A Crime of the Under-seas

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Table of Contents

A Crime of the Under-seas

I

There is an old saying that “one half of the world does not know how the other half lives,” but how true this is very few of us really understand. In the East, indeed, it amounts almost to the marvellous. There are men engaged in trades there, some of them highly lucrative, of which the world in general has never heard, and which the ordinary stay–at–home Englishman would in all probability refuse to believe, even if the most trustworthy evidence were placed before him. For instance, on the evening from which I date the story I am now about to tell you, three of us were seated chatting together in the verandah of the Grand Oriental Hotel at Colombo. We were all old friends, and we had each of us arrived but recently in Ceylon. McDougall, the big red–haired Scotchman, who was sitting on my right, had put in an appearance from Tuticorin by a British India boat only that morning, and was due to leave again for Burmah the following night. As far as I could gather he earned his living mainly by smuggling dutiable articles into other countries, where the penalty, if one is caught, is a fine of at least one thousand pounds, or the chance of receiving upwards of five years’ imprisonment. The man in the big chair next to him was Callingway, a Londoner, who had hailed the day before from South America, travelling in a P. and O. steamer from Australia. He was tracking an absconding Argentine Bank Manager, and, as it afterwards transpired, was, when we came in contact with him, on the point of getting possession of the money with which the other had left the country. Needless to say he was not a Government servant, nor were the Banking Company in question aware of his endeavours. Lastly there was myself, Christopher Collon, aged thirty–six, whose walk in life was even stranger, if such a thing were possible, than those of the two men I have just described. One thing at any rate is certain, and that is that if I had been called upon to give an accurate description of myself and my profession at that time, I should have found it extremely difficult to do so. Had I been the possessor of a smart London office, a private secretary, and half a dozen corresponding clerks, I should probably have called myself a private detective on a large scale, or, as they put it in the advertisement columns of our daily papers, a Private Enquiry Agent. Yet that description would scarcely have suited me; I was that and something more. At any rate it was a pretty hard life, and by the same token a fairly hazardous one. This will be the better understood when I say that one day I might receive a commission by cablegram from some London firm, who, we will suppose, had advanced goods to an Indian Rajah, and were unable to obtain payment for them. It was my business to make my way to his headquarters as soon as possible, and to get the money out of him by the best means in my power, eating nothing but what was cooked for me by my own servant meanwhile. As soon as I had done with him I might be sent on very much the same sort of errand to a Chinese Mandarin in Hankow or Canton, or possibly to worry a gold mining concession, or something of the sort, out of one of the innumerable Sultans of the protected Malayan States, those charming places where the head of the State asks you to dinner at six and you are found at midnight with six inches of cold *krise* in your abdomen. On one occasion I remember being sent from Singapore to Kimberley at three hours’ notice to meet and escort a Parsee diamond merchant from that town to Calcutta. And what was funnier still, though we travelled to Cape Town together, and even shared the same cabin on board the steamer afterwards, he never for an instant suspected that I was spying upon him.

Oftentimes I used to wonder what he would have thought, had he only guessed that I knew he was carrying upwards of a million pounds worth of diamonds in the simple leather belt he wore next to his skin, and that every night I used, when he was asleep, to convince myself that everything was right and that the stones were still there. His was a precious life that voyage, at least so his friends in Calcutta thought, and if I could only tell you all that happened during our intercourse, you would not wonder that I was glad when we reached India, and I had handed him over to the chief partners of his firm. But there, if I were to go on telling you my adventures, I should be talking from now to Christmas. Rather let me get to the matter in hand, beside which everything I had ever attempted hitherto ranks as nothing. When I have done I think you will admit that the familiar saying, embodied in my first sentence, should be altered from "one half the world does not know how the other half lives" to "one half the world does not know how the other half *gets its living*." There is a distinction with a good deal of difference.

I have often thought that there is no pleasanter spot in this strange old world of ours than the Grand Oriental Hotel, Colombo. Certainly there is not a more interesting place. There the student of character will have sufficient examples before him to keep him continually at work. Day and night vessels of all sorts and descriptions are entering the harbour, hailing from at least three of the four known quarters of the globe. At all hours men and women from Europe, from India, from Malaysia, from the further East, from Australia, and also from the Southern Seas and America *viâ* Australia, troop in and out of that hospitable caravanserai.

On this particular occasion, having talked of many things and half a hundred times as many places, we had come back to the consideration of our lives and the lack of home comforts they contained.

"If I could only see my way clear I'd throw it up, marry, and settle down," said Callingway; "not in England, or Scotland, or America, for that matter; but, to my thinking, in the loveliest island in the world."

"And where may that be?" I inquired, for I had my own ideas on the subject.

"Tasmania," he answered promptly. "The land of the red–faced apple. I know a little place on the Derwent that would suit me down to the ground."

"I'd na gae ye a pinch of snuff for it," said McDougall, with conviction. "What's life worth to a man in them hole–and–corner places? When I've done wi' roamin' it's in my mind that I'll set myself down at a little place I ken the name of, fifty miles north of the Clyde, where there's a bit of fishing, and shootin', and, if ye want it, well, just a drappie of the finest whuskey that was ever brewed in old Scotie. It's ma thinkin' I've ruined ma digestion wi' all these outlandish liquors that I've been swallowin' these twenty years gone. Don't talk o' your Tasmanias to me. I'm nae fond o' them. What have you to say, Mr. Collon?"

"You needn't be afraid. I'll not settle down as long as I can get about," I answered. "If you fellows are tired of your lives I'm not, and I'm certain of this much, Callingway, by the time you've been installed in your Tasmanian home twelve months, and you, McDougall, have been on your Scotch estate the same length of time, you'll both be heartily sick of them and wishing yourselves back once more in the old life out here."

“Try me, that’s all,” replied Callingway fervently. “Think what our present life is. We are here to–day and gone to–morrow. We’ve not a foot of earth in the whole wide world that we can call our own. The only home we know is a numbered room in a hotel or a cabin aboard a ship. We never know when we get up in the morning whether by nightfall we shall not be lying stark and cold shot through the heart, or with six inches of cold steel through our lungs. Our nerves from year’s end to year’s end are strained to breaking pitch, and there’s not a single decent woman to be found amongst the whole circle of our acquaintances. After all, a wife’s—”

“The lasses, the lasses, I agree with ye,” interrupted McDougall without ceremony. “After all ‘tis the lasses who make the joy o’ livin’. Hear what Robbie says:—

> “‘Health to the sex! ilk guid chiel says,
> Wi’ merry dance in winter days,
> An’ we to share in common:
> The gust o’ joy, the balm o’ woe,
> The soul o’ life, the Heav’n below,
> Is rapture–giving woman.’”

“If you’re going to get on that strain you’re hopeless,” I said. “When Callingway begins to think it is time for him to settle down, and you, McDougall, start quoting Burns, then I come to the conclusion that I’d better bid you good–night.”

As I spoke a “ricksha” drew up at the steps, and, when the coolie had set down his shafts, an elderly gentleman alighted. Having paid the man his fare he entered the verandah, and so made his way into the house. I had got so accustomed to new arrivals by this time that, beyond thinking what a good picture of the substantial old English merchant this one would have made, I did not pay much attention to him.

“Well,” said Callingway, after the few minutes’ pause which followed up my last remark, “I think I will ask you gentlemen to drink another whiskey and soda to my success, and then I will leave you and retire to my virtuous couch. My confounded boat sails at six o’clock to–morrow morning, and if I don’t sail in her I shall lose the society of a most estimable gentleman whom I am accompanying as far as Hong Kong. As it looks like being a profitable transaction I’ve no desire he should give me the slip.”

He touched the bell on the table at his side, and when the boy arrived to answer it, ordered the refreshment in question. We drank to his success in the business he was about to undertake, and then both he and McDougall bade me good–night and retired, leaving me alone in the verandah. It was a lovely evening, and as I was not at all in the humour for sleep I lit another cheroot and remained on where I was, watching the glimmering lights in the harbour beyond, and listening to the jabbering of the “ricksha” boys on the stand across the road.

As I sat there I could not help thinking of the curious life I was leading, of the many strange adventures I had had, and also of my miraculous escapes from what had seemed at the time to be almost certain death. Only that very day I had received an offer by telegram from a well–known and highly respected firm in Bombay inviting me to undertake a somewhat delicate piece of business in the Philippine Islands. The price offered me was,

in every sense of the word, a good one; but I detested Spanish countries so much that if anything better turned up I was prepared to let the other fall through without a second thought. But one has to live, even in the East, and for this reason I did not feel justified in throwing dirty water away before I had got clean.

As these thoughts were passing through my mind I distinctly heard some one step into the verandah from the door on my right, and a moment later, to my surprise, the stout old gentleman who, half an hour or so before, I had thought so typical of an English merchant, came round the chairs towards me. Having reached the place where I was sitting he stopped, and, taking a cheroot from his pocket, proceeded to light it. During the operation I noticed that he took careful stock of me, and, when he had finished, said quietly,—

“Mr. Collon, I believe?”

“That is my name,” I answered, looking up at him through the cloud of smoke. “Pray how do you come to be acquainted with it?”

“I have heard of you repeatedly,” he replied.

“Indeed,” I said. “And pray is there any way in which I can be of service to you?”

“I think so,” he replied, with a smile. “As a matter of fact, I have just arrived from Madras, where, hearing in an indirect way that you were supposed to be in Ceylon, I undertook this journey on purpose to see you.”

“Indeed!” I answered, with considerable surprise. “And pray what is it you desire me to do for you?”

“I want you to take charge of what I think promises to be one of the most extraordinary and complicated cases even in your extensive repertoire,” he said.

“If it is as you say, it must indeed be a singular one,” I answered. “Perhaps it would not give you too much trouble to furnish me with the details.”

“I will do so with the greatest pleasure,” he replied. “If you will permit me to take my seat beside you, you shall hear the story from beginning to end. I think, then, that you will agree with me that, provided you undertake it, it will, as I insinuated just now, in all probability prove the most sensational, as well as the most lucrative, case in which even you have hitherto been engaged.”

Thereupon he seated himself beside me, and told the following remarkable story.

II

"In the first place, Mr. Collon," said the old gentleman, who had shown himself so anxious to obtain my services, "I must introduce myself to you. My name is Leversidge, John Leversidge, and I am the junior partner of the firm of Wilson, Burke & Leversidge, of Hatton Garden, Paris, Calcutta, and Melbourne. We are, as you will have gathered from our first address, diamond and precious stone merchants, and we do a very large business in the East generally; also among the Pacific Islands and in Australia. With the two last named our trade is confined principally to pearls and gold, neither of them having very much in the way of gems to offer. Still their connection is worth so much to us as to warrant us in keeping two buyers almost continuously employed; a fact, I think, which speaks for itself. Now it so turned out that some six months or so ago we received a cablegram in London announcing the fact that an enormous black pearl, in all probability the finest yet brought to light, had been discovered near one of the islands to the southward of New Guinea. It had been conveyed first to Thursday Island, which, as perhaps you are aware, is the head and centre of this particular industry in Australian waters, and later on, with a considerable amount of secrecy, to Sydney, where our agent, a man in whom we had the greatest trust, made it his business to see it on our behalf. The result was a cypher cablegram to our firm in London, to say that the jewel was, as far as his knowledge went, absolutely unique, and that in his opinion it behoved us to purchase it, even at the exorbitant price asked for it by the rascally individual into whose hands it had now fallen. This was a person by the name of Bollinson, a half–bred Swede I should say by the description we received of him; though, for my part, from the way he treated us, I should think Jew would be somewhat nearer the mark. Whatever his nationality may have been, however, the fact remains that he knew his business so well, that when we obtained possession of the pearl, which we were determined to have at any price, we had paid a sum for it nearly double what we had originally intended to give. But that mattered little to us, for we had the *most perfect confidence in our servant*, who had had to do with pearls all his life, and who since he had been in our employ had been fortunate enough to secure several splendid bargains for us. So, to make a long story short, when he cabled the price—though I must confess we whistled a little at the figure—we wired back: 'Buy, and bring it home yourself by next boat,' feeling convinced that we had done the right thing and should not regret it. Now, as you know, there is to be an Imperial wedding in Europe in six months' time, and as we had received instructions to submit for his inspection anything we might have worthy of the honour, we felt morally certain that the sovereign in question would take the jewel off our hands, and thus enable us to get our money back and a fair percentage of interest, besides repaying us for our outlay and our trouble. Sure enough next day a message came in to us to say that our agent had completed the sale and was leaving for England that day, not *viâ* Melbourne and Adelaide, as we had supposed, or *viâ* Vancouver, which would have been the next best route; but by way of Queensland, the Barrier Reef, and the Arifura Sea, which was longer, and, as we very well knew, by no means so safe. Then he added the very significant information that since he had had the pearl in his keeping no less than *three separate and distinct attempts* had been made by other people to obtain possession of it. All that, you must understand, happened eight weeks ago. I was in London at the time, and can therefore give you the information first

hand."

"Eight weeks exactly?" I asked, for I always like to be certain of my dates. Many a good case that I have taken in hand has collapsed for the simple reason that the parties instructing me had been a little slipshod in the matter of their dates.

"Eight weeks to–morrow," he answered. "Or rather, since it is now past midnight, I think I might say eight weeks to–day. However, in this particular instance the date does not happen to be of much importance."

"In that case I must beg your pardon for interrupting you," I said. "You were saying, I think, that your agent reported that, before he left Sydney, no less than three attempts were made by certain parties to obtain possession of the pearl in question."

"That was so. But it is evident that he managed to elude them, otherwise he would have cabled again to us on the subject."

"Did you then receive no further message from him?"

"Only one from Brisbane to say that he had joined the mail–boat, *Monarch of Macedonia*, at that port, and would sail for England in her that day."

On hearing the name of the vessel I gave a start of surprise, and I might almost say of horror. "Good heavens!" I cried; "do you mean to say he was on board the *Monarch of Macedonia*? Why, as all the world knows by this time, she struck a rock somewhere off the New Guinea Coast and went to the bottom with all hands but two."

The old gentleman nodded his head. "Your information is quite correct, my dear sir," he said. "In a fog one night between eleven and twelve o'clock, she got in closer to the New Guinea Coast than she ought to have done, and struck on what was evidently an uncharted rock, and sank in between fifteen and twenty fathoms of water. Of her ship's company only two were saved, a foremast hand and a first saloon passenger, the Rev. W. Colway–Brown, a clergyman from Sydney. These two managed, by some extraordinary means, to secure a boat, and in her they made their way to the shore, which was between thirty and forty miles distant. Here they dwelt for a few days in peril of their lives from the natives, and were ultimately picked up by a trading schooner called *The Kissing Cup*, whose skipper carried them on to Thursday Island, where they were taken in and most kindly cared for."

"And your agent? Did you learn anything of his fate?"

"Nothing that was likely to be of any comfort to us," said the old fellow sadly. "We telegraphed as soon as we heard the news, of course, first to the agents in Brisbane, who, to prove that he sailed on board the vessel, wired us the number of his cabin, and then to the Rev. Colway–Brown, who was still in Thursday Island. The latter replied immediately to the effect that he remembered quite well seeing the gentleman in question on deck earlier in the evening, but that he saw nothing of him after the vessel struck, and could only suppose he must have been in bed when the accident happened. It was a most unhappy affair altogether, and, as you may suppose, we were not a little cut up at the loss of our old servant and trusted friend."

"I can quite believe that," I answered. "And now what is it you want me to do to help

you?”

Mr. Leversidge was silent for a few seconds, and thinking he might be wondering how he should put the matter to me I did not interrupt him.

“Well, Mr. Collon,” he said, after a few moments’ thought, “what we want you to do for us, is to proceed with me to the scene of the wreck as soon as possible, and to endeavour to obtain from her the pearl which our agent was bringing home to us. Your reputation as a diver is well known to us, and I might tell you that directly the news of the wreck reached us we said to each other, ‘That pearl must be recovered at any cost, and Christopher Collon is the man for the work.’ We will, of course, pay all expenses connected with the expedition. Will you therefore be good enough to tell me if you will undertake the work, and if so, what your charge will be?”

Many and strange as my adventures had hitherto been, and curious (for that is the most charitable term, I think) as were some of the applications I had had made to me in my time, I don’t think I had ever been made such an extraordinary offer as that brought under my notice by the old gentleman who had so unexpectedly come in search of me. He had not been far from the mark when he had said that this was likely to be one of the strangest cases that had ever come under my observation. Of one thing I was firmly convinced, and that was that I was not going to give him a decided answer at once. I did not know how my ground lay, and nothing was to be gained by giving my promise and being compelled to withdraw it afterwards. Besides, before I pledged myself, I wanted to find out how I stood with the law in the matter of the ship herself. I had no sort of desire to board her and bring off the jewel, and then find it advertised in all the papers of the world and myself called into court on a charge of wrecking or piracy, or whatever the particular term might be that covers that sort of crime.

“You must give me time to think it over,” I said, turning to the old gentleman beside me. “I want to discover my position. For all I know to the contrary I may be lending myself to a felony, and that would never do at all. Everybody is aware that the more adventures a jewel goes through the more valuable it becomes. On the other hand the arm of the law reaches a long way, and I am not going to be the cat that pulls your chestnuts out of the fire and burns her paws in so doing. That would scarcely suit Christopher Collon, however nice it might be for other people.”

“My dear sir,” replied Mr. Leversidge, “you need have no fear at all on that score. We have no desire to incriminate you or to hurt your interests in any possible way. I shall take charge of the affair myself, and that should be sufficient guarantee that we are not going to run any undue risk. I have both my public and my private reputation at stake, and for my own sake you may be sure I shall take very good care that we do not come into collision with the law. The good name of my firm is also in the balance, and that should count for something. No, my dear sir, the most rigid and absolute secrecy will be maintained, and the arrangements will be as follows: If you are agreeable, and we can come to terms, we shall charter a vessel, if possible, in Batavia, fit her out with the necessary appliances, and sail in her with all speed to the spot where the catastrophe happened. Then you will descend to the vessel, discover our agent’s luggage, which is certain to be in his cabin, we shall draw it up to the surface, examine it, obtain the pearl, and having done so sail again for Batavia, where the amount upon which we shall have agreed will be paid to you. After

that we must separate; you will go your way, I shall go mine, and not a living soul will be the wiser."

"That's all very well, but what about the officers and crew of the vessel we charter? Do you think they will not suspect; and how do you propose to square them?"

"We will do that, never fear. They will be certain to believe, from the confident way in which we act, that we have the right to visit the vessel. Besides, when we have once parted from them, we shall never see them again. No, I do not think you need be afraid of them. Come, what do you say?"

"I don't know what to say," I answered. "I'm not sure whether it would be worth my while to touch it. The risk is so great, and I've got another offer on hand just now that looks as if it might turn out well. All these things have to be considered before I can give you an answer."

"Naturally," he replied. "But still I trust you will see your way to helping us. Your skill as a diver is well known, and I pay you the compliment of believing that you have one of the rarest of all gifts, the knowledge of how to hold your tongue when it is necessary. Just think it over and acquaint me with your decision in the morning."

"Very good," I answered. "I will do so. You shall have my answer after breakfast, without fail."

"I am glad to hear it, and I thank you. Now, good–night."

"Good–night," I answered, and after that we separated to go to our respective rooms.

By five o'clock next morning, after a troubled night, I had made up my mind. If the old gentleman would give the terms I wanted, I would do what he asked. Half of the amount was to be paid before we left Colombo, and the balance on our return to Batavia, or on the completion of our work, provided it did not last more than six months. All expenses were to be defrayed by his firm, and a document was to be given me, exonerating me from all blame should the law think fit to come down upon us for what we were doing. All this I embodied in a letter which I copied and sent to Mr. Leversidge's room while he was dressing.

After breakfast he found me in the verandah.

"Many thanks for your note," he said promptly. "I shall be most happy to agree to your terms. We will settle them at once, if you have no objection."

"That is very kind of you," I answered; "but why this great hurry?"

"Because we must leave in the mail–boat this afternoon for Batavia, *viâ* Singapore," he replied. "As you will see for yourself, there is no time to be lost."

III

In every life there are certain to be incidents, often of the most trivial nature possible, which, little as we may think so at the time, are destined to remain with us, indelibly stamped upon our memories, until we shuffle off this mortal coil. As far as my own existence is concerned, I shall always remember the first view we obtained of Tanjong Priok, as the seaport of Batavia is called, on the day we arrived there from Singapore, engaged on the most extraordinary quest in which I had ever taken part. It was towards evening, and the sky, not merely the western, but indeed the whole length and breadth of the heavens, was suffused with the glorious tints of sunset. Such another I do not remember ever to have seen. In these later days, whenever I look back on that strange adventure, the first thing I see pictured in my mind's eye is that Dutch harbour with its shiny green wharves on one hand, its desolate, wind–tossed cocoa–nut trees upon the shore on the other, and that marvellously beautiful sky enveloping all like a blood–red mantle.

The voyage from Ceylon to Singapore, and thence to Java, calls for no special comment, save that it was accomplished at the maximum of speed and the minimum of convenience. So great, however, was Mr. Leversidge's desire to get to the scene of the disaster, that he could scarcely wait even for the most necessary preparations to be made. The whole way from Colombo to Singapore he grumbled at the speed of the vessel, and when we broke down later on off the coast of Sumatra, I really thought he would have had a fit. However, as I have said before, we reached it at last, and despite the catastrophe, in fairly good time. Having done so, we went ashore, and, acting on my advice, installed ourselves at the Hotel de Nederlander. There are few more beautiful places in the world than Java, and few where I would less care to spend my life. It was Leversidge's first visit to the island, however, and, as is usual in such cases, its beauty exercised a powerful effect upon him. Java is like itself and nothing else in the whole scope of the Immemorial East.

Once we were settled we began to think about our preparations for accomplishing the last part of our singular journey, namely, our voyage to the wreck. It was a delicate bit of business, and one that had to be undertaken in a careful manner in order that no suspicions might be aroused. The Dutch Government is as suspicious as a rat, and a great deal more watchful than most people give it the credit of being. If space permitted, which it does not, I could furnish you with tangible evidence on this head.

"What do you intend doing first?" I had inquired of Mr. Leversidge, on the evening of our landing, when we sat together after dinner in the verandah outside our bedrooms.

"To–morrow morning I shall commence my inquiries for a vessel to carry us on," he answered. "I do not, of course, in accordance with the promise I gave you, desire to compromise you in any way, but if you would give me a few hints as to the way in which I should proceed, I should be very grateful to you. This is the first time I have been in Java, and naturally I am not familiar with the ropes."

"I'll do all I can for you, with great pleasure," I replied; "on the understanding, of course, that I take none of the responsibility. In the first place, you will want a smart little vessel

that will get us down to the spot as quickly as possible. Then you will have to hire your diving gear, pumps, dress, etc., and these, as my life and the entire success of the business will depend upon them, must be of the very first quality. Having secured your boat, you must find a trustworthy skipper and crew. She must be provisioned, and when all that has been done, you must arrange to get away from Tanjong Priok without a soul here being the wiser as to what occasions your hurry. I take it that that is a fair summary of the case?"

"You have hit it exactly," he answered; "but I'm afraid it's rather more difficult than you suppose. In the first place, I want to be certain of my man before I go to him. I don't want to make a false step and find myself confronted with a person who will not only refuse to entertain my request point–blank, but will inform the Government as soon as my back is turned of my intentions. That would ruin everything."

"Well, if you want a man from whom you can make inquiries," I answered, "and at the same time feel safe in so doing, I think I can put you on the track of one. I've got his card in my bag now, and to–morrow morning I'll give it to you. One thing is very certain: if there is any one on this island who can help you, he is that man. But don't let him get an inkling that you're after pearls, whatever you do, or he'll want to stand in with you, as sure as you're born, or sell you to the Government if you don't let him have his own way. I know for a fact that he owns a fleet of schooners, all built for speed, though I expect when you ask him he will deny knowing anything at all about them. They're fitted up with the latest appliances in the way of pumps and gear, but I know nothing of the crews they carry. You must look after them yourself, only be very careful and keep your eyes open. Remember that every man about here is a sailor, or pretends to be. Oftener, however, he is as big a rascal as can be found in the East, and would not only play you false as soon as look at you, but would slit your throat on the first convenient opportunity, if for no other reward than to see how pretty you look while he is doing it. I've had to do with them for more years than I like to count, and I speak from experience. Now, with your permission, I'll be off to bed. I'll give you the fellow's address to–morrow morning."

"Many thanks," he said. "I am sincerely grateful to you for the help you have rendered me."

"Don't mention it. I only hope it may prove of real service to you. Good–night."

"Good–night, my dear sir," he answered. "Good–night. I trust that we have now definitely started on our work, and that we are on the threshold of great events."

Early next morning, that is to say after the early breakfast, which is served either in the bedrooms or in the verandahs, as visitors may prefer, I handed the old gentleman the card of the individual to whom I had referred on the previous evening, and he immediately set off in search of him. While he was gone I thought I would take a stroll down town and find out what was doing, so, donning my solar topee, I lit a cigar and set off. I had an old friend, who could tell me all I wanted to know—a man I had often found useful—and, what was better still, one whom I had impressed some time since with the belief that it would be by no means advisable to attempt to play fast and loose with me. He was a curious old fellow, of the name of Maalthaas, and claimed to be a Dutchman. But I happened to be aware that this was not his name; he was a native of Southern Germany, and had originally run away to escape military service. He dwelt at the top of a curious

building in the main thoroughfare of the native town, the lower portion of which was inhabited by Chinamen, and it was his boast that he knew more of what was going on in the further East than even Li Chung Tang himself.

I found him in the act of getting out of bed, and he looked as if he were suffering a recovery from a heavy opium bout, to which little excesses he was very partial. When I opened the door, he greeted me without showing the least surprise. A funnier little dried–up skin–and–bone creature no one could have desired to see.

“Mynheer Collon?” he said, or rather gasped, for he was always asthmatical. “I somehow expected I should see you this morning.”

“Then your expectation is realized,” I answered. “I happened to be in Batavia, so I thought I would look you up. It is months since I last set eyes on you.”

“But why did you leave Colombo so suddenly, Mynheer?” he asked inquisitively, disregarding the latter portion of my speech. “And how does it come about that you did not accept that offer to squeeze the dollars out of that tobacco firm in the Philippines?”

“How the deuce do you know anything about that?” I asked in surprise, for it must be borne in mind that that business had been negotiated in the strictest secrecy, and I had no idea that any one else, save the parties mostly concerned, had any inkling of it, much less this withered–up old mummy in Java, who sat on his bed screwing his nutcracker face up into what he thought was a pleasant smile.

“I am old, and deaf, and blind as a bat,” he answered; “but I am young enough to have my wits about me. My ears are always open for a bit of gossip, and blind as I am I can see as far into the world as my neighbours.”

“You’ve got wonderfully sharp eyes, Daddy,” I replied. “Everybody knows that. And what’s more, you never make a mistake, do you? If I were as clever as you are I’d start opium smuggling in Formosa to–morrow, and make a fortune out of it.”

Now it so happened that this very industry was the only real failure the old man had had in his life, or, to be more exact, it was the only failure which had ever come to light. In consequence he was the more sensitive about it.

“You think yourself very clever, don’t you?” he asked, “but you’re not quite as clever as old Maalthaas yet. For all he’s so old he still has his wits about him. Supposing he could tell you your errand here, and why that white–haired old English merchant, Leversidge, is with you, eh?”

“What do you know about Leversidge, you old wizard?” I cried; not, however, without a little feeling of nervousness, as I thought of what the consequences might be if this old rascal became aware of the game we were playing and of the necessity that existed for secrecy.

“A good deal more than you think,” he answered, with a sly chuckle. “When Hatton Garden takes Christopher Collon in tow, their little game is worth watching, it seems to me. At any rate, it’s worth seeing if you can discover the reason of it all.”

“It is just possible it might gratify your curiosity,” I said, “but for my own part I don’t see exactly where the benefit would come in. They pay me fairly well; still—”

“Still not the full value of the pearl?” he cried. “That’s what you were going to say, I suppose?”

The start I could not prevent myself from giving must have shown him that he had scored a bull’s–eye. But I recovered myself almost instantly, and by that time had made up my mind as to the course I should pursue. “No, I don’t suppose it is the full value of the pearl,” I answered. “It’s hardly likely it would be. Still, we must live, and, as perhaps you know, business has not been very brisk of late. How have you been doing yourself?”

“Nothing at all,” he answered; and then added significantly, “I’m looking out for something now. ‘Make hay while the sun shines,’ is my motto, and I’ve always found it a good one.”

“I’m sorry, then, that I can’t help you to anything,” I said. “If I could you know I’d go out of my way to do so, don’t you?”

Once more he glanced at me and chuckled. From what I knew of his ways, I could see that there was some mischief still to come.

“You were always grateful for a little help, my boy, weren’t you? We’ve had many a good bit of business together at one time or another, if my poor old memory serves me. It is just possible now that I can do you a good turn, but I’m a poor man, and I want something for my trouble.”

“What can you do for me?” I asked, as I searched his crafty old face with my eyes, in the hopes of getting some inkling of what he had in his mind.

“I can give you a warning about this present bit of work of yours,” he said. “It may save you a lot of trouble, and not only trouble but a bit of danger, too, if what I hear is correct.”

“The deuce you can!” I said; “and pray, what may that warning be?”

“Not too fast, my friend,” he answered. “Before I tell you I want my return. Give me the information I ask, and you shall know all I’ve got to tell. It’s worth hearing, I give you my word.”

