

## THE SEA-FARMER

"That wull be the doctor's launch," said Captain MacElrath.

The pilot grunted, while the skipper swept on with his glass from the launch to the strip of beach and to Kingston beyond, and then slowly across the entrance to Howth Head on the northern side.

"The tide's right, and we'll have you docked in two hours," the pilot vouchsafed, with an effort at cheeriness. "Ring's End Basin, is it?"

This time the skipper grunted.

"A dirty Dublin day."

Again the skipper grunted. He was weary with the night of wind in the Irish Channel behind him, the unbroken hours of which he had spent on the bridge. And he was weary with all the voyage behind him--two years and four months between home port and home port, eight hundred and fifty days by his log.

"Proper wunter weather," he answered, after a silence. "The town is undistinct. Ut wull be rainun' guid an' hearty for the day."

Captain MacElrath was a small man, just comfortably able to peep over the canvas dodger of the bridge. The pilot and third officer loomed above him, as did the man at the wheel, a bulky German, deserted from a warship, whom he had signed on in Rangoon. But his lack of inches made Captain MacElrath a no less able man. At least so the Company reckoned, and so would he have reckoned could he have had access to the carefully and minutely compiled record of him filed away in the office archives. But the Company had never given him a hint of its faith in him. It was not the way of the Company, for the Company went on the principle of never allowing an employee to think himself indispensable or even exceedingly useful; wherefore, while quick to censure, it never praised. What was Captain MacElrath, anyway, save a skipper, one skipper of the eighty-odd skippers that commanded the Company's eighty-odd freighters on all the highways and byways of the sea?

Beneath them, on the main deck, two Chinese stokers were carrying breakfast for'ard across the rusty iron plates that told their own grim story of weight and wash of sea. A sailor was taking down the life-line that stretched from the forecastle, past the hatches and cargo-winches, to the bridge-deck ladder.

"A rough voyage," suggested the pilot.

"Aye, she was fair smokin' ot times, but not that I minded thot so

much as the lossin' of time. I hate like onythun' tull loss time."

So saying, Captain MacElrath turned and glanced aft, aloft and alow, and the pilot, following his gaze, saw the mute but convincing explanation of that loss of time. The smoke-stack, buff-coloured underneath, was white with salt, while the whistle-pipe glittered crystalline in the random sunlight that broke for the instant through a cloud-rift. The port lifeboat was missing, its iron davits, twisted and wrenched, testifying to the mightiness of the blow that had been struck the old Tryapsic. The starboard davits were also empty. The shattered wreck of the lifeboat they had held lay on the fiddley beside the smashed engine-room skylight, which was covered by a tarpaulin. Below, to star-board, on the bridge deck, the pilot saw the crushed mess-room door, roughly bulkheaded against the pounding seas. Abreast of it, on the smokestack guys, and being taken down by the bos'n and a sailor, hung the huge square of rope netting which had failed to break those seas of their force.

"Twice afore I mentioned thot door tull the owners," said Captain MacElrath. "But they said ut would do. There was bug seas thot time. They was uncreditable bug. And thot buggest one dud the damage. Ut fair carried away the door an' laid ut flat on the mess table an' smashed out the chief's room. He was a but sore about ut."

"It must 'a' been a big un," the pilot remarked sympathetically.

"Aye, ut was thot. Thungs was lively for a but. Ut finished the mate. He was on the brudge wuth me, an' I told hum tull take a look tull the wedges o' number one hatch. She was takin' watter freely an' I was no sure o' number one. I dudna like the look o' ut, an' I was fuggerin' maybe tull heave to tull the marn, when she took ut over abaft the brudge. My word, she was a bug one. We got a but of ut ourselves on the brudge. I dudna miss the mate ot the first, what o' routin' out Chips an' bulkheadun' thot door an' stretchun' the tarpaulin over the sky-light. Then he was nowhere to be found. The men ot the wheel said as he seen hum goin' down the lodder just afore she hut us. We looked for'ard, we looked tull hus room, aye looked tull the engine-room, an' we looked along aft on the lower deck, and there he was, on both sides the cover to the steam-pipe runnun' tull the after-wunches."

The pilot ejaculated an oath of amazement and horror.

