

CHAPTER X. IN WHICH THE CREW VANISH.

At the door of the exchange I found myself along-side of the short, middle-aged gentleman who had made an appearance, so vigorous and so brief, in the great battle.

"Congratulate you, Mr. Dodd," he said. "You and your friend stuck to your guns nobly."

"No thanks to you, sir," I replied, "running us up a thousand at a time, and tempting all the speculators in San Francisco to come and have a try."

"O, that was temporary insanity," said he; "and I thank the higher powers I am still a free man. Walking this way, Mr. Dodd? I'll walk along with you. It's pleasant for an old foggy like myself to see the young bloods in the ring; I've done some pretty wild gambles in my time in this very city, when it was a smaller place and I was a younger man. Yes, I know you, Mr. Dodd. By sight, I may say I know you extremely well, you and your followers, the fellows in the kilts, eh? Pardon me. But I have the misfortune to own a little box on the Saucelito shore. I'll be glad to see you there any Sunday--without the fellows in kilts, you know; and I can give you a bottle of wine, and show you the best collection of Arctic voyages in the States. Morgan is my name--Judge Morgan--a Welshman and a forty-niner."

"O, if you're a pioneer," cried I, "come to me and I'll provide you with an axe."

"You'll want your axes for yourself, I fancy," he returned, with one of his quick looks. "Unless you have private knowledge, there will be a good deal of rather violent wrecking to do before you find that--opium, do you call it?"

"Well, it's either opium, or we are stark, staring mad," I replied. "But I assure you we have no private information. We went in (as I suppose you did yourself) on observation."

"An observer, sir?" inquired the judge.

"I may say it is my trade--or, rather, was," said I.

"Well now, and what did you think of Bellairs?" he asked.

"Very little indeed," said I.

"I may tell you," continued the judge, "that to me, the employment of a fellow like that appears inexplicable. I knew him; he knows me, too; he has often heard from me in court; and I assure you the man is utterly blown upon; it is not safe to trust him with a dollar; and here we find him dealing up to fifty thousand. I can't think who can have so trusted

him, but I am very sure it was a stranger in San Francisco."

"Some one for the owners, I suppose," said I.

"Surely not!" exclaimed the judge. "Owners in London can have nothing to say to opium smuggled between Hong Kong and San Francisco. I should rather fancy they would be the last to hear of it--until the ship was seized. No; I was thinking of the captain. But where would he get the money? above all, after having laid out so much to buy the stuff in China? Unless, indeed, he were acting for some one in 'Frisco; and in that case--here we go round again in the vicious circle--Bellairs would not have been employed."

"I think I can assure you it was not the captain," said I; "for he and Bellairs are not acquainted."

"Wasn't that the captain with the red face and coloured handkerchief? He seemed to me to follow Bellairs's game with the most thrilling interest," objected Mr. Morgan.

"Perfectly true," said I; "Trent is deeply interested; he very likely knew Bellairs, and he certainly knew what he was there for; but I can put my hand in the fire that Bellairs didn't know Trent."

"Another singularity," observed the judge. "Well, we have had a capital forenoon. But you take an old lawyer's advice, and get to Midway Island

as fast as you can. There's a pot of money on the table, and Bellairs and Co. are not the men to stick at trifles."

With this parting counsel Judge Morgan shook hands and made off along Montgomery Street, while I entered the Occidental Hotel, on the steps of which we had finished our conversation. I was well known to the clerks, and as soon as it was understood that I was there to wait for Pinkerton and lunch, I was invited to a seat inside the counter. Here, then, in a retired corner, I was beginning to come a little to myself after these so violent experiences, when who should come hurrying in, and (after a moment with a clerk) fly to one of the telephone boxes but Mr. Henry D. Bellairs in person? Call it what you will, but the impulse was irresistible, and I rose and took a place immediately at the man's back. It may be some excuse that I had often practised this very innocent form of eavesdropping upon strangers, and for fun. Indeed, I scarce know anything that gives a lower view of man's intelligence than to overhear (as you thus do) one side of a communication.

"Central," said the attorney, "2241 and 584 B" (or some such numbers)--"Who's that?--All right--Mr. Bellairs--Occidental; the wires are fouled in the other place--Yes, about three minutes--Yes--Yes--Your figure, I am sorry to say--No--I had no authority--Neither more nor less--I have every reason to suppose so--O, Pinkerton, Montana Block--Yes--Yes--Very good, sir--As you will, sir--Disconnect 584 B."

Bellairs turned to leave; at sight of me behind him, up flew his hands,

and he winced and cringed, as though in fear of bodily attack. "O, it's you!" he cried; and then, somewhat recovered, "Mr. Pinkerton's partner, I believe? I am pleased to see you, sir--to congratulate you on your late success." And with that he was gone, obsequiously bowing as he passed.