“Well, what is it you want to know? I’ve trusted you before, and I don’t mind doing so again. Ask your question and I’ll answer it. But if you get up to any larks, or play me false, why just you look out for yourself, that’s all.”

“I’m not going to play you false,” he answered, with another contortion of his face. “What I want to know is, when you induced the Sultan of Pela–Pelu to hand you over that Portugee chap, for whom the Tsungli–Yamen in Pekin offered that reward, what was the threat you used? I’ve got a little game to play there, and I want to be able to pinch him so as to make him squeal in case he refuses me. Tell me how you managed it, and I’ll give you the information you need.”

Before I answered him I took a minute or so to consider my position. I did not want to betray my secret unless I was absolutely compelled to do so, and yet I had good reason for believing that the old fellow would not have hinted that there was something I ought to know, unless his news were worth the telling. However, at last I made up my mind, took out my pocket–book and turned up a certain entry.

“There it is,” I said, as I handed it to him to read. “I got that information first hand, so I know it can be relied upon. I threatened him with exposure, and though he was very high up the tree before, he soon climbed down.”

Maalthaas read what was written on the page twice over, and then scribbled a few notes on a piece of paper, which he took from under his pillow. Having done so, he handed me back the book, which I pocketed.

“Now what have you got to tell me?” I inquired.

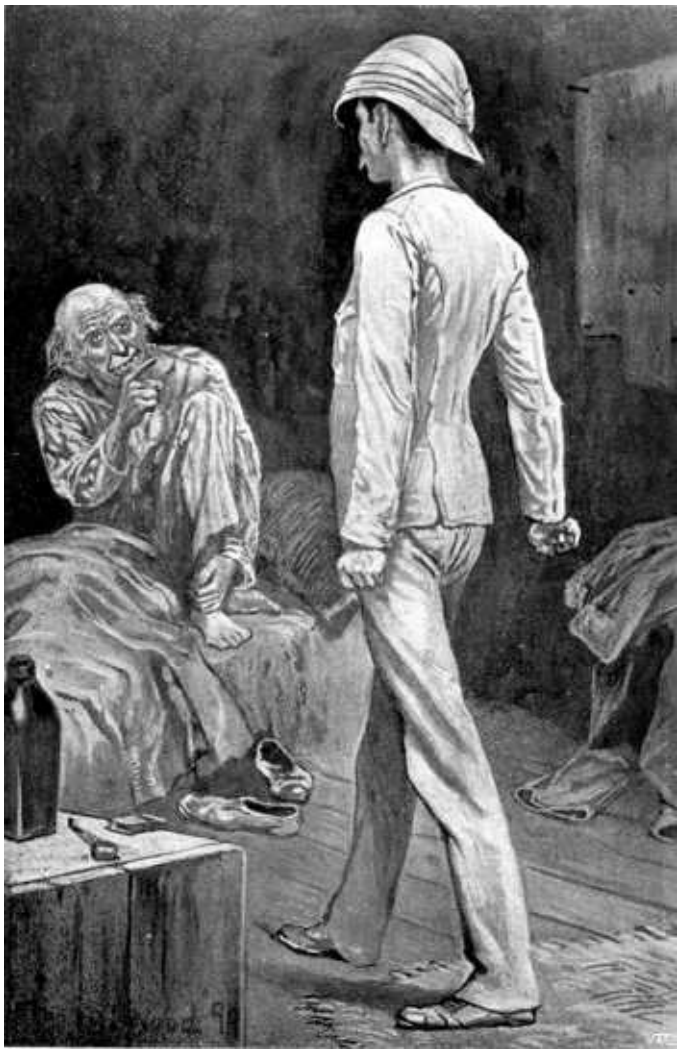
“First answer me one question,” he said. “You’re off to the wreck of the *Monarch of Macedonia*, are you not?”

“I’m not going to say whether we are, or are not,” I answered; “but suppose, for the sake of argument, we are. What then?”

He leaned a little closer towards me, and his crafty old eyes twinkled in his head like two brilliant stars.

“In that case,” he said, “my advice is, make haste, for you may be sure of one thing, and that is that *you’re not the first*.”

I sprang to my feet on hearing this. “Not the first!” I cried. “What the deuce do you mean? Why are we not the first?”



“I sprang to my feet on hearing this. ‘Not the first!’ I cried.”

“Because a schooner started yesterday for the wreck, with a full diving plant aboard. Jim Peach is running the show, *and he has Yokohama Joe with him*.”

I did not wait to hear any more, but picking up my hat made for the door, and before you could have counted fifty was flying up the street at my best speed. Jim Peach had beaten me once before, he was not going to do so again if I could help it.

IV

As I reached the hotel again after my interview with that crafty old rascal, Maalthaas, I saw Mr. Leversidge entering it by another gate. I hurried after him and just managed to catch him as he was crossing the verandah to pass into his own sitting–room. He turned sharply round on hearing my step behind him, and one glance at my face must have told him that there was something the matter. His face turned pale, and I noticed that his mouth twitched nervously.

“What is it?” he asked breathlessly. “What is it you have to tell me? I can see there is something wrong by your face.”

“There is indeed something wrong,” I answered. “Come inside and let me tell you. I hurried back on purpose to let you know at once.”

“I am obliged to you,” he said. “Now come inside. Your face frightens me. I fear bad news.”

“It is not good news I have to tell you, I’m afraid,” I replied. “But still, if we’re sharp, we may be able to remedy the mischief before it’s too late. First and foremost you must understand that this morning I called upon an old friend who lives here, one of the sharpest men in the East, if not the very sharpest. He’s a man who knows everything; who would in all probability be able to tell you why that Russian cruiser, which was due in Hong Kong last Friday, at the last moment put back to Vladivostock, though she did not require coal, and had nothing whatever the matter with her. Or he will tell you, as he did me, the reasons which induced a certain English jewel merchant to hasten to Colombo from Madras, and then come on to Java in company with a man named Christopher Collon.”

“Do you mean to say that our business here is known to people?” he cried in alarm. “In that case we are ruined.”

“Not quite, I think,” I answered; and then with a little boastfulness which I could not help displaying, I added, “In the first place it is not known to *people*. Only to one person. In the second, Maalthaas may play fast and loose with a good many folk, but he dares not do so with me. I carry too many guns for him, and we are too useful to each other to endeavour in any way to spoil each other’s games. But for him I should never have known what has happened now until it would have been too late to remedy it.”

“But you have not yet told me what *has* happened,” said Mr. Leversidge in an aggrieved tone.

“Well, the fact of the matter is,” I said, “while we have been congratulating ourselves on our sharpness, we have very nearly been forestalled in what we intended doing. In other words, we are not so early in the field as we thought we were.”

“What do you mean? Not so early in the field. Do you mean to tell me there is some one else trying to do what we are going to do? That some one else is setting off for the wreck?”

“I do,” I answered, with a nod of the head. “You have just hit it. A schooner left Tanjong Priok yesterday with a diver aboard, and as far as I can gather—and there seems to be no doubt about the matter—she was bound for the wreck.”

“Do you mean a Government vessel? Surely she must have been sent by the authorities?”

“I don’t mean anything of the sort,” I said. “The only authority she is sent by is Jim Peach, one of the sharpest men in these waters. And when I tell you that he is aboard her, and that he has Yokohama Joe, the diver, with him, I guess you’ll see there’s real cause for alarm. At any rate, Mr. Leversidge, it’s my opinion that if we’re not there first we may as well give up all thought of the pearls, for they’ll get them as sure as you’re born—don’t you make any mistake about that. I’ve never known Jimmy Peach fail in what he undertook but once. He’s a bad ‘un to beat is Jimmy. He knows these waters as well as you know Oxford Street, and if, as I expect, it’s his own schooner he’s gone in, then we shall have all our time taken up trying to catch her.”

As I said this the old gentleman’s face was a study. Expressions of bewilderment, anxiety, greed, and vindictiveness seemed to struggle in it for the mastery. It was evident that, brought up as he had been with a profound respect for the sacred rights of property, it was impossible for him to believe that the man could live who would have the audacity to behave towards him, John Leversidge, of Hatton Garden, as Peach and his gang were now said to be doing. He clenched his fists as he realized that the success of the enterprise depended entirely upon our being able to beat the others at their own game, and from the gleam I saw in his eye I guessed that there was not much the old boy would not do and dare to get possession of what had been bought and paid for by his firm, and what he therefore considered to be his own lawful property.

“If it is as you say, Mr. Collon,” he said, at length, “there can be no possible doubt as to what sort of action we should take. Come what may we must be on the spot first. I believe I am doing as my firm would wish when I say that those other rascals must be outwitted at all costs. If this man you speak of, this Peach, is a bad one to beat, let me tell you so am I. We’ll make a match of it and see who comes out best. I can assure you I have no fear for the result.”

“Bravely spoken,” I said. “I like your spirit, Mr. Leversidge, and I’m with you hand and glove. I’ve beaten Jimmy before, and on this occasion I’ll do so again.”

“I only hope and trust you may,” he answered. “And now what do you advise? What steps should we take first? Give me your assistance, I beg, for you must of necessity be better versed in these sort of matters than I. It seems to me, however, that one thing is very certain: if these men sailed yesterday in their schooner, and they have a day’s start of us, we shall find it difficult to catch them. We might do so, of course; but it would be safer to act as if we think we might not. For my own part I do not feel inclined to run the risk. I want to make it certain that we *do* get there before them.”

“The only way to do that is, of course, to charter a steamer,” I replied, “and that will run into a lot of money. But it will make it *certain* that we get the better of them.”

“In such a case money is no object. We must keep our word to the Emperor, and to do that my firm would spend twice the sum this is likely to cost. But the question is, where are we to find the steamer we want? I found it difficult, nay, almost impossible, to get even a

schooner this morning. And for the only one I could hear of the owner asked such a preposterous price that I did not feel disposed to give in to his demands until I had consulted you upon the subject, and made certain that we could not find another. What do you recommend?"

I considered the matter for a moment. I had had experience of Java shipowners before, and I knew something of their pleasant little ways. Then an idea occurred to me.

"I think if you will let me negotiate the matter, Mr. Leversidge," I said, "I may be able to obtain what you want. The man of whom I spoke to you just now, the same who gave me the information regarding Peach and his party, is the person to apply to. For a consideration I have no doubt he would find us a vessel, and though we may have to pay him for his trouble, he will take very good care that we are not swindled by any other party. There is one more suggestion I should like to make, and that is that you should let me telegraph to a person of my acquaintance in Thursday Island to send a schooner down to a certain part of the New Guinea coast, in charge of men he can trust. We could then on arrival tranship to her, and send the steamer back without letting those on board know anything of our errand. What do you think of that arrangement? In my opinion it would be the best course to pursue."

"And I agree with you," he answered. "It is an admirable idea, and I am obliged to you for it. We will put it into execution without loss of time. As soon as you have seen this man Maalthaas we will send the message you speak of to Thursday Island."

"I will see him at once," I replied. "There is no time to be lost. While we are talking here that schooner is making her way to the scene of the catastrophe as fast as she can go."

I accordingly departed, and in something less than a quarter of an hour was once more seated in the venerable Maalthaas' room. It did not take long to let him know the favour we wanted of him, nor did it take long for him to let me understand upon what terms he was prepared to grant it. "You won't come down in your price at all, I suppose?" I said, when he had finished. "What you ask is a trifle stiff for such a simple service."

"Not a guelder," he answered briefly.

"Provided we agree, when can we sail?"

"To–morrow morning at daylight, if you like. There will be no difficulty about that."

"And you guarantee that the men you send with her can be trusted?"

"Nobody in this world is to be trusted," he answered grimly. "I've never yet met the man who could not be bought at a price. And what's more if I did meet him I would be the last to trust him. What I will say is that the men who work the boat are as nearly trustworthy as I can get them. That's all."

"All right. That will do. I will go back to my principal now and let him know what you say. If I don't return here within an hour you can reckon we agree to your terms, and you can go ahead."

"No, thank you, Mynheer," said Maalthaas; "that won't do at all. If I receive the money within an hour, I shall take it that you agree, not otherwise. Half the money down and the remainder to be paid to the captain when you reach your destination. If you want him to

wait for you and bring you back, you must pay half the return fare when you get aboard, and the balance when you return here. Do you understand?”

“Perfectly. I will let you have an answer within an hour.”

Fifteen hours later the money had been paid, the cablegram to Thursday Island despatched, and we were standing on the deck of the Dutch steamer *König Ludwig*, making our way along the Java coast at the rate of a good fifteen knots an hour.

“If Master Peach doesn’t take care we shall be in a position to throw him a towline by this time on Saturday morning,” I said to Mr. Leversidge, who was standing beside me.

“I devoutly hope so,” he answered. “At any rate, you may be sure we’ll make a good race of it. What shall we call the stakes?”

“The Race for a Dead Man’s Pearls,” said I. “How would that do?”

V

To my surprise before we had been twenty–four hours at sea every one on board the *König Ludwig* seemed to have imbibed a measure of our eagerness, and to be aware that we were not in reality engaged in a pleasure trip, as had been given out, but in a race against a schooner which had sailed from the same port nearly forty–eight hours before. As a matter of fact it was Mr. Leversidge who was responsible for thus letting the cat out of the bag. Imperative as it was that the strictest reticence should be observed regarding our errand, his excitement was so great that he could not help confiding his hopes and fears, under the pledge of secrecy, of course, to half the ship's company. Fortunately, however, he had the presence of mind not to reveal the object of our voyage, though I fear many of them must have suspected it.

It was on the seventh day after leaving Batavia that we reached that portion of the New Guinea coast where it had been arranged that the schooner, for which I had telegraphed to Thursday Island, should meet us. So far we had seen nothing of Peach's boat, and in our own hearts we felt justified in believing that we had beaten her. Now, if we could only change vessels, and get to the scene of action without loss of time, it looked as if we should stand an excellent chance of completing our business and getting away again before she could put in an appearance. After careful consideration we had agreed to allow the steamer to return without us to Java, and when we had done our work to continue our journey on board the schooner to Thursday Island. Here we would separate, Leversidge returning with his treasure to England *viâ* Brisbane and Sydney, and I making my way by the next China boat to Hong–Kong, where I intended to lay by for a while on the strength of the money I was to receive from him. But, as you will shortly see, we were bargaining without our hosts. Events were destined to turn out in a very different way from what we expected.

It was early morning—indeed, it still wanted an hour to sunrise—when the captain knocked at our respective cabins and informed us that we had reached the place to which it had been arranged in the contract he should carry us. We accordingly dressed with all possible speed, and having done so made our way on deck. When we reached it we found an unusually still morning, a heavy mist lying upon the face of the sea. The latter, as far as we could judge by the water alongside, was as smooth and pulseless as a millpond. Not a sound could be heard save the steady dripping of the moisture from the awning on the deck. Owing to the fog it was impossible to tell whether or not the schooner from Thursday Island had arrived at the rendezvous. She might have been near us, or she might be fifty miles away for all we could tell to the contrary.

Once we thought we heard the sound of a block creaking a short distance away to port, but though we hailed at least a dozen times, and blew our whistles for some minutes, we were not rewarded with an answer.

"This delay is really very annoying," said Mr. Leversidge testily, after we had tramped the deck together for upwards of an hour. "Every minute is of the utmost importance to us, for every hour we waste in inaction here is bringing the other schooner closer. As soon as this fog lifts we shall have to make up for lost time with a vengeance."

How we got through the remainder of that morning I have only a very confused recollection. For my own part I believe I put in most of it with a book lying on the chartroom locker. Mr. Leversidge, on the other hand, was scarcely still for a minute at a time, but spent most of the morning running from place to place about the vessel, peering over the side to see if the fog were lifting, and consulting his watch and groaning audibly every time he returned it to his pocket. I don't know that I ever remember seeing a man more impatient.

As soon as lunch was finished we returned to the deck, only to find the fog as thick as ever. The quiet that was over everything was most uncanny, and when one of us spoke his voice seemed to travel for miles. Still, however, we could hear nothing, much less see anything, of the schooner which was to have taken us on to our destination.

"If this fog doesn't lift soon I believe I shall go mad," said Leversidge at last, bringing his hand down as he spoke with a smack upon the bulwarks. "For all we know to the contrary it may be fine where the wreck is, and all the time we are lying here inactive that rascal Peach's schooner, the *Nautch Girl*, is coming along hand over fist to spoil our work for us. I never knew anything so aggravating in my life."

As if nature were regretting having given him so much anxiety, the words had scarcely left his mouth before there was a break in the fog away to port, and then with a quickness that seemed almost magical, seeing how thick it had been a moment before, the great curtain drew off the face of the deep, enabling us to see the low outline of the cape ten miles or so away to starboard, and, as if the better to please us, a small vessel heading towards us from the south–eastward. As soon as I brought the glass to bear upon her I knew her for the schooner I had cabled to Thursday Island about. An hour later she was hove–to within a cable's length of us, and we were moving our traps aboard as expeditiously as possible. Then sail was got on her once more, the *König Ludwig* whistled us a shrill farewell, and presently we were bowling across the blue seas toward our destination at as fine a rate of speed as any man could wish to see.

For the remainder of that day we sailed on, making such good running of it that at sunrise on the morning following we found ourselves at the place for which we had been travelling—namely, the scene of the wreck of the unfortunate steamship *Monarch of Macedonia*. We were all on deck when we reached it, and never shall I forget the look of astonishment that came into Leversidge's face when the skipper sang out some orders, hove her to, and joined us at the taffrail, saying abruptly as he did so, "Gentlemen, here we are; I reckon this is the place to which you told me to bring you."

"This the place!" he cried, as he looked round him at the smooth and smiling sea. "You surely don't mean to tell me that it was just here that the *Monarch of Macedonia* met her cruel fate? I cannot believe it."

"It's true, all the same," answered the skipper. "That's to say, as near as I can reckon it by observations. Just take a look at the chart and see for yourself."

So saying he spread the roll of paper he carried in his hand upon the deck, and we all knelt down to examine it. In order to prove his position the skipper ran a dirty thumb–nail along his course, and made a mark with it about the approximate spot where he had hove the schooner to.

“Do you mean to say that the unfortunate vessel lies beneath us now?” asked Mr. Leversidge, with a certain amount of awe in his voice.

“As near as I can reckon it she ought to be somewhere about here,” returned the skipper, waving his hand casually around the neighbourhood. And then, taking a slip of paper from the pocket of his coat, he continued: “Here are the Admiralty Survey vessel’s bearings of the rock upon which she struck, so we can’t be very far out.”

Following Mr. Leversidge’s example we went to the port side and looked over.

“It seems a ghastly thing to think that down there lies that great vessel, the outcome of so much human thought and ingenuity, with the bodies of the men and women who perished in her still on board. I don’t know that I envy you in your task of visiting her, Collon. By the way, what are the Government soundings?”

“Seventeen fathoms,” answered the skipper.

“And you think she is lying some distance out from the rock on which she struck?”

“I do. The survivors say that as soon as she struck, the officer of the watch reversed his engines and pulled her off, but before he could get more than a cable’s length astern she sank like a stone.”

“I understand. And now, Mr. Collon, your part of the business commences. When do you propose to get to work? We must not delay any more than we can help, for the other schooner may be here at any moment.”

“I shall commence getting my things together immediately,” I answered, “and, if all goes well, the first thing to–morrow morning I shall make my descent. It would not be worth while doing so this afternoon.”

Accordingly, as soon as our mid–day meal was finished, I had the pumps and diving gear brought on deck and spent the afternoon testing them and getting them ready for the work that lay before me on the morrow. By nightfall I was fully prepared to descend in search of the pearl.

“Let us hope that by this time to–morrow we shall be on our way to Thursday Island with our work completed,” said Leversidge to me as we leant against the taffrail later in the evening. “I don’t know that I altogether care about thinking that all those poor dead folk are lying only a hundred feet or so beneath our keel. As soon as we have got what we want out of her we’ll lose no time in packing up and being off.”

I was about to answer him, when something caused me to look across the sea to the westward. As I did so I gave a little cry of astonishment, for not more than five miles distant I could see the lights of a vessel coming towards us.

“Look!” I cried, “what boat can that be?”

Mr. Leversidge followed the direction of my hand. “If I’m not mistaken,” the skipper said, “that is the *Nautch Girl*—Peach’s schooner.”

“Then there’s trouble ahead. What on earth is to be done?”

“I have no notion. We cannot compel him to turn back, and if he finds us diving here he will be certain to suspect our motive and to give information against us.”

We both turned and looked in the direction we had last seen the vessel, but to our amazement she was no longer there.

“What does it mean?” cried Leversidge. “What can have become of her?”

“I think I can tell you,” said the skipper, “We’re in for another fog.”

“A fog again,” replied the old gentleman. “If that is so we’re done for.”

“On the contrary,” I said, “I think we’re saved. Given a decent opportunity and I fancy I can see my way out of this scrape.”

VI

Of all the thousand and one strange phenomena of the mighty deep, to my thinking there is none more extraordinary than the fogs which so suddenly spring up in Eastern waters. At one moment the entire expanse of sea lies plain and open before the eye; then a tiny cloud makes its appearance, like a little flaw in the perfect blue, far down on the horizon. It comes closer, and as it does so, spreads itself out in curling wreaths of vapour. Finally, the mariner finds himself cut off from everything, standing alone in a little world of his own, so tiny that it is even impossible for him to see a boat's length before his face. At night the effect is even more strange, for then it is impossible to see anything at all.

On this particular occasion the fog came up quicker than I ever remember to have seen one do. We had hardly caught sight of the lights of the schooner, which we were convinced was none other than the *Nautch Girl*, than they disappeared again. But, as I had told Mr. Leversidge, that circumstance, instead of injuring us, was likely to prove our salvation. Had she come upon us in broad daylight while we were engaged upon our work on the wreck below, it would have been a case of diamond cut diamond, and the strongest would have won. Now, however, if she would only walk into the trap I was about to set for her, I felt confident in my own mind that we should come out of the scrape with flying colours.

"We must not attempt to conceal our position," I said, turning to the skipper, whom I could now barely see. "If I were you I should keep that bell of yours ringing, it will serve to let Peach know that there is somebody already on the spot, and it will help to prepare his mind for what is to come."

The skipper groped his way forward to give the necessary order, and presently the bell commenced to sound its note of warning. Thereupon we sat ourselves down on the skylight to await the arrival of the schooner with what composure we could command. Our patience, however, was destined to be sorely tried, for upwards of two hours elapsed before any sound reached us to inform us that she was in our neighbourhood. Then with an abruptness which was almost startling, a voice came to us across the silent sea.

"If I have to visit you niggers in that boat," the speaker was saying, "I'll give you as good a booting as ever you had in your lives. Bend your backs to it and pull or I'll be amongst you before you can look round and put some ginger into you."

There was no occasion to tell me whose voice it was. "That's Jimmy Peach," I said, turning to Mr. Leversidge, who was standing beside me at the bulwarks. "I know his pleasant way of talking to his crew. He's a sweet skipper is Jimmy, and the man he has with him, Yokohama Joe, is his equal in every respect."

"But how have they managed to get here?" asked the old gentleman. "Theirs is not a steam vessel, and besides being pitch dark in this fog there's not a breath of wind."

"They've got a boat out towing her," I answered. "If you listen for a moment you'll hear the creaking of the oars in the rowlocks. That's just what I reckoned they would do. Now I am going to give Master Jimmy one of the prettiest scares he has ever had in his life, and one that I think he will remember to his dying day. If he ever finds it out, and we meet

ashore, I reckon things will hum a bit."

So saying, I funnelled my mouth with my hands and shouted in the direction whence the voice had proceeded a few minutes before. "Ship ahoy! Is that the *Nautch Girl*, of Cooktown?"

There was complete silence while a man could have counted a hundred. Then a voice hailed me in reply: "What vessel are you?"

I was prepared for this question. "Her Majesty's gunboat *Panther*, anchored above the wreck of the *Monarch of Macedonia*," I answered. "Are you the *Nautch Girl*?"

There was another long pause, then a different voice answered, "*Nautch Girl* be hanged! We're the *bêche–de–mer* schooner *Caroline Smithers*, of Cairns, from Macassar to Port Moresby."

Once more I funnelled my hands and answered them. "All right," I replied, "just heave to a minute and I'll send a boat to make certain. I'm looking for the *Nautch Girl*, and, as she left Batavia ten days or so ago, she's just about due here now."

Turning to Mr. Leversidge, who was standing beside me, I whispered, "If I'm not mistaken he'll clear out now as quickly as he knows how."

"But why should he do so?" he inquired. "As long as he doesn't interfere with the wreck he has a perfect right to be here."

"As you say, he *has* a perfect right," I answered; "but you may bet your bottom dollar he'll be off as soon as possible. There is what the lawyers call a combination of circumstances against him. In the first place, I happen to know that he has been wanted very badly for some considerable time by the skipper of the *Panther* for a little bit of business down in the Kingsmill Group. They have been trying to nab him everywhere, but so far he has been too smart for them. In addition, he is certain to think his mission to the wreck has been wired to Thursday Island, and between the two I fancy he will come to the conclusion that discretion is the better part of valour and will run for it. Hark! there he goes."

We both listened, and a moment later could plainly distinguish the regular "cheep–cheep" of the oars as they towed the schooner away from us.

"He has got out two boats now," I said, "and that shows he means to be off as fast as he can go. Somehow I don't think we shall be troubled by Master Peach again for a day or two. But won't he just be mad if he ever finds out how we've fooled him. The world won't be big enough to hold the pair of us. Now all we want is the fog to hold up till he's out of sight. I don't feel any wind."

I wetted my finger and held it up above my head, but could feel nothing. The night was as still as it was foggy. Seeing, therefore, that it was no use our waiting about in the hope of the weather improving, I bade them good night, and, having been congratulated on my ruse for getting rid of Peach, and the success which had attended it, went below to my berth.

Sure enough when we came on deck next morning the fog had disappeared, and with it the schooner *Nautch Girl*. A brisk breeze was blowing. Overhead the sky was sapphire blue,

brilliant sunshine streamed upon our decks, while the sea around us was as green and transparent as an emerald. Little waves splashed alongside, and the schooner danced gaily at her anchor. After the fog of the previous night, it was like a new world, and when we had satisfied ourselves that our enemy was really out of sight it was a merry party that sat down to breakfast.

As soon as the meal was finished we returned to the deck. The same glorious morning continued, with the difference, however, that by this time the sea had moderated somewhat. The crew were already at work preparing the diving apparatus for my descent. After the anxiety of the *Nautch Girl's* arrival, the trick we had played upon her captain, and the excitement consequent upon it, it came upon me almost as a shock to see the main, or to be more exact, the only, object of my voyage brought so unmistakably and callously before me. I glanced over the side at the smiling sea, and as I did so thought of the visit I was about to pay to the unfortunate vessel which was lying so still and quiet beneath those treacherous waves. And for what? For a jewel that would ultimately decorate a mere earthly sovereign's person. It seemed like an act of the grossest sacrilege to disturb that domain of Death for such a vulgar purpose.

"I see you are commencing your preparations," said Mr. Leversidge, who had come on deck while I was giving my instructions to the man in charge of the diving gear. "Before you do so had we not better study the cabin plan of the vessel herself, in order that you may have a good idea as to where the berth you are about to visit is situated?"

"Perhaps it would be as well," I answered. "Where is the plan?"

"I have it in my portmanteau," replied the old gentleman, and a moment later, bidding me remain where I was, he dived below in search of the article in question. Presently he returned, bringing with him a sheet of paper, which, when he spread it out upon the deck, I recognised as one of those printed forms supplied by steamship companies to intending passengers at the time of booking.

"There," he said, as he smoothed it out and placed his finger on a tiny red cross, "that is the cabin our agent occupied. You enter by the companion on the promenade deck, and, having descended to the saloon, turn sharp to your left hand and pass down the port side till you reach the alleyway alongside the steward's pantry. Nineteen is the number, and our agent's berth was number one hundred and sixty–three, which, as you will observe from this plan, is the higher one on your left as you enter. The next cabin was that occupied by the Reverend Colway–Brown, who, as you are aware, was one of the persons who escaped. I think we may consider ourselves fortunate that he was a parson, otherwise we don't know what might have happened."

Taking up the plan he had brought and examining it carefully, I tried to impress it upon my memory as far as possible. "Now," I said, "I think I know my ground; so let us get to work. The sooner the business is finished and the pearl is in your keeping the better I shall be pleased."

"I shall have no objection to be done with it either, I can assure you," he answered. "It has been a most tiresome and unpleasant affair for everybody concerned."

I then strolled forward to the main hatch, beside which my dress had been placed. Everything was in readiness, and I thereupon commenced my toilet. To draw on the

costume itself was the matter of only a few seconds. My feet were then placed in the great boots with their enormous leaden soles; the helmet, without the glass, was slipped over my head and rivetted to the collar plate around my neck, the leaden weights, each of twenty–eight pounds, were fastened to my chest and back, the life–line was tied round my waist, and the other end made fast to the bulwark beside which my tender would take his place during such time as I should remain below.

“Now give me the lamp and the axe,” I said, as I fumbled my way to the gangway where the ladder had been placed, and took up my position upon it. “After that you can screw in the glass and begin to pump as soon as you like. It won’t be very long now, Mr. Leversidge, before you know your fate.”

“I wish you luck,” he answered, and then my tender, who had been careful to dip the front glass in the water, screwed it in, and almost simultaneously the hands at the machine commenced to pump. I was in their world and yet standing in a world of my own, a sort of amphibious creature, half of land and half of sea.

