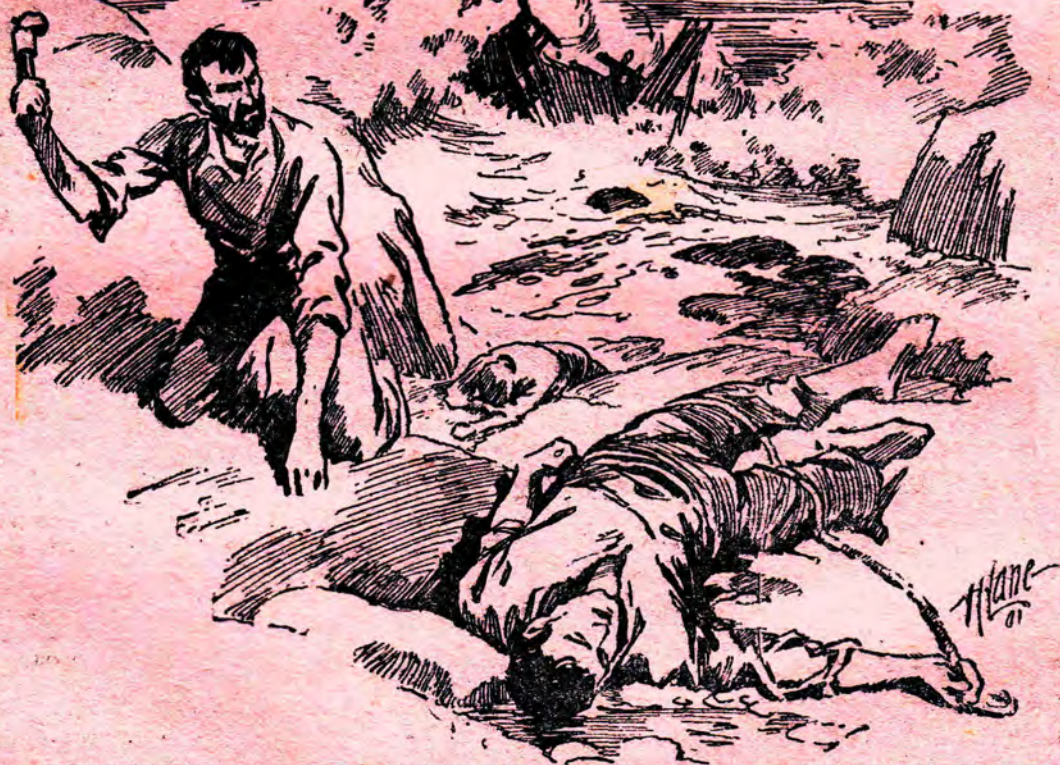


THE UNION JACK

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THE "UNION JACK"
CONTAINS
A LONG, COMPLETE NOVEL
EVERY FRIDAY.

SCHEMING FOR GOLD!



As the two men lay insensible, a hideous figure crept towards them. It was Captain Scrymgeour. He, too, had won his way ashore, he saw his only enemy lying helpless, and there was murder in his eyes as he stole upon him, clubbing a revolver.

No. 394

Also the Grand
New Serial:

FOR FAME AND FORTUNE!

FOR FAME

By G. WELLS CAMPBELL.

Author of "Tracked Round the World,"

"Dead Man's Gold," &c., &c.

AND FORTUNE.

Frank Fairfield's Reform—A Wonderful Machine—Wily Job Jason—The Stolen Plans—A Secret Mission.

The elder Mr. Fairfield drummed his fingers impatiently on his study-table, contradictory expressions chasing each other across his weather-beaten face.

From time to time he glanced at a roll of plans by his side, with a smile of satisfaction; then, taking out his watch, composed his face into an expression of anxiety. Once or twice he even stamped his foot impatiently, and a strong monosyllable escaped his lips.

"What's come to the boy?" he muttered presently as he noted the fact that his watch pointed to five o'clock. "He promised faithfully to be with me at four thirty, and still I wait. Can it be—?" He started, and his face paled. "No," he reassured himself. "Wild as Frank is, he never yet broke a promise to his father. Something important must have detained him."

Thus comforting himself, he arose from his chair, and paced the room, thoughtful and grave; but the anxiety fled from his face.

A tall, military-looking personage was this elder Frank Fairfield, father to one of the wildest young bloods in all London, and one of the cleverest mining engineers of the day.

Tall, broad of shoulder, well-knit, and erect, he looked every inch a man. His head was but sparsely covered with white hair, though one would scarcely have called him bald. No beard adorned his firm, square chin; but shading his upper lip was a heavy white moustache, which stood out in great contrast to his brown, weather-beaten skin.

In short, meeting Mr. Fairfield in the street, one might remark: "There goes a colonel, if you like! a splendid man and a martinet, I'll be bound!"

Such is the deceitfulness of appearances. Mr. Fairfield had never spent so much as a single day in the Army, and, as a look into the depths of his kindly grey eyes would have shown a close observer, was the reverse of being a martinet.

Kindly and benevolent to the last degree, Mr. Fairfield quite belied his looks. His one ambition in life was to be the very first engineer in the world, and his pet anxiety the wildness of his son Frank.

Fairfield had paced the length of his study some dozen times ere a knock was heard at the door, and, in response to a gently spoken "Come in!" there entered Frank Fairfield, junior.

"At last!" said the father, clasping his son by the hand. "You're late, Frank, my boy! What has kept you?"

Frank's face beamed all over. He was evidently in the best of humours and pleased with himself into the bargain. His good humour proved infectious, and the brown face of the elder man relaxed from its gravity into a smile.

About twenty-three years old, he was tall, broad, handsome, with a frank face and fascinating manners, Frank looked a fitting son for the old man. He always dressed in the latest fashion, went everywhere, and did everything—good and bad. Unfortunately, mostly bad.

"You'll be pleased when you know what's kept me, dad," said Frank, in answer to the old man's query. "I've been saying good-bye to old friends—no, not friends; say bad company—and it took me longer than I expected."

He smiled as he spoke, his eyes twinkled with delight, and an expression of genuine joy overspread his handsome features as he noticed how pleased the old man was to hear it.

"And this is to be really the end of your wild escapades?" asked the elder man. "No more cards, &c.? No more spending money like water, ruining your health, and endangering your future? For I tell you candidly, Frank, my purse could not have stood your extravagances much longer."

Frank's smile vanished. A look of grief took its place, and he said fervently how sorry he was.

"There is my invention," said the father presently. "The new crushing and separating machine, which is to lessen the cost of gold-mining by one-half. That will soon be on the market, dear boy, and I shall recuperate. I am satisfied that you should give over your wildness now, and do not regret what it has cost me to let you see the uselessness of a wicked

WE HAVE PLACED THIS GRAND NEW SERIAL FIRST IN THE PAPER TO DRAW YOUR SPECIAL ATTENTION TO IT. THE COMPLETE NOVEL "SCHEMING FOR GOLD" BEGINS ON PAGE 5.

life. I have spoken to Mr. Edward Handcroft on your behalf, and, as a personal favour to me, he has consented to give you a position in the counting-house, a vacancy having just occurred—one Charles Headlam, your predecessor, having been discharged for dishonesty."

Frank was truly glad of this. Tired of his wild life, and grieved to see how his dissipated habits were affecting the father he loved, he had renounced all, and intended to lead a quiet, industrious life in future.

"You commence your duties on Monday next," continued the father. "This is Wednesday, so you have four clear days to prepare yourself for your new life. Leave me now, Frank, my boy. I have some points to perfect in these plans, and would be alone."

A tear glistened in the old man's eye as he spoke, and, taking the hint that his emotion was too strong for him, Frank left his father alone, the latter's blessing ringing in his ears as the door closed upon him.

"Deuce take it! How the governor does take the wind out of a chap's sails!" he muttered as he descended the stairs. "He pretty nearly made me blubber like a great kid! But he's a dear old chap, anyway, hang it! I don't believe there's another dad in the kingdom would let his son have his fling like this!" His brow clouded a moment. "There's the club!" he muttered. "How the chaps will chaff when I refuse to mix with 'em again. H'm! Ab, well"—a smile breaking—"let 'em. It won't worry me. Dad's been a brick, and he's got to come before everybody now! Let the fellows rip! Let 'em rip!"

That latter sentence was a favourite expression of Frank's. His happy-go-lucky nature would not allow him to worry over anything for more than a minute, and when any matter perplexed him, he simply dismissed it with the words: "Let it rip!" altering the second word as circumstances required.

Notwithstanding his wildness and carelessness, Frank was good at heart, and now that he really saw he had been enjoying himself at the cost of his father's peace of mind, he was only too glad to reform. If ever a reformation were sincere, Frank Fairfield's was that one.

Proof of this was found in the fact that when Mr. Fairfield, senior, passed through the counting-house of E. Handcroft and Co., on Monday morning, the most industrious clerk in the place was his own son.

The cashier and general manager of the counting-house, Mr. Job Jason, received Frank, and instructed him in his duties.

On the instant, Frank conceived an overwhelming desire to punch his manager's head. Not that Jason was overbearing, just the reverse.

His sleek ways and meek tone annoyed Frank, and, a good character-reader, the shifty green eyes that never looked him full in the face, told him that Jason was not a man to be trusted.

The manager was a man of medium height, with very little hair, smooth face, and soberly dressed. In fact, he looked almost ecclesiastical—an effect, be it said, of which Jason was, in his innermost soul, rather proud.

For a month Frank worked assiduously, taking to the work, and, in his easy-going way, forgetting he had ever lived otherwise.

Then a bomb fell into his quiet life.

The crushing and separating machine of the elder Fairfield, for which such a bright future had been planned, was at last completed. The model, made by the painstaking hands of the inventor, together with the plans, had been removed to Mr. Handcroft's private office, and financial negotiations had been satisfactorily concluded between Fairfield and Handcroft.

The greatest secrecy had been observed, and every precaution taken to prevent the slightest atom of news regarding the invention reaching other firms.

But, alas! those plans remained in the office but one night. The following morning, upon Handcroft's arrival, he found his desk broken open, and the precious papers gone. The model, too, had been tampered with.

START THIS GRAND SERIAL TO-DAY.

A heavy hammer in the hands of some unknown scoundrel had irretrievably smashed it up, and the broken pieces lay scattered about the office.

Little Mr. Handcroft, his chubby face and shining bald head glowing with rage, was perfectly furious. In his frenzy, he had even put his spectacles on upside down, and his huge corporation rose and fell as indignation and chagrin filled the fat and usually pleasant little man.

Handcroft had only been seen in a temper once or twice, his general demeanour being laughing and jolly. The whole world seemed to Handcroft to be a huge joke, and all the happenings therein things to be laughed at. So, far from being suspected of being an engineer, one would have taken him for a prosperous pork merchant.

But now his blood was up! The great invention which was to have put his firm, at one stroke, above all others, was gone! He had no duplicate plans, and the working out of fresh ones meant years of hard work to Mr. Fairfield. The inventor himself was little less perturbed, though he showed it in a different way, his face simply setting into sterner lines, and his kindly eyes hardening with a steely glitter. He spoke little.

It is a noticeable fact that when men of Handcroft's temperament are roused, their rage is awful to witness. Handcroft was raving mad.

"Great Scott, Fairfield!" he cried. "You don't seem to care a straw! Hang me! I'll have the villain who did this sought out if I break the firm! I'll have him hung, drawn and quartered, then hung again! Misfortune and evil overtake him! If I only knew who he was I'd—I'd fall on him!"

This was intended as a terrible threat, as Handcroft weighed not an ounce under fifteen stone.

"The thing's done," said Fairfield quietly, and in a hard voice, "and it's useless to get frantic over it. Our first move should be to interview all the employees, meanwhile sending for the police."

"A good plan!" roared Handcroft. "We'll do it! Here, boy!"—to a messenger—"tell Jason to send me everybody in the firm, half a dozen at a time! Go on! git! scurry!"

The boy disappeared from the awful wrath of his master, and presently the contingents came in. One after another, batches of half a dozen entered, and were questioned, till the last six were reached.

This group contained Frank and Jason.

"I say," said Jason, as they were going through the corridor that led to the proprietor's office, "this is a bad business. The plans of the new crusher have been stolen, and the model smashed. The governor is questioning everybody!"

"Well, I've nothing to fear," said Frank lightly, "but I'm sorry for dad!"

"The innocent are not always proved so," said Jason silkily. "One never knows but what one says, though innocent enough, may hang him."

"What I say won't hang me!" said Frank. "I'm quite safe, my friend, so pray don't worry. Let it rip!"

"But it might condemn me," pursued Jason artfully.

"In what way?"

"Why, I was in Handcroft's office last thing last night, getting some letters off his file. Heaven knows I've had nothing to do with this awful crime"—holding up his hands in horror at the mere thought—"but if you mentioned the circumstance of my having been in the office—you saw me, you know—why the detective they employ will at once mark me out and weave a web round me. Such a thing is not uncommon."

"Then you wish me to say nothing of the matter?" asked Frank, eyeing the other keenly.

"Precisely," said Jason.

Frank tried in vain to see some sign of guilt on the other's face. It was as calm and saintly as ever. And the young man was fain to persuade himself that his dislike for Jason was simply a personal antipathy for which there was no deep reason.

Therefore, when the questioning was done, Frank discreetly held his tongue regarding Jason's presence in the chief's office on the previous night; while Jason himself swore he had not been in the office, save when Handcroft was there himself.

"This is exasperating!" snapped Handcroft, when all had been interviewed. "Here, I've wasted best part of a day and learnt nothing. Might have expected as much. As soon expect a fishmonger to bawl 'stinking fish' as for a thief to confess his guilt!"

"Precisely!" said Jason quietly. And the silky voice seemed only to irritate Handcroft more.

"Where, in the name of all that's wicked, is that dolt of a detective I sent for? Hanging the time out, so as to give the thief plenty of time to cover his tracks, and thus make a longer job for himself! Confound him!"

At that moment a boy entered with a note, which read to the effect that the required detective would be sent the following morning. Handcroft's rage was now a sight to see, and he ordered everybody from his presence save Frank.

A look of unutterable sadness crossed the elder Fairfield's face as he noted the exception and left the room, while Jason had to turn his head quickly to hide the smile which rose to his lips. When they had gone, Handcroft, greatly cooled now, turned to the wondering Frank.

"My boy," said he, "don't run away with the idea that I've detained you in order to accuse you—for I haven't. I've got the real thief fixed in my mind, and—and—it isn't you!"

"Might I ask—"

"You may. I know you don't love the person, so I think I can safely tell you. He's a pious-looking fellow, with small eyes, a silky voice, and the appearance of a Sunday-school teacher."

"Jason!" ejaculated Frank.

"The very man!" said Handcroft. "You flatter my descriptive abilities."

Then Frank told Handcroft of the conversation which had passed between himself and Jason in the corridor, at which the fat proprietor, now almost as jolly as ever again, chuckled hugely, and rubbed his chubby hands together in a highly satisfied manner.