"Aye," the skipper went on wearily, "an' on both sides the steam-pipe uz well. I tell ye he was in two pieces, splut clean uz a herrin'. The sea must a-caught hum on the upper brudge deck, carried hum clean across the fiddley, an' banged hum head-on tull the pipe cover. It sheered through hum like so much butter, down atween the eyes, an' along the middle of hum, so that one leg an' arm was fast tull the one piece of hum, an' one leg an' arm fast

tull the other piece of hum. I tull ye ut was fair grewsome. We putt hum together an' rolled hum in canvas uz we pulled hum out."

The pilot swore again.

"Oh, ut wasna onythun' tull greet about," Captain MacElrath assured him. "'Twas a guid ruddance. He was no a sailor, thot mate-fellow. He was only fut for a pugsty, an' a dom puir apology for thot same."

It is said that there are three kinds of Irish--Catholic, Protestant, and North-of-Ireland--and that the North-of-Ireland Irishman is a transplanted Scotchman. Captain MacElrath was a North-of-Ireland man, and, talking for much of the world like a Scotchman, nothing aroused his ire quicker than being mistaken for a Scotchman. Irish he stoutly was, and Irish he stoutly abided, though it was with a faint lip-lift of scorn that he mentioned mere South-of-Ireland men, or even Orange-men. Himself he was Presbyterian, while in his own community five men were all that ever mustered at a meeting in the Orange Men's Hall. His community was the Island McGill, where seven thousand of his kind lived in such amity and sobriety that in the whole island there was but one policeman and never a public-house at all.

Captain MacElrath did not like the sea, and had never liked it. He wrung his livelihood from it, and that was all the sea was, the

place where he worked, as the mill, the shop, and the counting-house were the places where other men worked. Romance never sang to him her siren song, and Adventure had never shouted in his sluggish blood. He lacked imagination. The wonders of the deep were without significance to him. Tornadoes, hurricanes, waterspouts, and tidal waves were so many obstacles to the way of a ship on the sea and of a master on the bridge--they were that to him, and nothing more. He had seen, and yet not seen, the many marvels and wonders of far lands. Under his eyelids burned the brazen glories of the tropic seas, or ached the bitter gales of the North Atlantic or far South Pacific; but his memory of them was of mess-room doors stove in, of decks awash and hatches threatened, of undue coal consumption, of long passages, and of fresh paint-work spoiled by unexpected squalls of rain.

"I know my buzz'ness," was the way he often put it, and beyond his business was all that he did not know, all that he had seen with the mortal eyes of him and yet that he never dreamed existed. That he knew his business his owners were convinced, or at forty he would not have held command of the Tryapsic, three thousand tons net register, with a cargo capacity of nine thousand tons and valued at fifty-thousand pounds.

He had taken up seafaring through no love of it, but because it had been his destiny, because he had been the second son of his father instead of the first. Island McGill was only so large, and the

land could support but a certain definite proportion of those that dwelt upon it. The balance, and a large balance it was, was driven to the sea to seek its bread. It had been so for generations. The eldest sons took the farms from their fathers; to the other sons remained the sea and its salt-ploughing. So it was that Donald MacElrath, farmer's son and farm-boy himself, had shifted from the soil he loved to the sea he hated and which it was his destiny to farm. And farmed it he had, for twenty years, shrewd, cool-headed, sober, industrious, and thrifty, rising from ship's boy and fore-castle hand to mate and master of sailing-ships and thence into steam, second officer, first, and master, from small command to larger, and at last to the bridge of the old Tryapsic--old, to be sure, but worth her fifty thousand pounds and still able to bear up in all seas, and weather her nine thousand tons of freight.

From the bridge of the Tryapsic, the high place he had gained in the competition of men, he stared at Dublin harbour opening out, at the town obscured by the dark sky of the dreary wind-driven day, and at the tangled tracery of spars and rigging of the harbour shipping. Back from twice around the world he was, and from interminable junketings up and down on far stretches, home-coming to the wife he had not seen in eight-and-twenty months, and to the child he had never seen and that was already walking and talking. He saw the watch below of stokers and trimmers bobbing out of the fore-castle doors like rabbits from a warren and making their way aft over the rusty deck to the mustering of the port doctor. They

were Chinese, with expressionless, Sphinx-like faces, and they walked in peculiar shambling fashion, dragging their feet as if the clumsy brogans were too heavy for their lean shanks.