And now a madcap humour came upon me. It was plain Bellairs had been communicating with his principal; I knew the number, if not the name; should I ring up at once, it was more than likely he would return in person to the telephone; why should not I dash (vocally) into the presence of this mysterious person, and have some fun for my money. I pressed the bell.

"Central," said I, "connect again 2241 and 584 B."

A phantom central repeated the numbers; there was a pause, and then "Two two four one," came in a tiny voice into my ear--a voice with the English sing-song--the voice plainly of a gentleman. "Is that you again, Mr. Bellairs?" it trilled. "I tell you it's no use. Is that you, Mr. Bellairs? Who is that?"

"I only want to put a single question," said I, civilly. "Why do you want to buy the Flying Scud?"

No answer came. The telephone vibrated and hummed in miniature with all the numerous talk of a great city; but the voice of 2241 was silent.

Once and twice I put my question; but the tiny, sing-song English voice, I heard no more. The man, then, had fled? fled from an impertinent question? It scarce seemed natural to me; unless on the principle that the wicked fleeth when no man pursueth. I took the telephone list and turned the number up: "2241, Mrs. Keane, res. 942 Mission Street." And that, short of driving to the house and renewing my impertinence in person, was all that I could do.

Yet, as I resumed my seat in the corner of the office, I was conscious of a new element of the uncertain, the underhand, perhaps even the dangerous, in our adventure; and there was now a new picture in my mental gallery, to hang beside that of the wreck under its canopy of sea-birds and of Captain Trent mopping his red brow--the picture of a man with a telephone dice-box to his ear, and at the small voice of a single question, struck suddenly as white as ashes.

From these considerations I was awakened by the striking of the clock. An hour and nearly twenty minutes had elapsed since Pinkerton departed for the money: he was twenty minutes behind time; and to me who knew so well his gluttonous despatch of business and had so frequently admired his iron punctuality, the fact spoke volumes. The twenty minutes slowly stretched into an hour; the hour had nearly extended to a second; and I still sat in my corner of the office, or paced the marble pavement of the hall, a prey to the most wretched anxiety and penitence. The hour for lunch was nearly over before I remembered that I had not eaten. Heaven knows I had no appetite; but there might still be much to do--it

was needful I should keep myself in proper trim, if it were only to digest the now too probable bad news; and leaving word at the office for Pinkerton, I sat down to table and called for soup, oysters, and a pint of champagne.

I was not long set, before my friend returned. He looked pale and rather old, refused to hear of food, and called for tea.

"I suppose all's up?" said I, with an incredible sinking.

"No," he replied; "I've pulled it through, Loudon; just pulled it through. I couldn't have raised another cent in all 'Frisco. People don't like it; Longhurst even went back on me; said he wasn't a three-card-monte man."

"Well, what's the odds?" said I. "That's all we wanted, isn't it?"

"Loudon, I tell you I've had to pay blood for that money," cried my friend, with almost savage energy and gloom. "It's all on ninety days, too; I couldn't get another day--not another day. If we go ahead with this affair, Loudon, you'll have to go yourself and make the fur fly. I'll stay of course--I've got to stay and face the trouble in this city; though, I tell you, I just long to go. I would show these fat brutes of sailors what work was; I would be all through that wreck and out at the other end, before they had boosted themselves upon the deck! But you'll do your level best, Loudon; I depend on you for that. You must be all

fire and grit and dash from the word 'go.' That schooner and the boodle on board of her are bound to be here before three months, or it's B. U. S. T.--bust."

"I'll swear I'll do my best, Jim; I'll work double tides," said I. "It is my fault that you are in this thing, and I'll get you out again or kill myself. But what is that you say? 'If we go ahead?' Have we any choice, then?"

"I'm coming to that," said Jim. "It isn't that I doubt the investment. Don't blame yourself for that; you showed a fine, sound business instinct: I always knew it was in you, but then it ripped right out. I guess that little beast of an attorney knew what he was doing; and he wanted nothing better than to go beyond. No, there's profit in the deal; it's not that; it's these ninety-day bills, and the strain I've given the credit, for I've been up and down, borrowing, and begging and bribing to borrow. I don't believe there's another man but me in 'Frisco," he cried, with a sudden fervor of self admiration, "who could have raised that last ten thousand!--Then there's another thing. I had hoped you might have peddled that opium through the islands, which is safer and more profitable. But with this three-month limit, you must make tracks for Honolulu straight, and communicate by steamer. I'll try to put up something for you there; I'll have a man spoken to who's posted on that line of biz. Keep a bright lookout for him as soon's you make the islands; for it's on the cards he might pick you up at sea in a whaleboat or a steam-launch, and bring the dollars right on board."

It shows how much I had suffered morally during my sojourn in San Francisco, that even now when our fortunes trembled in the balance, I should have consented to become a smuggler and (of all things) a smuggler of opium. Yet I did, and that in silence; without a protest, not without a twinge.

