COPYRIGHTED, AND PUBLISHED BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT.

The Adventures of Captain Kettle

By CUTCLIFFE HYNE

No. 9—

The Wreck of The Cattle Boat



There was considerable trouble and risk in bringing the lifeboat up alongside, but it must be granted that she was very unhandy.

The gale that had blown them out into the Atlantic had moderated, certainly, though there was a still considerable breeze blowing, but the sea was running as high as ever, and all Capt. Kettle's skill was required to prevent the boat from being incontinently swamped. McTodd and the two Portuguese baled incessantly, but the boat was always half waterlogged. In fact, from constitutional defects, she had made very wet weather of it all through the blow.

It was the part of the steamer to have borne down and given the lifeboat a lee in which she could have been more readily handled, and three times the larger vessel made an attempt to do this, but without avail. Three times she worked round in a wallowing circle, got to windward, and distributed a smell of farmyard over the rugged furrows of ocean, and then lost her place again before she could drift down and give the smaller craft shelter. Three times did the crew of the lifeboat, with maritime point and fluency, curse the incompetence of the rust-streaked steamer and all her complement.

"By James!" said Kettle savagely, after the third attempt, "are they all farmers on that ship? I've had a nigger steward that knew more about handling a vessel."

"She's an English ship," said McTodd, "and delicate. They're nursing her in the engine room. Look at the way they throttle her down when she races."

"The fools on her upper bridge are enough for me to look at," Kettle retorted. "Why didn't they put a sailorman aboard of her before she was kicked out of port? By James! if we'd a week's water and victuals with us in the lifeboat here, I'd beat back for the Canaries as we are, and keep clear of that tin farmyard for bare safety's sake."

"We haven't a crumb nor a drink left," said the engineer, "and I'd not recommend this present form of conveyance to the insurance companies."

A wave top came up from the tireless gray sea, and slapped green and cold about his neck and shoulders. "Goshi There comes more of the Atlantic to bale back into place. Mon, this is no' the kind of navigation I admire."

Meanwhile the clumsy tramp steamer had gone round in a jagged circle of a mile's diameter, and was climbing back to position again over the hills and dales of ocean. She rolled and she pitched, and she wallowed among the seas, and to the lay mind she would have seemed helplessness personified. But to the expert eye she showed defects in her handling with every sheer she took among the angry waste of waters.

"Old man and the mates must be staying down below out of the wet," said Kettle, contemptuously as he gazed. "Looks as if they've left some sort of a cheap Dutch quartermaster on the upper bridge to run her. Don't tell me there's an officer holding an English ticket in command of that steamer. They aren't going to miss us this time though, if they knew it."

"Looks like as if they were going to soss down slap on top of us," said McTodd, and set to taking off his coat and boots.

But the cattle steamer, if not skilfully handled, at any rate this time had more luck. She worked her way up to windward again, and then fell off into the trough, squattering down almost out of sight one minute, and in fact showing little of herself except a couple of stumpy, untidy masts and a brine-washed smokestack above the seascape, and being heaved up almost clear the next second, a picture of rust streaks and yellow spouting scuppers.

Both craft drifted to leeward before the wind, but the steamer offered most surface and moved the quicker, which was the object of the maneuver. It seemed to those in the lifeboat that they were not going to be missed this time, and so they lowered away their sodden canvas, shipped tholepins, and got out their oars. The two Portuguese firemen did not assist at first, preferring to sit in a semi-dazed condition on the wet floor gratings; but McTodd and Kettle thumped them about the head, after the time-honored custom, till they turned to, and so presently the lifeboat, under three straining oars, was holding up toward her would-be deliverer.

A man on the cattle boat's upper bridge was exhibiting himself as a very model of nervous incapacity, and two at any rate of the castaways in the lifeboat were watching him with grim scorn.

"Keeping them on the dance in the engine room, isn't he?" said McTodd. "He's rung that telegraph bell fifteen different ways this last minute."

"That man isn't fit to skipper anything that hasn't got a towrope made fast ahead," said Kettle contemptuously. "He hasn't the nerve of a pound of putty."

"I'm thinking we shall lose the boat. They'll never get her aboard in one piece."

"If we get amongst their cow pens with our bare lives we shall be lucky. They're going to heave up a line. Stand by to catch it, quick."

The line was thrown and caught. The cattle steamer surged up over a huge rolling sea, showing her jagged bilge chocks clear; and then she squelched down again, dragging the lifeboat close in a murderous cuddle, which smashed in one of her sides as though it had been made from eggshell. Other lines were thrown by the hands who stood against the rail above, and the four men in the swamping boat each seized an end.

