CHAPTER XVII

One night Dag Daughtry sat at a table in the saloon called the Pile-drivers' Home. He was in a parlous predicament. Harder than ever had it been to secure odd jobs, and he had reached the end of his savings. Earlier in the evening he had had a telephone conference with the Ancient Mariner, who had reported only progress with an exceptionally strong nibble that very day from a retired quack doctor.

"Let me pawn my rings," the Ancient Mariner had urged, not for the first time, over the telephone.

"No, sir," had been Daughtry's reply. "We need them in the business. They're stock in trade. They're atmosphere. They're what you call a figure of speech. I'll do some thinking to-night an' see you in the morning, sir. Hold on to them rings an' don't be no more than casual in playin' that doctor. Make 'm come to you. It's the only way. Now you're all right, an' everything's hunkydory an' the goose hangs high. Don't you worry, sir. Dag Daughtry never fell down yet."

But, as he sat in the Pile-drivers' Home, it looked as if his fall-down was very near. In his pocket was precisely the room-rent for the following week, the advance payment of which was already three days overdue and clamorously demanded by the hard-faced landlady. In the rooms, with care, was enough food with which to pinch through for another

day. The Ancient Mariner's modest hotel bill had not been paid for two weeks--a prodigious sum under the circumstances, being a first-class hotel; while the Ancient Mariner had no more than a couple of dollars in his pocket with which to make a sound like prosperity in the ears of the retired doctor who wanted to go a-treasuring.

Most catastrophic of all, however, was the fact that Dag Daughtry was three quarts short of his daily allowance and did not dare break into the rent money which was all that stood between him and his family and the street. This was why he sat at the beer table with Captain Jorgensen, who was just returned with a schooner-load of hay from the Petaluma Flats. He had already bought beer twice, and evinced no further show of thirst. Instead, he was yawning from long hours of work and waking and looking at his watch. And Daughtry was three quarts short! Besides, Hanson had not yet been smashed, so that the cook-job on the schooner still lay ahead an unknown distance in the future.

In his desperation, Daughtry hit upon an idea with which to get another schooner of steam beer. He did not like steam beer, but it was cheaper than lager.

"Look here, Captain," he said. "You don't know how smart that Killeny Boy is. Why, he can count just like you and me."

"Hoh!" rumbled Captain Jorgensen. "I seen 'em do it in side shows. It's all tricks. Dogs an' horses can't count."

"This dog can," Daughtry continued quietly. "You can't fool 'm. I bet you, right now, I can order two beers, loud so he can hear and notice, and then whisper to the waiter to bring one, an', when the one comes, Killeny Boy'll raise a roar with the waiter."

"Hoh! Hoh! How much will you bet?"

The steward fingered a dime in his pocket. If Killeny failed him it meant that the rent-money would be broken in upon. But Killeny couldn't and wouldn't fail him, he reasoned, as he answered:

"I'll bet you the price of two beers."

The waiter was summoned, and, when he had received his secret instructions, Michael was called over from where he lay at Kwaque's feet in a corner. When Steward placed a chair for him at the table and invited him into it, he began to key up. Steward expected something of him, wanted him to show off. And it was not because of the showing off that he was eager, but because of his love for Steward. Love and service were one in the simple processes of Michael's mind. Just as he would have leaped into fire for Steward's sake, so would he now serve Steward in any way Steward desired. That was what love meant to him. It was all love meant to him--service.

"Waiter!" Steward called; and, when the waiter stood close at hand: "Two

beers.--Did you get that, Killeny? Two beers."

Michael squirmed in his chair, placed an impulsive paw on the table, and impulsively flashed out his ribbon of tongue to Steward's close-bending face.

"He will remember," Daughtry told the scow-schooner captain.

"Not if we talk," was the reply. "Now we will fool your bow-wow. I will say that the job is yours when I smash Hanson. And you will say it is for me to smash Hanson now. And I will say Hanson must give me reason first to smash him. And then we will argue like two fools with mouths full of much noise. Are you ready?"

Daughtry nodded, and thereupon ensued a loud-voiced discussion that drew Michael's earnest attention from one talker to the other.

