

## CHAPTER XXIII. THE BUDGET OF THE "CURRENCY LASS."

Before noon on the 26th November, there cleared from the port of Sydney the schooner, Currency Lass. The owner, Norris Carthew, was on board in the somewhat unusual position of mate; the master's name purported to be William Kirkup; the cook was a Hawaiian boy, Joseph Amalu; and there were two hands before the mast, Thomas Hadden and Richard Hemstead, the

latter chosen partly because of his humble character, partly because he had an odd-job-man's handiness with tools. The Currency Lass was bound for the South Sea Islands, and first of all for Butaritari in the Gilberts, on a register; but it was understood about the harbour that her cruise was more than half a pleasure trip. A friend of the late Grant Sanderson (of Auchentroon and Kilclarty) might have recognised in that tall-masted ship, the transformed and rechristened Dream; and the Lloyd's surveyor, had the services of such a one been called in requisition, must have found abundant subject of remark.

For time, during her three years' inaction, had eaten deep into the Dream and her fittings; she had sold in consequence a shade above her value as old junk; and the three adventurers had scarce been able to afford even the most vital repairs. The rigging, indeed, had been partly renewed, and the rest set up; all Grant Sanderson's old canvas had been patched together into one decently serviceable suit of sails; Grant Sanderson's masts still stood, and might have wondered at themselves.

"I haven't the heart to tap them," Captain Wicks used to observe, as he squinted up their height or patted their rotundity; and "as rotten as our foremast" was an accepted metaphor in the ship's company. The sequel rather suggests it may have been sounder than was thought; but no one knew for certain, just as no one except the captain appreciated the dangers of the cruise. The captain, indeed, saw with clear eyes and spoke his mind aloud; and though a man of an astonishing hot-blooded courage, following life and taking its dangers in the spirit of a hound upon the slot, he had made a point of a big whaleboat. "Take your choice," he had said; "either new masts and rigging or that boat. I simply ain't going to sea without the one or the other. Chicken coops are good enough, no doubt, and so is a dinghy; but they ain't for Joe." And his partners had been forced to consent, and saw six and thirty pounds of their small capital vanish in the turn of a hand.

All four had toiled the best part of six weeks getting ready; and though Captain Wicks was of course not seen or heard of, a fifth was there to help them, a fellow in a bushy red beard, which he would sometimes lay aside when he was below, and who strikingly resembled Captain Wicks in voice and character. As for Captain Kirkup, he did not appear till the last moment, when he proved to be a burly mariner, bearded like Abou Ben Adhem. All the way down the harbour and through the Heads, his milk-white whiskers blew in the wind and were conspicuous from shore; but the Currency Lass had no sooner turned her back upon the lighthouse, than he went below for the inside of five seconds and reappeared clean shaven. So many doublings and devices were required to get to sea with

an unseaworthy ship and a captain that was "wanted." Nor might even these have sufficed, but for the fact that Hadden was a public character, and the whole cruise regarded with an eye of indulgence as one of Tom's engaging eccentricities. The ship, besides, had been a yacht before; and it came the more natural to allow her still some of the dangerous liberties of her old employment.

A strange ship they had made of it, her lofty spars disfigured with patched canvas, her panelled cabin fitted for a traderoom with rude shelves. And the life they led in that anomalous schooner was no less curious than herself. Amalu alone berthed forward; the rest occupied staterooms, camped upon the satin divans, and sat down in Grant Sanderson's parquet smoking-room to meals of junk and potatoes, bad of their kind and often scant in quantity. Hemstead grumbled; Tommy had occasional moments of revolt and increased the ordinary by a few haphazard tins or a bottle of his own brown sherry. But Hemstead grumbled from habit, Tommy revolted only for the moment, and there was underneath a real and general acquiescence in these hardships. For besides onions and potatoes, the Currency Lass may be said to have gone to sea without stores. She carried two thousand pounds' worth of assorted trade, advanced on credit, their whole hope and fortune. It was upon this that they subsisted--mice in their own granary. They dined upon their future profits; and every scanty meal was so much in the savings bank.

Republican as were their manners, there was no practical, at least no

dangerous, lack of discipline. Wicks was the only sailor on board, there was none to criticise; and besides, he was so easy-going, and so merry-minded, that none could bear to disappoint him. Carthew did his best, partly for the love of doing it, partly for love of the captain; Amalu was a willing drudge, and even Hemstead and Hadden turned to upon occasion with a will. Tommy's department was the trade and traderoom; he would work down in the hold or over the shelves of the cabin, till the Sydney dandy was unrecognizable; come up at last, draw a bucket of sea-water, bathe, change, and lie down on deck over a big sheaf of Sydney *\_Heralds\_* and *\_Dead Birds\_*, or perhaps with a volume of Buckle's *\_History of Civilisation\_*, the standard work selected for that cruise. In the latter case, a smile went round the ship, for Buckle almost invariably laid his student out, and when Tom awoke again he was almost always in the humour for brown sherry. The connection was so well established that "a glass of Buckle" or "a bottle of civilisation" became current pleasantries on board the *Currency Lass*.