Half climbing, half hoisted from above, they made their way up the rusted plating, and the greedy waves from underneath sucked and clamored at their heels. It was quite a toss-up even then whether they would be dragged from their hold; but human muscles can put forth desperate efforts in these moments of desperate stress; and they reached the swaying deck planks, bruised and breathless and gasping, but for the time being safe.

The cattle boat's mate who had been assisting their arrival sorted them into castes with ready perception. "Now, you two dagos," he said to the Portuguese, "get away forward—port side—and bid some of our firemen to give you a bunk. I'll tell the steward to bring you along a tot of rum directly." He clapped a friendly hand on McTodd's shoulder. "Bo'sn," he said, "take this gentleman down to the messroom and pass the word to one of the engineers to come and give him a welcome." And then he turned as to an equal and shook Kettle by the hand. "Very glad to welcome you aboard, old fellow—beg pardon, captain, I should have said; didn't see the face on your sleeve before. Come below with me, captain, and I'll fix you up with some dry things outside and some wet things in before we have any further chatter."

"Mr. Mate," said Kettle, "you're very polite, but hadn't I better go up onto the bridge and say 'howdy' to the skipper first?"

The mate of the cattle boat grinned and tucked his arm inside Capt. Kettle's and dragged him off with kindly force toward the companionway. "Take the synch from me, captain, and don't. The old man's in such a mortal fear for the ship, that he's fair crying with it, if he'd had his way, I don't fancy he'd have seen your boat at all. He said it was suicide to try and pick you up with such a sea running. But the second mate and I put in some ugly talk, and so he just had to do it. Here's the companion. Step inside, and I'll shut the door."

"Pretty sort of captain to let his mates boss him."

"Quite agree with you, captain; quite agree with you all the way. But that's what's done on this ship, and there's no getting over it. It's not to my liking either—I'm an old Conway boy, and was brought up to respect discipline. However, I daresay you'll see for yourself how things run before we dump you back on dry mud again. Now, here we are at my room, and there's a change of clothes in that drawer beneath the bed, and underwear below the settee here. You and I are much of a build, and the kit's quite at your service till your own is dry again."

The mate was back again in ten minutes—dripping, cheerful, hospitable. "Holy tailors!" said he, "how you do set off clothes! Those old duds came out of a ship-chest once, and I've been ashamed of their shabbiness more years than I care to think about; but you've a way of carrying them that makes them look well fitting and quite new. Well, I tell you I'm pleased to see a spruce man on this ship. Come into the cabin now and peck a bit. I ordered you a meal, and I saw the steward as I came past the door trying to hold it down in the fiddles. The old girl can roll a bit, can't she?"

"I should say your farmyard's getting well churned up."

"You should just go into those cattle decks and see. It's just hades for the poor brutes. We're out of the river Plate, you know, and we've carried bad weather with us ever since we got our anchors. The beasts were badly stowed, and there were too many of them put aboard. The old man grumbled, but the shippers didn't take any notice of him. They's signed for the whole ship, and they just crammed as many sheep and cows into her as she'd hold."

"You'll have the cruelty to animal people on board of you before you're docked, and then your skipper had better look out."

"He knows that, captain, quite as well as you do, and there isn't a man more sorry for himself in all the western ocean. He'll be fined heavily and have his name dirtied, so sure as ever he sets a foot ashore. Legally, I suppose, he's responsible; but really he's no more to blame than you. He is part of the ship, just as the engines, or the mates, or the tablespoons are; and the whole bag o' tricks was let by wire from Liverpool to a South American dago. If he'd tuned, he'd have got the straight kick-out from the owners, and no further argument. You see there are little bits of owners."

"They're the worst sort."

"It doesn't matter who they are. A skipper has got to do as he's told."

"Yes," said Kettle with a sigh, "I know that."

"Well," said the mate, "you may thank your best little star that you're only here as a passenger. The grub's beastly, the ship stinks, the cook's a fool, and everything's as uncomfortable as can be. But there's one fine amusement ahead of you, and that's try and cheer up the other passenger."

"Stowaway?"

"No, bona fide passenger, if you can imagine anyone being mug enough to book a room on a foul cattle-loaded tramp like this. I guess it was because she was hard up. She was a governess, or something of that sort, in Buenos Ayres, lost her berth, and wanted to get back again cheap. I guess we could afford to cut rates and make a profit there.

"Poor lady."

"I've not seen much of her myself. The second mate and I are most of the crew of this ship (as the Old Man objects to our driving the regular deckhands), and when we're not at work, we're asleep. I don't stop to introduce you. You must chum on. Her name's Carnegie."