"And suppose," said I, "suppose the opium is so securely hidden that I can't get hands on it?"

"Then you will stay there till that brig is kindling-wood, and stay and split that kindling-wood with your penknife," cried Pinkerton. "The stuff is there; we know that; and it must be found. But all this is only the one string to our bow--though I tell you I've gone into it head-first, as if it was our bottom dollar. Why, the first thing I did before I'd raised a cent, and with this other notion in my head already--the first thing I did was to secure the schooner. The Nora Creina, she is, sixty-four tons, quite big enough for our purpose since the rice is spoiled, and the fastest thing of her tonnage out of San Francisco. For a bonus of two hundred, and a monthly charter of three, I have her for my own time; wages and provisions, say four hundred more: a drop in the bucket. They began firing the cargo out of her (she was part loaded) near two hours ago; and about the same time John Smith got the order for the stores. That's what I call business."

"No doubt of that," said I. "But the other notion?"

"Well, here it is," said Jim. "You agree with me that Bellairs was ready to go higher?"

I saw where he was coming. "Yes--and why shouldn't he?" said I. "Is that the line?"

"That's the line, Loudon Dodd," assented Jim. "If Bellairs and his principal have any desire to go me better, I'm their man."

A sudden thought, a sudden fear, shot into my mind. What if I had been right? What if my childish pleasantry had frightened the principal away, and thus destroyed our chance? Shame closed my mouth; I began instinctively a long course of reticence; and it was without a word of my meeting with Bellairs, or my discovery of the address in Mission Street, that I continued the discussion.

"Doubtless fifty thousand was originally mentioned as a round sum," said I, "or at least, so Bellairs supposed. But at the same time it may be an outside sum; and to cover the expenses we have already incurred for the money and the schooner--I am far from blaming you; I see how needful it was to be ready for either event--but to cover them we shall want a rather large advance."

"Bellairs will go to sixty thousand; it's my belief, if he were properly

handled, he would take the hundred," replied Pinkerton. "Look back on the way the sale ran at the end."

"That is my own impression as regards Bellairs," I admitted. "The point I am trying to make is that Bellairs himself may be mistaken; that what he supposed to be a round sum was really an outside figure."

"Well, Loudon, if that is so," said Jim, with extraordinary gravity of face and voice, "if that is so, let him take the Flying Scud at fifty thousand, and joy go with her! I prefer the loss."

"Is that so, Jim? Are we dipped as bad as that?" I cried.

"We've put our hand farther out than we can pull it in again, Loudon," he replied. "Why, man, that fifty thousand dollars, before we get clear again, will cost us nearer seventy. Yes, it figures up overhead to more than ten per cent a month; and I could do no better, and there isn't the man breathing could have done as well. It was a miracle, Loudon. I couldn't but admire myself. O, if we had just the four months! And you know, Loudon, it may still be done. With your energy and charm, if the worst comes to the worst, you can run that schooner as you ran one of your picnics; and we may have luck. And, O, man! if we do pull it through, what a dashing operation it will be! What an advertisement! what a thing to talk of, and remember all our lives! However," he broke off suddenly, "we must try the safe thing first. Here's for the shyster!"

There was another struggle in my mind, whether I should even now admit my knowledge of the Mission Street address. But I had let the favourable moment slip. I had now, which made it the more awkward, not merely the original discovery, but my late suppression to confess. I could not help reasoning, besides, that the more natural course was to approach the principal by the road of his agent's office; and there weighed upon my spirits a conviction that we were already too late, and that the man was gone two hours ago. Once more, then, I held my peace; and after an exchange of words at the telephone to assure ourselves he was at home, we set out for the attorney's office.

The endless streets of any American city pass, from one end to another, through strange degrees and vicissitudes of splendour and distress, running under the same name between monumental warehouses, the dens and taverns of thieves, and the sward and shrubbery of villas. In San Francisco, the sharp inequalities of the ground, and the sea bordering on so many sides, greatly exaggerate these contrasts. The street for which we were now bound took its rise among blowing sands, somewhere in view of the Lone Mountain Cemetery; ran for a term across that rather windy Olympus of Nob Hill, or perhaps just skirted its frontier; passed almost immediately after through a stage of little houses, rather impudently painted, and offering to the eye of the observer this diagnostic peculiarity, that the huge brass plates upon the small and highly coloured doors bore only the first names of ladies--Norah or Lily or Florence; traversed China Town, where it was doubtless undermined

with opium cellars, and its blocks pierced, after the similitude of rabbit-warrens, with a hundred doors and passages and galleries; enjoyed a glimpse of high publicity at the corner of Kearney; and proceeded, among dives and warehouses, towards the City Front and the region of the water-rats. In this last stage of its career, where it was both grimy and solitary, and alternately quiet and roaring to the wheels of drays, we found a certain house of some pretension to neatness, and furnished with a rustic outside stair. On the pillar of the stair a black plate bore in gilded lettering this device: "Harry D. Bellairs, Attorney-at-law. Consultations, 9 to 6." On ascending the stairs, a door was found to stand open on the balcony, with this further inscription, "Mr. Bellairs In."