He saw them and he did not see them, as he passed his hand beneath his visored cap and scratched reflectively his mop of sandy hair. For the scene before him was but the background in his brain for the vision of peace that was his--a vision that was his often during long nights on the bridge when the old Tryapsic wallowed on the vexed ocean floor, her decks awash, her rigging thrumming in the gale gusts or snow squalls or driving tropic rain. And the vision he saw was of farm and farm-house and straw-thatched outbuildings, of children playing in the sun, and the good wife at the door, of lowing kine, and clucking fowls, and the stamp of horses in the stable, of his father's farm next to him, with, beyond, the woodless, rolling land and the hedged fields, neat and orderly, extending to the crest of the smooth, soft hills. It was his vision and his dream, his Romance and Adventure, the goal of all his effort, the high reward for the salt-ploughing and the long, long furrows he ran up and down the whole world around in his farming of the sea.

In simple taste and homely inclination this much-travelled man was more simple and homely than the veriest yokel. Seventy-one years his father was, and had never slept a night out of his own bed in his own house on Island McGill. That was the life ideal, so



Captain MacElrath considered, and he was prone to marvel that any man, not under compulsion, should leave a farm to go to sea. To this much-travelled man the whole world was as familiar as the village to the cobbler sitting in his shop. To Captain MacElrath the world was a village. In his mind's eye he saw its streets a thousand leagues long, aye, and longer; turnings that doubled earth's stormiest headlands or were the way to quiet inland ponds; cross-roads, taken one way, that led to flower-lands and summer seas, and that led the other way to bitter, ceaseless gales and the perilous bergs of the great west wind drift. And the cities, bright with lights, were as shops on these long streets--shops where business was transacted, where bunkers were replenished, cargoes taken or shifted, and orders received from the owners in London town to go elsewhere and beyond, ever along the long sea-lanes, seeking new cargoes here, carrying new cargoes there, running freights wherever shillings and pence beckoned and underwriters did not forbid. But it was all a weariness to contemplate, and, save that he wrung from it his bread, it was without profit under the sun.

The last good-bye to the wife had been at Cardiff, twenty-eight months before, when he sailed for Valparaiso with coals--nine thousand tons and down to his marks. From Valparaiso he had gone to Australia, light, a matter of six thousand miles on end with a stormy passage and running short of bunker coal. Coals again to Oregon, seven thousand miles, and nigh as many more with general

cargo for Japan and China. Thence to Java, loading sugar for Marseilles, and back along the Mediterranean to the Black Sea, and on to Baltimore, down to her marks with chrome ore, buffeted by hurricanes, short again of bunker coal and calling at Bermuda to replenish. Then a time charter, Norfolk, Virginia, loading mysterious contraband coal and sailing for South Africa under orders of the mysterious German supercargo put on board by the charterers. On to Madagascar, steaming four knots by the supercargo's orders, and the suspicion forming that the Russian fleet might want the coal. Confusion and delays, long waits at sea, international complications, the whole world excited over the old Tryapsic and her cargo of contraband, and then on to Japan and the naval port of Sassebo. Back to Australia, another time charter and general merchandise picked up at Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide, and carried on to Mauritius, Lourenco Marques, Durban, Algoa Bay, and Cape Town. To Ceylon for orders, and from Ceylon to Rangoon to load rice for Rio Janeiro. Thence to Buenos Aires and loading maize for the United Kingdom or the Continent, stopping at St. Vincent, to receive orders to proceed to Dublin. Two years and four months, eight hundred and fifty days by the log, steaming up and down the thousand-league-long sea-lanes and back again to Dublin town. And he was well weary.

A little tug had laid hold of the Tryapsic, and with clang and clatter and shouted command, with engines half-ahead, slow-speed, or half-astern, the battered old sea-tramp was nudged and nosed and

shouldered through the dock-gates into Ring's End Basin. Lines were flung ashore, fore and aft, and a 'midship spring got out. Already a small group of the happy shore-staying folk had clustered on the dock.

"Ring off," Captain MacElrath commanded in his slow thick voice; and the third officer worked the lever of the engine-room telegraph.

"Gangway out!" called the second officer; and when this was accomplished, "That will do."

It was the last task of all, gangway out. "That will do" was the dismissal. The voyage was ended, and the crew shambled eagerly forward across the rusty decks to where their sea-bags were packed and ready for the shore. The taste of the land was strong in the men's mouths, and strong it was in the skipper's mouth as he muttered a gruff good day to the departing pilot, and himself went down to his cabin. Up the gangway were trooping the customs officers, the surveyor, the agent's clerk, and the stevedores. Quick work disposed of these and cleared his cabin, the agent waiting to take him to the office.

"Dud ye send word tull the wife?" had been his greeting to the clerk.

"Yes, a telegram, as soon as you were reported."