"Miss Carnegie," Kettle repeated, "that sounds familiar. Does she write poetry?"

The mate yawned. "Don't know. Never asked her. But perhaps she does. She looks ill enough."

The mate went off to his room then, turned in all standing, and was promptly asleep. Kettle, with memories of the past refreshed, took paper and a scratchy pen, and fell to concocting verse.

He wondered, and at the same time he half dreaded, whether this was the same Miss Carnegie whom he had known before. In days past she had given him a commission to liberate her lover from the French penal settlement of Cayenne. With infinite danger and difficulty he had wrenched the man free from his warders, and then, finding him a worthless fellow, had by force married him to an old Jamaican negress, and sent the girl their marriage lines as a token of her release. He had had no word or sign from her since, and was in some dread now lest she might bitterly resent the liberty he had taken in meddling so far with her affairs.

However, like it or not, there was no avoiding the meeting now, and so he went on—somewhat feverishly—with his writing.

The squalid meal entitled tea came on, and he had to move his papers. A grimy steward spread a dirty cloth, wetted it liberally with water, and shipped fiddles to try and induce the table ware to keep in place despite the rolling. The steward mentioned that none of the officers would be down, that the two passengers would meal together, and in fact did his best to be affable; but Kettle listened with cold inattention, and the steward began to wish him over the side, whence he had come.

The laying of the table was ended at last. The steward put on his jacket, clanged a bell in the alleyway, and then came back and stood armed with a large tin teapot, all ready to commence business. So heavy was the roll that at times he had to put his hand on the floor for support.

Capt. Kettle watched the door with a haggard face. He was beginning to realize that an emotion was stirred within him that should have no place in his system. He told himself sternly that he was a married man with a family; that he had a deep affection for both his wife and children; that, in cold fact, he had seen Miss Carnegie in the flesh but once before. But there was no getting over the memory that she made poetry, a craft that he adored, and he could not forget that she had already lived in his mind for more months than he dared count.

His conscience took him by the ear, and sighed out the word love. On the instant, all his pride of manhood was up in arms, and he rejected the imputation with scorn; and then, after some thought, formulated his liking for the girl in the term interest. But he knew full well that his sentiment was something deeper. His heart in his chest heaved when he thought of her.

Then, in the distance he heard her approaching. He wiped the moisture from his face with the mate's pocket-handkerchief. Above the dine of the seas and the noises from the crowded cattle-pens outside, he could make out the faint rustle of draperies, and the uncertain footsteps of someone painfully making a way along, hand over hand against the bulkhead. A bunch of fingers appeared round the jamb of a door, slender white fingers, one of them decked with a queer old ring, which he had seen just once before, and had pictured a thousand times since. And then the girl herself stepped out into the cabin, swaying to the roll of the ship.

She nodded to him with instant recognition. "It was you they picked up out of the boat? O, I am so glad you are safe."

Kettle strode out toward her on his steady sea legs, and stood before her, still not daring to take her hand. "You have forgiven me?" he murmured. "What did was a liberty, I know, but if I had not liked you so well I should not have dared to do it."

She cast down her eyes and flushed. "You are the kindest man I ever met," she said. "The very kindest." She took his hand in both hers and gripped it with nervous force. "I shall never forget what you did for me, captain."

The grimy steward behind them coughed and rattled the teapot lid, and so they sat themselves at the table and the business of tea began. All of the ship's officers were either looking after the work entailed by the heavy weather on deck, or sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion in their bunks; and so none joined them at the meal. But the steward incessantly hovered at their elbows, and it was only during his fitful absences that their talk was anything like unrestrained.

"You said you liked poetry," the girl whispered shyly when the first of these opportunities came. "I wrote the most heartfelt verses that ever came from me over that noble thing you tried to do for a poor stranger like me."

Capt. Kettle blushed like a maid. "For one of the magazines" he asked.

She shook her head sadly, "It was not published when I left England, and it had been sent back to me from four magazine offices. That was nothing new. They never would take any of my stuff."

Kettle's fingers twitched suggestively. "I'd like to talk a minute or so with some of those editors. I'd make them sit up."

"That wouldn't make them print my poems."

"Wouldn't it, miss? Well, perhaps you know best there. But I'd guarantee it'd hinder them from printing anything else for awhile, the inky-fingered brutes. The twaddling stories those editors set up a-type about low down pirates and detective bugs are enough to make one sick."