"We've got him!" he chuckled. "He's convicted himself already. Just wait till I get Squeers down here—Detective Sam Squeers—and he'll clap the irons on him in no time. But this wasn't what I wanted to speak to you about," he broke off. "I have here"—producing a parchment envelope—"an important letter, containing some secrets which I would trust to few people. I want you to take them to my agent at Chidlington to-night. Will you go?"

"You have but to command me, sir," said Frank. "I shall be proud to execute the commission, and to show you that your confidence in a reformed bounder isn't misplaced."

"Then do so," said Handcroft, beaming on Frank as if he considered this reformation a very fine joke. "I shall place the fullest confidence in you."

When Frank left the office that night he found his father waiting for him in the vestibule.

The old man's face was still clouded, his eyes looked haggard, and it could easily be seen that he had received a severe blow. But none knew how severe.

"Frank, my boy," he said, in a pained voice, "we'll go home together to-night. I wish to talk with you."

"Right, dad!" said Frank cheerfully.

But a glance at his father's face warned him that levity was out of place at the moment; therefore, he assumed a grave air, and walked in silence by his father's side till the house was reached.

Not a word had been exchanged on the road, and dinner was equally silent. When the things had been cleared away, however, old man Fairfield arose and spoke:

"I am going to the study," he said softly. "I desire you to accompany me."

Wondering why his father should be so grave and distant with him, Frank obeyed, and a minute later stood facing the old man in the old-fashioned, littered-up room where the crusher had been invented.

"Frank," began the father, "I am grieved to have to say to you that which I am about to say, but little matters which have come under my notice render it necessary. Frank, you have just quitted a wild and extravagant life, in which gambling played a prominent part. It is well known about town that you contracted enormous debts in this way—"

"Which were all paid up a month ago," interrupted Frank. "That is well. But people do not know it. Are you aware that the theft of these plans will probably be fastened on you, owing to those debts and past extravagances?"

"I am not aware of it!" said Frank hotly. "I know nothing of the kind. I left my club life long before the plans disappeared, and settled everything up. The past and present have nothing in common. Surely, surely"—seeing a look on his father's face—"you do not suspect me, dad? You do not suspect me of robbing my own father?"

"I did not say so," replied Fairfield, rather coldly. "All I say is that suspicion is likely to attach itself to you."

As a fact, Fairfield had suspected his son. But, when he looked into the frank face—the eyes of which were blazing now with just indignation—he felt he had been wrong, and mentally voted himself a cad. Then Handcroft's private interview with Frank recurred to him, and he said:

"Why did Handcroft detain you, if he did not suspect you? Was it not to accuse you?"

Frank's face brightened.

"Look here, dear old dad," he said. "It seems to me your trouble has upset your usually clear reasoning—in short, you've got hold of the wrong end of the stick. Why, when you hear why he kept me back you'll feel like kicking yourself for sheer joy!"

The elder man's face relaxed.

"Then enlighten me, Frank," he said. "And if your communication is as satisfactory as you promise it shall be, a weight will be lifted from my mind."

Thereupon Frank detailed his conversation with the chief; and, as he had prophesied, his father felt like kicking himself with joy. No longer did dark suspicions of his son—unworthy of his noble nature those suspicions were—overcloud his troubled mind. The loss of the plans and model was his only trouble, and he felt thankful it was no worse.

"So you see, dad," concluded Frank, "even clever chaps like you make mistakes at times. By the by, old Handcroft says he has a pretty shrewd idea as to who really did steal the plans, and promises to have the bracelets on him directly Detective Squeers arrives. If it were not for spoiling this detective's job, I'd smash the villain's far from beautiful countenance! No, no!"—as the other demanded the thief's name—"I was told not to divulge it, and won't break my promise. If Mr. Handcroft likes to tell you, he can; but you won't get it out of me. So please don't worry, dad. It'll all come right in the end, you can bet your reputation. So let it rip, dad, and we'll be cheerful together for the hour before I start to Chidlington. 'Cheats never prosper,' say the kids. And neither do thieves, say I. So let it rip. Come; we'll open a bottle of Moet, and be merry."

And, in spite of himself, carried away by Frank's irresistible cheerfulness, the old man quickly found himself forgetting his trouble, and chatting with his handsome son as pleasantly as if nothing had happened.

An hour later, as gay as ever, Frank parted from his father, and was soon being whirled rapidly towards King's Cross, fully determined to show his employer how well his trust should be guarded.

Edward Handcroft's Mysterious Disappearance—Sam Squeers, Detective—Falsely Accused—The Lost Telegram.

The morning after the discovery of the robbery found Edward Handcroft's office in, if possible, a greater state of excitement than ever.

The usual time for Handcroft's arrival had gone an hour. Jason had sent a messenger to the chief's private house in Clapham to see whether he were ill, and the messenger had returned with the news that Mr. Handcroft, breaking a record of twenty-five years, had not been home all night.

Further inquiries were immediately made, and the conclusion came to by all concerned that, in some mysterious way, Handcroft had disappeared.

How, when, or why was not evident; and they were just those points of the case Jason and the elder Fairfield were discussing when Detective Sam Squeers was announced.

The announcement was quite a superfluous ceremony, however, for the detective entered shoulder to shoulder with the messenger who took in his card.

"Good-morning, gentlemen!" he said hastily, offering his hand and shaking as if this were a meeting with a pair of long-lost brothers, or something of the sort.

He was a curious individual, this Squeers, and, though reputed to be one of the cleverest men in his profession, never seemed to be capable of thinking seriously of any one matter for more than a minute or two at a time. Of medium height, with extraordinarily broad shoulders, his form would hardly be called comely, though the massive limbs and shoulders compelled admiration. His hair was sandy, and very closely cropped—presumably to allow of easy hirsute disguise—while his face was as white as a sheet. A nose which resembled in shape a door-knob shone out a ruby glow from the midst of this white ground with a brilliancy and effect only to be equalled by a danger-signal. The wonder was that it did not impart a tinge of colour with its light over the rest of his face. But it didn't. And, glancing at him, he gave one the impression that at some time in his life he must have been given to stooping too much, thus causing all the blood in his head to gravitate to his nose. When he smiled, the comical aspect was enhanced, and the effect was killing. As the smile seldom left his face, the mortality in Sam Squeers's neighbourhood must have been very high.

"Good-morning, gentlemen!" he repeated. "I'm Squeers—Sam Squeers—in fact, Detective Sam Squeers. Little matter of lost plans or something. Are you Mr. Fairfield?"—addressing Jason.

"No, Mr. Squeers," said Jason, giving his name. "This is Mr. Fairfield, whose plans have been lost. But, dear me! there's more than plans lost now—Handcroft's!"

"You don't say!" said Squeers, looking astonished. "Dear me! That's bad. He might have waited till I'd found these plans before he lost himself. I can't do two things at once."

"We don't expect you to, Mr. Squeers," said Mr. Fairfield. "But I have no doubt you will find both matters run into the same case. That is how I look at it."

"Shrewd man," said Squeers. "Shouldn't wonder—shouldn't, indeed. Do you suspect anyone?"

"No one."

"Oh, that's rot!" ejaculated Squeers. "Someone's got to be suspected, you know. Look here, I'll trot round the works

in disguise, and if I haven't got anyone under suspicion before dinner you can call me a pumpkin."

He then took all particulars of the robbery, and was about to depart, when Jason called him back.

"Dear, dear, Mr. Squeers!" he said. "Do you know you've got a horrid blackbeetle crawling over your tie?"

Squeers laughed, and picked off the beetle, which he laid on the palm of his hand.

"That's Nick," he smiled—"a little pal of mine. See him run round my hand? He fancies there's microbes there, and is on their track. Rare pal is Nick! Many a case I've won over good old Nick."

"You astonish me!" gasped Jason, backing, as Squeers approached with the repulsive insect.

"Truth!" asseverated Squeers. "All criminals are afraid of beetles. Try him on your collar, Mr. Jason. He's tame!"

But Jason had taken refuge on a shelf, and refused to come down till the obnoxious insect had been placed safely in Squeers's waistcoat-pocket.

"I'll put you down in my list of suspected persons," laughed Squeers, taking out his notebook. "You're afraid of Nick. Well, good-bye, Mr. Jason and Mr. Fairfield! I'll call round with the lost goods as soon as poss. Toor-aloo!"

"One moment, Mr. Squeers," faltered Jason, who had now descended. "You are in want of a suspect. I'll give you one."

"Aha!" smiled Squeers, again producing the notebook. "I thought you were wrong at first. The idea! A robbery! No one suspected! Come, what's his name?"

"Frank Fairfield!"

"Liar!" All the latent ferocity in the old man blazed forth in that one word as he heard his son accused.

"It is the truth," said Jason quietly, and as if he regretted having to mention the matter at all.

"Prove it!" cried the elder Fairfield, while Squeers wrote in shorthand like a Parliamentary reporter. "Prove it up to the hilt!" he roared, "or, by Heaven, I will felly you!"

"Proof is a scarce commodity," bleated Jason, "but circumstantial evidence shows a great deal. For instance, I saw your son in Mr. Handcroft's office the night before the theft. He begged me not to mention the matter, as he had been there for no felonious purpose, and I, trusting him, knowing his father to be so honourable a man—cunningly—said nothing at the time. I feared, however, my silence had been ill-advised, and in vain, when I perceived that Mr. Handcroft detained him after he had questioned every one else. I happen to know that our chief accused him of the crime. I likewise happen to know that he has large unpaid gambling debts, and that the money he would realise on this theft would be very acceptable to him. Furthermore, young Fairfield has disappeared, too. Where has he gone? Having been accused by Handcroft, he has evidently contrived to remove the poor old gentleman from his path—perhaps murder—"

Crash!

During the recitation of this tissue of lies, Mr. Fairfield had stood erect, his tanned face pale, and his eyes blazing; then, with a mighty swing of his powerful right arm, he struck Jason a blow on that false face of his, which stretched his son's calumniator on the floor senseless.

A look of utter contempt he bestowed upon the prostrate form of Jason, then he turned to Squeers, who stood there, the personification of astonishment.

"Every word this man has uttered is false!" he said. "My son is as innocent as myself! For this our's lies, I have dealt him a blow from which he does not deserve to recover. You were a witness to that blow, Squeers, and if, as may happen, he dies you know where to find me. I shall not run away."

As he spoke, he strode from the office, leaving Squeers in a great state of perplexity, and Jason as senseless as a log.

But what of the man who was the innocent cause of this little scene? Entrusted with his master's greatest secret, he was fulfilling his trust religiously.

Yet, all unknown to him, a web was just beginning to weave itself around him, and soon he would be hunted by the minions of the law for the crime of another.

Everything was against the absent Frank, and the reason of his father tottered on its throne as he thought of the awful homecoming which awaited his boy.

His wild life, gambling debts, his interview with the chief, his absence—which would be contorted into an attempt to prove an alibi regarding the disappearance of Handcroft—would all be marshalled against him.

His father saw all this, but had such implicit faith in the eventual triumph of truth over falsehood that he frantically telegraphed to his hotel at Chidlington: "Return at once. Your honour is at stake!"

But the telegram never reached Frank Fairfield, and what a stirring life-drama was the outcome of the cause and effect of that fact!

(This exciting Serial Story will be continued in next Friday's UNION JACK, No. 395.)

NEXT FRIDAY.

'LAST OF HIS RACE.'

LIVING TWO LIVES!

By H. S. WARWICK.

(Concluded.)

The Trial Opens—The Counsel for the Defence Asks the Chief Witness Some Strange Questions—Who "Mr. Morrow" Really Was—Jim Comes Into His Own.

The morning of the great murder-trial dawned. The court, which opened at ten o'clock, was packed.

All eyes were bent eagerly towards the dock as pale, yet self-possessed, the lad charged with the crime for which the law exacts the extreme penalty entered, and in a firm voice pleaded "Not Guilty."

The clerk of arraigns mumbled the customary words of address to the jury, recounting the indictment, and the prisoner's plea of "Not Guilty."

The counsel for the prosecution rose, and began his speech.

Our readers are acquainted with the facts that formed the basis of his remarks. He dwelt strongly on the fact that the chief witness against the prisoner was a man held in high esteem for his generous and philanthropic qualities, which had found wide scope for exercise in the neighbourhood where he lived. This witness averred that he saw what was beyond doubt deliberate murder. Was this the sort of man, he would ask the jury—a man whose life had been spent in good works—likely to bear false-witness—to swear away an innocent life?

Referring to the prisoner, the counsel for the prosecution spoke fairly, and with no desire to unduly bias the minds of the jury. "Probably," he said, "the prisoner—who appeared to think that his father had suffered great injuries at the hands of Brood—had yielded to the momentary impulse of an immature, undisciplined mind, to a mad desire for revenge for a real or fancied wrong."

And so the speech went on.

The counsel for the defence—Mr. Glazebrook, K.C.—listened without a trace of anxiety on his face, and more than once, as he devoted himself to carefully polishing his finger-nails, a peculiar smile parted his lips, which made those who knew the famous barrister whisper:

"Glazebrook's got a card up his sleeve!"

At last the prosecuting counsel sat down, and his junior rose to examine the witnesses for the Crown.

"Martin Morrow!"

In response to the call the man with the withered eye stepped up into the witness-box, and took the oath.

The junior counsel for the Crown began his examination. The witness answered question after question calmly, and without a trace of hesitation. Most people in court began to think the case against the prisoner looked very black.

The junior closed his examination. The counsel for the defence rose to cross-examine the witness.

"Now, sir, on your oath, will you tell the jury," said the barrister, looking keenly at the witness, "whether the fact that you wear a false beard and moustache and wig when you come into this court is for the purpose of hiding your identity? Yes or no?"

Everyone in the court was startled, and on the witness the effect of these words was amazing. He swayed and clutched at the rail for support. All his self-possession had deserted him. He was trembling violently. He tried to speak, but for a moment he could only produce an inarticulate sound.

"I protest against the question, my lord!" he said faintly to the judge.

"It is relevant to the case, my lord," murmured the counsel. The judge, who had not failed to notice with swift suspicion the witness's discomfiture, said sternly:

"You must answer the question."

"I do not wear them as a disguise," he said faintly. The spectators listened breathlessly. They felt there was some hidden significance behind the counsel's words. That the witness's beard and moustache were not his own was a complete surprise to all, so perfectly natural did they look.

Joe and Harwood were grinning.

"This is touching him up a little, eh, laddie?" chirped the comedian.

"Very good," said Mr. Glazebrook to the witness, whose nerve had evidently forsaken him completely. "Will you now tell the jury—on your oath, sir—whether one of your eyes is not—artificial?"

The witness looked appealingly at the judge.

"Answer the question!" said his lordship.

"Yes"—so faintly that the monosyllable could hardly be heard.

"And now, sir," went on the counsel mercilessly, "tell the

jury when last you called yourself Langrish Brood, school-master!"

