

CHAPTER XXV. A BAD BARGAIN.

With the first colour in the east, Carthew awoke and sat up. A while he gazed at the scroll of the morning bank and the spars and hanging canvas of the brig, like a man who wakes in a strange bed, with a child's simplicity of wonder. He wondered above all what ailed him, what he had lost, what disfavour had been done him, which he knew he should resent, yet had forgotten. And then, like a river bursting through a dam, the truth rolled on him its instantaneous volume: his memory teemed with speech and pictures that he should never again forget; and he sprang to his feet, stood a moment hand to brow, and began to walk violently to and fro by the companion. As he walked, he wrung his hands. "God--God--God," he kept saying, with no thought of prayer, uttering a mere voice of agony.

The time may have been long or short, it was perhaps minutes, perhaps only seconds, ere he awoke to find himself observed, and saw the captain sitting up and watching him over the break of the poop, a strange blindness as of fever in his eyes, a haggard knot of corrugations on his brow. Cain saw himself in a mirror. For a flash they looked upon each other, and then glanced guiltily aside; and Carthew fled from the eye of his accomplice, and stood leaning on the taffrail.

An hour went by, while the day came brighter, and the sun rose and drank up the clouds: an hour of silence in the ship, an hour of agony beyond

narration for the sufferers. Brown's gabbling prayers, the cries of the sailors in the rigging, strains of the dead Hemstead's minstrelsy, ran together in Carthew's mind, with sickening iteration. He neither acquitted nor condemned himself: he did not think, he suffered. In the bright water into which he stared, the pictures changed and were repeated: the baresark rage of Goddedaal; the blood-red light of the sunset into which they had run forth; the face of the babbling Chinaman as they cast him over; the face of the captain, seen a moment since, as he awoke from drunkenness into remorse. And time passed, and the sun swam higher, and his torment was not abated.

Then were fulfilled many sayings, and the weakest of these condemned brought relief and healing to the others. Amalu the drudge awoke (like the rest) to sickness of body and distress of mind; but the habit of obedience ruled in that simple spirit, and appalled to be so late, he went direct into the galley, kindled the fire, and began to get breakfast. At the rattle of dishes, the snapping of the fire, and the thin smoke that went up straight into the air, the spell was lifted. The condemned felt once more the good dry land of habit under foot; they touched again the familiar guide-ropes of sanity; they were restored to a sense of the blessed revolution and return of all things earthly. The captain drew a bucket of water and began to bathe. Tommy sat up, watched him awhile, and slowly followed his example; and Carthew, remembering his last thoughts of the night before, hastened to the cabin.

Mac was awake; perhaps had not slept. Over his head Goddedaal's canary

twittered shrilly from its cage.

"How are you?" asked Carthew.

"Me arrum's broke," returned Mac; "but I can stand that. It's this place I can't abide. I was coming on deck anyway."

"Stay where you are, though," said Carthew. "It's deadly hot above, and there's no wind. I'll wash out this----" and he paused, seeking a word and not finding one for the grisly foulness of the cabin.

"Faith, I'll be obliged to ye, then," replied the Irishman. He spoke mild and meek, like a sick child with its mother. There was now no violence in the violent man; and as Carthew fetched a bucket and swab and the steward's sponge, and began to cleanse the field of battle, he alternately watched him or shut his eyes and sighed like a man near fainting. "I have to ask all your pardons," he began again presently, "and the more shame to me as I got ye into trouble and couldn't do nothing when it came. Ye saved me life, sir; ye're a clane shot."

"For God's sake, don't talk of it!" cried Carthew. "It can't be talked of; you don't know what it was. It was nothing down here; they fought. On deck--O, my God!" And Carthew, with the bloody sponge pressed to his face, struggled a moment with hysteria.

"Kape cool, Mr. Cart'ew. It's done now," said Mac; "and ye may bless God

ye're not in pain and helpless in the bargain."

There was no more said by one or other, and the cabin was pretty well cleansed when a stroke on the ship's bell summoned Carthew to breakfast. Tommy had been busy in the meanwhile; he had hauled the whaleboat close aboard, and already lowered into it a small keg of beef that he found ready broached beside the galley door; it was plain he had but the one idea--to escape.

"We have a shipful of stores to draw upon," he said. "Well, what are we staying for? Let's get off at once for Hawaii. I've begun preparing already."

"Mac has his arm broken," observed Carthew; "how would he stand the voyage?"

"A broken arm?" repeated the captain. "That all? I'll set it after breakfast. I thought he was dead like the rest. That madman hit out like----" and there, at the evocation of the battle, his voice ceased and the talk died with it.

After breakfast, the three white men went down into the cabin.

"I've come to set your arm," said the captain.

"I beg your pardon, captain," replied Mac; "but the firrst thing ye got

to do is to get this ship to sea. We'll talk of me arrum after that."

"O, there's no such blooming hurry," returned Wicks.

"When the next ship sails in, ye'll tell me stories!" retorted Mac.

"But there's nothing so unlikely in the world," objected Carthew.

"Don't be deceivin' yourself," said Mac. "If ye want a ship, divil a one'll look near ye in six year; but if ye don't, ye may take my word for ut, we'll have a squadron layin' here."

"That's what I say," cried Tommy; "that's what I call sense! Let's stock that whaleboat and be off."

"And what will Captain Wicks be thinking of the whaleboat?" asked the Irishman.

"I don't think of it at all," said Wicks. "We've a smart-looking brig under foot; that's all the whaleboat I want."

