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The Adventures of Captain Kettle

By CUTCLIFFE HYNE

No. II— The Salving of the Duncansby Head

"The boat's an old P. and O. lifeboat," said Mr. McTodd, "diagonal-built, of teak and quite big enough for the purpose. Of course, something with steam in her would be better, because we're both steamer men, but that's out of the question. That would mean too many to share. So the thing is, can you buy this lifeboat and victual her for the trip? I'm no' what ye might call a capitalist myself, just for the moment."

Capt. Kettle eyed the grimy serge of his companion with disfavor. "You don't look it," he said.

"That last engine room you got sacked from must have been a mighty filthy place."

"'Twas," said McTodd. "But as it happened, I didn't get the sack. I ran from her here in Gib because I'd no wish to get back to England and have this news useless in my pocket. And, of course, I had to let slide the eight pound in wages that was due to me."

"By James, it's beginning to look like business when a Scottie runs away from siller that he's righteously earned."

"Well, I'm no' denying it was a speculation. It's a bit of a speculation, if I'm come to reckon up, asking a newly fledged sea captain to join in such a venture."

Kettle's face hardened, "See here," he said, "keep a civil tongue in your head, or go out of this lodging. I'm to be treated with respect, or I don't deal with you."

"Then let my clothes alone and be civil yourself. It's a mighty dry shop this, captain."

"I've no whisky in the place nor spare money to buy it. If we're to go on with this plan of yours we shall want every dollar that can be raised."

"That's true, and neither me nor Tonio have 10 shillings between us."

Kettle gave up pacing the room and set himself on the edge of the table and frowned. "I don't see the use of taking either Antonio, if that's his name, or your other Dago. I don't like the breed of them. You and I would be quite enough to handle an open boat, and quite able to take care of ourselves. If the wreck's got the money on her, and we dinger it, we'll promise to bring them back their share all right; and if the thing's a fizzle, as it's very likely to be, well they'll be saved a very unpleasant boat cruise."

"It's no go," said the engineer, "and you may make up your mind to have them as shipmates, captain, or sit here on your tail where you are. D'ye think I've got any appetite for Dagos myself? No, sir, no more than you. I don't trust them no more than a stripped thread. And they don't trust me. They wouldn't trust you. They would no' trust the provost of Edinboro' if he was to make similar proposals to them."

"Then have you no idea where this steamboat was put on the ground?"

"Man, I've telled ye 'no' already."

"Seems to me you don't know much, Mr. McTodd."

"I don't. What I know is this: I came ashore here after a very exhausting trip down the Mediterranean, just for a drink to fortify the system against the chills on the run home. I went to a little dark shebeen, where I kenned the cutthroat in charge, and gave the name of the ship I wanted sending back to, in case sleep overcame me, and settled down for an afternoon's enjoyment. Ye'll ken what I mean?"

I know you're a drunken beast when you get the chance for an orgie."

"I have my weaknesses, captain, or maybe, I'd no' have left Ballindrochater, where my father was Free Kirk minister. We both have our weaknesses, Capt. Owen Kettle, and it's they that have brought us to what we are."

"If you don't leave me alone and get on with your yarn," said Kettle acidly, "you'll find yourself in the street."

"O, I like your hospitality fine, and I'll stay, thanks, Weel, I'd just settled myself down to a good square drink at this Spaniard's shebeen, when out of a dark corner comes 'Tonio and the other dago, bowing and taking off their hats as polite as though I'd been an archbishop at the very best.

"I'd met 'Tonio in Lagos. He was a greaser on a branch boat there, and I was her second engineer. He's some English, and he did the talking. The other dago knew nothing but his own unrighteous tongue, and just said see-see when 'Tonio explained to him what was going on, and grinned like a bagful of monkeys. I give 'Tonio credit; he spat out his tale like a man. He and his mate were in the stokehold of a dago steamboat coming from the river Platte to Genoa, and calling at some of the western islands en route.

"One night they were just going off watch, and were leaning over the rail to get a breath of cool air before turning in. They were steaming past some rocky islands, and there in plain sight ashore. There was no mistake about it! they both saw her; a steamboat of some 1,500 tons. And what was more, the other Portugee, 'Tonio's friend, said he knew her. According to him she was the Duncansby Head. He'd served in her stokehold three voyages, and he said he'd know her anywhere."

"A dago word isn't worth much for a thing like that," said Kettle.