According to custom, I gave a last glance round to see that all was working properly, and then with a final wave of my hand to those upon the deck began to descend the ladder into the green water, little dreaming of the terrible surprise that was awaiting me at the bottom of the ocean.

VII

The novice when making his first descent beneath the waves in a diving dress is apt to find himself confronted with numerous surprises. In the first place he discovers that the dress itself, which, when he stood upon the deck, had appeared such a cumbersome and altogether unwieldy affair, becomes as light as any feather as soon as he is below the surface. To his amazement he is able to move about with as much freedom as he was accustomed to do on land. And despite the fact that his supply of air is being transmitted to him through many yards of piping from a pump on the deck above, and in consequence smells a little of india–rubber, he is relieved to find, when he has overcome his first nervousness, that he can breathe as comfortably and easily as when seated in the cabin of the vessel he has so lately quitted.

As stated in the previous chapter, as soon as the glass had been screwed into the front of my helmet I waved a farewell to my friends on the schooner's deck and began to descend the ladder on my adventurous journey. Men may take from me what they please, but they can never destroy my reputation as a diver. And, indeed, the task I was about to attempt was one that any man might be proud of accomplishing successfully.

The bottom on which I had landed was of white sand, covered here and there with short weeds and lumps of coral, the latter being of every conceivable shape and colour. Looking up I could distinguish through the green water the hull of the schooner, and could trace her cable running down to the anchor, which had dropped fifty feet or so from the spot where I now stood. Before me the bottom ascended almost precipitously, and, remembering what I had been told, I gathered that on the top of this was the rock upon which the unfortunate vessel had come to grief. Having noted these things, I turned myself about until I could see the boat herself. It was a strange and forlorn picture she presented. Her masts had gone by the board, and as I made my way towards her I could plainly distinguish the gaping rent in her bows which had wrought her ruin.

Clambering over the mass of coral upon which she was lying, I walked round her examining her carefully, and, when I had done so, began to cast about me for a means of getting on board. This, however, proved a rather more difficult task than one would have at first imagined, for she had not heeled over as might have been supposed, but had settled down in her natural position in a sort of coral gully, and in consequence her sides were almost as steep as the walls of a house. However, I was not going to be beaten, so, taking my life–line in my hand, I signalled to my tender above, by a code I had previously arranged with him, to lower me the short iron ladder which had been brought in case its services should be required. Having obtained this I placed it against the vessel's side, but not before I had taken the precaution to attach one end of a line to it and the other to my waist, so that we should not part company and I be left without a means of getting out of the vessel again when once I was inside. Mounting by it, I clambered over the broken bulwarks and was soon at the entrance to the saloon companion ladder on the promenade deck. Already a terrible and significant change was to be noticed in her appearance: a thick green weed was growing on the once snow–white planks, and the brilliant brasses, which had been the pride and delight of her officers in bygone days, were now black and

discoloured almost beyond recognition. Remembering what she had once been, the money she had cost, the grandeur of her launch and christening, and the pride with which she had once navigated the oceans of the world, it was enough to bring the tears into one's eyes now to see her lying so dead and helpless below the waves of which she had once been so bright an ornament. I thought of the men and women, the fathers and mothers, the handsome youths and pretty girls who had once walked those decks so confidently; of the friendships which had been begun upon them, and the farewells which had there been said, and then of that last dread scene at midnight when she had crashed into the unknown danger, and a few moments later had sunk down and down until she lay an inert and helpless mass upon the rocky bed where I now found her.

Feeling that, if I wished to get my work done expeditiously, I had better not waste my time looking about me, I attempted to open the door of the saloon companion ladder, but the wood had swollen, and, in spite of my efforts, defied me. However, a few blows from my axe smashed it in and enabled me to enter. Inside the hatch it was too dark for me to see very clearly, but with the assistance of my electric lamp this difficulty was soon overcome, and, holding the latter above my head, I continued my descent.

On the landing, half–way down, jammed into a corner, I encountered the first bodies, those of a man and woman. My movement through the water caused them to drop me a mocking curtsey as I passed, and I noticed that the man held the woman in his arms very tight, as though he were resolved that they should not be parted, even by King Death himself.

Reaching the bottom of the ladder, I passed into the saloon, not without a shudder, however, as I thought of the work that lay before me. God help the poor dead folk I saw there! They were scattered about everywhere in the most grotesque attitudes. Some were floating against the roof, and some were entangled in the cleated chairs. I have entered many wrecks in my time, and have seen many curious and terrible sights, but what I saw in this ill–fated vessel surpassed anything I have ever met with in my experience. Any attempt to give a true description of it would be impossible. I must get on with my story and leave that to your imagination.

By the time I had made my way so far I had had about enough of it for the time being, and stood in need of a rest. Accordingly I retraced my steps to the deck and signalled to my tender that I was about to return to the surface. The change, when I did so, from the semi–obscurity of that horrible world below the seas to the brilliant sunshine I found existing above, was almost startling in its abruptness. But it was good after what I had seen below to find myself once more in the company of living people. Leversidge's surprise at seeing me reappear so soon was almost pathetic. He could scarcely contain his eagerness to question me, and as soon as the front glass of my helmet had been removed he accordingly set to work.

"What has brought you up from below so soon?" he inquired. "You have only been gone a quarter of an hour. Have you found the pearl?"

I shook my head. "I have not even been able to discover the man's cabin yet," I answered. "I came up because I needed a rest. I'm working at a big depth, you must remember. And, besides, there are those who are far from being the best of company down below."

“But tell me about the vessel herself,” the old gentleman continued. “What is she like, and did you experience any difficulty in getting aboard her?”

I answered his questions to the best of my ability, and after a few minutes’ rest ordered the glass to be screwed into the helmet again, and then once more descended to the bottom of the ocean.

Being familiar by this time with the best means of getting on board the wreck, it was not very long before I was making my way down the companion ladder into the saloon. Then, without wasting further time looking about me, I pushed on in search of the cabin I wanted, which, as I have already said, was on the port side, third door from the steward’s pantry. It was not long before I found it, and had broken open the door. Having done so, I held my lamp aloft and entered. Never shall I forget the sight I saw there. Well prepared as I was for something gruesome, the horrible sight that now met my eyes almost overcame me. The body of Mr. Leversidge’s unfortunate agent was lying on his chest, half in and half out of his bunk, for all the world as if he were looking for something under his pillow. His coat and waistcoat were off, otherwise he was fully dressed. Withdrawing my eyes from him, not without some difficulty, I looked about the cabin for his luggage, and for some moments could see no sign of it. Then I caught sight of a trunk and a Gladstone bag beneath one bunk, and another trunk beneath that opposite. All were as rotten as sodden brown paper, by reason of their long immersion in the salt water. By dint of some manoeuvring, however, I managed to get them out of the cabin into the alleyway without disturbing the body in the bunk, and then by degrees carried them up the companion ladder to the deck above. Having done this, I signalled to my friends to lower their lines, and, as soon as I had made them fast, had the satisfaction of seeing them drawn up to the schooner above. This having been accomplished, I returned once more to that awful cabin in order to search the body and to make quite sure that I had left nothing behind me that I might afterwards wish I had brought away.

Reaching the cabin again, I—but there, how can I tell you the rest? Suffice it that I pulled the remains of what had once been Mr. Leversidge’s agent out of his bunk, glanced at him, and then dropped him again with a cry that echoed in my helmet until I thought it would have burst the drums of both my ears. The shock of the discovery I had made was almost too much for me, and for upwards of a minute I leant against the bulkhead, staring at the poor corpse before me in stupefied amazement. Then I roused myself, and kneeling upon the floor began my search for something which, when I had found it, I placed carefully in the canvas bag I carried round my waist. Then I set off as fast as I could go to reach the surface once more. God knows I had made an astounding enough discovery in all conscience, and as I climbed the ladder I wondered what Mr. Leversidge would have to say to it.

"Dropped him again with a cry that echoed in my helmet."

VIII

So overpowered was I by the importance of the discovery I had made in the bowels of that sunken ship, that when I reached the top of the ladder and found myself standing once more among my fellow–men in the decent and clean world above the waves, it seemed as if I must begin my story to old Leversidge before the front glass of my helmet was removed; and, if such a thing were possible, his impatience was even greater than my own. There we stood, scarcely three feet apart, in the same world, breathing the same air, looking upon the same things, and yet to all intents and purposes for the time being as widely separate as the poles.

As soon, however, as the glass was removed I accepted my tender's assistance, and clambering aboard seated myself on the combing of the main hatch. Beside me on the deck lay the sodden baggage, just as I had sent it up from the vessel below, as yet untouched. On seeing it I bade my tender, as soon as my helmet was removed, commence unpacking it. While he was thus employed Leversidge stood opposite me, his lips trembling and his fingers itching to draw me away in order that he might question me as to the result of my search. When, therefore, I was attired in civilized dress, he could no longer contain himself, but putting his arm through mine, and picking up the baggage from the seat, drew me away towards the cabin aft, where, having made certain that we were alone, he seated himself at the table and once more eagerly scanned my face.

"What have you to tell me?" he inquired, in a voice so changed that it almost startled me. "You have discovered something which has surprised you. I can see that much in your face. What is it? Have you got the pearl?"

"One thing at a time, if you please," I answered. "I must take your questions in their proper order. To begin with, let me confess that I have *not* got the pearl. It is just possible that it may be in that luggage I sent up from below, though I must say for my own part I don't think it probable. At any rate, if it is not there, I can only hazard a guess as to where it can be. Certainly it is not on the person of the drowned man, for I searched him thoroughly before I came up."

Almost before I had finished speaking he had seated himself on the floor beside the bag he had brought with him to the cabin. It must have been a cheap concern when new, for to wrench it open now was a matter of very small difficulty. The material of which it was composed was certainly not leather, but some sort of composition, which tore away from its fastenings like so much brown paper. I sat still, smoking my pipe and composedly watching him while he pitched on to the floor the various articles it contained. It was evident from the expression on his face that he was not repaid for his search. At any rate, signs of a pearl there were none, nor were there any indications to show that it had ever been kept in there at all. The old man turned the heap of clothes over and over, and afterwards examined the bag most carefully, but no amount of looking could show him the article for which he was so ardently searching. Having at length convinced himself that it was not there he turned to me again.

"It is quite certain," he said, looking up at me sharply, "that it is not in this bag. Are you

sure there was no other luggage in the cabin?”

“Quite sure,” I answered. “But, before we go any further, perhaps you had better let me tell you all that I discovered when I was down below. Heaven knows it throws a new enough light upon the subject.”

“Go on,” he said, pushing the things he had taken out of the bag away from him as he spoke. “Tell me everything. You know how impatient I am. What is it you have discovered?”

“I will tell you,” I answered. “As I said just now, when I entered the cabin I saw the body of your agent lying half in and half out of his bunk. From the state of his toilet it was plain that he had not retired for the night when the vessel struck, as you remember the Reverend Colway–Brown stated. It struck me as strange, therefore, that he had not been able to get out of his cabin during the brief time allowed the unfortunate passengers for escape. However, that is neither here nor there. There is one point which dwarfs all the others. Having discovered this luggage, which you have now examined, and sent it up to you, I determined to search the person of the man himself for the pearl. I did so only to make one terrible discovery.”

“What was that?” cried Mr. Leversidge, in an agony of impatience. “For Heaven’s sake, man, get on quicker with your story. Why don’t you come to the point? Can’t you see that you are driving me distracted with your shilly–shallying? What was the matter with our man that he caused such a shock to your feelings?”

I paused for a moment, fixed my eyes hard upon him, and then said impressively, “*He has been murdered. His throat was cut from ear to ear.*”

If the matter had not been so terribly serious I should have felt inclined to laugh at the expression upon the old gentleman’s face. He was as white as a sheet, his eyes started half out of his head, and his mouth opened and shut like a fish fresh taken from his native element. It was nearly half a minute before he could find sufficient voice to answer me.

“Murdered!” he cried. “My God, what do you mean, Collon? You must be mad to say such a thing. How could he have been murdered? And who could have done it?”

“That he was murdered admits of no doubt,” I answered. “There was the proof before me. What is more, for the reason that the victim was preparing to retire to rest, it is plain it must have been done just before the vessel struck.”

“But who did it, think you? Did you discover any clue that could tell us that? Not that it matters much, seeing that both murderer and victim are now dead.”

“Don’t be too sure of that. We know the victim is dead, but of the man who killed him I am not so sure.”

“What do you mean?”

In answer I took from the locker beside me the small canvas bag I had worn strapped round my waist when I visited the vessel. I plunged my hand into it and drew out something that I pushed across the table to my friend. He picked it up with a cry of astonishment.

“A razor!” he cried. “But doesn’t this look as if the man did away with himself?”

“I think not,” I answered. “Just look at the white handle and tell me if you know the name upon it.”

He took out his glasses, and, having placed them upon his nose, carefully examined the bone handle of the deadly weapon I had given him. This time he was even more astonished than before, and, if the truth must be told, more shocked.

“Colway–Brown,” he said to himself; “why, bless my soul, that’s the name of one of the sole survivors from the wreck, the person to whom we telegraphed from Batavia, the clergyman who gave us the last news of the dead man. What does this terrible thing mean?”

“If you ask what I think,” I said very slowly and deliberately, “I think it looks like a put–up job. If you will remember, when you gave me the outline of the case, you told me that attempts had been made to obtain the pearl before your agent left Australia. It is plain, therefore, that it was known to be in his possession. An individual accordingly ships as a parson, calls himself Colway–Brown, books a berth in the next cabin to that occupied by your unfortunate friend. There is only one thing, however, which beats me, and that, I must confess, is a stumper.”

“What is it?”

“I can’t understand what induced him to murder the man on that particular night of all others. It was such a stupid place to choose. He might have done it in Thursday Island and have got safely ashore, or he might have waited until they got to Batavia. To do it between two ports of call, and at such a time of night, seems to me like the work of a madman, and I can’t make head or tail of it.”

“Perhaps when the vessel struck the scoundrel determined to obtain the pearl or perish in the attempt.”

“I’m afraid that won’t do either, for by his own confession we know the Rev. Colway–Brown was on deck at the time she struck. He could not, therefore, have made his way down the companion ladder, crossed the saloon, and passed along the alleyway to the cabin, have entered, cut your agent’s throat, found and possessed himself of the pearl, have returned to the deck and saved his own life in the few seconds that elapsed between the moment of the vessel’s striking and her foundering.”

“But if he did not do it then how do you account for it?” he asked.

“I can’t account for it at all,” I answered. “One thing, however, is self–evident. The suspicion is strongest against Colway–Brown, and, as your pearl is not among the dead man’s effects or upon his body, it is only natural to suppose that it is in the custody of that reverend gentleman, who was so fortunate as to get ashore, not only with his life, but as he thought without being detected in his crime.”

“The rascal, the double–dyed rascal. But he needn’t think he has beaten us. I’ll run him to earth and he shall swing for this, or my name is not Leversidge.”

“But you have got to catch him first,” I said, “and from the sample he has already given us of his prowess I incline to the belief that he’s as slippery a customer as ever wore shoe–

leather."

"Nevertheless he shall hang, or I'll know the reason why."

"I think I can tell you the reason why," I said quietly. "He won't hang, because when everything is said and done it would be about the most inadvisable step you could take, in your own interests and those of your firm, to bring him before a court of Justice. You're not particularly anxious, I suppose, that the Government should become aware of your visit to this wreck?"

"Very naturally," he replied. "I have already told you that, I think."

"In that case how do you propose to show that you became aware of the fact that your man *was* murdered? and if you will excuse my saying so, I cannot help thinking that you will find it an extremely difficult, if not quite impossible, task to prove that our friend Colway–Brown was the man who committed this terrible crime."

"Not at all," he answered. "What about the razor? We know that it is his property, and if it was not with it that the murder was committed, how do you account for it being in his cabin?"

"I am not attempting to account for it at all," I answered. "I am simply endeavouring to show you how futile it would be in all probability to try to bring the crime home to the man whom we suspect."

"Then what do you propose doing?"

I thought for a few moments before I answered.

"Well, as far as I can see, the best plan would be," I said, "to follow our reverend friend up, and when we have got him in a close corner, just to tax him with his crime and threaten to hand him over to Justice if he does not return to you the property he stole. If this is judiciously managed there should not be much difficulty in obtaining from him what you want."

"But supposing he has parted with the pearl in the meantime, what then? A nice position we should find ourselves in."

"I don't think he is likely to dispose of it just yet," I answered. "You see he would not have an opportunity. He would be afraid to try it on in Thursday Island, where the pearl was known, or, for the matter of that, in Australia at all. What is more, he'll not be likely to hurry, having no notion that there is anybody on his track. He knows he is the only soul who escaped from the wreck, and he is certain to think his victim will remain undiscovered for all time. With a little luck you should be able to catch him before he can get away."

"But you speak of *my* catching him. Surely you do not intend to let me go on alone? Remember I set such store by your assistance."

"If you wish it I will, of course, go through the business with you," I answered. "But it looks like being a bigger affair than I at first contemplated, and my time is valuable."

"It shall be made worth your while; you need have no fear on that score. And now, I suppose, it is no use our remaining here; what shall we do?"

“Up anchor and be off to Thursday Island as fast as we can go,” I said promptly.

“And when we get there?”

“Seize the Reverend Colway–Brown as soon as possible, if he’s there, and frighten him into handing over the jewel he has so wrongfully taken possession of, by the best methods in our power.”

“And if he has left the island?”

“Then we’ll follow him like bloodhounds until we catch him, even if we have to go half round the world to do it.”

“You mean it?”

“I do,” I answered.

“Then shake hands on it.”

We shook hands, and in less than a quarter of an hour the schooner was bowling along under a merry breeze towards Thursday Island, and its most important inhabitant, as far as we were concerned, the Reverend Colway–Brown.

IX

The sun was in the act of disappearing behind the fringe of jungle which clothes the western hilltops of Thursday Island, when our schooner passed through Prince of Wales' Straits and dropped her anchor off the small township of Port Kennedy. Every one on board was on deck at the moment, and I can vouch for the fact that in two minds at least, those of Mr. Leversidge and myself, there was a feeling of intense excitement. Ever since we had sat together in the schooner's cabin, and I had told him of the terrible discovery I had made in his agent's berth on board the *Monarch of Macedonia*, we had been longing for the moment to arrive when we should reach the island, and either find ourselves face to face with the Reverend Colway–Brown or learn something which would eventually lead us to him. That he would be foolish enough, after what had happened, to remain any longer in the island than he could help, I did not for a moment suppose. He would naturally be anxious to put as many miles as possible between himself and the wreck, and also to reach some place where he could dispose of the jewel. There were half a hundred reasons why he should not attempt to do so in Thursday Island. In the first place, there was no one there who could give him the price he would be likely to ask, and in the second it must be remembered that it was in this very locality it had first made its appearance and attracted so much attention. To have shown it there, or to have allowed any one to have suspected its presence, would have been an act of the wildest folly, and it was plain that the Reverend Colway–Brown was no fool. For these reasons I felt convinced in my own mind that when we went ashore to make inquiries we should find our bird flown.

Prior to sighting the island we had held a conference with the skipper in the deck–house, when Mr. Leversidge had discharged the amount due for the hire of the vessel, and at the same time had supplemented it with a handsome present to her officers and crew. As far as they were concerned I was sure the secret of our visit to the wreck would be in safe hands.

This business matter having been settled to every one's satisfaction, as soon as the anchor was down we collected our baggage and descended into the boat which was waiting for us alongside. As we did so a steamer rounded the point and approached the anchorage. I recognised her and made a note of the fact in my own mind for future use, in case it should be necessary.

It was not the first time I had been in Thursday Island by many a score, and I was well acquainted with the customs and peculiarities of the place and its inhabitants. I did not, therefore, waste my time making inquiries in any of the grog shanties beside the beach, but passed along the front until I reached the most gorgeous caravanserai of all, the Hotel of All Nations. It was here, I felt certain, if anywhere, that we should hear some tidings of the man we were after. Accordingly, I walked through the verandah, and, with Mr. Leversidge at my heels, entered the bar. The real business hour had not yet arrived, and for this reason, save for a Kanaka asleep in a corner, and a gorgeously upholstered youth polishing glasses behind the counter, the bar was deserted. It was plain that the latter had never seen me before, or, if he had, that he had forgotten both my name and the circumstances under which we had last met. I accordingly bade him call his employer to me.

“Good gracious, can it be you, Mr. Collon?” exclaimed the latter as he entered the room and saw me standing before him; “I thought you were in China. Leastways, Bill Smith, of the *Coral Queen*, was only saying yesterday that the mate of the *Chang Tung* saw you at Foochow the last time he was up there, which was about five months ago.”

“Five months is a long time,” I said, with a laugh. “It is possible for a good deal to happen in that time. Five months ago, if you had told any of the people who went down in the *Monarch of Macedonia* what was before them, they would not have believed you.”

“That was a bad thing, wasn’t it?” he replied, shaking his head. “I suppose you know that the only persons who escaped were brought on here. As a matter of fact, I took them in.”

“I guessed as much,” I answered. “I said to my friend here, as we came along, that I felt certain they would come to the Hotel of All Nations.”

“Yes; I took them in. The foremast hand, however, went up in the China boat the following day; but the Rev. Colway–Brown stayed longer.”

“The deuce he did!” As I said this I glanced at the bar–tender, who was listening with both his ears. I had no desire that he should hear what we had to say, so I drew his employer a little on one side, saying, “By the way, Birch, can we have five minutes with you alone in your own private room?”

“And why not?” he replied. “Surely, if there’s one man in this world who’s we’come, it’s you, Dick Collon. Come along with me, gentlemen, and let us have our talk together.”

A few moments later we were installed in the hospitable landlord’s private office, from the windows of which a magnificent view could be obtained of the harbour, the islands beyond, and, on a very clear day, of Cape York, the most northerly coast line of Australia, peeping up miles away to the southward. Many and strange would be the stories that the room could tell were it possible for it to speak. In it men had sold their birthrights to all intents and purposes for a mess of pottage; in it others, who had hitherto been considered nobodies, had learnt the news that the tide of fortune had turned for them, and that for the future they were to take their places among the high–born of the earth. In that room men flying from justice in the South, who had believed themselves beyond the reach of pursuit and had come ashore while the mail–boat coaled, had been arrested. For me alone that room had at least a hundred different memories and associations. I had been familiar with it for many years, but this much I can safely say, never had I entered it on such a strange errand as that which was now engrossing all my attention.

“Well, what can I do for you?” asked Birch, when he had invited us to be seated and had closed the door behind him.

“I want to ask a particular favour of you,” I said. “I want you to tell me all you know about the Reverend Colway–Brown.”

“The man we were speaking of just now?” Birch asked, with an expression of surprise; “the only survivor from the wreck?”

“Exactly,” I answered. “My friend here is very much interested in him, and is most anxious to find him.”

“In that case I am afraid you have come too late,” Birch replied. “He left for Brisbane last

week in the *Oodnadatta*. He wanted to get back to Sydney, he said, as soon as possible. We took up a collection for him, and the steamship company granted him a free passage South. I reckon the poor chap wanted it, for he'd lost everything he possessed in the world, and came out of that wreck just as near stone broke as a man could well be."

"Feeling pretty miserable, too, I don't doubt," I said.

"Miserable is no word for it," he answered; "you never saw such a doleful chap, nor I'll be bound one half so frightened, in your life. All the time he was in this house he was just ready to jump away from his own shadow at a moment's notice. As nervous and timid as a baby. Couldn't bear to be left by himself, and yet as unsociable as could be when you were with him. Small wonder, say I, when you come to think of what he had been through. It's a mystery to me how he came out of it alive."

"Did he tell you much about it while he was here?" inquired Leversidge. "I suppose he gave you his experiences in detail?"

"That's just the funny part of it," Birch replied. "Do what you would you could not get that poor chap to talk about 'that terrible night,' as he called it. On any other subject he could be interesting enough when he liked, but directly you began to question him about the wreck or anything connected with the vessel, he would put his hands up to his eyes and shudder as if he saw the whole thing happening over again. For my own part I don't think he'll ever be able to forget it. It will be a nightmare to him as long as he lives."

"So I should imagine," said Leversidge, with such unusual emphasis that our host, who was in the act of pouring us out some refreshment, paused and looked at him in surprise.

I hastened to continue the conversation. "Poor chap!" I said; "from all accounts he must have stood pretty close to death that night. Now what we are trying to do is to find him. You say he went South last week in the *Oodnadatta*, intending to bring up in Sydney. You don't happen to know what his address is there, do you? It is of the utmost importance to us that we should find him with as little delay as possible."

Birch thought for a few moments, and then shook his head. "I'm afraid I can tell you nothing that would help you," he said. "All the fellow wanted from morning till night was to get South as fast as possible. His wife was in Sydney, he said, and he was afraid she would be anxious until she saw him in the flesh again. That was his one cry—get South—get South."

"And he never told you whether he lived in Sydney or out in the Bush?"

"He never told us where he lived at all. On that point he was as silent as an oyster."

"But if he's a parson, it should not be a very difficult matter to find out where his charge is," said Mr. Leversidge; "particularly now that there's been all this light thrown on his name. Of course you know of what persuasion he was a minister?"

Here to our amazement Birch smacked his knee and burst into a roar of laughter. This was more than I could stand. "Confound you," I said, "what on earth are you laughing at?"

"At the idea of your asking me what persuasion he was a minister of. It's as good as a play."

“How so? I don’t see anything funny in it.”

“Don’t you? Well, then, I do,” returned Birch. “In the first place, my old friend Collon, and you, Mr. Leversidge, it gives you both away pretty thoroughly. You told me just now that you knew the man and wanted to help him. All I can say is, that if you do you know precious little about him. Why, gentlemen, I tell you that that parson was as tough a bird as any I’ve met. He may or may not be a labourer in the vineyard, but all I *can* say is that, if he *is*, he’s got the finest command of bad language for a minister that ever I’ve heard, and I can do a bit that way myself. The day after he landed here, one of my Kanaka boys spilt some hot soup on his hand at table, and he rounded on him and gave him the most infernal cursing ever I heard in all my born days. I tell you it made the whole table sit up like one man. If he talks to his congregation like that, it’s no wonder they sent him home for a sea voyage.”

Leversidge and I looked at each other, you may be sure, on hearing this.

“Well, if you can tell us nothing more, I’m afraid it’s no use our waiting on in the island. There’s a mail–boat at anchor now. I think the best thing we can do, Mr. Leversidge, would be to board her and set off for Brisbane, *en route* to Sydney, as quickly as we can go.”

“I agree with you,” answered my companion. “Good–day, Mr. Birch, and thank you for your courtesy.”

“Don’t mention that, I beg, sir,” returned the affable Birch. “I only wish I could do more to help you in your search for your friend.”

I shook hands with him in my turn, and was following Leversidge towards the verandah steps, when Birch called me back. Sinking his voice he said, “What is it, Dick, my lad? What’s your little game? Why do you want this swearing parson so badly?”

“A matter of business,” I answered; “a mere matter of business.”

Birch smiled knowingly, and winked at me. “A Hatton Garden bit of business, I suppose,” he said. “You surely don’t think I failed to recognise your friend, did you? Now, shall I do you a good turn?”

“By all means,” I replied. “I’d do you one if I could.”

“Well, then, take this on board with you, and think it over at your leisure. The day the parson left us he came to me alone in my room yonder and offered me—”

“Offered you what?” I said, forgetting that I might be overheard.

“One of the finest black pearls I ever saw or heard of,” he answered. “He wanted me to buy it, but I refused, so he had to take it away with him to his poor wife in Sydney. There, what do you think of that?”

“Thank you, John,” I said, warmly shaking him by the hand. “You’ve told me just what I wanted to know. Good–bye.”

On the way down the hill I informed Leversidge of what I had been told. He stopped in the dust and looked at me. “Good,” he said, wagging his head sagaciously. “That removes all doubt as to whether he was the man who stole the pearls.”

“And it also proves without a shadow of a doubt that he was the demon who cut your agent’s throat. My Reverend Colway–Brown, there is a day of retribution saving up for you, or I’m very much mistaken.”

“But what do you think of it all?”

“What do I think? Why, I think his reverence must have been a little off his head when he offered Birch that pearl. It’s by slips like that that they give themselves away. Now here’s the boat; let’s board her and continue the chase.”

X

Within an hour and a half of our setting foot ashore in Thursday Island from the schooner, we were on board the mail–boat *en route* for Brisbane and the South. It was a glorious evening, and the beauty of the scenery as one approaches and enters the famous Albany Pass is, I am prepared to say, second to none in the maritime world. I am afraid, however, on this particular occasion our thoughts were too much occupied with the chase we were engaged in, and the news we had so lately received, for us to be able to give very much attention to anything else. Our quarry had had a good week's start of us, and it was just possible in that time he might have found an opportunity of giving us the slip altogether. But he was not going to do so if I could help it. For some reason or another, apart from the crime he had committed, I had conceived a violent hatred of the man, and I was fully determined not to let him slip through my fingers and escape to enjoy the fruits of his villainy if it could be prevented.

On reaching Cooktown, our first port of call, and a starting–point of much of the island trade, I informed Mr. Leversidge that it was my intention to go ashore in order to make quite certain that he had not left his vessel there. The old gentleman was not feeling very well that day, and it was with the utmost reluctance that he confessed his inability to accompany me.