"Excuse me!" cried Tommy. "That's childish talk. You've got a brig, to be sure, and what use is she? You daren't go anywhere in her. What port are you to sail for?"

"For the port of Davy Jones's Locker, my son," replied the captain.

"This brig's going to be lost at sea. I'll tell you where, too, and that's about forty miles to windward of Kauai. We're going to stay by her till she's down; and once the masts are under, she's the Flying Scud no more, and we never heard of such a brig; and it's the crew of the schooner Currency Lass that comes ashore in the boat, and takes the first chance to Sydney."

"Captain dear, that's the first Christian word I've heard of ut!" cried Mac. "And now, just let me arrum be, jewel, and get the brig outside."

"I'm as anxious as yourself, Mac," returned Wicks; "but there's not wind enough to swear by. So let's see your arm, and no more talk."

The arm was set and splinted; the body of Brown fetched from the forepeak, where it lay still and cold, and committed to the waters of the lagoon; and the washing of the cabin rudely finished. All these were done ere midday; and it was past three when the first cat's-paw ruffled the lagoon, and the wind came in a dry squall, which presently sobered to a steady breeze.

The interval was passed by all in feverish impatience, and by one of the party in secret and extreme concern of mind. Captain Wicks was a fore-and-aft sailor; he could take a schooner through a Scotch reel, felt her mouth and divined her temper like a rider with a horse; she, on her side, recognising her master and following his wishes like a dog. But by a not very unusual train of circumstance, the man's dexterity was

partial and circumscribed. On a schooner's deck he was Rembrandt or (at the least) Mr. Whistler; on board a brig he was Pierre Grassou. Again and again in the course of the morning, he had reasoned out his policy and rehearsed his orders; and ever with the same depression and weariness. It was guess-work; it was chance; the ship might behave as he expected, and might not; suppose she failed him, he stood there helpless, beggared of all the proved resources of experience. Had not all hands been so weary, had he not feared to communicate his own misgivings, he could have towed her out. But these reasons sufficed, and the most he could do was to take all possible precautions. Accordingly he had Carthew aft, explained what was to be done with anxious patience, and visited along with him the various sheets and braces.

"I hope I'll remember," said Carthew. "It seems awfully muddled."

"It's the rottenest kind of rig," the captain admitted: "all blooming pocket handkerchiefs! And not one sailor-man on deck! Ah, if she'd only been a brigantine, now! But it's lucky the passage is so plain; there's no manoeuvring to mention. We get under way before the wind, and run right so till we begin to get foul of the island; then we haul our wind and lie as near south-east as may be till we're on that line; 'bout ship there and stand straight out on the port tack. Catch the idea?"

"Yes, I see the idea," replied Carthew, rather dismally, and the two incompetents studied for a long time in silence the complicated gear above their heads.

But the time came when these rehearsals must be put in practice. The sails were lowered, and all hands heaved the anchor short. The whaleboat was then cut adrift, the upper topsails and the spanker set, the yards braced up, and the spanker sheet hauled out to starboard.

"Heave away on your anchor, Mr. Carthew."

"Anchor's gone, sir."

"Set jibs."

It was done, and the brig still hung enchanted. Wicks, his head full of a schooner's mainsail, turned his mind to the spanker. First he hauled in the sheet, and then he hauled it out, with no result.

"Brail the damned thing up!" he bawled at last, with a red face. "There ain't no sense in it."

It was the last stroke of bewilderment for the poor captain, that he had no sooner brailed up the spanker than the vessel came before the wind. The laws of nature seemed to him to be suspended; he was like a man in a world of pantomime tricks; the cause of any result, and the probable result of any action, equally concealed from him. He was the more careful not to shake the nerve of his amateur assistants. He stood there with a face like a torch; but he gave his orders with aplomb; and

indeed, now the ship was under weigh, supposed his difficulties over.

The lower topsails and courses were then set, and the brig began to walk the water like a thing of life, her forefoot discoursing music, the birds flying and crying over her spars. Bit by bit the passage began to open and the blue sea to show between the flanking breakers on the reef; bit by bit, on the starboard bow, the low land of the islet began to heave closer aboard. The yards were braced up, the spanker sheet hauled aft again; the brig was close hauled, lay down to her work like a thing in earnest, and had soon drawn near to the point of advantage, where she might stay and lie out of the lagoon in a single tack.

Wicks took the wheel himself, swelling with success. He kept the brig full to give her heels, and began to bark his orders: "Ready about. Helm's a-lee. Tacks and sheets. Mainsail haul." And then the fatal words: "That'll do your mainsail; jump forrard and haul round your foreyards."

To stay a square-rigged ship is an affair of knowledge and swift sight; and a man used to the succinct evolutions of a schooner will always tend to be too hasty with a brig. It was so now. The order came too soon; the topsails set flat aback; the ship was in irons. Even yet, had the helm been reversed, they might have saved her. But to think of a stern-board at all, far more to think of profiting by one, were foreign to the schooner-sailor's mind. Wicks made haste instead to wear ship, a

manoeuvre for which room was wanting, and the Flying Scud took ground on

a bank of sand and coral about twenty minutes before five.

Wicks was no hand with a square-rigger, and he had shown it. But he was a sailor and a born captain of men for all homely purposes, where intellect is not required and an eye in a man's head and a heart under his jacket will suffice. Before the others had time to understand the misfortune, he was bawling fresh orders, and had the sails clewed up, and took soundings round the ship.