"Wait a bit. The pair of them staid where they were and looked at the rest of the watch on deck. The second mate on the bridge was staring ahead sleepily; the quartermaster at the wheel was nodding and blinking at the binnacle; the lookout on the forecastle was seated on a fife-rail, snoring; no one of these had seen the wreck. And so they themselves didn't talk. Their boat was running short of coal, and so she put into Gib here to rebunker; and from another dago on the coal-hulk, who came aboard to help trim, they got some news. The Duncansby Head had shifted her cargo at sea, had picked up heavy weather and got unmanageable, and had been left by her crew in the boats. The mate's boat and the second mate's boat were picked up; the old man's boat had not been heard of. It was supposed that the Duncansby Head herself had foundered immediately after she was deserted."

"Yes, all that's common gossip on the Rock. Mulready was her skipper—J. R. Mulready—I'd known him years."

"Weel, poor deevil, it's perhaps good for him he's drowned."

"Yes, I suppose it is. He's saved a sight of trouble. D'ye know, Mac, Jimmy Mulready and I passed for mate the same day, and went to sea with our bran new tickets in the same ship, him as mate, me as second."

"The sea's an awful poor profession for all, except a shipowner that lives ashore."

"'Tis. Yes, that's a true word. It is. And so Antonio and his mate told the other dago, that they'd seen the wreck?"

"Not much. They kept their heads shut. There was money in the idea if it could only be worked, and a Portugee likes dollars as much as a white man. So there you have the whole yarn, except that they got to knew that the Duncansby was on her way home after a long spell at tramping when she got into trouble, and carried all the money she'd earned in good solid gold in the charthouse drawer."

"It sounds a soft thing, I'll not deny," said Kettle. "But why should Mr. Antonio and his friend come to you?"

"They ran from their ship here in Gib and laid low till she had sailed. It was the natural thing for them to do. But when they began to look round them in cold blood they found themselves a bit on the beach. They'd no money; there's such a shady crowd here in Gib that everything's well watched, and they couldn't steal; and so there was nothing for it but to take a partner into the concern. Of course being Dagos they weren't likely to trust one of their own sort."

"Not much. And so they came to you?"

"They knew me," said the engineer. "And I came to you because I knew you, captain. I'm no navigator myself, though I can make shift to handle a sailboat, so a navigator was wanted. I said to myself the man in all creation for this job is Capt. Kettle, and then what should I do but run right up against you."

"Thank you, Mac."

"But there's one other thing you'll have to do, and that's buy, beg, borrow or steal the ship to carry the expedition, because the rest of us can't raise a blessed shilling amongst us. It needn't be a big outlay. That old P. & O. life boat, which I was talking about would carry us fine, and I think three £5 notes would buy her."

"Very well," said Kettle. "And now let's get a move on us. There's been enough time spent in talk, and the sooner we're on that wreck the less chance there is of any one else getting there to overhaul her before us."

It would be unprofitable to follow in detail the fitting out of this wrecking expedition upon insufficient capital, and so be it briefly stated that the old lifeboat (which had passed through many hands since she was cast from the P. & O. service) was purchased by dint of haggling for an absurdly small sum, and victualled and watered for 18 days. The Portuguese, who still refused to disclose the precise location of the wreck, said that it might take a fortnight to reach her, and prudence would have suggested that it was advisable to take at least a month's provisions. But the meagerness of their capital flatly forbade this, and they were only able to furnish the boat with what would spin out to 18 days on an uncomfortably short ration. They trusted that what pickings they might find in the storerooms of the wreck herself would provide them for the return voyage.

With this slender equipment then, they sailed forth from Gibraltar Bay, an obvious party of adventurers. They were bombarded by the questions and the curious stares of all the shipping interest on the Rock; they were flatly given to understand by a naval boatbody (who had been bidden carry his inquisitiveness to the deuce) that they had earned official suspicion and would be watched accordingly, and if ever illwishes could sink a craft, that ancient P. & O. lifeboat was full to her marks.

The voyage did not begin with prosperity. There is always a strong surface current running in through the straits, and just then the breezes were light. The lifeboat was a dull sailer, and her people in consequence had the mortification of keeping Carnero Point and the frowning Rock behind in sight for three baking days. The two Portuguese were first profane, then sullen, then frightened; some saint's day, it appeared, had been violated by the start; and they began first to hint at, and then to insist on a return. To which Kettle retorted that he was going to see the matter through now, if he had to hang in the straits for the whole 18 days, and subsist for the rest of the trip upon dew and their belts; and in this McTodd backed him up.