"But my absence is of no consequence," he was kind enough to say. "I have the most implicit confidence in you, and I am sure you will make all the necessary inquiries quite as well without me. I have only one request to make, however, and that is, that you come on board again as soon as possible, in order to let me know if you have discovered anything that is likely to be of use to us. You can imagine how impatient I shall be to hear your news."

"I won't be an instant longer than I can help," I answered. "As soon as I have made the necessary inquiries, I'll return."

Then bidding him good–bye, I made my way ashore and up the one long and dusty street which constitutes the business portion of Cooktown. The first thing to be done was to visit the office of the steamship company's agent to endeavour to find out whether they could tell me anything concerning the Reverend Colway–Brown. This, it appeared, the agent was quite unable to do. He had seen the gentleman in question on board the vessel, he told me, but beyond having congratulated him on his marvellous escape, he had no further conversation with him. Somewhat disappointed at the meagreness of his information, I left him, and went on up the street, intending to make inquiries at an hotel kept by an old diving acquaintance, who, I felt sure, would have made it his business to see the man in question had he come ashore.

Reaching the house, I entered it, to find my old mate sitting behind the bar, reading a sporting article from the *Australasian* to a man who was lounging on a bench near the door smoking a cigar.

On seeing me, he sprang to his feet, and, seizing my hand, shook it until I began to think he was never going to let it go again.

“Dick Collon, by all that’s glorious!” he cried. “Well, who’d have thought of seeing you down here again! I was told you had given up these waters altogether. What brings you to Cooktown?”

“Can’t you see?” I answered. “Don’t I look as if I needed a change of air?”

“Change of air be hanged!” he replied, with a laugh. “You never needed such a thing in your life. Is there any one with you?”

“Only an old chap from England,” I said; “I am showing him the beauties of Australia.”

“What’s his name?”

“Leversidge,” I replied. “He’s a little under the weather to–day, or I’d have brought him along with me. He’s out here looking for a man—the chap, in fact, who escaped from the *Monarch of Macedonia*, the Reverend Colway–Brown.”

“The deuce he is! And can’t he find him?”

“He hasn’t done so yet. It was to discover if you could tell us whether he came ashore here that brought me up to see you.”

“I’m sorry I can’t help you, old man; but what does he want to see him about? That’s, of course, if it isn’t private business.”

“He wants to find out what the parson can tell him about a friend who went down in the boat from which he was so lucky as to escape—that’s all.”

“Well, I’m only sorry I can’t help you,” he said, but with a little hesitation that I did not fail to notice. “And now tell me more about yourself. Remember, it’s ages since last we met.”

We chatted for a while together about old days. Then the man who had been smoking near the door joined us in a drink, and after a little more talk about horse–racing and things in general I said I must be getting back to my boat. On hearing that I intended walking towards the harbour, the bookmaker–looking party, who had thrust himself upon us, decided to accompany me, and while we were upon the way was so good as to offer to show me, for a consideration, a number of excellent means of making a fortune upon the Australian turf. To his mortification, however, we parted, without my deciding to avail myself of his assistance.

Upon my informing Mr. Leversidge, when I reached his cabin, of the success I had met with, we unitedly came to the conclusion that our man had not left the boat in Cooktown, as we had thought possible, but must have continued his voyage in her towards a more southern port. On hearing, however, that our departure would be delayed for at least a couple of hours, I determined to go ashore again for another stroll. Eventually I found myself once more in my old mate’s house. He received me with great hilarity, and it soon became evident that during my absence he had been sampling his own wares to considerable purpose. The bar was crowded, and when I entered it was plain that he had been retailing some good jest, for the laughter that followed was long and uproarious.

“Come in, old lad,” he cried on seeing me. “You’re the very man we want, for we were just talking of you. The boys here want to shake you by the hand.”

Wondering what the joke could be, and thinking it behoved me to find out, I complied with his request.

“I don’t know when I’ve laughed so much,” began my friend, as he poured me out some whisky. “And I’ll bet all I’m worth, you never as much as suspected, did you now?”

“Never suspected what?” I asked, rather sharply, finding my temper rising at the grins I saw upon the faces round me. “Out with it, old man; let me know what the joke is.”

“Well, it’s a good one, you may be sure of that,” he answered. “There you were hob–nobbing together as thick as thieves. ‘Ptarmigan’s the horse,’ says he. ‘I’m not so sure,’ say you. ‘I’ll back him against your choice for a fiver,’ says he. But you weren’t on. And all the time you never suspected for an instant that he was neither more nor less than the very man you were inquiring about this afternoon, the chap who escaped from the *Monarch of Macedonia* a few weeks back.”

“What?” I cried, scarcely able to believe that I heard aright. “Do you mean to tell me that that seedy old beggar who talked so much about horse–racing and walked with me to the harbour side was the Reverend Colway–Brown, the man I asked you about?”

“The very man,” he answered, and as he did so he brought his hand down with a smack upon my shoulder. “I can tell you, Dick, I nearly burst my sides with laughing when I saw you two jabbering away together.”

Seeing how I had been taken in, the crowd in the bar thought fit to laugh. But when I ran my eye over them they changed their minds and looked another way. I was so angry, I could have thrashed Donovan for the trick he had played me. It didn’t take him long, however, to see I was annoyed.

“Come, come, Dick, old man,” he said, “you mustn’t be angry with me. I couldn’t do anything else. He spent a week in my house here, you see, and was uncommon free with his money. What’s more, when he came to me, he told me he didn’t want it to be known that he was the man who escaped, as everybody stared at him so. For this reason he changed his name, and I promised I’d not give him away to anybody, so I couldn’t, even to you.”

“It’s plain I’ve been had, and badly too,” I said angrily. “You’ve spoiled a rare good bit of business for me, and I don’t take it kindly of you, Jim. Where is the fellow now?”

“Aboard the schooner *Friendship*,” he answered, “lying alongside your own boat. He’s left my house now, so I don’t mind telling you that. But you will have to look sharp if you want to catch him; he sails to–night.”

Without another word I left the place and ran down the street as hard as I could go. I remembered having seen the schooner alongside us when I had left the mail–boat, but when I got there now she was gone. “Where’s the schooner that was lying here?” I inquired of some loafers I discovered hanging about the wharf.

“The *Friendship*, do you mean?” asked one of the men. “Why, there she is, out yonder!”

He pointed to a white sail that was just disappearing round the opposite headland. On seeing that, I clenched my fist with rage, and bestowed the reverse of a blessing upon Jim Donovan. But for his putting me off the scent I might by this time have brought the chase

to a successful issue. However, the man was safely out of my clutches now, and no amount of wishing would bring him back again. I dreaded, however, the task of telling old Leversidge how easily I had been taken in.

“Do you know where the schooner is bound for?” I inquired of the man beside me, who had all this time been watching my face.

“For the Gilberts first, and then on to Honolulu,” he answered.

I thanked him and then made my way back to the steamer to acquaint my employer with my failure. He heard my tale out to the end, and though I could see he was bitterly disappointed, did not once upbraid me for my stupidity.

“Nonsense, my dear fellow!” he said, in answer to my expression of regret. “You could not help it. You had never seen this Colway–Brown before, so how could you be expected to recognise him, particularly when he took such pains to deceive you? But what do you think is the best thing for us to do?”

“We must get down to Sydney with all speed, and catch a steamer there for Honolulu. With decent luck we should arrive at the island first. In the meantime I’m going to hunt up the owners of the *Friendship,* and get permission to board their schooner when she arrives. They know me, and I think will grant it.”

This I did, and when I had explained my reason, in confidence, to the head of the firm, my request was immediately granted. Armed with a letter to their captain, I returned to the mail–boat, and in less than half an hour we were continuing our voyage to the South. Arriving at Brisbane, we caught the mail train to Sydney, and within five hours of our arrival in the capital of New South Wales were on board the steamer *Pride of the Pacific*, bound for Honolulu *viâ* Fiji. It was, indeed, a race against time, and the Reverend Colway–Brown, murderer and thief, was the prize.

XI

Who that has ever seen it will forget daybreak on a fine morning in Honolulu Harbour? Surely no one. The background of tree–clad island, so dark yet so suggestive of tropical luxuriance; the sky overhead so full of rainbow hues, and the sea so calm and yet possessed of all the colours of the inside of a pearl shell. When one sees it one is forced to the conclusion that there could never be another like it. It is beautiful beyond conception.

The sun had not yet made his appearance above the horizon when Mr. Leversidge and I left the hotel at which we had been residing since our arrival in the island, and made our way down to the small steamer we had chartered, and which had been ordered to be ready to put to sea with us at a moment's notice. Information had been brought to us late the night before that the schooner, whose coming we had been so eagerly awaiting, had been sighted further down the coast, and, in consequence, we were anxious to put off to her as soon as might be.

"The chase is growing exciting," said Mr. Leversidge, as we crossed the gangway and bade the skipper "Good–morning!" "It is to be hoped the reverend gentleman has not left his vessel in the Gilberts and made off in another direction. In that case we shall in all probability have lost sight of him for good and all."

"I'm not afraid of that," I answered. "In the first place he would not be able to get enough for his booty there to make it worth his while to sell, and in the second I have a sort of conviction that he is making for America. Such a pearl as he has with him would command a much better figure in San Francisco than it would be likely to do either here or in the Gilberts, and from what I have seen of the man I should say he was quite smart enough to be aware of that fact."

"I am glad to hear you say so," returned Mr. Leversidge. "Nevertheless, I shall not feel easy in my mind until I have it in my possession once more. I shall not forget the chase this man has given us as long as I live."

"I don't suppose you will," I said. "It has been exciting enough in all conscience. I only hope the finish may be satisfactory."

"I hope it may," he answered quietly. And just then I heard the skipper whistle the engine–room, and presently we cast off our moorings and got under weigh. Throwing a trail of black smoke behind us we left the harbour and passed out to sea, the mate at the wheel, the skipper pacing the bridge, and Leversidge and I straining our eyes in search of the vessel for which we were so anxiously waiting. It was upwards of an hour, however, before we saw her white sails rising above the sea line ahead of us. Half an hour later only five miles or so separated us, and every moment was bringing us closer to each other. When we had come so near that we could even distinguish the people standing on her decks, I approached our commander.

"Now then, captain," I said, "the sooner you lay us on board that boat the better we shall be pleased. I've a letter to deliver to the skipper from his owners, and it must be in his possession with as little delay as possible."

“I’ll do my best,” he answered, and immediately put his helm over.

The schooner’s captain, seeing that we wished to speak him, hove his vessel to, when our skipper sang out that he would send a boat. One was soon alongside, and into her, when her crew had taken their places at the oars, Mr. Leversidge and I bundled. Ten minutes later we had been hauled aboard the schooner, and I was presenting the captain with the letter I had received from his owners.

He read it carefully, and having done so turned to me: “This is a pretty serious matter, Mr.—,”—here he paused and consulted the letter again—“Mr. Collon. But I don’t see how I’m to gainsay you. My owners say I’m to permit you to act as you think best with regard to my passenger, so I suppose you must have your way. Still, I don’t feel easy in my mind.”

“You need not worry yourself, captain,” I said. “Whatever happens, you may be sure your owners will not hold you responsible. Is the man we want on deck, or must we look for him below?”

“He’s not out of his bunk yet, I believe,” replied the skipper; “but if you will follow me below I’ll soon ascertain.”

We accompanied him, as directed, along the deck and down the companion ladder. Entering the small cuddy he informed Mr. McGuire that two gentlemen desired to speak to him, and then shrugged his shoulders, and made his way up on deck again. He could barely have reached it before a man, clad in a suit of filthy pyjamas, and with his hair standing nearly on end, and his eyes almost out of his head, emerged from the cabin opposite which we were sitting and confronted us. I saw him start back against the bulwarks and throw up his hands as if to shut out the memory of our faces, and almost at the same moment I heard my companion utter a little cry, followed by the words, “My God, what’s this?” Then McGuire, or Colway–Brown, by which name we knew him better, clutched at the panelling, missed it, and gradually slid down until he fell in a heap upon the deck. The recognition had been too much for him, and he had fainted.

When he recovered his senses, we lifted him up and placed him on a locker beside the table. A more miserable figure could scarcely have been found in all the Southern Seas. Again and again he looked at Leversidge, and every time he looked he groaned. I was more puzzled than I could express. The old gentleman’s face alone was worth walking a long way to see. At last he got his breath, and was able to use his voice.

“You miserable, cheating hound!” he cried, springing to his feet and speaking with a vehemence that astonished me quite as much as the scene which occasioned it. “Do you mean to tell me that it is you who have been playing this trick upon us? Am I to understand that you are the dog who has led us this dance? By heavens, you shall pay for it as severely as ever man paid yet!”

Here he paused for breath, and I seized the opportunity to ask for an explanation.

“Don’t you understand?” he cried, wheeling round to me, his eyes flaming, and his usually florid countenance now white with rage. “This miserable wretch is no more the Reverend Colway–Brown than I am.”

“Indeed!” I said, with my mouth wide open with surprise. “Then who is he?”

”*My own agent—the man we trusted. The man who was to have brought the pearl to England!*”

“This is really very pretty,” I said, as soon as I had recovered from my astonishment. “And, what’s more, it explains a good many things that I could not understand. No wonder he took fright when I mentioned your name at Donovan’s Hotel in Cooktown. Had it not been for that bilious attack of yours you would have been with me, and, in that case, you would have recognised him, and we should have been spared this voyage across the Pacific. But still there is one matter that requires consideration.” Here I turned to the wretched fellow before us. “If the Reverend Colway–Brown did not murder the agent, it is plain that the agent must have murdered the Reverend Colway–Brown. We gave the parson the credit of that business. It appears, however, that we were mistaken.”

By this time the wretched man’s agony was almost painful to witness. Try how he would he could not recover his self–possession. Prior to that moment he had imagined himself accused of mere stealing, while the secret of the more serious charge he believed to be still safely locked up in the mail–boat cabin at the bottom of the sea. It came upon him, therefore, as a greater shock to find his crime discovered, and by the very man of all others of whom he had the greatest reason to be afraid. Small wonder that he felt ill at ease. In my own heart I’m afraid I pitied him, but not when I thought of the sinking mail–boat and the wild struggle in cabin 33.

“What have you to say for yourself?” asked Leversidge, turning to the other again. “Are you aware that we have only to convey you ashore in order to give you into custody as the murderer of Colway–Brown?”

“I am aware of that,” cried the wretched man; “but you do not know everything. You do not know what I had to put up with. You can have no idea of the temptations that were placed in my way. He was one of the gang that dogged my steps first from Melbourne to Sydney, and then on to Brisbane. I was surrounded, morning, noon, and night, by thieves and murderers. I scarcely dared close my eyes for fear I should never open them again, or if I did that I should find my precious charge gone. This man you call Colway–Brown was the head of the gang, but it was not until we had reached Thursday Island that I found him out. Then he began to hang round me on deck and in my cabin, talking always of pearls and precious stones, and trying to induce me to be friendly with him. On the night of the wreck he came into my berth, just as I was thinking of retiring to rest. One glance showed me that he was under the influence of liquor, and I also noticed that he carried one hand in his pocket in a suspicious sort of fashion. Presently he came up alongside me as I stood beside my washstand basin, and before I knew what he was about had whipped a razor from his pocket and was trying for my throat. I was too startled by the suddenness of it all to cry out, but not sufficiently so as to be unable to defend myself. I wrestled with him with the strength of despair, and at last was fortunate enough to get the mastery and to throw him upon the deck. Then the devil, who arranges all these things for his own benefit, you may be sure, got hold of me, and for a few moments I was not conscious of what I did. I remember looking down at him as he lay below me on the deck, and I also remember seizing the razor, which had fallen from his hand, and giving myself a nasty cut in so doing. After that I am not sure of my actions; but one thing is very certain, when I rose to my feet his throat was cut from ear to ear. You, Mr. Leversidge, who are so angry

with me now, may not believe me when I say so, but I tell you that I fell back against my berth trying to find the pluck to kill myself when I thought of what I had done. But I could not do it. I leaned against my bunk and hid my face in my blood–stained hands, sobbing as if my heart would break. Then I looked down at the man, and seeing that he was quite dead, wondered how I could best manage to save my neck from the fatal noose.

"While I was trying to collect my thoughts, and wondering what I should do, the vessel quivered from stem to stern; then I heard a noise on deck, a shouting and trampling of feet. I immediately left my cabin and ran up the companion ladder as fast as I could go, only to find the great ship sinking. What happened during the next few minutes I cannot say; indeed, I do not remember anything of what happened until I found myself floating on the surface of the water, wondering how long I should remain alive. The rest you know. I was saved, with one other man, and, what was more, I had the pearl with me. It is my belief it is accursed. It was not until I was out of the water, and found that there were only two of us saved, that the idea occurred to me to impersonate the dead man, and thus keep the jewel for myself. I fought with it, God knows how hard, but it was too strong for me, and at last I gave in. The chances, I argued, were all in my favour. So far as I knew, with the exception of the foremast hand, who did not know one passenger from another, I was the only survivor. Your agent was supposed to be drowned. If, therefore, I called myself Colway–Brown, I might escape detection.

"When I reached Thursday Island, intending to strike for America, where I thought I should have a better opportunity of selling my stolen property without being detected, I called myself by the name of the dead man. Then came your telegram asking for information concerning your agent. I answered it as I thought the spurious parson would have done, and told myself I should be troubled by you no more. The week following I left for the South, but every one was so curious to see me that I abandoned that idea and left the vessel at Cooktown, intending to change into this boat, and so make my way *viâ* Honolulu to the States. But it was not to be. You, sir, found me at Jim Donovan's Hotel, and it was only by a stroke of good fortune that I managed to give you the slip. Now you, Mr. Leversidge, have caught me, and it remains for you to say what you will do."

I looked at Leversidge, who looked at me. The position was an awkward one. There could be no doubt that the man's story was a true one; and if so, for a part of it, at least, he deserved our pity.

It was Mr. Leversidge who solved the difficulty by inquiring what had become of the pearl. In answer the man fumbled in the breast–pocket of his coat, and presently drew out a small flat box, which he passed across the table.

"It is there, the cursed thing!" he said bitterly. "Would to God I had never seen it! It has wrought my ruin, body and soul."

With feverish earnestness Mr. Leversidge opened the box, and took from the cotton wool, with which it was filled, the finest black pearl I had ever set eyes on in the whole course of my experience. Seeing it, I could easily understand the temptation it had given rise to in the other's heart. Mr. Leversidge, however, replaced it in its nest, and stowed the box away in his pocket. Then he turned to the wretched man before us.

"You know in your own heart," he said, "whether the story you have told us regarding that

man’s death be true or not. In either case you may be sure of one thing, and that is, that your wretched secret is in safe keeping. May God forgive you, and permit you to work out your own salvation; we shall not punish you further. The rest is a matter for your own conscience.”

Ten minutes later we were back on our own steamer, returning to Honolulu as fast as she could carry us, little dreaming what awaited us there.

XII

It was well–nigh mid–day before we reached our hotel; but as soon as we did so Mr. Leversidge placed the small box containing the pearl in a safe place. Having had such difficulty in finding it, he had no desire to run the risk of losing it again. This done, we devoted half an hour to business, and after that I went down to the agent's office to make inquiries about the mail–boat for Japan, which was due to arrive from San Francisco the following day. The remainder of the afternoon was occupied with calls upon old friends, and it was not until well after nightfall that I returned to our hotel. On arriving there, to my surprise, I found Mr. Leversidge in my bedroom in a state of wildest excitement. He was standing in the middle of the room holding the small wooden box containing the pearl in his hand. I inquired what was the matter.

"Thank Heaven you have returned," he cried. "Collon, I have made a terrible discovery. You will scarcely believe, but we've been swindled again, and in the most barefaced manner possible, by that seemingly repentant hound on board the steamer."

"What on earth do you mean?" I inquired, scarcely able to credit what he said. "How have we been swindled?"

In answer to my question he lifted the lid of the box and tipped its contents into the palm of his hand, which he held towards me in a theatrical fashion.

"We've been horribly taken in," he said. "This is not the pearl my firm purchased. It is a dummy—a fake, a make–believe. That clever rascal must have manufactured it himself for this express purpose, and all his protestations were as false as the pearl itself."

"What?" I cried. "I can't believe it. Let me look at the thing."

Taking it from him I examined it carefully. What he said was true. It was not genuine. At the same time, however, I am prepared to assert that it was the finest forgery of its kind I have ever come across in a fairly extensive experience. Until that moment, in my own heart, I had been despising the spurious Colway–Brown for a mere chicken–hearted cur, who, as soon as he was collared, wept and whined, and declared himself over–tempted and deeply repentant. Now, however, I was beginning to have a greater respect for him than I had yet felt, and for the simple and sufficient reason that in a trial of skill he had proved one too many for us.

"What can we do?" asked Mr. Leversidge. "By this time he may have changed to another boat, and have left the Island. In that case we shall have to commence our chase over again."

I was about to reply, when one of the native servants of the hotel entered the room and handed Mr. Leversidge a note, which he opened. Having read it he passed it on to me.

"Good heavens! I can scarcely believe it," I heard him say softly to himself. "Read that, Mr. Collon."

The note was from the captain of the schooner *Friendship*, and ran as follows:—

"To J. Leversidge, Esq.,

"Pacific Hotel, Honolulu.

"Dear Sir,—

"I regret exceedingly having to inform you that the man whom you visited on board my vessel this morning was, half an hour ago, shot by a person who had evidently been awaiting his arrival in this port. The murderer is in safe custody. As I understand from him that you were, or had been until lately, his employer, I thought it my duty to at once communicate with you.

"I am, Sir,

"Yours very obediently,

"J. BOLSOVER."

"This is retribution with a vengeance," I said. "But who can the murderer be?"

"One of the gang who was after the pearl in Australia, I'll be bound," returned Mr. Leversidge. Then the expression on his face suddenly changed, and he seized me by the arm. "For hundreds of reasons he would be certain to carry the pearl about his person. Can the murderer have stolen it, think you?"

"We will very soon ascertain," I answered, springing from the chair into which I had just thrown myself. "Come, Mr. Leversidge, we'll be off to the boat at once. This is no time for half measures."

So saying, we seized our hats and left the hotel in search of the schooner *Friendship*. When we got on board we found an unusual stillness reigning. The skipper greeted us at the entrance of the companion ladder and shook us by the hand. "This is a bad business, gentlemen," he said, "and I regret that it should have happened aboard my boat."

"A very bad business, as you say," Mr. Leversidge replied. "How long ago did it happen?"

"About an hour and a half," replied the other. "It was getting dark, when a man came aboard and asked to see your friend. He was standing just where we are now, and after they had said a few words they walked aft together. They must have started quarrelling at once, for as I went down the ladder to the cuddy I heard some high words pass between them, then a shot was fired, and your friend fell upon the deck. I rushed on deck and got there just in time to seize the murderer as he was going over the side. We clapped him in irons straight away, and as soon as we had done so, set ashore for the police."

"And the murdered man?"

"We carried him below, but he expired before we got him there. He lies now in his cabin. The police are coming to take him off in an hour's time. Perhaps you would like to see him?"

"Thank you," said Mr. Leversidge, and the captain led the way to the berth below, where he left us alone with the dead man.

“It’s now, or never,” I said. “If we want the pearl, we’ve got to find it before the police come off to take possession of the body, otherwise how are you going to establish your rights to it.”

“But where do you intend looking for it?” Mr. Leversidge inquired.

“I’m going to begin by searching the body,” I answered, “and then if we are permitted sufficient time, I shall take a look at his luggage. You had better guard the door.”

As I spoke I took from my pocket a small, but exceedingly sharp pair of folding scissors, which I make a point of always carrying about with me. Then drawing back the blanket with which the body was covered, I ran my practised fingers over it. It is wonderful what a number of hiding–places the human frame contains. But it is the business of my life to know them all, and on this particular occasion it was not long before I discovered that high up under his right arm his coat had been carefully padded. To cut the lining was the work of a few seconds, and the results justified my expectations. “Here is your pearl, Mr. Leversidge,” I said, holding it up, and a moment later I handed him the jewel in question. “Now let us get on deck as soon as possible. You had better leave your address, however, with the captain, in order that the police may know where to find you should your presence be required at the inquest.”

He followed my advice, and then we descended to our boat alongside. Next morning, to obviate any chance of future inconvenience, we made it our business to attend at the police office, where we stated what we knew of the murdered man. Three hours later I bade Mr. Leversidge farewell on the hurricane deck of the American mail–boat.

“Good–bye, Mr. Collon,” he said. “It seems strange to be parting like this after all we have gone through together. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your co–operation. There is only one question I wish to ask you before you go.”

“And what is that?”

“Was I right, or was I wrong, when I told you in Ceylon that I thought this case would prove to be one of the most extraordinary even in your varied repertoire?”

“You were quite right,” I answered. “I have never known another like it. Good–bye.”

“Good–bye, and may you always be equally successful.”

* * * * *

Three months later, when I was just bringing to a conclusion a delicate bit of business in Cochin China, the incoming mail–boat brought me a small packet, which, when I had opened it, I discovered contained a valuable diamond ring, with a card bearing this inscription:—“To Christopher Collon, in recognition of a signal service rendered to Wilson, Burke & Leversidge, of Hatton Garden.”

The great black pearl which was the cause of all that has been told in this story is now amongst the most valued jewels of an Empress. How little, when it lies black as night upon her snow–white bosom, does she think what it cost in human life, or of the part it played in the drama to which I now invariably refer as “A CRIME OF THE UNDER–SEAS.”

THE PHANTOM STOCKMAN

"A remarkably charming situation, and as pretty a homestead as any I have seen in the Bush," I said. "You have certainly worked wonders during the short time you have been in possession."

It was a moonlight night, and Jim Spicer and I were sitting in the verandah of Warradoona Station in Western New South Wales. Ten o'clock had struck nearly half an hour before, and, at a quarter past, Mrs. Spicer had bidden us "Good–night" and had gone off to bed. On hearing that I did not feel tired, her husband had invited me to bring my pipe and grog into the verandah, where we could chat about old times without disturbing anybody. I had only arrived that afternoon from Melbourne, and, as we had not met for more than three years, it may be easily imagined that we had much to say to each other. Years before we had been on a station together in Queensland, had done two overlanding trips in the same party, and had more than once tried our luck upon the gold–fields in partnership. Then he had taken a billet as manager of a big station in the Far West, and I had gone south to Melbourne to give up the Bush and settle down to the humdrum business I had inherited from my father. My surprise may therefore be understood when one morning I received a letter from my old comrade, informing me that he was married and had taken a property on Warradoona Creek. He brought his letter to a conclusion by telling me that if I stood in need of a holiday, and would care to undertake the long journey out to his place, he would not only give me a hearty welcome, but would be very thankful for my assistance in unravelling a mystery which up to the time of writing had baffled him completely. What the mystery was he did not say.

Now, as all the Bush world knows, Warradoona, despite the fact that it is on the direct overlanding route to Western Queensland, is one of the most unget–at–able places on the face of our great Island Continent. To begin with, you have a four hundred mile railway journey, then a coach ride of upwards of two hundred more, which will bring you to the township of Yarrapanya, a settlement of four houses at the junction of Warradoona Creek with the Salt Bush River. In the township horses can be obtained, and with their assistance the remainder of the journey, upwards of a hundred miles, may be accomplished. At the best of times it is a tedious undertaking, but when the floods are out, or, on the other hand, in the summer season when there is no water at all, it becomes a peculiarly dangerous one. To compensate for these drawbacks, however, when you *do* reach the station you will receive as hearty a welcome as any to be obtained in the Bush. The property itself is a large one, and certainly the best in that district. The homestead is a neat Bush building constructed of wood, roofed with shingles, and boasting on every side a broad verandah. It is built on the side of a hill and overlooks the plain that separates the higher land from the river. Away to the north where the Ranges trend in towards the Creek, there is a narrow pass through which come all the overlanding parties bringing cattle from Queensland to the south. To the southward a dense Mulga Scrub commences, and clothes the whole face of the hills as far as the eye can reach. Across the river and lying some thirty miles due west is Yarka Station, where, at the time of which I write, resided Jim's nearest neighbour, the Honourable Marmaduke Chudfield, a young Englishman, who, after he had given his

family repeated opportunities of studying the more frivolous side of his character, had been shipped to Australia, where it was confidently hoped hard work and a limited supply of money would turn him into a staid and respectable colonist.

“Yes,” said Spicer, as he walked to the rail of the verandah, and looked down upon the moonlit plain, “it is, as you say, by no means a bad sort of place. As I shall show you to–morrow, the station buildings are above the average in point of completeness, the run is well sheltered and grassed, the supply of water is abundant, and, as you are aware, we are on the direct cattle route to the south. Moreover, I have got the place for a considerable period on exceptional terms.”

“I congratulate you most heartily. Now tell me the disadvantages; for I suppose there *are* some.”

“So far as I have seen there is only one. At the same time, however, I must confess that that one is quite big enough to outweigh all the advantages put together. In point of fact, it was that very disadvantage that made me write to you last week and endeavour to induce you to pay us a visit.”

“Now I come to think of it, I remember in your letter you *did* speak of some mystery that you wanted cleared up. What is it? In these prosaic days mysteries, save in mining matters, are few and far between. I am all impatience to hear what shape yours assumes.”

While I had been speaking Spicer had been leaning on the verandah rail looking down the hillside towards the river. Now he turned, and, placing his back against one of the posts that supported the roof, regarded me steadily for some seconds.