"She lies lovely," he remarked, and ordered out a boat with the starboard anchor.

"Here! steady!" cried Tommy. "You ain't going to turn us to, to warp her off?"

"I am though," replied Wicks.

"I won't set a hand to such tomfoolery for one," replied Tommy. "I'm dead beat." He went and sat down doggedly on the main hatch. "You got us on; get us off again," he added.

Carthew and Wicks turned to each other.

"Perhaps you don't know how tired we are," said Carthew.

"The tide's flowing!" cried the captain. "You wouldn't have me miss a rising tide?"

"O, gammon! there's tides to-morrow!" retorted Tommy.

"And I'll tell you what," added Carthew, "the breeze is failing fast, and the sun will soon be down. We may get into all kinds of fresh mess in the dark and with nothing but light airs."

"I don't deny it," answered Wicks, and stood awhile as if in thought. "But what I can't make out," he began again, with agitation, "what I can't make out is what you're made of! To stay in this place is beyond me. There's the bloody sun going down--and to stay here is beyond me!"

The others looked upon him with horrified surprise. This fall of their chief pillar--this irrational passion in the practical man, suddenly barred out of his true sphere, the sphere of action--shocked and daunted them. But it gave to another and unseen hearer the chance for which he had been waiting. Mac, on the striking of the brig, had crawled up the companion, and he now showed himself and spoke up.

"Captain Wicks," said he, "it's me that brought this trouble on the lot of ye. I'm sorry for ut, I ask all your pardons, and if there's any one can say 'I forgive ye,' it'll make my soul the lighter."

Wicks stared upon the man in amaze; then his self-control returned to him. "We're all in glass houses here," he said; "we ain't going to turn to and throw stones. I forgive you, sure enough; and much good may it do you!"

The others spoke to the same purpose.

"I thank ye for ut, and 'tis done like gentlemen," said Mac. "But there's another thing I have upon my mind. I hope we're all Prodestan's here?"

It appeared they were; it seemed a small thing for the Protestant religion to rejoice in!

"Well, that's as it should be," continued Mac. "And why shouldn't we say the Lord's Prayer? There can't be no hurt in ut."

He had the same quiet, pleading, childlike way with him as in the morning; and the others accepted his proposal, and knelt down without a word.

"Knale if ye like!" said he. "I'll stand." And he covered his eyes.

So the prayer was said to the accompaniment of the surf and seabirds, and all rose refreshed and felt lightened of a load. Up to then, they had cherished their guilty memories in private, or only referred to

them in the heat of a moment and fallen immediately silent. Now they had faced their remorse in company, and the worst seemed over. Nor was it only that. But the petition "Forgive us our trespasses," falling in so apposite after they had themselves forgiven the immediate author of their miseries, sounded like an absolution.

Tea was taken on deck in the time of the sunset, and not long after the five castaways--castaways once more--lay down to sleep.

Day dawned windless and hot. Their slumbers had been too profound to be refreshing, and they woke listless, and sat up, and stared about them with dull eyes. Only Wicks, smelling a hard day's work ahead, was more alert. He went first to the well, sounded it once and then a second time, and stood awhile with a grim look, so that all could see he was dissatisfied. Then he shook himself, stripped to the buff, clambered on the rail, drew himself up and raised his arms to plunge. The dive was never taken. He stood instead transfixed, his eyes on the horizon.

"Hand up that glass," he said.

In a trice they were all swarming aloft, the nude captain leading with the glass.

On the northern horizon was a finger of grey smoke, straight in the windless air like a point of admiration.

"What do you make it?" they asked of Wicks.

"She's truck down," he replied; "no telling yet. By the way the smoke builds, she must be heading right here."

"What can she be?"

"She might be a China mail," returned Wicks, "and she might be a blooming man-of-war, come to look for castaways. Here! This ain't the time to stand staring. On deck, boys!"

He was the first on deck, as he had been the first aloft, handed down the ensign, bent it again to the signal halliards, and ran it up union down.

"Now hear me," he said, jumping into his trousers, "and everything I say you grip on to. If that's a man-of-war, she'll be in a tearing hurry; all these ships are what don't do nothing and have their expenses paid. That's our chance; for we'll go with them, and they won't take the time to look twice or to ask a question. I'm Captain Trent; Carthew, you're Goddedaal; Tommy, you're Hardy; Mac's Brown; Amalu--Hold hard! we can't make a Chinaman of him! Ah Wing must have deserted; Amalu stowed away; and I turned him to as cook, and was never at the bother to sign him. Catch the idea? Say your names."

And that pale company recited their lesson earnestly.

"What were the names of the other two?" he asked. "Him Carthew shot in the companion, and the one I caught in the jaw on the main top-gallant?"

"Holdorsen and Wallen," said some one.

"Well, they're drowned," continued Wicks; "drowned alongside trying to lower a boat. We had a bit of a squall last night: that's how we got ashore." He ran and squinted at the compass. "Squall out of nor'-nor'-west-half-west; blew hard; every one in a mess, falls jammed, and Holdorsen and Wallen spilt overboard. See? Clear your blooming heads!" He was in his jacket now, and spoke with a feverish impatience and contention that rang like anger.

"But is it safe?" asked Tommy.