Once started away from the whisky bottle, there was nothing very yielding about Mr McTodd. Only one compromise did Kettle offer to make. He would stand across and drop his Portuguese partners on the African shore if they on their part would disclose the whereabouts of the wreck; and in due time, when the dividends were gathered, he faithfully promised them their share. But to this they would not consent. In fact, there was a good deal of mutual distrust between the two parties.

At last, however, a kindly slant of wind took the lifeboat in charge and hustled her wetly out into broad Atlantic; and when they had run the shores of Europe and Africa out of sight, and there was nothing around them but the blue heaving water, with here and there a sail and a steamer's smoke, the Senor Antonio saw fit to give Capt. Kettle a course.

"We was steamin' froma Teneriffe to Madeira when we saw thosea rocks with Doncansby Head asho'."

"H'm," said Kettle. "Those'll be the Salvage Islands."

"Steamah was pile up on de first. 'Nother island we pass after."

"That's Piton Island if I remember. "Let's have a look at the chart." He handed over the tiller to McTodd, took a tattered Admiralty chart from one of the lockers and spread it on the damp floor gratings. The two Portuguese helped with their brown paws to keep it from fluttering away. "Yes, either Little Piton or Great Piton. Which side did you pass it on?"

Antonio thumped a gunwale of the lifeboat.

"Kept it on the port hand going north, did you? Then it must be Great Piton, and a sweet show it is for reefs according to this chart. I wish I'd a Directory. It will be a regular cat's dance getting in. But I say, young man, isn't there a light there?"

"Lighta?" I not understand."

"You savvy — lighthouse — faro — show-mark-light in dark?"

"O, yes, lighthouse. I got there. No, no lighthouse."

"Well, there's one marked here as 'projected,' and I was afraid it might have come. I forgot the Canaries were Spanish, and Madeira was Portugee, and that these rocks which lie halfway would be a sort of slack cross between the pair of them. Manana's the motto, isn't it Tenio? Never do to-day what you hope another flat will do for you to-morrow."

"So, si, manana," said the Portuguese, who had not understood one word in ten of all this. Manana we find rich, plenty too much rich. God save queen!"

"Those Canary fishing schooners land on the Salvages sometimes," said McTodd, "so I heard once in Las Palmas,"

"I guest we got to take our chances, Mac. If the old wreck's been overhauled before we get there, it's our bad luck; if she hasn't been skimmed clean, we'll take what we can and I fancy we shall be men enough to stick to it. It isn't as if she was piled up on some civilized beach with coastguards to take possession and all the rest of it. The islands are either Spanish or Portuguese. They belong to a pack of thieves anyway, and we've just as much right to help ourselves as anyone else has. What we've got to do at present is to shove for the ruin of a lifeboat along as though she were a racing yacht. At the shortest we've got 700 miles of the blue water ahead of us."

Open-boat voyaging in the broad Atlantic may have its pleasures, but these, such as they were, did not appeal to either Kettle or his companions. They were thoughgoing steamer sailors; they despised sails, and the smallness of their craft gave them qualms both mental and physical. By day the sun scorched them with intolerable glare and violence; by night the clammy sea mists drenched them to the bone.

For a larger vessel the weather would have been accounted favorable; for their cockle-shell it was once or twice terrific. In two squalls that they ran into breaking combers filled the lifeboat to the thwarts, and they had to bale for their bare lives. They were cramped and sore from their constrained position and want of exercise; they got sea sores on their wrists and salt grime on every inch of their persons; they were growing gaunt on the scanty rations; and, in fact, a better presentation of a boat full of desperate castaways it would be hard to hit upon. Flotillas of iridescent, pink-sailed nautilus scudded constantly astern; and these made their only company. Except for the nautilus, the sea seemed desolate.

In this guise then they ended their voyage, which had spun out to nigh upon 1,000 miles through contrary winds and the necessity for incessant tacking; and in the height of one blazing afternoon they rose to the tops of the islands out of a twinkling turquoise sea.

These appeared first as mere dusty black rocks sticking up out of the calm blue—Great Salvage island to the north-ward and Great Piton to the south and beyond—but they grew as the boat neared them, and presently appeared to be built upon a frieze of dazzling feathery whiteness. The lifeboat swept on to reach them, climbing and diving over the rollers. She had canvas decks, quartermast high, contrived to throw off the sprays; and over these the faces of her people peered ahead, wild and gaunt, salt-crusted and desperate.

Great Salvage Island drew abeam and passed away astern; Great Piton lay close ahead now fringed with a thousand reefs, each with its spouting breakers. The din of the surf came to them loudly up the wind. A flock of seafowl, screaming and circling, sailed out to escort them in; and ahead, behind the banks of breakers, drawing them on as water will draw a choking man, was the rusted smokestack and stripped masts of a derelict merchant steamer.