“First and foremost, old man,” he said, “try to bear it in mind that I don’t want to be laughed at. I’ve got so much at stake that I’m as touchy on the subject as an old man with the gout. The trouble I have to contend with is that this place is supposed to be haunted. I know it’s a silly sort of thing for a matter–of–fact fellow like myself to say; but still the fact remains, and a remarkably unpleasant fact it is.”

“The deuce it is,” I replied. “And pray what is the place supposed to be haunted by?”

“By a man on a white horse who rides about on a plain down yonder.”

“Is this only hearsay, or have you seen the apparition yourself?”

“I have seen him on three occasions,” replied Spicer solemnly. “The first time was the week after I arrived on the place, the second was three months ago, and the last was the very Saturday upon which I wrote to you. But as if that were not enough, we have been worried ever since our arrival by the most dismal noises in the house itself.”

“What sort of noises do you mean?”

“By all sorts, confound them! Sometimes by a shriek about midnight that fetches you up in bed with the perspiration rolling off your face; sometimes by moans and groans; and sometimes, but not so often, by a peculiar noise that is for all the world like a human voice, muffled by a blanket, trying to say, ‘Save me, save me,’ and not succeeding very well. As you know, I am a fairly plucky man, and for that reason I think I might manage to stand it myself; but then I’ve got some one else to consider. I have to think of my wife. Under ordinary circumstances she is as plucky a little woman as ever made her home in

the Bush, but no woman's nerves would stand the continual strain that is put upon them here. You see, my work often takes me out on the run for days at a time, and I have to leave her alone. Female servants we have none, not so much even as a solitary black gin. When we came up we brought a woman with us from Melbourne, but she only stayed a week and then went off with the first bullock team that passed this way. However, we managed, by offering big wages, to get another. She stayed a month, and then said she would prefer to go off to the township alone rather than stay another night upon the place. We have been here five months and a week, and during that time I have had four men cooks, three chief stockmen, eight inferior ditto, and ten horse boys. As for a strange black, I've not seen one near the place since I first set foot upon it. The last time I was staying the night at Chudfield's place across the river, I tried to persuade one he wanted to get rid of to come over and keep my own two boys company. His answer was significant. 'Baal (no) come up this fella,' he said. 'Too much debbil debbil alonga Warradoona.' The long and the short of the matter is, old friend, unless I can manage to put a stop to this phantom business I shall be a ruined man. All my savings are locked up in this place, and if I don't make it pay, well, I must sell up and go back to Queensland and be a servant again instead of a master."

"It's a nasty position," I said. "I don't wonder you want to get it settled. By the way, how long has the place possessed this sinister reputation?"

"Only for the last three years," he answered.

"Is there any sort of story to account for it?"

Spicer was silent for a moment.

"Well, there you have me on a tender spot," he replied. "Though I don't like to own it, I must confess there *is* a story."

"Can you tell it to me?"

"If you think it will help you to a solution of the problem I shall be glad to do so. You must understand that about three years ago a mob of cattle camped, according to custom, upon the plain down yonder. They were on their way from Queensland to Adelaide, in charge of an old drover named Burke, a worthy old fellow who'd been on the road all his life. During the evening a quarrel arose between him and his second in command. From high words they came to blows, and in the encounter the subordinate got the worst of it. He professed to be satisfied and turned into his blankets apparently sorry for what he had done. An hour later the third white man of the party mounted his horse and went out to watch the cattle, leaving the other two, as he thought, asleep. When he returned two hours later he found Burke stabbed to the heart and the other man missing. Do you remember, when you crossed the river to–day, noticing a grave enclosed by a white railing?"

"Perfectly. I wondered at the time whose it could be."

"Well, that's where Burke is buried."

"The phantom, then, is supposed to be the ghost of the murdered man? What form does it take?"

"It is that of an old man with a long grey beard; he is dressed all in white and is mounted

upon a white horse, who carries his head rather high. He holds a stock–whip in his hand and wears a white felt hat pulled far down over his eyes."

"Has anybody else seen him?"

"Dozens of people. It drove away Jamison, the first owner of the place, and the original builder of this house. Williams, from Mindana, came next; he built the men's hut away to the left there, and cleared out bag and baggage exactly three months to a day after he had paid his purchase money. He said he would rather lose five thousand pounds than stop another night on the place. Macpherson, a long–headed Scotchman, as hard as a tenpenny nail, and about as emotional as a brickbat, came next. He paid his money and was not going to lose it just because he heard funny noises and saw queer sights. But at the end of six months he had changed his tune. Money was no object to him, he said; he was content to lose every penny he possessed in the world provided he saw no more of Warradoona. Benson followed Macpherson. He got the place dirt cheap, cattle thrown in, and, from what the folk in the township told me, seemed to think he'd done a mighty smart stroke of business."

"What became of Benson?"

"He returned to the south without even unpacking his bullock wagons. He has bought a place in New Zealand now, I believe. It was from him that I purchased the property."

"And the price you paid for it?"

"Would be less than a quarter of its value but for the Phantom Stockman. As it is, I am upset on an average three nights a week; my wife is frightened nearly out of her wits every time she goes to bed; and with the exception of my head stockman, Ruford, and two black boys, I can keep no servants upon the place, and in consequence have to work my stock short–handed, which is an impossibility. To put it plainly, either the Phantom Stockman or I must go. I thought all this out last week and the upshot of my cogitations was my letter to you. I know from experience that you've got a cool head, and I have had repeated evidence of your pluck. Young Chudfield, my next–door neighbour, the man who, for the sake of my company, has done his level best to persuade me to give the place a further trial, has promised to come over and give us a hand, and if we three can't settle the mystery between us, well, I think we ought to be ashamed of ourselves, that's all."

"We'll certainly have a good try," I answered. "I'm not a believer in ghosts myself, and it will go hard with us if we can't manage to discover of what sort of material our troublesome friend is composed. One further question. Does he put in an appearance at regular intervals, or is he indiscriminate in his favours?"

"As far as *he* is personally concerned he is fairly regular. It is about the full of the moon that he appears to be most active, but the noises in the house go on at all hours, sometimes two or three nights in succession. Then perhaps there will be a week's silence, after which we will be worried night after night, till we are nearly driven distracted."

"It seems a most mysterious affair," I said. "And I can quite understand that you are worried by it."

"You would say so if you had to live here," he answered. "It gets on your nerves till you feel inclined to jump away from your own shadow. Now I expect you're tired, and would

like to be off to roost. Help yourself to a night–cap, and then we'll have a look at your room together."

I had leant forward to the table and taken up the demijohn containing the spirit—in point of fact, I was in the act of pouring some of its contents into my glass—when from the dark house behind us there came a long, low moan, followed by a shriek that cut the still night air like the sharp tearing of a sheet of calico. After that there was complete silence, which to my thinking was worse even than the scream. I sprang to my feet.

"My God," I cried, "what's that?"

But Spicer only laughed in a curious way.

"You are being introduced to our supernatural friend," he replied. "Now you know the sort of thing we are being continually called upon to put up with."

"But it sounded so intensely human," I said. "And yet, now I come to think of it, there was a peculiar muffled note about it that rather upsets my theory. One thing, however, is quite certain: it came from the house, and I should say from the centre passage."

"You are quite right. That's where we always hear it. But if you think there is anybody hiding there you're mistaken. Come and look for yourself."

So saying he led the way into the house. I followed him. As he had said, there was nobody to be seen. The passage in question was about twenty feet long by four wide. There was a door at each end, and two on either side. It was well lighted by an oil lamp supported on an iron bracket screwed into the woodwork. The walls were composed of weather boards, while the floor was covered by a strip of oilcloth, which stretched from end to end. Spicer lifted the lamp from its socket, and, opening one of the doors on the left, led me into the sitting–room. We explored it carefully, but there was nothing there that could in any way account for the noise we had heard. Having satisfied ourselves on this point, we crossed to the room on the opposite side of the passage. This was my bedroom, and in it, as in the other apartment, our search was unrewarded. The room next to it was Spicer's office, and, save a safe, a desk, a small cupboard, a chair, and a row of account books, contained nothing to excite our suspicion. We passed into the passage again.

"This room," he said, pointing to the door opposite the office, "is our bedroom."

He tapped on the door.

"Minnie," he cried, "are you awake?"

"Yes," was the answer, "and very frightened. How long will you be before you come to bed?"

"I am coming now," he replied. Then, turning to me, he held out his hand. "Good–night," he said, "and pleasant dreams to you. It seems a shame to have brought you up here only to worry you with our troubles."

"I am very glad, indeed, that I came," I replied. "And if I can help you to some solution of your difficulty I shall be still more glad."

A quarter of an hour later I was in bed and asleep. If there was any further noise that night I did not hear it. I was tired after my long journey, and slept on until long after the sun had

risen next morning.

When I did turn out I went into the verandah, where I discovered my hostess.

“Good–morning,” she said, as she offered me her hand. “Jim has just gone across to the stockyard, but he will be back to breakfast in a moment.”

Many people might have been discovered in Australia who would have thanked their stars that they were not the proprietors of Warradoona Station, but there would have been few who would not have envied Spicer his partner in life. She was a pretty brunette, with wonderful brown eyes, and a sympathetic, motherly way about her that made every one feel at home in her company, even if they had never seen her until five minutes before.

“I cannot tell you how very kind I think you are,” she said, “to come to our assistance. You can imagine what a depressing effect this place has had upon Jim and myself. We have tried everything we can think of to solve the mystery, but without success. Now it remains to be seen whether you will fare any better than we have done.”

“I am going to do my best,” I answered, and as I said so, Jim came up the steps.

“Good–morning,” he said as he reached the verandah. “I hope you slept well and that you were not disturbed by any more noises.”

“If there were any to hear they didn’t wake me,” I answered. “I suppose you have not discovered anything that throws any sort of light upon that scream we heard last night?”

“Nothing at all,” he replied, shaking his head. “But, to add to the discomfort we are already enduring, our cook has just informed me that he saw the White Horseman on the plain last night, and in consequence has given me notice that it is his intention to leave at mid–day. He says he would rather forfeit all his wages than remain another night.”

“Oh, Jim, I am sorry to hear that,” said his wife. “We shall have great difficulty in getting another. We *do* indeed seem doomed to misfortune.”

Jim said nothing, but I saw his mouth harden as we went in to breakfast. His patience was well–nigh exhausted, and I suspected that if the mystery were not solved before many days were over he would follow the example of his predecessors, forfeit all the money he had put into it, and sever his connection with Warradoona.

During the morning I gave him a hand with some branding in the stockyard, and in the afternoon we went for a ride across the river, hoping to meet the mob of cattle his men were out collecting. We were unsuccessful, however, and it was dusk when we reached home again. By the time we had turned our horses loose, and placed our saddles on the racks, the full moon was rising above the Ranges behind the house. On reaching the verandah we heard voices in the sitting–room.

“That’s Marmaduke Chudfield, I’ll wager a sovereign,” said Jim. “I’m glad he’s come over, for though he’s rather a namby–pamby sort of individual, he’s not bad company.”

A moment later we had entered the room, and I was being introduced to a tall, slim youth of perhaps eight–and–twenty years of age. His height could not have been much under six feet two, his face was devoid of beard or moustache, and boasted a somewhat vacuous expression, which a single eye–glass he wore continually only served to intensify. He

spoke with a lisp and a drawl, and if one could judge by his own confessions, seemed to have no knowledge of any one thing in the whole system of the universe. In less than five minutes' conversation I had struck the bed rock of his intelligence, to use a mining phrase, and, while I had small doubt of his good nature, was not at all impressed by his sagacity. His station, Yarka, was, so Jim informed me later, a grand property, and carried a large number of cattle. This success, however, was in no sense due to Chudfield's exertions. To quote his own words, he "left everything to his overseer, a German, named Mulhauser, don't–cher–know, and didn't muddle things up by shoving his spoke in when it was no sort of jolly assistance, don't–cher–know. Cattle farming was not exactly his line, and if he had to pay a chap to work, well, he'd make him work, while he himself sat tight and had a jolly good time with continual trips to town and friends up to stay, and all that sort of thing, don't–cher–know."

After dinner we sat in the verandah and smoked our pipes until close upon ten o'clock, when Mrs. Spicer bade us "Good–night" and retired to her own room, as on the previous evening. After she had left us, there was a lull in the conversation. The night was perfectly still, as only nights in the Bush can be; the moon was well above the roof, and in consequence the plain below us was well–nigh as bright as day. The only sound to be heard was the ticking of the clock in the sitting–room behind us, and the faint sighing of the night–breeze through the scrub timber on the hills behind the house. And here I must make a digression. I don't think I have so far explained that in front of the house there was an unkempt garden about fifty yards long by thirty wide, enclosed by a rough Bush fence. In an idle sort of way I sat smoking and watching the rails at the bottom. The beauty of the night seemed to exercise a soothing influence upon the three of us. Jim, however, was just about to speak when Chudfield sprang from his chair, and, pointing towards the fence, at which only a moment before I had been looking, cried, "What's that?"

We followed the direction of his hand with our eyes, and as we did so leapt to our feet. Being but a sorry scene–painter I don't know exactly what words I should employ to make you see what we saw then. Scarcely fifty yards from us, seated upon a white horse, was a tall man, with a long grey beard, dressed altogether in white, even to his hat and boots. In his hand he carried a white stock–whip, which he balanced upon his hip. How he had managed to come so close without making a sound to warn us of his approach was more than I could understand; but this much was certain, come he did. The time, from our first seeing him to the moment of his wheeling his horse and riding silently away again, could not have been more than a minute, but all the same we were able to take perfect stock of him.

"Follow me," shouted Jim, as he rushed down the steps and ran towards the gate at the bottom of the garden. We followed close at his heels, but by the time we reached the fence the Phantom Stockman had entirely disappeared. We stared across the moonlit plain until our eyes ached, but not a sign of the apparition we had seen rewarded us.

"That is the third time he has been up here since I have had the place," said our host, "and each time he has vanished before I could get close enough to have a good look at him."

"What beats me was the fact that his horse made no sound," remarked the Honourable Marmaduke, "and yet the ground is hard enough hereabouts."

“Wait here till I get a lantern,” cried Spicer. “Don’t go outside the fence, and then you won’t obliterate any tracks he may have made.”

So saying he hastened back to the house, to return in about five minutes carrying in his hand a large lantern. With its assistance we carefully explored the ground on the other side of the fence, but to no purpose. There was not a sign of a horse’s hoof to be seen.

“Well, this beats cock fighting,” said the Honourable, as Jim blew out the light and we turned to walk back to the house. “This is Hamlet’s father’s ghost with a vengeance, don’t–cher–know. I shall be glad whenever he takes it into his head to pay me a visit at Yarka. I’m afraid in that case my respected parent would see me in England sooner than would be quite convenient to him.”

To this speech Jim replied never a word, nor did I think his remark worth an answer. Once in the verandah we separated, bidding each other good–night, Jim to go to his own room, the Honourable to take possession of the sofa in the sitting–room, upon which a bed had been made up for him, and I to my own dormitory. I saw Jim turn down the lamp in the passage and heard him blow it out as I shut my door. Then I undressed and jumped into bed.

How long I had been asleep I do not know, but I have the most vivid remembrance of suddenly finding myself sitting up in bed with the sweat pouring off my face, and the echo of surely the most awful shriek mortal man ever heard ringing in my ears. Before I could recover my self–possession it rang out again, followed this time by a strange moaning sound that must have continued while I could have counted twenty. Thinking this had gone about far enough I jumped out of bed, opened the door, and ran into the passage, only to be seized by a pair of arms. Lifting my right hand I took my assailant by the throat, and just as I did so, Jim’s door opened and he came out, holding a candle in his hand. Then it was that I made the discovery that it was not the ghost’s throat I was clutching between my finger and thumb, but that of the Honourable.

“Confound you two,” said Jim angrily. “What on earth are you up to?”

“Up to?” gasped Chudfield. “Why, I heard the most villainous scream just now that I ever heard in my life, and came running out of my room to see what was the matter, only to be collared by the throat by this chap.” Then turning to me he continued, in his usual drawling way, “I believe you’ve half broken my neck, don’t–cher–know.”

“Bother your neck,” I cried shortly, for my dander was up and somebody had got to suffer for the fright I had received. “Jim, did you hear that scream?”

“Worse luck,” answered poor Jim. “I wish I could say I hadn’t. What the deuce does it mean?”

“It means,” I replied sternly, “that if there’s a ghost in this place I’ve got to see him before I’ll be satisfied. And if it’s a trick, well, I’ve got to find the chap that’s playing it or know the reason why. When I do, I’ll do what Chudfield here accuses me of half doing. I’ll break his neck.”

With that I walked first to the door at one end of the passage and examined it, then to the other; after that I tried the door leading into the office. All three were securely locked on our side.

“As far as I can remember, the sound seemed to come from about here,” I said, pointing to the centre of the floor. “What is underneath these boards, Jim?”

“Only solid Mother Earth,” he replied. “I had some of the planks up when I came into the place and put new ones down.”

“Well, I’m going to sit up and await further developments,” I said. “Do either of you feel inclined to share my vigil?”

“I will do so with pleasure,” said Jim.

“And I too, if it’s necessary,” said the Honourable, with peculiar eagerness. “I’m not going to risk being wakened out of my sleep by another shriek like that.”

Jim went into his bedroom and said something to his wife. After that we dressed and made ourselves as comfortable as possible in the sitting–room. But though we remained there till daylight we heard nothing further. As day dawned we returned to our beds to sleep soundly until we were roused by Mrs. Spicer at eight o’clock.

That afternoon, in spite of our jeers, the Honourable left us to return to his own abode. He had had enough and to spare of Warradoona, he said, and as he had not proved himself a very good plucked one, we did not exert ourselves very much to make him change his mind.

“I never thought he’d prove to be such a coward,” said Jim, as we watched the youth disappear behind the river timber. “Still, he’s a man extra about the place, and if those wretched cattle are coming in to–night we shall want all the hands we can raise to look after them on the plain.”

“Do you think they will be here to–night?”

“It’s more than likely. They ought to have been in this morning, and as they can’t halt in the scrub they’ll be driven by force of circumstances into camping on the plain. In that case it will be a pound to a sixpence that our friend the Stockman will give us some trouble. He generally puts in an appearance when there’s a mob passing through.”

“If he does we must tackle him, and decide once and for all the question of his—well, of his spirituality, shall I say? You can find a couple of revolvers, I suppose?”

“Half a dozen if need be, and what’s more, cartridges to fit them.”

We then walked back to the house together. It was tea time, and as soon as we had made ourselves tidy we sat down to it. Half way through the meal there was a heavy step in the verandah, and a moment later Ruford, Jim’s one remaining stockman, entered the room.

“So you’ve turned up at last,” said Jim, as he became aware of the other’s identity. “Where are the cattle?”

“Camped on the plain,” was the reply. “Bad luck to ‘em. It was as much as I could do to get the two black boys to remain with them. Are you coming down?”

“We’ll be down in half an hour,” said Jim. “This gentleman and myself will camp with you to–night and give you a hand. Now be off and get your tea.”

He disappeared without another word.

“But if you two are going to help with the cattle, what is to become of me?” asked Mrs. Spicer. “I cannot be left here alone.”

“That’s perfectly true,” said Jim. “I never thought of it. Confound that miserable coward Chudfield. I’ll tell you what I’ll do, Minnie. I’ll send Ruford up to take care of you. He won’t be sorry for an evening’s comfort, and it is most imperative that we should go down, you see, in case the Stockman should turn up to–night. If he does we hope to bring matters to a crisis.”

Faithful to our promise, as soon as the meal was over, we saddled our horses and rode down towards the camp fire that we could see burning brightly on the plain below.

By the time we reached it the appearance of the night had changed, clouds had covered the sky, and a soft drizzle was falling. Ruford had taken the cattle down to the river, and when they had drunk their fill had tailed them slowly on to camp, where the two black boys were watching them. It was not a cheerful night, for the wind had risen, and was moaning among the she–oak trees like a million lost spirits. A more lonesome spot I never was in than that plain.

As we approached the fire Ruford said snappishly,—

“I suppose you think it’s funny to hang round a camp, whispering and moaning, in order to frighten a man out of his wits.”

“Who has been hanging about the camp whispering and moaning?” asked Spicer. “Why, you duffer, we’ve only just come down from the Homestead. You must be either drunk or dreaming.”

“Dreaming be hanged!” he said. “I tell you that there’s been some one moaning like old — round this ‘ere camp ever since dusk!”

“Moaning like your grandmother,” said Spicer, descending from his saddle and tying his horse up to a tree near by. “I want you to go up to the house and camp there. Mrs. Spicer is all alone, and I think she may be frightened. We’ll look after the cattle.”

When he had gone we stretched ourselves beside the fire on the blankets we found there and fell to yarning.

I can see the whole scene now. Owing to the heavy clouds mentioned above, it was as dark as the inside of your hat, with not a gleam of light in the whole length and breadth of the sky. Ruford had stirred up the fire before he left us, and the flames were roaring upwards, when suddenly there came a long, peculiar moan from the scrub behind us that brought us up into a sitting posture like one man. We looked in the direction whence it seemed to come, and saw there, standing in the full light of the fire, a tall, thin man, of about fifty years of age. He had white hair and a long grey beard. He was dressed, even to his riding boots, in some white material, and he carried a stock–whip in his hand. His face was as pale as death and infinitely sad, and he seemed to be looking from one to the other of us as if he did not know which to address.

We were both struck dumb with astonishment, until Spicer, raising himself on his elbow, shouted,—

“Hullo, my man! Where do *you* hail from?”

Then the figure faded away into the darkness as quietly as it had come, and you can just imagine how we stared.

“Well, this beats all the other manifestations into a cocked hat,” cried Spicer, and seizing a burning stick and bidding me follow with another, he dashed into the scrub in the direction we supposed the stranger to have taken.

For upwards of twenty minutes we searched high and low, in every possible hiding–place within fifty yards of the camp, but without success. Not a single trace of our mysterious visitor could we discover. Then we returned to the fire and lay down again.

Spicer’s watch was from nine to eleven, and as it was almost eight then, he resolved to try and snatch an hour’s sleep before it would be necessary for him to get into the saddle once more. He soon gave up the attempt, however.

Though we did not see any more of the stranger just then, I can assure you we were far from being easy in our minds. The cattle had suddenly become very restless, and from their lowing and snorting we could tell that they were uneasy. While we listened, the same peculiar moaning noise came from the scrub away to our left. It sounded for all the world like the crying of a woman in dreadful trouble, but though we peered repeatedly into the night, and twice crept away from the fire in that direction, we could discover nothing to account for it.

At nine o’clock Spicer went on watch, and the black boys came into camp reporting the cattle as very restless.

For some time after he had gone I lay on my blankets looking up at the sky. Clouds still covered the heavens, and it looked as if a wet night were pending. Sometime about ten o’clock Spicer called to me to join him, as something was radically wrong with the mob; so saddling my horse I rode out.

As I went the clouds parted, and for a moment the moon shone brilliantly forth. It was a curious sight that I then beheld. The cattle—there were about five hundred of them—were all up, moving to and fro and bellowing continuously. What made us the more uneasy was the fact that, now and again, the old bull in command would separate himself from the mob and sniff the wind, after which he would let out a bellow that fairly shook the earth. Whenever he sees the leader do that, a cattleman knows that it behoves him to stand by and keep his eyes open for trouble.

Coming up with Spicer, I asked him what he thought was the matter, but for some moments he did not answer.

Then he said very mysteriously,—

“Did you meet him as you came out?”

“Meet whom?” I asked.

“Why, our friend, the Phantom Stockman?”

“The devil! And has he turned up again?”

After looking cautiously round, Jim edged his horse up alongside mine and said quietly,—

“He’s been hovering round these cattle for the past half–hour. They can see him, and that’s

what’s making them so confoundedly restless. You take my word for it, we shall have serious trouble directly!”

“Confound it all,” I said. “That will mean double watches all night, and in this drizzle too.”

“It can’t be helped. But you had better tell the boys to be ready in case they are wanted. Look! Look! Here he comes again!”

I looked in the direction he indicated, and, true enough, out of the thick mist which now hid the trees along the river bank, and into the half moonlight where we stood, rode the phantom whom we had seen two hours before by our camp fire. But there was a difference now; this time he was mounted on his white horse, and seemed to be like us on watch. At first I fancied my brain was creating a phantom for me out of the whirling mist; but the snorting and terror of the cattle, as they became aware of his presence, soon convinced me of his reality.

Little by little the fellow edged round the scrub, and then disappeared into the fog again, to reappear a minute or two later on our left. Then he began to come slowly towards us. I can tell you the situation was uncanny enough to creep the flesh of a mummy. He was sitting loosely in his saddle, with his stock–whip balanced on his hip; indeed, to show how details impress themselves on one’s mind, I can remember that he had one of his sleeves rolled up and that he carried his reins slung over his left arm.

When he was within eight or ten paces of where we stood, my horse, which had been watching him as if turned to stone, suddenly gave a snort, and wheeling sharp round bolted across the plain as if the devil were behind him. Before I had gone fifty yards I heard Spicer come thundering after me, and we must have had a good two miles gallop before we could pull the terrified beasts up. Then we heard the cattle rushing a mile or so on our right.

“I knew they’d go,” wailed Spicer; “they’re well–nigh mad with fright. Now, what the deuce is to be done?”

“Try and head them, I suppose.”

“Come on, then, for all you’re worth. It’s neck or nothing with us now!”

We set off down the angle of the plain as fast as our horses could lay their legs to the ground. It was a near thing, for, hard as we went, we were only just in time to prevent the leaders from plunging into the river. If you know anything of overlanding, you’ll understand the work we had. As it was, I don’t believe we could have managed it at all if it had not been for the extraneous—or, as I might perhaps say, *spiritual*—aid we received.

While Spicer took the river side, I worked inland, along the bottom of the cliff, and as the two black boys had bolted for the Homestead long before the cattle broke, we had no one between us to bring up the tail. Suddenly, Heaven alone knows how, the Phantom Stockman came to our assistance; and a more perfect drover could scarcely have been found. He wheeled his cattle and brought up his stragglers, boxed ‘em, and headed ‘em off, like the oldest hand. But however clever a bushman he may have been, it was plainly his own personality that effected the greatest good; for directly the mob saw him, they turned tail and stampeded back on to the plain like beasts possessed.

At last, however, we got them rounded up together, and then Spicer rode over to where I stood and said,—

“Give an eye to ‘em, will you, while I slip back to the camp? I want to get something.”

I had not time to protest, for next minute he was gone, and I was left alone with that awful stranger whom I could still see dodging about in the mist. When he got back, Jim reined up alongside me and said,—

“This is getting a little too monotonous to my thinking.”

“What are you going to do?” I gasped, my teeth chattering in my head like a pair of castanets.

“Try the effect of this on him,” he answered, and as he spoke he pulled a revolver from his pocket. “I don’t care if it sends every beast across the river.”

At that moment, on his constant round, the phantom came into view again. On either side of him the cattle were sniffing and snorting at him, plainly showing that they were still wild with terror. This behaviour puzzled us completely, for we both knew that a mob would never treat an ordinary flesh–and–blood stockman in that way. When he got within twenty paces of us Spicer cried,—

“Bail up, matey—or, by jingo, I’ll put daylight into you!”

Obedient to the order the figure instantly pulled up.

The moon was bright enough now for us to see his face. And, though, as I’ve said before, I’m not a coward as a general rule, I can tell you that it made me feel fairly sick, so white and creepy–looking was it. Then he held up his hand as if in protest and started towards us.

This didn’t suit Spicer, however, for he yelled,—

“Stand off! or by the living God I swear I’ll fire. Stand off!”

But the figure continued to come towards us. Then *Crack! Crack! Crack!* went the revolver, and next moment there was a frightful scream and the sound of galloping hoofs. I saw no more, for, as Jim fired, my horse reared and fell back, crushing me beneath him.

I suppose I must have been stunned by the fall, for when I recovered my senses Spicer was leaning over me.

“Is he gone?” I asked as soon as I could speak.

“Yes! Gone like mad across the plain and the cattle with him. I must either have missed him, or the bullet must have passed clean through him.”

As there was now no further reason why we should remain where we were, we returned to the Homestead and told our tale. Then when it was light enough, we had our breakfast and mounted our horses and went out into the scrub to look for the cattle we had lost. By the time dusk fell we had collected three hundred and fifty out of the five hundred head Ruford had brought on to the plain. The poor beasts were quite knocked up; and as it was useless thinking of pushing them on in that condition, we were consequently compelled to camp them for one more night on that awful plain. But to our delight we saw no more of

the Phantom Stockman.

Next morning while we were at breakfast, Billy, the black boy, who had been out after the horses, came dashing up to the Homestead, almost beside himself with excitement.

“Me been find him,” he cried. “Me been find him, all same fellow what been make debbil–debbil longa here.”

“What do you mean?” asked Spicer, putting down his cup of tea. “Where have you found the man?”

“Me been find him longa billabong. My word he most like dead, mine think it.”

Spicer made a sign to me, and without another word we jumped up and ran in the direction of the stockyard. Mounting our horses we followed our guide through the scrub for a distance of perhaps a mile and a half until we came to a small billabong or backwater of the main river.

Away at the further end we could see a curious white heap, and towards it we galloped, making our horses put their best feet foremost, you may be sure.