There was a heavy crash. The man in the witness-box had fallen in a fit.

"Mr. Glazebrook, kindly explain the meaning of this!" cried the judge, as startled as anyone in court.

"It means, my lord, that if the witness's false beard, moustache, and hair were stripped off, and that grey, dead-looking eye—which is glass—were replaced by an artificial eye matching the sound one, you would see the supposed murdered man, Langrish Brood. That, my lord, is my case."

And he sat down.

"Blowed if he hasn't taken all the credit to himself for the discovery!" muttered Joe, in disgust as he looked at the complacent barrister. "And I fondly thought you and I were going to have a good show-in at the 'curtain'!"

This was the secret Harwood and Joe had learnt when they stole into "Mr. Morrow's" bedroom: Langrish Brood was not dead!

The man had lived two lives. As a safeguard against a time when his crimes might be discovered, he had created a second personality, that of the recluse "Mr. Morrow," appearing from time to time in this disguise.

So complete was the disguise that no one dreamed that Brood and Morrow were not two distinct persons, the secret of its success lying in the fact that the man had a glass eye.

In his role of Brood the schoolmaster, he wore an artificial eye that was a perfect match to his sound one. When he assumed the role of Morrow, he changed this glass eye for another with the appearance of a natural eye that had withered into sightlessness. This change alone was sufficient to transform marvellously Brood's appearance.

The scoundrel's reason for this deception is obvious. Should a time come when the police were on his track, his plan was simply to sink his identity as Brood, and become "Mr. Morrow," the esteemed philanthropist, whilst the police would be hunting for a criminal who had practically ceased to exist.

Brood had not been touched by the bullet from Jim's revolver. Startled by the lightning, he had started back, and lost his balance, and fell—not very far, being caught unhurt by the cage at the end of the chain, a few feet below the level of the shaft mouth.

As Jim ran off he climbed out, just as Marks, who had managed to steal into the Grange and out again unseen, came back with the means of Brood disguising himself as the man with the withered eye.

Possessed of iron nerve, he had determined on a master-stroke. He would accuse Jim of murder, and thereby both obtain revenge on the boy, and check any further police-search for Brood.

The scoundrel was subsequently tried for his crimes, and found guilty, and sentenced to death. He left a confession, in which was explained the only mystery of this narrative that remains unsolved.

He had mesmerised Leonard Pearson, and made the boy a tool in his plans for disposing of his victim, Roy Darrell, by whose murder Karlsake had stepped into a fortune.

It was Leonard Pearson who, under "hypnotic suggestion," involuntarily impersonated Roy Darrell on the night journey to the inn, and thence to Plymouth, where Dr. Pudsey's conveyance was waiting to take the boy to the Retreat.

Of that journey the boy, on being freed from his hypnotic state, retained no remembrance. Subsequently, by accident, he discovered the involuntary part he had played in concealing a great crime. He paid for his discovery with his life, as our readers already know.

Marks disappeared without a trace. Pudsey also thought it prudent to seek other climes.

Little more remains to be told. After a weary illness, Jim's father came slowly back to health, to find the unmerited stain on his name removed. The scoundrel, who, dying of consumption, felt remorse troubling him, was induced to make a clean breast of the frauds for which Jim's father, the innocent cat's-paw, had so long suffered, and ultimately a free "pardon" was granted to the much-wronged man.

Rob-of-the-Inn happily recovered from his injuries.

Jim Ruthven, son of the Squire of Hethersett, is little altered by his sudden access of fortune from the gay, generous-hearted, happy-go-lucky Jim Nameless, whom we introduced to our readers at the opening of this story.

There is nothing he loves better than to gather all his old friends around him at the Grange—Harwood, the Chevalier and his "missus," good old Joe Baggs, Captain Marston, and Mr. Bloxam—to spin yarns of the old days when he was a strolling player, or a pupil at the queer school on the moors.

THE END.

"LAST OF HIS RACE."

NEXT FRIDAY

Scheming for Gold.

An Exciting Complete Novel by CHARLES HAMILTON,
Author of "Brave British Boys," "The Blue-Box Mystery," &c.

CHAPTER I.

An Unwelcome Guest—"I hoped never to see you again!"—Struck Down in Treachery—The Mystery of a Night—Marcus Dene is not Quite Satisfied.

A boat glided under the main chains of the ship "Opossum," lying at anchor in the estuary of the Humber.

Boatswain Wemyss stepped upon the gangway, and gave a glance over the side into the shadows.

"Is that you, Mr. Bryce?"

"Yes, Wemyss. Is Captain Scrymgeour aboard?"

"In his cabin, sir, waiting for you."

"Very good."

The boat, secured by her painter, floated empty beside the huge ship. Two men boarded the "Opossum."

One of them, Bryce, was known to Wemyss. A pale, thin, nervous man, but a good sailor, and chief mate of the "Opossum." The other was a stranger—evidently the visitor the captain had been expecting, and whom Wemyss was ordered to show at once down to the cabin.

The two men passed aft, and descended the companion, and the boatswain was left alone upon the gangway. There was a foreboding expression upon his face.

Well he knew that the captain's visitor was unwelcome. He had heard Scrymgeour muttering several times about the man who was coming to see him, and he had more than once de-

tected the words "scoundrel" and "wastrel." Wemyss believed that ere long he would hear sounds of quarrelling from the cabin.

Outside the cabin-door, in the glimmer of the cuddy-lamp, the two men stopped and exchanged whispers.

"Bryce, keep your pecker up! All's going famously!" was what the stranger said.

"I can't help feeling a bit shaky, Keene."

"Pshaw, man! Why, you're trembling!"

"I wish I had your nerve."

"Courage—leave everything to me. I promise you that all shall go like clockwork."

Bryce tapped at the door.

"Come in!"

They entered. The captain's cabin of the "Opossum" was a spacious, well-furnished, and well-lighted apartment. A man, who had been restlessly pacing its length, from the port-hole to the opposite bulkhead, had stopped abruptly at the sound of Bryce's timid tap. His eyes became fixed upon the stranger as he advanced into the cabin.

"Mr. Keene, sir," said Bryce.

"Very good. Thanks. You may leave us."

Bryce stepped out of the cabin, and closed the door. But he did not go further. He stood, leaning his hand upon the table by the mizzen-mast, trembling in every limb. His ears were strained to catch any sound proceeding from the cabin. He seemed the prey of a deep, unconquerable terror.

As soon as Bryce had gone out, his companion, left alone with Captain Scrymgeour, threw aside the large slouched hat which had shaded and concealed his countenance.

The lamplight showed a strong, handsome face, with clearly marked features, deep-set eyes, and thick, heavy brows.

But what was remarkable about the face was that it was almost an exact replica of that of Captain Scrymgeour.

From the likeness between them, the two men might have been twins; evidently they were very near relations. Both seemed about thirty years of age. A critical eye would have noticed certain minute dissimilarities; the men were not precisely "doubles," yet in similar garb the impersonation of one by the other would not have been a difficult task.

In expression, it is true, the two faces were at this moment totally unlike. Captain Scrymgeour looked disturbed and angry, and his eyes were shining beneath his heavy brows, while Sholto Keene was calm, smiling, and placid.

He held out his hand to the captain of the "Opossum." Scrymgeour waved it away with a disdainful gesture. Quite unruffled, Keene allowed it to fall to his side again.

"You do not appear glad to see me, Edmund," he remarked. "This is a pleasant welcome to the cousin you have not seen for two years or more."

"And whom I hoped never to see again!" Captain Scrymgeour said bitterly. "Don't let us waste time in talk. You have demanded an interview with me. What is your motive? Have you committed another forgery? Are you hunted by the police? What fresh disgrace have you brought upon your family?"

Keene made a deprecatory gesture.

"Are you not a little hard upon me, Edmund?" he said. "Perhaps I have been more sinned against than sinning. But I did not come here to talk about the past."

"Why did you come?"

Keene did not appear to hear the question.

"The 'Opossum' sails to-morrow?" he asked.

"With the tide."

"To Trincomalee?"



Just as the skipper's fingers were closing upon the letter the right hand of Sholto Keene reappeared, with something in it. Before Scrymgeour could divine his treacherous intention, the hand rose and fell with lightning rapidity, and a fearful blow was struck.

"LAST OF HIS RACE," COMPLETE NEXT FRIDAY.

"Yes."

"With a consignment of specie to the Bank of Ceylon?"

Captain Scrymgeour smiled ironically.

"Are you thinking of stealing it?" he asked.

Keene smiled, too.

"That would be a difficult job," he remarked; "especially as Marcus Dene, the nephew of one of your owners, is coming on board as a special guard of the gold."

The captain looked startled.

"It seems to me that you know a good deal about the matter," he said suspiciously.

"Yes," Keene assented calmly, "pretty nearly all there is to be known, I reckon."

"Which means that you have been told. And am I to suppose that Mr. Bryce has been blabbing out his employer's secrets?" angrily exclaimed the skipper of the "Opossum."

"Yes, I have learned a good deal from Mr. Bryce."

"And your object, sir? If you had designs upon the specie I can hardly suppose that you would come to me and betray yourself." And Captain Scrymgeour looked extremely puzzled.

"The fact is," drawled Keene, "I have a letter to give you, which may alter your opinion with regard to me."

"A letter? From whom?"

"From Mr. Dene, the senior partner in the firm that employs you."

"I do not understand this. Give me the letter."

Keene thrust both his hands into his side-pockets, as if uncertain which contained the letter. He withdrew his left hand, with a sealed envelope in it, and held it out. Captain Scrymgeour stopped closer to him to take it.

Just as the skipper's fingers were closing upon the letter the right hand of Sholto Keene reappeared, with something in it. Before Scrymgeour could divine his treacherous intention, the hand rose and fell with lightning rapidity, and a fearful blow was struck.

Across the captain's bronzed forehead came a great splash of blood. Clutching at his head with both hands, the captain reeled backward. He tried to cry out, but only a faint, inarticulate moan struggled past his palsied lips.

Keene gripped him with his left hand, and pitched him roughly upon a couch, where he lay without motion.

Was he dead?

Keene seemed to think so.

"Mr. Bryce!"

The door opened; the face of Bryce, white and terror-stricken, appeared in the aperture.

"I—thought it was the captain called," he stammered, in a nervous whisper; for Keene had imitated his cousin's voice.

"Mr. Bryce," said Keene—and his voice was almost exactly that of the captain—"your friend is taken ill. He has swooned. Do you know if he is subject to fits?"

This was uttered loud enough for the boatswain to hear—for Wemyss, in his uneasiness, had drawn near the companion-way. It was also heard by Blackie, the negro cook, in the galley.

Keene accompanied his speech with a fierce, menacing glare, warning Bryce that this was no time for cowardice.

"Yes," the mate faltered, "he has sometimes had attacks of epilepsy. Poor fellow! I'm afraid this is one."

"Ah! you will have to get him ashore, and place him in a doctor's hands. But let us see if we cannot restore him first."

The cabin-door closed, and the listening boatswain turned away from the companion-hatch with a puzzled and dissatisfied look.

"Thar ain't been a rumpus, or I should hev heard it," Wemyss said to himself. "But epilepsy—that's all my eye! Captain Scrymgeour has knocked him down, and he said that so's to keep it dark. He can't take me in, nohow." And Wemyss wagged his head in an extremely knowing manner.

The cabin-door did not reopen for quite half an hour.

When it did, two men came out, and, supporting a third between them, helped him up the companion-way.

"Anything wrong, sir?" the boatswain asked.

"An attack of epilepsy," said Bryce, who was very pale.

"The poor fellow is subject to them."

The insensible man, whose head and face were concealed by the big slouch hat, was taken to the side, and the pair lowered him into the boat, declining the bo'sun's aid.

One took the oars, the other the tiller; the painter was cast loose, and the boat passed up the Humber, towards the sleeping town of Hull.

Wemyss's face wore a troubled look as he watched it disappear.

"Ef I didn't know Captain Scrymgeour to be the squarest and fairest skipper afloat I should think there had been some foul play here," he muttered.

Spurn Head vanished astern as the "Opossum," under full sail, plunged into the North Sea in the grey light of early morning.

Upon the starboard quarter the hills of Lincolnshire were for a time visible, but these also soon dropped astern.

The "Opossum" had commenced her voyage. It was a fine breezy morning, and as the sun rose higher in the heavens, the ocean, sunny and light, was inspiring to look upon.

While the officers and seamen were busy as bees, there was one man who had nothing to do. This was Marcus Dene, in whose charge the consignment of specie was being sent to the Bank of Ceylon.

He was a young man—very young to hold so great a responsibility—but his pleasant, boyish face showed, to a careful observer, the traces of an iron resolution and a dauntless courage. In the hour of danger this was a man who was not likely to be found wanting.

Marcus Dene had always had a fondness for the sea, and he had acted as skipper in his uncle's yacht, so that he was not without considerable skill as a sailor. Glad indeed he had been when Mr. Dene offered him his present charge.

"I want someone I can absolutely trust, and one who will not lose his head in an emergency," Mr. Dene had said. "You are just the man, Marcus, especially as you are a good sailor. Not that there can be any danger in this voyage. The gold is as safe as if it were in the Bank of England. But there is no telling what may arise, and I shall feel more easy if you accompany the consignment."

A voyage in a fine vessel like the "Opossum," and the chance of seeing something of Ceylon, suited Marcus admirably.

He had come on board the ship only an hour before she sailed, his things having been sent on earlier.

Captain Scrymgeour—whom he knew slightly, having met him once or twice in the firm's offices in Hull—had received him cordially, and yet not exactly as Marcus had expected to be received by a bluff sea-captain.

It seemed to our hero that Scrymgeour scrutinised him at their meeting as if taking his exact measure, both physically and mentally. What the captain's conclusions might be he could not know, yet it seemed to him that Scrymgeour was somehow unpleasantly impressed.

"I don't think I like the skipper as much as I thought I should," Marcus reflected; "and as for the chief mate, he is a watery-looking specimen. Roberts, the second mate, was pleasant enough when I saw him in Hull. I wonder where he is now? I haven't seen him since I came aboard."

Marcus had too much knowledge of the sea to worry the captain with questions at such a busy time, but he could not help wondering where the second mate was. Later in the day he found an opportunity of speaking to the boatswain. Mr. Wemyss was sitting upon the edge of a skylight, enjoying his noggin of rum, when Marcus nodded to him.

"You are the bo'sun, of course? Let me introduce myself; I am Marcus Dene, passenger to Ceylon."

As the specie was not known by the crew to be aboard the "Opossum," Marcus posed as an ordinary passenger, so as not to excite curiosity concerning him in the fore-castle.

"I've heard of you afore, sir," said the boatswain, touching his forelock. "I'm William Wemyss, sir, at your service."

After a few observations about the ship and the voyage, Marcus came to the point.

"I haven't seen your second mate yet."

"No, sir; we left him ashore."

"Why was that?"