It appeared that Miss Carnegie's father had died since she and Kettle had last met, and the girl had found herself left almost destitute. She had been lured out to Buenos Ayres by an advertisement, but without finding employment, and, sick at heart, had bought with the last of her scanty store of money a cheap passage home in this cattleboat.

She would land in England entirely destitute; and although she did not say this—spoke cheerfully of the future in fact, Kettle was torn with pity for her state. But what, he asked himself with fierce scorn, could he do. He was penniless himself; he had a wife and family depending on him; and who was he to take this young unmarried girl under his charge?

They talked long on that and other days, always avoiding vital questions, and, meanwhile, the reeking cattle-boat wallowed north, carrying with her, as it seemed, a little charmed circle of evil weather as her constant accomplishment.

Between times when he was not in attendance on Miss Carnegie, Kettle watched the life of the steamer with professional interest, and all a strong man's contempt for a weak commander. The 'tween decks was an Aceldama, in the heavy weather, the cattle pens smashed, the poor beasts broke their legs, gored one another and were surged about in horrible melees. The cattlemen were half incapable, wholly mutinous. They dealt out compressed hay and water when the gangways were cleared and held to it that this was the beginning and end of their duty. To pass down the winch chain and haul out the dead and wounded was a piece of employment that they flatly refused to tamper with. They said the deck-hands could do it.

The deck-hands scenting a weak commander, said they had been hired as sailor men and also declined to meddle, and, as a consequence, this necessary sepulture business was done by the mates.

In Kettle's first and only interview with the cattle boat's captain he saw this operation going on through a hatchway before his very face. The mate and the second mate clambered down by the battens and went along the filthy gangway below, dragging the winch chain after them. The place was cluttered with carcasses and jammed with broken pens, all surging together to the roll of the ship. The lowings and the groans of the cattle were awful. But at last a bight of rope was made fast round a dead beast's horns and the word was given to haul. The winch clattered and the chain drew. The two men below jumping to this side and that for their lives, handspliced the carcass free of obstacles, and at last it came up the hatch, a battered, shapeless rag, almost unrecognizable.

A mob of men, sulky, sullen, and afraid, stood round the hatch, and one of those, when the poor remains came up and swung to the roll of the ship over the side, cut the bowline with his knife and let the carcass plop into the racing seas. The chain clashed back again down between the iron coamings of the hatch, and the two mates below went on with their work. No one offered to help them. No one, as Kettle grimly noted, was made to do so.

"Do your three mates run this ship, captain?" asked Kettle at last.

"They are handy fellows."

"If you ask me, I should call them poor critters. What for do they put in all the work themselves when there are that mob of deck hands and cattle-hands standing round doing the gentleman as though they were in the gallery of a theatre?"

There was some misunderstanding when the crew were shipped. They say they never signed on to handle dead cattle."

"I've seen those kind of misunderstandings before, captain, and I've started in to smooth them away."

"Well?" said the captain of the cattle boat.

"O, with me!" said Kettle truculently, "they straightened out as soon as ever I began to hit. If your mates know their business, they'd soon have that crew in hand again."

"I don't allow my mates to knock the men about. To give them their due, they wanted to; they were brought up in a school which would probably suit you, captain, all three of them; but I don't permit that sort of thing. I am a Christian man, and I will not order my fellow-men to be struck. If the fellows refuse their duty, it lies between them and their consciences."

"As if an old sailor had a conscience!" murmured Kettle to himself. "Well, captain, I'm no small piece of a Christian myself, but I was taught that whatever my hand findeth to do, to do it with all my might, and I guess bashing a lazy crew comes under that head."

"I don't want either your advice or your theology."

"If I wasn't a passenger here," said Kettle, "I'd like to tell you what I thought of your seamanship and your notion of making a master's ticket respected. But I'll hold my tongue on that. As it is, I think I ought just to say I don't consider this ship safe, run the way she is."

The captain of the cattle boat flushed darkly. He jerked his head towards the ladder. "Get down off this bridge," he said.

"What!"

"You hear me. Get down off my bridge. If you've learnt anything about your profession you must know this is private up here, and no place for blooming passengers."

Kettle glared and hesitated. He was not used to receiving orders of this description, and the innovation did not please him. But for once in his life he submitted. Miss Carnegie was sitting under the lee of the deckhouse at, watching him, and somehow or other he did not choose to have a scene before her. It was all part of this strange new feeling which had come over him.

He gripped his other impulses tight, and went and sat beside her. She welcomed him cordially. She made no secret of her pleasure at his presence. But her talk just now jarred upon him. Like other people who see the ocean and its traffic merely from the amateur's view, she was able to detect romance beneath her present discomforts, and she was pouring into his ear her scheme for making it the foundation of her most ambitious poem.