There is a yarn about an open boat which had voyaged 1,200 miles over the lonely Pacific, coming upon a green atoll and being sailed recklessly in through the surf, and drowning every soul on board; and the yarn is easily believable. Capt. Kettle and his companions had undergone horrible privations; here, at last, was the isle of their hopes, and the treasure (as it seemed) in full view; but, by some intolerable fate they were barred from it by relentless walls of surf. Kettle ran in as close as he dared, and then flattened in his sheets, and sailed the lifeboat close-hauled along the noisy line of the breakers to the Norrard, looking for an opening.

The two Portuguese grumbled openly, and when not a ghost of a landing place showed, and Kettle put her about to sail back again, even the cautious McTodd put up his word to "run in and risk it."

But Kettle, though equally sick as they were of the boat and her voyage, had all of a sailor's dislike for losing his ship whatever she might be, and cowed them all with voice and threats; and at last his forbearance was rewarded. A slim passage through the reef showed itself at the southern end of the island; and down it they dodged, trimming their sheets six times a minute, with an escort of dangers always close on either hand; and finally ran into a rocky bay which held comparatively smooth water.

There was no place to beach the boat; they had to anchor her off, but with a whip on the cable they were able to step ashore on a ledge of stone, and then haul the boat off again out of harm's way.

It may be thought that they capered with delight at treading on dry land again; but there was nothing of this. With their cramped limbs and disused joints, it was as much as they could do to hobble, and every step was a wrench. But the lure ahead of them was great enough to triumph over minor difficulties. Half a mile away along the rocks was the Duncansby Head, and for her they raced at the top of their crippled gait. And the sea-fowl screamed curiously above their heads.

They scratched and tore themselves in this frantic progress over the sharp volcanic rocks, they choked with thirst, they panted with their labor; but none of these things mattered.

The deserted steamer, when they came to her, was lying off from the shore at the other side of a lake of deep water. But they were fit for no more waiting, and each, as he came opposite her, waded in out of his depth, and swam off with eager strokes. Davit falls trailing in the water gave them an entrance way, and up these they climbed with the quickness of apes; and then, with one accord, they made for the pantry and the steward's storeroom. The gold which had lured them was forgotten; the immediate needs of their famished bodies were the only things they remembered. They found a cheese box, a box of musty biscuits, and a filter full of stale and tepid water; and they gorged till they were filled, and swore they had never sat to so delicious a meal.

With repletion came the thoughts of fortune again, and off they went to the charthouse to finger the coveted gold. But here was a disappointment ready and waiting for them. They had gone up in a body, neither nationality trusting the other, and together they ransacked the place with thoroughness. There were papers in abundance, there were clothes furry with mildew, there was a broken box of cheap cigars; but of money there was not so much as a bronze piece.

"Eh, well," said Kettle, sitting back on the musty bedclothes, "we have had our trouble for nothing. Someone's been here first and skimmed the place clean. By James, yes. And look on the floor there. See those cigarette ends? They're new and dry. If the old man had been a cigarette smoker he wouldn't have chucked his butts on his charthouse deck, and, even if he had done, they'd have been washed to bits when she was hove down on her beam ends. You can see by the decks outside that she's been pretty clean swept. No, it's those fishermen, as you say, who have been here before us."

"Well," said McTodd, "if I were a swearer, I could say a deal."

"The dagos are swearing enough for the whole crowd of us, to judge by the splutter of them. The money's gone clean. It's vexing, but that's a fact. Still, I don't like to go back empty-handed."

"I'm as keen as yourse'. There's that £8 of my wages I left when I ran in Gib, that's got to be made up somehow. What's wrong with getting off the hatches, and seeing how her cargo's made up?"

"She's loaded with hides. I saw it on the manifest. There was Jimmy Mulready's scrawl at the foot of it. That photo there above the bed-foot will be his wife. Poor old Jimmy. He got religion before I did, and started his insurance, too, and, if he's kept them both up, he and his widow ought to be all right— By James, did you feel that?"

McTodd stared round him.

"What?" he asked.

"She moved."

"I took it for sure she was on the ground."

"So did I. But she isn't. There, you can feel her lift again."

They went out on deck. The sun was already dipping in the western sea behind the central hill of the island, and in another few minutes it would be dark. There is little twilight so far south. So they took cross bearings on the shore, and watched intently. Yes, there was not a doubt about it. The Duncansby Head floated, and she was moving across the deep water lake that held her.