"She'll likely be comin' down on the marnin' train," the skipper had soliloquized, and gone inside to change his clothes and wash.

He took a last glance about the room and at two photographs on the wall, one of the wife the other of an infant--the child he had never seen. He stepped out into the cabin, with its panelled walls of cedar and maple, and with its long table that seated ten, and at which he had eaten by himself through all the weary time. No laughter and clatter and wordy argument of the mess-room had been his. He had eaten silently, almost morosely, his silence emulated by the noiseless Asiatic who had served him. It came to him suddenly, the overwhelming realization of the loneliness of those two years and more. All his vexations and anxieties had been his own. He had shared them with no one. His two young officers were too young and flighty, the mate too stupid. There was no consulting with them. One tenant had shared the cabin with him, that tenant his responsibility. They had dined and supped together, walked the bridge together, and together they had bedded.

"Och!" he muttered to that grim companion, "I'm quit of you, an' wull quit . . . for a wee."

Ashore he passed the last of the seamen with their bags, and, at the agent's, with the usual delays, put through his ship business.

When asked out by them to drink he took milk and soda.

"I am no teetotaler," he explained; "but for the life o' me I canna bide beer or whusky."

In the early afternoon, when he finished paying off his crew, he hurried to the private office where he had been told his wife was waiting.

His eyes were for her first, though the temptation was great to have more than a hurried glimpse of the child in the chair beside her. He held her off from him after the long embrace, and looked into her face long and steadily, drinking in every feature of it and wondering that he could mark no changes of time. A warm man, his wife thought him, though had the opinion of his officers been asked it would have been: a harsh man and a bitter one.

"Wull, Annie, how is ut wi' ye?" he queried, and drew her to him again.

And again he held her away from him, this wife of ten years and of whom he knew so little. She was almost a stranger--more a stranger than his Chinese steward, and certainly far more a stranger than his own officers whom he had seen every day, day and day, for eight hundred and fifty days. Married ten years, and in that time he had been with her nine weeks--scarcely a honeymoon. Each time home had

been a getting acquainted again with her. It was the fate of the men who went out to the salt-ploughing. Little they knew of their wives and less of their children. There was his chief engineer--old, near-sighted MacPherson--who told the story of returning home to be locked out of his house by his four-year kiddie that never had laid eyes on him before.

"An' thus 'ull be the loddie," the skipper said, reaching out a hesitant hand to the child's cheek.

But the boy drew away from him, sheltering against the mother's side.

"Och!" she cried, "and he doesna know his own father."

"Nor I hum. Heaven knows I could no a-picked hum out of a crowd, though he'll be havin' your nose I'm thunkun'."

"An' your own eyes, Donald. Look ut them. He's your own father, laddie. Kiss hum like the little mon ye are."

But the child drew closer to her, his expression of fear and distrust growing stronger, and when the father attempted to take him in his arms he threatened to cry.

The skipper straightened up, and to conceal the pang at his heart

he drew out his watch and looked at it.

"Ut's time to go, Annie," he said. "Thot train 'ull be startun'."

He was silent on the train at first, divided between watching the wife with the child going to sleep in her arms and looking out of the window at the tilled fields and green unforested hills vague and indistinct in the driving drizzle that had set in. They had the compartment to themselves. When the boy slept she laid him out on the seat and wrapped him warmly. And when the health of relatives and friends had been inquired after, and the gossip of Island McGill narrated, along with the weather and the price of land and crops, there was little left to talk about save themselves, and Captain MacElrath took up the tale brought home for the good wife from all his world's-end wandering. But it was not a tale of marvels he told, nor of beautiful flower-lands nor mysterious Eastern cities.

"What like is Java?" she asked once.

"Full o' fever. Half the crew down wuth ut an' luttle work. Ut was quinine an' quinine the whole blessed time. Each marnun' 'twas quinine an' gin for all hands on an empty stomach. An' they who was no sick made ut out to be hovun' ut bad uz the rest."

Another time she asked about Newcastle.

"Coals an' coal-dust--thot's all. No a nice suttu. I lost two Chinks there, stokers the both of them. An' the owners paid a fine tull the Government of a hundred pounds each for them. 'We regret tull note,' they wrut me--I got the letter tull Oregon--'We regret tull note the loss o' two Chinese members o' yer crew ot Newcastle, an' we recommend greater carefulness un the future.' Greater carefulness! And I could no a-been more careful. The Chinks hod forty-five pounds each comun' tull them in wages, an' I was no a-thunkun' they 'ud run.