"Because he didn't turn up afore we sailed, sir. When we was going to weigh anchor, I heard Mr. Bryce say to the skipper that Mr. Roberts hadn't come aboard yet. The skipper said he'd be hanged if he'd lose the tide for any man!"

"Why didn't Roberts return, do you think? He struck me as being a very fair seaman, not at all likely to neglect his duty."

"So I thought him, sir; but there's no telling. Anyway, it's clear he's neglected his duty in this case, as he has forced the captain to sail without him. It's a mean trick to play any skipper, for he must have known that Captain Scrymgeour could not afford to lose the tide."

"But is it intended to make the voyage without a second mate?" asked Marcus in amazement.

"Ay! what could be done otherwise, sir? We stop at no English port, and the skipper is not likely to take a foreigner aboard."

Marcus was surprised and bewildered. But soon he found that Mr. Roberts was not the only member of the ship's company who had been left on the banks of the Humber.

The young man took his meals with the officers, of course, at the dining-table in the cuddy, and when he and the captain met there in the evening, Scrymgeour began to speak upon the matter—taking the bull by the horns, as it seemed to Marcus.

"I dare say you've noticed, Mr. Dene, that our crew is short of several hands?" he remarked, but at the same time keeping his eyes fixed on his hearer's face.

"No! I missed the second mate—that's all," answered Marcus.

"Yes, the lubber!" Captain Scrymgeour frowned. "He left me in the lurch at the last moment, when it was too late to replace him. It means watch-and-watch with Bryce for me, all the way to Ceylon. By Jove! I'll make him smart for this when I step ashore in Old England again!"

"And some of your hands have followed his example?"

"Yes; eight men, and all of them men I considered among the best in my crew. I cannot help thinking that they were tempted by the offer of bigger money to break the articles they signed with me. You know there's been a strike in Hull, and good seamen are wanted in the Humber. I am sailing with twenty-four men for'ard instead of thirty-two."

Marcus stirred his tea slowly as he asked in a reflective way:

"Do you consider it safe, Captain Scrymgeour, to sail the 'Opossum' with a reduced crew, and an officer short?"

"I am the best judge of that, Mr. Dene!" replied the skipper stiffly. "I am not likely to take the 'Opossum' to sea in an unsafe state."

"I beg your pardon; but, considering what we have aboard—"

"We have aboard, in the iron-bound chest in your cabin, one hundred thousand English sovereigns. But we have something more precious to me than that, were every coin my own!"

"Indeed! What is it?"

"My reputation as a seaman and a commander!" was the reply. "If anything happened to the 'Opossum,' where should I be? You may take my word for it, I risk nothing. The specie is only a secondary consideration—quite secondary."

And the skipper marched out of the cuddy, his manner showing that he was "on his dignity."

Marcus smiled to himself. The skipper was clearly offended; but the young man was not sure in his mind whether Scrymgeour really felt the indignation he showed. Why he should suspect the captain of playing a part he could not have said; but, since coming aboard the "Opossum," he had considerably modified his former favourable opinion of her commander.

If Marcus Dene could have heard what Captain Scrymgeour said to Mr. Bryce as they stood by the binnacle that night, he would have found good grounds for his vague suspicions.

"Bryce, we shall have to take care of that cub. He is no mere lad to be fooled or put upon. He is going to make a lot of trouble for us in the near future."

Bryce looked uneasily at the skipper.

"You don't mean to say he suspects, sir?"

"Of course not!" irritably exclaimed the captain. "How could he? But he is wide awake and alert. Depend upon it, when we pass the Bay of Biscay, and give Portugal a wide berth, he will begin to smell a rat."

"Can't you keep him from knowing how we steer? Why not quarrel with him, and cease to be on speaking terms?"

The skipper rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Not a bad idea that," he remarked; "but, of course, by the time we ought to be entering the Straits of Gibraltar, and he finds us heading for West Africa, he must learn that we are disobeying orders."

"Do you think he will try to resist your authority?"

"I shouldn't be surprised if he appealed to the crew. He is just the kind of fellow to give us all the trouble he can when he finds that the bullion is in danger. But, after all, unless our secret came out, I shall always have the upper hand. And, by thunder! it cannot, and shall not, come out!"

By this time it will be seen that all was not as it should have been on board the "Opossum."

CHAPTER 2

Marcus Suspects the Skipper—What Does Scrymgeour Mean?—Coming to a Crisis.

Marcus had anticipated a pleasant voyage to the sunny south, but he soon found that his stay upon the "Opossum" was not likely to bring him much pleasure.

He was prepared to be friendly and sociable with the captain and mate, his companions aft; but after the first day or two Captain Scrymgeour developed an unaccountable coldness of manner towards him.

His answers were short and brusque, and he never of his own accord addressed any remark to Marcus, so that when they took meals together they generally sat in grim silence.

This state of affairs naturally had a chilling effect upon our hero's frank, boyish nature; especially as he could not think of any cause to which to attribute Scrymgeour's strange manner. Bryce followed the captain's lead, and between them they made Marcus's life extremely uncomfortable.

One effect of this was that Marcus, having no one to talk to aft, began to "cultivate" the seamen, and as he was a born sailor, he was able to understand Jack Tar's nature, and make a friend of him.

Wemyss, the bo'sun, had a little "caboose" aft, and in the evenings Marcus saw much of him; for the boatswain did not share the watches, and after sundown he was generally free.

A rough, bluff fellow was Will Wemyss; but he had a heart of gold, and Marcus soon took a great liking to him.

The whole ship's company had observed the skipper's coldness to Marcus, and it was not long before Wemyss spoke about it.

"You've got foul of the skipper's hawse somehow, Mr. Dene," he remarked. "The whole fo'c's'le's noticed it."

"I know it, Wemyss; but I can't imagine the reason. I have done nothing to offend him that I know of."

"Queer, too. Cap'n Scrymgeour was never a man to take offence and bear malice," Wemyss said, shaking his head. "There's been a change in him since we dropped anchor in the Humber last time, Mr. Dene. And do you know, I don't think he likes you making friends for'ard."

"Why, what objection can there be to that?" exclaimed Marcus.

"None at all, as I knows on, sir; and yet I believe it's the case. He bullied Kit Marley something awful yesterday, and all because he said he had been wasting time chattering with idlers. Now, you know, Kit wasn't wasting time; he was off-duty, and you only talked with him for a few minutes afore he went to his hammock."

Marcus's brow darkened. He saw himself the victim of a seemingly causeless persecution, and his anger began to rise.

"I am awfully sorry to get Marley into hot water," he said. "If Captain Scrymgeour is going to take it like that, I shall have to keep abait the mainmast in future, I suppose. But I shall have a talk with him. I am not going to take this sort of thing quietly."

Captain Scrymgeour took the first watch that evening, and when he came down at eight bells he found Marcus in the cuddy.

Taking no notice of him, the captain proceeded to mix himself a glass of whisky-and-water. Marcus stepped towards him, resolved to have it "out" now.

"Captain Scrymgeour, I want you to explain the reason of your treatment of me for the past few days," he said.

"What have you got to complain of?" grunted the skipper, in a most ungracious tone.

"If you choose to act like a bear at your own table, I do not feel called upon to teach you manners. But when you persecute a seaman with whom I happen to exchange a few words, I consider I have a right to protest."

"You encourage the hands to dawdle and chatter!"

"I do nothing of the kind!"

"Familiarity between fore and aft is the ruin of discipline. You should know better than to mix with the crew. If you will do it, I cannot prevent you, as you are not under my orders; but I can punish the men you chatter with, and I will do so. So you had better stop it!"

The captain's tone and manner were so aggressive and insolent that Marcus was hard put to it to control his temper.

"You are not doing all this without a reason; you have a motive for this rudeness, Captain Scrymgeour!" he exclaimed.

"My reason is simple. I won't have any confounded longshoreman interfering with the affairs of my ship!" declared the skipper. "So just you keep aft, and mind your own business, and you'll be all right."

And he swung off to his cabin; not any too soon, either, for Marcus's eyes were gleaming, and his fists were clenched.

"By George! I should like him to speak to me like that upon dry land!" muttered Marcus wrathfully. "If he is not a bit more careful, I shall knock him down upon his own deck."

In his cabin, the skipper was chuckling.

"That settles him," he said to himself. "It was a good move of his to try and get on the right side of the fo'c's'le; but I reckon I've nipped that in the bud!"

Unwilling to expose the seamen to the anger of the captain, Marcus did not go for'ard after that, and now his life was more lonely than ever.

He no longer even spoke to the officers, so Wemyss was the only man he ever exchanged a word with for the next few days. To an open-hearted, genial young fellow, such a situation was well-nigh intolerable, and Marcus began heartily to wish that the voyage was over. He determined that, after he had seen the specie landed at Trincomalee, he would find another vessel to bring him back to England. But ere long he made the startling discovery that Ceylon, instead of daily drawing nearer, was every day becoming farther distant.

The "Opossum," instead of entering the Straits of Gibraltar, passed the Portuguese coast with a wide sweep, standing out into the boundless Atlantic.

This course had been followed for a couple of days before Marcus discovered it.

But when, instead of Spanish cliffs on the port bow, there continued to stretch the same waste of rolling waves, long after the Straits should have been entered, Marcus became seriously disquieted.

He lost no time in speaking to Captain Scrymgeour. The latter was quite ready for him.

"Why are we not in the Mediterranean, Captain Scrymgeour?" the young man asked, confronting the commander of the "Opossum" upon the quarter-deck.

Everyone who heard the abrupt question turned his eyes upon Marcus and the captain.

"Is that your business, Mr. Dene?" asked Scrymgeour insolently.

"Decidedly. You know the capacity in which I am on board this vessel. I demand to know why you have directly disregarded your instructions."

Marcus's intense dislike of the captain made him speak with more heat than he should have shown, perhaps; but there was no doubt as to his right to demand an explanation.

"Do you know what my instructions are, Mr. Dene?" Captain Scrymgeour asked, with perfect coolness.

"To proceed to Trincomalee, by the Suez Canal route."

"Nothing of the kind."

Marcus stared.

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I am going to Ceylon by way of the Cape."

"Impossible!"

Captain Scrymgeour shrugged his shoulders, and turned away, as if declining to discuss the subject further. But Marcus was not to be put off so easily.

"Captain Scrymgeour, can you show me written instructions from your owners authorising you to do this?" he demanded.

"Am I under your orders?" exclaimed Scrymgeour.

"I am responsible for the valuable cargo you carry."

This was news to the crew, and they pricked up their ears at once.

"Was not that to remain a secret, Mr. Dene?"

"The cargo may be more endangered by secrecy than by publicity," at once retorted Marcus.

Captain Scrymgeour scowled blackly.

"What do you mean, Marcus Dene?" he cried. "What is it you dare to insinuate?"

"I insinuate nothing; but I am beginning to see light, I think. It was not for nothing that you left your second mate and a number of your seamen ashore in Hull," Marcus said.

He saw a startled glitter leap into the captain's eyes.

"Do you think I am going to play Captain Kidd at this time of day, and carry off my employer's vessel to unknown seas, and turn pirate?" Scrymgeour asked, in a tone of irony.

The sailors began to grin; but Marcus was not to be turned from his purpose by ridicule. His uncle had entrusted to him the golden freight, and its loss meant ruin, or pretty near it, to the firm. Marcus knew that it was his duty to make a resolute stand.

Captain Scrymgeour might or might not have designs upon

the specie, but the circumstances of the case seemed to justify strong suspicion, and Marcus felt that it was necessary for him to take action. If Scrymgeour could show authority in writing for altering the course, well and good. If he could not, what conclusion could be drawn but that he meant to carry off the specie? Marcus was not too young to know that even honest and honourable men sometimes yield to the temptation of a large sum of gold; and he did not regard the skipper as a man with particularly nice notions of honour.

Marcus's look and voice were resolute as he said:

"I accuse you of nothing yet. But I ask you to prove to me your right to sail to the Cape, when every man on board knows that you were ordered to make Ceylon by Suez and the Red Sea."

"I do not choose to be dictated to by you."

"You refuse to show your instructions?"

"To you—most assuredly."

"Then I can only believe that you are disobeying orders."

"Very good. Believe what you like."

"But you are not doing it for nothing, and there is but one motive I can assign to you."

"Stealing the ship, eh?" sneered the skipper.

"No; stealing her freight."

"The freight in her hold?"

"No; that in my cabin."

"When we reach port, Mr. Dene, I shall call upon you to substantiate your charge," said Captain Scrymgeour, with a great deal of dignity. "Till then, let me remind you that I command this ship. Leave the deck."

"You refuse to enter the Straits of Gibraltar?" asked Marcus, his eyes beginning to glitter.

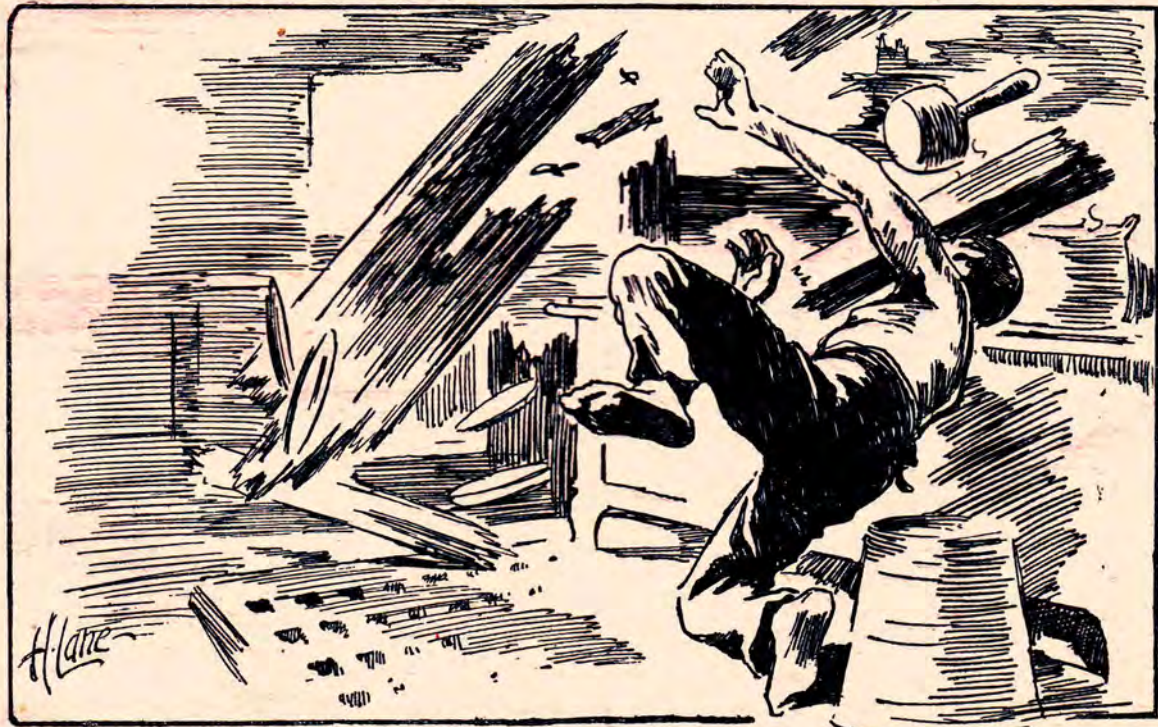
"I refuse to even discuss the matter with you."