On reaching it, we found a man lying huddled up upon the ground beneath a low–growing tree. He was dressed in a complete suit of white flannel, his boots were painted the same colour, and even his hat was fixed up to match, white. Still looped over his ears was a long grey beard and moustache of false hair.

Spicer dismounted and knelt beside him. After feeling his heart he plucked the beard away and almost shouted his astonishment aloud.

“Good heavens!” he cried; “do you recognise this man?”

I stooped and looked. *I don’t know whether you will believe it, but the Phantom Stockman, the person who had performed such prodigies two nights before, was none other than our friend Chudfield, the young English owner of Yarka Station, across the river, the man who had appeared to be so frightened by the ghost, and who had made it his boast that he knew nothing at all about Bush–work.* For some moments we stood and stared at him in stupefied amazement. I was the first to speak.

“Is he dead, do you think?” I asked.

“Quite,” said Spicer. “Look at this mark under his chin. Galloping through the scrub in the dark the other night to get away from us, he must have been caught by that bough up there and have been dashed from his saddle. Death must have been almost instantaneous.”

Round his waist was a long thin cord which ran away some twenty yards or so into the bush. We followed it up and discovered a large piece of raw hide tied to the end of it.

Spicer examined the latter carefully.

“The beast that owned this skin was only killed two days ago,” he said. “Now I know why our cattle were so restless. They smelt the blood, and, as you are aware, that invariably terrifies them. Cunning beggar! he pretended to know nothing, and yet he knew enough for this.”

“Yes,” I said; “but what about the other night when the phantom appeared at the garden

fence, and this man was sitting in the verandah with us?”

“Why, he probably wanted to disarm suspicion, and so sent his overseer, who must be in the secret, to play the part.”

“But what was his object in frightening you?”

“Can’t you guess? Well, just let me find out where our friend’s stockyard is situated in the Ranges up yonder, and I think I’ll be able to tell you. I remember now that when I came here his cattle were all over Warradoona, and that he used the place just as if it were his own, to say nothing of having his choice of all the unbranded and other cattle that former tenants had left upon it.”

Leaving the body where we had found it, to be picked up on our homeward journey, we crossed the river and plunged into the scrub beyond.

An hour later we discovered, cunningly hidden in a lonely gulley, a big stockyard *in which our lost cattle were still penned up*. There was no one in sight and nothing to prove how the animals had got there, but a clearer case of duffing could scarcely have been found. Moreover, there were branding irons in the shed adjoining, and they were those of Yarka Station.

“I think we know quite enough now,” said Spicer solemnly, as we mounted our horses to return.

“Enough to lay the Ghost of the Stockman of Warradoona at any rate,” I replied.

Three hours later we were at home once more, and Chudfield’s body was lying in a hut, waiting for the police from Yarrapanya who would hold the inquest. A black boy had meanwhile been sent across to Yarka Station to inform the manager of the catastrophe.

Our lunch that day was a mixture of happiness and sadness. Happiness, because the mystery of the Phantom Stockman had been cleared up for good and all; and sadness, because of the pain that was inseparable from the discovery of a friend’s duplicity.

When the meal was at an end we passed into the verandah. After a little conversation there, Spicer disappeared, to return in a few moments with a pick–axe and a basket of tools.

“What are you going to do?” I inquired, as he set them down in the passage and took off his coat.

“I want, if possible, to discover how those screams were worked,” he replied. “It looks like being a long job; so if you will give me your assistance in ripping up these boards, I shall be very grateful.”

“Of course, I’ll help,” I said, and thereupon we set to work.

But though we laboured for the best part of the afternoon, the result was disappointing in the extreme. Nothing but dry earth and wood–shavings confronted us.

“That being so, we’ll take down the posts that support the walls on either side,” said Jim, and as he spoke he attacked that upon which the lamp was fixed. “If we can’t find anything there we’ll continue to pull the house to pieces until we do.”

But we were spared that trouble. On loosening the post in question we made an important discovery. It was hollow from end to end, and in the cavity reposed a lead pipe, about an inch in diameter. We consulted together for a moment, and then took the pick–axe into my bedroom and ripped up a plank in the floor. By this means we were able to see that the pipe crossed the room and passed under the further wall. Outside we picked it up once more and traced it past the well, the kitchen, and the stockyard, into the scrub, where it entered an enormous blasted gum tree standing fifty yards or so from the house.

“I see the whole thing as clear as daylight,” cried Spicer joyfully, as he mounted the tree and prepared to lower himself into the hollow. “I believe we’ve solved the mystery of the shrieks at night, and now the whole thing is as simple as A B C. Go back to the house and listen.”

I did as he wished, and when I had been in the passage about a minute, was rewarded by hearing a scream re–echo through the house, followed by a muffled cry, “Oh, save me! save me!”

As the sound died away, Mrs. Spicer came running into the house from the kitchen with a scared face. A moment later we were joined by her husband.

“Did you hear that scream, Jim?” she inquired anxiously. “I thought you said we should not be worried by it again?”

He put his arm round her waist and drew her towards him.

“Nor shall we, little woman,” he said. “That scream was to let us know that the phantom is laid at last, and that after to–day this place is going to be as sweet and homely as any a man could wish to live in. That poor beggar in the hut there tried to keep it empty as long as he could for his own purposes, but I beat him in the end. Now I’ve got it for a quarter its value, and whatever else he may have done we must not forget that we owe that, at least, to our old enemy the Phantom Stockman of Warradoona.”

The Treasure of Sacramento Nick

Away on the northernmost coast of Australia lies a little world all by itself and unlike anything else to be found in the whole immemorial East. Its chief centre is in Torres Straits, where the majority of the inhabitants employ themselves in pearl–fishing, gathering *bêche–de–mer* and tortoise–shell, and generally in accumulating those gigantic fortunes of which one hears so much and sees so little.

Walking the streets of Thursday Island, the smallest of the group, yet the centre of commerce and the seat of such government as the Colony of Queensland can afford it, you will be struck with the number of nationalities represented. Dwelling together, if not in unity, certainly in unison, are Caucasians and Mongolians, Ethiopians and Malayans, John Chinaman living cheek by jowl with the barbarian Englishman, Cingalee with Portuguese, Frenchman with Kanaka—all prejudices alike forgotten in the one absorbing struggle for the unchanging British sovereign. On the verandahs of the hotels sit continually men who talk with the familiarity of old friends about the uttermost parts of the earth, and whose lives are mainly spent in places to which the average man never goes nor dreams of going. If you are a good listener they will tell you many things worth knowing; and towards midnight you will feel stealing over you a hazy conviction that the nineteenth century is as yet unborn, and that you are listening to the personal narrative of Sinbad the Sailor in an unexpurgated form.

One afternoon as I was sitting in my verandah watching the China mail–boat steam to her anchorage, and wondering if I had energy enough to light a third cheroot, I felt my arm touched. Turning, I discovered a little Solomon boy, about ten years old, attired in an ancient pair of hunting breeches, and grinning from ear to ear. Having succeeded in attracting my attention, he handed me a letter. It was from my friend, McBain, the manager of a pearling station on an adjacent island, and set forth the welcome fact that he would be pleased to see me on a matter of some importance, if I could spare the time to dine with him that evening. There was nothing I could spare more easily or more willingly.

Once comfortably seated in the verandah, McBain explained his reason for sending to me. “You’ll think me mad, but I’ve got a curiosity here that I want to examine before any one else gets hold of him.”

“Black or white?” I asked, with but little interest, for we lived in a land of human curiosities.

“White.”

“Nationality?”

“Cosmopolitan, I should fancy.”

“Profession?”

“Adventurer, with a marvellous big A.”

“And hailing from—?”

“Well, he doesn’t seem to know himself. One of my luggers took him out of an open boat about two degrees west of the Ladrones.”

“But he surely knows how he got into the boat? Men don’t go pleasure trips across oceans without knowing whence they started. Hasn’t he anything to say for himself?”

“That’s just what I want you to hear. Either the man’s a superhuman liar, or else he’s got a secret of the biggest thing on earth. We’ll have him up to–night, and you shall judge for yourself.”

When dinner was over we took ourselves and our cigars into the cool verandah, and for half an hour or so sat smoking and talking of many things. Then a footstep crunched upon the path, and a tall, thin man stood before us.

McBain rose and wished him “Good–evening,” as he did so pushing a chair into such a position that I could see his face. “I beg your pardon, but I don’t think you told me your name last night.”

“Sir, my name is Nicodemus B. Patten, of Sacramento City, State of California, U.S.A.—most times called Sacramento Nick.”

“Well, Mr. Patten, let me introduce you to a friend who is anxious to hear the curious story you told me last night. Will you smoke?”

Gravely bowing to me, he selected a cheroot, lit it, and blew the smoke luxuriously through his nose. The lamp light fell full and fair upon his face, and instinctively I began to study it. It was a remarkable countenance, and, in spite of its irregularity of feature, contained a dignity of expression which rather disconcerted me. There were evident traces of bodily and mental suffering in the near past, but it was neither the one nor the other which had stamped the lines that so much puzzled me. After satisfying myself on certain other points, I begged him to begin.

He did so without hesitation or previous thought.

“Gentlemen, before I commence my story, let me tell you that when first the things I am going to tell you of came about, there were three of us: Esdras W. Dyson, of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, U.S.A.; James Dance, of London, England; and Nicodemus B. Patten, of Sacramento City, now before you. I reckon most folks would have called us adventurers, for we’d ferreted into nearly every corner of the globe. Snakes alive! but I’ve seen things in my time that would fairly stagger even you, and I guess my story of to–night ain’t the least curious of ‘em.

“Perhaps you don’t remember the junk that fell foul of the *Bedford Castle* nigh upon three years ago, when she was four days out from Singapore?”

I remembered the circumstance perfectly. It was an act of flagrant piracy which had made some noise at the time; and I had also a faint recollection of having been told that white men were suspected of being mixed up in it. On being asked if he knew anything of the matter, he said: “Well, I don’t *say* we did, mind you; but I had a suspicion we were in China waters at the time. But bless you, in those days there were few places and few things that *we* hadn’t a finger in. Understand, I am telling you this because I don’t want to

sail under false colours, and also because such work is all over now; the firm's smashed up, and we'll never go on the Long Trail again.

"Two years ago, for certain reasons not necessary to mention, we wanted to lay by for a while, so bringing up at Batavia fixed right on to the Nederlander. Java's a one–horse place for business purposes, but if you know the ropes—well, there's not a better place in the world to hide in.

"Now, gentlemen both, you may take it from me that there never was such a chap for browsing about among niggers, finding out what was doing, and if there was anything to be made, as Esdras W. Dyson, of Milwaukee, U.S.A.

"In the first place, he could patter any lingo from Chinese to Malay with a tongue that'd talk round the devil himself; and when he suspicioned a nigger had anything worth knowing—well, he'd just freeze to that charcoal sketch till he fairly got it out of him. Rigged out in native dress and properly coloured, he could pass in anywhere. It was he who found out the thing that ruined us, brought me here, and left Jim and himself feeding the fishes a thousand fathoms deep. Directly we arrived in Batavia he began hanging round the Native Quarter, making himself mighty agreeable for some particular information he wanted. He was away for two or three days; then one night as Dance and me were smoking on the piazza he came striding up the path in the devil's own hurry. 'Boys!' says he in a whisper, 'I'm on it, up to the hilt, the biggest and the all–firedest stroke of good fortune we've hit yet. I'm going *fantee* to–night, so keep your weather eyes lifted, and when I say come, come right away!' With that he went to his room, and we could hear him rummaging about in his trunks.

"A bit later a native fruit–hawker came round the corner, bowing and scraping towards us. We told him to clear out, but he commenced a pitiful yarn, all the time pushing his baskets closer to us. 'Fine Duriens and the sweetest of Mangosteens, if the Presence will only buy!' But the big night–watchman had caught sight of him, and came trundling down the piazza. You can reckon our astonishment, when the hawker said: 'How is it, boys? Do you think they'll *savee*? Keep your kits packed and be prepared to *trek* directly you get the word from me.' Here the watchman came up. 'On the word of a poor man, the Duriens are freshly plucked and the Mangosteens hung upon the trees this morning.' We refused to buy, and he went away crying his fruit towards the Native Quarter.

“A native fruit–hawker came round the corner.”

“For two or three days not a shadow of a sign came from him. Then one of those Chinese hawkers came into the square with two coolies carrying his goods, and as soon as we set eyes on the second nigger we recognised Milwaukee, and stood by to take his message in whatever form it might come. Pulling up at our chairs, the Chinkey told his men to set down their loads, himself coming across to us with a tray of fans, scents, and what not; but seeing Milwaukee had a packet of slippers in his hands, we only wanted slippers. The merchant sings out, and he brings ‘em over, handing one pair to Dance and another to me. We stepped inside to try them on, and, as we expected, in one of the shoes was a letter neatly stowed away. I forget now how it went, but it was to the effect that he had found out all he wanted to know, and that we were to meet him at eight on the Singapore Wharf at Tanjong Priok, bringing no kit save our revolvers.

“After squaring things at the hotel, and destroying what was dangerous in our baggage, we *trekked* for the Priok just as dusk was falling. Sharp at eight we were waiting on the wharf where the Messagerie boats lie, and wondering what the deuce was going to happen. Inside of ten minutes a native boat came pulling up the river, and as it passed us the rower sneezed twice, very sharp and sudden. It was an old signal, and Dance gave the return. The boatman hitches right on to the steps and comes ashore.

“‘Good boys,’ says he, very quiet and careful; ‘up to time, that’s right. Now to business! D’ye see that schooner lying outside the breakwater? Well, she sails at daylight. I put the skipper and mate ashore not ten minutes ago, and they’re to return in an hour. There’s only

three chaps aboard, and it’s our business to cut her out before the others come back. D’ye understand?’

“‘But what d’ye reckon to do then, Milwaukee?’ I asked, for it seemed a risky game, just for the sake of a mangy Dutch trader.

“‘Never you mind now; when I do tell you, you’ll say it’s worth the candle. Come, jump in here, and I’ll pull you aboard!’

“The harbour was as quiet as the sea out yonder; a Dutch man–of–war lay under the wing of the breakwater, and a Sourabaya mail–boat to the left of her. We passed between them, down towards the lighthouse, and out into the open. Outside there was a bit of a sea running, but Milwaukee was always hard to beat, and at last we managed to get alongside. Somebody, most likely the anchor–watch, caught our painter, and took a turn in it, saying in Dutch, ‘You’re back early, Mynheer.’ By the time he twigged his mistake we were aboard, and Dance had clapped a stopper on his mouth. The others were below, and I reckon you’d have laughed if you could have seen the look on their faces when, after Milwaukee’s thumping on the fo’c’stle, they turned out to find their craft in other hands. However, they soon saw what was up, and reckoned it was no use making fools of themselves. Then Milwaukee went to the wheel, singing out to get sail on her, and stand by to slip the cable. We knew our business, and in less than twenty minutes were humming down the coast a good ten knots an hour.

“As soon as the course was set and everything going smooth, Milwaukee made right aft to where Dance was steering. ‘I guess it’s time,’ says he, ‘to let you into the secret. You know me and I know you, which is enough said between pards. We’ve been in many good things together, but this is going to be the biggest we’ve sighted yet. It doesn’t mean hundreds of pounds, but thousands, millions maybe; anyhow, enough to set us three up as princes all the world over!’

“‘Sounds well; but how did you come to know of it?’ we asked, a bit doubtful like.

“Before answering, he took a squint at the card and then aloft. ‘Keep her as she goes, Jim. How did I come to hear of it? How does a man hear anything? Why, by going to the places and among the folk who talk. I got wind of it months ago, but never came across anything straight out till I went *fantee* among the niggers. Losh, boys, if you want yarns to raise your scalp, go down town and smoke among the darkies; I’ve done it, and you bet I know. There was one old chap who used to drop in every night, and smoke and chew and spit and lie till you couldn’t rest. From his talk he’d once done a bit in our line, and his great sweat was about an island he’d been to fifty years ago, where there’s an old Portugee treasure–ship aground, chock full of gold, diamonds, rubies, and pearls, all waitin’ for the man as’ll go to get ‘em. At first I reckoned he lied, for how he got there he didn’t rightly remember; but he swore he found the ship, and was in the act of broaching her cargo, when the natives came and sent him back to sea again. What he did get, except a bloomin’ old dagger, was stolen from him in Saigon. Directly I sighted that instrument, I began to guess there might be something in his yarn after all; for, wherever he got it, it was a genuine Portugees weapon of a couple of hundred years back. Well, as any lubber knows, the Portugee sailed these seas two hundred years ago; why shouldn’t one of ‘em have been wrecked with all her cargo and never been heard of since? Answer me that! Anyhow, you

bet I froze to that nigger.

"'At first he played cunning and seemed to suspicion I was after something. So one night I got him alone and—d'ye remember Hottentot Joe in the Kimberley?—well, p'raps I played the same game on this old cove, and when he was sound off I began to pump him all I knew. The old chap had been sailing pretty near to the truth, but still he'd kept a bit up his sleeve; however, I got that bit, and here's his chart as near as I can fix it.'

"So saying, he drew out a paper and held it to the binnacle. Then putting his finger on a coloured mark, he went on: 'It's a bit hazy steering after we get here, inasmuch as, being a nigger, he couldn't keep proper reckoning. But once among these islands, I guess we can't be far off the right one, and to find it—by God, we'll search every mud–bank in the Pacific! Accordin' to his fixin' it has a big mountain climbing from its centre, with a monster white rock half–way up, shaped like a man's fist. In a bee–line with the rock there's a creek running inland, big enough to float a seventy–four; follow that creek up a mile or so and you come to a lake, and on the other side of that lake's where the old barge ought to be. Now, what do you think?'

"'What do I think? Why, I think, Milwaukee, you are a fool to have brought us on such a rotten chase, and we're bigger fools to have followed you. The island, I guess, never existed, and we'll get stretched for this boat by the first warship that sights us. But now we are here, we'd better make the best of it. What do you say, Jim?'

"'I stand with you,' said Dance, and that settled it.

"To make a long story short, we sailed that hooker right on end for nigh upon three weeks. The wind was mostly favourable, the boat had a slippery pair of heels, and the stores, considering they were laid in by Dutchmen, were none too bad. Only one thing was wrong to my thinking, and that was the supply of grog aboard. If I had my way there'd have been a gimlet through the lot; but Milwaukee was skipper, and wouldn't hear of it.

"Tuesday, the thirteenth of January, saw the tether of the old darkie's chart, so we held a bit of a palaver, and settled to go on cruising about the islands which we were picking up and dropping every day.

"You folk who live inside this rot–gut reef don't know what islands are. Out there, you see them on all sides, pushing their green heads up to watch the ships go by, with the air so warm, the sea so green, and the sky so blue that it's like living in a new world. Birds of every colour fly across your bows all day, and in the hush of night, lying out on deck, you can hear the waterfalls trickling ashore, and now and again the crash of a big tree falling in the jungle.

"One forenoon while I was at the wheel, Milwaukee and Jim Dance fell to quarrelling. It started over nothing, and would have come to nothing but for that tarnation liquor. I sung out to them to stop; but it was no use, so leaving the hooker to look after herself, I went forrard. Before I could reach him, the skipper had drawn a revolver, and I heard Jim cry, 'For Gawd's sake don't shoot!' Then there was a report, and sure enough Dance fell dead.

"Can you picture it? Overhead, the blue sky, a few white clouds, and the canvas just drawing; on the deck, poor Jim lying as if asleep, and Milwaukee leaning against the foremast staring at him. Seein' there was no use in keepin' the body aboard, I called one of

the Dutchmen aft and told him to fix it up in a bit of canvas. Then together we hove it overboard; it sank with a dull plunge, and so we lost the first of our mess.

“Milwaukee being too drunk to take his trick at the wheel, I stood it for him. A bit before sundown he comes on deck looking terrible fierce and haggard. Rolling aft, he says with a voice solemn as a judge: ‘Sacramento Nick, you’re a good man and true. On your Bible oath, may God strike you dead if you lie, did I shoot James Dance, mariner?’

“Seeing what was passing in his mind, I said simply, ‘You did.’

“‘Was I drunk, being in charge of this vessel at the time?’

“‘You were!’

“‘That is your word and deed, so help you God?’

“‘Ay, ay!’

“‘Well, that being so, no more need be said. It’s the sentence of the court. Shipmate, your hand.’

“We shook hands, and he turned to the taffrail. Before I knew what he was about, he had leaped upon it and plunged into the sea. He only rose once; then the white belly of a shark showed uppermost, and never again did I see Esdras W. Dyson, of Milwaukee City, Wisconsin.

“Three days later, when I was too dog–tired to keep watch, those cut–throat Dutchmen mutinied and sent me adrift in the long–boat with one week’s provisions and a small beaker of water.

“Strangers, have you ever been cast adrift? I can see you haven’t; well, hope that your luck don’t run that way. Fortunately it was fair weather, and I was able to rig a bit of a sail; but how long I was cruising among those islands, drat me if I know. Being ignorant, so to speak, of my position, one way was as another, and when short of provisions I’d just go ashore, pick fruit, fill my beaker, and then set sail again. One warm afternoon I found myself abreast of the largest island I’d seen yet. From its centre rose a high mountain, and, strike me dead if I lie, half–way up that last was *a big white rock, shaped like a man’s fist*! When I saw it I was clean staggered; I stood up and stared till I could stare no longer. It was just as if I’d stumbled by mistake on the very island we’d set out to seek. By tacking I managed to get right under its lee, and there, sure enough, between two high banks was the entrance to a fairish river. Furling the sail, I took to my oars and pulled inside. The sun was close on down by this time, and I was dog–tired; so as nothing could be gained by bursting the boilers, when, as far as I knew, all the future was afore me, I anchored where I was, and stayed in my boat till morning.

“You bet as soon as it was light I pushed on again, bringing out on a slap–up lake perhaps a mile long by half a mile across. The water was as clear as crystal and as smooth as glass. Making for a plain of dazzling white sand at the furthest end, I beached my boat and prepared to start explorations. Then, just as her nose grounded, my eyes caught sight of a big creeper–covered mass lying all alone in the centre of the plain. May I never know a shieve–hole from a harness–cask again, if it wasn’t an old galleon of the identical pattern to be seen in the Columbus’ picter–books. Trembling like a palsied monkey, I jumped out

and ran for it.

“Then, just as her nose grounded, my eyes caught sight of a big creeper–covered mass.”

“She may have been close on a hundred tons burden, but it was impossible to calculate her size exactly for the heap of stuff that covered her. How she ever got on to that plain, and why she hadn’t rotted clean away during the two hundred years or more she must have lain there, are things I can’t explain. Anyhow, I didn’t stay to puzzle ‘em out then, but set to work hunting for a way to get inside her. From the main–deck seemed to be the best course, and to reach that I started hacking at the blooming creepers. It was harder work than you’d think, for they’d spliced and twisted ‘emselves into cables, and a jack–knife was about as much use on ‘em as a tooth–pick. When night came I’d done a big day’s work, and had only just got a footing on her deck.

“Next morning I went at it again, and by mid–day had the satisfaction of standing before the cuddy entrance. Again I felt the same dod–dratted funk creeping over me; but when I remembered the treasure, I said good–bye to that, and placed my shoulder against the door. It crumbled away and fell in a heap upon the deck, and when the dust had passed I found myself at the entrance of a small alleyway leading into the saloon. I entered it, stepping gingerly; but had only gone a few steps before the deck suddenly gave way, and I found myself disappearing with a crash into the lower regions. The fall was a darned sight bigger than I liked; but it served a purpose, for my weight on landing started a plank and brought a glimmer of light into the darkness.

“Finding I was not hurt, I fell to groping for a way out again; then I noticed the rottenness of the timbers, and determined to enlarge the light I had just made. The two kicks and a shove brought a flood of sunshine pouring in, and a horrible sight met my eyes. I was standing beside an old–fashioned bed–place on which lay (you may believe me or not) the mummified body of a man stretched full out and hanging on to the stanchions like grim death. He was not alone, for in the centre of the cabin, clutching at a heavy table, was another chap, also perfectly preserved, half standing, with his feet braced against the thick

cross–bars and his shrivelled parchment face, with its staring eyes turned towards me, grinning like a poisoned cat. My scalp seemed to lift and my innards to turn to water. Letting out one yell, I clambered for the open air.

“Outside all was sunshine, blue sky, and bright colour, and, as if to set off what I had just left, a big butterfly came hovering towards me. In a few minutes my presence of mind returned, and I began to laugh at the idea of Sacramento Nick being afeared of dead men; so back I went in search of further mysteries. Again I entered the cuddy, and lowered myself into the under–cabin; but this time I was prepared for anything. The treasure–guard stared, but said nothing.

“While I was wondering how I’d best set about my search, a smart breeze came whistling in, caught the figure at the table, disengaged his hold, and brought his old carcase with a dry rattle to the floor. With his fall a small piece of metal rolled to my feet, and picking it up I found it to be a key of real curious shape and workmanship. Fired with my discoveries, I slipped across to try it on the first of the chests I saw ranged round the cabin, when to my astonishment I found it open. Somebody had been there before me; perhaps I was too late! All of a sweat I looked in, but ‘twas too dark; I tried to pull the whole chest towards the light, but it was a main sight too heavy. Then I plunged my hand in and—great Jehoshaphat, how I yelled! Clutching what I could hold, I dashed across the cabin, up into the light, and throwing myself upon the ground, spread what I had brought before me. It took less than a second to see that they were diamonds, and, by all the stars and stripes, diamonds of the first water! There they lay winking and blinking at me and the sun, and for the first time I began to *savee* my amazing wealth. For the minute I was clean stark staring mad. I closed my eyes, and wondered if when I opened them again I should find it all a dream; but no, the beauties were there, looking brighter and even larger than before.

“Gentlemen, it’s strange how the habits and precautions of civilization linger with a man even in the queerest places. For while not twenty yards from where I stood was greater wealth than I or fifty men could ever spend, I found myself fearful of losing one, picking each gem up with scrupulous care, and securing it inside my jumper. The next box was locked, so I tried the key. In spite of age and rust the wards shot back and the cover lifted. Again I felt the touch of stones, and again seizing a handful, I went back into the light. This time they were rubies; Burmese rubies, my experience told me, and not a tarnation flaw in one of ‘em. For a second time I carefully picked them up and was hiding ‘em as before, when I happened to look round. Dash my buttons, if I was alone! On all sides were niggers regarding me with considerable attention. I sprang to my feet and felt for my revolver. Fool that I was, I had left it in the boat! Seeing that I was aware of their presence, they closed in on me, and as they did so I took stock of ‘em. They were unlike other South Sea natives, being of better build and but little darker than myself. True, they were rigged out in a short loin–cloth not unlike *tappa,* but they carried neither spear nor shield. When I saw this I was for showing fight, but soon gave that idea up; they were too many for me.

“After a few minutes’ inspection they began to march me through the forest in a westerly direction, all the time talking a lingo that seemed curiously familiar. Just upon sunset we entered a large clearing on which stood a fair–sized native village, and I thought as I

looked at it that, if ever I got out of this mess and turned to blackbirding, I'd know where to come for niggers. It contained perhaps fifty huts, all built of wood and with conical–shaped grass roofs. A trim garden ran down the centre, at the furthest end of which stood the largest and the most slap–up building of the lot. As soon as we hove in sight, a crowd came out to meet us, and in the middle of hundreds of yelling darkies I was marched up to the big house. The old chief, who had been bossing affairs with the swagger of a New York policeman, told me to wait while he carried his carcass up some steps and disappeared. After a little while he returned, and signified that I should follow him.

"When I got inside I had plenty of time to look about me, for it must have been full half an hour before any one came. Then some grass curtains were drawn aside, and what looked like a man entered. I say *looked like*, because I ain't really clear in my mind as to *what* he was; anyway, I shouldn't be far from the mark in sayin' he was quite a hundred years old, and just about as deformed as he well could be. He was as white as myself, and from the antics of the chief who had fetched me to his presence I could see that he had a great hold over the niggers. Throwing himself upon the ground, that old fool of a chief feebly wagged his toes till told to rise. Then he started explaining where he had found me and what I was doing.

"During his yarn, old grandfer', whose name I afterwards found was Don Silvio, riddled me into augurholes with his evil little eyes; then, having ordered the chief out, he started to examine me himself. He spoke the same lingo as the niggers, a sort of bastard Portugee, and still looking me through and through, asked, 'Stranger, how came you to this island?'

"I reckoned it best to keep the real truth from him, so said, 'I am a shipwrecked mariner, Señor, and fetched here in an open boat.'

"His eyes blazed, and his long, lean fingers twitched round his jewelled stick. 'And had you no thought of what treasure you might find?'

"'Señor,' said I, looking him square in the face, 'let me put it to you. Is it likely that a shipwrecked mariner would think of treasure?'

"A storm was brewing in his eyes, and I guessed it would break on me. Suddenly he yelled: 'You lie—you dog, you thief—you lie! You came for what you could steal, but nothing shall you take away, nothing—not one stone. The Fates that consumed those who came aforetime shall consume you also. Shipwreck or no shipwreck, you shall die!'

"He fell to beating a gong with his stick, and a dozen or so natives came tumbling in. They seemed to know their business, and before I had time to get in a word I was being dragged away down the street, to a small and securely guarded hut, where I was pushed in and the door closed. Disliking the look of things, as soon as I recovered my breath I started hunting about for a way of escape, but that was no good. Added to my other troubles, I was just famishing, and was beginning to fix it that my end was to be starvation, when footsteps approached, the door opened, and a native girl appeared, bearing on her head two wooden dishes which she set down before me. Being a favourite with the sex, I tried to draw her into conversation, but either she didn't understand my talk or fear had taken away her tongue; anyway, not a word would she utter. After she had left me I set to work on the food, and never before or since have I enjoyed a meal so much. Then stretching myself on some dry reeds in a corner I soon fell asleep.