"I wonder what we do next," said I.

"Guess we sail right in," returned Jim, and suited the action to the word.

The room in which we found ourselves was clean, but extremely bare. A rather old-fashioned secretaire stood by the wall, with a chair drawn to the desk; in one corner was a shelf with half-a-dozen law books; and I can remember literally not another stick of furniture. One inference imposed itself: Mr. Bellairs was in the habit of sitting down himself and suffering his clients to stand. At the far end, and veiled by a curtain of red baize, a second door communicated with the interior of the house. Hence, after some coughing and stamping, we elicited the

shyster, who came timorously forth, for all the world like a man in fear of bodily assault, and then, recognising his guests, suffered from what I can only call a nervous paroxysm of courtesy.

"Mr. Pinkerton and partner!" said he. "I will go and fetch you seats."

"Not the least," said Jim. "No time. Much rather stand. This is business, Mr. Bellairs. This morning, as you know, I bought the wreck, Flying Scud."

The lawyer nodded.

"And bought her," pursued my friend, "at a figure out of all proportion to the cargo and the circumstances, as they appeared?"

"And now you think better of it, and would like to be off with your bargain? I have been figuring upon this," returned the lawyer. "My client, I will not hide from you, was displeased with me for putting her so high. I think we were both too heated, Mr. Pinkerton: rivalry--the spirit of competition. But I will be quite frank--I know when I am dealing with gentlemen--and I am almost certain, if you leave the matter in my hands, my client would relieve you of the bargain, so as you would lose"--he consulted our faces with gimlet-eyed calculation--"nothing," he added shrilly.

And here Pinkerton amazed me.

"That's a little too thin," said he. "I have the wreck. I know there's boodle in her, and I mean to keep her. What I want is some points which may save me needless expense, and which I'm prepared to pay for, money down. The thing for you to consider is just this: am I to deal with you or direct with your principal? If you are prepared to give me the facts right off, why, name your figure. Only one thing!" added Jim, holding a finger up, "when I say 'money down,' I mean bills payable when the ship returns, and if the information proves reliable. I don't buy pigs in pokes."

I had seen the lawyer's face light up for a moment, and then, at the sound of Jim's proviso, miserably fade. "I guess you know more about this wreck than I do, Mr. Pinkerton," said he. "I only know that I was told to buy the thing, and tried, and couldn't."

"What I like about you, Mr. Bellairs, is that you waste no time," said Jim. "Now then, your client's name and address."

"On consideration," replied the lawyer, with indescribable furtivity, "I cannot see that I am entitled to communicate my client's name. I will sound him for you with pleasure, if you care to instruct me; but I cannot see that I can give you his address."

"Very well," said Jim, and put his hat on. "Rather a strong step, isn't it?" (Between every sentence was a clear pause.) "Not think better of

it? Well, come--call it a dollar?"

"Mr. Pinkerton, sir!" exclaimed the offended attorney; and, indeed, I myself was almost afraid that Jim had mistaken his man and gone too far.

"No present use for a dollar?" says Jim. "Well, look here, Mr. Bellairs: we're both busy men, and I'll go to my outside figure with you right away--"

"Stop this, Pinkerton," I broke in. "I know the address: 924 Mission Street."

I do not know whether Pinkerton or Bellairs was the more taken aback.

"Why in snakes didn't you say so, Loudon?" cried my friend.

"You didn't ask for it before," said I, colouring to my temples under his troubled eyes.

It was Bellairs who broke silence, kindly supplying me with all that I had yet to learn. "Since you know Mr. Dickson's address," said he, plainly burning to be rid of us, "I suppose I need detain you no longer."

I do not know how Pinkerton felt, but I had death in my soul as we came

down the outside stair, from the den of this blotched spider. My whole being was strung, waiting for Jim's first question, and prepared to blurt out, I believe, almost with tears, a full avowal. But my friend asked nothing.

"We must hack it," said he, tearing off in the direction of the nearest stand. "No time to be lost. You saw how I changed ground. No use in paying the shyster's commission."

Again I expected a reference to my suppression; again I was disappointed. It was plain Jim feared the subject, and I felt I almost hated him for that fear. At last, when we were already in the hack and driving towards Mission Street, I could bear my suspense no longer.

"You do not ask me about that address," said I.

"No," said he, quickly and timidly. "What was it? I would like to know."

