing paste. In view of what follows I really think he would prefer my not mentioning his name.

"Well," he was saying, "I must admit that I *am* beginning to weaken on it a bit. It's a piece of tomfoolery that'll land us all in a deuce of a hole—you see if it doesn't! Charity or

no charity"—he dropped his half-smoked cigarette into his empty coffee-cup—"there's no getting away from the fact that it's obtaining money under false pretences."

His brother chief across the table shivered afresh at this gloomy presentment of the case, and drew his kaross closer about his shoulders. When clothed and in his right mind he practised the calling of captain in the Royal Marines; and, whereas he has since attained to the dignity of a field officer in the British Army, it would seem desirable that he also should remain anonymous.

"Perhaps," he suggested moodily, "our learned friend and host can tell us whether it comes 'within the meaning of the Act.'"

The learned friend—one of the pair in evening dress—instantly rose to his feet. Thrusting his left hand beneath his coat-tails, he slowly waved his pince-nez to and fro before him with his right.

"M'lud and gentlemen of the jury," he began, "the point upon which my gallant friend is desirous of taking counsel's opinion is, I am bound to admit, a most pertinent one. Does the pious fraud to which we stand com-

mitted come within the cognizance of the law? The Jesuits teach us, gentlemen, that evil may be done to compass good; but in this respect, alas! I find the spiritual and temporal authorities at issue. We cannot blink our eyes to the fact that in the event of detection—though with such histrionic talent as yours, gentlemen, I do not apprehend it—the maximum penalty is——”

“‘To sit in solemn silence in the dull dark dock
Of a pestilential prison with a lifelong lock,’”

hummed the fourth member of the party from the piano, whither he had moved during his host’s bantering speech. The grimace that he made over his shoulder set even the unhappy Zulus laughing.

Now when I tell you that the speaker has lately “taken silk,” and that the singer is to-day a public entertainer at the very top of his profession, you will perceive the propriety on my part of reticence in the matter of patronymics. I shall therefore in future refer to the four conspirators as the Soldier, the Sailor, the Jester, and the Junior Bar respectively.

Presently, in the middle of a brilliant im-

promptu, the Jester swung round on the music-stool, and faced the silent trio at the table.

"I don't quite tumble," he said. "Is the Duchess herself 'in the know'?"

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed the Junior Bar fervently. "Her Presbyterian grace is the last woman in the world to appreciate the humour of the situation. If you fellows give the show away to-night, another door to the woolsack will be slammed in my face."

"Working your promotion, eh?" laughed the Sailor, to whom the method was not entirely unknown. "By-the-bye, what was it she wanted you to do?"

From the notes and invitation cards stuck in the mirror above the fireplace the Junior Bar picked out one with a small coronet stamped on the top left-hand corner.

"I'll read you her letter," he said. "'Dear Mr. So-and-so, I am getting up a bazaar and entertainment at the Town Hall in aid of local charities, and I want *you* to help me by giving what I believe is termed a *side show*. The Vicar has kindly consented to exhibit his "wonders of the microscope" in the office of the borough waterworks engineer, while in the

Mayor's parlour the Duke will show a *thrilling* series of cinematographs of the Upper House during a debate on the Artisans' Dwellings Bill. It would be quite *too* charming if, at intervals during the evening, you would give some of your *clever* conjuring performances in the council chamber. *Do* be a saint, and help the cause of charity.'"

He tossed the note into the fire.

"Of course," observed the Soldier, "you promised to fill the saintly rôle. No one, I am certain, could do it better."

"Of course," rejoined the Junior Bar serenely. "But last night I went down to the Aquarium to see the Zulus, and there I fell among thieves, who——"

"The Royal Marine Light Infantry, the Royal Navy, and a humble Society clown," explained the Jester, with cheerfulness.

"Who robbed me of my native caution, and filled my brain with this midsummer madness instead."

"Say we did it!" retorted the indignant Soldier.

"I do," said the Junior Bar promptly. "You three and 'John Jamieson' between you. If

you"—he levelled a judicial finger at the pair of masqueraders—"hadn't told me that you had seen hundreds of Zulus on the Cape station, I should never have thought of the thing. Besides," he added in an aggrieved tone, "you were all as keen on it last night as I was."

"That was the 'John Jamieson,'" said the Soldier, with conviction.

"Then before clearing out," laughed the other, unlocking the *tantalus* on the sideboard, "we'll have a hair of the dog that bit us! We can't possibly back out of the business now," he continued, as he poured the golden fluid into the four tumblers. "On the strength of last night's agreement I wired the first thing this morning to the Duchess. "Cancel conjuring tricks," I said. "Have arranged with management Aquarium to bring down two Zulu warriors."

The simultaneous groan of the wretched understudies was interrupted by the entrance of a messenger.

"The keb is at the door, gen'lemen," he said.

* * * * *

That happy suburb-village, which enjoyed the patronage of the charitable Duchess, lay at no great distance from the arch-conspirator's quarter of the town. The first ten minutes of the journey thither were accomplished in a sheltering four-wheeler; the remaining five-and-thirty in a specially reserved compartment of the London and Provincial Railway. These secretive measures (which had been insisted on by the two unhappy principals) were fully justified during the brief interval of publicity entailed by the transit between the two vehicles. For the platform crowd, jumping to the conclusion that the long-ulstered, slouch-hatted pair were a couple of southern anarchists in the hands of the detectives, yelled unprintable epithets at them through the window until the time of departure. It must be admitted, however, that in the matter of repartee a long familiarity with the ocean gave the suspects an overwhelming advantage.

The growing irritation of the latter (which a winning rubber of whist in the train had gone far to allay) broke out afresh on the arrival of the party at their destination. So upset, indeed, were the gallant officers by the bazaar

posters on the station walls, that considerable diplomacy was necessary on the part of the Junior Bar and Jester to entice them into her grace's carriage, which was waiting in the yard. Nor did the drive to the Town Hall tend to reassure the conscience-stricken impostors, who sat throughout the journey each with a dusky nose flattened against his window-pane. For every blank wall blazed with the scarlet tidings of their advent, while every hoarding bore an injunction to the public not to forget it. Even the private entrance at which they alighted had its flame-lettered board propped against the doorpost.

"My Christian aunt!" exclaimed the exasperated Sailor, "that makes the tenth! I counted nine of the rotters out of the starboard window as we came along."

"This ruddy town," drawled the Soldier responsively, as he tripped over his assegai, "seems to think that a Zulu is a kind of glorified Ham on tin wheels. It's enough to make one spit blood!"

"Good evening; *so* good of you to come." The honorary secretary of the bazaar was shaking hands effusively with the Jester and

the Junior Bar. "The dear Duchess will be *so* relieved to hear you have arrived. The place is simply packed; but not a soul will be persuaded to buy anything, or look at the Duke's cinematographs, or even attend the Vicar's charming 'talks on the microscope.'"

"Dear me!" murmured the Jester politely, "how very extraordinary! What on earth did they pay their sixpences for?"

"My dear sir, solely to see these splendid specimens of untutored savagery." He placed his hand patronisingly on the Sailor's shoulder, who indignantly shook it off. "They have been clamouring for the Zulus for the last half-hour, and the sooner we can introduce our coloured friends to them the better. Otherwise," he added anxiously, "there will be trouble."

"That puts the hat on it," said the Soldier, with conviction. "Dim my eyes if I stop another blessed minute!"

"Why, the man speaks er—idiomatic English!" exclaimed the shocked secretary.

"Like a parrot," snapped the Junior Bar vindictively, as he headed the would-be deserter off the door. "My dear sir, the poor creatures' aptitude for picking up bad language

is marvellous. Their English, for the most part, is absolutely unfit for publication. Ah, good evening, Duchess; I have kept my promise, you see."

After her grace had finished gushing over the "dear Zulus" (who looked savage enough during the process to satisfy the most blood-thirsty audience), the quartette were hastily conducted behind a curtained platform in the council chamber. The room beyond was in a perfect uproar, and even the Junior Bar began to wonder what would happen if his little hoax should be discovered. A piano had been hired for the occasion, and it was hurriedly decided that by its means the Jester should first endeavour to soothe the audience into a better frame of mind.