Hemstead's province was that of the repairs, and he had his hands full. Nothing on board but was decayed in a proportion; the lamps leaked; so did the decks; door-knobs came off in the hand, mouldings parted company with the panels, the pump declined to suck, and the defective bathroom came near to swamp the ship. Wicks insisted that all the nails were long ago consumed, and that she was only glued together by the rust. "You shouldn't make me laugh so much, Tommy," he would say. "I'm afraid I'll shake the sternpost out of her." And, as Hemstead went to and fro

with his tool basket on an endless round of tinkering, Wicks lost no opportunity of chaffing him upon his duties. "If you'd turn to at sailing or washing paint or something useful, now," he would say, "I could see the fun of it. But to be mending things that haven't no insides to them appears to me the height of foolishness." And doubtless these continual pleasantries helped to reassure the landsmen, who went to and fro unmoved, under circumstances that might have daunted Nelson.

The weather was from the outset splendid, and the wind fair and steady. The ship sailed like a witch. "This Currency Lass is a powerful old girl, and has more complaints than I would care to put a name on," the captain would say, as he pricked the chart; "but she could show her blooming heels to anything of her size in the Western Pacific." To wash decks, relieve the wheel, do the day's work after dinner on the smoking-room table, and take in kites at night,--such was the easy routine of their life. In the evening--above all, if Tommy had produced some of his civilisation--yarns and music were the rule. Amalu had a sweet Hawaiian voice; and Hemstead, a great hand upon the banjo, accompanied his own quavering tenor with effect. There was a sense in which the little man could sing. It was great to hear him deliver *My Boy Tammie* in Austrilian; and the words (some of the worst of the ruffian Macneil's) were hailed in his version with inextinguishable mirth.

Where hye ye been a' dye?

he would ask, and answer himself:--

I've been by burn and flowery brye,  
Meadow green an' mountain grye,  
Courtin' o' this young thing,  
Just come frye her mammie.

It was the accepted jest for all hands to greet the conclusion of this song with the simultaneous cry: "My word!" thus winging the arrow of ridicule with a feather from the singer's wing. But he had his revenge with \_Home, Sweet Home,\_ and \_Where is my Wandering Boy To-night?\_--ditties into which he threw the most intolerable pathos. It appeared he had no home, nor had ever had one, nor yet any vestige of a family, except a truculent uncle, a baker in Newcastle, N.S.W. His domestic sentiment was therefore wholly in the air, and expressed an unrealised ideal. Or perhaps, of all his experiences, this of the Currency Lass, with its kindly, playful, and tolerant society, approached it the most nearly.

It is perhaps because I know the sequel, but I can never think upon this voyage without a profound sense of pity and mystery; of the ship (once the whim of a rich blackguard) faring with her battered fineries and upon her homely errand, across the plains of ocean, and past the gorgeous scenery of dawn and sunset; and the ship's company, so strangely assembled, so Britishly chuckle-headed, filling their days

with chaff in place of conversation; no human book on board with them except Hadden's Buckle, and not a creature fit either to read or to understand it; and the one mark of any civilised interest, being when Carthew filled in his spare hours with the pencil and the brush: the whole unconscious crew of them posting in the meanwhile towards so tragic a disaster.

Twenty-eight days out of Sydney, on Christmas eve, they fetched up to the entrance of the lagoon, and plied all that night outside, keeping their position by the lights of fishers on the reef and the outlines of the palms against the cloudy sky. With the break of day, the schooner was hove to, and the signal for a pilot shown. But it was plain her lights must have been observed in the darkness by the native fishermen, and word carried to the settlement, for a boat was already under weigh. She came towards them across the lagoon under a great press of sail, lying dangerously down, so that at times, in the heavier puffs, they thought she would turn turtle; covered the distance in fine style, luffed up smartly alongside, and emitted a haggard looking white man in pyjamas.

"Good-mornin', Cap'n," said he, when he had made good his entrance. "I was taking you for a Fiji man-of-war, what with your flush decks and them spars. Well, gen'lemen all, here's wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year," he added, and lurched against a stay.

"Why, you're never the pilot?" exclaimed Wicks, studying him with a

profound disfavour. "You've never taken a ship in--don't tell me!"

"Well, I should guess I have," returned the pilot. "I'm Captain Dobbs, I am; and when I take charge, the captain of that ship can go below and shave."

"But, man alive! you're drunk, man!" cried the captain.

"Drunk!" repeated Dobbs. "You can't have seen much life if you call me drunk. I'm only just beginning. Come night, I won't say; I guess I'll be properly full by then. But now I'm the soberest man in all Big Muggin."

"It won't do," retorted Wicks. "Not for Joseph, sir. I can't have you piling up my schooner."