“I was awakened in the chill grey of dawn by the entrance of the same beauty, who put down my breakfast, saying as she did so, ‘White man, eat well, for at sunrise you die!’ For a moment the shock cleared me out of speech; I could only sit and stare at her. She seemed to see what was going on in my mind, and as if in comfort added, ‘Stranger, why do you fear death? It can only come once!’

“Her reasoning, though logical enough, wasn’t of the kind calculated to meet my trouble, and when she had left me I started wondering if anybody in Sacramento City would ever hear of my fate, and bitterly cursing the day I set out in search of this villainous island. As I sat with my head upon my hands, the jewels I had stuck in my jumper fell to the floor and lay there taunting me with their sparkling splendour. Howsomever, it was no use crying over spilled milk; I had brought the situation on myself, and, whatever happened, must go through with it. Suddenly my ear caught the pat of naked feet outside the cell. Then the door was unbarred and the chief entered. ‘Come, white man,’ he said, ‘all is made ready, and the axe waits for the bare flesh!’ How would you have felt in such a situation? As for myself, I put a good face on it, and resolved, since I could no longer live a free and independent American citizen, to die as such. Pity, I thought, there wasn’t a band. I was led up the village to the open plot before Don Silvio’s house. It might have been the fourth of July for the crowd that was assembled. In the centre, for my special benefit, was an object which held an awful fascination for me; a curiously carved block of wood, dull brown in colour, and on two sides much stained and worn. It didn’t take me a year to understand what it meant; and you may think it strange, seeing the nature of my position, but, true as gospel, I fell to wondering how my long neck would figure stretched across it.

“When I was halted, I took it for granted that the work of dispatching me would commence at once, but I was mistaken. The execution could not take place until the arrival of Don Silvio, and the sun was a good hour up before there was a stir in the crowd, and the withered monkey–faced little devil came stumping towards me. If he had appeared a hundred years old in the half–dark of his house, he now looked double that age, but the fire in his eyes was as bright as ever. Hobbling to within a dozen paces of where I stood, he took thorough stock of me. Then, tapping the block with his stick, he said: ‘Señor, you are about to hunt treasure in a golden country, where I trust your efforts may meet with better success. I wish you farewell.’ After relieving himself of this, he went to his seat; two natives raised a great grass umbrella above his head, and, all being comfortable, he gave orders for the performance to begin. A nigger stepped from the crowd and approached me, carrying in his hand an axe. Reaching the block he signed me to kneel. I took a last look round—first at the thick jungle, then at the great mountain pushing itself up into the blue sky. After that my eyes returned to the block, and, gentlemen both, a wonderful circumstance happened. Understand me clearly! Standing on either side of it were two thin columns of palest blue smoke, maybe six feet in height. As I stared at ‘em they gradually took the shapes of men, till I could make out the features of old Milwaukee and poor Jim Dance, of London Town. They seemed to be gently beckoning me and telling me not to fear. P’raps I kind of understood, for I stretched my long neck across the block without a sign of funk. I heard the cackling laugh of Don Silvio, I saw the headsman draw a step closer, his arms go up, and then I shut my eyes, and remember no more.

* * * * *

“When I came to my senses I was lying on the bed of rushes in my old quarters, and the native girl before mentioned was seated beside me. On putting my hand to my head to sort of fix matters, she laughed merrily, and said: ‘Stranger, it is still there, but to–morrow it will certainly be gone!’ Why they hadn’t killed me I couldn’t understand, unless it was to put me to the torture of waiting another day; anyhow, the following morning I was prepared for the guard when they came to lead me out.

“Once more the crowd was there, once more that villainous old Don kept me waiting, and once more the axe went up but failed to strike. I was respited for another day. Well, this sort of thing happened every blessed morning, till I nearly went mad with the strain of it. On the eighth day, instead of being kept in the square, I was marched straight to the Don’s house. The old pirate was waiting for me, and as soon as I arrived fell to questioning me about the outer world, seeming to take an all–fired interest in such parts of my own life as I thought fit to tell him. When he had found out all he wanted, he said: ‘Go now, for the present you are free; but remember, if you but approach that ship by so much as half a mile, that same moment you die!’ I stumbled out of his presence and down the street like a man dazed. That he had some reason for sparing my life was certain; but what it was, for the life of me I couldn’t then determine. Arriving at my hut, I threw myself upon the rushes and tried to think it out.

“That evening, a little after sundown, while walking outside the village and racking my brain for a chance of escape, an event happened which changed all my thoughts and plans. I was passing through a bit of jungle, where the fireflies were beginning to play to and fro, when I came face to face with the most beautiful girl I had ever seen, and—well, I’m a free–born American citizen, and as such the equal of any man living; but I reckon that young woman took the conceit out of me. She couldn’t have been more than eighteen years of age: her skin was as white as milk, her hair and eyes of the deepest black; and when she walked it was like the sound of falling rose–leaves. Seeing me, she started with surprise, and was half–inclined to run; but something seemed to tell her I wasn’t particular harmful, so overcoming her fear she said, ‘Señor, I am glad my grandfather has given you your freedom!’ Her grandfather! Not being able to make it out, I said, ‘Surely, miss, Don Silvio ain’t your grandfather?’ ‘No, Señor, he was my father’s grandfather, but I call him so because the other is so tedious.’ Perhaps my manner, as I say, didn’t appear very dangerous; anyway, after this her bashfulness seemed to vanish, and we walked back to the village as comfortable as you please. She told me that it was she who had induced the old rascal to spare my life, and I reckon the look I gave her for that had something to do with the flush as spread across her face. She also let me into the risk I had run by breaking into the old galleon, which, accordin’ to her tellin’, was a sacred thing upon the island. She did not know how long it had lain there, but suspicioned her great–grandfather had commanded it as a young man, and that all the rest who came with him were dead,—a fact which, you bet, I could quite believe.

“The moon was full up before we sighted the village, and when she left me I went back to my hut in a flumux of enchantment, as much in love as the veriest schoolboy. Somehow after this I never thought of escape, but set to work improving my quarters and laying out a garden. Every day Don Silvio came to question me, and you’d better guess I did my best to corral the old chap’s confidence. How I got on you’ll hear shortly.

“Well, each evening as soon as the sun was down, I visited the grove beyond the village, where, sure enough, I always met the Don’s great–granddaughter. Her beauty and amazin’ innocence so held me that I was nearly mad to make her my wife; and when I found that she reckoned to have the same liking for me, I could bear it no longer, so went right off to ask the old man for her hand. Not having the least hope of being successful, you can judge of my surprise when he promised her to me straight away, and, what’s more, fixed it that the wedding should take place next day. He kept his word, and on the following morning, in the presence of all the village, she became my wife.

“The year that followed topped everything I ever knew of happiness. It slipped by in a rosy mist, and when our boy was born my cup was full. I proclaimed him American, according to the constitution of the United States, and the old Don announced a great feast in his honour. It was spread in the square, and all the village sat down to it. I can see the sight now: the shadowy outline of the mountain beyond the great flaring torches of sweet–smelling wood, the long rows of tables, the shouts and laughter of the niggers, and at the head, between my wife and her great–grandfather, the boy in his cradle. When the feast was right at its height, the old Don rose and handed me a silver mug filled with some sweet liquor. He told me to drink to my son’s health, and suspecting no treachery, I did so. Next moment a change stole over me; I made a try to get on to my feet, but it was no use; everything seemed to be slipping away. I could just see my wife start towards me and the old Don pull her back, when my head sank on the table, and my senses left me.

“The next thing I remember is finding myself lying precious sick and weak at the bottom of my own boat, with nothing but the big green seas rolling around me. The island had vanished, and with it my wife and child. At first I reckoned I must have been asleep and dreamed the last year; but no, the food with which the boat was stocked was clear enough evidence of its truth. For an eternity I sailed those cursed seas this way and that, seeking for the land I had lost; but I must have drifted into different waters, for I saw no more islands. My food ran out, and I had given up all hope of being saved, when one of your luggers hove in sight and picked me up.

“Now, gentlemen, you’ve heard my story. Whether you believe it or not, of course I don’t know; but I take my affidavy that all I have told you is true; and what’s more, if you’ll fit out a vessel to search for that island and its treasure, I’ll take command of her. Should we find it, I reckon I can make you the two richest men on earth; and when I get my wife and child I shall be the happiest. In proof that the treasure’s there, and as my contribution towards the expenses, I hand you this.” From an inner pocket he produced a leather pouch, from which he took what at first appeared to be a small piece of crystal; on inspection it turned out to be a diamond, worth at least a hundred pounds. “That stone,” said he, holding it at the angle which would best show its fire, “came from the coffers of the treasure–ship, and is the only one left out of all I saw and took. I will leave it with you for the present. Remember, there’s thousands more aboard the old galleon, bigger and better nor that. Say, gentlemen, will you adventure for such merchandise?”

It was too late to go into the question that night, so we bade him come up for a further talk in the morning. Rising, he gravely bowed to us, and without another word withdrew. Next day he was not to be found, nor has he ever made his appearance since. Whether he lost himself and fell into the sea, or whether he was an impostor and feared detection, I haven’t

the remotest idea. I only know that I have a valuable diamond in my possession, which I am waiting to restore to its uncommonly curious owner.

Into the Outer Darkness

> “I am not wrath, my own lost love, although
> My heart is breaking—wrath I am not, no!
> For all thou dost in diamonds blaze, no ray
> Of light into thy heart’s night finds its way.
> I saw thee in a dream. Oh, piteous sight!
> I saw thy heart all empty, all in night;
> I saw the serpent gnawing at thy heart;
> I saw how wretched, oh, my love, thou art!”
>
> —Heine.

You will, perhaps, remember how the soul of Tom Guilfoy was saved by his wife, how Godfrey Halkett was killed by his sweetheart, and how the plans of the Kangaroo Girl were shattered at one blow by a certain grandee aide–de–camp. All those things are matters of history. This is a story of a similar nature, but with a somewhat different ending.

I am not going to tell you how I acquired my information, nor shall I say in which Australian colony the events occurred. If you have ever originated a scandal yourself, you will understand why and sympathise with me. Remember, however, personally, I don’t blame them. Situated as they were, they couldn’t have done otherwise. But I *do* contend that it refutes the charge globe–trotters bring against us when they say *there is nothing underneath the surface of Australian society*.

Officially, and for the purposes of trade, the man was named Cyril George Paton Haywood; his friends, however, called him Lancelot. The woman’s maiden name was Alice Mary Whittaker, otherwise Guinevere; and as Lancelot and Guinevere, they are as famous through three colonies as a certain governor’s mislaid particular despatch.

Lancelot was in the Civil Service, Deputy–Assistant–Registrar–General of Lands, Titles, or something brilliant of that description. Departmentally, he ranked high, was entitled to wear a uniform on occasion, and boasted the right of private *entrée* at vice–regal levees; financially, however, he was too low altogether. The greyheads lost no opportunity of affirming that he was too young, and even cadets know that it is impossible for a man to be accounted brilliant until age has removed the opportunity of showing it. That is why, according to the peculiarity of our legislation, we venerate and retain fossils to the detriment of younger and abler men.

Among other things Lancelot was consumptive, and, apart from his salary, penniless. So he naturally loved Guinevere, with a love that was dog–like in its faithfulness, and she returned his passion with equal fervour. For three seasons, to my certain knowledge, they drove together, sat out dances together, and met on every conceivable opportunity. She was desperately thorough in everything she undertook. Any man who has ever danced

with her will confirm this statement.

Then King Arthur appeared on the scene, and languid society—we were in the hills for the hot months—sat down to watch results.

Arthur was not an ideal knight in any way. His past was a sealed book, therefore it was adjudged disreputable; his present was a golden age, so he had evidently turned over a new leaf. He was worth a quarter of a million, men said; but even that couldn't prevent him from being a podgy little red man with a double chin, always horribly clean, and given to the display of many diamonds. He told Mrs. Whittaker, in confidence, at the Bellakers' ball, that he was anxious to marry and settle down if he could only meet the right sort of girl; and, being a good mother, she informed her husband, in the brougham on the way home, that she could put her hand on just the very identical maid.

Whittaker said nothing, for he was fighting a financial crisis at the time; and, besides, he had every confidence in his wife.

About a month later Arthur purchased a gorgeous summer palace half–way up the mountain–road, furnished it magnificently, and set himself to entertain on his own lines. He had for neighbours a dignified judge and a popular widow. The judge lent him tone, the widow gave him female society. Indirectly, he paid through the nose for both.

Needless to say, every one was disposed to be cordial, for he gave delightful impromptu dances on cool summer evenings, and his iced champagne–cup was undeniable. He threw his tennis–courts open to society generally, and his billiard–room was the rendezvous for youths of sporting tastes for miles round. He also organized lovely moonlight riding picnics; and after a day in the sweltering heat of the plains, it was vastly refreshing to dodge through the cool gullies in congenial company.

Early in the summer Lancelot took rooms in the township down the hillside, and in the evenings he would stroll quietly along the mountain roads with Guinevere. Of course every one else was strolling too, but that only gave zest to the affair; and as most of them were also playing at love, their presence hardly mattered.

In the autumn, when people were beginning to think of returning to the city, Whittaker died, leaving his family almost unprovided for.

King Arthur was among the first to tender his sympathies, and, I'm told, after five minutes' preamble, asked point–blank for Guinevere's hand in marriage.

In spite of her grief, Mrs. Whittaker was able to grasp the majesty of his offer, and took care that night to show her daughter how necessary it was, for all their sakes, that she should marry well. Guinevere, however, could not see it in the same light. If it had been Lancelot, she would have been only too happy, she said; but even for her family's sake she was not going to marry anybody else. The mother postponed the matter for a week, then she argued, pleaded, threatened, and finally wept; but her daughter remained obstinate.

Knowing all this, you can imagine our surprise when, two months later, the engagement of King Arthur to beautiful Guinevere was publicly announced. But what amazed us still more was the fact that Lancelot did not seem to be affected thereby in the very smallest degree. His heart complaint was rapidly developing itself, and perhaps his valve demanded his complete attention.

If, however, we had seen a certain little letter, smeared with tear–stains and innumerable blotches, we might have understood matters; but as we did not, we had, like a certain lady of scriptural fame, to argue on what might be called insufficient premises.

Towards the end of June, Arthur and Guinevere were married in the Anglican Cathedral, the Lord Bishop officiating.

It was in all respects a brilliant wedding, and the bridegroom's present to the bride was a thing to see and marvel over. Guinevere walked through the ceremony as if she had been doing nothing else from childhood. (As I have said, she was desperately thorough in all she undertook.) Lancelot was not present; his health would not permit of it, he said.

The happy couple left the same day in the steamer *Chang–Sha*, to spend their honeymoon in Japan.

* * * * *

One morning, on arrival at the office, Lancelot found a letter on his table. It was from an eminent firm of English solicitors, and informed him of the death of an unknown relative, who, in consideration perhaps of their never having met, had left him the sum of thirty thousand pounds snugly invested.

He was barely interested, and asked what earthly manner of use it was to him now? Any one could see that he was growing daily worse, and I believe it was that very week that his doctor first insisted that he should resign his appointments and settle down in some quiet place, where he could not be excited in any shape or form. He was only thirty–three, but a very old man.

Early in December the happy couple returned to the south. The hot weather had commenced, again everybody was resident in the hills. Arthur and his wife went straight to the palace on the mountain–road, and on her first "afternoon," Guinevere's large drawing–room was filled with callers. Two things were painfully evident to the least observant: she was only a walking skeleton, while her husband was cleaner and more distressfully polite than ever. At first, we didn't know how to account for it; but men who saw his brandy–pegs understood what they meant, and told their women–folk, who, as usual, spread the report abroad.

Lancelot called on the Monday following their return, and Arthur welcomed him, if anything, a little too effusively. Guinevere crossed the room to shake hands, and the afternoon light enabled them to take stock of each other properly. They were a pair of ghosts, and each was shocked almost beyond the bounds of decency at the change in the other. He followed her to the Japanese afternoon tea–table, and took a cup of tea from her hands. The tremor of the cup and saucer told their own tale. Arthur watched them from the fireplace with the blandest of smiles upon his face. It pleased him to see the tears gather in his wife's eyes, as she recognised the change in her old lover. From that day forward, Lancelot was made free of the house, and Arthur insisted that he should be asked to every function, however great or small.

Whatever his own thoughts might have been, Lancelot could not fail to see the pleasure his society gave Guinevere, so he settled it in his own mind that the invitations emanated from her. His health was too feeble to admit of his riding or playing tennis; but driving

along the mountain–roads, strolling in the gardens, or idling in the music–room, he was her constant companion. Naturally, folk talked, though Arthur assured them that he was only too glad to see his wife happy with her old friends. But it was not true, the long brandy pawnee glasses in his study said so most emphatically.

This sort of thing went on all through the summer months, until the roses began to bloom again in Guinevere's cheeks. Her husband noticed the change, but did not comment on it; he was going to have his day of reckoning by–and–by.

One day Lancelot called upon a certain famous specialist (I'll tell you a pretty piece of scandal about his wife some day), and after a brief wait was shown into the consulting–room. He sniffed the professional smell of the place for five minutes, and while listening to the ticking of the clock upon the mantelpiece, made up his mind on a certain subject.

After the specialist had completed a searching examination, Lancelot said,—"As you see, I am growing thinner every day; it nearly kills me to walk fifty yards, and my appetite has forsaken me completely. It's not the first time you've told men their fate: tell me mine. What is the length of my tether?"

"My dear sir, my very dear sir!" that worthy man replied, as he put his paraphernalia back into their respective cases, "we must not despair! While there is life there is hope; with proper care you may yet—"

"But I shall take no care. How long have I to live?"

"As I have said, with scrupulous attention to detail and proper advice, say twelve months, possibly more."

"And without that care?"

"I cannot tell you—perhaps five minutes, perhaps five months; it depends upon yourself."

"I am glad to hear that. Good–day!"

As he stepped into his buggy a letter crinkled in his breast–pocket. He laid himself back on the seat, murmuring Heine's

> "Lay your dear little hand on my heart, my fair!
> Ah! you hear how it knocks on its chamber there?
> In there dwells a carpenter grim and vile,
> And he's shaping a coffin for me the while.
>
> "There is knocking and hammering night and day;
> Long since they have frightened my sleep away.
> Oh, carpenter, show that you know your trade,
> That so to sleep I may soon be laid!"

Half–way up the mountain–road, Arthur overtook the buggy and cantered alongside.

"You're looking pretty cheap, old man," he said; "better come to dinner to–night, and see if we can't cheer you up—7.30 as usual!"

"Thanks! I think I will," answered Lancelot. "I don't feel particularly bright!"

* * * * *

Immediately after dessert Guinevere retired, leaving her husband and their guest together.

As Lancelot drew his handkerchief from his pocket, a letter came with it and fell unnoticed to the floor.

On rising Arthur saw it and picked it up. He read it without apology, and as he did so his face set. Then he politely handed it to his guest, saying,—

“I must beg your pardon, this is evidently your property!”

Lancelot did not speak, but sank back in his chair while the other continued,—“This is really a most unfortunate affair; and so my wife is about to dishonour my name, in order to devote herself more exclusively to the care of your health?”

“The fault is mine,” stammered Lancelot, “only mine!”

“My dear fellow, not at all. Judging from that letter, she is in love with you—possibly she is right. We won’t argue that matter. She seems fond of playing the *rôle* of St. Mary Magdala.”

“What do you mean to do?”

“Turn her out of my house to–night, or settle the matter with you!”

“Settle with me; but for God’s sake spare her!”

“Very well! Let us discuss the question quietly. As you know, I do not believe in what is called sentiment, and fortunately I am able to say, with a clear conscience, that I am not in love with my wife. Probably if I were, I should act otherwise. Now, what I propose is, that chance shall decide for us whether my wife leaves Australia, as she suggests, with you, or whether you go alone concealing your destination and promising never to communicate in any way with her again. Both are unpleasant alternatives, but my gain is, that in either case I shall be rid of you!”

“Good God, man, what an unholy arrangement! Supposing I refuse?”

“For her sake you cannot. I assure you I should turn her out of my house to–night!”

“But will you treat her kindly if I agree?”

“Isn’t that rather a curious question from you to me? You must see that it depends entirely on her. Do you agree to my proposal?”

“God help me, I have no alternative!”

There was a long pause, during which Guinevere’s music came faintly from the drawing–room.

“Very well; in that case, we had better decide at once. What is my wife playing?”

“An Andante and Scherzo of Beethoven’s.”

“Do you know it?”

“Thoroughly.”

“Then you have that much in your favour. See, here, it is just three and a half minutes to

nine by that clock. If she stops before the first stroke of the hour, I win, and she stays with me, and *vice versâ*. Do you agree?”

“I cannot do otherwise. God help her; it is all my fault!”

“Not at all, I assure you. Let us make ourselves comfortable. Will you try that port? No? You are foolish; it is an excellent vintage. Ah! one minute gone! What a lovely melody it is; and she plays it charmingly. The laughter of the Scherzo is delicious! May I trouble you for that decanter? Thank you! Two minutes gone. It appears as if my luck is going to fail me at last. Well, it can’t be helped. I don’t know which of us will be the gainer by the change. By the way, let me recommend you to go to Europe, and you might winter in Algiers; the climate you will find most ben—Ah! she has stopped. Well, I am afraid, Mr. Haywood, Fate has decided *against* you. Shall I order your carriage?”

Lancelot did not answer save by a little convulsive gasp. Then a little trickle of blood ran from his lips down his chin. The excitement had been too much for him; the frail cord that bound him to life had snapped, and he was dead.

The Story of Tommy Dodd and "the Rooster"

"Keep back, in the yellow! Come up, on Othello!
Hold hard, on the chestnut! Turn round, on The Drag:
Keep back there, on Spartan! Back, you, sir, in tartan!
So! steady there! easy! and down went the flag."

—Adam Lindsay Gordon.

Men in all ranks of society, from cabinet ministers to hotel clerks, are apt to underestimate the true importance of Little Things. Women never do, because it is their business in life to overestimate everything. Though these statements may seem paradoxical, when you've studied the sad history of Tommy Dodd and "The Rooster," my meaning will be as clear as noonday.

Jack Medway's Love Affair was a case in point; for if he had paid proper attention to small matters, he would not have cuffed "The Rooster" in Bourke Street, nor emphasized the insult by calling him a "dirty brat"; then most assuredly he would have married the girl of his heart, instead of a certain vivacious widow who now bullies his life away. Of course people bursting with common sense will deem it impossible that a rebuke given to a street–arab in Melbourne could affect the destinies of four people three years afterwards in North Queensland; nevertheless, without a shadow of doubt, such was the case. Just let me explain a little before you watch the course of events for yourself.

In the first place, Tommy Dodd was a racehorse, and one who had earned fame for himself on every course in Victoria from Mosquito Creek to Cape Howe. That he was not originally intended for the turf was evident from the fact that he made his first appearance in Government employ; and it was not until he had nearly killed four telegraph messengers and two important citizens that he was deemed unfit for the public service. Then he was put up to auction, and Lazarus Levi secured him for a quarter of his real value. He was a most accommodating quadruped, and with not more than nine–stone–six on his back was able, when his owner so desired, to make even crack performers look ridiculous. He had one fault, however, and that was—But I'll tell you about that directly.

"The Rooster" was another curiosity. His body was the body of a child, his face was the face of a lad; but his knowledge of the world, and the racing world in particular, could only have been gained in generations of experience. A great love for Tommy Dodd, and an intense hatred for the before–mentioned Mr. John Medway, of Barcoola Station, were among other of his peculiarities.

Now it so happened that after Jack Medway was appointed manager of Barcoola, he fell in love. I don't push this forward as anything extraordinary; but, as the statement of the fact is necessary to the proper narration of this story, I am bound to repeat, Jack Medway was in love, and Gerty Morris was the object of his affection. He also *respected* a dashing

widow, named Leversidge.

The trouble dates from the issue of the first advertisements in connection with the Barcoola Races. At this yearly festival every owner, manager, jackeroo and rouseabout, within a hundred miles of the course, makes it a point of honour to be present. Then, for the space of a week, life is one whirl of shows, picnics, dances, and meetings. But above all the races reigned supreme.

One Sunday afternoon in Dr. Morris's verandah The Ladies' Bracelet was discussed, and Gerty Morris half hinted that Medway should enter a horse for it in her name. Naturally he jumped at the chance, and after summing up the strength of the most likely entries, cast about him for a nag.

(At this point the curtain should fall upon Act I., with rosy limelight effects, suggestive of Dawning Love and High Ideas.)

* * * * *

When an owner runs a horse to suit his book he should not grumble if his method is discovered; for stewards do *sometimes* see crooked running, and when they do they are apt to make things troublesome for that owner. Perhaps the proprietor of Tommy Dodd had met with some misfortune of this sort, for that sagacious animal suddenly disappeared from the southern racing world, and was seen therein no more.

A month later a mob of horses came up to Queensland, and at the sale a long, lolloping chestnut gelding, name unknown, was knocked down to Medway for twenty pounds. Though he was not aware of the fact, he was now the owner of the famous Tommy Dodd.

After the sale, driving home from the township, Beverley, of Kimona, nearly annihilated a drunken atom lying on the track. He picked him up and drove on. Next day, ascertaining that he possessed racing experience, he put him on to exercise The Gift. The Gift was his entry for The Bracelet, under the nomination of an *unknown* Alice Brown, in whom everybody, of course, recognised the before–mentioned Miss Gertrude Morris. That atom was "The Rooster," who had followed Tommy Dodd from the south. And here again Fate played up against Jack Medway.

(Curtain on Act II.: subdued lights and music suggestive of much Mystery.)

* * * * *

A week later the entries of the Barcoola Jockey Club's Autumn Meeting were announced, and Mr. J. Medway's Young Romeo, and Mr. R. Beverley's The Gift, were in the list of competitors.

The training of both animals was proceeding satisfactorily, and the owner of Young Romeo, *alias* Tommy Dodd, informed Miss Morris that the bracelet she so much coveted must certainly become her property. Beverley had written to her that morning to the same effect.

"The Rooster" ferreted about until he discovered his equine friend's abode, and at the same time learnt all he cared to know about the owner.

Then, remembering the insult of three years before, he saw a chance of revenge. He was

quick–witted enough to notice the rivalry between Beverley and Medway, and he quite understood that both men had staked their life's happiness upon the issue of the race. He knew more about Tommy Dodd than any man living, so he took Beverley into his confidence, and revealed the animal's one peculiarity. That gentleman gave him a sovereign to hold his tongue, and as Young Romeo was the only horse he feared, he now saw his way clear to victory.

(Here Act III. terminates, with much red fire and music suggestive of conspiracy.)

* * * * *

It is all nonsense to say that a good day's sport cannot be enjoyed without grand–stands, electric scratching–boards, and telegraphs. The Barcoola Jockey Club possessed none of these advantages, and yet their races were always wonderfully successful. The fact is, in North Queensland the horse is *the* consideration; but the farther you go south, the nearer you get to directors' meetings and bank overdrafts—consequently, the more iniquitous and black–guardly the sport becomes.

Jack Medway drove his party on to the course in great style, and pretty Gerty Morris sat beside him, looking the picture of health and happiness. Beverley watched the waggonette draw up in a good position, and smiled sardonically. (The Gift was as fit as hands could make him: Young Romeo was his only enemy; and armed with "The Rooster's" knowledge, he knew he held *him* safe.)

Now, the secret was very simple after all. Years before, when Tommy Dodd was in Government employ, he had been put to a good deal of torture by one small telegraph boy, whose peculiar pleasure it was to flay him daily with a green hide whip. When this amiable young gentleman had succeeded in rawing the horse's sides to his own satisfaction, he still further goaded the poor brute by raising the hide as if to strike, yet never letting it descend. The result of this was that, even in his racing days, Tommy Dodd could never be persuaded to pass a lifted whip. This was "The Rooster's" secret, and the sequel you shall know directly.

The races opened splendidly. A Bush Handicap of 30 sovs., half a mile, was won after a determined struggle by Mr. Exton's Headstrong, 7 st. 2 lb., totalisator dividend, £3 10s. The District Plate went to Mr. Goodwyn's Endymion, 6 st. 10 lb., totalisator dividend, £5 6s. After that, hampers were opened, and every one went to luncheon. Dick Beverley lunched with the Barcoola party, and made himself vastly agreeable to all concerned—his rival included. The Bracelet Stakes was the first event after luncheon, and the two men went away to dress.

Young Romeo had been excellently prepared, and for old association's sake took to the process very kindly. "The Rooster" kept The Gift out of the way till he was wanted, on the plea that he was "a mighty nervous 'oss to 'andle."

After weighing in, Jack Medway offered Beverley a level fifty against his mount. "I'll take you," said Beverley, and strolled away to saddle.

Every one was pleased with the appearance of Young Romeo. He carried himself prettily, and swept over the ground with that easy gliding motion characteristic of a thoroughbred. His rider looked and behaved well in the saddle, so the ladies were unanimous in their

praise. The Gift was not a handsome horse, but he had a wear–and–tear appearance that was better than mere beauty, and more than one who could judge of horse–flesh slipped away to put “just a saver” on him. The remainder of the field were a very so–so lot indeed.