In Kettle's mind, to build an epic on such a groundwork was nothing short of profanation. He viewed the sea, seamen and sea duties with an intimate eye; to him they were common and unclean to the furthest degree: no trick of language could elevate their meanenesses. He pointed out how she would prostitute her talent by laying hold of such an unsavory subject, and extolled the beauty of his own ideal.

"Tackle a cornfield, miss," he would say again and again, "with its butter-yellow color and its blobs of red poppies, and the green hedges all round. You write poetry such as I know you can about a cornfield, and farmers, and farm buildings with thatched roofs, and you'll wake up one of these mornings (like all poets hope to do some day) and find yourself famous. And because why, you want to know? Well, miss, it's because cornfields and the country and all that are what people want to hear about, and dream they've got handy to their own back doorstep. They're so peaceful, so restful. You take it from me, no one would even want to read four words about this beastly cruel sea, and the brutes of men who make their living by driving ships across it. No, by Ja—. No, miss, you take it from a man who knows, they'd just despise it." And so they argued endlessly at the point, each keeping an unchanged opinion.

Perhaps with all the human freight that the cattleboat carried, Mr. McTodd was the only one person entirely happy. He had no watch to keep, no work to do; the mess room was warm, stuffy, and entirley to his taste; liquor was plentiful; and the official engineers of the ship were Scotch and argumentative. He never came on deck for a whiff of fresh air, never knew a moment's tedium; he lived in a pleasant atmosphere of broad dialect, strong tobacco, and toasting oil, and thoroughly enjoying himself; though when the moment of trial came, and his thews and energies were wanted for the saving of human life, he quickly showed that this Capua had in no way sapped his efficiency.

The steamer had, as has been said, carried foul weather with her all the way across the Atlantic from the River Plate, as though it were a curse inflicted for the cruelty of her stevedores. The crew forgot what it was like to wear dry clothes, the afterguard lived in a state of bone-weariness. A harder captain would have still contrived to keep them up to the mark; but the man who was in supreme command was feeble, and undecided, and there is no doubt that vigilance was dangerously slackened.

A fog, too, which came down to cover the sea, stopped out all view of the sun, and compelled them for three days to depend on a dead reckoning; and (after the event) it was said a strong current set the steamer unduly to the westward.

Anyway, be the cause what it may, Kettle was pitched violently out of his bunk in the deep of one night, just after two bells, and from the symptoms which loudly advertised themselves, it required no expert knowledge to tell that the vessel was beating her bottom out on rocks, to the accompaniment of a murderously heavy sea. The engines stopped, steam began to blow o frnolsily from the escapes, and what with that, and the cries of the men, and the crashing of seas, and the beating of iron, and the beast cries from the cattle decks, the din was almost enough to split the ear. And then the syren burst out into one vast bellow of pain, which drowned all the other noises as though they had been children's whispers.

Kettle slid on coat and trousers over his pajamas, and went and thumped at a door at the other side of the alleyway.

"Miss Carnegie!"

"Yes."

"Dress quickly."

"I am dressing, captain."

"Get finished with it, and then wait, I'll come for you when it's time."

It is all very well to be cool on these occasions, but sometimes the race is to the prompt. Captain Kettle made his way up on deck against a green avalanche of water which was cascading down the companionway. No shore was in sight, and the ship had backed off after she had struck, and was now rolling heavily in the deep trough. She was low in the water, and every second wave swept her.

No one seemed to be in command. The dim light showed Kettle one lifeboat wrecked in davits, and a disorderly mob of men trying to lower the other. But someone let go the stern falls so that the boat shot down perpendicularly, and the next wave smashed the lower half of it into splinters. The frenzied crowd left it to try the port quarterboat, and Kettle raced them across the streaming decks, and got first to the davits. He plucked a green-heart belaying pin from the rail, and laid about him viciously. "Back, you scum!" he shouted, "get back, or I'll smash in every face amongst you, Good Lord, isn't there a mate or a man left on this stinking farmyard? Am I to keep off all this two-legged cattle by myself.

They fought on, the black water swirling waist deep among them with every roll, the syren bellowing for help overhead, and the ship sinking under their feet; and gradually, with the frenzy of despair, the men drove Kettle back against the rail, whilst others of them cast off the falls of the quarterboat's tackles preparatory to letting her drop. But then, out of the darkness, up came McTodd and the steamer's mate, both shrewd hitters, and men not afraid to use their skill, and once more the tables were turned.