"Safe?" bellowed the captain. "We're standing on the drop, you moon-calf! If that ship's bound for China (which she don't look to be), we're lost as soon as we arrive; if she's bound the other way, she comes from China, don't she? Well, if there's a man on board of her that ever clapped eyes on Trent or any blooming hand out of this brig, we'll all be in irons in two hours. Safe! no, it ain't safe; it's a beggarly last chance to shave the gallows, and that's what it is."

At this convincing picture, fear took hold on all.

"Hadn't we a hundred times better stay by the brig?" cried Carthew.

"They would give us a hand to float her off."

"You'll make me waste this holy day in chattering!" cried Wicks. "Look here, when I sounded the bell this morning, there was two foot of water there against eight inches last night. What's wrong? I don't know; might be nothing; might be the worst kind of smash. And then, there we are in for a thousand miles in an open boat, if that's your taste!"

"But it may be nothing, and anyway their carpenters are bound to help us repair her," argued Carthew.

"Moses Murphy!" cried the captain. "How did she strike? Bows on, I believe. And she's down by the head now. If any carpenter comes tinkering here, where'll he go first? Down in the forepeak, I suppose! And then, how about all that blood among the chandlery? You would think you were a lot of members of Parliament discussing Plimsoll; and you're just a pack of murderers with the halter round your neck. Any other ass got any time to waste? No? Thank God for that! Now, all hands! I'm going below, and I leave you here on deck. You get the boat cover off that boat; then you turn to and open the specie chest. There are five of us; get five chests, and divide the specie equal among the five--put it at the bottom--and go at it like tigers. Get blankets, or canvas, or clothes, so it won't rattle. It'll make five pretty heavy chests, but we can't help that. You, Carthew--dash me!--You, Mr. Goddedaal, come below.

We've our share before us."

And he cast another glance at the smoke, and hurried below with Carthew at his heels.

The logs were found in the main cabin behind the canary's cage; two of them, one kept by Trent, one by Goddedaal. Wicks looked first at one, then at the other, and his lip stuck out.

"Can you forge hand of write?" he asked.

"No," said Carthew.

"There's luck for you--no more can I!" cried the captain. "Hullo! here's worse yet, here's this Goddedaal up to date; he must have filled it in before supper. See for yourself: 'Smoke observed.--Captain Kirkup and five hands of the schooner Currency Lass.' Ah! this is better," he added, turning to the other log. "The old man ain't written anything for a clear fortnight. We'll dispose of your log altogether, Mr. Goddedaal, and stick to the old man's--to mine, I mean; only I ain't going to write it up, for reasons of my own. You are. You're going to sit down right here and fill it in the way I tell you."

"How to explain the loss of mine?" asked Carthew.

"You never kept one," replied the captain. "Gross neglect of duty.

You'll catch it."

"And the change of writing?" resumed Carthew. "You began; why do you stop and why do I come in? And you'll have to sign anyway."

"O! I've met with an accident and can't write," replied Wicks.

"An accident?" repeated Carthew. "It don't sound natural. What kind of an accident?"

Wicks spread his hand face-up on the table, and drove a knife through his palm.

"That kind of an accident," said he. "There's a way to draw to windward of most difficulties, if you've a head on your shoulders." He began to bind up his hand with a handkerchief, glancing the while over Goddedaal's log. "Hullo!" he said, "this'll never do for us--this is an impossible kind of a yarn. Here, to begin with, is this Captain Trent trying some fancy course, leastways he's a thousand miles to south'ard of the great circle. And here, it seems, he was close up with this island on the sixth, sails all these days, and is close up with it again by daylight on the eleventh."

"Goddedaal said they had the deuce's luck," said Carthew.

"Well, it don't look like real life--that's all I can say," returned

Wicks.

"It's the way it was, though," argued Carthew.

"So it is; and what the better are we for that, if it don't look so?"
cried the captain, sounding unwonted depths of art criticism. "Here! try
and see if you can't tie this bandage; I'm bleeding like a pig."

As Carthew sought to adjust the handkerchief, his patient seemed sunk
in a deep muse, his eye veiled, his mouth partly open. The job was yet
scarce done, when he sprang to his feet.

"I have it," he broke out, and ran on deck. "Here, boys!" he cried, "we
didn't come here on the eleventh; we came in here on the evening of the
sixth, and lay here ever since becalmed. As soon as you've done with
these chests," he added, "you can turn to and roll out beef and water
breakers; it'll look more shipshape--like as if we were getting ready
for the boat voyage."

And he was back again in a moment, cooking the new log. Goddedaal's was
then carefully destroyed, and a hunt began for the ship's papers. Of
all the agonies of that breathless morning, this was perhaps the most
poignant. Here and there the two men searched, cursing, cannoning
together, streaming with heat, freezing with terror. News was bawled
down to them that the ship was indeed a man-of-war, that she was close
up, that she was lowering a boat; and still they sought in vain. By what

accident they missed the iron box with the money and accounts, is hard to fancy; but they did. And the vital documents were found at last in the pocket of Trent's shore-going coat, where he had left them when last he came on board.

Wicks smiled for the first time that morning. "None too soon," said he. "And now for it! Take these others for me; I'm afraid I'll get them mixed if I keep both."

"What are they?" Carthew asked.

"They're the Kirkup and Currency Lass papers," he replied. "Pray God we need 'em again!"

"Boat's inside the lagoon, sir," hailed down Mac, who sat by the skylight doing sentry while the others worked.

"Time we were on deck, then, Mr. Goddedaal," said Wicks.

As they turned to leave the cabin, the canary burst into piercing song.