"All right," said Dobbs, "lay and rot where you are, or take and go in and pile her up for yourself like the captain of the Leslie. That's business, I guess; grudged me twenty dollars' pilotage, and lost twenty thousand in trade and a brand new schooner; ripped the keel right off of her, and she went down in the inside of four minutes, and lies in twenty fathom, trade and all."

"What's all this?" cried Wicks. "Trade? What vessel was this Leslie, anyhow?"

"Consigned to Cohen and Co., from 'Frisco," returned the pilot, "and



badly wanted. There's a barque inside filling up for Hamburg--you see her spars over there; and there's two more ships due, all the way from Germany, one in two months, they say, and one in three; Cohen and Co.'s agent (that's Mr. Topelius) has taken and lain down with the jaundice on the strength of it. I guess most people would, in his shoes; no trade, no copra, and twenty hundred ton of shipping due. If you've any copra on board, cap'n, here's your chance. Topelius will buy, gold down, and give three cents. It's all found money to him, the way it is, whatever he pays for it. And that's what come of going back on the pilot."

"Excuse me one moment, Captain Dobbs. I wish to speak with my mate," said the captain, whose face had begun to shine and his eyes to sparkle.

"Please yourself," replied the pilot. "You couldn't think of offering a man a nip, could you? just to brace him up. This kind of thing looks damned inhospitable, and gives a schooner a bad name."

"I'll talk about that after the anchor's down," returned Wicks, and he drew Carthew forward. "I say," he whispered, "here's a fortune."

"How much do you call that?" asked Carthew.

"I can't put a figure on it yet--I daren't!" said the captain. "We might cruise twenty years and not find the match of it. And suppose another ship came in to-night? Everything's possible! And the difficulty is this Dobbs. He's as drunk as a marine. How can we trust him? We ain't

insured--worse luck!"

"Suppose you took him aloft and got him to point out the channel?" suggested Carthew. "If he tallied at all with the chart, and didn't fall out of the rigging, perhaps we might risk it."

"Well, all's risk here," returned the captain. "Take the wheel yourself, and stand by. Mind, if there's two orders, follow mine, not his. Set the cook for'ard with the heads'ls, and the two others at the main sheet, and see they don't sit on it." With that he called the pilot; they swarmed aloft in the fore rigging, and presently after there was bawled down the welcome order to ease sheets and fill away.

At a quarter before nine o'clock on Christmas morning the anchor was let go.

The first cruise of the Currency Lass had thus ended in a stroke of fortune almost beyond hope. She had brought two thousand pounds' worth of trade, straight as a homing pigeon, to the place where it was most required. And Captain Wicks (or, rather, Captain Kirkup) showed himself the man to make the best of his advantage. For hard upon two days he walked a verandah with Topelius, for hard upon two days his partners watched from the neighbouring public house the field of battle; and the lamps were not yet lighted on the evening of the second before the enemy surrendered. Wicks came across to the Sans Souci, as the saloon was called, his face nigh black, his eyes almost closed and all bloodshot,

and yet bright as lighted matches.

"Come out here, boys," he said; and when they were some way off among the palms, "I hold twenty-four," he added in a voice scarcely recognizable, and doubtless referring to the venerable game of cribbage.

"What do you mean?" asked Tommy.

"I've sold the trade," answered Wicks; "or, rather, I've sold only some of it, for I've kept back all the mess beef and half the flour and biscuit; and, by God, we're still provisioned for four months! By God, it's as good as stolen!"

"My word!" cried Hemstead.

"But what have you sold it for?" gasped Carthew, the captain's almost insane excitement shaking his nerve.

"Let me tell it my own way," cried Wicks, loosening his neck. "Let me get at it gradual, or I'll explode. I've not only sold it, boys, I've wrung out a charter on my own terms to 'Frisco and back; on my own terms. I made a point of it. I fooled him first by making believe I wanted copra, which of course I knew he wouldn't hear of--couldn't, in fact; and whenever he showed fight, I trotted out the copra, and that man dived! I would take nothing but copra, you see; and so I've got the blooming lot in specie--all but two short bills on 'Frisco. And the sum?"

Well, this whole adventure, including two thousand pounds of credit, cost us two thousand seven hundred and some odd. That's all paid back; in thirty days' cruise we've paid for the schooner and the trade. Heard ever any man the match of that? And it's not all! For besides that," said the captain, hammering his words, "we've got Thirteen Blooming Hundred Pounds of profit to divide. I bled him in four Thou.!" he cried, in a voice that broke like a schoolboy's.

For a moment the partners looked upon their chief with stupefaction, incredulous surprise their only feeling. Tommy was the first to grasp the consequences.

"Here," he said, in a hard, business tone. "Come back to that saloon. I've got to get drunk."

"You must please excuse me, boys," said the captain, earnestly. "I daren't taste nothing. If I was to drink one glass of beer, it's my belief I'd have the apoplexy. The last scrimmage, and the blooming triumph, pretty nigh hand done me."

"Well, then, three cheers for the captain," proposed Tommy.

But Wicks held up a shaking hand. "Not that either, boys," he pleaded. "Think of the other buffer, and let him down easy. If I'm like this, just fancy what Topelius is! If he heard us singing out, he'd have the staggers."