The note of timidity offended me like a buffet; my temper rose as hot as mustard. "I must request you do not ask me," said I. "It is a matter I cannot explain."

The moment the foolish words were said, that moment I would have given worlds to recall them: how much more, when Pinkerton, patting my hand, replied: "All right, dear boy; not another word; that's all done. I'm convinced it's perfectly right." To return upon the subject was beyond

my courage; but I vowed inwardly that I should do my utmost in the future for this mad speculation, and that I would cut myself in pieces before Jim should lose one dollar.

We had no sooner arrived at the address than I had other things to think of.

"Mr. Dickson? He's gone," said the landlady.

Where had he gone?

"I'm sure I can't tell you," she answered. "He was quite a stranger to me."

"Did he express his baggage, ma'am?" asked Pinkerton.

"Hadn't any," was the reply. "He came last night and left again to-day with a satchel."

"When did he leave?" I inquired.

"It was about noon," replied the landlady. "Some one rang up the telephone, and asked for him; and I reckon he got some news, for he left right away, although his rooms were taken by the week. He seemed considerable put out: I reckon it was a death."

My heart sank; perhaps my idiotic jest had indeed driven him away; and again I asked myself, Why? and whirled for a moment in a vortex of untenable hypotheses.

"What was he like, ma'am?" Pinkerton was asking, when I returned to consciousness of my surroundings.

"A clean shaved man," said the woman, and could be led or driven into no more significant description.

"Pull up at the nearest drug-store," said Pinkerton to the driver; and when there, the telephone was put in operation, and the message sped to the Pacific Mail Steamship Company's office--this was in the days before Spreckels had arisen--"When does the next China steamer touch at Honolulu?"

"The City of Pekin; she cast off the dock to-day, at half-past one," came the reply.

"It's a clear case of bolt," said Jim. "He's skipped, or my name's not Pinkerton. He's gone to head us off at Midway Island."

Somehow I was not so sure; there were elements in the case, not known to Pinkerton--the fears of the captain, for example--that inclined me otherwise; and the idea that I had terrified Mr. Dickson into flight, though resting on so slender a foundation, clung obstinately in my mind.

"Shouldn't we see the list of passengers?" I asked.

"Dickson is such a blamed common name," returned Jim; "and then, as like as not, he would change it."

At this I had another intuition. A negative of a street scene, taken unconsciously when I was absorbed in other thought, rose in my memory with not a feature blurred: a view, from Bellairs's door as we were coming down, of muddy roadway, passing drays, matted telegraph wires, a Chinaboy with a basket on his head, and (almost opposite) a corner grocery with the name of Dickson in great gilt letters.

"Yes," said I, "you are right; he would change it. And anyway, I don't believe it was his name at all; I believe he took it from a corner grocery beside Bellairs's."

"As like as not," said Jim, still standing on the sidewalk with contracted brows.

"Well, what shall we do next?" I asked.

"The natural thing would be to rush the schooner," he replied. "But I don't know. I telephoned the captain to go at it head down and heels in air; he answered like a little man; and I guess he's getting around. I believe, Loudon, we'll give Trent a chance. Trent was in it; he was in it up to the neck; even if he couldn't buy, he could give us the

straight tip."

"I think so, too," said I. "Where shall we find him?"

"British consulate, of course," said Jim. "And that's another reason for taking him first. We can hustle that schooner up all evening; but when the consulate's shut, it's shut."

At the consulate, we learned that Captain Trent had alighted (such is I believe the classic phrase) at the What Cheer House. To that large and unaristocratic hostelry we drove, and addressed ourselves to a large clerk, who was chewing a toothpick and looking straight before him.

"Captain Jacob Trent?"

"Gone," said the clerk.

"Where has he gone?" asked Pinkerton.

"Cain't say," said the clerk.

"When did he go?" I asked.

"Don't know," said the clerk, and with the simplicity of a monarch offered us the spectacle of his broad back.

What might have happened next I dread to picture, for Pinkerton's excitement had been growing steadily, and now burned dangerously high; but we were spared extremities by the intervention of a second clerk.

"Why! Mr. Dodd!" he exclaimed, running forward to the counter. "Glad to see you, sir! Can I do anything in your way?"

How virtuous actions blossom! Here was a young man to whose pleased ears I had rehearsed _Just before the battle, mother,_ at some weekly picnic; and now, in that tense moment of my life, he came (from the machine) to be my helper.

"Captain Trent, of the wreck? O yes, Mr. Dodd; he left about twelve; he and another of the men. The Kanaka went earlier by the City of Pekin; I know that; I remember expressing his chest. Captain Trent? I'll inquire, Mr. Dodd. Yes, they were all here. Here are the names on the register; perhaps you would care to look at them while I go and see about the baggage?"