"My God!" cried Carthew, with a gulp, "we can't leave that wretched bird to starve. It was poor Goddedaal's."

"Bring the bally thing along!" cried the captain.

And they went on deck.

An ugly brute of a modern man-of-war lay just without the reef, now quite inert, now giving a flap or two with her propeller. Nearer hand, and just within, a big white boat came skimming to the stroke of many oars, her ensign blowing at the stern.

"One word more," said Wicks, after he had taken in the scene. "Mac, you've been in China ports? All right; then you can speak for yourself. The rest of you I kept on board all the time we were in Hongkong, hoping you would desert; but you fooled me and stuck to the brig. That'll make your lying come easier."

The boat was now close at hand; a boy in the stern sheets was the only officer, and a poor one plainly, for the men were talking as they pulled.

"Thank God, they've only sent a kind of a middy!" ejaculated Wicks. "Here you, Hardy, stand for'ard! I'll have no deck hands on my quarter-deck," he cried, and the reproof braced the whole crew like a cold douche.

The boat came alongside with perfect neatness, and the boy officer stepped on board, where he was respectfully greeted by Wicks.

"You the master of this ship?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said Wicks. "Trent is my name, and this is the Flying Scud of Hull."

"You seem to have got into a mess," said the officer.

"If you'll step aft with me here, I'll tell you all there is of it," said Wicks.

"Why, man, you're shaking!" cried the officer.

"So would you, perhaps, if you had been in the same berth," returned Wicks; and he told the whole story of the rotten water, the long calm, the squall, the seamen drowned; glibly and hotly; talking, with his head in the lion's mouth, like one pleading in the dock. I heard the same tale from the same narrator in the saloon in San Francisco; and even then his bearing filled me with suspicion. But the officer was no observer.

"Well, the captain is in no end of a hurry," said he; "but I was instructed to give you all the assistance in my power, and signal back for another boat if more hands were necessary. What can I do for you?"

"O, we won't keep you no time," replied Wicks cheerily. "We're all ready, bless you--men's chests, chronometer, papers and all."

"Do you mean to leave her?" cried the officer. "She seems to me to lie nicely; can't we get your ship off?"

"So we could, and no mistake; but how we're to keep her afloat's another question. Her bows is stove in," replied Wicks.

The officer coloured to the eyes. He was incompetent and knew he was; thought he was already detected, and feared to expose himself again. There was nothing further from his mind than that the captain should deceive him; if the captain was pleased, why, so was he. "All right," he said. "Tell your men to get their chests aboard."

"Mr. Goddedaal, turn the hands to to get the chests aboard," said Wicks.

The four Currency Lassies had waited the while on tenter-hooks. This welcome news broke upon them like the sun at midnight; and Hadden burst into a storm of tears, sobbing aloud as he heaved upon the tackle. But the work went none the less briskly forward; chests, men, and bundles were got over the side with alacrity; the boat was shoved off; it moved out of the long shadow of the Flying Scud, and its bows were pointed at the passage.

So much, then, was accomplished. The sham wreck had passed muster; they

were clear of her, they were safe away; and the water widened between

them and her damning evidences. On the other hand, they were drawing nearer to the ship of war, which might very well prove to be their prison and a hangman's cart to bear them to the gallows--of which they had not yet learned either whence she came or whither she was bound; and the doubt weighed upon their heart like mountains.

It was Wicks who did the talking. The sound was small in Carthew's ears, like the voices of men miles away, but the meaning of each word struck home to him like a bullet. "What did you say your ship was?" inquired Wicks.

"Tempest, don't you know?" returned the officer.

Don't you know? What could that mean? Perhaps nothing: perhaps that the ships had met already. Wicks took his courage in both hands. "Where is she bound?" he asked.

"O, we're just looking in at all these miserable islands here," said the officer. "Then we bear up for San Francisco."

"O, yes, you're from China ways, like us?" pursued Wicks.

"Hong Kong," said the officer, and spat over the side.

Hong Kong. Then the game was up; as soon as they set foot on board, they would be seized; the wreck would be examined, the blood found, the

lagoon perhaps dredged, and the bodies of the dead would reappear to testify. An impulse almost uncontrollable bade Carthew rise from the thwart, shriek out aloud, and leap overboard; it seemed so vain a thing to dissemble longer, to dally with the inevitable, to spin out some hundred seconds more of agonised suspense, with shame and death thus visibly approaching. But the indomitable Wicks persevered. His face was like a skull, his voice scarce recognisable; the dullest of men and officers (it seemed) must have remarked that telltale countenance and broken utterance. And still he persevered, bent upon certitude.

"Nice place, Hong Kong?" he said.

"I'm sure I don't know," said the officer. "Only a day and a half there; called for orders and came straight on here. Never heard of such a beastly cruise." And he went on describing and lamenting the untoward fortunes of the *Tempest*.

But Wicks and Carthew heeded him no longer. They lay back on the gunnel, breathing deep, sunk in a stupor of the body: the mind within still nimbly and agreeably at work, measuring the past danger, exulting in the present relief, numbering with ecstasy their ultimate chances of escape. For the voyage in the man-of-war they were now safe; yet a few more days of peril, activity, and presence of mind in San Francisco, and the whole horrid tale was blotted out; and Wicks again became Kirkup, and Goddedaal became Carthew--men beyond all shot of possible suspicion, men who had never heard of the *Flying Scud*, who had never been in sight of

Midway Reef.

