V

"What's the matter with King Tom of late?" would ask someone when, all the cards in a heap on the table, the traders lying back in their chairs took a spell from a hard gamble.

"Tom has learned to hold his tongue, he must be up to some dam' good thing," opined another; while a man with hooked features and of German extraction who was supposed to be agent for a Dutch crockery house--the famous "Sphinx" mark--broke in resentfully:

"Nefer mind him, shentlemens, he's matt, matt as a Marsh Hase. Dree monats ago I call on board his prig to talk pizness. And he says like dis--'Glear oudt.' 'Vat for?' I say. 'Glear oudt before I shuck you oferboard.' Gott-for-dam! Iss dat the vay to talk pizness? I vant sell him ein liddle case first chop grockery for trade and--"

"Ha, ha, ha! I don't blame Tom," interrupted the owner of a pearling schooner, who had come into the Roads for stores. "Why, Mosey, there isn't a mangy cannibal left in the whole of New Guinea that hasn't got a cup and saucer of your providing. You've flooded the market, savee?"

Jorgenson stood by, a skeleton at the gaming table.

"Because you are a Dutch spy," he said, suddenly, in an awful tone.

The agent of the Sphinx mark jumped up in a sudden fury.

"Vat? Vat? Shentlemens, you all know me!" Not a muscle moved in the faces around. "Know me," he stammered with wet lips. "Vat, funf year--berfegtly acquaint--grockery--Verfluchte sponsher. Ich? Spy. Vat for spy? Vordamte English pedlars!"

The door slammed. "Is that so?" asked a New England voice. "Why don't you let daylight into him?"

"Oh, we can't do that here," murmured one of the players. "Your deal, Trench, let us get on."

"Can't you?" drawled the New England voice. "You law-abiding, get-a-summons, act-of--parliament lot of sons of Belial--can't you? Now, look a-here, these Colt pistols I am selling--" He took the pearler aside and could be heard talking

earnestly in the corner. "See--you load--and--see?" There were rapid clicks. "Simple, isn't it? And if any trouble--say with your divers"--click, click, click--"Through and through--like a sieve--warranted to cure the worst kind of cussedness in any nigger. Yes, siree! A case of twenty-four or single specimens--as you like. No? Shot-guns--rifles? No! Waal, I guess you're of no use to me, but I could do a deal with that Tom--what d'ye call him? Where d'ye catch him? Everywhere--eh? Waal--that's nowhere. But I shall find him some day--yes, siree."

Jorgenson, utterly disregarded, looked down dreamily at the falling cards. "Spy--I tell you," he muttered to himself. "If you want to know anything, ask me."

When Lingard returned from Wajo--after an uncommonly long absence--everyone remarked a great change. He was less talkative and not so noisy, he was still hospitable but his hospitality was less expansive, and the man who was never so happy as when discussing impossibly wild projects with half a dozen congenial spirits often showed a disinclination to meet his best friends. In a word, he returned much less of a good fellow than he went away. His visits to the Settlements were not less frequent, but much shorter; and when there he was always in a hurry to be gone.

During two years the brig had, in her way, as hard a life of it as the man. Swift and trim she flitted amongst the islands of little known groups. She could be descried afar from lonely headlands, a white speck travelling fast over the blue sea; the apathetic keepers of rare lighthouses dotting the great highway to the east came to know the cut of her topsails. They saw her passing east, passing west. They had faint glimpses of her flying with masts aslant in the mist of a rain-squall, or could observe her at leisure, upright and with shivering sails, forging ahead through a long day of unsteady airs. Men saw her battling with a heavy monsoon in the Bay of Bengal, lying becalmed in the Java Sea, or gliding out suddenly from behind a point of land, graceful and silent in the clear moonlight. Her activity was the subject of excited but low-toned conversations, which would be interrupted when her master appeared.

"Here he is. Came in last night," whispered the gossiping group.

Lingard did not see the covert glances of respect tempered by irony; he nodded and passed on.

"Hey, Tom! No time for a drink?" would shout someone.

He would shake his head without looking back--far away already.

Florid and burly he could be seen, for a day or two, getting out of dusty gharries,

striding in sunshine from the Occidental Bank to the Harbour Office, crossing the Esplanade, disappearing down a street of Chinese shops, while at his elbow and as tall as himself, old Jorgenson paced along, lean and faded, obstinate and disregarded, like a haunting spirit from the past eager to step back into the life of men.

Lingard ignored this wreck of an adventurer, sticking to him closer than his shadow, and the other did not try to attract attention. He waited patiently at the doors of offices, would vanish at tiffin time, would invariably turn up again in the evening and then he kept his place till Lingard went aboard for the night. The police peons on duty looked disdainfully at the phantom of Captain H. C. Jorgenson, Barque Wild Rose, wandering on the silent quay or standing still for hours at the edge of the sombre roadstead speckled by the anchor lights of ships--an adventurous soul longing to recross the waters of oblivion.

The sampan-men, sculling lazily homeward past the black hull of the brig at anchor, could hear far into the night the drawl of the New England voice escaping through the lifted panes of the cabin skylight. Snatches of nasal sentences floated in the stillness around the still craft.