He was accompanied before the curtain by the Junior Bar, who unblushingly introduced him as the greatest exponent in Europe of primitive African music. Whereupon the unabashed Jester held the house spellbound for the next ten minutes with a marvellous improvisation of minor arpeggios and chords, which he called the Zulu national anthem; and amid the vociferous applause at its close the

Junior Bar again bowed himself on to the platform.

Everyone, said he, who had read the thrilling romances of Mr. Rider Haggard—and who had not?—was familiar with the valour and other sterling qualities of the great Zulu race. Thanks to the enterprising management of the Westminster Aquarium, the people of this country were then being afforded an opportunity of meeting some of the most renowned warriors of the dusky nation face to face. But the ladies and gentlemen whom he had the pleasure of addressing were exceptionally fortunate. By an arrangement which need not be detailed he, the speaker, had happily been enabled that evening to bring down two of the most august chiefs of the band to their very doors. He confidently asked for his distinguished protégés a cordial and respectful reception, and begged without further preamble to introduce them to the audience.

Then he led on the two limp heroes of a hundred fictitious kraal-burnings. No rehearsal of any kind had been possible—indeed, the master mind had decreed that it was safer to leave things entirely to the spur of the

moment. Yet it was certainly unfortunate that the pair should have differed so materially in their conception of Zulu military deportment. For, whereas the Sailor (with a vague notion of depicting the quick-step of an *impi*) advanced like a dancing bear on hot bricks, the Soldier affected the slouch of the British raw recruit, with which he was more familiar.

Happily the audience was not disposed to be hypercritical. It thoroughly believed in the foreign curiosities it had paid to see, and—owing to its deafening plaudits—heard nothing of the mutual recriminations which were being freely exchanged upon the platform.

“Pig-dog!” hissed the Sailor, “do you want to give the show away with that ridiculous double shuffle?”

“Judging from *your* exhibition,” retorted the other, “one would suppose you’d done time on the treadmill! How the devil was I to know that Zulus walked like that?”

“The blessed pair of you are enough to break any showman’s heart,” put in the wrathful Junior Bar. “You might have known, anyhow, that they don’t sneak about like performing poodles. Why couldn’t you shake

your spears and yell a few names out of *King Solomon's Mines*? — Ladies and gentlemen," he continued aloud, "I have much pleasure in announcing that the great chief Boomtarara, or Fat Head, has consented to sing you one of the exquisite love songs of his nation."

The Jester had already rattled off a fearful and wonderful prelude in seven flats ere the indignant Sailor realised that *he* was the Fat Head referred to. He had never sung a bar of music in his life, and was further handicapped by the impossibility of detecting in the accompaniment the slightest resemblance to a melody. Yet the music (and the audience) had to be faced. Bathed in perspiration, and with his eyes glued to the ceiling, the pride of the *Vernon* torpedo school moaned pitifully at that grinning suburban audience for five minutes by the municipal clock. A furtive glance pianowards revealed the Jester with tears of laughter rolling down his cheeks. Behind the curtain were audible the hysterical sobs of the Soldier and Junior Bar. The wicked words that the singer presently said to the latter gentleman are fortunately immaterial to the story.

Then came the war dance of Bow Legs—chief of the Umtidumti, according to the showman, though hitherto described in this narrative as the Soldier.

Beside his terpsichorean display the song of Fat Head was a finished performance ; for the dancer's feet were even less capable of following the Jester's chromatic scales than the singer's tongue had been. His assegai, moreover, was continually getting mixed up with his legs, a detail that was less suggestive of a Zulu brave than of an inebriated lamplighter on his rounds. Both "turns," however, were rapturously received by the audience ; and the witch-doctor's chant, the death dance, and the combat—with which the impostors were emboldened to follow up their success—aroused the wildest enthusiasm.

Then it was that the Junior Bar proved himself to be an indifferent artist. The climax had been reached, and, according to the accepted canons, he should have bowed himself and his puppets off the stage without further delay. Instead of which he must needs fly in the face of a hitherto kindly Fortune by making a final speech.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said he, "so deeply moved are my illustrious friends Fat Head and Bow Legs by the magnificent reception you have accorded them, that they yearn to tell you so in their own language. Alas! were there but one in this vast audience conversant with the soft Zulu tongue——"

A bronzed, bearded, ponderous figure in the audience slowly rose to its feet.

"I am," it said, in deep gutturals that fell upon the hearts of the conspirators like lead, "a varmer of der Transvaal—how say you?—a Boer. All my live I haf among Zulus lif'd. Allemachter, I vill in der own tongue mit your great chiefs Fat 'Ead and Bow Leg shbeak."

He did. Like petrified Pompeians the four sinners stiffened in the respective attitudes in which the judgment overtook them. For some time past, 'tis true, the arch-conspirator had been uneasily conscious of that stolid, sceptical countenance in the third row. Yet who would have dreamt of finding in a gathering of suburban shopkeepers at a charity bazaar a man who spoke Zulu far more readily than English?

By the time the sonorous voice ceased the

trio on the stage were in a state of mental collapse, while the clatter with which the piano was closed clearly betrayed the condition of the Jester's nerves. The Junior Bar, noting a tendency on the part of the others to bolt, promptly recovered his wits.

"Idiots!" he whispered, "do you want to get your thick skulls cracked in a street row? Pull yourselves together, for Heaven's sake, and leave things to me!"

They could not have left them in better hands. With clenched fists and flashing eyes he faced the muttering audience, and no one who saw him that night ever wondered afterwards at his brilliant success as a criminal advocate.

"English men and women," he cried, "I appeal to you on behalf of our august visitors and our two humble selves." His bow included the limp figure at the piano. "At great personal inconvenience we have travelled here to-night in the sacred cause of charity. For upwards of an hour we have endeavoured to instruct as well as entertain you. And what is our reward? Public insult! Ladies and gentlemen, who is this stranger within your

gates who has placed a gratuitous affront upon the honoured guests of England? I will tell you." He pointed an accusing forefinger at the astonished Boer. "He is—an impostor! For—so the great chiefs assure me—*the fellow has not spoken a single syllable of the Zulu dialect!*"

For the space of ten seconds he who had ears to hear might have detected the traditional pin drop. What *was* heard at the expiration of that period was the uprising in wrath of the male portion of the audience, followed by the vigorous guttural protests of the stranger within their gates. Under cover of the public interest in his forced march to the municipal fountain in the square, the conspirators bid a hasty good-night to the Duchess, and caught the twelve-fifteen to town.

On the carriage floor there presently lay a gentleman in "faultless" evening dress, with three dishevelled figures perched upon his shirt-front, trousers, and black silk socks respectively.

"My name is Fat Head, is it?" said the first playfully, with a thumb upon his victim's collar-stud, "and my language is not fit for publication, and——"

"What price turning me into an organ-grinder's monkey, and telling the Duchess I talk like a parrot, and calling me 'Bow Legs' on a public platform?" interrupted the third, with ominous restraint.

"Gentlemen," announced the man in the middle with forced calm and twitching fingers, "I am about to render upon the four-buttoned waistcoat the Zulu national anthem in seven flats!"

* * * * *

In the four-wheeler, half an hour later, the Junior Bar (no longer in faultless attire) sniggered aloud.

"Out with it!" said the Soldier suspiciously.

"One of the bobbies told me as we were leaving," explained the other, "that the poor devil was in the lock-up for disorderly conduct. I was thinking of the wicked words the Mayor will hear this morning from the stranger within his gates!"

THE RISING OF JOGA

THE RISING OF JOGA

*"For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem."*

THE last time I saw Jannaway, unrepentant prodigal and subaltern of the Sea Regiment, he was on main guard at Devonport. That most convenient of half-way houses, as two-thirds of the British Army (and all the Navy) know, is set on the top of Stonehouse Hill on the road to the sister garrison of Plymouth. It is a guardhouse of the usual stereotyped design, raised above the street on a railed platform, and approached by a flight of steps at either end. Beneath the verandah are an arm rack and a wooden bench, from the latter of which the warriors who are off sentry critically compare passing petticoats with those (or their equivalents) of foreign lands. Within are a large room for the men and a small den for the officer, the

one whitewashed, the other (as a graceful concession to the claims of rank) washed with yellow. For the rest, this jaundiced apartment contains, in addition to the articles mentioned on the inventory board over the fireplace, a corkscrew; and no officer and gentleman of either Service below the rank of major or commander would dream of continuing his journey without looking in to inquire after the health of the subaltern in command.