So they came alongside, under many craning heads of seamen and projecting mouths of guns; so they climbed on board somnambulous, and looked blindly about them at the tall spars, the white decks, and the crowding ship's company, and heard men as from far away, and answered them at random.

And then a hand fell softly on Carthew's shoulder.

"Why, Norrie, old chappie, where have you dropped from? All the world's been looking for you. Don't you know you've come into your kingdom?"

He turned, beheld the face of his old schoolmate Sebright, and fell unconscious at his feet.

The doctor was attending him, a while later, in Lieutenant Sebright's cabin, when he came to himself. He opened his eyes, looked hard in the strange face, and spoke with a kind of solemn vigour.

"Brown must go the same road," he said; "now or never." And then paused, and his reason coming to him with more clearness, spoke again: "What was I saying? Where am I? Who are you?"

"I am the doctor of the Tempest," was the reply. "You are in Lieutenant

Sebright's berth, and you may dismiss all concern from your mind. Your troubles are over, Mr. Carthew."

"Why do you call me that?" he asked. "Ah, I remember--Sebright knew me! O!" and he groaned and shook. "Send down Wicks to me; I must see Wicks at once!" he cried, and seized the doctor's wrist with unconscious violence.

"All right," said the doctor. "Let's make a bargain. You swallow down this draught, and I'll go and fetch Wicks."

And he gave the wretched man an opiate that laid him out within ten minutes and in all likelihood preserved his reason.

It was the doctor's next business to attend to Mac; and he found occasion, while engaged upon his arm, to make the man repeat the names of the rescued crew. It was now the turn of the captain, and there is no doubt he was no longer the man that we have seen; sudden relief, the sense of perfect safety, a square meal and a good glass of grog, had all combined to relax his vigilance and depress his energy.

"When was this done?" asked the doctor, looking at the wound.

"More than a week ago," replied Wicks, thinking singly of his log.

"Hey?" cried the doctor, and he raised his hand and looked the captain

in the eyes.

"I don't remember exactly," faltered Wicks.

And at this remarkable falsehood, the suspicions of the doctor were at once quadrupled.

"By the way, which of you is called Wicks?" he asked easily.

"What's that?" snapped the captain, falling white as paper.

"Wicks," repeated the doctor; "which of you is he? that's surely a plain question."

Wicks stared upon his questioner in silence.

"Which is Brown, then?" pursued the doctor.

"What are you talking of? what do you mean by this?" cried Wicks, snatching his half-bandaged hand away, so that the blood sprinkled in the surgeon's face.

He did not trouble to remove it. Looking straight at his victim, he pursued his questions. "Why must Brown go the same way?" he asked.

Wicks fell trembling on a locker. "Carthew's told you," he cried.

"No," replied the doctor, "he has not. But he and you between you have set me thinking, and I think there's something wrong."

"Give me some grog," said Wicks. "I'd rather tell than have you find out. I'm damned if it's half as bad as what any one would think."

And with the help of a couple of strong grogs, the tragedy of the Flying Scud was told for the first time.

It was a fortunate series of accidents that brought the story to the doctor. He understood and pitied the position of these wretched men, and came whole-heartedly to their assistance. He and Wicks and Carthew (so soon as he was recovered) held a hundred councils and prepared a policy for San Francisco. It was he who certified "Goddedaal" unfit to be moved and smuggled Carthew ashore under cloud of night; it was he who kept Wicks's wound open that he might sign with his left hand; he who took all their Chile silver and (in the course of the first day) got it converted for them into portable gold. He used his influence in the wardroom to keep the tongues of the young officers in order, so that Carthew's identification was kept out of the papers. And he rendered another service yet more important. He had a friend in San Francisco, a millionaire; to this man he privately presented Carthew as a young gentleman come newly into a huge estate, but troubled with Jew debts which he was trying to settle on the quiet. The millionaire came readily to help; and it was with his money that the wrecker gang was to be

fought. What was his name, out of a thousand guesses? It was Douglas Longhurst.

As long as the Currency Lassies could all disappear under fresh names, it did not greatly matter if the brig were bought, or any small discrepancies should be discovered in the wrecking. The identification of one of their number had changed all that. The smallest scandal must now direct attention to the movements of Norris. It would be asked how he who had sailed in a schooner from Sydney, had turned up so shortly after in a brig out of Hong Kong; and from one question to another all his original shipmates were pretty sure to be involved. Hence arose naturally the idea of preventing danger, profiting by Carthew's new-found wealth, and buying the brig under an alias; and it was put in hand with equal energy and caution. Carthew took lodgings alone under a false name, picked up Bellairs at random, and commissioned him to buy the wreck.

"What figure, if you please?" the lawyer asked.

"I want it bought," replied Carthew. "I don't mind about the price."

"Any price is no price," said Bellairs. "Put a name upon it."

"Call it ten thousand pounds then, if you like!" said Carthew.

In the meanwhile, the captain had to walk the streets, appear in the

consulate, be cross-examined by Lloyd's agent, be badgered about his lost accounts, sign papers with his left hand, and repeat his lies to every skipper in San Francisco: not knowing at what moment he might run into the arms of some old friend who should hail him by the name of Wicks, or some new enemy who should be in a position to deny him that of Trent. And the latter incident did actually befall him, but was transformed by his stout countenance into an element of strength. It was in the consulate (of all untoward places) that he suddenly heard a big voice inquiring for Captain Trent. He turned with the customary sinking at his heart.