"But thot's their way--'we regret tull note,' 'we beg tull advise,' 'we recommend,' 'we canna understand'--an' the like o' thot. Domned cargo tank! An' they would thunk I could drive her like a Lucania, an' wi'out burnun' coals. There was thot propeller. I was after them a guid while for ut. The old one was iron, thuck on the edges, an' we couldna make our speed. An' the new one was bronze--nine hundred pounds ut cost, an' then wantun' their returns out o' ut, an' me wuth a bod passage an' lossin' time every day. 'We regret tull note your long passage from Voloparaiso tull Sydney wuth an average daily run o' only one hundred an' suxty-seven. We hod expected better results wuth the new propeller. You should a-made an average daily run o' two hundred and suxteen.'

"An' me on a wunter passage, blowin' a luv'in' gale half the time, wuth hurricane force in atweenwhiles, an' hove to sux days, wuth



engines stopped an' bunker coal runnun' short, an' me wuth a mate thot stupid he could no pass a shup's light ot night wi'out callun' me tull the brudge. I wrut an' told 'em so. An' then: 'Our nautical adviser suggests you kept too far south,' an' 'We are lookun' for better results from thot propeller.' Nautical adviser!--shore pilot! Ut was the regular latitude for a wunter passage from Voloparaiso tull Sydney.

"An' when I come un tull Auckland short o' coal, after lettun' her druft sux days wuth the fires out tull save the coal, an' wuth only twenty tons in my bunkers, I was thunkun' o' the lossin' o' time an' the expense, an' tull save the owners I took her un an' out wi'out pilotage. Pilotage was no compulsory. An' un Yokohama, who should I meet but Captun Robinson o' the Dyapsic. We got a-talkun' about ports an' places down Australia-way, an' first thing he says: 'Speakun' o' Auckland--of course, Captun, you was never un Auckland?' 'Yus,' I says, 'I was un there very recent.' 'Oh, ho,' he says, very angry-like, 'so you was the smart Aleck thot fetched me thot letter from the owners: "We note item of fufteen pounds for pilotage ot Auckland. A shup o' ours was un tull Auckland recently an' uncurrred no such charge. We beg tull advise you thot we conseeder thus pilotage an onnecessary expense which should no be uncurrred un the future.'" "

"But dud they say a word tull me for the fufteen pounds I saved tull them? No a word. They send a letter tull Captun Robinson for

no savun' them the fufteen pounds, an' tull me: 'We note item of two guineas doctor's fee at Auckland for crew. Please explain thus onusual expunditure.' Ut was two o' the Chinks. I was thunkun' they hod beri-beri, an' thot was the why o' sendun' for the doctor. I buried the two of them ot sea not a week after. But ut was: 'Please explain thus onusual expunditure,' an' tull Captun Robinson, 'We beg tull advise you that we conseeder thus pilotage an onnecessary expense.'

"Dudna I cable them from Newcastle, tellun' them the old tank was thot foul she needed dry-dock? Seven months out o' drydock, an' the West Coast the quickest place for foulun' un the world. But freights was up, an' they hod a charter o' coals for Portland. The Arrata, one o' the Woor Line, left port the same day uz us, bound for Portland, an' the old Tryapsic makun' sux knots, seven ot the best. An' ut was ot Comox, takun' un bunker coal, I got the letter from the owners. The boss humself hod signed ut, an' ot the bottom he wrut un hus own bond: 'The Arrata beat you by four an' a half days. Am dusappointed.' Dusappointed! When I had cabled them from Newcastle. When she drydocked ot Portland, there was whuskers on her a foot long, barnacles the size o' me fust, oysters like young sauce plates. Ut took them two days afterward tull clean the dock o' shells an' muck.

"An' there was the motter o' them fire-bars ot Newcastle. The firm ashore made them heavier than the engineer's speecifications, an'

then forgot tull charge for the dufference. Ot the last moment, wuth me ashore gettun' me clearance, they come wuth the bill: 'Tull error on fire-bars, sux pounds.' They'd been tull the shup an' MacPherson hod O.K.'d ut. I said ut was strange an' would no pay. 'Then you are dootun' the chief engineer,' says they. 'I'm no dootun',' says I, 'but I canna see my way tull sign. Come wuth me tull the shup. The launch wull cost ye naught an' ut 'ull brung ye back. An' we wull see what MacPherson says.'