Passing one day on my lawful occasions, and observing that the guard for that date was furnished by the Marines, I instinctively crossed the road to learn the name of the officer. A bluejacket with a note in his hand descended one flight of steps as I climbed the other, and in the doorway of the yellow-washed room, resplendent in scarlet and gold and fully accoutred, stood Jannaway. He was tearing into minute fragments an invitation card, and was scowling murderously at the back of the departing seaman.

"How the devil do *you* spell 'accept'?" he snapped, without preamble of any kind.

Now, we had not met for years, the last

occasion being, as I remembered, an awkward midnight "bobbery" with Chinese coolies in Belay Street, Singapore. I wanted to know whether, luckier than myself, he had come through the business with a whole skin; and, since the manner of my reception piqued me, I also wanted to kick him.

"The best authorities," I retorted, divining his difficulty, "spell it with two."

Then Jannaway swore—earnestly, at considerable length, and with much comprehensiveness. For his remarks included not only the Port Admiral, the sergeant, corporal, lance-corporal, bugler, and entire rank and file of the guard, but the editor of the local paper as well, a copy of whose journal lay in a crumpled ball in the farthest corner of the room.

It was a tropical morning at the end of August, and I charitably set down Jannaway's conduct to the sun.

"I happened to be passing," I explained feebly, by way of changing the conversation, "and thought I would look in and see how you were."

He wearily placed a couple of tumblers upon

the table, and dragged a basketful of bottles from beneath it.

"Scotch or Irish?" he asked.

"Neither, thanks; it's much too early. The sun isn't over the foreyard yet."

He glanced at me in languid surprise, then fell to counting on his fingers.

"One gunner, one A.S.C. johnnie, two of the Rutlands, one naval lieutenant, and a couple of subs—yes, not reckoning you, I've had seven fellows in here already this morning. Each of 'em was bursting to learn the state of my health, and each was a total stranger to me. Not one of 'em, though"—he glanced significantly at an almost empty bottle in the basket—"seemed to think it too early!"

"It is one of the greatest privileges of main guard," I suggested, "to be as the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land."

"Oh, thanks, is it? Well, then, you can have all my share of the privilege, sonny. I look upon main guard as being, without exception, the biggest curse on the roster!"

"It is rough on a fellow's wine bill," I admitted, "and the monotony is damnable."

Jannaway kicked viciously at a crumpled

envelope on the floor. "There is something a deuced sight worse," he blurted out, "than wine bill and monotony combined. I call it positively indecent of people to pester a poor devil with invitations when they know he is tied by the leg here for twenty-four hours and cannot refuse!"

"I don't quite follow."

"Take a pew and a cigarette, then, and I'll enlighten you. Can you imagine me, of all men in the world, fooling away my time in a drawing-room?"

The scene in Belay Street rose before my mind, and I replied that I certainly could not.

"Well, then," he returned gloomily, "you will have no difficulty in doing so for the future, if you chance to be dining at Admiralty House this evening. I shall be there."

I hastened to assure him of my deepest sympathy.

"Since calling on our chief's wife six months ago," he continued, as he lit his cigarette from my match, "I haven't so much as looked through the chink of a drawing-room door. Poodlefaking isn't in my line, and I've hitherto

contrived to boom off all invitations with the usual conventional lie."

I congratulated him on his success. He flung the match into the grate with the vigour of a fielder throwing from the boundary at cricket.

"I've always had a presentiment," he went on indignantly, "that I should be cornered at last in this god-forsaken mantrap. What else could one expect with a footling clause in the 'Orders for the Officer of the Guard' to the effect that he may hand over his command to the sergeant for two hours for the purpose of dining at Admiralty or Government House?"

"The 'usual conventional lie'——" I began.

"Is, under the circumstances, dead off, since one cannot possibly have a prior engagement. I first grasped the cussedness of the situation about twenty minutes ago, when the doorway was suddenly darkened by a seafaring, flat-footed son of Belial with a note. You can imagine the language I used!"

Again that lantern-lit *mêlée* recurred to my memory, and I told him that I could.

"Of course I had to accept, and then, to

put the hat on my misery, I'm hanged if I could remember how the beastly word was spelt!"

"Why didn't you ask the bluejacket?"

"I did. He said he always wrote it with an 'x'! Then I went right through the sixty-four columns of the *Western Morning News*, from the births to the last Baptist tea fight, and of course—for the first time this year, probably—the word was conspicuous by its absence."

He glared resentfully at the crumpled journal in the corner.

"Well?" I asked.

"I next sent for Saxby, the sergeant of the guard. He was with me in China, and I knew him for the biggest fool in the sergeants' mess. Still, even fools can sometimes spell. He advised me to write the word on a piece of paper and see how it looked; but as it seemed to both of us to have too many 'c's,' he said he would ask the men in the guardroom how they felt about it."

"Good Lord!"

"Judging by their profanity, they must have felt very strongly on the subject. When

Saxby returned, he said that they were equally divided in opinion as to whether the word had one 'c' or two, so the drummer had been given the casting vote. He had decided in favour of one, and that," concluded Jannaway moodily, "is how I finally spelt it!"

Two naval parsons, "old ships" of Jannaway's, looking in at this juncture to inquire after his health, I rose to go.

"Unless I am greatly mistaken in the Flag Lieutenant," I said cheerfully, "everyone will hear of this to-night. But of course you can quote as your authorities Bugler Sticks and at least half the guard, can't you? By-the-bye, I hear that the dinner is to be a big affair—Heads of Departments, the Archdeacon, the Mayor, and, Jannaway, their womenfolk!"

I was half-way down the steps before Jannaway had found a lump of coal to throw at me, and the last I heard of him was his apology to the maritime clergy for the unwonted warmth of expression into which he had been betrayed.

The remainder of this chronicle of Jannaway's red-letter day on main guard at Devonport is hearsay; and although I have been at pains

to collect it from such reliable sources as the Flag Lieutenant, Sergeant Saxby, several afternoon callers at the main guard, and one of the ladies at the Admiral's dinner party, you are not legally bound, gentle reader, to accept it as evidence. Before definitely rejecting it, however, I would urge you to consider whether the alleged events hereinafter related are entirely irreconcilable with such passages of Jannaway's career as those already recorded in the history of *Joseph and Bathsheba* and the *Homecoming of the Strange Children*.

As the day wore on and the terrors of the dinner party loomed larger each succeeding hour, Jannaway set himself seriously to the task of bracing his nerves for the ordeal of the evening. In this endeavour he was greatly assisted by sympathisers of all branches of the Service who dropped in during the afternoon, and so successful were their combined efforts that, when the fateful hour arrived, he set forth crooning a harvest hymn to the Highlander and naval surgeon who had undertaken to "give him the touch" as far as his destination.

Deprived on the threshold of Admiralty House of these moral and physical supports, Jannaway collapsed upon a hall chair and shed bitter tears of loneliness. But presently, having borrowed a handkerchief from the scandalised butler in place of his own (which had mysteriously worked from the breast of his tunic into his trousers and was inaccessible), he pulled himself together and followed his benefactor upstairs to the drawing-room.

It had been his design to slip into the room, if possible, unannounced, and, having paid his respects to his hostess amid the general buzz of conversation, subside unobtrusively into the background. To this end, indeed, he had bribed the butler *en route*; but, unfortunately mistaking the strip of polished floor between the doorsill and the carpet for yet another step to be climbed, he set his foot down with an unpremeditated vigour that rattled the very china in the cabinets. So shaken was he in mind and body by this loudly advertised entrance that, on being presented to the girl he was to take down to dinner, he straightway fell into an impenetrable silence, which lasted throughout the meal, and was still unbroken

when the ladies left the table. Before the men rejoined them, however, he had so far recovered as to instruct the evangelical and highly outraged Archdeacon in the subtleties of altar lights and the eastward position. Yet I doubt if even the righteous anger of that dignitary equalled the wrath of his late partner at dinner, to whom, on his return to the drawing-room and under cover of a Japanese screen, he proposed, and whom he subsequently discovered to be the wife of the Flag Lieutenant.