I drew the book toward me, and stood looking at the four names all written in the same hand, rather a big and rather a bad one: Trent, Brown, Hardy, and (instead of Ah Sing) Jos. Amalu.

"Pinkerton," said I, suddenly, "have you that _Occidental_ in your pocket?"

"Never left me," said Pinkerton, producing the paper.

I turned to the account of the wreck. "Here," said I; "here's the name.

'Elias Goddedaal, mate.' Why do we never come across Elias Goddedaal?"

"That's so," said Jim. "Was he with the rest in that saloon when you saw them?"

"I don't believe it," said I. "They were only four, and there was none that behaved like a mate."

At this moment the clerk returned with his report.

"The captain," it appeared, "came with some kind of an express waggon, and he and the man took off three chests and a big satchel. Our porter helped to put them on, but they drove the cart themselves. The porter thinks they went down town. It was about one."

"Still in time for the City of Pekin," observed Jim.

"How many of them were here?" I inquired.

"Three, sir, and the Kanaka," replied the clerk. "I can't somehow find out about the third, but he's gone too."

"Mr. Goddedaal, the mate, wasn't here then?" I asked.

"No, Mr. Dodd, none but what you see," says the clerk.

"Nor you never heard where he was?"

"No. Any particular reason for finding these men, Mr. Dodd?" inquired the clerk.

"This gentleman and I have bought the wreck," I explained; "we wished to get some information, and it is very annoying to find the men all gone."

A certain group had gradually formed about us, for the wreck was still a matter of interest; and at this, one of the bystanders, a rough seafaring man, spoke suddenly.

"I guess the mate won't be gone," said he. "He's main sick; never left the sick-bay aboard the Tempest; so they tell ME."

Jim took me by the sleeve. "Back to the consulate," said he.

But even at the consulate nothing was known of Mr. Goddedaal. The doctor of the Tempest had certified him very sick; he had sent his papers in, but never appeared in person before the authorities.

"Have you a telephone laid on to the Tempest?" asked Pinkerton.

"Laid on yesterday," said the clerk.

"Do you mind asking, or letting me ask? We are very anxious to get hold of Mr. Goddedaal."

"All right," said the clerk, and turned to the telephone. "I'm sorry," he said presently, "Mr. Goddedaal has left the ship, and no one knows where he is."

"Do you pay the men's passage home?" I inquired, a sudden thought striking me.

"If they want it," said the clerk; "sometimes they don't. But we paid the Kanaka's passage to Honolulu this morning; and by what Captain Trent was saying, I understand the rest are going home together."

"Then you haven't paid them?" said I.

"Not yet," said the clerk.

"And you would be a good deal surprised, if I were to tell you they were gone already?" I asked.

"O, I should think you were mistaken," said he.

"Such is the fact, however," said I.

"I am sure you must be mistaken," he repeated.

"May I use your telephone one moment?" asked Pinkerton; and as soon as permission had been granted, I heard him ring up the printing-office where our advertisements were usually handled. More I did not hear; for suddenly recalling the big, bad hand in the register of the What Cheer House, I asked the consulate clerk if he had a specimen of Captain Trent's writing. Whereupon I learned that the captain could not write, having cut his hand open a little before the loss of the brig; that the latter part of the log even had been written up by Mr. Goddedaal; and that Trent had always signed with his left hand. By the time I had gleaned this information, Pinkerton was ready.

"That's all that we can do. Now for the schooner," said he; "and by to-morrow evening I lay hands on Goddedaal, or my name's not Pinkerton."

"How have you managed?" I inquired.

"You'll see before you get to bed," said Pinkerton. "And now, after all this backwarding and forwarding, and that hotel clerk, and that bug Bellairs, it'll be a change and a kind of consolation to see the schooner. I guess things are humming there."

But on the wharf, when we reached it, there was no sign of bustle,

and, but for the galley smoke, no mark of life on the Norah Creina.

Pinkerton's face grew pale, and his mouth straightened, as he leaped on board.

"Where's the captain of this----?" and he left the phrase unfinished, finding no epithet sufficiently energetic for his thoughts.

It did not appear whom or what he was addressing; but a head, presumably the cook's, appeared in answer at the galley door.

"In the cabin, at dinner," said the cook deliberately, chewing as he spoke.

"Is that cargo out?"

"No, sir."

"None of it?"

"O, there's some of it out. We'll get at the rest of it livelier to-morrow, I guess."

"I guess there'll be something broken first," said Pinkerton, and strode to the cabin.

Here we found a man, fat, dark, and quiet, seated gravely at what seemed

a liberal meal. He looked up upon our entrance; and seeing Pinkerton continue to stand facing him in silence, hat on head, arms folded, and lips compressed, an expression of mingled wonder and annoyance began to dawn upon his placid face.

"Well!" said Jim; "and so this is what you call rushing around?"

"Who are you?" cries the captain.