"Then you leave only one course open to me. Men of the 'Opossum,'—and Marcus's voice rang clear and high—"I call upon you to stand by me! There are aboard this vessel, in the iron-bound chest in my cabin, one hundred thousand sovereigns in gold, consigned to the Bank of Ceylon."

A low murmur came from the crew at this announcement. Every man had been brought aft by the sound of the altercation; even the black cook had come up from the galley.

Captain Scrymgeour made no attempt to prevent the disclosure. He watched Marcus from beneath his overhanging brows, a sardonic smile curving his lips.

"My uncle, Mr. Dene, placed me in charge of the golden freight," continued Marcus. "I have the firm's letters to prove that, if any of you doubt it. No danger to the specie was anticipated, but I was sent with it to make all secure. The very last danger the firm looked for is precisely the one that has now arisen—the captain has proved treacherous."



The shell dropped fairly into the waist of the "Opossum," and exploded on the maindeck. The havoc it wrought was fearful. The cuddy-front was shattered, and the cook was blown to pieces.

NEXT FRIDAY "LAST OF HIS RACE."



A handspike hustled past his head. Had it struck him he would have been killed instantly. A ringing shot was Marcus's answer, and the man who threw the missile dropped, with a bullet in his leg. This was the signal for a fierce rush by the mutineers.

Men of the 'Opossum,' stand by me; I take the sole responsibility. Will you do so, or will you become Captain Scrymgeour's accomplices in the theft of the specie?"

A dead silence, lasting a minute, followed Marcus's appeal to the crew. Then Captain Scrymgeour spoke:

"My lads, you have heard the vapourings of this lunatic, now return to your duty. Too much time has already been wasted."

The habit of discipline prevailed.

The seamen dispersed. Not a man stepped to the side of Marcus. Wemyss gave him an expressive glance, conveying that he would have something to say later, but did not venture to take his part.

Marcus was not surprised, yet he was disappointed, by the futility of his appeal.

It was not likely that the seamen would back him up in coercing the captain, when, if he chanced to be in the wrong, they would all be liable to severe punishment for mutiny.

But Marcus had done his duty; and he had at least effected something—he had by his disclosure made every man into a watcher of the captain's actions. He knew that.

There was another effect, however, he had not reckoned upon, which the communication had upon the crew.

The discovery that a hundred thousand sovereigns were packed away aft caused much excitement in the fore-cabin, and some members of the crew began to whisper and hint that if the "old man" meant to "collar" them, it was only right for the fore-cabin to share.

"Why not share anyway, captain or no captain?" boldly exclaimed Ackroyd, a foxy-faced seaman, who was generally in the officers' black books. He had shipped on the "Opossum" with forged papers, to escape arrest for a robbery in Grimsby, and he was about the most dangerous character there could have been in the fore-cabin of the vessel at that critical time. "A hundred thousand pounds would divvy out well, mates."

But the suggestion was a little too precipitate to be welcomed at so early a stage. Still, there were not wanting certain men to discuss the proposition in whispers with Ackroyd.

Captain Scrymgeour watched the crew go one by one, and then he fixed a sneering stare upon Marcus.

"Your shot hasn't hit the target, Dene," he said. "You see that it is not easy to make a crew revolt."

"I do not yet despair of baffling you," steadily replied Marcus.

"Do you mean that you will try to cause me further trouble?" asked the skipper, in a threatening tone.

"I shall do my best to prevent the seizure of the specie by lawless hands."

"Then, if you declare war, I shall crush you. Suppose I have you placed under arrest? It is in my power as captain to put you in irons."

Captain Scrymgeour's object was to make Marcus show his hand, and in this he succeeded.

Marcus meant to let it be seen that he was not to be trifled with. From his breast-pocket he produced a revolver.

"I did not expect to have to fight for the gold," he said quietly; "but I was not fool enough to come to sea unprepared to do so. I shall not be put in irons while I can pull trigger, and I warn you that if I am interfered with I shall shoot to kill. Shall I give you a sample of my skill with this little toy? Perhaps it may keep you from trickery." Marcus aimed the pistol. "Do you see that smudge of tar on the bowsprit? I will show you a centre shot."

He fired, and the bullet was true to the mark. Scrymgeour and Bryce exchanged glances. The latter turned a little pale.

"You see, captain," continued Marcus coolly, "I can protect myself, and I hope to be able to protect the specie also."

And with that as a Parthian shaft, he turned upon his heel and left the quarter-deck.

Captain Scrymgeour's brows were contracted with rage. "He is a dangerous man, Bryce," said he. "It will soon be war to the knife between us and Marcus Dene!"

CHAPTER 3.

The Calm Before the Storm—Ackroyd Goes Aft—The Strange Light from the Sea.

Three days passed aboard the "Opossum" without any outbreak; but the calm was a treacherous one.

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There was ferment in the fore-castle, and it was observed by Marcus that the crew had divided into parties.

Six or seven of the worst men had gathered under the lead of Ackroyd, and they were often seen talking together in whispers, but "shut up" directly others came near.

The men left behind at Hull by Captain Scrymgeour had been the best and steadiest portion of his crew, and there were a considerable number of scamps among the remainder.

Wemyss often discussed with Marcus the way things were going; and the honest bo'sun showed that he was much disturbed in mind.

"Ackroyd's gang hev got something up their sleeve, Mr. Dene," he said once to Marcus. "It was like chuckin' a fire-brand onto a haystack ter tell 'em of the specie."

"What could I do?"

"Do ye really think Captain Scrymgeour means to collar it?"

"I am certain he has planned it."

"In that case, you couldn't do nothing else than speak out, o' course. But I reckon it'll mean bloodshed."

"You think Ackroyd and his mates will want to share it with the skipper?"

"I think they'll hev a try fur it at the first opportunity, whether the skipper does or not."

"That means mutiny?"

"Yes. You see, half the crew are lascars, or no-account rascals, and of the rest, the best fellers were left behind. And of the honest men we hev, their ideas hev been unsettled, as it were, by the thought o' the gold. It's a big sum, Mr. Dene. And, besides, they reckon that if it's to be pinched, they'll git inter hot water anyway, and so—"

"They may as well be hung for sheep as lambs. I see. But are there no men whom you can answer for, Wemyss?"

"I kin speak for myself, sir, and for Kit Marley, my mate; but that's about all."

"You'll stand by me?"

"Tooth and nail, Mr. Dene, except in a matter of mutiny. It's ticklish work defying one's captain on the high seas. And the bo'sun shook his head very doubtfully."

"I won't ask you to do that. But don't you believe now, Wemyss, that the skipper means to steal the specie?"

"It looks like it, sir, I admit; but I don't like to think sich a thing of Captain Scrymgeour. He was always a good skipper to me, and a hearty seaman, blow fair or foul, and it cuts me pretty deep to suspect him of sich a game. But he ain't been the same man since the night afore we sailed, Mr. Dene, and it has once or twice struck me that p'raps his head ain't quite right."

Marcus looked astonished.

"He is about the last man I should suspect of having a screw loose, Wemyss."

"I'd hev said that a month ago, sir; but I can't help thinking that wot happened that night upset his top timbers a bit. He allus useter hev a good memory, but arter leaving the Humber he kept on forgettin' things. Sometimes he didn't know a man's name; sometimes he forgot where the things he wanted were kept. And he ain't 'arf so good a sailor as he was. Ef you've noticed, sir, Mr. Bryce does most of the orderin'; and more'n once Captain Scrymgeour has given wrong directions. Ef I hadn't sailed with him for years, sir, I should reckon he'd never commanded anything bigger than a pleasure-yacht before this voyage."

"You say something happened the night before we sailed. Will you tell me what it was?"

Wemyss, in impressive tones, told of the mysterious visitor of the night, and how the captain and mate had taken him away in the boat after an interview in the cabin.

Marcus was decidedly startled.

"That has a very suspicious look, Wemyss. In your place, I should have suspected that the visitor had been foully dealt with in the cabin, and that the tale of an epileptic fit was devised to cover the fact that they were carrying a dead or wounded man to the boat."

"Yes, sir, but I considered Captain Scrymgeour too straight a man fur that sorter thing. 'Sides, from wot I heard him mutterin', I knew he didn't want the visitor, whoever he was, to come. And there's no doubt the feller came of his own accord, an' wasn't forced at all."

"Do you happen to know his name?"

"No; it wasn't mentioned in my hearin'."

"There's a black mystery there, Wemyss, and it confirms me in my opinion that the skipper is a scoundrel."

To this the boatswain made no reply. It was clear that he was doubtful in mind, but that he was inclined to share Marcus's opinion, though unwilling to do so.

During the three days following the open dispute, Marcus spoke no word to the captain.

More than once he caught Scrymgeour's eyes fixed upon him threateningly; but that did not daunt him.

Fearful of treachery, he took his precautions against a sudden attack. He slept with his cabin door locked and

bolted, and the porthole securely closed, with his loaded revolver ready to his hand. The specie remained in his cabin; Scrymgeour had made no motion to remove it. Marcus could do nothing but wait for the crisis, which he felt sure would come soon.

The "Opossum," with favourable winds, kept on southward, and on the third evening sighted Cape Bojador, a promontory jutting into the Atlantic from the coast of Spanish West Africa.

"Land!" cried a seaman in the main cross-trees. And the surprised crew rushed to the port side to view it.

Marcus had now proof, if he wanted any, that Captain Scrymgeour was not merely following the Cape route to Ceylon. The "Opossum" was too near the coast for that.

There was much excited discussion for and of this unexpected glimpse of terra firma; but the captain did not condescend to vouchsafe any explanation. The crew, however, or at least the sharpest of them, drew their own conclusions.

"Mates," said Ackroyd to his associates, "do ye know why we hev come to this corner of the earth? It's so's Captain Scrymgeour kin pinch the spondulies unbeknown, and not be seen by the ships that kiver the ocean out yonder!"

"But he can't land 'em here, in a wild country," said Jim Caulker; "thur's none but niggers an' thiev' Spanish traders hereabouts, mate."

"Who said he meant to land it?"

"But if he keeps it aboard the 'Opossum'?"

"Who said he'd keep it aboard the 'Opossum'?"

"But he must do one or the other; he can't shove a hundred thousand thick 'uns in his weskit-pocket and swim away!" exclaimed Caulker.

"No, he can't; but he may shove 'em in the longboat and be off with 'em, and leave us in the lurch."

"And let us take the 'Possum' back to England?"

Ackroyd gave him a look of withering contempt.

"No, you blithering ass! Afore he went he'd stick the 'Possum' on a reef, or bore a hole in the bottom!"

"Jerusalem! that's a lively look-out fur us."

"Yes, if we like to let him do it; but I reckon we know a trick worth two of that," Ackroyd answered. "I'm goin' to interview Captain Scrymgeour!"

"You?"

"Why not? I ain't afeared of him. I'm one man, and he's another, and I shall put it to him straight."

Ackroyd was a thorough blackguard, and full of impudence and self-confidence; but, in spite of his boasting, it was not without an inward tremor that he prepared to go aft when his watch was relieved.

Captain Scrymgeour was far from expecting such a visit.

He had left the deck in charge of Wemyss, and was in his cabin with the mate, when eight bells struck.

There was more animation in Scrymgeour's iron face than usual. He looked like a man prepared for a crisis. He knew that danger was ahead, but he did not fear it.

The reverse was the case with the mate. He was a poltroon to the finger-tips, and at the slightest prospect of peril his spirit shrank. But the prize for which he was now working was so large that he kept firm to his purpose in spite of his own cowardice.

"Now we are coming to the point," Captain Scrymgeour said, rubbing his hands. "Buck up, Bryce; don't be an old woman now, and success is within our grasp."

"I shall not fail you, sir; but I fear that our task will be more difficult than you imagine. Marcus Dene has let the crew into the secret, and it stands to reason that their thoughts are running upon the gold."

"No doubt, no doubt; but I do not apprehend a general mutiny for the purpose of seizing the specie. And in one day more we shall be clear of this craft."

"If all goes well."

"Hang your croaking!" exclaimed the captain. "All will go well. What can stop us? When the 'Opossum' runs upon a reef, I suppose all hands will be ready to lend aid in getting the gold ashore? Once there, we bury it for safety."

Then—

Tap! tap!

"Who the dickens is that? Come in!"

The door opened to admit Ackroyd. He ducked his head to the officers with a mingling of sheepishness and impudence.

"What do you want?"

"To speak a leetle to you, sir."

"Go on."

"Captain Scrymgeour, we forrard hands know wot your little game is, and we are willing to stand by you—me and my mates—if you gree to our conditions."

The skipper stared, as well he might.

"Don't try to come the 'igh and mighty, skipper. We all know that you mean to pinch the yellow boys, and we ain't got nothin' ter say agin it, purvided you share out fair."

Captain Scrymgeour's first impulse was to take out his revolver and give Ackroyd a crack upon the head with the butt.

"LAST OF HIS RACE" COMPLETE NEXT FRIDAY.

He reflected, however, that he could not afford to make enemies for a'd, and a minute's thought showed him that, under the present circumstances, it would be wisest to make a confidant of Ackroyd.

"Can I trust you?" he asked slowly.

"Clear through, so long as you don't try ter go back on me!" the ruffian declared.

"Then— Great Scott! what is that?"

Each of the three men uttered an exclamation of terror, and not without cause.

For through the open porthole, from the darkness of the sea, came a sudden gleam of bright white light.

It lay like a white bar across the cabin, dimming the effulgence of the swinging lamp, which was yellow in comparison.

"Davy Jones!" ejaculated Ackroyd, "what do it mean? Captain—Mr. Bryce—wot is it?"

As he spoke voices were heard raised on deck.

Captain Scrymgeour recovered in a moment from his panic. The lines of his face seemed to harden, and a glitter shone in his eyes, while his brows were darkly drawn. His voice had a metallic ring as he said calmly:

"It is the searchlight of a cruiser."

"We are lost!" muttered Bryce.

"Coward! Follow me!" And in a moment the captain was upon the deck of the "Opossum."

CHAPTER 4.

A Stern Chase—The Captain's Courage—A Change of Plan—Hol for Florida—The Captain's Reply to Ackroyd—A Night Attack.

Blackness on the sea, blackness on the shore—save where that gleam of white cut like a knife through the gloom.

Away to the east the desert rocks of Africa; away to the west the rolling Atlantic. Astern the searchlight that lay in livid brilliance along a strip of the ocean.

The crew of the "Opossum," every man on deck, glared at the apparition with distended eyes.

They knew it must be a cruiser; but they did not know why the searchlight played upon them.