"But they would no come. Ot Portland I got the bill un a letter. I took no notice. Ot Hong-Kong I got a letter from the owners. The bill hod been sent tull them. I wrut them from Java explainun'. At Marseilles the owners wrut me: 'Tull extra work un engine-room, sux pounds. The engineer has O.K.'d ut, an' you have no O.K.'d ut. Are you dootun' the engineer's honesty?' I wrut an' told them I was no dootun' his honesty; thot the bill was for extra weight o' fire-bars; an' thot ut was O.K. Dud they pay ut? They no dud. They must unvestigate. An' some clerk un the office took sick, an' the bill was lost. An' there was more letters. I got letters from the owners an' the firm--'Tull error on fire-bars, sux pounds'--ot Baltimore, ot Delagoa Bay, ot Moji, ot Rangoon, ot Rio, an' ot Montevuddio. Ut uz no settled yut. I tell ye, Annie, the owners are hard tull please."

He communed with himself for a moment, and then muttered indignantly: "Tull error on fire-bars, sux pounds."

"Hov ye heard of Jamie?" his wife asked in the pause.

Captain MacElrath shook his head.

"He was washed off the poop wuth three seamen."

"Whereabouts?"

"Off the Horn. 'Twas on the Thornsby."

"They would be runnun' homeward bound?"

"Aye," she nodded. "We only got the word three days gone. His wife is greetin' like tull die."

"A good lod, Jamie," he commented, "but a stiff one ot carryun' on. I mind me when we was mates together un the Abion. An' so Jamie's gone."

Again a pause fell, to be broken by the wife.

"An' ye will no a-heard o' the Bankshire? MacDougall lost her in Magellan Straits. 'Twas only yesterday ut was in the paper."

"A cruel place, them Magellan Straits," he said. "Dudna thot

domned mate-fellow nigh putt me ashore twice on the one passage through? He was a eediot, a lunatuc. I wouldna have hum on the brudge a munut. Comun' tull Narrow Reach, thuck weather, wuth snow squalls, me un the chart-room, dudna I guv hum the changed course? 'South-east-by-east,' I told hum. 'South-east-by-east, sir,' says he. Fufteen munuts after I comes on tull the brudge. 'Funny,' says thot mate-fellow, 'I'm no rememberun' ony islands un the mouth o' Narrow Reach. I took one look ot the islands an' yells, 'Putt your wheel hard a-starboard,' tull the mon ot the wheel. An' ye should a-seen the old Tryapsic turnun' the sharpest circle she ever turned. I waited for the snow tull clear, an' there was Narrow Reach, nice uz ye please, tull the east'ard an' the islands un the mouth o' False Bay tull the south'ard. 'What course was ye steerun'?' I says tull the mon ot the wheel. 'South-by-east, sir,' says he. I looked tull the mate-fellow. What could I say? I was thot wroth I could a-kult hum. Four points dufference. Five munuts more an' the old Tryapsic would a-been funushed.

"An' was ut no the same when we cleared the Straits tull the east'ard? Four hours would a-seen us guid an' clear. I was forty hours then on the brudge. I guv the mate his course, an' the bearun' o' the Askthar Light astern. 'Don't let her bear more tull the north'ard than west-by-north,' I said tull hum, 'an' ye wull be all right.' An' I went below an' turned un. But I couldna sleep for worryun'. After forty hours on the brudge, what was four hours more? I thought. An' for them four hours wull ye be lettun' the

mate loss her on ye? 'No,' I says to myself. An' wuth thot I got up, hod a wash an' a cup o' coffee, an' went tull the brudge. I took one look ot the bearun' o' Askthar Light. 'Twas nor'west-by-west, and the old Tryapsic down on the shoals. He was a eediot, thot mate-fellow. Ye could look overside an' see the duscoloration of the watter. 'Twas a close call for the old Tryapsic I'm tellun' ye. Twice un thirty hours he'd a-hod her ashore uf ut hod no been for me."

Captain MacElrath fell to gazing at the sleeping child with mild wonder in his small blue eyes, and his wife sought to divert him from his woes.

"Ye remember Jummy MacCaul?" she asked. "Ye went tull school wuth hus two boys. Old Jummy MacCaul thot hoz the farm beyond Doctor Haythorn's place."

"Oh, aye, an' what o' hum? Uz he dead?"