"YOU ain't Captain Trent!" said the stranger, falling back. "Why, what's all this? They tell me you're passing off as Captain Trent--Captain Jacob Trent--a man I knew since I was that high."

"O, you're thinking of my uncle as had the bank in Cardiff," replied Wicks, with desperate aplomb.

"I declare I never knew he had a nevvvy!" said the stranger.

"Well, you see he has!" says Wicks.

"And how is the old man?" asked the other.

"Fit as a fiddle," answered Wicks, and was opportunely summoned by the clerk.

This alert was the only one until the morning of the sale, when he was once more alarmed by his interview with Jim; and it was with some anxiety that he attended the sale, knowing only that Carthew was to be represented, but neither who was to represent him nor what were the instructions given. I suppose Captain Wicks is a good life. In spite of his personal appearance and his own known uneasiness, I suppose he is secure from apoplexy, or it must have struck him there and then, as he looked on at the stages of that insane sale and saw the old brig and her not very valuable cargo knocked down at last to a total stranger for ten thousand pounds.

It had been agreed that he was to avoid Carthew, and above all Carthew's lodging, so that no connexion might be traced between the crew and the pseudonymous purchaser. But the hour for caution was gone by, and he caught a tram and made all speed to Mission Street.

Carthew met him in the door.

"Come away, come away from here," said Carthew; and when they were clear of the house, "All's up!" he added.

"O, you've heard of the sale, then?" said Wicks.

"The sale!" cried Carthew. "I declare I had forgotten it." And he told

of the voice in the telephone, and the maddening question: "Why did you want to buy the Flying Scud?"

This circumstance, coming on the back of the monstrous improbabilities of the sale, was enough to have shaken the reason of Immanuel Kant. The earth seemed banded together to defeat them; the stones and the boys on the street appeared to be in possession of their guilty secret. Flight was their one thought. The treasure of the Currency Lass they packed in waist-belts, expressed their chests to an imaginary address in British Columbia, and left San Francisco the same afternoon, booked for Los Angeles.

The next day they pursued their retreat by the Southern Pacific route, which Carthew followed on his way to England; but the other three branched off for Mexico.

EPILOGUE:

TO WILL H. LOW.

DEAR LOW: The other day (at Manihiki of all places) I had the pleasure to meet Dodd. We sat some two hours in the neat, little, toy-like church, set with pews after the manner of Europe, and inlaid with mother-of-pearl in the style (I suppose) of the New Jerusalem. The

natives, who are decidedly the most attractive inhabitants of this planet, crowded round us in the pew, and fawned upon and patted us; and here it was I put my questions, and Dodd answered me.

I first carried him back to the night in Barbizon when Carthew told his story, and asked him what was done about Bellairs. It seemed he had put the matter to his friend at once, and that Carthew took it with an inimitable lightness. "He's poor, and I'm rich," he had said. "I can afford to smile at him. I go somewhere else, that's all--somewhere that's far away and dear to get to. Persia would be found to answer, I fancy. No end of a place, Persia. Why not come with me?" And they had left the next afternoon for Constantinople, on their way to Teheran. Of the shyster, it is only known (by a newspaper paragraph) that he returned somehow to San Francisco and died in the hospital.

"Now there's another point," said I. "There you are off to Persia with a millionaire, and rich yourself. How come you here in the South Seas, running a trader?"

He said, with a smile, that I had not yet heard of Jim's last bankruptcy. "I was about cleaned out once more," he said; "and then it was that Carthew had this schooner built, and put me in as supercargo. It's his yacht and it's my trader; and as nearly all the expenses go to the yacht, I do pretty well. As for Jim, he's right again: one of the best businesses, they say, in the West, fruit, cereals, and real estate; and he has a Tartar of a partner now--Nares, no less. Nares will keep

him straight, Nares has a big head. They have their country-places next door at Saucelito, and I stayed with them time about, the last time I was on the coast. Jim had a paper of his own--I think he has a notion of being senator one of these days--and he wanted me to throw up the schooner and come and write his editorials. He holds strong views on the State Constitution, and so does Mamie."

"And what became of the other three Currency Lassies after they left Carthew?" I inquired.

"Well, it seems they had a huge spree in the city of Mexico," said Dodd; "and then Hadden and the Irishman took a turn at the gold fields in Venezuela, and Wicks went on alone to Valparaiso. There's a Kirkup in the Chilean navy to this day, I saw the name in the papers about the Balmaceda war. Hadden soon wearied of the mines, and I met him the other day in Sydney. The last news he had from Venezuela, Mac had been knocked over in an attack on the gold train. So there's only the three of them left, for Amalu scarcely counts. He lives on his own land in Maui, at the side of Hale-a-ka-la, where he keeps Goddedaal's canary; and they say he sticks to his dollars, which is a wonder in a Kanaka. He had a considerable pile to start with, for not only Hemstead's share but Carthew's was divided equally among the other four--Mac being counted."

"What did that make for him altogether?" I could not help asking, for I had been diverted by the number of calculations in his narrative.

"One hundred and twenty-eight pounds nineteen shillings and eleven pence halfpenny," he replied with composure. "That's leaving out what little he won at Van John. It's something for a Kanaka, you know."

And about that time we were at last obliged to yield to the solicitations of our native admirers, and go to the pastor's house to drink green cocoanuts. The ship I was in was sailing the same night, for Dodd had been beforehand and got all the shell in the island; and though he pressed me to desert and return with him to Auckland (whither he was now bound to pick up Carthew) I was firm in my refusal.