As a matter of fact, Topelius accepted his defeat with a good grace; but the crew of the wrecked Leslie, who were in the same employment and loyal to their firm, took the thing more bitterly. Rough words and ugly looks were common. Once even they hooted Captain Wicks from the saloon verandah; the Currency Lassess drew out on the other side; for some minutes there had like to have been a battle in Butaritari; and though the occasion passed off without blows, it left on either side an increase of ill-feeling.

No such small matter could affect the happiness of the successful traders. Five days more the ship lay in the lagoon, with little employment for any one but Tommy and the captain, for Topelius's natives discharged cargo and brought ballast; the time passed like a pleasant dream; the adventurers sat up half the night debating and praising their good fortune, or strayed by day in the narrow isle, gaping like Cockney tourists; and on the first of the new year, the Currency Lass weighed anchor for the second time and set sail for 'Frisco, attended by the same fine weather and good luck. She crossed the doldrums with but small delay; on a wind and in ballast of broken coral, she outdid expectations; and, what added to the happiness of the ship's company, the small amount of work that fell on them to do, was now lessened by the presence of another hand. This was the boatswain of the Leslie; he had been on bad terms with his own captain, had already spent his wages in the saloons of Butaritari, had wearied of the place, and while all his shipmates coldly refused to set foot on board the Currency Lass, he

had offered to work his passage to the coast. He was a north of Ireland man, between Scotch and Irish, rough, loud, humorous, and emotional, not without sterling qualities, and an expert and careful sailor. His frame of mind was different indeed from that of his new shipmates; instead of making an unexpected fortune, he had lost a berth; and he was besides disgusted with the rations, and really appalled at the condition of the schooner. A stateroom door had stuck, the first day at sea, and Mac (as they called him) laid his strength to it and plucked it from the hinges.

"Glory!" said he, "this ship's rotten."

"I believe you, my boy," said Captain Wicks.

The next day the sailor was observed with his nose aloft.

"Don't you get looking at these sticks," the captain said, "or you'll have a fit and fall overboard."

Mac turned towards the speaker with rather a wild eye. "Why, I see what looks like a patch of dry rot up yonder, that I bet I could stick my fist into," said he.

"Looks as if a fellow could stick his head into it, don't it?" returned Wicks. "But there's no good prying into things that can't be mended."

"I think I was a Currency Ass to come on board of her!" reflected Mac.

"Well, I never said she was seaworthy," replied the captain: "I only said she could show her blooming heels to anything afloat. And besides, I don't know that it's dry rot; I kind of sometimes hope it isn't. Here; turn to and heave the log; that'll cheer you up."

"Well, there's no denying it, you're a holy captain," said Mac.

And from that day on, he made but the one reference to the ship's condition; and that was whenever Tommy drew upon his cellar. "Here's to the junk trade!" he would say, as he held out his can of sherry.

"Why do you always say that?" asked Tommy.

"I had an uncle in the business," replied Mac, and launched at once into a yarn, in which an incredible number of the characters were "laid out as nice as you would want to see," and the oaths made up about two-fifths of every conversation.

Only once he gave them a taste of his violence; he talked of it, indeed, often; "I'm rather a violent man," he would say, not without pride; but this was the only specimen. Of a sudden, he turned on Hemstead in the ship's waist, knocked him against the foresail boom, then knocked him under it, and had set him up and knocked him down once more, before any one had drawn a breath.

"Here! Belay that!" roared Wicks, leaping to his feet. "I won't have none of this."

Mac turned to the captain with ready civility. "I only want to learn him manners," said he. "He took and called me Irishman."

"Did he?" said Wicks. "O, that's a different story! What made you do it, you tomfool? You ain't big enough to call any man that."

"I didn't call him it," spluttered Hemstead, through his blood and tears. "I only mentioned-like he was."

"Well, let's have no more of it," said Wicks.

"But you ARE Irish, ain't you?" Carthew asked of his new shipmate shortly after.

"I may be," replied Mac, "but I'll allow no Sydney duck to call me so. No," he added, with a sudden heated countenance, "nor any Britisher that walks! Why, look here," he went on, "you're a young swell, aren't you? Suppose I called you that! 'I'll show you,' you would say, and turn to and take it out of me straight."

On the 28th of January, when in lat. 27 degrees 20' N., long. 177 degrees W., the wind chopped suddenly into the west, not very strong, but puffy and with flaws of rain. The captain, eager for easting, made



a fair wind of it and guyed the booms out wing and wing. It was Tommy's trick at the wheel, and as it was within half an hour of the relief (seven thirty in the morning), the captain judged it not worth while to change him.