"Me! I'm Pinkerton!" retorted Jim, as though the name had been a talisman.

"You're not very civil, whoever you are," was the reply. But still a certain effect had been produced, for he scrambled to his feet, and added hastily, "A man must have a bit of dinner, you know, Mr. Pinkerton."

"Where's your mate?" snapped Jim.

"He's up town," returned the other.

"Up town!" sneered Pinkerton. "Now, I'll tell you what you are: you're a Fraud; and if I wasn't afraid of dirtying my boot, I would kick you and your dinner into that dock."

"I'll tell you something, too," retorted the captain, duskiy flushing.

"I wouldn't sail this ship for the man you are, if you went upon your knees. I've dealt with gentlemen up to now."

"I can tell you the names of a number of gentlemen you'll never deal with any more, and that's the whole of Longhurst's gang," said Jim. "I'll put your pipe out in that quarter, my friend. Here, rout out your traps as quick as look at it, and take your vermin along with you. I'll have a captain in, this very night, that's a sailor, and some sailors to work for him."

"I'll go when I please, and that's to-morrow morning," cried the captain after us, as we departed for the shore.

"There's something gone wrong with the world to-day; it must have come bottom up!" wailed Pinkerton. "Bellairs, and then the hotel clerk, and now This Fraud! And what am I to do for a captain, Loudon, with Longhurst gone home an hour ago, and the boys all scattered?"

"I know," said I. "Jump in!" And then to the driver: "Do you know Black Tom's?"

Thither then we rattled; passed through the bar, and found (as I had hoped) Johnson in the enjoyment of club life. The table had been thrust upon one side; a South Sea merchant was discoursing music from a mouth-organ in one corner; and in the middle of the floor Johnson and a fellow-seaman, their arms clasped about each other's bodies, somewhat

heavily danced. The room was both cold and close; a jet of gas, which continually menaced the heads of the performers, shed a coarse illumination; the mouth-organ sounded shrill and dismal; and the faces of all concerned were church-like in their gravity. It were, of course, indelicate to interrupt these solemn frolics; so we edged ourselves to chairs, for all the world like belated comers in a concert-room, and patiently waited for the end. At length the organist, having exhausted his supply of breath, ceased abruptly in the middle of a bar. With the cessation of the strain, the dancers likewise came to a full stop, swayed a moment, still embracing, and then separated and looked about the circle for applause.

"Very well danced!" said one; but it appears the compliment was not strong enough for the performers, who (forgetful of the proverb) took up the tale in person.

"Well," said Johnson. "I mayn't be no sailor, but I can dance!"

And his late partner, with an almost pathetic conviction, added, "My foot is as light as a feather."

Seeing how the wind set, you may be sure I added a few words of praise before I carried Johnson alone into the passage: to whom, thus mollified, I told so much as I judged needful of our situation, and begged him, if he would not take the job himself, to find me a smart man.

"Me!" he cried. "I couldn't no more do it than I could try to go to hell!"

"I thought you were a mate?" said I.

"So I am a mate," giggled Johnson, "and you don't catch me shipping noways else. But I'll tell you what, I believe I can get you Arty Nares: you seen Arty; first-rate navigator and a son of a gun for style." And he proceeded to explain to me that Mr. Nares, who had the promise of a fine barque in six months, after things had quieted down, was in the meantime living very private, and would be pleased to have a change of air.

I called out Pinkerton and told him. "Nares!" he cried, as soon as I had come to the name. "I would jump at the chance of a man that had had Nares's trousers on! Why, Loudon, he's the smartest deep-water mate out of San Francisco, and draws his dividends regular in service and out." This hearty indorsation clinched the proposal; Johnson agreed to produce Nares before six the following morning; and Black Tom, being called into the consultation, promised us four smart hands for the same hour, and even (what appeared to all of us excessive) promised them sober.

The streets were fully lighted when we left Black Tom's: street after street sparkling with gas or electricity, line after line of distant luminaries climbing the steep sides of hills towards the overvaulting

darkness; and on the other hand, where the waters of the bay invisibly trembled, a hundred riding lanterns marked the position of a hundred ships. The sea-fog flew high in heaven; and at the level of man's life and business it was clear and chill. By silent consent, we paid the hack off, and proceeded arm in arm towards the Poodle Dog for dinner.

At one of the first hoardings, I was aware of a bill-sticker at work: it was a late hour for this employment, and I checked Pinkerton until the sheet should be unfolded. This is what I read:--

TWO HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD.

OFFICERS AND MEN OF THE

WRECKED BRIG FLYING SCUD

APPLYING,

PERSONALLY OR BY LETTER,

AT THE OFFICE OF JAMES PINKERTON, MONTANA
BLOCK,

BEFORE NOON TO-MORROW, TUESDAY, 12TH,

WILL RECEIVE

TWO HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD.