"Mon!" said the engineer enthusiastically; "ye've a great head, and a great future before you. I'd never have guessed it."

"I took it for granted she'd beaten her bottom out in getting here; but she's blundered in through the reefs without touching; and if she's come in, she can get out again, and we're the fellows to take her."

"With engines."

"With engines, yes. If she's badly broken down in the hardware shop, we're done. I'd forgotten the machinery, and that's a defect. We'll find a lantern, and I'll go down with you, Mac, and give them an inspect."

The two Portuguese had already sworn themselves to a standstill, and had gone below and found bunks; but the men from the little islands in the north had more energy in their systems, and they expanded it tirelessly. McTodd overhauled every nut, every bearing, every valve, every rod of the engines, with an expert's criticism, and found nothing that would prevent active working; Kettle rummaged the rest of the ship; and far into the morning they foregathered again in the charthouse, and compared results.

She had been swept, badly swept; everything movable on deck was gone; cargo had shifted, and then shifted back again till she had lost all her list and was in proper trim; the engines were still workable if carefully nursed; and, in fact, though battered, she was entirely seaworthy. And while with tired gusto they were comparing these things, weariness at last got the better of them and first one and then the other incontinently dropped off into the deadest of sleep.

That the Duncansby Head had come in unsteered and unscathed through the reefs, and therefore under steam and control could go out again, was on the face of it a very simple and obvious theory to propound; but to discover a passage through the rocks to make this practicable was quite another matter. For three days the old P. and O. lifeboat plied up and down from outside the reefs and had 20 narrow escapes from being smashed into staves. It looked as if nature had performed a miracle, and taken the steamer bodily in her arms, and lifted her over at least a dozen black walls of stone.

The two Portuguese were already sick to death of the whole business, but for their feelings neither Kettle nor McTodd had any concern whatever. They were useful in the working of the boat, and therefore they were taken along, and when they refused duty or did it with too much listlessness to please, they were cuffed into activity again. There was no verbal argument about the matter. "Work or Suffer" was the simple motto the two Islanders went upon, and it answered admirably. They knew the breed of the Portuguese of old.

At last, by dint of daring and toil, the secret of the pass through the noisy, spouting reefs was won, it was sounded carefully and methodically for sunken rocks, and noted in all possible ways; and the P. & O. lifeboat was hoisted on the Duncansby's davits. The Portuguese were driven down into the stokehold to represent double watches of a dozen men and make the requisite steam; McTodd fingered the rusted engines like an artist; and Kettle took his stand alone with the steam wheel on the upper bridge.

They had formally signed articles, and apportioned themselves pay, Kettle as master, McTodd as chief engineer, and the Portuguese as firemen, because salvage is apportioned pro rata, and the more pay a man is getting the larger is his share. One which account (at McTodd's suggestion) they awarded themselves paper stipends which they could feel proud of, and put down the Portuguese for the ordinary firemen's wages then paid out of Gibraltar, neither more nor less. For, as the engineer said: "There was a fortune to be divided up somehow, and it would be a pity for a pair of unclean Dagoes to have more than was absolutely necessary, seeing that they would not know what to do with it."

Capt. Kettle felt it to be one of the supreme moments of his life when he rang on the Duncansby's bridge telegraph to "Half-speed ahead." Here was a bid for fortune such as very rarely came in any shipmaster's way; not getting salvage, the larger part of which an owner would finger, for mere assistance, but taking to port a vessel which was derelict and deserted—the greatest and rarest plum that the seas could offer. It was a thought that thrilled him.

But he had not much time for sentimental musings in this strain. A terribly nervous bit of pilotage lay ahead of him; the motive power of his steamer was feeble and uncertain; and it would require all his skill and resourcefulness to bring her into deep blue water. Slowly she backed or went ahead, dodging round to get a square entrance to the railway, and then with a slam Kettle rang on his telegraph to "Full speed ahead," so as to get her under the fullest possible command.

She darted out into the narrow, winding lane between the walls of broken water, and the roar of the surf closed round her. Rocks sprang up out of the deep—hungry black rocks, as deadly as explosive torpedoes. With a full complement of hands, and with a pilot for years acquainted with the place, it would have been an infinitely dangerous piece of navigation; with a half-power steamer which had only one man all told upon her decks, and he almost a stranger to the place, it was a miracle how she got out unscathed. But it was a miracle assisted by the most brilliant seamanship. Kettle had surveyed the channel in the lifeboat, and mapped every rock in his head, and when the test came he was equal to it. It would be hard to come across a man of more iron nerve.