The puffs were heavy but short; there was nothing to be called a squall, no danger to the ship, and scarce more than usual to the doubtful spars. All hands were on deck in their oilskins, expecting breakfast; the galley smoked, the ship smelt of coffee, all were in good humour to be speeding eastward a full nine; when the rotten foresail tore suddenly between two cloths and then split to either hand. It was for all the world as though some archangel with a huge sword had slashed it with the figure of a cross; all hands ran to secure the slatting canvas; and in the sudden uproar and alert, Tommy Hadden lost his head. Many of his days have been passed since then in explaining how the thing happened; of these explanations it will be sufficient to say that they were all different and none satisfactory; and the gross fact remains that the main boom gybed, carried away the tackle, broke the mainmast some three feet above the deck and whipped it overboard. For near a minute the suspected foremast gallantly resisted; then followed its companion; and by the time the wreck was cleared, of the whole beautiful fabric that enabled them to skim the seas, two ragged stumps remained.

In these vast and solitary waters, to be dismasted is perhaps the worst calamity. Let the ship turn turtle and go down, and at least the pang is over. But men chained on a hulk may pass months scanning the empty sea

line and counting the steps of death's invisible approach. There is no help but in the boats, and what a help is that! There heaved the Currency Lass, for instance, a wingless lump, and the nearest human coast (that of Kauai in the Sandwiches) lay about a thousand miles to south and east of her. Over the way there, to men contemplating that passage in an open boat, all kinds of misery, and the fear of death and of madness, brooded.

A serious company sat down to breakfast; but the captain helped his neighbours with a smile.

"Now, boys," he said, after a pull at the hot coffee, "we're done with this Currency Lass, and no mistake. One good job: we made her pay while she lasted, and she paid first rate; and if we were to try our hand again, we can try in style. Another good job: we have a fine, stiff, roomy boat, and you know who you have to thank for that. We've got six lives to save, and a pot of money; and the point is, where are we to take 'em?"

"It's all two thousand miles to the nearest of the Sandwiches, I fancy," observed Mac.

"No, not so bad as that," returned the captain. "But it's bad enough: rather better'n a thousand."

"I know a man who once did twelve hundred in a boat," said Mac, "and he

had all he wanted. He fetched ashore in the Marquesas, and never set a foot on anything floating from that day to this. He said he would rather put a pistol to his head and knock his brains out."

"Ay, ay!" said Wicks. "Well I remember a boat's crew that made this very island of Kauai, and from just about where we lie, or a bit further.

When they got up with the land, they were clean crazy. There was an iron-bound coast and an Old Bob Ridley of a surf on. The natives hailed 'em from fishing-boats, and sung out it couldn't be done at the money. Much they cared! there was the land, that was all they knew; and they turned to and drove the boat slap ashore in the thick of it, and was all drowned but one. No; boat trips are my eye," concluded the captain, gloomily.

The tone was surprising in a man of his indomitable temper. "Come, Captain," said Carthew, "you have something else up your sleeve; out with it!"

"It's a fact," admitted Wicks. "You see there's a raft of little bally reefs about here, kind of chicken-pox on the chart. Well, I looked 'em all up, and there's one--Midway or Brooks they call it, not forty mile from our assigned position--that I got news of. It turns out it's a coaling station of the Pacific Mail," he said, simply.

"Well, and I know it ain't no such a thing," said Mac. "I been quartermaster in that line myself."

"All right," returned Wicks. "There's the book. Read what Hoyt says--read it aloud and let the others hear."

Hoyt's falsehood (as readers know) was explicit; incredulity was impossible, and the news itself delightful beyond hope. Each saw in his mind's eye the boat draw in to a trim island with a wharf, coal-sheds, gardens, the Stars and Stripes and the white cottage of the keeper; saw themselves idle a few weeks in tolerable quarters, and then step on board the China mail, romantic waifs, and yet with pocketsful of money, calling for champagne, and waited on by troops of stewards. Breakfast, that had begun so dully, ended amid sober jubilation, and all hands turned immediately to prepare the boat.

Now that all spars were gone, it was no easy job to get her launched. Some of the necessary cargo was first stowed on board; the specie, in particular, being packed in a strong chest and secured with lashings to the afterthwart in case of a capsizing. Then a piece of the bulwark was razed to the level of the deck, and the boat swung thwart-ship, made fast with a slack line to either stump, and successfully run out. For a voyage of forty miles to hospitable quarters, not much food or water was required; but they took both in superfluity. Amalu and Mac, both ingrained sailor-men, had chests which were the headquarters of their lives; two more chests with handbags, oilskins, and blankets supplied the others; Hadden, amid general applause, added the last case of the brown sherry; the captain brought the log, instruments, and chronometer;

nor did Hemstead forget the banjo or a pinned handkerchief of Butaritari shells.

It was about three P.M. when they pushed off, and (the wind being still westerly) fell to the oars. "Well, we've got the guts out of YOU!" was the captain's nodded farewell to the hulk of the Currency Lass, which presently shrank and faded in the sea. A little after a calm succeeded, with much rain; and the first meal was eaten, and the watch below lay down to their uneasy slumber on the bilge under a roaring shower-bath. The twenty-ninth dawned overhead from out of ragged clouds; there is no moment when a boat at sea appears so trenchantly black and so conspicuously little; and the crew looked about them at the sky and water with a thrill of loneliness and fear. With sunrise the trade set in, lusty and true to the point; sail was made; the boat flew; and by about four in the afternoon, they were well up with the closed part of the reef, and the captain standing on the thwart, and holding by the mast, was studying the island through the binoculars.