The other quarter-boat had been lowered and swamped; this boat was the only one remaining.

"Now, Mac," said Kettle, "help the mate take charge, and murder every one that interferes. Get the boat in the water and fend off. I'll be off below and fetch up Miss Carnegie. We must put some hurry in it. The old box hasn't much longer to swim. Take the lady ashore and see she comes to no harm."

"O, aye," said McTodd, "and we'll keep a seat for yerself, skipper."

"You needn't bother," said Kettle, "I take no man's place in this sort of tea-party." He splashed off across the streaming decks, and found the cattle-boat's captain sheltering under the lee of the companion, wringing his hands. "Out, you blitherer," he shouted, "and save your mangy life. Your ship's gone now; you can't play hash with her any more."

After which pleasant speech he worked his way below, half swimming, half wading, and once more beat against Miss Carnegie's door. Even in this moment of extremity he did not dream of going in unasked.

She came out to him in the half-swamped alleyway, fully dressed. "Is there any hope?" she asked.

"We'll get you ashore, don't you fear." He clapped an arm around her waist and drew her strongly on through the dark and the swirling water toward the foot of the companion. "Excuse me, miss," he said. "This is not familiarity. But I have got the firmer sea-legs, and we must hurry."

They pressed up the stair, battling with great green cascades of water, and gained the dreadful turmoil on deck. A few weak stars gleamed out above the wind, and showed the black wave tops dimly. Already some of the cattle had been swept overboard, and were swimming about like the horned beasts of a nightmare. The din of surf came to them amongst the other noises, but no shore was visible. The steamer had backed off the reef on which she had struck, and was foundering in deep water. It was indeed a time for hurry. It was plain she had very few more minutes to swim.

Each sea now made a clean breach over her, and a passage about the decks was a thing of infinite danger. But Kettle was resourceful and strong, and he had a grip around Miss Carnegie and a hold on something solid when the waters drenched on him, and he contrived never to be wrenched entirely from his hold.

But when he had worked his way aft, a disappointment was there ready for him. The quarterboat was gone, McTodd stood against one of the davits, cool and philosophical as ever.

"You infernal Scotchman, you've let them take away the boat from you," Kettle snarled. "I should have thought you could have kept your end up with a mangy crowd like that."

"Use your eyes," said the engineer. "The boat's in the wash below there at the end of the tackles with her side stove in. She drowned the three men that were lowered in her because they'd no' sense enough to fend her off."

"That comes of setting a lot of farmers to work a steamboat."

"Aweel," said McTodd, "steamers have been lost before, and I have it in mind, captain, that you've helped."

"By James, if you don't carry a civil tongue you drunken Geordie, I'll knock you some teeth down to cover it."

"O, I owe you that," said McTodd, "but now we're quits. I bide here, Capt. Kettle, because I thought you'd maybe like to swim the leddy off to the shore, and at that I can bear a useful hand."

"Mac," said Kettle, "I take back what I said about your being Scotch. You're a good soul." He turned to the girl, still shouting to make his voice carry above the clash of the seas and the bellow of the syren and the noises of the dying ship. "It's our only chance, Miss—swimming. The life-buoys from the bridge are all gone—I looked. The hands will have taken them. There'll be a lot of timber floating about when she goes down, and we'll be best clear of that. Will you trust to us?"

"I trust you in everything," she said.

Deeper and deeper the steamer sank in her wallow. The lower decks were swamped by this, and the miserable cattle were either drowned in their stalls or washed out of her. There was no need for the three to jump—they just let go their hold, and the next incoming wave swept them clear of the steamer's spar deck, and spurned them 100 yards from her side.

They found themselves amongst a herd of floating cattle, some drowned, some swimming frenziedly; and with the inspiration of the moment laid hold of a couple of the beasts which were tangled together by a halter, and so supported themselves without further exertion. It was no use swimming for the present. They could not tell which way the shore lay. And it behooved them to reserve all their energies for the morning, so well as the numbing cold of the water would let them.

Of a sudden the bellow of the steamer's syren ceased, and a pang went through them as though they had lost a friend. Then came a dull, muffled explosion. And then, a huge, ragged shape loomed up through the night like some vast monument, and sank swiftly straight downward out of sight beneath the black, tumbled sea.

"Poor old girl!" said McTodd, spitting out sea water, "they'd a fine keg of whisky down in her messroom."

"Poor devil of a skipper!" said Kettle; "it's to be hoped he's drowned out of harm's way, or it'll take lying to keep him any rags of his ticket.