"Yes, siree! Mexican war rifles--good as new--six in a case--my people in Baltimore--that's so. Hundred and twenty rounds thrown in for each specimen--marked to suit your requirements. Suppose--musical instruments, this side up with care--how's that for your taste? No, no! Cash down--my people in Balt--Shooting sea-gulls you say? Waal! It's a risky business--see here--ten per cent. discount--it's out of my own pocket--"

As time wore on, and nothing happened, at least nothing that one could hear of, the excitement died out. Lingard's new attitude was accepted as only "his way." There was nothing in it, maintained some. Others dissented. A good deal of curiosity, however, remained and the faint rumour of something big being in preparation followed him into every harbour he went to, from Rangoon to Hongkong.

He felt nowhere so much at home as when his brig was anchored on the inner side of the great stretch of shoals. The centre of his life had shifted about four hundred miles--from the Straits of Malacca to the Shore of Refuge--and when there he felt himself within the circle of another existence, governed by his impulse, nearer his desire. Hassim and Immada would come down to the coast and wait for him on the islet. He always left them with regret.

At the end of the first stage in each trip, Jorgenson waited for him at the top of the boat-stairs and without a word fell into step at his elbow. They seldom

exchanged three words in a day; but one evening about six months before Lingard's last trip, as they were crossing the short bridge over the canal where native craft lie moored in clusters, Jorgenson lengthened his stride and came abreast. It was a moonlight night and nothing stirred on earth but the shadows of high clouds. Lingard took off his hat and drew in a long sigh in the tepid breeze. Jorgenson spoke suddenly in a cautious tone: "The new Rajah Tulla smokes opium and is sometimes dangerous to speak to. There is a lot of discontent in Wajo amongst the big people."

"Good! Good!" whispered Lingard, excitedly, off his guard for once. Then--"How the devil do you know anything about it?" he asked.

Jorgenson pointed at the mass of praus, coasting boats, and sampans that, jammed up together in the canal, lay covered with mats and flooded by the cold moonlight with here and there a dim lantern burning amongst the confusion of high sterns, spars, masts and lowered sails.

"There!" he said, as they moved on, and their hatted and clothed shadows fell heavily on the queer-shaped vessels that carry the fortunes of brown men upon a shallow sea. "There! I can sit with them, I can talk to them, I can come and go as I like. They know me now--it's time-thirty-five years. Some of them give a plate of rice and a bit of fish to the white man. That's all I get--after thirty-five years--given up to them."

He was silent for a time.

"I was like you once," he added, and then laying his hand on Lingard's sleeve, murmured--"Are you very deep in this thing?"

"To the very last cent," said Lingard, quietly, and looking straight before him.

The glitter of the roadstead went out, and the masts of anchored ships vanished in the invading shadow of a cloud.

"Drop it," whispered Jorgenson.

"I am in debt," said Lingard, slowly, and stood still.

"Drop it!"

"Never dropped anything in my life."

"Drop it!"

"By God, I won't!" cried Lingard, stamping his foot.

There was a pause.

"I was like you--once," repeated Jorgenson. "Five and thirty years--never dropped anything. And what you can do is only child's play to some jobs I have had on my hands--understand that--great man as you are, Captain Lingard of the Lightning. . . . You should have seen the Wild Rose," he added with a sudden break in his voice.

Lingard leaned over the guard-rail of the pier. Jorgenson came closer.

"I set fire to her with my own hands!" he said in a vibrating tone and very low, as if making a monstrous confession.

"Poor devil," muttered Lingard, profoundly moved by the tragic enormity of the act. "I suppose there was no way out?"

"I wasn't going to let her rot to pieces in some Dutch port," said Jorgenson, gloomily. "Did you ever hear of Dawson?"

"Something--I don't remember now--" muttered Lingard, who felt a chill down his back at the idea of his own vessel decaying slowly in some Dutch port. "He died--didn't he?" he asked, absently, while he wondered whether he would have the pluck to set fire to the brig--on an emergency.

"Cut his throat on the beach below Fort Rotterdam," said Jorgenson. His gaunt figure wavered in the unsteady moonshine as though made of mist. "Yes. He broke some trade regulation or other and talked big about law-courts and legal trials to the lieutenant of the Komet. 'Certainly,' says the hound. 'Jurisdiction of Macassar, I will take your schooner there.' Then coming into the roads he tows her full tilt on a ledge of rocks on the north side--smash! When she was half full of water he takes his hat off to Dawson. 'There's the shore,' says he--'go and get your legal trial, you--Englishman--'" He lifted a long arm and shook his fist at the moon which dodged suddenly behind a cloud. "All was lost. Poor Dawson walked the streets for months barefooted and in rags. Then one day he begged a knife from some charitable soul, went down to take a last look at the wreck, and--"

"I don't interfere with the Dutch," interrupted Lingard, impatiently. "I want Hassim to get back his own--"

"And suppose the Dutch want the things just so," returned Jorgenson. "Anyway

there is a devil in such work--drop it!"