"Well, and where's your station?" cried Mac.

"I don't someway pick it up," replied the captain.

"No, nor never will!" retorted Mac, with a clang of despair and triumph in his tones.

The truth was soon plain to all. No buoys, no beacons, no lights, no

coal, no station; the castaways pulled through a lagoon and landed on an isle, where was no mark of man but wreckwood, and no sound but of the sea. For the seafowl that harboured and lived there at the epoch of my visit were then scattered into the uttermost parts of the ocean, and had left no traces of their sojourn besides dropped feathers and addled eggs. It was to this they had been sent, for this they had stooped all night over the dripping oars, hourly moving further from relief. The boat, for as small as it was, was yet eloquent of the hands of men, a thing alone indeed upon the sea but yet in itself all human; and the isle, for which they had exchanged it, was ingloriously savage, a place of distress, solitude, and hunger unrelieved. There was a strong glare and shadow of the evening over all; in which they sat or lay, not speaking, careless even to eat, men swindled out of life and riches by a lying book. In the great good nature of the whole party, no word of reproach had been addressed to Hadden, the author of these disasters. But the new blow was less magnanimously borne, and many angry glances rested on the captain.

Yet it was himself who roused them from their lethargy. Grudgingly they obeyed, drew the boat beyond tidemark, and followed him to the top of the miserable islet, whence a view was commanded of the whole wheel of the horizon, then part darkened under the coming night, part dyed with the hues of the sunset and populous with the sunset clouds. Here the camp was pitched and a tent run up with the oars, sails, and mast. And here Amalu, at no man's bidding, from the mere instinct of habitual service, built a fire and cooked a meal. Night was come, and the stars

and the silver sickle of new moon beamed overhead, before the meal was ready. The cold sea shone about them, and the fire glowed in their faces, as they ate. Tommy had opened his case, and the brown sherry went the round; but it was long before they came to conversation.

"Well, is it to be Kauai after all?" asked Mac suddenly.

"This is bad enough for me," said Tommy. "Let's stick it out where we are."

"Well, I can tell ye one thing," said Mac, "if ye care to hear it. When I was in the China mail, we once made this island. It's in the course from Honolulu."

"Deuce it is!" cried Carthew. "That settles it, then. Let's stay. We must keep good fires going; and there's plenty wreck."

"Lashings of wreck!" said the Irishman. "There's nothing here but wreck and coffin boards."

"But we'll have to make a proper blyze," objected Hemstead. "You can't see a fire like this, not any wye awye, I mean."

"Can't you?" said Carthew. "Look round."

They did, and saw the hollow of the night, the bare, bright face of the

sea, and the stars regarding them; and the voices died in their bosoms at the spectacle. In that huge isolation, it seemed they must be visible from China on the one hand and California on the other.

"My God, it's dreary!" whispered Hemstead.

"Dreary?" cried Mac, and fell suddenly silent.

"It's better than a boat, anyway," said Hadden. "I've had my bellyful of boat."

"What kills me is that specie!" the captain broke out. "Think of all that riches,--four thousand in gold, bad silver, and short bills--all found money, too!--and no more use than that much dung!"

"I'll tell you one thing," said Tommy. "I don't like it being in the boat--I don't care to have it so far away."

"Why, who's to take it?" cried Mac, with a guffaw of evil laughter.

But this was not at all the feeling of the partners, who rose, clambered down the isle, brought back the inestimable treasure-chest slung upon two oars, and set it conspicuous in the shining of the fire.

"There's my beauty!" cried Wicks, viewing it with a cocked head. "That's better than a bonfire. What! we have a chest here, and bills for close



upon two thousand pounds; there's no show to that,--it would go in your vest-pocket,--but the rest! upwards of forty pounds avoirdupois of coined gold, and close on two hundredweight of Chile silver! What! ain't that good enough to fetch a fleet? Do you mean to say that won't affect a ship's compass? Do you mean to tell me that the lookout won't turn to and SMELL it?" he cried.

Mac, who had no part nor lot in the bills, the forty pounds of gold, or the two hundredweight of silver, heard this with impatience, and fell into a bitter, choking laughter. "You'll see!" he said harshly. "You'll be glad to feed them bills into the fire before you're through with ut!" And he turned, passed by himself out of the ring of the firelight, and stood gazing seaward.

His speech and his departure extinguished instantly those sparks of better humour kindled by the dinner and the chest. The group fell again to an ill-favoured silence, and Hemstead began to touch the banjo, as was his habit of an evening. His repertory was small: the chords of *\_Home, Sweet Home\_* fell under his fingers; and when he had played the symphony, he instinctively raised up his voice. "Be it never so 'umble, there's no plyce like 'ome," he sang. The last word was still upon his lips, when the instrument was snatched from him and dashed into the fire; and he turned with a cry to look into the furious countenance of Mac.