Never had Jannaway more fully appreciated the sheltering darkness of night than when he was ushered into it with the most frigid of stares by the Admiral's apoplectic butler. His spirits, which had been considerably damped by the Flag Lieutenant's parting observations in the hall, quickly regained their buoyancy in the fresh air, and, bethinking himself that one of his sentries was posted in the immediate neighbourhood, he resolved to save himself a journey by visiting the man without returning in the orthodox manner for the corporal of the guard.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

From the far side of the great wooden gates

came the sharp challenge, while Jannaway was still a dozen paces distant, and at his reply, "Visiting rounds!" the small square wicket was unlocked and thrown open by the sentry, who thereupon brought his rifle to the "port."

Then followed one of those extraordinary occurrences which science and common sense are alike incapable of explaining. It is always quoted by Jannaway as an instance of how a perfectly sober man may involuntarily exhibit one or more of the symptoms of alcoholism.

Advancing towards the black aperture, which showed distinctly in the loom of the big grey gates, his legs suddenly and unaccountably bore him to the right, in the manner of a ship deflected by some mysterious magnetic influence from her true course. Instead, therefore, of stepping through the wicket, as he had designed, he brought up with a violent concussion of boots and helmet peak against the solid woodwork of the gate. This dreadful clatter in the stillness of the night so upset the sentry that he added to it by dropping his rifle and bayonet. Jannaway, on the other hand, though equally surprised, retained sufficient

presence of mind to pretend that he had deviated from his path for the purpose of ascertaining whether the paint (laid on five years before) was yet dry.

Fetching a considerable compass, he again essayed to hit off the elusive wicket, the only notable difference in the result being that this time he collided with the left-hand side of the gate and made his nose bleed. The precise point at which he would have delivered his third frontal attack, and the nature of the wound he might have received, are matters for conjecture. For at this crisis the sentry, who had recovered his scattered wits and his fallen arms in the same moment, thrust his head through the opening and suggested that the officer should try it backwards. "This solution of the difficulty was so obvious," explained Jannaway afterwards, "that I could have kicked myself for not thinking of it before. I instantly adopted the suggestion, and, naturally enough, found the wicket without further trouble. The confoundedly high sill, however, catching me behind the knees, I came an infernal cropper on my back, whereupon the grinning fool of a sentry, instead of

helping me, shouldered arms and bellowed, 'Pass, visiting rounds ; all's well !''

To protect his legs from further magnetic disturbances Jannaway rode back to the guard-house urchinwise behind the Archdeacon's carriage, which was returning homewards at a decorously early hour. It was fortunate, perhaps, that he took the precaution of alighting outside the gaslit area, for awaiting him on the railed platform was Sergeant Saxby, who saluted and reported that all had gone well during his absence.

Without reference to an almanac I am unable to state the exact hour at which Jannaway first noticed the reflection on the sky. It is certain that he and Saxby had discussed many subjects in the interim. For, glad enough to while away a few moments of the long night's vigil, he had detained the sergeant in conversation, and the transition from criticism of yesterday's field day to argument on Japanese mythology suggests much intervening talk of gods and men. With the names and functions of the former, indeed, the "biggest fool in the sergeants' mess" displayed an acquaintance that went far towards modifying his superior's

opinion of him ; and it was in the middle of a dissertation on the goddess of the moon, whose temple sits upon the hill above Kobe, that Jannaway shouted to the bugler of the guard to sound the fire call.

“ One of those old houses near the Barbican, probably,” he observed to Sergeant Saxby, who was gazing curiously in that direction.

“ Very likely, sir,” returned the other. “ It’s almost as bad a quarter for fires as Kanagawa. And yet,” he added doubtfully, “ this blaze seems to be on the far side of Staddon Heights.”

Sharp and resonant on the still night air rang the brazen notes of the alarm, and with a great clattering of rifles and ammunition boots the sleepy guard turned out and stood to their arms. Before the faint orange glow on the eastern sky had grown perceptibly brighter the call had been repeated by every regiment in garrison. Now it blared forth from the neighbouring North and South Raglan and the Granby barracks in Devonport ; now from the more distant quarters of Jannaway’s own corps at Stonehouse. A brief interval, and the warning sang briskly from Millbay,

while close on its heels came the barely audible response from the far-off Plymouth Citadel. When, finally, a gun boomed from the port guardship in the Hamoaze, Jannaway was proudly conscious that some six or seven hundred officers and men had been roused from their beds and hammocks at his bidding, and were impatiently waiting in the darkness to learn the locality of the fire.

Now, as the light above Plymouth grew stronger a strained silence fell by degrees on the whispering and shuffling guard. Then a man in the rear rank sniggered, and, as Jannaway turned sharply to check him, Sergeant Saxby stepped from his place on the right flank, and brought his hand to his rifle sling with a slap that half hid him in a cloud of pipeclay.

"It's Joga, sir," he whispered. "You've roused the whole blessed garrison and port to see—— The next man as smiles," he added aloud to the convulsed ranks behind him, "will 'ave his name took."

One glance at that golden gleam upon the crestline of Staddon Heights—and Jannaway understood. In a single instant all the vain-

glory at his smartness in discovering the fire forsook him and fled. No longer was he uplifted at the thought of those waiting hundreds wantonly torn from their beauty sleep—nay, when he remembered them, he swore very fervently under his breath instead. He speculated with shudders as to the terms in which they would refer to him on the morrow, when they learned the naked truth. He found himself wondering, too, what he should presently say to the garrison field officer; and the perspiration dripped from his forehead at the sound of a galloping charger on Stonehouse Hill and at the thought of what the garrison field officer would say to him. Finally, recalling the Flag Lieutenant's parting admonition that "things are not always what they seem," Jannaway silently wept.

For, according to Japanese divinity, Joga is she who dwells in the harvest moon.

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THAT WHICH WAS LOST

THAT WHICH WAS LOST

THE Major danced in the moonlight at the foot of the barrack clock-tower, and, shaking his fist at the quarters immediately below the dial, challenged their occupant to descend and renew the combat. Through the bars of the locked main gate a couple of belated passengers peered curiously from the street. In the gloom of the adjoining archway the grey-coated guard alternately grinned approval and condemned in scandalised whispers. A solitary panel of light, formed by an uncurtained window of the mess anteroom, was cut in the dark parallelogram of the opposite block of buildings; and the glimpse it afforded of a red-jacketed officer and a waiter rearranging overturned furniture plainly localised the outbreak of hostilities.

"Come out, you bolting bagpiper," shouted

the Major alluringly, "and let me dust the parade with you!"

A window opened here and there in the grey and silent faces of the square, and half a dozen close-cropped heads were hastily thrust forth. The watchers at the gate were reinforced by a policeman, while the sergeant of the guard moved tentatively from the shadow into the brilliant moonlight.

"Beg pardon, sir," he began.

"Come down," roared the unheeding Major, "and finish the job in the open!"

A head and shoulders craned out from the window under the clock, and a tense voice floated down on the still night air.

"For God's sake, Major, go to bed. Do you want to wake the whole blessed garrison? You were spoiling for a licking, and you've had it. What more do you want?"

The Major swore with some originality and much heartiness, while the grinning guard ceased whispering to listen. The constable outside the gate produced his notebook and sucked the point of his pencil. It was not a civil case as yet, but in this world of surprises one never knows one's luck.

"I tripped over a chair, you young liar! You know it as well as I do, and that you seized the chance to bolt. Come down, and fight it out like a man!"

"If you're set on brawling with someone, why the devil don't you find a bricklayer in the town? As for me, I'll have nothing further to do with you."