"No, but he was after askun' your father, when he sailed last time for Voloparaiso, uf ye'd been there afore. An' when your father says no, then Jummy says, 'An' how wull he be knowun a' tull find hus way?' An' with thot your father says: 'Verry sumple ut uz, Jummy. Supposun' you was goin' tull the mainland tull a mon who luvud un Belfast. Belfast uz a bug sutty, Jummy, an' how would ye be findun' your way?' 'By way o' me tongue,' says Jummy; 'I'd be

askun' the folk I met.' 'I told ye ut was sumple,' says your father. 'Ut's the very same way my Donald finds the road tull Voloparaiso. He asks every shup he meets upon the sea tull ot last he meets wuth a shup thot's been tull Voloparaiso, an' the captun o' thot shup tells hum the way.' An' Jummy scratches hus head an' says he understands an' thot ut's a very sumple motter after all."

The skipper chuckled at the joke, and his tired blue eyes were merry for the moment.

"He was a thun chap, thot mate-fellow, oz thun oz you an' me putt together," he remarked after a time, a slight twinkle in his eye of appreciation of the bull. But the twinkle quickly disappeared and the blue eyes took on a bleak and wintry look. "What dud he do ot Voloparaiso but land sux hundred fathom o' chain cable an' take never a receipt from the lighter-mon. I was gettun' my clearance ot the time. When we got tull sea, I found he hod no receipt for the cable.

"An' ye no took a receipt for ut?' says I.

"No,' says he. 'Wasna ut goin' direct tull the agents?'

"How long ha' ye been goin' tull sea,' says I, 'not tull be knowin' the mate's duty uz tull deluver no cargo wuthout receipt for same? An' on the West Coast ot thot. What's tull stop the

lighter-mon from stealun' a few lengths o' ut?'

"An' ut come out uz I said. Sux hundred hundred went over the side, but four hundred an' ninety-five was all the agents received. The lighter-mon swore ut was all he received from the mate--four hundred an' ninety-five fathom. I got a letter from the owners ot Portland. They no blamed the mate for ut, but me, an' me ashore ot the time on shup's buzz'nness. I could no be in the two places ot the one time. An' the letters from the owners an' the agents uz still comun' tull me.

"Thot mate-fellow was no a proper sailor, an' no a mon tull work for owners. Dudna he want tull break me wuth the Board of Trade for bein' below my marks? He said as much tull the bos'n. An' he told me tull my face homeward bound thot I'd been half an inch under my marks. 'Twas at Portland, loadun' cargo un fresh watter an' goin' tull Comox tull load bunker coal un salt watter. I tell ye, Annie, ut takes close fuggerin', an' I WAS half an inch under the load-line when the bunker coal was un. But I'm no tellun' any other body but you. An' thot mate-fellow untendun' tull report me tull the Board o' Trade, only for thot he saw fut tull be sliced un two pieces on the steam-pipe cover.

"He was a fool. After loadun' ot Portland I hod tull take on suxty tons o' coal tull last me tull Comox. The charges for lighterun' was heavy, an' no room ot the coal dock. A French barque was lyin'



alongside the dock an' I spoke tull the captun, askun' hum what he would charge when work for the day was done, tull haul clear for a couple o' hours an' let me un. 'Twenty dollars,' said he. Ut was savun' money on lighters tull the owner, an' I gave ut tull hum. An' thot night, after dark, I hauled un an' took on the coal. Then I started tull go out un the stream an' drop anchor--under me own steam, of course.

"We hod tull go out stern first, an' somethun' went wrong wuth the reversun' gear. Old MacPherson said he could work ut by hond, but very slow ot thot. An' I said 'All right.' We started. The pilot was on board. The tide was ebbun' stuffly, an' right abreast an' a but below was a shup lyin' wuth a lighter on each side. I saw the shup's ridun' lights, but never a light on the lighters. Ut was close quarters to shuft a bug vessel onder steam, wuth MacPherson workun' the reversun' gear by hond. We hod to come close down upon the shup afore I could go ahead an' clear o' the shups on the dock-ends. An' we struck the lighter stern-on, just uz I rung tull MacPherson half ahead.

"'What was thot?' says the pilot, when we struck the lighter.

"'I dunna know,' says I, 'an' I'm wonderun'.'

"The pilot was no keen, ye see, tull hus job. I went on tull a guid place an' dropped anchor, an' ut would all a-been well but for

thot domned eediot mate.

"We smashed thot lighter,' says he, comun' up the lodder tull the brudge--an' the pilot stondun' there wuth his ears cocked tull hear.

"What lighter?' says I.

"Thot lighter alongside the shup,' says the mate.

"I dudna see no lighter,' says I, and wuth thot I steps on hus fut guid an' hard.