"This is your idea, Pinkerton!" I cried.

"Yes. They've lost no time; I'll say that for them--not like the Fraud," said he. "But mind you, Loudon, that's not half of it. The cream of the idea's here: we know our man's sick; well, a copy of that has been mailed to every hospital, every doctor, and every drug-store in San Francisco."

Of course, from the nature of our business, Pinkerton could do a thing of the kind at a figure extremely reduced; for all that, I was appalled at the extravagance, and said so.

"What matter a few dollars now?" he replied sadly. "It's in three months that the pull comes, Loudon."

We walked on again in silence, not without a shiver. Even at the Poodle Dog, we took our food with small appetite and less speech; and it was not until he was warmed with a third glass of champagne that Pinkerton cleared his throat and looked upon me with a deprecating eye.

"Loudon," said he, "there was a subject you didn't wish to be referred to. I only want to do so indirectly. It wasn't"--he faltered--"it wasn't because you were dissatisfied with me?" he concluded, with a quaver.

"Pinkerton!" cried I.

"No, no, not a word just now," he hastened to proceed. "Let me speak first. I appreciate, though I can't imitate, the delicacy of your nature; and I can well understand you would rather die than speak of it, and yet might feel disappointed. I did think I could have done better myself. But when I found how tight money was in this city, and a man like Douglas B. Longhurst--a forty-niner, the man that stood at bay in a corn patch for five hours against the San Diablo squatters--weakening on the operation, I tell you, Loudon, I began to despair; and--I may have made mistakes, no doubt there are thousands who could have done better--but I give you a loyal hand on it, I did my best."

"My poor Jim," said I, "as if I ever doubted you! as if I didn't know you had done wonders! All day I've been admiring your energy and resource. And as for that affair----"

"No, Loudon, no more, not a word more! I don't want to hear," cried Jim.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I don't want to tell you," said I; "for it's a thing I'm ashamed of."

"Ashamed, Loudon? O, don't say that; don't use such an expression even in jest!" protested Pinkerton.

"Do you never do anything you're ashamed of?" I inquired.

"No," says he, rolling his eyes. "Why? I'm sometimes sorry afterwards, when it pans out different from what I figured. But I can't see what I would want to be ashamed for."

I sat a while considering with admiration the simplicity of my friend's character. Then I sighed. "Do you know, Jim, what I'm sorriest for?" said I. "At this rate, I can't be best man at your marriage."

"My marriage!" he repeated, echoing the sigh. "No marriage for me now. I'm going right down to-night to break it to her. I think that's what's shaken me all day. I feel as if I had had no right (after I was engaged) to operate so widely."

"Well, you know, Jim, it was my doing, and you must lay the blame on me," said I.

"Not a cent of it!" he cried. "I was as eager as yourself, only not so bright at the beginning. No; I've myself to thank for it; but it's a wrench."

While Jim departed on his dolorous mission, I returned alone to the office, lit the gas, and sat down to reflect on the events of that momentous day: on the strange features of the tale that had been so far unfolded, the disappearances, the terrors, the great sums of money; and

on the dangerous and ungrateful task that awaited me in the immediate future.

It is difficult, in the retrospect of such affairs, to avoid attributing to ourselves in the past a measure of the knowledge we possess to-day. But I may say, and yet be well within the mark, that I was consumed that night with a fever of suspicion and curiosity; exhausted my fancy in solutions, which I still dismissed as incommensurable with the facts; and in the mystery by which I saw myself surrounded, found a precious stimulus for my courage and a convenient soothing draught for conscience. Even had all been plain sailing, I do not hint that I should have drawn back. Smuggling is one of the meanest of crimes, for by that we rob a whole country pro rata, and are therefore certain to impoverish the poor: to smuggle opium is an offence particularly dark, since it stands related not so much to murder, as to massacre. Upon all these points I was quite clear; my sympathy was all in arms against my interest; and had not Jim been involved, I could have dwelt almost with satisfaction on the idea of my failure. But Jim, his whole fortune, and his marriage, depended upon my success; and I preferred the interests of my friend before those of all the islanders in the South Seas. This is a poor, private morality, if you like; but it is mine, and the best I have; and I am not half so much ashamed of having embarked at all on this adventure, as I am proud that (while I was in it, and for the sake of my friend) I was up early and down late, set my own hand to everything, took dangers as they came, and for once in my life played the man throughout. At the same time, I could have desired another field

of energy; and I was the more grateful for the redeeming element of mystery. Without that, though I might have gone ahead and done as well, it would scarce have been with ardour; and what inspired me that night with an impatient greed of the sea, the island, and the wreck, was the hope that I might stumble there upon the answer to a hundred questions, and learn why Captain Trent fanned his red face in the exchange, and why Mr. Dickson fled from the telephone in the Mission Street lodging-house.