The speaker withdrew his head, while the policeman noted the suggestion *re* a bricklayer as "inciting to disturb the public peace," and the sergeant of the guard despatched his corporal in quest of the orderly officer.

"As for you," retorted the Major *fortissimo*, "I wouldn't be found buried in the same cemetery with you, you haggis-eating perisher!"

Even a worm will turn, to say nothing of a Scot whose national dish is lightly spoken of. Footsteps were heard descending the spiral staircase, and a moment later a tall youth in a scarlet mess jacket issued from the doorway at the bottom. The star upon his shoulder-knot and the single tracery of gold lace on his sleeve showed him to be a subaltern; yet, and in spite of his loosely knitted and somewhat lanky limbs, a practised

observer would have detected in him at least the match of the more heavily fashioned Major. There was a careless smile on his face as he sauntered towards the latter, but the smile was backed by an expression of extreme wariness, and, like Agag, he "came delicately."

"At all events," he observed blandly, "there are no chairs here to trip over. But——"

"But what?"

"How about the er—shadow of the clock-tower?"

For answer the Major, making a feint at the waistcoat, instantly followed it up with a blow straight from his shoulder at his enemy's taunting face. But the enemy, despite his apparent carelessness, had never ceased for an instant to regard the Major out of the tail of his eye. Swift as the attack had been, the flail-like parry of the defence was swifter. Like the sails of a windmill in a blizzard, the long arms of the Scot swung this way and that, beating down, hurling upwards, rendering utterly ineffectual the smashing, well-directed blows of his assailant. In vain did the latter, with an

agility remarkable in a man of his weight and years, dance round and tilt at the human windmill before him, like a frenzied Don Quixote run amok. With equal rapidity the windmill ever changed front, revolving with the circular disturbance outside it, until it seemed to face the thirty-two points of the compass at once.

By the time the corporal of the guard returned with the orderly officer public interest had been thoroughly aroused. A rear rank had been added to the watchers at the gate, and, despite the loud and unceasing admonition of the policeman (whose view they obstructed) to "move on," the front rank had their heads wedged between the bars. The most stertorous of the recumbent forms on the guardroom plank beds had recovered consciousness and joined their comrades beneath the arch, while every barrack window that commanded the parade held a dozen grey-shirted figures struggling for the accommodation afforded at the utmost to three. The orderly officer came, saw, and—like a prudent youth of five foot nothing—conquered the impulse to intervene between two belligerents

whose combined inches totalled a hundred and forty. He perceived it clearly to be the duty of the field officer of the week, to whose quarters he promptly betook himself.

The spectacle which greeted that gallant warrior on his arrival five minutes later was unique in his lengthy experience. The stern-featured Government clock was emphasising with hands and tongue the fact that the hour was midnight, yet the wakefulness of the barracks, no less than the brilliant moonshine, seemed to have turned night into day. Instead of peacefully snoring between their blankets, dreaming (as all well-disciplined soldiers should) of Honour, Glory and Loot, the rank and file at a score of open windows struggled and shivered in their shirts. Standing on the steps of their mess were the sergeants, dressed (with a fitting sense of the dignity of non-commissioned rank) as far as their trousers, and hotly debating the ethics of self-defence, while, scarcely a dozen yards distant, the wholly demoralised guard chinked their coin and betted openly on the issue. The big main gate was blocked by a crowd doubly incensed by their inability to see round

corners and by the exasperating reiterations of a sailor in their rear that *he* couldn't see through their blighted and sanguinary bodies. In full view of the greater portion of this audience, bareheaded and in mess uniform, a major and subaltern of Her Majesty's regular forces were fighting like a couple of drunken bargees.

At this stage each of the combatants, as a boxing enthusiast put it, had "knocked some of the paint off" the other. While the ends of the subaltern's tie trailed like glengarry cap ribbons over his shirt front, the Major's collar resembled a frill round an underdone ham. The former's knuckles were bleeding, and one of the latter's eyes gave promise of autumnal tints on the morrow. Recognising that prolonged contemplation of such a scene scarcely made for "good order and military discipline," the new-comer speedily put an end to it by ordering the belligerents to their quarters under close arrest and everyone else within his jurisdiction to bed. The guard returned to the guardroom, and the crowd at the gate dispersed—the policeman vindicating the majesty of the law and soothing his own outraged feelings by

taking the sailor into custody on a charge of "excessive profanity."

The immediate cause of this grave military scandal I never knew, nor is it material to the story, which is mainly concerned with the issue. It certainly did not transpire at the subsequent trial, the offenders themselves being hard put to it for a rational explanation of their conduct. But it is an axiom equally accepted in farm-yard, school and mess that there cannot exist with peace more than one "cock of the walk"; and, should two unhappily arise, the slightest of pretexts will serve to set the feathers flying.

The following day the relentless Juggernaut of Military Law was set in motion by the sergeant of the guard, who handed in a report to the subaltern of the day, who presented it with one of his own to the field officer of the week, who, supplementing them with a third, laid all three before the colonel commanding, who sent them with a covering letter to the general, who forwarded the entire case with his comments to the commander-in-chief in Pall Mall. Each had the honour to be the addressee's "obedient servant," or "most obedient," or "with the highest respect the

most obedient, humble," as the case might be—the humility, submission, and respect increasing with the rank of the writer; and each had the honour to chronicle with soldierly laconism the temporary lapse to primitive manhood of "the officers named in the margin."

Pall Mall, already upset by the failure of a new pattern regulation mousetrap to effect its purpose, was prostrated by this fresh disgrace to the British arms. It was before the monotonous days of regrettable incidents, and perhaps some sense of perspective was lost in confronting this second scandal. At any rate, a feeling of what was due to the Service and country quickly prevailed, and a colossal correspondence with the harassed and shame-stricken garrison began. Answers to countless official conundrums were peremptorily demanded by one side, and guessed at with indifferent success by the other. Innumerable forms were filled up by the latter, forwarded post haste, and as promptly returned, with attention drawn to Army orders bearing cabalistic figures and lettered from A to Z. For seven long days these rites of the red-tape god were practised by his genuflecting ministers; on the eighth

the deity spake. A general court-martial was to assemble forthwith, so ran the decree, for the trial of Major Rupert Ireton-Pym and Lieutenant Alan Boyd, both of the Rutlandshire Light Infantry, for conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline.

The court was accordingly convened, assembled, sat for three days in a draughty room over the archway hereinbefore mentioned, and investigated (according to its oath) "without favour, partiality, or affection" the tale of original sin laboriously unfolded before it. It was lied to by enthusiasts of the ring, harrowed by a tearful Q.C., cautioned by a red-coated judge-advocate, and temporarily bewildered by all three. Nevertheless their subsequent deliberations could have but one issue. Men who fight for ten minutes in brilliant moonlight before an entire regiment can scarcely hope to prove an alibi or mistaken identity. To give the delinquents credit for average sanity, they attempted neither. The case was as plain as the jackstaff on the roof above the tribunal's heads. The court found the prisoners guilty, and ordered Lieutenant Alan Boyd to forfeit one day's seniority. The Major, as the

elder and the aggressor, they ordered to be cashiered.

On the evening of the day of reckoning Ireton-Pym—alas! no longer Major—sat in his dreary quarters, staring moodily into the grate. Like the pipe between his tightly clenched teeth, the fire had died out, though both coal and tobacco lay in sufficiency ready to his hand. An open portmanteau, tumbled with clothes and effects, stood in the middle of the partially dismantled room, while heaped in a corner was the uniform he never again would wear.

A soldier of twenty years' experience, the last but one of a long line which had furnished both Royalist and Roundhead leaders in the great Civil War, none understood better than himself the enormity of the military crime for which he had just been broken. So far from questioning the justice of the sentence, he recognised that had he been a member of the court-martial he would have voted for nothing less. Yet there raged in his breast an illogical, ungovernable hatred of his country in general and in particular of the Service which had that day disowned him. On the

table lay a letter from his father, in which the stern old martinet of the Crimea and Mutiny renounced his eldest son for a sin more heinous in his eyes than murder. It was, as I have already said, before the dull days of regrettable incidents, and the regiment resented being saddled with the military scandal of the year. His brother officers marked this resentment by leaving him severely alone, and Ireton-Pym reflected with bitterness that by an act of after-dinner folly he had lost the fruits of twenty years' service and alienated himself from kinsfolk and comrades alike.