But Captain Scrymgeour knew only too well.

He gripped the taffrail with both hands, and glared through the white radiance.

He could see the point from which the long ray sprang; but he could not make out a ship.

"What do you see?" stammered Bryce, at his side.

"Nothing."

"But you think—"

"I do not think. I know. It is a cruiser, and sent out in search of the 'Opossum.'"

"Can you be sure?"

"They have, doubtless, picked up my cousin's body in the Humber," said Scrymgeour, in a low voice.

Bryce made a gesture of terror.

"Oh, be a man! Is this a time for weakness? If my neck is in the noose, yours isn't far out of it. Our lives are at stake now. Be a man!"

"What's to be done?"

"That's what I'm trying to think out."

Marcus was standing at a little distance observing the searchlight. He wore a pleased expression. How a cruiser came to be upon the track of the "Opossum" he had not the remotest idea. But it was clear that the ship was being hunted for, and he began to hope that his anxieties on account of the specie were coming to an end.

The strengthening of the light upon the "Opossum" showed that the cruiser was coming nearer. The vessel was, then, seen!

"All hands aloft!" suddenly sang out the captain. "Shake out mainsail, topsails, and royals; by the luck of Satan, there's a breeze that will help us!"

But the voice of Marcus followed immediately.

"Men of the 'Opossum,' that is a King's ship, as you can see for yourselves. You are breaking the law if you help Captain Scrymgeour to escape from it!"

There was hesitation among the crew. Every man felt reluctant to take a decided step, knowing not his neighbour's views, and uncertain of his own. If Captain Scrymgeour had wavered then, it would have been all over with him. But this man, villain as he was, was as brave as the bravest.

"Hold your tongue, boy!" he yelled furiously. "Men, obey your captain!"

"Men, yonder cruiser, with her engines, will soon run down your sailing craft, and then you will have to take the consequences of trying to elude her!" cried Marcus.

That was a weighty argument; but the skipper was ready to meet it.

"Among the Bojador reefs, I would elude any ship afloat!" he exclaimed. "Stand by me, shipmates, and I will make all your fortunes. We have a hundred thousand pounds on board; who will share it with me?"

It was a bold measure, this taking the crew into his scheme of robbery, confessing that Marcus's former accusation was a true one. But it was a time for bold measures. Without the hearty co-operation of the crew, Scrymgeour could not hope to escape the cruiser. At the best it would be touch and go. And so he was prepared to bid high for the support of his men.

Ackroyd was prompt to reply to the captain's appeal.

"I, for one!" he cried. "Mates, what do you say?"

His half-dozen associates shouted out their adherence.

That was enough for the waverers. Almost every voice followed suit.

"We stand by you, captain!"

The few dissentients kept silent. It was useless to oppose so great a majority.

A hundred thousand pounds!

To these underpaid, overworked seamen, the sum was immense; dazzling in its magnitude.

And men who would not have mutinied on account of the gold, were willing to follow the captain, their natural leader, when he proposed to lead them to plunder. So strong is the habit of obedience.

Marcus was baffled again.

He did not make further appeal, for the crew were as likely as not, at the captain's order, to throw him overboard, in their present mood.

Prudence counselled a retreat to his cabin; but he was naturally eager to watch the course of events, and, in spite of the risk, he remained on deck. But he took care to keep his revolver handy. There was no telling how soon it might be wanted now.

Mr. Bryce directed the seamen, Scrymgeour returning to the taffrail to watch for the cruiser. He took no further notice just then of Marcus. There was no time at present for dealing with him.

The courses were shaken out, then the upper sails, and as the breeze was favourable, and, moreover, a pretty stiff one, the "Opossum" moved rapidly through the water.

She was a gallant craft, and could make a splendid speed under favouring conditions; but the cruiser, with her screw, of course, had the advantage.

The light still rested upon the "Opossum," and slowly but steadily the strange vessel drew nearer.

"Port!" curtly said Scrymgeour to the helmsman.

"Where are we going?" Bryce asked uneasily. "This course will run us upon the reefs of Cape Bojador."

"Nothing of the kind. We are going where the cruiser cannot follow. With decent luck we're safe."

"Do you know this coast, then?"

"Why do you think I selected it for our landing? I am not likely to run myself into an unknown country. I was skipper of a slave-schooner here for five years; you know that the trade flourishes hereabouts, in spite of reports of its suppression. My little craft has run many a cargo round Cape Bojador. Precious few reefs and channels here that I don't know about. I ran along almost this very tack once with a French gunboat astern of me, sailing four knots to my one."

"And you got clear?"

"A sensible question—should I be here if I hadn't? But there's one doubt in my mind. Where I took the schooner I may not be able to take a ship like the 'Opossum.' That's where the danger lies, Bryce."

"How long before we know the worst?"

"Half an hour."

"She'll run us down in that time."

"No, she won't; though she'll be very close."

"Don't you reckon she'll use her guns?"

"I hope not."

Bryce shivered. He could not understand Scrymgeour's coolness. Not a trace of fear was there in the captain's face, though his words plain showed that it was even chances whether or not the "Opossum" eluded her pursuer.

Fast fled the gallant ship—a pillar of gleaming canvas in the searchlight.

Faster came the cruiser upon her track. And now the seamen could hear the throbbing of her engines, and make out the dark lines of her hull.

Boatswain Wemyss drew near to Marcus.

"I know that vessel, sir," he remarked. "She was repairing a boiler at Hull when the 'Opossum' was in the Humber. I can make her out now. It's the 'Iron Duke,' sir, and she has got a fine set of teeth if she likes to show 'em."

"The 'Iron Duke?' I know her commander—Captain Montague. She is one of the fastest craft in the Navy, Wemyss. The 'Opossum' has no chance against her."

"I can't understand Cap'n Scrymgeour, sir. He must know that! I don't take any stock in the idea that he can give her the slip among the reefs. Wot kin an English skipper know of this bit of coast?"

"Perhaps he has sailed here before?"

"Not to my knowledge, anyway."

"You see I was right, Wemyss—he has confessed his intention of stealing the specie."

The boatswain nodded, with an expression of great sorrow. "Yes, sir, there's no denyin' it now. But I can't think wot has come over him. He was as honest as you or I in the old days."

"You won't stand by him any longer, Wemyss?"

The boatswain looked doubtful.

"I dunno, sir," he slowly replied. "It ain't the part of a good seaman ter go back upon his captain in time of danger, though, of course, I don't hold with stealin' the specie. He's been a good skipper to me, Mr. Dene. I can't forget that."

Boom!

A heavy shot struck spray from the sea a little to port of the "Opossum."

"That's a warning," said Wemyss.

Captain Scrymgeour shook his fist at the "Iron Duke."

Boom!

Another splash. To starboard this time.

"Curse them! We shall win yet!" snarled Scrymgeour.

The captain's eyes were on the sea; quick orders passed his lips. Looming dimly up, the sailors saw great cliffs on the port-bow. Above the water, here and there, showed the cruel fangs of sunken rocks.

All realised that the "Opossum" was in a situation of the most imminent and deadly peril. Faces became pale and drawn; breath short and spasmodic. But the calm confidence of the skipper encouraged the crew.

Rapid orders succeeded each other. The "Opossum" seemed to wind like a serpent.

Boom!

A shell burst over the "Opossum's" royals, and a cry of terror broke from the startled seamen.

"The next will settle us!" Bryce muttered, with quivering lips. "We are lost!"

"Shut up, you whining cur!"

Almost sublime was the coolness of the captain at that terrible moment. Marcus could not help regarding him with a certain admiration.

The "Iron Duke" had done with warnings. The next shell would burst on deck. But grimly the captain held on, as if life or death were all one to him.

But the seamen scuttled into the forecabin, or down the hatchways, fearful of the coming death.

Boom! Crash!

Beautifully aimed by the unknown gunner, the shell dropped fairly into the waist of the "Opossum," and exploded upon the maindeck.

The havoc it wrought was fearful.

The cuddy-front was shattered, the galley entirely demolished, and the cook, who was crouching there in dire terror amid his pots and pans, was blown to pieces. A seaman at the forecabin was struck in the face by a hurtling fragment and killed instantly.

Panic seized upon the crew. Half a dozen more shells would shatter the "Opossum" down to the orlop-deck. A howl ran along the deck:

"Lay to! Captain, bring her to, afore we're all cut to pieces!"

A smile of derisive contempt was Scrymgeour's only answer. The helmsman's hand trembled on the wheel, and he looked doubtfully at the skipper. A revolver came into view in the steady grasp of Scrymgeour.

"Keep on!" he said curtly.

"But, sir—"

"Falter an instant, and I will kill you like a dog!"

The helmsman kept on, though his face was white.

"He shall stop!" said Marcus. "Now is the time for me to act!"

But Wemyss gripped him, and held him back.

"Let me go, man!"

"He'll kill you, sir!"

"That's my risk. Stand back!"

"Mr. Dene, keep quiet. You shall kill me before you touch the captain!" exclaimed the boatswain.

"Are you mad, Wemyss?"

"I stand by my captain, Mr. Dene!" Wemyss said resolutely. "I don't keer wot he's doin'. It ain't the part of a British seaman to desert him when he's in a corner."

The fidelity of the simple sailor touched Marcus, and he hesitated. But he had his duty to do!

"Let me go, Wemyss! I shall be sorry to use violence—"

Crash!

A shell carried away the main-royal of the "Opossum." Blocks, fragments of wood and rope, rained on the deck. But the ship swept on.

There came a rush of feet along the decks. A line of fierce faces advanced upon the captain.

"Cap'n, stop her! We won't be butchered like dumb cattle to please you, you thief!"

"Back, you curs!"

A burly lascar sprang like a madman at the skipper, clutching at his throat.

Scrymgeour's hand was quickly raised; a flash and a report followed, and the lascar lurched drunkenly backward, with a bullet in his brain.

The sailors recoiled.

Another gun from the "Iron Duke" would have made them hurl themselves upon the skipper.

But another gun was not heard.

"Fools! Cowards!" cried Scrymgeour. "We are safe now!"

The cruiser was losing ground!

When the captain shot down the lascar Marcus had attempted to wrench himself free, to place himself at the head of the mutinous seamen; but Wemyss would not let him go.

Then Marcus struck fiercely, and fiercely the boatswain struck back, and they gripped and struggled with savage strength.

But for the bo'sun's misplaced fidelity, Marcus's revolver would have answered Scrymgeour's, and the "Iron Duke" would have made an easy capture.

But, in the burly bo'sun's grasp, Marcus was powerless to influence the course of events. While they blindly fought, Captain Scrymgeour was passing beyond reach of the cruiser's fire.

The "Opossum" had for some time been threading a difficult channel, and as soon as the "Iron Duke" came to the dangerous reefs she had to reverse her engines.

To keep on meant to drive upon sharp, jagged rocks, unless incessant soundings were taken; and meanwhile the "Opossum," having passed the rocks, was taking full advantage of the breeze.

The searchlight died away astern. Silence succeeded the throbbing of the engines. The chase was over.

The "Opossum" swept onward like a racer.

Marcus and Wemyss separated, looking rather foolishly at each other, each repenting his fury in the brief struggle.

"Safe! safe!" said Bryce; and the colour began to steal back into his cheeks.

Captain Scrymgeour turned a fierce glare upon the seamen.

"Do you call yourselves men?" he snarled. "A ferocious set of curs you are, to snap at me when I'm getting you out of danger!"

"You got us into it first," sullenly said Caulker. "There's poor Jackson lyin' yonder with his skull stove in, and Blackie cut to shavings amidships."

"Lucky it's no worse. But, for my part, I'd be glad if the shot had relieved me of a few more of you whining cowards!" retorted the skipper, with fierce disdain.

"Chuck it, cap!" said Ackroyd. "I didn't whine, for one. And, anyhow, it's all over now."

"And as for the specie—," began Caulker.

"No time to discuss that now. The cruiser will be after us again as soon as she's clear of the Bojador reefs. We can't divide the skin before we've killed the lion. Our necks must be secured first."

This was reasonable enough, and no one dissented. Men were set to work to repair damages. But the interior of the ship remained a scene of wreck and desolation. Nothing could undo the shattering effect of the "Iron Duke's" fire there.

The three dead men were sewn up in their hammocks, and dropped overboard—not without some growls from the countrymen of the lascar Scrymgeour had killed. To these the skipper paid no heed.

He stood by the binnacle, his brows puckered in an angry, thoughtful frown. Bryce watched him in silence. He knew that Scrymgeour was trying to think of some way out of the dangers that were thickening round. But there was no plan the skipper could think of which had not its drawbacks, and very serious ones.

"We must do it," Scrymgeour burst out at length, looking at the mate.

"Do what, captain?"

"Hard-a-starboard, helmsman!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Man the lee-braces, lads!"

The "Opossum" swung off away from the African coast, and her bows turned westward to the open ocean.

"Do you mean that we are not to land in Africa, sir?" asked Bryce uneasily.

"Yes."

"But where, then?"

"In the West Indies." Captain Scrymgeour drew the mate aside, and went on to speak rapidly: "The body of my cousin, as I have said, must have been found in the Humber, and that, of course, has raised the question in the firm's mind, 'How comes it that the "Opossum" has sailed all the same?' They must be dull indeed if they do not suspect a conspiracy to seize the specie."

"Of course, that is suspected."

"Or, rather, say it is known. Roberts and the men we left

"LAST OF HIS RACE" COMPLETE NEXT FRIDAY.

at Hull will tell how they were drugged, and awoke to find the 'Opossum' gone. Probably every warship in the western seas has by this time received orders to look for us. Of course, they know that men attempting to carry off a cargo of gold would never enter the Mediterranean, to be cornered in the narrow seas. That's why the 'Iron Duke' is examining this coast. It was our cursed luck that she should chance upon us. But, after all, it has put us upon our guard. But it is no longer safe for us to linger upon the African coast. Our only chance is to give it a wide berth, and cut across the Atlantic."

"Right into the regular track of ships."

"That cannot be helped. Once we make the coast of Florida, we can sink the 'Opossum,' bury the gold, and return later in a cutter to take it away."

Dawn broke, to find the "Opossum" far out of sight of land—alone upon the heaving Atlantic!

Marcus and the boatswain, after their encounter, for a time became distant towards each other; but this did not last long. Blows struck at such a moment were not likely to leave enmity in manly hearts, and they were soon upon their former footing of intimacy.

Only Marcus understood that, against the captain, he could not depend upon Wemyss, whose sense of discipline seemed to banish all other considerations from his mind.

Marcus's position was a strange one, and only an iron courage could have long borne with it.

He was on board the "Opossum" as the guardian of the chest of sovereigns, and yet he heard the whole crew calmly discussing the stealing of them, without power to oppose their lawless intentions. He was regarded with suspicious eyes by the men, and only his continual watchfulness, and his known skill with the revolver, saved him from death. For there were several fierce spirits for whom openly advocated throwing him overboard. But no one cared to undertake the task. It would not have been an easy one.