The talk died out of them after that, and the miseries of the situation closed in. The water was cold, but the air was piercing, and so they kept their bodies submerged, each holding on to the bovine raft, and each man sparing a few fingers to keep a grip on the girl. One of the beasts they clung to quickly drowned; the other, strange to say, kept its nostrils above water, swimming strongly, and in the end came alive to the shore, the only four-footed occupant of the steamer to be saved.

At the end of each minute it seemed to them that they were too bruised and numbed to hang on another 60 seconds; and yet the next minute found them still alive and dreading its successor. The sea moaned around them, mourning the dead; the fleet of drowned cattle surged helpless to this way and to that, bruising them with rude collisions; and the cold ate them to the bone, mercifully numbing their pain and anxiety. Long before the dawn the girl had sunken into a stupor, and was only held from sinking by the nervous fingers of the men; and the men themselves were merely automata, completing their task with a legacy of will.

When from somewhere out of the morning mists a fisher boat sailed up, manned by ragged, kindly Irish, all three were equally lost to consciousness, and all three were hauled over the gunwale in one continuous dripping string. The grip of the men's fingers had endured too long to be loosened for a sudden call such as that.

They were taken ashore and tended with all the care poor homes could give; and the men, used to hardships, recovered with a dose of warmth and sleep.

Miss Carnegie took longer to recover, and, in fact, for a week lay very near to death. Kettle stayed on in the village making almost hourly enquiries for her. He ought to have gone away to seek fresh employment. He ought to have gone back to his wife and children, and he upbraided himself bitterly for his neglect of these duties. But still he could not tear himself away. For the future—Well, he dreaded to think what might happen in the future.

But at last the girl was able to sit up and see him, and he visited her, showing all the deference an ambassador might offer to a queen. I may go so far as to say that he went into the cottage quite infatuated. He came out of it disillusioned.

She listened to his tale of the wreck with interest and surprise. She was almost startled to hear that others, including the captain and two of his mates, were saved from the disaster besides themselves, but at the same time unfeignedly pleased. And she was pleased also to hear that Kettle was subpoenaed to give evidence before the forthcoming enquiry.

"I am glad of that," she said, "because I know you will speak with a free mind. You have told me so many times how incompetent the captain was, and now you will be able to tell it to the proper authorities."

Kettle looked at her blankly. "But that was different," he said. "I can't say to them what I said to you."

"Why not? Look what misery and suffering and loss of life the man has caused. He isn't fit to command a ship."

"But, Miss," said Kettle, "it's his living. He's been brought up to seafaring, and he isn't fit for anything else. You wouldn't have me send out the man to starve? Besides, I'm a shipmaster myself, and you wouldn't have me try to take away another master's ticket? The cleverest captain afloat might meet with misfortune, and he's always got to think of that when he's put up to give evidence against his fellows."

"Well, what are you going to do, then?"

"O, we've got together a tale, and when the old man is put up on his trial the mates and I will stick to it through thick and thin. You can bet that we are not going to swear away his ticket."

"His ticket?"

"Yes; his master's certificate—his means of livelihood."

"I think it's wrong," she said excitedly; "criminally wrong. And, beside, you said, you didn't like the man."

"I don't; I dislike him, cordially. But that's nothing to do with the case. I've my own honor to think of, Miss. How'd I feel if I went about knowing I'd done my best to ruin a brother captain for good and always?"

"You are wrong," she repeated vehemently.

"The man is incompetent by your own saying, and, therefore, he should suffer."

Kettle's heart chilled.

"Miss Carnegie," he said, "I am disappointed in you. I thought from your poetry that you had feelings: I thought you had charity; but I find you are cold."

"And you!" she retorted, "you that I have set up for myself as an ideal of most of the manly virtues, do you think I feel no disappointment when I hear that you are deliberately proposing to be a liar?"

"I am no liar," he said sullenly. "I have most faults, but not that. This is different; you do not understand. It is not lying to defend one's fellow shipmaster before an enquiry board."

The girl turned to the pillow in her chair and hid her face. "O, go!" she said, "go! I wish I had never met you. I thought you were so good, and so brave and so honest, and when it comes to the pinch, you are just like the rest! Go, go! I wish I thought I could ever forget you."

"You say you don't understand," said Kettle. "I think you deliberately won't understand, miss. You remember that I said I was disappointed in you, and I stick to that now. You make me remember that I have got a wife and family I am fond of. You make me ashamed I have not gone to them before."

He went to the door and opened it. "But I do not think I shall ever forget," he said, "how much I cared for you, sure. Goodby, Miss."

"Goodby," she sobbed from her pillow. "I wish I could think you are right, but perhaps it is best as it is."