With one exception. On the opposite side of the fireplace, very pale, and with suspiciously twitching mouth and humid eyes, sat kinsman and comrade combined—his younger brother. During the past three days the lad, who was awaiting his commission, had followed the course of the trial with an ever-increasing anxiety, and the result, so obvious from the outset to everyone else, had left him stunned and heartbroken. With him it was an article of faith that the king could do no wrong, and in his boyish estimation this brother, more

than twenty years his senior and wearing the clasps of three campaigns, was a king indeed. So blind was his idolatry that he saw nothing but virtue in his idol's fall. The hero of a dozen battles had doubtless been insulted by this subaltern who had never seen a shot fired in anger. What soldier worthy of the name, to say nothing of an Ireton-Pym, would tamely submit to such treatment? And, once the first blow had been struck, it would become a point of honour, especially after the chair episode, to fight it out to the end. How his adored brother could, without loss of honour, have acted otherwise than he did was incomprehensible to the boy, and the consequently apparent injustice of the sentence was to him a cruel and entirely unexpected disaster.

He sprang impetuously to his feet. "Dear old chap," he said, with a break in the preternaturally gruff voice, "it's a damned shame! The way the judge-advocate summed up against you was a public scandal, when the biggest fool in the Service could see that the whole thing was a put-up job to hound you out of the regiment. You were a jolly sight too keen a soldier for such a ladylike

crowd of poodlefakers as the Rutlands, and of course they resented the comparison. Rupert," he placed his hand on his brother's shoulder, "I want you to let me do something I'm just spoiling for. Promise you won't interfere, there's a dear old man, because my heart is set on it. You *will* promise, won't you?"

The ex-major still stared into the empty fireplace, though he reached up and gripped the hand on his shoulder.

"Fire away, youngster," he said wearily. "What's the latest madness?"

"You may call it madness if you like, but at any rate I'll guarantee that it won't lack method. Look here, Rupe, you've had the gloves on with me often enough, and you know that I'm more than a bit handy with my fists. Besides, there are one or two tricks I've picked up since, and—well, the long and short of it is I want you to let me send a challenge round to that rotter, Boyd. I'm certain I could flatten him out with a dodge I learnt the other day from a johnnie in town for a couple of quid and a drink."

In spite of himself the man laughed at the

boy's proposal. "Poor kid," he said, gently forcing him back into his chair, "the blood of the old Rupert flows as surely in your veins as it does in mine. *You* have inherited his impetuosity and warm heart, *I* his name, hot temper, and—for your sake let us hope—all his cursed bad luck. Anyhow, I am not going to let you make a bid for any of it. My slice of the family heirloom ought to satisfy our generation at least."

He spoke with great bitterness, savagely poking meanwhile the grate inscribed V.R. The boy walked over to the writing-table in the window, and again was pushed back with kindly hands into his seat by the fireplace.

"My dear old chap"—the elder brother looked down affectionately at the younger—"you haven't the ghost of a chance, in spite of the infallible trick that cost two pounds and a drink to acquire. Boyd would knock you into the middle of next week with the first blow—besides, hand-to-hand combats seem to be out of favour with the authorities." He smiled grimly. "It is an age of long-range weapons. Look here, young un, your career in the Service is just beginning; take the tip

of a man whose career has closed, and—chuck the gloves for the rifle. Straight shooting is far more likely to serve you a good turn in the future than the straightest hitting.”

A prolonged bugle wail pierced the stillness of the autumn night.

“‘Out lights!’ Well, well—here endeth the lesson! Lay it well to heart, young un—the lesson of a devil of a temper, a glass of port too many, and hereditary prejudice against Presbyterians. And now—it is time we said ‘Good-night!’”

For some time the pair stood with gripped hands, looking into each other’s eyes. Then the younger completely broke down. Flinging his arm round his idolised brother’s neck, he burst into an uncontrollable storm of weeping. “Dear old Rupe,” he sobbed, “I have always been so cocksure that you would one day be commander-in-chief, or at least a field-marshal! And now this piece of damned bad luck has knocked me endways. Anyhow, cashiered or not, there is at least one man in the Service who will stand by you till death itself. God bless you, old chap, and good-bye—until to-morrow!”

Moved by a sudden impulse, he reached up and kissed his brother on the forehead. The next minute he had run down the stairs out into the welcome gloom of a moonless and starless night.

* * * * *

Before the bugles had sounded the "dress" for morning parade he was back again and knocking at his brother's door. It was opened by the ex-major's servant, who, recognising the visitor, promptly endeavoured to mask a very evident embarrassment under an expression of incurable idiocy. The inquiry as to his master's whereabouts elicited the clear and concise statement that he was in bed, that he was on parade, but that he, the incurable idiot, would go and see. After which, having exhausted his powers of subterfuge, he passed the back of his hand across his eyes and huskily invited "Muster Oliver" to call him a liar.

It was some time before the lad realised that his brother had gone. A bath full of soapy water had not yet been emptied; a pair of guttering candles still burned on the mantel-piece of the darkened inner room. But the

small camp bed in the corner was as undisturbed as it had been on the previous evening, nor was a Sherlock Holmes necessary to prove that it had not since been slept in.

"He was gone before I come in this mornin', sir," explained the servant ruefully, "without so much as a line to tell me what to do with his kit an' things. The best of masters he was, too! When I think of 'ow he might 'ave 'ammered Mr. Boyd in my kitchen downstairs without let or 'indrance the 'ole blessed night, I feel downright mad with him, and—'ere's a letter he left be'ind for you, sir."

Tearing open the envelope, and forgetting in his anxiety the presence of the worthy private who hung breathless on every syllable, the boy read the contents aloud. They were brief and to the point—as a soldier's words should be; yet the growing huskiness on the one hand and the increasing sniffs on the other showed that a certain echo of coming tragedy, dim and subtle as it was, had been detected by reader and listener alike.

"Dear old Noll," ran the letter, "last night's good-bye flattened me out more effectually than Boyd's fists and the court-martial com-

bined. I simply can't face another. It must be, then, the *oki saionara*, the big or last good-bye, as they say in Japan. Moreover, although I am sane enough to realise that I have only myself to blame for my ruin, I am sufficiently mad to feel nothing but 'hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness' towards the Service and everyone in it. I have—once more to quote the Prayer Book—'descended into hell.' All night long I have sat at the window of my quarters, watching, watching, watching—for *the first passer-by*. If ever I pray again it will be to the drowsy god, who kept the entire regiment from chief to drummer abed till sunrise. At daybreak I threw the damned thing (still at half-cock) into the water-butt at the back. I am already smashed, it is true; but you will now see the wisdom of my bolting, lest a still worse thing happen unto me.

"And, dear old chap, do not, I beg you, waste valuable time and money in a fruitless search; for, believe me, it will be fruitless. I am no coward; I have no intention of taking my own life. But I know that you and I will never again stand face to face with gripped hands and look into each other's eyes. It is

kismet. Think of me, therefore, as though I were already some years dead. That you, at least, will always think kindly of me, I have, thank God, no doubt.

“In losing the Queen’s commission I have dragged the good old military name of Ireton-Pym in the mud. The commission will shortly be borne again by another member of the family, and he must one day clear the mud from that name by some meritorious service in the field. I have a curious presentiment that it will not be long before the opportunity occurs. Study your profession thoroughly, so as to be ready for any emergency ; and, above all, remember my advice about shooting. Aim well below the object, raise the rifle steadily, and press immediately the sight comes on.

“Once more, my only and dearly loved brother, good-bye ! good-bye !—RUPERT.”

A hurried postscript contained instructions for the disposal of certain papers and effects, and a lump rose in the boy’s throat as he found himself possessor, amongst other things, of the fugitive’s proudly cherished medals and clasps. The letter closed with a bequest to Private Benjamin Gruntwag of several

greatly coveted articles of furniture for his quarters in the married square, a piece of intelligence which reduced that already snuffling warrior to actual tears.