For days the "Opossum" crossed the waste of waters. She sighted several ships each day; homeward-bound Australians, and vessels from Rio or Panama. But no cruisers were seen, to the crew's intense relief.

Captain Scrymgeour began to exult. Driven from Africa, he believed he could find a landing-place equally secure among the desolate cliffs of Florida. He saw himself the possessor of the huge sum for which he had sinned so recklessly, and he could not conceal his satisfaction.

"Do you think you can baffle me now, my lad?" he said one day to Marcus. "We sight Florida to-morrow morning."

Marcus did not reply; he wore a troubled expression. He had vaguely hoped that something would happen to mar the skipper's plots, and now it seemed that success was within the grasp of the conspirator. It galled Marcus bitterly to stand by while the money entrusted to his charge was in jeopardy. Yet what could he do? One man could not fight a score.

The skipper's glee was checked a little when Ackroyd and a number of the crew came aft that day.

"You expect to make the land to-morrow, cap'n?" said Ackroyd, who was now leader of the fore-castle, his adherents counting all the crew with the exception of two or three.

"Yes!" Scrymgeour answered, shortly enough.

"What do you mean to do with the gold? I ask in the name of the fo'c's'le."

"It is to be taken ashore."

"And wot then?"

"I shall bury it in a secure place, and later on we can charter a cutter in Havana or New Orleans to fetch it."

"And the 'Opossum'?"

"We shall have to scuttle her to cover our tracks."

"Of course. An' I s'pose," continued Ackroyd, in a tone of derisive sarcasm, "that you never thort of scuttling her with the crew still on board, while you and Mr. Bryce made off in a boat?"

This had been precisely the plan of the unscrupulous skipper. He was not a little startled to find this common sailor able to read him so easily. He assumed an air of indignation.

"Have I given you reason to suspect me of playing you false?" he demanded.

"Yes, lots. You are robbing your employers, and I'll bet you'd rob us if we gave you a chance!" Ackroyd declared.

"But we ain't givin' no chances!" said Jim Caulker.

"That's so, mate. We're going to make sure that we ain't swindled out our share in the spondulics!"

"What is it you ask?" said the captain, with as much patience as he could command.

"Trot out the thick 'uns, and divvy up; each of us is quite able to look after his share!" replied Ackroyd.

Captain Scrymgeour's teeth came together with a click.

"And the amount of each of your shares—what do you reckon that to be?" he asked.

"Wal, leavin' out Mr. Dene and Wemyss and Kit Marley, who aire too almighty honest fur this sorter game, thur aire

twenty-one of us, countin' you and Mr. Bryce. That works out at purty nearly five thousand apiece fur all of us."

"Well; and you could not even carry it."

"Nix; but it would be safer in our charge than in yours. If we wanter bury it, we kin each manage it fur ourselves. The facts is, cap'n, you wanter swindle us, and we ain't to be done. Divvy up, or—"

"Or what?" asked the captain, with menacing calmness.

"Or look out for squalls!"

Ackroyd, confident in the numbers that backed him, stared insolently at the skipper as he delivered his ultimatum.

He did not understand the kind of man he had to deal with.

Captain Scrymgeour was determined to keep the treasure solely to himself, and he would have died rather than share it with the crew. He knew that a fight must come. Had matters gone as he had planned them in England, he might have made this grand coup without danger to himself. But the actual events had not turned out according to his plans. A conflict was inevitable now. And since it had to come, he was prepared to strike the first blow and so reduce the odds arrayed against him. While talking with Ackroyd, he had slid his hand into his pocket, as it were carelessly, and in his clutch was the revolver he had before used so fatally.

"Squalls," repeated Captain Scrymgeour, in a reflective sort of way. "What kind of squalls, Ackroyd?"

"In a word, cap'n, if you don't hand out the gold, we'll take it ourselves, and that's the long and the short of it!" And the ruffian's tone and manner were full of bluster.

"Do you want my answer at once?"

"Now—this moment!"

"There it is, then!"

The captain's hand jerked up; the muzzle of his revolver was thrust almost into the mouth of Ackroyd.

Before the astonished man could recede, the death-shot sped.

He flung out his arms wildly, and staggered back, shrieking; and then crashed down upon his face.

Only a quiver ran through his limbs, and then he lay still; a lifeless, breathless corpse!

"Oh!" came in a deep-drawn breath from the seamen. They stood pale and appalled, utterly unnerved by the frightful suddenness of Ackroyd's death.

"All true men, stand by your captain!" rang out Scrymgeour's voice. And Bryce, Wemyss, and Kit Marley moved up to support him, and Marcus drew his revolver.

"Back, men," continued the captain, "I am master of this craft, and every man who disputes my authority will be served the same as Ackroyd."

Cowed, lacking a leader, the seamen yielded to the stern tones of command.

Sheepish, divided between fear and rage, they retreated to the fore-castle, without a word of bluster.

The captain replaced his revolver in his pocket, with a laugh of contempt.

"That's the way to treat 'em!" he said. "If I had shown the white feather, I should have been torn to pieces in the twinkling of an eye."

"Do you expect them to rest satisfied with this state of affairs?" asked Marcus. "If so, you are greatly mistaken."

"If they show their teeth again—and I expect they will—I shall teach 'em a lesson. But let us have an understanding, Mr. Dene. Are you for or against me in the tussle?"

"For you, to keep the gold out of the clutches of the crew. Against you, if you attempt to remove the strongbox from my cabin."

The captain nodded sarcastically.

"But what if the 'Opossum' runs upon a reef? Will you try to keep the gold in your cabin, to go down to Davy Jones' locker?"

"At any rate, I shall never abandon it to you," replied Marcus. And he walked away.

"And you, Wemyss, may I depend upon you?"

"As fur as concerns my dooty, sir; but 'tain't no use askin' me to become a thief!" the bo'sun answered bluntly. "You sail this ship, an' I obey your horders, as in dooty bound; but if you're goin' to steal the gold, you can do that orf your own bat!"

"So you turn your back upon your old skipper?" said Scrymgeour, with a peculiar smile.

"I never was a thief, sir. Don't ask me to become one now. I can't do it."

"Do you say the same, Marley?"

"Jest the same as my mate, sir, beggin' your pardon."

"Very good!" Captain Scrymgeour shrugged his shoulders and left them.

When night fell there was no watch upon the deck of the "Opossum."

The boatswain piped, but no hands tumbled up.

Captain Scrymgeour, when he gave an order, found no one there to execute it.

"Where the deuce are the crew, Wemyss?" he demanded.

"They won't come out of the fo'c's'le, sir."

"Ah, sulking over the way I served Ackroyd, I suppose! We must do without 'em."

Bryce went to the wheel; and with some difficulty the skipper and the bo'sun and his mate braced the yard.

From the forecabin the seamen watched them, no one offering to lend a hand.

"You won't keep that up long, cap'n!" called out Jim Caulker. "There's a gale coming up from the south, and if you can handle the ship without us then, you air welcome to do it. Share out the gold, or not a rope will we touch, if we all go to their bottom fur it!"

To this defiance the captain made no reply, but his expression became troubled. He was not daunted by this new difficulty; but he could not help feeling worried. In this luckless voyage perils seemed to start up round him at every step.

Darkness deepened upon the sea.

There was no moon, and the stars were few and dim. There was a faint phosphorescence upon the ocean, and the leaping waves gleamed eerily round the ship.

Aft, Captain Scrymgeour and Bryce were alert and watchful, and Wemyss and Marley were in the cuddy, with handspikes ready to their grasp. No one doubted that there would be a struggle with the crew before dawn. But the captain had little fear of the result, since he had deprived them of the leadership of the daring and resolute Ackroyd.

Marcus remained in his cabin, with the door ajar. He was seated upon the strongbox, which was the cause of all this distrust and discord. He had made up his mind to lend the captain the aid of his revolver in the event of a conflict. For if Scrymgeour carried off the chest, he might keep track of it, and perhaps recover it. While, if the sovereigns were portioned out between a score of men, there would be little chance of ever gathering them together again.

The clink of a shoe upon an iron bolt warned the captain that cautious feet were stealing along the densely-shadowed maindeck from the forecabin.

He whispered to Bryce, who lashed the helm, and they passed down the companion-way. A word, and the three men below were on the alert.

The smashing of the cuddy front by one of the "Iron Duke's" shells had opened a way aft for the mutineers.

The gaps had been partly boarded over; but there were still large apertures, and the improvised barrier was very flimsy, not likely to long resist a determined assault.

The moment he could distinguish a human form upon the deck, the skipper fired.

A terrible yell answered the shot, and a man fell writhing upon the planks.

A howl of fury and excitement, and a forward rush, followed. Men, with marlinespikes, or capstan bars in their hands, sprang up out of the darkness, and rushed to the attack. Heavy blows fell upon the boards that barred their path, and in a couple of minutes they were through.

Scrymgeour, Bryce, and Marcus had kept up a steady fire with their revolvers all the while, and six men lay outside the cuddy, dead or disabled.

"Kill 'em! kill 'em!" howled Jim Caulker. And he led his followers pluckily in a desperate charge, careless of the crackling revolvers.

In that narrow, dark space, a fearful struggle took place. Only the flash of fire lit the scene. Men went down, and were trampled on blindly; bludgeon and knife were wildly plied, striking friend as well as foe.

It was pandemonium while it lasted; but that was only for a minute.

While they fought, forgetting everything in the rage of battle, there came a terrific crash, followed by a lurching of the ship, and a rush of water along the deck.

The gale, foretold by Caulker, forgotten by all in their mutual ferocity, had struck the "Opossum," finding her utterly unprepared.

The mainmast had gone by the board, carrying the foremast with it, and the vessel heeled over to starboard, while heavy seas broke upon her quarter, and raced over her slanting deck.

CHAPTER 5.

The Gale—Between Life and Death—The Wreck of the "Opossum."

The conflict ceased abruptly; almost every man was thrown off his feet; living, dead, and dying were hurled this way and that in horrible confusion.

Captain Scrymgeour, Marcus, and Wemyss struggled out upon the deck, where the breaking seas instantly drenched them.

The gale was roaring madly; it was a real West Indian squall—sudden and sharp—and already mountainous waves were running beside the "Opossum," each towering mass of water in turn threatening to engulf her.

"If we don't cut away the wreck we shall go down like a stone!" the captain shouted, in stentorian tones. "Men, if

you would live, tumble up there! All hands on deck, for your lives!"

The three seized hatchets, and set to work, and one by one the survivors of the fight crawled out of the cuddy and joined them.

The mainmast had broken sheer off, and had detached itself from the binding-ropes, and danced away like a cork upon the crests of the billows. But the foremast, which had been dragged down by its fall, was still bound to the "Opossum" by the starboard-shrouds, and it kept the ship heeled over at a dangerous angle. Wave after wave swept the slanting deck, and it was clear to the dullest that if the craft were not righted she would soon fill and go down. Vigorous blows from axe and knife fell upon the tough ropes, every man exerting his full strength, fighting for dear life. They forgot their mutual rancour in combining against their common enemy—the sea.

It seemed an age—but it was really only a few minutes—before the ropes parted, and the fallen mast went whirling away upon the racing seas.

The "Opossum," with a shake and a shiver, righted, and the baffled waves, no longer able to seeth over her bulwarks, roared and foamed and maddened around her.

There was, fortunately, no rain, but the wind was bitter and tearing, and made so fearful a din that it was a matter of difficulty to make one's voice heard.

The remnant of the crew, clinging to spars, or ropes, or gratings, presented a woebegone appearance, their pale faces full of fear and desperation.

While the "Opossum" was swept by the seas, the water had carried off all who could not hold on. Dead and wounded both had been washed away, as well as several poor wretches who, losing their presence of mind in the imminence of the peril, were unable to take care of themselves.

Of the mutinous gang who had invaded the cuddy, intent upon seizing the specie, only six remained on board the "Opossum," while of the defenders, poor Kit Marley, stabbed in the affray, had been washed away among the dead. Bryce was in an even worse plight.

Marcus saw the mate crouching by the binnacle, to which he held with a convulsive grasp. His face gleamed white in the gloom, and in his rolling eyes was a strange, uncanny glitter. He mumbled like an animal as he crouched there, oblivious to everything but unreasoning terror.

A dreadful suspicion crossed Marcus's mind as he looked at the miserable object. He reached the binnacle actively, and, holding on with one hand, shook Bryce with the other.

"Courage, man! Brace up! The danger's over!"

"Leave me alone, Sholto Keene. I'll have nothing to do with it; it's too risky!"

These were the words Marcus managed to catch as the mate mumbled them out. The young man drew away with an involuntary shiver.

"He is mad!"

Bryce, always a poltroon, had lost his senses when he found the ship, as he believed, sinking.

When the final rush of the mutineers made the combat hard to hand, his spirit quailed, and he fled into his cabin in fear; but from this refuge the invading water had driven him to the deck.

There, battered, beaten, bruised, drenched, expecting death every moment, his craven soul had failed under the strain, and he remained a chattering imbecile.

"Who is Sholto Keene?" was Marcus's next thought. "The name has a familiar sound. I have heard it, I believe, in connection with Captain Scrymgeour. Yes; it was a cousin of his."

Crash!

Down came the mizzen-mast, with a roar of rending canvas and snapping cordage. Left without the support of the others, it could not resist the gale. It swooped over the stern, smashing beneath it the gaff and spanker. A shriek shrilled through the din; a human form accompanied the wreckage into the sea.

Bare of masts, the "Opossum" was raked by the wind, and every man on deck had to fight for life and breath.

The seamen one by one crept into the fo'c's'le, where at least they were secured from being blown away, though if the ship went down they would be drowned like rats in a trap.

Captain Scrymgeour was grinding his teeth and muttering fierce curses. The boats were of course gone. He no longer possessed any control over the ship. Any moment he feared to find that she had sprung a leak. This, then, was the ending of all his deep-laid schemes! The chest of gold was to repose at the bottom of the Atlantic, while the fish picked his bones in the blue depths! For this he had plotted, planned, contrived, and stained his hands with blood!

But, enraged as he was, he did not yet give up hope. He heaped maledictions upon untoward Fate; but he hoped still to snatch his prize in spite of Fortune.

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"If the old tub keeps afloat till morning, I'll run her upon the Florida rocks, and still get the treasure ashore," he muttered indomitably. "I shall not be able to remove the chest, but I shall get it ashore a bit at a time, and bury it among the cliffs. If only the tub doesn't founder, and send the gold and all of us to Davy Jones's together."

As the villain spoke, a cracked and dissonant voice rose from below, singing a sea-ditty out of tune.

"That's the beginnin'," said Wemyss to Marcus. "When they are quite drunk, it'll be knives an' marlinspikes to their front."

Marcus crossed over to Scrymgeour.

"Do you see the result of your villainy, captain?" he asked. "When those fellows have finished drinking they will come up to cut our throats!"

"Look out for yourselves, then, that's all, and shoot to kill!" replied the captain carelessly.