In the village street outside, was Mr. McTodd clothed in rasping serge, and inclined to be sententious. "They've whisky here," he said with a jerk of the thumb, "Irish whisky, that's got a smoky taste that's rather alluring when you've got over the first dislike. I'm out o' siller myself or I'd stand ye a glass, but if ye're in funds, I could guide ye to the place?"

Kettle was half tempted. But with a wrench he said, "No," adding that if he once started, he might not know when to stop.

"Quite right," said the engineer, "you're quite (hic) right, skipper. A man with an inclination to level himself with the beasts that perish, should always be abstemious." He sat against a wayside fence and prepared for sleep.

"Like me," he added solemnly, and shut his eyes.

"No," said Kettle to himself; "I won't forget it that way, I guess I can manage without. She pretty well cured me herself. But a-sight of the missis will do the rest."

And so Capt. Owen Kettle went home to where Mrs. Kettle kept house in the by-street in South Shields, that unlovely town on Tyneside; and a worrying time he had of it with that estimable woman, his wife, before the explanations which he saw fit to give were passed as entirely satisfactory. In fact, he was not quite forgiven for his escapade with Miss Carnegie or for that other involuntary excursion with Donna Clotilde La Touche till such time as he had acquired fortune from adventure on the seas and was able to take Mrs. Kettle away from her unsavory surroundings and settle down in comfort in a small farmstead on the Yorkshire moors with a hired maid to assist at the housework. But that was not until some considerable time after he was wrecked with Mr. McTodd on the Irish coast; and between the two dates he assisted to make a good deal more history which is (or will be) elsewhere related.

(Copyright by Cutcliffe Hyne.)

ANECDOTAL

A middle-aged Japanese and Japanese boy stood before a steamship office regarding the globe that revolved in the window. "Do you mean to tell me," said the boy, "that the world is as round as that?" "I do," the man answered. "Then," said the boy, "I can't understand why the people on the other side don't fall off." The man sneered. "You fatigue me," he said, wearily. "Well, why is it?" the boy persisted. "Heaven," the man answered, "has given those people common sense, and they hold on."

When a ruined gambler kills himself at Monte Carlo the employees of the Casino, to avoid a scandal, fill his pockets with gold and bank notes. Thus the real cause of his suicide does not appear. A Yankee came to Monte Carlo with about one hundred dollars in five-franc pieces. He lost the money slowly and painfully, and late that he fired a revolver, and, with a loud groan, fell full length on the grass. Instantly three or four dark, silent figures rushed up, filled his pockets with money, and left him there to be discovered in the morning by the police. But long before morning, the enterprising Yankee, his pockets distended with gold, had shaken the dust of Monte Carlo from his feet.

Russell Sage has a horror of law suits. A clerk of Mr. Sage's said the other day: "I sought out the chief one morning in his office. 'You remember, sir,' I said, 'my complaint against my wife's uncle?'

"'Yes,' he answered.

"'Well, said I, 'the man is obdurate, and I think of bringing suit against him. What do you advise?'

"Mr. Sage was silent a moment, frowning thoughtfully. Then he said: 'Listen. When I was clerk in Troy, I had a case against a man that seemed quite as good as yours. I visited a prominent lawyer, and I laid the whole matter before him in detail. When I was through he told me that he would be delighted to take the case—that it was a case that couldn't lose.

"'It can't lose?' said I.

"'It can't lose,' he repeated.

"'I rose, and took up my hat. I thanked the lawyer and told him that I wouldn't bring suit at all. And then I explained that it was my opponent's side, and not my own, which I had laid before him.'"

Pat was in the habit of going home drunk every night and beating his wife Biddy. Finally she appealed to the priest. The priest called that evening, and Pata came home drunk as usual. "Pat," said the priest, "you're drunk. If you ever get drunk again I'll turn you into a rat—do you mind thata? If I don't see you'll I'll know about it just the same, and into a rat you go. Now you mind that." Pat was very docile that night, but the next evening he came home even worse drunk than ever, kicked in the door, and Biddy dodged behind the table to defend herself. "Don't be afraid, darlint," says Pat, as he steadied himself before dropping into a chair, "I'm not going to bate ye. I won't lay the weight of me finger on ye. Ye know his riverence said last night if I got dhrunk again he'd turn me into a rat. He didn't see me, but he knows I'm dhrunk, and this night into a rat I go. But watch me, and when ye see me gettin' little, and the hair growin' out on me, and me whiskers getting long, if ye ever loved me, darlint, for God's sake keep yer eye on the cat."