"It sounds for all the world," he sobbed, "like a last will and testament, so 'elp his Gawd. Muster Oliver"—an enormous sunburned paw was laid on the lad's sleeve—"you won't pay no 'eed to that silly talk o' kismet? I've served in the East myself, and have never yet seen a kismet that couldn't be defeated by an averagely obstinate British soldier."

The boy seized the sunburned paw, and shook it warmly.

"Gruntwag," said he, "you're a brick. You've put new heart into me by saying that. I swear to you that henceforward I will never rest until I have found my brother—alive or dead."

Thus began the long, untiring search for Rupert Ireton-Pym—outcast, pauper, heir to a baronetcy—by his devoted and only brother. Alternately elated by hope and depressed by its non-fulfilment, torn continually by anxiety and dread, the boy suffered a thousand bereave-

ments in fearing one. Never for an instant did he pause to consider the great advantages to himself of the wanderer's death. To him the dear wanderer was infinitely more than title, lands, and historic home combined, for the love of these two brothers, the last of the Ireton-Pyms, was indeed "wonderful, passing the love of women."

This is no precise and detailed chronicle of events which, an the gods will, may one day afford material for other and merrier tales. Still less is it a time-table of an impulsive lad's wild-goose chases through the purlieus and byways of three kingdoms. The jester who, despite himself, sets out to unfold a sad and solemn drama of human passions checked by the long arm of coincidence—or Providence, which you will—must steadfastly resist all temptation to jest by the way. Therefore I press on to the end that was appointed by the inscrutable Designer of every human story—an end at which some may marvel, but of which none may question the wisdom.

A dozen trails were followed, a dozen phantoms tracked, yet always with the same disheartening result. After many hundred

miles of dusty weariness the trail would, metaphorically speaking, end in a cul-de-sac. After days and nights of feverish, hot-foot chase the phantom (after the manner of phantoms) would vanish in thin air, or, what was even worse, become a very material "someone else."

In due course the seeker after a fallen idol was gazetted to the Marines, and these Jack-o'-lantern journeyings were of necessity curtailed. But his efforts to discover his idol's whereabouts, so far from being relaxed on that account, were, if anything, increased. The boy was liberally supplied with money, for, though the stern old baronet would not permit the defaulter's name to be mentioned in his presence, I think he found secret consolation in furnishing the searcher (ostensibly for other purposes) with the necessary sinews of war. The regiment, too, from colonel downwards, "played the game." The new arrival was reticence itself, yet they knew and appreciated the reason of his spasmodic and timid applications for forty-eight hours "on urgent private affairs." The long-suffering of the subalterns who "looked out" for him during his absence

was no less surprising to those who know the British officer than the chief's short memory in the matter of his last week's leave.

And then, one grey October morning, there came a brilliant ray of sunshine in the shape of a letter from Scotland. The writer, a friend of the family, while shooting in the outer Hebrides, had seen "with his own eyes" Rupert Ireton-Pym! Of that there was no possible room for doubt; it was the man himself, the ex-major, and no other. It was true that they had not exchanged a word. It was also true that the wanderer had a beard, and wore the kilt he had derided in happier days. Still, it was the man. The boy packed his Gladstone and sent his servant for a cab, the colonel and subalterns playing the game as they had played it a dozen times before.

Never had a journey promised so well as this one, never had the clue been so strong, the information so positive. As the express raced northwards the lad leaned back in his corner, with the *Pink Un* over his face and renewed hope under his waistcoat. At last he would find his dear brother (the letter had spoken of him as the new land steward of the

estate) and persuade him to come home. Ireton Hall, not the remote island property of a stranger, was the fitting care of the heir to the baronetcy; and the choleric old soldier at present in possession had, under pressure of increasing gout, shown symptoms of desiring the outcast's return. Yes, the blackest of clouds has its silver——

“Any gentleman in this compartment of the name o' Hireton-Pym?”

“Thank you, guard.”

The cadet of that historic house took the telegram handed to him through the window and tore open the envelope. They had reached Carlisle, and he felt that he was now literally within measurable distance of him he had sought so long. Then, at the eleventh hour, his beautiful “castle in Spain” collapsed like a house of cards. Never had his spirits been so high as the moment before, never had the heart-sickness borne of oft-deferred hope been so great as the moment after the coming of the message. “Return immediately,” it ran, with characteristic Service laconism and Post Office disregard of punctuation and capitals, “battalion ordered south africa adjutant.”

Stifling under a manly expletive something very like a boyish sob, Oliver Ireton-Pym hastily pitched his belongings out of the carriage into the hands of a porter, and crossed to the up platform. An hour later he was hurrying back to London.

* * * * *

A tiny flash high up among the rocks on the right, the hell whine through the twilight of a cursed Mauser bullet, and down below on the veldt another British rifle slipped from its owner's grasp to the bottom of the shallow shelter trench.

"My Gawd! I've copped it—fair. Tell——"

A quivering bundle of khaki and bandolier followed the rifle, and presently lay as still. Ah me! One likes to think that the rest of the message was told to a divine and pitying Listener, and that some dear woman at home for whom it had been intended was sustained and comforted.

"Shergold, Barnes, and 'Alliday—that makes three in our 'alf-comp'ny in less than ten minutes, sir. The son of 'Am has got the range to a yard."

"Then it's more than we have, sergeant," said Ireton-Pym, the subaltern, testily. "Lower your sights, men; your shots are all going over the hill. Try five-fifty."

They tried it. But when you have nothing more definite to fire at than an occasional flash from a loom of rocks piled against the skyline, your shooting resembles that of a bow drawn at a venture. In this case, however, the luck of the Old Testament archer was conspicuous by its absence. The British bullets splashed, and flattened themselves, and rang metallic notes upon the great boulders of the kopje; yet, as surely as a man in the trench carelessly showed a head or an arm above the low parapet, so surely the kopje winked, and another casualty was added to the sergeant's list.

It was the hour of dawn, and a big battle was pending. In hasty entrenchments scratched up during the darkness, in deep folds and hollows of the veldt, behind ant-hills, rocks, and every other object that afforded cover, the long, successive lines of the British force lay before the Boer position. On the extreme right of the fighting-line was a battalion of the Royal

Marine Light Infantry, its own right flank protected by the company of which Ireton-Pym was subaltern. That they were taking part in operations of more than usual importance everyone in the company knew; yet, with a sad lack of the sense of proportion, they showed less interest in the main issues of the game than in the doings of a solitary Boer sharpshooter who had established himself within six hundred yards of their position.

"If one o' you blind Bartimæuses will charge my magazine for me," mumbled the sergeant, as he tied a rag round a smashed wrist with his other hand and his teeth, "I'll make shift to empty it, one-'anded though I am. And, what's more, I'll get ten inners—even if I don't hit the blessed bull's-eye itself—which I'd give a month's pay to do, for the honour of the regi——"

For the honour of the regiment indeed, and something more than a month's pay! This time the aim of the hidden foe had been an inch or two truer, and the wounded sergeant's own gallant heart was the bull's-eye.

Then at last an overwhelming rage against

this unseen slayer of his men filled the breast of the lad who was their comrade and friend as well as their officer. A dreadful lust for vengeance danced in the boyish eyes; lines of grim determination, of set irrevocable purpose, that puckered the forehead and pegged down the corners of the mouth, crept into the smooth and beardless face. Silently reaching out from where he lay, he loosened the rifle from the dead sergeant's grip, and carefully recharged the empty magazine; and as he snuggled the weapon into the groove of the parapet, and looked along its sights, the veterans of the company understood that their lieutenant was a boy no longer, and that the last ten minutes had transformed him into a man of like passions with themselves.