The truth is, since I have been mixed up with Havens and Dodd in the design to publish the latter's narrative, I seem to feel no want for Carthew's society. Of course I am wholly modern in sentiment, and think nothing more noble than to publish people's private affairs at so much a line. They like it, and if they don't, they ought to. But a still small voice keeps telling me they will not like it always, and perhaps not always stand it. Memory besides supplies me with the face of a pressman (in the sacred phrase) who proved altogether too modern for one of his neighbours, and

Qui nunc it per iter tenebricosum

as it were, marshalling us our way. I am in no haste to

--nos proecedens--

be that man's successor. Carthew has a record as "a clane shot," and for some years Samoa will be good enough for me.

We agreed to separate, accordingly; but he took me on board in his own boat with the hard-wood fittings, and entertained me on the way with an account of his late visit to Butaritari, whither he had gone on an errand for Carthew, to see how Topelius was getting along, and, if necessary, to give him a helping hand. But Topelius was in great force, and had patronised and--well--out-manoevred him.

"Carthew will be pleased," said Dodd; "for there's no doubt they oppressed the man abominably when they were in the Currency Lass. It's diamond cut diamond now."

This, I think, was the most of the news I got from my friend Loudon; and I hope I was well inspired, and have put all the questions to which you would be curious to hear an answer.

But there is one more that I daresay you are burning to put to myself; and that is, what your own name is doing in this place, cropping up (as it were uncalled-for) on the stern of our poor ship? If you were not born in Arcadia, you linger in fancy on its margin; your thoughts are

busied with the flutes of antiquity, with daffodils, and the classic poplar, and the footsteps of the nymphs, and the elegant and moving aridity of ancient art. Why dedicate to you a tale of a caste so modern;--full of details of our barbaric manners and unstable morals;--full of the need and the lust of money, so that there is scarce a page in which the dollars do not jingle;--full of the unrest and movement of our century, so that the reader is hurried from place to place and sea to sea, and the book is less a romance than a panorama--in the end, as blood-bespattered as an epic?

Well, you are a man interested in all problems of art, even the most vulgar; and it may amuse you to hear the genesis and growth of *The Wrecker*. On board the schooner *Equator*, almost within sight of the Johnstone Islands (if anybody knows where these are) and on a moonlit night when it was a joy to be alive, the authors were amused with several stories of the sale of wrecks. The subject tempted them; and they sat apart in the alley-way to discuss its possibilities. "What a tangle it would make," suggested one, "if the wrong crew were aboard. But how to get the wrong crew there?"--"I have it!" cried the other; "the so-and-so affair!" For not so many months before, and not so many hundred miles from where we were then sailing, a proposition almost tantamount to that of Captain Trent had been made by a British skipper to some British castaways.

Before we turned in, the scaffolding of the tale had been put together. But the question of treatment was as usual more obscure. We had long

been at once attracted and repelled by that very modern form of the police novel or mystery story, which consists in beginning your yarn anywhere but at the beginning, and finishing it anywhere but at the end; attracted by its peculiar interest when done, and the peculiar difficulties that attend its execution; repelled by that appearance of insincerity and shallowness of tone, which seems its inevitable drawback. For the mind of the reader, always bent to pick up clues, receives no impression of reality or life, rather of an airless, elaborate mechanism; and the book remains enthralling, but insignificant, like a game of chess, not a work of human art. It seemed the cause might lie partly in the abrupt attack; and that if the tale were gradually approached, some of the characters introduced (as it were) beforehand, and the book started in the tone of a novel of manners and experience briefly treated, this defect might be lessened and our mystery seem to inhere in life. The tone of the age, its movement, the mingling of races and classes in the dollar hunt, the fiery and not quite unromantic struggle for existence with its changing trades and scenery, and two types in particular, that of the American handy-man of business and that of the Yankee merchant sailor--we agreed to dwell upon at some length, and make the woof to our not very precious warp. Hence Dodd's father, and Pinkerton, and Nares, and the Dromedary picnics, and the railway work in New South Wales--the last an unsolicited testimonial from the powers that be, for the tale was half written before I saw Carthew's squad toil in the rainy cutting at South Clifton, or heard from the engineer of his "young swell." After we had invented at some expense of time this method of approaching and fortifying our police

novel, it occurred to us it had been invented previously by some one else, and was in fact--however painfully different the results may seem--the method of Charles Dickens in his later work.

I see you staring. Here, you will say, is a prodigious quantity of theory to our halfpenny worth of police novel; and withal not a shadow of an answer to your question.

Well, some of us like theory. After so long a piece of practice, these may be indulged for a few pages. And the answer is at hand. It was plainly desirable, from every point of view of convenience and contrast, that our hero and narrator should partly stand aside from those with whom he mingles, and be but a pressed-man in the dollar hunt. Thus it was that Loudon Dodd became a student of the plastic arts, and that our globe-trotting story came to visit Paris and look in at Barbizon. And thus it is, dear Low, that your name appears in the address of this epilogue.

For sure, if any person can here appreciate and read between the lines, it must be you--and one other, our friend. All the dominos will be transparent to your better knowledge; the statuary contract will be to you a piece of ancient history; and you will not have now heard for the first time of the dangers of Roussillon. Dead leaves from the Bas Breau, echoes from Lavenue's and the Rue Racine, memories of a common past, let these be your bookmarkers as you read. And if you care for naught else in the story, be a little pleased to breathe once more for a moment the

airs of our youth.

The End.