

#### IV. HOW HE DISPOSED OF HIS FOWLING-PIECE

Next day I went alone to the shipping office to sign the articles, and there I met a great crowd of sailors, who as soon as they found what I was after, began to tip the wink all round, and I overheard a fellow in a great flapping sou'wester cap say to another old tar in a shaggy monkey-jacket, "Twig his coat, d'ye see the buttons, that chap ain't going to sea in a merchantman, he's going to shoot whales. I say, maty--look here--how d'ye sell them big buttons by the pound?"

"Give us one for a saucer, will ye?" said another.

"Let the youngster alone," said a third. "Come here, my little boy, has your ma put up some sweetmeats for ye to take to sea?"

They are all witty dogs, thought I to myself, trying to make the best of the matter, for I saw it would not do to resent what they said; they can't mean any harm, though they are certainly very impudent; so I tried to laugh off their banter, but as soon as ever I could, I put down my name and beat a retreat.

On the morrow, the ship was advertised to sail. So the rest of that day I spent in preparations. After in vain trying to sell my fowling-piece for a fair price to chance customers, I was walking up Chatham-street with it, when a curly-headed little man with a dark oily face, and a

hooked nose, like the pictures of Judas Iscariot, called to me from a strange-looking shop, with three gilded balk hanging over it.

With a peculiar accent, as if he had been over-eating himself with Indian-pudding or some other plushy compound, this curly-headed little man very civilly invited me into his shop; and making a polite bow, and bidding me many unnecessary good mornings, and remarking upon the fine weather, begged t me to let him look at my fowling-piece. I handed it to him in an instant, glad of the chance of disposing of it, and told him that was just what I wanted.

"Ah!" said he, with his Indian-pudding accent again, which I will not try to mimic, and abating his look of eagerness, "I thought it was a better article, it's very old."

"Not," said I, starting in surprise, "it's not been used more than three times; what will you give for it?"

"We don't buy any thing here," said he, suddenly looking very indifferent, "this is a place where people pawn things." Pawn being a word I had never heard before, I asked him what it meant; when he replied, that when people wanted any money, they came to him with their fowling-pieces, and got one third its value, and then left the fowling-piece there, until they were able to pay back the money.

What a benevolent little old man, this must be, thought I, and how very

obliging.

"And pray," said I, "how much will you let me have for my gun, by way of a pawn?"

"Well, I suppose it's worth six dollars, and seeing you're a boy, I'll let you have three dollars upon it"

"No," exclaimed I, seizing the fowling-piece, "it's worth five times that, I'll go somewhere else."

"Good morning, then," said he, "I hope you'll do better," and he bowed me out as if he expected to see me again pretty soon.

I had not gone very far when I came across three more balls hanging over a shop. In I went, and saw a long counter, with a sort of picket-fence, running all along from end to end, and three little holes, with three little old men standing inside of them, like prisoners looking out of a jail. Back of the counter were all sorts of things, piled up and labeled. Hats, and caps, and coats, and guns, and swords, and canes, and chests, and planes, and books, and writing-desks, and every thing else. And in a glass case were lots of watches, and seals, chains, and rings, and breastpins, and all kinds of trinkets. At one of the little holes, earnestly talking with one of the hook-nosed men, was a thin woman in a faded silk gown and shawl, holding a pale little girl by the hand. As I drew near, she spoke lower in a whisper; and the man shook his head, and

looked cross and rude; and then some more words were exchanged over a miniature, and some money was passed through the hole, and the woman and child shrank out of the door.

I won't sell my gun to that man, thought I; and I passed on to the next hole; and while waiting there to be served, an elderly man in a high-waisted surtout, thrust a silver snuff-box through; and a young man in a calico shirt and a shiny coat with a velvet collar presented a silver watch; and a sheepish boy in a cloak took out a frying-pan; and another little boy had a Bible; and all these things were thrust through to the hook-nosed man, who seemed ready to hook any thing that came along; so I had no doubt he would gladly hook my gun, for the long picketed counter seemed like a great seine, that caught every variety of fish.

At last I saw a chance, and crowded in for the hole; and in order to be beforehand with a big man who just then came in, I pushed my gun violently through the hole; upon which the hook-nosed man cried out, thinking I was going to shoot him. But at last he took the gun, turned it end for end, clicked the trigger three times, and then said, "one dollar."

"What about one dollar?" said I.

"That's all I'll give," he replied.

"Well, what do you want?" and he turned to the next person. This was a young man in a seedy red cravat and a pimply face, that looked as if it was going to seed likewise, who, with a mysterious tapping of his vest-pocket and other hints, made a great show of having something confidential to communicate.

But the hook-nosed man spoke out very loud, and said, "None of that; take it out. Got a stolen watch? We don't deal in them things here."

Upon this the young man flushed all over, and looked round to see who had heard the pawnbroker; then he took something very small out of his pocket, and keeping it hidden under his palm, pushed it into the hole.

"Where did you get this ring?" said the pawnbroker.

"I want to pawn it," whispered the other, blushing all over again.

"What's your name?" said the pawnbroker, speaking very loud.

"How much will you give?" whispered the other in reply, leaning over, and looking as if he wanted to hush up the pawnbroker.

At last the sum was agreed upon, when the man behind the counter took a little ticket, and tying the ring to it began to write on the ticket; all at once he asked the young man where he lived, a question which embarrassed him very much; but at last he stammered out a certain number

in Broadway.

"That's the City Hotel: you don't live there," said the man, cruelly glancing at the shabby coat before him.

"Oh! well," stammered the other blushing scarlet, "I thought this was only a sort of form to go through; I don't like to tell where I do live, for I ain't in the habit of going to pawnbrokers."

"You stole that ring, you know you did," roared out the hook-nosed man, incensed at this slur upon his calling, and now seemingly bent on damaging the young man's character for life. "I'm a good mind to call a constable; we don't take stolen goods here, I tell you."

All eyes were now fixed suspiciously upon this martyred young man; who looked ready to drop into the earth; and a poor woman in a night-cap, with some baby-clothes in her hand, looked fearfully at the pawnbroker, as if dreading to encounter such a terrible pattern of integrity. At last the young man sunk off with his money, and looking out of the window, I saw him go round the corner so sharply that he knocked his elbow against the wall.

I waited a little longer, and saw several more served; and having remarked that the hook-nosed men invariably fixed their own price upon every thing, and if that was refused told the person to be off with himself; I concluded that it would be of no use to try and get more from

them than they had offered; especially when I saw that they had a great many fowling-pieces hanging up, and did not have particular occasion for mine; and more than that, they must be very well off and rich, to treat people so cavalierly.

My best plan then seemed to be to go right back to the curly-headed pawnbroker, and take up with my first offer. But when I went back, the curly-headed man was very busy about something else, and kept me waiting a long time; at last I got a chance and told him I would take the three dollars he had offered.

"Ought to have taken it when you could get it," he replied. "I won't give but two dollars and a half for it now."

In vain I expostulated; he was not to be moved, so I pocketed the money and departed.