"Ah, I would give five years of my life for a sight of the 'Iron Duke' now!"

"Do you think she has tracked us across the Atlantic? That is certainly impossible. No, Marcus Dene, this fight will be fought out among ourselves."

"Do you still hope to land the treasure, and secure it to yourself?" Marcus asked, in amazement. "I shall begin to think that you are mad."

"I suppose we stand by each other against those drunken scoundrels?" asked Scrymgeour, disregarding his words.

"Certainly. But after that—"

"After that we will settle with one another. Good!"

Marcus was careful to keep at a distance from the skipper when the intoxicated seamen gave signs of the coming outbreak, for he feared that Scrymgeour would attempt to finish their contest by laying him low with a treacherous shot.

The five seamen who survived of the "Opossum's" once numerous crew came staggering out upon the maindeck.

Without a word of warning Scrymgeour aimed his revolver at Jim Caulker, and pulled the trigger.

But he had forgotten that, drenched as he was, the pistol would be rendered useless by the wetting of the cartridges. The trigger snapped, but no report followed. Caulker uttered a drunken shout, and ran at the captain, brandishing a clasp-knife. But a roll of the ship overturned him, and he pitched to port, and lay dazed in the scuppers.

Whether the seamen had or had not intended to renew their conflict with the captain, his action decided them to do so. Warned by Caulker's mishap, they advanced upon their enemy cautiously, no longer dreading his revolver.

Captain Scrymgeour realised his peril, and his bronzed face became a shade paler.

"Stand by me, Marcus Dene!" he sang out; and he began to retreat aft.

Marcus kept his revolver in a waterproof case, so that it had not suffered by his immersion in the water.

"Keep back, men!" he shouted. "I shall shoot if you advance another step!"

His levelled weapon backed up his words.

But the seamen, maddened by liquor, heeded not the warning. A howl of defiance answered him, and a handspike hurtled past his head. Had it struck him, he would have been killed instantly. It was necessary to act with decision.

A ringing shot was his answer, and the man who threw the missile dropped with a bullet in his leg.

Marcus had not wished to take his life; but to wound was to kill; for the disabled man, helpless to save himself, was tossed overboard by the rolling of the ship. His white face was seen for an instant amid the spray, and then it vanished for ever.

A rush at Marcus followed. Three savage men came at him like tigers, while Jim Caulker, crawling out of the scuppers, advanced upon the captain again. Scrymgeour reversed his pistol, to use it as a club, and awaited the ruffian.

Marcus did not waste a shot.

As the three intoxicated mutineers came madly scrambling at him, he fired once—twice—and first one and then another rolled and tumbled along the deck, and slid into the sea. The third man's marlinspike was lifted to crush in Marcus's skull, when Wemyss interposed. His handspike struck the assailant across the forehead, and he dropped like a log, instantaneously killed.

Captain Scrymgeour and Caulker had by this time come to close quarters.

Caulker attacked the skipper with blind ferocity; but, with his fists fuddled by liquor, he was no match for the cool, innervated man he sought to kill.

Scrymgeour eluded his knife, and dealt him a terrific blow upon the head, and, as he reeled, mercilessly repeated it. Caulker gave a low moan, and his lifeless body pitched to leeward.

The captain began to scramble towards the companion.

"Some fresh cartridges, and then to rid myself of Marcus Dene," was his reflection.

But as he was about to descend, a cry came from Wemyss: "A leak! A leak!"

Water was gurgling and hissing below the main-hatch of the "Opossum."

The thundering seas had at last done their work. A leak had been started below the water-line, and the hold was filling.

Captain Scrymgeour howled out a fearful malediction. It seemed as if the end had really come at last.

His eyes swept despairingly to the west. Then a gleam of hope brightened them. He heard the roar of surf; he saw black rocks looming through the spray. It was Florida at last!

"Land! land!" he cried.

"Thank Heaven!" said Marcus fervently.

The line of white foam, which marked where the waves broke, became clearer to the view.

With anxious eyes the men watched the surf, which roared louder to their ears every moment.

With frightful suddenness the vessel was flung into the very midst of the boiling chaos.

Lifted upon a mighty wave, the "Opossum" rose high, and was hurled upon the rocky shore.

The terrific crash of smashing timbers told how the ship's bottom had been staved in by the concussion.

The wave receded, leaving the wreck high, if not dry, upon a mass of jagged rock.

The next wave struck her with terrible force, driving her further upon the rocks, and smashing in the fore-castle as if it had been a house of cards. But the stern remained upon its perch, and from it the drenched and dazed men crept landward over the rocks, fighting every inch of the way with the pursuing billows that sought to drag them back to death.

Bryce, insane with fear, clung to Marcus like a limpet to a rock, hampering his every movement. Worn out by the struggle, breathless and spent, Dene was not equal to the strain. His senses swam, and he felt himself going. His feet were torn from under him, and the next wave would have carried him seaward but for Wemyss. Exhausted himself, the boatman could do little—he could only tear the idiot mate from the drowning Marcus. Relieved of the weight and encumbrance, Marcus mechanically renewed the struggle, and at length staggered beyond reach of the waves, and fell senseless upon the ground.

Wemyss, powerless to help Bryce, fought his way ashore, and fell near Marcus, while the mate of the "Opossum" was washed back to sea, and disappeared amid the surf.

As the two men lay insensible, a hideous figure crept towards them. It was Captain Scrymgeour. He, too, had won his way ashore, and lived; but his face was covered with blood from a cut in his head, and his senses were reeling. But he saw his only enemy lying helpless, and there was murder in his sunken, glittering eyes as he stole upon him, clubbing a revolver.

Death was very near to Marcus then. But it did not reach him; for the villain's strength was not equal to his will. Within a couple of yards of his victim he sank down, the pistol fell from his nerveless fingers, and he lay as inert and unconscious as the man he would have killed.

Senseless they lay, while the pounding waves beat upon the wreck of the "Opossum," tearing her to pieces plank by plank.

CHAPTER 6.

Ashore—The Last Fight—The Revelation—The Death of the Schemer—Conclusion.

With a long, shuddering sigh Marcus rose to his feet. He had lain senseless for three hours, but at length consciousness returned.

His opening eyes beheld a dull, leaden sky, already dimming into night. As he rose, he saw the waves breaking within a few yards of him, still violent and angry, but less so than when he had seen them last.

Upon the rocks lay the shattered hulk of the "Opossum," and so complete was the destruction of the once gallant vessel, that the iron-bound chest was now exposed to view. It lay amid the ruins of the cabins, its weight having saved it from being washed away. Battered, but unbroken, it still held the great prize so many men had fought and died for.

Marcus's eyes, leaving that fatal object, fell upon the still forms of Wemyss and Captain Scrymgeour.

He knelt by the side of the brave boatswain, and was rejoiced to see that he was not hurt beyond having sustained some severe bruises.

The captain's condition was more serious. The cut upon his head, made by a jagged edge when he was thrown upon the rocks, was deep, and had bled copiously. His breathing was difficult and stertorous. But he was not dead, nor, as Marcus thought, likely to die; so the young man's first action was to examine his revolver. He had one cartridge left, and the waterproof-case had kept it unharmed.

"That is for Scrymgeour's heart if he raises a finger against

me!" Marcus muttered grimly. "It would only be what he deserves if I blew his brains out now as he lies. That is how he would serve me."

With some trouble he succeeded in restoring Wemyss, and the boatswain unsteadily rose.

"This 'yar is a fine fix, Mr. Dene," remarked the bo'sun, looking round dismally upon the rough sea and desolate shore. "Looks as if thur wasn't a town fur a hundred miles."

"I doubt if there is. But I am not anxious to be visited until that chest is emptied of its contents. There's gold enough there to bring every rogue in Florida here, if it were known."

"How'll you hide it, sir? You can't move that chest."
"We must break it open, and take out the gold. We can pile it into one of these clefts, and bury it under a heap of rock."

"Wot about the cap'n?" said the bosun uneasily.

Marcus's brow darkened.

"I have one shot left. If he interferes with me I shall kill him! But we need not trouble about him now; he won't come to himself for hours."

Marcus little imagined that the skipper had already come to, and was shamming insensibility, and listening to every word. He remained quite still, with only one thought in his dazed mind—of getting the better of Marcus, and obtaining sole possession of the treasure.

The sea was going down; only the "tail" of the gale remained; and the "Opossum" was now above the water-mark.

Marcus and Wemyss climbed into the wreck, and refreshed themselves from a keg of brandy, which put new life into their exhausted frames. What little remained of the cabin-stores they carried to the shelter of a high rock. They were likely to need every crumb yet. After this they rested, agreeing to leave the task of burying the gold until the morning.

When they returned to the place where they had left the captain lying, they discovered that he had vanished.

"He is gone," Marcus observed. "But he will return. We must watch and sleep by turns, Wemyss, or we shall not wake when the sun rises. If I had thought him able to move I would have tried him up."

They were tired enough, and after a frugal meal, when they sat under a sloping rock, Wemyss fell into a deep sleep.

"I shall have to take the whole watch," thought Marcus. "I could not trust him to keep awake."

It was with the greatest difficulty that he fought back the sleep that almost overpowered him. It was only the fear of his enemy creeping upon him in the darkness that enabled him to keep the terrible drowsiness at bay.

Crash!

It was not a loud sound, but it seemed like thunder to Marcus's suddenly startled ears.

A jagged lump of rock hurled at his head missed him by only a few inches.

Instantly he was upon his feet, revolver in hand, peering into the shadows.

The form of the captain detached itself from the blackness. His eyes were gleaming, his face was still clotted with blood. An open knife was clutched in his right hand.

"Your life or mine, Marcus Dene!" cried he desperately; and he hurled himself upon the young man.

But a single shot was between Marcus and death. Had he missed, the knife would have been buried in his heart. The captain had taken the chance—it was death to one or the other.

But Marcus did not miss.

He fired with a steady hand—rapidly, but precisely—and the knife, when within two inches of his breast, slid from the fingers of the captain.

Groaning heavily, he fell at the young man's feet.

Wemyss started up in alarm.

"What's the matter, sir?"

"It's the captain—and I have killed him," replied Marcus calmly.

The boatswain's face was sorrowful as he bent over the quivering body.

"He is not dead, Mr. Dene," he said. And then added gravely: "But he will not live till morning."

The dying man lay upon the earth, his head propped upon Wemyss's folded coat.

Babbling words fell from his lips. Death was nigh. But first came delirium; and in the fit the wretched man chattered and shrieked and cursed. Sometimes he spoke in connected sentences, and then deep and dark meanings flashed upon the minds of the horror-stricken listeners.

Gradually, from his unconscious confessions, Marcus was able to piece together the whole fearful story.

Bryce's addressing the captain as "Sholto Keene" had raised strange suspicions in Marcus's mind, for he had heard of a "wastrel" cousin of Scrymgeour's who bore that name. That, added to Wemyss's account of what had taken place the

night before the "Opossum" sailed from the Humber, gave him the clue to the meaning of the dying man's ravings.

Upon that memorable night Sholto Keene had come aboard the "Opossum" for the purpose of destroying his cousin, and taking his place, their resemblance in face and voice—which we described in our first chapter—rendering the impersonation an easy task, if once Edmund Scrymgeour could be got rid of.

Keene struck the captain down in his cabin, either killing or stunning him. When Wemyss thought the captain and the mate were bearing the visitor back to the boat, it was really Captain Scrymgeour whom Keene and Bryce were taking away. With the mate's assistance Keene had changed clothes with the senseless skipper, and taken Scrymgeour's identity upon himself.

Marcus and Wemyss exchanged glances of horror as they heard, in the mutterings of the delirious schemer, how poor Scrymgeour, with his pockets filled with lead, had been sunk in the Humber that night.

"My poor skipper!" Wemyss exclaimed, with the tears running down his honest face. "Oh, if I had only known!"

"It was an amazing piece of daring," Marcus said slowly.

"But once the first step succeeded, the rest was easy. I have never heard of a bolder imposture."

"You see, sir, my faith in Cap'n Scrymgeour wasn't misplaced. I knew he was a fair an' square skipper."

"No, you could not know that this scoundrel had taken his place. Poor Edmund Scrymgeour! I have wronged him in thought. Yet who would have dreamed of this? Even now I can scarcely believe it."

For hours the wretch babbled on; but at length his voice died away in the exhaustion that preceded death. His breathing became irregular, spasmodic, and finally ceased.

Sholto Keene—so long known as Captain Scrymgeour—lay dead upon the rocks of the Florida coast. And this was the end—to die when the treasure he coveted was almost within his grasp!

When day came, Marcus and Wemyss carried the gold, after splitting open the chest, to a deep cleft. After an hour's labour it was all transferred, and they piled up rocks upon it to bury it from human view.

"If we sight a British cruiser we'll tell of it," said Marcus; "but if any other vessel, we'll leave it there till we reach some port where we can find a trustworthy captain to fetch it away."

Upon a high rock they raised a spar from the wreck as a flagstaff, and hoisted a piece of canvas as a signal of distress.

Several days passed, and no sail was seen. The castaways lived upon the provisions that had saved from the wreck, the amount of which grew every day alarmingly scantier.

It was upon the sixth day that Marcus saw the smoke of a steamer against the sky—now blue and sunny.

"Maybe it's the 'Iron Duke,' sir," Wemyss said hopefully. "Arter s'arching the Africky coast she might have come west, same as we did. It wouldn't take her skipper long to guess which way the 'Opossum' had gone."

"Quite possible. We shall soon see. She's coming straight for the shore, as I live!"

The "Iron Duke" it was.

Soon the castaways could make out the lines of the vessel they had last seen off Cape Bojador, in far-off Africa.

The lowering of a boat from the cruiser showed that the signal of distress was seen.

Marcus and the bo'sun, almost frantic with joy, tore down from the rocks to the water's edge to meet the boat. Words cannot describe their delight at the sight of the familiar Navy-blue and the ruddy English faces.

The "Iron Duke" landed the treasure, and Marcus and Wemyss, at Hull, three weeks after picking them up on the coast of Florida.

It was, as Sholto Keene had surmised, the finding of the real Captain Scrymgeour's body in the Humber, and the drugging of the second mate and part of the crew, so as to leave them behind, that gave the owners the knowledge that a conspiracy was afoot to seize the specie.

Active pursuit and search followed, and the meeting of the "Iron Duke" and the "Opossum" off Cape Bojador had been the first nail in the coffin of the daring conspiracy.

But it was clear that, but for Marcus, Sholto Keene would have succeeded in the end. And the young man was made much of, shortly afterwards being taken into the firm as a junior partner. Wemyss, too, was not forgotten, and when a new "Opossum" was built, the honest bo'sun became second mate of her, with the prospect of rising to be "chief."

The specie, which had passed through so many dangers, was again shipped for Trincomalee; and this time it arrived safely at its destination, and the Bank of Ceylon received the gold for which Sholto Keene had fought and schemed and sinned, only to be foiled at the finish.

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