"I'll be damned if I stand this!" cried the captain, leaping up

belligerent.

"I told ye I was a voilent man," said Mac, with a movement of deprecation very surprising in one of his character. "Why don't he give me a chance then? Haven't we enough to bear the way we are?" And to the wonder and dismay of all, the man choked upon a sob. "It's ashamed of meself I am," he said presently, his Irish accent twenty-fold increased. "I ask all your pardons for me voilence; and especially the little man's, who is a harmless crayture, and here's me hand to'm, if he'll condescind to take me by 't."

So this scene of barbarity and sentimentalism passed off, leaving behind strange and incongruous impressions. True, every one was perhaps glad when silence succeeded that all too appropriate music; true, Mac's apology and subsequent behaviour rather raised him in the opinion of his fellow-castaways. But the discordant note had been struck, and its harmonics tingled in the brain. In that savage, houseless isle, the passions of man had sounded, if only for the moment, and all men trembled at the possibilities of horror.

It was determined to stand watch and watch in case of passing vessels; and Tommy, on fire with an idea, volunteered to stand the first. The rest crawled under the tent, and were soon enjoying that comfortable gift of sleep, which comes everywhere and to all men, quenching anxieties and speeding time. And no sooner were all settled, no sooner had the drone of many snorers begun to mingle with and overcome the

surf, than Tommy stole from his post with the case of sherry, and dropped it in a quiet cove in a fathom of water. But the stormy inconstancy of Mac's behaviour had no connection with a gill or two of wine; his passions, angry and otherwise, were on a different sail plan from his neighbours'; and there were possibilities of good and evil in that hybrid Celt beyond their prophecy.

About two in the morning, the starry sky--or so it seemed, for the drowsy watchman had not observed the approach of any cloud--brimmed over in a deluge; and for three days it rained without remission. The islet was a sponge, the castaways sops; the view all gone, even the reef concealed behind the curtain of the falling water. The fire was soon drowned out; after a couple of boxes of matches had been scratched in vain, it was decided to wait for better weather; and the party lived in wretchedness on raw tins and a ration of hard bread.

By the 2nd February, in the dark hours of the morning watch, the clouds were all blown by; the sun rose glorious; and once more the castaways sat by a quick fire, and drank hot coffee with the greed of brutes and sufferers. Thenceforward their affairs moved in a routine. A fire was constantly maintained; and this occupied one hand continuously, and the others for an hour or so in the day. Twice a day, all hands bathed in the lagoon, their chief, almost their only pleasure. Often they fished in the lagoon with good success. And the rest was passed in lolling, strolling, yarns, and disputation. The time of the China steamers

was calculated to a nicety; which done, the thought was rejected and ignored. It was one that would not bear consideration. The boat voyage having been tacitly set aside, the desperate part chosen to wait there for the coming of help or of starvation, no man had courage left to look his bargain in the face, far less to discuss it with his neighbours. But the unuttered terror haunted them; in every hour of idleness, at every moment of silence, it returned, and breathed a chill about the circle, and carried men's eyes to the horizon. Then, in a panic of self-defence, they would rally to some other subject. And, in that lone spot, what else was to be found to speak of but the treasure?

That was indeed the chief singularity, the one thing conspicuous in their island life; the presence of that chest of bills and specie dominated the mind like a cathedral; and there were besides connected with it, certain irking problems well fitted to occupy the idle. Two thousand pounds were due to the Sydney firm: two thousand pounds were clear profit, and fell to be divided in varying proportions among six. It had been agreed how the partners were to range; every pound of capital subscribed, every pound that fell due in wages, was to count for one "lay." Of these, Tommy could claim five hundred and ten, Carthew one hundred and seventy, Wicks one hundred and forty, and Hemstead and Amalu ten apiece: eight hundred and forty "lays" in all. What was the value of a lay? This was at first debated in the air and chiefly by the strength of Tommy's lungs. Then followed a series of incorrect calculations; from which they issued, arithmetically foiled, but agreed from weariness upon

an approximate value of 2 pounds, 7 shillings 7 1/4 pence. The figures were admittedly incorrect; the sum of the shares came not to 2000 pounds, but to 1996 pounds, 6 shillings: 3 pounds, 14 shillings being thus left unclaimed. But it was the nearest they had yet found, and the highest as well, so that the partners were made the less critical by the contemplation of their splendid dividends. Wicks put in 100 pounds and stood to draw captain's wages for two months; his taking was 333 pounds 3 shillings 6 1/2 pence. Carthew had put in 150 pounds: he was to take out 401 pounds, 18 shillings 6 1/2 pence. Tommy's 500 pounds had grown to be 1213 pounds 12 shillings 9 3/4 pence; and Amalu and Hemstead, ranking for wages only, had 22 pounds, 16 shillings 1/2 pence, each.