Backing, and going ahead, to get round right-angled turns of the fairway, shaving reefs so closely that the wash from them creamed over her rail, the battered old tramp steamer faced a million dangers for every fathom of her onward way; but never once did she actually touch, and in the end she shot out into the clear, deep water, and gaily hit diamonds from the wavetops that lay in the sunshine.

It is possible for a man to concentrate himself so deeply upon one thing that he is deaf to all else in the world; and until he had worked the Duncansby Head out into the open Capt. Kettle was in this condition. He was dimly conscious of voices hailing him, but he had no leisure to give them heed. But when the strain was taken off him then there was no more disregarding the cries. He turned his head and saw a half-sunk raft, which seven men with clumsy paddles were frantically laboring toward him along the outer edge of the reefs.

Without a second thought he rang off engines, and the steamer lost her way and fell into the trough and waited for them. From the first he had a foreboding as to who they were; but the men were obviously cast away; and by all the laws of the sea and humanity he was bound to rescue them.

Ponderously the raft paddled up and got under the steamer's lee. Kettle came down off the bridge and threw them the end of a halliard, and eagerly enough, they scrambled up the rusted plating and clambered over the rail. They looked around them with curiosity, but with an obvious familiarity.

"I left my pipe stuck behind that stanchion," said one, "and, by gum, it's there still."

"F'c's'le door's stove in," said another; "I wonder if they've scoffed my chest."

"You Robinson Crusoes seems to be making yourselves at home," said Kettle.

One of the men knuckled his shock of hair. "We was on her, sir, when she happened her accident. We got off in the captain's boat, and she was smashed to bits landing on great Salvage yonder. We've been living there ever since on rabbits and gulls and cockles till we built that raft and ferried over here. It was tough living, but I guess we were better off than the poor beggars that were swamped in the other boats."

"The other two boats got picked up," "Did they though? Then I call it beastly hard luck on us."

"Capt. Mulready was master, wasn't he? Did he get drowned when your boat went ashore?"

The sailor shrugged his shoulders. "No, sir. Capt. Mulready's on the raft down yonder. He feels all crumpled up to find the old ship's afloat, and you've got her out. She'd a list on when we left her that would have scared Beresford, but she's chucked that straight again; and who's to believe it was ever there?"

Kettle grated his teeth. "Thank you, my lad," he said. "I quite see. Now get below and find yourself something to eat, and then you go forrard and turn too." Then, leaning his head over the bulwark, he called down: "Jimmy!"

The broken man on the raft looked up, "Hullo, Kettle, that you "

"Yes. Come aboard."

"No, thanks. I'm off back to the island. "I'll start a picnic there of my own. Good luck, old man."

"If you don't come aboard willingly, I'll send and have you fetched. Quit fooling."

"O, if you're set on it," said the other tiredly, and scrambled up the rope. He looked around with a drawn face. "To think she should have lost that list, and righted herself like this. I thought she might turn turtle any minute when we quitted her; and I'm not a scary man either."

"I know you aren't. Come into the charthouse and have a drop of whisky. There's your missus' photo stuck up over the bedfoot. How's she?"

"Dead, I hope. It will save her going to the workhouse."

"O," he said, "it's not as bad as that." "If you'll tell me why not? I shall lose my ticket over this job, sure, when it comes before the Board of Trade, and what owner's likely to give me another ship?"

"Well, Jimmy, you'll have to sail small and live on your insurance."

"I dropped that years ago and drew out what there was. Had to—with eight kids, you know. They take a lot of feeding."

"Eight kids, by James!"

"Yes, eight kids, poor little beggars, and the missus and me all to go hungry from now onward. But they do say workhouses are very comfortable nowadays. You'll look in and see us sometimes—won't you, Kettle?" He lifted the glass which had been handed to him. "Here's luck to you, old man, and you deserve it. I bought that whisky from a chandler in Rio. It's a drop of right, isn't it?"

"Here, chuck it," said Kettle.

"I'm sorry," said Capt. Mulready, "but you shouldn't have had me on board. I should have been better picknicking by myself on Great Piton yonder. I can't make a cheerful shipmate for you, old man."

"Brace up," said Kettle.

"By the Lord, if I'd only been a day earlier with that raft," said the other, musingly, "I could have taken her out, as you have done, and brought her home, and I believe the firm would have kept me on. There need have been no enquiry; only 'delayed,' that's all; no one cares so long as a ship turns up sometimes."

"It wouldn't have made any difference," said Kettle, frowning. "Some of those lousy Portuguese have been on board and scoffed all the money."

"What money?"

