

CHAPTER XIV

Early next morning, the morning watch of sailors, whose custom was to fetch the day's supply of water for the galley and cabin, discovered that the barrels were empty. Mr. Jackson was so alarmed that he immediately called Captain Doane, and not many minutes elapsed ere Captain Doane had routed out Grimshaw and Nishikanta to tell them the disaster.

Breakfast was an excitement shared in peculiarly by the Ancient Mariner and Dag Daughtry, while the trio of partners raged and bewailed. Captain Doane particularly wailed. Simon Nishikanta was fiendish in his descriptions of whatever miscreant had done the deed and of how he should be made to suffer for it, while Grimshaw clenched and repeatedly clenched his great hands as if throttling some throat.

"I remember, it was in forty-seven--nay, forty-six--yes, forty-six," the Ancient Mariner chattered. "It was a similar and worse predicament. It was in the longboat, sixteen of us. We ran on Glister Reef. So named it was after our pretty little craft discovered it one dark night and left her bones upon it. The reef is on the Admiralty charts. Captain Doane will verify me . . . "

No one listened, save Dag Daughtry, serving hot cakes and admiring. But Simon Nishikanta, becoming suddenly aware that the old man was babbling, bellowed out ferociously:

"Oh, shut up! Close your jaw! You make me tired with your everlasting 'I remember.'"

The Ancient Mariner was guilelessly surprised, as if he had slipped somewhere in his narrative.

"No, I assure you," he continued. "It must have been some error of my poor old tongue. It was not the Wide Awake, but the brig Glisten. Did I say Wide Awake? It was the Glisten, a smart little brig, almost a toy brig in fact, copper-bottomed, lines like a dolphin, a sea-cutter and a wind-eater. Handled like a top. On my honour, gentlemen, it was lively work for both watches when she went about. I was super-cargo. We sailed out of New York, ostensibly for the north-west coast, with sealed orders--"

"In the name of God, peace, peace! You drive me mad with your drive!" So Nishikanta cried out in nervous pain that was real and quivering. "Old man, have a heart. What do I care to know of your Glisten and your sealed orders!"

"Ah, sealed orders," the Ancient Mariner went on beamingly. "A magic phrase, sealed orders." He rolled it off his tongue with unction. "Those were the days, gentlemen, when ships did sail with sealed orders. And as super-cargo, with my trifle invested in the adventure and my share in the gains, I commanded the captain. Not in him, but in me were reposed the

sealed orders. I assure you I did not know myself what they were. Not until we were around old Cape Stiff, fifty to fifty, and in fifty in the Pacific, did I break the seal and learn we were bound for Van Dieman's Land. They called it Van Dieman's Land in those days . . . "

It was a day of discoveries. Captain Doane caught the mate stealing the ship's position from his desk with the duplicate key. There was a scene, but no more, for the Finn was too huge a man to invite personal encounter, and Captain Dome could only stigmatize his conduct to a running reiteration of "Yes, sir," and "No, sir," and "Sorry, sir."

Perhaps the most important discovery, although he did not know it at the time, was that of Dag Daughtry. It was after the course had been changed and all sail set, and after the Ancient Mariner had privily informed him that Taiohae, in the Marquesas, was their objective, that Daughtry gaily proceeded to shave. But one trouble was on his mind. He was not quite sure, in such an out-of-the-way place as Taiohae, that good beer could be procured.

As he prepared to make the first stroke of the razor, most of his face white with lather, he noticed a dark patch of skin on his forehead just between the eyebrows and above. When he had finished shaving he touched the dark patch, wondering how he had been sunburned in such a spot. But he did not know he had touched it in so far as there was any response of sensation. The dark place was numb.

"Curious," he thought, wiped his face, and forgot all about it.

No more than he knew what horror that dark spot represented, did he know that Ah Moy's slant eyes had long since noticed it and were continuing to notice it, day by day, with secret growing terror.

Close-hauled on the south-east trades, the Mary Turner began her long slant toward the Marquesas. For'ard, all were happy. Being only seamen, on seamen's wages, they hailed with delight the news that they were bound in for a tropic isle to fill their water-barrels. Aft, the three partners were in bad temper, and Nishikanta openly sneered at Captain Doane and doubted his ability to find the Marquesas. In the steerage everybody was happy--Dag Daughtry because his wages were running on and a further supply of beer was certain; Kwaque because he was happy whenever his master was happy; and Ah Moy because he would soon have opportunity to desert away from the schooner and the two lepers with whom he was domiciled.

Michael shared in the general happiness of the steerage, and joined eagerly with Steward in learning by heart a fifth song. This was "Lead, kindly Light." In his singing, which was no more than trained howling after all, Michael sought for something he knew not what. In truth, it was the lost pack, the pack of the primeval world before the dog ever came in to the fires of men, and, for that matter, before men built fires and before men were men.

He had been born only the other day and had lived but two years in the world, so that, of himself, he had no knowledge of the lost pack. For many thousands of generations he had been away from it; yet, deep down in the crypts of being, tied about and wrapped up in every muscle and nerve of him, was the indelible record of the days in the wild when dim ancestors had run with the pack and at the same time developed the pack and themselves. When Michael was asleep, then it was that pack-memories sometimes arose to the surface of his subconscious mind. These dreams were real while they lasted, but when he was awake he remembered them little if at all. But asleep, or singing with Steward, he sensed and yearned for the lost pack and was impelled to seek the forgotten way to it.

Waking, Michael had another and real pack. This was composed of Steward, Kwaque, Cocky, and Scraps, and he ran with it as ancient forbears had ran with their own kind in the hunting. The steerage was the lair of this pack, and, out of the steerage, it ranged the whole world, which was the Mary Turner ever rocking, heeling, reeling on the surface of the unstable sea.

But the steerage and its company meant more to Michael than the mere pack. It was heaven as well, where dwelt God. Man early invented God, often of stone, or clod, or fire, and placed him in trees and mountains and among the stars. This was because man observed that man passed and was lost out of the tribe, or family, or whatever name he gave to his group, which was, after all, the human pack. And man did not want to be

lost out of the pack. So, of his imagination, he devised a new pack that would be eternal and with which he might for ever run. Fearing the dark, into which he observed all men passed, he built beyond the dark a fairer region, a happier hunting-ground, a jollier and robuster feasting-hall and wassailing-place, and called it variously "heaven."

Like some of the earliest and lowest of primitive men, Michael never dreamed of throwing the shadow of himself across his mind and worshipping it as God. He did not worship shadows. He worshipped a real and indubitable god, not fashioned in his own four-legged, hair-covered image, but in the flesh-and-blood image, two-legged, hairless, upstanding, of Steward.