"Look here," said Lingard, "I took these people off when they were in their last ditch. That means something. I ought not to have meddled and it would have been all over in a few hours. I must have meant something when I interfered, whether I knew it or not. I meant it then--and did not know it. Very well. I mean it now--and do know it. When you save people from death you take a share in their life. That's how I look at it."

Jorgenson shook his head.

"Foolishness!" he cried, then asked softly in a voice that trembled with curiosity--"Where did you leave them?"

"With Belarab," breathed out Lingard. "You knew him in the old days."

"I knew him, I knew his father," burst out the other in an excited whisper. "Whom did I not know? I knew Sentot when he was King of the South Shore of Java and the Dutch offered a price for his head--enough to make any man's fortune. He slept twice on board the Wild Rose when things had begun to go wrong with him. I knew him, I knew all his chiefs, the priests, the fighting men, the old regent who lost heart and went over to the Dutch, I knew--" he stammered as if the words could not come out, gave it up and sighed--"Belarab's father escaped with me," he began again, quietly, "and joined the Padris in Sumatra. He rose to be a great leader. Belarab was a youth then. Those were the times. I ranged the coast--and laughed at the cruisers; I saw every battle fought in the Battak country--and I saw the Dutch run; I was at the taking of Singal and escaped. I was the white man who advised the chiefs of Manangkabo. There was a lot about me in the Dutch papers at the time. They said I was a Frenchman turned Mohammedan--" he swore a great oath, and, reeling against the guard-rail, panted, muttering curses on newspapers.

"Well, Belarab has the job in hand," said Lingard, composedly. "He is the chief man on the Shore of Refuge. There are others, of course. He has sent messages north and south. We must have men."

"All the devils unchained," said Jorgenson. "You have done it and now--look out--look out. . . ."

"Nothing can go wrong as far as I can see," argued Lingard. "They all know what's to be done. I've got them in hand. You don't think Belarab unsafe? Do you?"

"Haven't seen him for fifteen years--but the whole thing's unsafe," growled

Jorgenson.

"I tell you I've fixed it so that nothing can go wrong. It would be better if I had a white man over there to look after things generally. There is a good lot of stores and arms--and Belarab would bear watching--no doubt. Are you in any want?" he added, putting his hand in his pocket.

"No, there's plenty to eat in the house," answered Jorgenson, curtly. "Drop it," he burst out. "It would be better for you to jump overboard at once. Look at me. I came out a boy of eighteen. I can speak English, I can speak Dutch, I can speak every cursed lingo of these islands--I remember things that would make your hair stand on end--but I have forgotten the language of my own country. I've traded, I've fought, I never broke my word to white or native. And, look at me. If it hadn't been for the girl I would have died in a ditch ten years ago. Everything left me--youth, money, strength, hope--the very sleep. But she stuck by the wreck."

"That says a lot for her and something for you," said Lingard, cheerily.

Jorgenson shook his head.

"That's the worst of all," he said with slow emphasis. "That's the end. I came to them from the other side of the earth and they took me and--see what they made of me."

"What place do you belong to?" asked Lingard.

"Tromso," groaned out Jorgenson; "I will never see snow again," he sobbed out, his face in his hands.

Lingard looked at him in silence.

"Would you come with me?" he said. "As I told you, I am in want of a--"

"I would see you damned first!" broke out the other, savagely. "I am an old white loafer, but you don't get me to meddle in their infernal affairs. They have a devil of their own--"

"The thing simply can't fail. I've calculated every move. I've guarded against everything. I am no fool."

"Yes--you are. Good-night."

"Well, good-bye," said Lingard, calmly.

He stepped into his boat, and Jorgenson walked up the jetty. Lingard, clearing the yoke lines, heard him call out from a distance:

"Drop it!"

"I sail before sunrise," he shouted in answer, and went on board.

When he came up from his cabin after an uneasy night, it was dark yet. A lank figure strolled across the deck.

"Here I am," said Jorgenson, huskily. "Die there or here--all one. But, if I die there, remember the girl must eat."

Lingard was one of the few who had seen Jorgenson's girl. She had a wrinkled brown face, a lot of tangled grey hair, a few black stumps of teeth, and had been married to him lately by an enterprising young missionary from Bukit Timah. What her appearance might have been once when Jorgenson gave for her three hundred dollars and several brass guns, it was impossible to say. All that was left of her youth was a pair of eyes, undimmed and mournful, which, when she was alone, seemed to look stonily into the past of two lives. When Jorgenson was near they followed his movements with anxious pertinacity. And now within the sarong thrown over the grey head they were dropping unseen tears while Jorgenson's girl rocked herself to and fro, squatting alone in a corner of the dark hut.

"Don't you worry about that," said Lingard, grasping Jorgenson's hand. "She shall want for nothing. All I expect you to do is to look a little after Belarab's morals when I am away. One more trip I must make, and then we shall be ready to go ahead. I've foreseen every single thing. Trust me!"

In this way did the restless shade of Captain H. C. Jorgenson recross the water of oblivion to step back into the life of men.