"Why, what she'd earned. What there was in the charthouse drawer."

The dishevelled man gave a tired chuckle. "O, that's all right. I put in at Las Palmas and transferred it to the bank there, and sent home the receipt by the B. & A. mailboat to Liverpool. No. I'm pleased enough about the money. But it's this other thing I made the bungle of, just being a day too late with that raft."

Kettle heard a sound and sharply turned his head. He saw a grimy man in the doorway. "Mr. McTodd," he said, "who the mischief gave you leave to quit your engine room? Am I to understand you've been standing there in that doorway to listen?"

"Her own engineer's come back, so I handed her over to him and came on deck for a spell. As for listening, I've heard every word that's been said, Capt. Mulready, you have my very deepest condolences."

"Mr. McTodd," said Kettle, with a sudden blaze of fury, "I'm captain of this ship, and you're intruding. Get to Hamlet out of here." He got up and strode furiously out of the door, and Mr. McTodd retreated before him. "Now keep your hands off me," said the engineer. "I'm as mad about the thing as yourself, and I don't mind blowing off a few pounds of temper. I don't know Capt. Mulready and you do, but I'd hate to see any man all crumpled up like that if I could help it."

"He could be helped by giving him back his ship, and I'd do it if I was by myself. But I've got a Scotch partner, and I'm not going to try for the impossible."

"Dinna abuse Scotland," said McTodd, wagging a grimy forefinger. "It's your ain wife and bairns ye're thinking about."

"I ought to be, Mac, but, God help me! I'm not."

"Varra weel," said McTodd; "then, if that's the case, skipper, just set ye doon here and we'll have a palaver."

"I'll hear what you've got to say," said Kettle more civilly, and for the next half-hour the pair of them talked as earnestly as only poor men can talk when they are deliberately making up their minds to resign a solid fortune which is already within their reach. And at the end of that talk Capt. Kettle put out his hand and took the engineer's in a heavy grip. "Mac," he said, "you're Scotch, but you're a gentleman right through under your clothes."

"I was born to that estate, skipper, and I no more wanted to see yon puir deevil pulled down to our level than you do. Better go and give him the news, and I'll get our boat in the water again, and revictualled."

"No," said Kettle, "I can't stand by and be thanked. You go. I'll see to the boat."

"Be hanged if I do!" said the engineer. "Write the man a letter. You're great on the writing line; I've seen you at it."

And so in the tramp's main cabin below Capt. Kettle penned this epistle:

"To Capt. J. R. Mulready:

"Dear Jimmy,—Having concluded not to take trouble to work Duncansby Head home, have pleasure in leaving her to your charge. We, having other game on hand, have now taken French leave, and shall now bear up for Western islands. You've no call to say anything about our being on board at all. Spin your own yarn; it will never be contradicted. Yours truly,

"O. Kettle, Master.

"pp N. A. McTodd, Chief Engineer, O.K.

"P.S.—We have taken along these two Dagos. If you had them they might talk when you got them home. We having them, they will not talk. So you've only your own crowd to keep from talking. Good luck, old tintacks."

Which letter was sealed and nailed up in a conspicuous place before the lifeboat left en route for Grand Canary.

It was the two Portuguese who felt themselves principally aggrieved men. They had been made to undergo a great deal of work and hardship; they had been defrauded of much plunder which they quite considered was theirs, for the benefit of an absolute stranger in whom they took not the slightest interest; and, finally, they were induced "not to talk" by processes which jarred upon them most unpleasantly.

They did not talk, and in the fullness of time they returned to the avocation of shovelling coal on steam vessels. But when they sit down to think, neither Antonio nor his friend (whose honored name I never learned) regard with affection those little islands in the northern sea, which produced Capt. Owen Kettle and his sometime partner, Mr. Neil Angus McTodd.

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DEADLY BRANDS OF WEATHER MANKIND HAS GOT TO FACE

Murderous Mists, and Fogs of Dust, the Blizzard, the Hailstorm, the Sirocco of the Mediterranean, Help to Make Earth a Qualified Paradise

A London fog is not only unpleasant, it is also extremely unwholesome. A week's fog sends the average winter death-rate of 16 per 1,000 up to nearly 20. In one foggy week last winter the deaths from diseases of the lungs and throat rose in London from 196 to the alarming total of 445.

Fog comes with a high barometer and calm weather. It is not generally known that in weather of this kind—an "anti-cyclone," as the experts term it—all persons employed below ground in coal mines are obliged to take special precautions. At such times the danger from fire-damp and dust explosions is far greater than when pressure is low and the air is moving briskly.