Whether a long immunity from harm had made the enemy careless, or the growing light alone had betrayed his whereabouts, I know not, but it happened that as Ireton-Pym glanced up his rifle barrel towards the shadowy kopje, the slouch hat of the sharpshooter was silhouetted for a moment against the primrose sky. "Straight shooting is far more likely to serve you a good turn in the future than the

straightest hitting." The farewell words of his lost brother and the advice contained in the letter flashed across the mind of the sergeant's would-be avenger. Aiming well below the object he steadily raised the muzzle of the dead man's rifle, and, the instant the sights came on, fired. But this time there was no metallic ring of a bullet upon the rocks. Instead came a rousing British cheer from the men in the shelter trench and the enthusiastic shout from one of them of "a bull to Muster Pym!" For the bullet had done its appointed work, and they had seen their hitherto invisible foe fling his arms wildly to the sky and pitch headlong among the shadows. Shergold, Barnes, Halliday, and the sergeant were avenged.

But there was no time for exultation over the tumbled rag-bag who had killed them. The bugles were sounding the "Advance!" and the real business of the day was beginning—the dreadful, bloody business of a general engagement. It was the era of the Gospel according to St. Joshua—or some other equally primitive general, when a belief in frontal attacks against a strongly entrenched,

Mauser-armed enemy was necessary to acceptance at Pall Mall and to the salvation hanging thereby. Time after time, in accordance with the teaching of that crimson-bound, brazen-clasped gospel, was the gallant (and costly) British infantry devotedly led to a glorious (and utterly wasted) martyrdom. Time after time, with thinned, though continually reinforced ranks, the panting martyrs were flung back from the fire-ringed heights to the rolling veldt like surf-battered swimmers on a beach. Yet even frontal attacks, especially if they be British, will prevail, provided you persist long enough and sacrifice a sufficient number of men. The veldt was full of evening shadows, the long black shadows of the living and the invisible shadows of the dead, ere the final bayonet charge drove the enemy out of their rat-runs and down the reverse slopes of the hills in one blind, panic-stricken rush.

Of the strong, healthy men who had cheered Ireton-Pym in the shelter trench at dawn many at sunset were writhing with agony at the field hospitals; many, to whom Azrael had been kinder, lay here and there on the hillsides stiffened by sudden death. But a sweaty,

grimy remnant still remained at the end of the bloody day to answer the "Assembly" and limp back to bivouac under the pitying stars, and among these was Ireton-Pym himself. He was very weary, very footsore, but not a little pleased with himself for having lived to add another clasp to those he had already earned, and as he chatted with Allenby, the senior subaltern of the company, the boy would not have changed places with an emperor.

"After playing general post with the enemy all round the blessed compass from sunrise to sunset," he was saying, "it's a bit difficult in this god-forsaken land to fix one's position on the map. I seem to have been here before—perhaps I dreamt it. Anyhow, sleeping or waking, I'll take my oath this isn't the first time I have seen that stone heap yonder on the left."

"If you were dreaming," rejoined the other, stopping to light a cigarette, "all I can say is you shoot a jolly sight straighter in your sleep than most of us do when awake. That's the kopje where you potted the sniping son of Belial this morning."

Ireton-Pym gazed under his hands at the hill now bathed in the ruddy afterglow of sunset.

"By Jove, you're right! It's the same spot, and yet"—a tinge of sadness crept into his voice—"there seems to be a difference somehow."

His comrade puffed thoughtfully at his cigarette. "Yes," he admitted, "a difference—the difference between the dawn and sunset of a damnable, bloody day. We have seen things since the dawn, Noll, which I for one don't care if I never see again; and the worst have been English things—Anglo-Saxon, at all events—fighting their own flesh and blood. Noll, old man, I have looked to-day into the eyes of more than one of those reptiles, and one at least, I am glad to say, I have sent to his own place."

"And I am equally glad they did not come my way," said Ireton-Pym gravely. "I am only conscious of having killed that one man, and now, upon my soul, I am more than half sorry for it!"

"Rot! Why, if you hadn't killed him the odds are you wouldn't have been here now.

Besides, think of Sergeant Ellison and those other poor devils in the shelter-trench."

"Nevertheless," persisted the boy, "I am sorry," at which Allenby laughed.

But presently an idea came to the latter. "How about asking leave to fall out for half an hour," he suggested, "and going up yonder to look at the son of Ham?"

At first Ireton-Pym refused. Although in the course of the campaign he had looked with growing indifference on dead men by the score, he had a not altogether unnatural reluctance to see in cold blood one who had fallen by his own hand. In the end, however, the rallies of his comrade prevailed. The necessary leave was obtained, and a few minutes later the pair were climbing the steep sides of the kopje.

It was not long before they came upon the object of their visit. The dead sharpshooter lay face downwards among the rocks, his rifle still gripped by his stiffened fingers, a hole in the back of his head. There is always a touch of pathos about the helpless dead, but there was something so inexpressibly desolate in this tumbled figure on the hilltop that a lump

rose in Ireton-Pym's throat, and a mist gathered before his eyes as he gazed upon his handiwork of the morning.

"Yes," he muttered, "I am sorry, damned sorry. I wish to God, Allenby, my brother's tip about shooting—he was a crack shot, you know—hadn't come into my head just when it did. I might have missed the poor devil otherwise!"

But Allenby, after the first careless glance at the corpse, which to the veteran campaigner of twenty summers was an unconsidered trifle, had turned to watch through his field-glasses the movements of the battalion on the veldt beneath them.

"They seem to be bivouacking very near our position of this morning," he announced, "and—Noll, some of our company are lifting poor Ellison and the rest of the killed out of the shelter trench. You ought to be jolly glad you did pot that—— Here, I say, old man! Pull yourself together. Touch of the sun, eh?"

He was barely in time to catch the swaying figure in his arms. His comrade's face was as white as the face of the dead man at their

feet, who, Allenby perceived, now lay upon his back, staring upwards at the brightening Southern Cross.

With shaking fingers the boy unhooked the collar of his khaki tunic.

"Yes," he whispered, gazing stonily across the purple landscape at the last crimson streak of day, "a touch of the sun, no doubt. I shall be—all right—in a minute."

Something prompted the senior subaltern to stoop down and examine the features of the dead. The next moment he looked up sharply at the set, blanched face of the living.

"My God," he muttered under his breath, "it is!"

* * * * *

Bingham, Captain of No. 1 Company, being greatly exercised in the matter of his junior subaltern's behaviour, raised himself on his elbow, and said as much to his other youthful assistant.

"When a boy skirmishes over a howling wilderness like this from daylight to dusk without food," he observed, "and then spends the night playing with an old biscuit box, there must be a screw loose somewhere. What

did you do with him when you dragged him up that cursed kopje yonder?"

"Not me," yawned Allenby, feigning a drowsiness he was far from feeling, "sun."

"Ah! Well"—there was no pretence about his captain's yawn—"must see doctor—first thing—mornin'."

All night long the boy sat by the bivouac fire, carving letter after letter with his penknife on two bits of a splintered box. In the indigo sky above him, like myriads of tiny fire balloons, hung the Cross and other constellations of the southern hemisphere. Around him mountain and kopje and veldt, the vivid scene on which so many glazing eyes had closed that day, were now solemn and mysterious in the transparent gloom of the subtropical night. The air was full of drowsiness, the far-off croaking of frogs, the snore of worn-out men, the muffled tramp of a patrol, and the distant challenge of sentries. As the night rolled on the fire died down to a dull glow of embers, the stars lost their brilliancy, the indigo paled to a steely blue; and still the boy toiled on at his self-appointed task.

Not until the first tinge of primrose showed

in the eastern sky did he close his penknife and return it to his pocket. Then, clasping in his arms the result of his long night's work, he stiffly rose to his feet and stole unobserved from the camp.

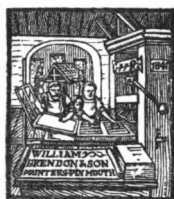
It was barely two hours later when they found him, yet he had done much in the interval besides terminating his own life. He was lying across a lonely cairn among the rocks on a kopje summit—a cairn that must have taxed its builder's strength to the utmost, and his still warm hands clutched an object set up among the stones at its head.

The object was a rudely fashioned cross formed of two pieces of a splintered biscuit box lashed together with string, and bearing the following laboriously carved inscription:—

R. I—P.

THAT WHICH WAS LOST IS FOUND.

THE END



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