"I got you," Captain Jorgensen announced, as he saw the waiter approaching with but a single schooner of beer. "The bow-wow has forgot, if he ever remembered. He thinks you an' me is fighting. The place in his mind for one beer, and two, is wiped out, like a wave on the beach wipes out the writing in the sand."

"I guess he ain't goin' to forget arithmetic no matter how much noise you shouts," Daughtry argued aloud against his sinking spirits. "An' I ain't goin' to butt in," he added hopefully. "You just watch 'm for himself."

The tall, schooner-glass of beer was placed before the captain, who laid a swift, containing hand around it. And Michael, strung as a taut string, knowing that something was expected of him, on his toes to serve, remembered his ancient lessons on the Makambo, vainly looked into the impassive face of Steward for a sign, then looked about and saw, not two glasses, but one glass. So well had he learned the difference between one and two that it came to him--how the profoundest psychologist can no more state than can he state what thought is in itself--that there was one glass only when two glasses had been commanded. With an abrupt upspring, his throat half harsh with anger, he placed both forepaws on the table and barked at the waiter.

Captain Jorgensen crashed his fist down.

"You win!" he roared. "I pay for the beer! Waiter, bring one more."

Michael looked to Steward for verification, and Steward's hand on his head gave adequate reply.

"We try again," said the captain, very much awake and interested, with the back of his hand wiping the beer-foam from his moustache. "Maybe he knows one an' two. How about three? And four?"

"Just the same, Skipper. He counts up to five, and knows more than five when it is more than five, though he don't know the figures by name after

five."

"Oh, Hanson!" Captain Jorgensen bellowed across the bar-room to the cook of the Howard. "Hey, you square-head! Come and have a drink!"

Hanson came over and pulled up a chair.

"I pay for the drinks," said the captain; "but you order, Daughtry. See, now, Hanson, this is a trick bow-wow. He can count better than you. We are three. Daughtry is ordering three beers. The bow-wow hears three. I hold up two fingers like this to the waiter. He brings two. The bow-wow raises hell with the waiter. You see."

All of which came to pass, Michael blissfully unappeasable until the order was filled properly.

"He can't count," was Hanson's conclusion. "He sees one man without beer. That's all. He knows every man should ought to have a glass. That's why he barks."

"Better than that," Daughtry boasted. "There are three of us. We will order four. Then each man will have his glass, but Killeny will talk to the waiter just the same."

True enough, now thoroughly aware of the game, Michael made outcry to the waiter till the fourth glass was brought. By this time many men were

about the table, all wanting to buy beer and test Michael.

"Glory be," Dag Daughtry solloquized. "A funny world. Thirsty one moment. The next moment they'd fair drown you in beer."

Several even wanted to buy Michael, offering ridiculous sums like fifteen and twenty dollars.

"I tell you what," Captain Jorgensen muttered to Daughtry, whom he had drawn away into a corner. "You give me that bow-wow, and I'll smash Hanson right now, and you got the job right away--come to work in the morning."

Into another corner the proprietor of the Pile-drivers' Home drew Daughtry to whisper to him:

"You stick around here every night with that dog of yourn. It makes trade. I'll give you free beer any time and fifty cents cash money a night."

It was this proposition that started the big idea in Daughtry's mind. As he told Michael, back in the room, while Kwaque was unlacing his shoes:

"It's this way Killeny. If you're worth fifty cents a night and free beer to that saloon keeper, then you're worth that to me . . . and more, my son, more. 'Cause he's lookin' for a profit. That's why he sells

beer instead of buyin' it. An', Killeny, you won't mind workin' for me, I know. We need the money. There's Kwaque, an' Mr. Greenleaf, an' Cocky, not even mentioning you an' me, an' we eat an awful lot. An' room-rent's hard to get, an' jobs is harder. What d'ye say, son, to-morrow night you an' me hustle around an' see how much coin we can gather?"

And Michael, seated on Steward's knees, eyes to eyes and nose to nose, his jowls held in Steward's hand's wriggled and squirmed with delight, flipping out his tongue and bobbing his tail in the air. Whatever it was, it was good, for it was Steward who spoke.