"After the pilot was gone I says tull the mate: 'Uf you dunna know onythun', old mon, for Heaven's sake keep your mouth shut.'

"But ye dud smash thot lighter, dudn't ye?' says he.

"Uf we dud,' says I, 'ut's no your buzz'ness tull be tellun' the pilot--though, mind ye, I'm no admuttun' there was ony lighter.'

"An' next marnun', just uz I'm after dressun', the steward says, 'A mon tull see ye, sir.' 'Fetch hum un,' says I. An' un he come. 'Sut down,' says I. An' he sot down.

"He was the owner of the lighter, an' when he hod told hus story, I

says, 'I dudna see ony lighter.'

"'What, mon?' says he. 'No see a two-hundred-ton lighter, bug oz a house, alongside thot shup?'

"'I was goin' by the shup's lights,' says I, 'an' I dudna touch the shup, thot I know.'

"'But ye dud touch the lighter,' says he. 'Ye smashed her. There's a thousand dollars' damage done, an' I'll see ye pay for ut.'

'Look here, muster,' says I, 'when I'm shuftun' a shup ot night I follow the law, an' the law dustunctly says I must regulate me actions by the lights o' the shuppun'. Your lighter never hod no ridun' light, nor dud I look for ony lighter wuthout lights tull show ut.'

"'The mate says--' he begins.

"'Domn the mate,' says I. 'Dud your lighter hov a ridun' light?'

"'No, ut dud not,' says he, 'but ut was a clear night wuth the moon a-showun!.'

"'Ye seem tull know your buzz'ness,' says I. 'But let me tell ye

thot I know my buzz'ness uz well, an' thot I'm no a-lookun' for lighters wuthout lights. Uf ye thunk ye hov a case, go ahead. The steward will show ye out. Guid day.'

"An' thot was the end o' ut. But ut wull show ye what a pair fellow thot mate was. I call ut a blessun' for all masters thot he was sliced un two on thot steam-pipe cover. He had a pull un the office an' thot was the why he was kept on."

"The Wekley farm wull soon be for sale, so the agents be tellun' me," his wife remarked, slyly watching what effect her announcement would have upon him.

His eyes flashed eagerly on the instant, and he straightened up as might a man about to engage in some agreeable task. It was the farm of his vision, adjoining his father's, and her own people farmed not a mile away.

"We wull be buyun' ut," he said, "though we wull be no tellun' a soul of ut ontul ut's bought an' the money paid down. I've savun' consuderable these days, though pickun's uz no what they used to be, an' we hov a tidy nest-egg laid by. I wull see the father an' hove the money ready tull hus hond, so uf I'm ot sea he can buy whenever the land offers."

He rubbed the frosted moisture from the inside of the window and

peered out at the pouring rain, through which he could discern nothing.

"When I was a young men I used tull be afeard thot the owners would guv me the sack. Stull afeard I am of the sack. But once thot farm is mine I wull no be afeard ony longer. Ut's a puir job thus sea-farmun'. Me managin' un all seas an' weather an' perils o' the deep a shup worth fufty thousand pounds, wuth cargoes ot times worth fufty thousand more--a hundred thousand pounds, half a million dollars uz the Yankees say, an' me wuth all the responsibility gettun' a screw o' twenty pounds a month. What mon ashore, managin' a buz'ness worth a hundred thousand pounds wull be gettun' uz small a screw uz twenty pounds? An' wuth such masters uz a captun serves--the owners, the underwriters, an' the Board o' Trade, all pullun' an wantun' dufferent thungs--the owners wantun' quick passages an' domn the rusk, the underwriters wantun' safe passages an' domn the delay, an' the Board o' Trade wantun' cautious passages an' caution always meanun' delay. Three dufferent masters, an' all three able an' wullun' to break ye uf ye don't serve their dufferent wushes."

He felt the train slackening speed, and peered again through the misty window. He stood up, buttoned his overcoat, turned up the collar, and awkwardly gathered the child, still asleep, in his arms.

"I wull see the father," he said, "an' hov the money ready tull hus hond so uf I'm ot sea when the land offers he wull no muss the chance tull buy. An' then the owners can guv me the sack uz soon uz they like. Ut will be all night un, an' I wull be wuth you, Annie, an' the sea can go tull hell."

Happiness was in both their faces at the prospect, and for a moment both saw the same vision of peace. Annie leaned toward him, and as the train stopped they kissed each other across the sleeping child.