From talking and brooding on these figures, it was but a step to opening the chest; and once the chest open, the glamour of the cash was irresistible. Each felt that he must see his treasure separate with the eye of flesh, handle it in the hard coin, mark it for his own, and stand forth to himself the approved owner. And here an insurmountable difficulty barred the way. There were some seventeen shillings in English silver: the rest was Chile; and the Chile dollar, which had been taken at the rate of six to the pound sterling, was practically their smallest coin. It was decided, therefore, to divide the pounds only, and to throw the shillings, pence, and fractions in a common fund. This, with the three pound fourteen already in the heel, made a total of seven pounds one shilling.

"I'll tell you," said Wicks. "Let Carthew and Tommy and me take one

pound apiece, and Hemstead and Amalu split the other four, and toss up for the odd bob."

"O, rot!" said Carthew. "Tommy and I are bursting already. We can take half a sov' each, and let the other three have forty shillings."

"I'll tell you now--it's not worth splitting," broke in Mac. "I've cards in my chest. Why don't you play for the slump sum?"

In that idle place, the proposal was accepted with delight. Mac, as the owner of the cards, was given a stake; the sum was played for in five games of cribbage; and when Amalu, the last survivor in the tournament, was beaten by Mac, it was found the dinner hour was past. After a hasty meal, they fell again immediately to cards, this time (on Carthew's proposal) to Van John. It was then probably two P.M. of the 9th February; and they played with varying chances for twelve hours, slept heavily, and rose late on the morrow to resume the game. All day of the 10th, with grudging intervals for food, and with one long absence on the part of Tommy from which he returned dripping with the case of sherry, they continued to deal and stake. Night fell: they drew the closer to the fire. It was maybe two in the morning, and Tommy was selling his deal by auction, as usual with that timid player; when Carthew, who didn't intend to bid, had a moment of leisure and looked round him. He beheld the moonlight on the sea, the money piled and scattered in that incongruous place, the perturbed faces of the players; he felt in his own breast the familiar tumult; and it seemed as if there rose in his

ears a sound of music, and the moon seemed still to shine upon a sea, but the sea was changed, and the Casino towered from among lamplit gardens, and the money clinked on the green board. "Good God!" he thought, "am I gambling again?" He looked the more curiously about the sandy table. He and Mac had played and won like gamblers; the mingled gold and silver lay by their places in the heap. Amalu and Hemstead had each more than held their own, but Tommy was cruel far to leeward, and the captain was reduced to perhaps fifty pounds.

"I say, let's knock off," said Carthew.

"Give that man a glass of Buckle," said some one, and a fresh bottle was opened, and the game went inexorably on.

Carthew was himself too heavy a winner to withdraw or to say more; and all the rest of the night he must look on at the progress of this folly, and make gallant attempts to lose with the not uncommon consequence of winning more. The first dawn of the 11th February found him well-nigh desperate. It chanced he was then dealer, and still winning. He had just dealt a round of many tens; every one had staked heavily; the captain had put up all that remained to him, twelve pounds in gold and a few dollars; and Carthew, looking privately at his cards before he showed them, found he held a natural.

"See here, you fellows," he broke out, "this is a sickening business, and I'm done with it for one." So saying, he showed his cards, tore them

across, and rose from the ground.

The company stared and murmured in mere amazement; but Mac stepped gallantly to his support.

"We've had enough of it, I do believe," said he. "But of course it was all fun, and here's my counters back. All counters in, boys!" and he began to pour his winnings into the chest, which stood fortunately near him.

Carthew stepped across and wrung him by the hand. "I'll never forget this," he said.

"And what are ye going to do with the Highway boy and the plumber?" inquired Mac, in a low tone of voice. "They've both wan, ye see."

"That's true!" said Carthew aloud. "Amalu and Hemstead, count your winnings; Tommy and I pay that."

It was carried without speech: the pair glad enough to receive their winnings, it mattered not from whence; and Tommy, who had lost about five hundred pounds, delighted with the compromise.

"And how about Mac?" asked Hemstead. "Is he to lose all?"

"I beg your pardon, plumber. I'm sure ye mean well," returned the



Irishman, "but you'd better shut your face, for I'm not that kind of a man. If I t'ought I had wan that money fair, there's never a soul here could get it from me. But I t'ought it was in fun; that was my mistake, ye see; and there's no man big enough upon this island to give a present to my mother's son. So there's my opinion to ye, plumber, and you can put it in your pockut till required."

"Well, I will say, Mac, you're a gentleman," said Carthew, as he helped him to shovel back his winnings into the treasure chest.

"Divil a fear of it, sir! a drunken sailor-man," said Mac.

The captain had sat some while with his face in his hands: now he rose mechanically, shaking and stumbling like a drunkard after a debauch. But as he rose, his face was altered, and his voice rang out over the isle, "Sail, ho!"

All turned at the cry, and there, in the wild light of the morning, heading straight for Midway Reef, was the brig Flying Scud of Hull.