The ship captain dreads fog far worse than any other kind of weather. He infinitely prefers a heavy gale. Fog is usually supposed to be confined to more or less northern latitudes, but this is a mistake. Steamers coming from South Africa occasionally fall in with fog of the most impenetrable description, caused not by moisture in the air, but by dust blown out to sea from the continent of Africa.

In March, 1903, the Union Castle steamer Dunolly Castle ran into a fog of this kind when only twenty degrees north of the Equator, and steamed through it for three days and nights. It was so dark that for many hours it was impossible to see from one end of the vessel to the other, and the vessel had to proceed dead slow.

Another steamer, the Springfield, lost her way in this strange dust fog, the material of which came from the Sahara, more than two hundred miles away; and was wrecked. The south-east gale, which causes an ocean dust fog of this kind, is known as the Harmattan.

MOUNTAINS HAD VANISHED.

Bad as this was, it was nothing to a dust storm which Mr. Garstang, the Egyptian explorer encountered in Lower Egypt. One morning one of his men came rushing in to say the "edge of the world" was broken off. Rushing out he saw the western mountains had vanished. In a few moments everything went literally dark as pitch, and the party flung themselves on their faces on the ground.

With a rush and a roar the storm broke upon them, and in an instant had whipped away their tents. Sand filled the whole air, and several of the men and animals were buried deep under masses of intensely hot desert dust. It was a storm of this description which destroyed the whole army of Cambyses more than twenty-four centuries ago.

North America is famed for blizzards and cyclones, both of them extremely unpleasant and dangerous in their separate ways.

Less known than either of these types of storms is the so-called "White Death" of Alaska. This is a fog in which the whole air becomes full of minute particles of ice. It is thick beyond belief, and exposure to it for any length of time in the open means certain death to human beings.

Two years ago a tribe of forty Indians were found dead. They had been caught far from shelter in this death-dealing mist. The phenomenon is, fortunately, rare, and apparently its causes are still unknown. No type of weather is more dreaded by fur traders and prospectors.

SOMETHING LIKE HAILSTONES.

In the Rocky Mountains hail-storms of appalling severity are not uncommon, so heavy that they are actually dangerous to human life. But it is a place called Timaru, in New Zealand, which boasts the record hail-storm. That was in November, two years ago. A gentleman caught in it sent home an account, in which he described how, to save his horse, he was forced to cover the animal with his rugs, the carriage mat, and cushions. He himself would have been killed but for covering his own head with a cushion. During the quarter of an hour during which the storm lasted, the vehicle was filled to overflowing with hailstones the size of hens' eggs.

So, too, at Baku, on the Caspian, the unfortunate people have been suffering under a most detestable infliction ever since the recent firing of the oil wells by the rioters. The burning naphtha throws up with the oil great quantities of water, which, transformed into steam by the tremendous heat, hang like snow-white clouds above the town. When these clouds fall in the shape of rain they bring down with them a quantity of finely atomized naphtha which covers houses, windows, and streets with a greasy coating of ill-smelling oil.

Italy is also visited by a hot wind from the south which is known as the "Sirocco." This wind will run the temperature in Southern Italy up to 110 degrees F. in the shade, and has a most peculiar effect on the human system, causing intense weakness and irritable depression. The Sirocco is said to be indirectly the cause of more murders, and of quarrels in which blood is shed, than any other phenomenon of Nature.

MR. WALTER LONG PAYS £750.

An action for £2,000 damages against Mr. Walter Long, M.P., at the suit of a Dublin artist named William J. Sherwin, was settled by consent in the Dublin courts recently.

In November last Mr. Sherwin was riding on his bicycle along Nassau Street, when, he alleges, the pole of Mr. Long's carriage knocked him off the bicycle and injured him in the spine. The bicycle was smashed, and Mr. Sherwin alleged that he suffered greatly from the shock.

On the case being called, it was stated that a settlement had been arrived at under which Mr. Long agreed to pay the plaintiff £750 and costs.

HIS BELOVED MUMMY.

There lives in the Boulevard de la Vitette, Paris, an old gentleman of wealth and of antiquarian tastes. Among many specimens collected through many years was a mummy from Egypt, that of a daughter of one of the Pharaohs, which the old collector treasured with great care. One day in his absence a serving-maid determined to discover what was in the mysterious casket. Under her clumsy fingers the remains of the king's daughter crumbled to ashes. When the old collector returned and found instead of his beloved princess a little heap of dust inclosed within the many linen bands his rage mastered him and, seizing a revolver, he shot the housemaid dead.