As the rivals passed the Barcoola party in their preliminary canter, Gerty Morris scanned both men carefully, but could not make up her mind which she preferred. However, Medway had openly promised her the bracelet, so he had that in his favour. His colours were white jacket, red sleeves and cap; and she had worked a tiny sprig of ivy on the collar, of which he was inordinately proud.

After a little delay at the post, the flag dropped to a good start. Warrigal was the first away, with Endymion and The Gift in close attendance; Young Romeo was unfortunate, and brought up the rear with The Jackeroo and Blush Rose. As they passed the windmill, Endymion changed places with Warrigal, and Young Romeo came up to fourth place. Then The Gift forged to the front and led by a length. On entering the dip, Medway pushed Young Romeo to second place, and remained there watching events until they came into the straight. The crowd, thinking all was over, commenced shouting, “The Gift wins,” “The Gift in a canter,” “The Gift,” etc., etc., etc., until Jack Medway thought it time to make play, so he set sail in pursuit. Young Romeo was full of running and overhauled his rival foot by foot; when fifty yards from the post they were locked neck and neck. Both were doing all they knew. Then “The Rooster’s” secret flashed through Beverley’s mind, and instantly he raised his whip, *but did not strike*. Next moment he was past the post with a couple of lengths to spare. To every one’s surprise, Young Romeo, on his right, had shut up like a concertina just as he had it all his own way. *The bracelet was the property of Miss Brown.*

Next day we were informed that Gerty Morris had accepted Beverley, of Kimona, with her parents’ full consent, and, strange to say, at the dinner given to celebrate that wonderful event she wore the bracelet of the famous race. Medway was among those invited, but he declined the invitation on the plea that business demanded his presence elsewhere.

* * * * *

“I often think that if he knew everything he would be the first to regret having hurt ‘The Rooster’s’ feelings that night in Bourke Street. They say he is not having a very happy time of it with his wife—once the Widow Leversidge.”

Now don’t you think I’m right about the importance of Little Things?

Quod Erat Demonstrandum

> “That this is doctrine, simple, ancient, true;
> Such is life’s trial, as old Earth smiles and knows.
> If you loved only what were worth your love,
> Love were clear gain, and wholly well for you;
> Make the low nature better by your throes!
> Give earth yourself, go up for gain above!”
>
> —R. Browning.

Any afternoon, between three and five, you will probably find in the Club Library, somewhere near the S T E and T R A Bookcase, a thin, restless–eyed man of perhaps five–and–fifty years of age. He will answer to the name of Pennethorne—Cornelius Pennethorne—and he can *sometimes* be trusted to converse in a fairly rational manner. Generally, however, he is chock–full of nonsensical ideas, founded on what he calls “Inferences from Established Principles,” and these make it almost impossible for him to do anything, from tying his bootlace to reducing his Overdraft, except on theories of his own determining.

He sold out of the Army because he had proved to the War Office that the science of modern warfare was founded on an entirely wrong basis, and the greyheads refused his aid to set it right. So, washing his hands of the whole affair, he came to Australia. This was in ‘69, or perhaps ‘70.

Knowing nothing about station work, he gave sixty thousand pounds for a property on the Diamantina, in order to demonstrate his own theories on cattle–breeding. And when they proved unworkable, he spent a small fortune inventing a gold–crushing plant—another failure. In similar manner all his pet projects faded away, one after another, like cats’–paws on a big lagoon.

But he learnt nothing from these rebuffs, and there was no *kudos* to be gained by showing him what an utter ass he really was. You *can* reason with some men, but not with Pennethorne: he came from obstinate Cornish stock; and as soon as he saw the theory of the moment a failure, he threw it away and dived deeper still into something else.

When he had exhausted cattle–breeding, horse–breaking, irrigation and gold–mining, he hunted about for some other channel in which to sink his money; but for the moment nothing came to hand.

Then some one sent him a pamphlet entitled “The Folklore of our Aboriginal Predecessors,” or something of an equally idiotic nature; and in this he saw a fresh opening. His district was infested with blacks, so he plunged holus–bolus into their private affairs. He argued that the theory of their treatment was altogether wrong, and for three months he choked the Colonial Press with lengthy screeds denouncing every one concerned in their government. Beginning with the Protector of Aboriginals and his staff,

he took in the Commissioner of Police, and clergy of all denominations. Then, working through the Legislative and Executive Councils, he finished with a great blare at the Governor himself. It never, for an instant, struck him that he was making an egregious ass of himself. That, probably, would be some one else's theory.

Now of all this absurd man's absurd ideas, his fondest, and consequently his most absurd, was that, fundamentally, the nature of both blacks and whites is the same. He contended that education and opportunity are alone responsible for the difference. He said he would prove it.

Taking from the nearest tribe a little half–caste girl, perhaps eight years of age, he sent her south to school, and, cutting off all communication with her people, sat himself down to watch results.

After the child had been enjoying the advantages of every luxury for ten years, he went down to ascertain what progress she had made, and was astounded at the result. In place of the half–wild urchin he remembered, he found a well–mannered, accomplished girl, able to hold her own anywhere. She received him with an air of *abandon* that staggered him, and he was pleased beyond measure. He said he would go down to the Club and show the scoffers there that one theory, at least, had proved successful.

On reaching it he discovered a strange generation, and was not a little chagrined to find himself and his theories almost forgotten. The younger men watched him meandering about the rooms, and said to each other, "Who is this old bore Pennethorne, and what forgotten part of the interior does he come from?"

So delighted was he with the success of his scheme that he sent the girl to Europe for a year, he himself returning to the Back–blocks. It must be remembered here that her colour was not pure black, but a sort of dirty brown, that she was by no means ill–looking, and that she had been perfectly educated.

Then came the situation he should have foreseen, "When her education was completed, what was to be done with her?" In the loneliness of his station he thought and thought, but could come to no conclusion. She would know enough to make a perfect governess; but then, perhaps, no one would care to give her employment. It was impossible that she should go back to the tribe, and it was equally unlikely that any suitable man would ask her hand in marriage. He began to realize what a white elephant he had raised up for himself.

One cold winter's night, when the rain was beating down and the wind whistling round the station–house, it flashed through his mind that it would be by no means unpleasant to exchange his grumpy old housekeeper for a younger woman—one who could make the evenings pleasant with music and intellectual conversation. But it would have this drawback—it would mean matrimony.

All this time his *protégée* was writing him charming letters from Rome and Naples, commenting shrewdly on all the wonders she was seeing. Sometimes on the run he would read these letters, and think out certain schemes all by himself.

On her return he went down to Sydney for the special purpose of meeting her. He found a pretty little woman in a neat dark blue travelling dress awaiting him. Her white cuffs and

collar contrasted charmingly with her dark complexion. She received him very nicely, and he noticed that she had picked up the little mannerisms of the better–class Englishwomen she had met. They drove to the Australian, and a week later were married by special licence.

Most men who remembered him said he was a very big fool; the rest said that they would give *their* opinions when they saw how events turned out.

Directly they were married they posted straight off to the station. And herein Pennethorne acted very unwisely. He should have toured Tasmania and New Zealand, or visited Japan in the orthodox way. But he was unlike other men, and it was a moral impossibility for him to act like a rational being—his theories got in the way and tripped him up.

For the first year or so everything progressed beautifully, and he wrote glowing accounts of his new life to the few men whose friendship he had thought worth retaining. Then the correspondence ceased abruptly, and his friends marvelled.

Now, of all those who had scoffed at Pennethorne's theories, the most persistent was William Pevis Farrington, afterwards His Honour Mr. Justice Farrington. In the middle of his happiness, Pennethorne had invited the judge, if ever he should be travelling that way, etc.—you know the usual sort of thing—to put in a day or two with him, and see for himself how things stood. About a year later Farrington did happen to be somewhere in the district and called as requested.

Meeting his host near the homestead, they rode up together, and Farrington noticed that Pennethorne decidedly looked his age. When they reached the house the latter, leaving his guest in the dining–room, went in search of his wife, to return about ten minutes later saying she was unwell. They dined alone. All through the meal Pennethorne seemed disturbed and uncomfortable, and when it was over led the way into the garden, where he said abruptly, "Farrington, you think me a madman, don't you?"

The judge mumbled the only thing he could think of at the moment, and endeavoured to push the conversation off to a side track by an inquiry after Mrs. Pennethorne's health. It had precisely the contrary effect to what he intended.

His friend had twelve years' arrears to work off before he could be considered, conversationally, a decent companion. So, setting to work, he poured into the unfortunate judge's ears his granary of theories, facts, and arguments. He marshalled his arguments, backed them up with his theories, and clinched all with his facts, his voice rising from its usual placid level to a higher note of almost childish entreaty. Unconsciously he was endeavouring to convince himself, through the medium of a second person, of the wisdom contained in his marriage experiment.

Farrington listened attentively. His trained mind distinguished between what the other believed and what he was endeavouring to prove against his own convictions. However, he could see that the keynote of the whole harangue was Failure, but as every one admitted that the last experiment had proved entirely successful, in what direction did such failure lie? He was more than a little mixed, and by delicate cross–examination elicited certain facts that puzzled him still more.

One thing was plainly evident: Pennethorne was very much in love with his wife. In the

first place he was given to understand that no man could desire a more amiable wife than Mrs. Pennethorne had proved herself to be. This heading included virtues too numerous to mention—but she was not well. Nor could any man desire a more *accomplished* wife than Mrs. Pennethorne, who was fit to be the helpmate of an Oxford Don—but she was not well. His assertions always had the same refrain—"She was not well!"

Because he could not understand, Farrington became deeply interested.

* * * * *

Just before daylight the judge was wakened by his host. He saw in an instant that something terrible had happened.

Mrs. Pennethorne had disappeared in the night, her husband knew not whither!

Even with his teeth chattering in his head, and his palsied old hand rattling the candlestick, he was compelled to state *his theory* of her absence.

Farrington, seeing he was not responsible for his actions, acted for him. He routed out all the station hands and scoured the country. They spent all day searching the scrub, dragging the dams and waterholes, and at nightfall had to give it up as hopeless.

Farrington and Pennethorne rode home together. Passing through a rocky gully, they noticed the smoke of a camp fire floating up into the still night air, and rode up to make inquiries. The blacks were at their evening meal. One filthy girl raised her head and looked up at them from her frowsy blankets. *It was Mrs. Pennethorne!*

After thirteen years of civilization the race instinct had proved too strong: the reek of the camp fires, the call of the Bush, and the fascination of the old savage life had come back upon her with double intensity, and so the last theory had to be written down a failure. *Q.E.D.*

Cupid and Psyche

"Handsome, amiable, and clever,
With a fortune and a wife;
So I make my start whenever
I would build the fancy life.
After all the bright ideal,
What a gulf there is between
Things that are, alas! too real
And the things that might have been!"

—Henry S. Leigh.

His name upon the ship's books was Edward Braithwaite Colchester, but between Tilbury and Sydney Harbour he was better known as Cupid. His mother was a widow with four more olive branches, absolutely dependent on her own and Teddy's exertions.

At the best of times Kindergartens for the children of respectable tradespeople are not particularly remunerative, and the semi–detached villa in Sydenham was often sorely tried for petty cash. But when Teddy was appointed fourth officer of the X.Y.Z. Company's steamship *Cambrian Prince*, endless possibilities were opened up.

If you will remember that everything in this world is ordained to a certain end, you will see that Teddy's future entirely depended on his falling in love—first love, of course, and not the matter–of–fact business–like affair that follows later.

After his second voyage he obtained a fortnight's leave and hastened home. Being fond of tennis and such–like amusements, he was naturally brought into contact with many charming girls, who, because he was a strange man and a sailor, were effusively polite. Then he fell hopelessly in love with a horribly impossible girl, and in the excitement of the latest waltz proposed, and was accepted, on the strength of a fourth officer's pay, an incipient moustache, and a dozen or so brass buttons.

During the next voyage his behaviour towards unmarried women was marked by that circumspection which should always characterize an engaged man. He never allowed himself to forget this for an instant, and his cabin had for its chief ornament a plush–framed likeness of a young lady gazing, with a wistful expression, over a palpably photographic sea.

Now, it was necessary for his ultimate happiness that Teddy Colchester should learn that, like his own brass buttons, without constant burnishing, a young lady's affection is apt to lose much of its pristine brightness, and that too much sea air is good for neither. He ticked off the days of absence, and, as his calendar lessened, his affection increased.

At Plymouth a letter met him—a jerky, inky, schoolgirl epistle, evidently written by a writer very cold and miserable; and the first reading stunned him. Had he seen a little more of the real world, he would have been able to read between the lines something to

this effect: “You’re Teddy, three months away, and I’m madly in love with a soldier.” Then he would have noted that the writer was staying in Salisbury, after which he would have hunted up his home papers and discovered that the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry Cavalry were encamped at Humington Down. But as he had only seen life through a telescope, he could not do this, consequently his pain was a trifle acute.

His mother wrote him four pages of sympathy. But though she wondered at any girl jilting her boy, she could not help a feeling of satisfaction at its being still in her power to transmute three–quarters of his pay into food and raiment for her brood.

Next voyage the *Cambrian Prince* had her full complement of passengers, and the “Kangaroo Girl,” whom perhaps you may remember, was of the number. At Plymouth a little reserved girl joined, and as she is considerably mixed up in this story, you must know that she rejoiced in the unpretentious name of Hinks.

For the first week or so Teddy held very much aloof from the passengers, engaging himself entirely with recollections of the girl for whose sake he was going to live “only in a memory.”

Being an honest, straightforward young fellow, he of course followed the prescribed programme of all blighted love affairs. He began by pitying himself for the sorrow he was undergoing, then went on to picture the future that might have been theirs had she married him; but before they were clear of the Bay he had arrived at the invariable conclusion, and was pitying himself for pitying the girl who was foolish enough to jilt such an entirely estimable young man as Edward Braithwaite Colchester.

One moonlight night, after leaving “Gib,” he was leaning over the rails of the promenade deck, feeling sympathetically inclined to the world in general, when somebody stepped up beside him. It was Miss Hinks. She prefaced her conversation with two or three questions about the sea, and he made the astounding discovery that her voice possessed just the note of sympathy he required for his complaint. He had felt sorry for her because other people snubbed her, and she for him because she had been told exaggerated stories about his love affair. Together they made rather a curious couple.

“One moonlight night … somebody stepped up beside him.”

When, under the supervision of the “Kangaroo Girl,” the shore parties for Naples were being organized, Miss Hinks was tacitly left out. Somehow the impression got about that she was poor, and no one cared about paying her expenses. But eventually she did go, and it was in the charge of the fourth officer. When she thanked him for his kindness, he forgot for the moment his pledge “to live henceforth only in a memory.”

The “Kangaroo Girl,” on discovering that Miss Hinks *had* been on shore, under the escort of that “dear little pink officer,” was vastly amused, and christened them Cupid and Psyche.

Now, the end of it all was, that Teddy began to find himself caring less and less for the thumb–stained photograph in his locker, and more and more for the privilege of pumping his sorrows into a certain sympathetic ear. Shipboard allows so many opportunities of meeting; and, strange as it may appear, a broken heart is quickest mended when subjected to a second rending. This cure is based on the homoeopathic principle of like curing like.

By the time they reached Aden he had convinced himself that his first love affair had been the result of a too generous nature, and that this second was the one and only *real* passion of his life.

At Colombo Miss Hinks went ashore with the doctor’s party—tiffined at Mount Lavinia, dined at the Grand Oriental, and started back for the ship about nine o’clock.

Teddy, begrimed with coal–dust, watched each boat load arrive, and as he did so his love

increased.

On account of the coal barges it was impossible for boats to come alongside, consequently their freight had to clamber from hulk to hulk. Miss Hinks was the last of her party to venture; and just as the doctor, holding out his hand, told her to jump, the hulk swayed out and she fell with a scream into the void. Then, before any one could realize what had happened, the barge rolled back into its place. Miss Hinks had disappeared.

Teddy, from half–way up the gangway, tore off his coat, leapt into the water, and, at the risk of having his brains knocked out, dived and plunged between the boats, but without success. Then he saw something white astern, and swam towards it.

* * * * *

The half–drowned couple must have come to an understanding in the rescuing–boat, for next day their engagement was announced.

The “Kangaroo Girl” gave evidence of her wit when she said, “It was fortunate they were Cupid and Psyche, otherwise they would find love rather insufficient capital to begin housekeeping upon!”

Teddy wrote to his mother from Adelaide, and she, poor woman, was not best pleased to hear the news. But a surprise was in store for us all.

On the *Cambrian Prince’s* arrival in Sydney, Miss Hinks was met by an intensely respectable old gentleman, who, it appeared, was her solicitor. On being informed of the engagement, he examined Teddy with peculiar interest, and asked if he were aware of his good fortune. Miss Hinks smiled.

Half an hour later we learnt that the girl whom we’d all been pitying for her poverty was none other than Miss Hinks–Gratton, *the millionairess and owner of innumerable station and town properties*!

The Teddy of to–day is a director of half a dozen shipping companies, and he quite agrees with me “that everything in this world is ordained to a certain end.”

Misplaced Affections

"Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old Time is still a–flying:
And this same flower that smiles to–day,
To–morrow will be dying.

"Then be not coy, but use your time;
And while ye may, go marry:
For having lost but once your prime,
You may for ever tarry."

—R. Herrick.

The point I wish to illustrate is, that it is not safe, at any time, to play with such an inflammable passion as Love, even though it be to oblige one's nearest and dearest friend. Once upon a time pretty Mrs. Belverton used to laugh at me for warning her, but she is compelled to admit the truth of my argument now.

It was Mrs. Belverton, you will remember, who originated the famous Under Fifty Riding Club, whose initials, *U.F.R.C.*, over two crossed hunting–crops and a double snaffle, were construed, by irreverent folk, to mean *Unlimited Flirtation Religiously Conserved*. The Club is now defunct, but its influence will be traceable in several families for many years to come.

The following events, you must know, occurred the summer before William Belverton received the honour of knighthood, and while he was renting Acacia Lodge at the corner of the Mountain Road, the house below Tom Guilfoy's, and nearly opposite the residence of the Kangaroo Girl of blessed memory.

It was by extending her sympathies as guide, philosopher, and friend to all unhappy love affairs that Mrs. Belverton made herself famous in our Australian world; and many and extraordinary were the scrapes this little amusement dragged her into. Could her drawing–room curtains have spoken, they would have been able to throw light upon many matters of vital interest, but matters of such a delicate nature as to absolutely prohibit their publication here.

The Otway–Belton couple, for instance, owe their present happiness to her assistance at a critical juncture in their family history; while the Lovelaces, man and wife, would to–day be separated by the whole length and breadth of our earth, but for her tact during a certain desperate five minutes in the Greenaways' verandah. So on, in numberless cases, to the end of the chapter.

You must know that for three months during the particular year of which I am writing, we had with us a young globe–trotter, who rejoiced in the name of Poltwhistle. I can't tell you any more about him, save that he was a big Cornishman, rawboned, and vulgarly rich. His

people should have been more considerate; they should have kept him quietly at home counting his money–bags, instead of allowing him to prowl about God's earth upsetting other people's carefully thought–out arrangements.

The trouble all commenced with his meeting pretty little dimpled Jessie Halroyd at a Government House tennis–party and convincing himself, after less than half an hour's disjointed conversation, that she was quite the nicest girl he had ever encountered. He met her again next day at the Chief Justice's dinner–party. Then by dint of thinking continually in the same strain, he fell to imagining himself in love. But as she had long since given her affections to Lawrence Collivar, of the Treasury, and had not experience enough to conduct two affairs at one and the same time, his behaviour struck us all as entirely ridiculous.

Having called on Mrs. Halroyd the Monday following, where he was fed and made much of, he set to work thenceforward to pester the daughter with his attentions. It was another example of the Lancaster trouble, of which I've told you elsewhere, only with the positions turned wrong–side uppermost.

For nearly a month this persecution was steadily and systematically carried on, until people, who had nothing at all to do with it, began to talk, and the girl herself was at her wits' end to find a loophole of escape. I must tell you at this point, that, even before the Cornishman's coming, her own selection had been barely tolerated by the Home Authorities; now, in the glare of Poltwhistle's thousands, it was discountenanced altogether. But Jessie thought she loved Collivar, and she used to grind her pretty little teeth with rage when Poltwhistle came into the room, and say she was not going to give up Lawrence, whatever happened. Then she suddenly remembered Mrs. Belverton, and with desperate courage went down, told her all, and implored her aid.

Now it so happened that Mrs. Belverton had nothing to do just then, and stood in need of excitement. Moreover, Collivar was her own special and particular *protégé*. In fact, it was neither more nor less than *her* influence that had given him his rapid advancement in the Public Service, and through this influence his love for little Jessie Halroyd. She was educating him, she said, to make an ideal husband, and she was certainly not going to allow a rawboned New Arrival to upset her plans.

At the end of the interview, taking the girl's hand in hers, she said comfortingly,—

"Go home, my dear, and try to enjoy yourself; snub Mr. Poltwhistle whenever you see him, and leave the rest to me!"

When she was alone, this excellent woman settled herself down in her cushions, and devoted half an hour to careful contemplation.

She understood that with a man whose skull went up to nothing at the back of his head, like Poltwhistle's, ordinary measures would be worse than useless, so she decided upon a scheme that embodied an honour which even kings and princes might have envied.

That same night she was booked to dine with Arthur and Guinevere, of whom I have also told you, on the Mountain Road, and Providence (which is more mixed up in these little matters than most people imagine) placed on her left hand none other than the Cornishman himself.

Having heard a great deal of the famous Mrs. Belverton and her sharp sayings, he was prepared to be more than a little afraid of her. She observed this and utilised it to the best advantages.

Neglecting every one else, even her own lawful partner, who, I may tell you, was a globe–trotter of no small importance, she made herself infinitely charming to the angular gawk beside her, and to such good purpose that, before Belverton began, according to custom, to brag about his port, he was in a whirlwind of enchantment, and had forgotten his original admiration for good and all.

Next day as he was riding down to tennis at the Halroyds', he met Mrs. Belverton outside the library. Looking at him through the lace of a pretty red parasol, and with the most innocent of faces, she asked his advice as to the sort of literature she should peruse. Of course that necessitated sending home his horse and overhauling the bookshelves—with any woman a dangerous proceeding, but with Mrs. Belverton an act of more than suicidal folly. A child might have foreseen the result. Before they had reached shelf B he had completely lost his head, and when they left the library, he disregarded his tennis appointment and begged to be allowed to carry home her books for her.

She kept him with her until all chance of tennis was over, then having filled him with pound cake, tea, and improving conversation, sent him away, vowing that he had at last met perfection in womankind.

Her scheme was succeeding admirably, for Poltwhistle from that hour forsook his former flame altogether. Mrs. Halroyd wondered; but her daughter professed delight, and seeing this, Collivar prosecuted his wooing with renewed ardour.

But Mrs. Belverton, with all her cleverness, had made one miscalculation, and the effect was more than usually disastrous. She had forgotten the fact that Jessie Halroyd was, in spite of her heart trouble, little more than a child. And the upshot of this was that when that young lady saw Poltwhistle no longer worshipped at her shrine, but was inclining towards another woman, prettier and more accomplished than herself, she allowed her school–girl's vanity to be hurt.

Within a week of her visit to Acacia Lodge, she had developed an idea that, all things considered, Poltwhistle was by no means bad looking, and certainly everybody knew that he was rich. Within a fortnight, Collivar having offended her, she was sure that she liked him quite as much as most men; and in less than three weeks (so strangely perverse is woman) she had snubbed Collivar, and was hating Mrs. Belverton with all her heart and soul for enticing the Cornishman's attentions away from herself.

Then it became Collivar's turn to seek assistance; and at this juncture, as the situation looked like getting beyond even her, Mrs. Belverton lost her temper and said some very bitter things about everybody concerned, herself included.

However, to sit down and allow herself to be beaten formed no part of that lady's nature; so carefully reviewing the case, she realized that the only possible way out of the difficulty was a reversal of her former tactics. To this end she dropped Poltwhistle and took up Collivar, hoping thereby to turn the jealous girl's thoughts back into their original channel.

The Hillites stared and said to each other:—

“Dear, dear! What a shocking flirt that Mrs. Belverton is, to be sure! First it was that nice Mr. Poltwhistle, and now it’s young Collivar, of the Treasury. Her conduct is really too outrageous!”

One muggy Saturday afternoon, towards the end of the hot weather, the Under Fifty Riding Club met opposite the library to ride to The Summit for tea and strawberries. There was a good attendance of members, and Mrs. Belverton, Miss Halroyd, Poltwhistle, and Collivar were among the number.

Every one paired off in the orthodox fashion, and as Collivar annexed Mrs. Belverton, Poltwhistle was obliged to content himself with Miss Halroyd. He was not too polite in consequence.

Before they reached the summit of the mount, thick clouds had gathered in the sky, and heavy thunder was rumbling along the hills. The Club members ate their strawberries, flirted about the grounds, and started for home just as dusk was falling.

The same pairing was adopted on the return journey, and Poltwhistle, from his place in the rear, watched the other couple with jealous, hungry eyes.

It was a tempestuous evening. Heavy thunder rolled continuously, and when, nearly half–way home, the clouds burst and the rain poured down, there was a general rush for shelter. Mrs. Belverton, to her dismay, found herself, in the half darkness, sitting on her horse, beneath a big gum–tree, with both Collivar and Poltwhistle for her companions.

The latter, whose manners were about on a par with his modesty, had left Miss Halroyd on the road to seek shelter for herself.

With a hurricane of rage in her heart, the poor girl, now, according to her lights, thoroughly in love, saw the reason of his conduct and followed him, reaching the other side of the tree unperceived. It was so dark you could hardly distinguish your hand before your face, and the rain was simply pouring down.

Sometimes, when she is in a communicative mood, Mrs. Belverton can be persuaded to tell the story of that half–hour under the gum–tree, and she catalogues it as the funniest thirty minutes she has ever experienced. But though she laughs about it now, I fancy she did not enjoy it so much at the time.

From each hinting that the other should retire, both men fell to justifying their presence there, and finished by whispering into the lady’s ears, between the thunder–claps, protestations of their undying love and devotion.

Then, while the thunder was crashing, the lightning flashing, the rain soaking them through and through, and Mrs. Belverton was wondering how it was all to end, Jessie Halroyd rode round the tree.

They all stared, you may be sure, and because Mrs. Belverton had adventured the whole miserable business for her sake, she naturally hissed,—

“False friend, false friend, I hate you! Oh, Mrs. Belverton, how I hate you—I could kill you!”

A flash of lightning showed her face. It was all white and quivering, like a badly made

blanc–mange pudding. There was a pause till somebody said very innocently, and I am told it was the funniest part of the whole affair,—

“My dear child, you’re getting wet through; do bring your horse into shelter!”

But before the sentence was finished the girl had turned her horse’s head and was galloping down the streaming road at break–neck speed.

Then Mrs. Belverton gathered her wits together and set to work to undeceive her two admirers. All things considered, the operation must have been a curious one. When it was accomplished she rode home alone, meditating, I presume, on the futilities of this mundane existence.

The sad conclusion we, the Hillites, have come to, is that both Poltwhistle and Collivar hate their would–be benefactress most cordially for endeavouring to promote their happiness, and abominate each other still more for interfering and spoiling sport. While Miss Halroyd, who goes home next mail–day, hates all three with an undying hatred, and of course cannot be made to understand that her own folly alone is responsible for everything that happened. Personally, I should be more interested to know what easy–going William Belverton thinks about it all.

In Great Waters

> “Short shrift! sharp fate! dark doom to dree!
> Hard struggle, though quickly ending!
> At home or abroad, by land or sea,
> In peace or war, sore trials must be,
> And worse may happen to you or to me,
> For none are secure and none can flee
> From a destiny impending.”
>
> —Adam Lindsay Gordon.

“Don’t thank me; I’m sure I’m equally obliged to you. I haven’t seen a strange face these three months; and though I am that despised animal, a broken–down gentleman, I’ve never quite been able to overcome a foolish hankering after some dealing with my old caste again. Pardon the implied compliment!

“You’d better hobble your horses and turn them loose towards the creek. I’ll run them up in the morning with my own.

“Having done that, if you’re hungry, you’ll find tea in the billy, and damper and meat in those ration bags. It’s Queensland boundary rider’s fare, but the best I can offer you.

“Monotonous country? By Heavens, yes! The children in exile knew no worse. On all sides, sand, mulga, and desolation—desolation, mulga, and sand, and unceasing regret, the portion of every man who has his lot in it!

“Have you quite finished? Then light your pipe. No, no! not with a vesta like a new chum, but with a fire–stick—so! When you’ve been in the Bush as long as I have, you will see in a match something more than a pipe–light. But by that time you will be on the high road to a still more peculiar wisdom, which will never be of service to you.

“Now, draw your blankets to the fire and cease thinking of your horses. They’re on good feed, so let them eat their fill. If what I hear of the country out back is true, they’ll get no more this side of the Barcoo.

“What do I say? How do I know that you are new to the country? Simply enough! By the light in your eyes, the palms of your hands, and the freshness of your voice. Besides, when a man has been long in the West, does he stand up for want of a chair? Forgive my rudeness, but you’ll learn it all soon enough.

“Talking of classes! Consider the class I represent. In this country it is a numerous one, and the Bush is both our refuge and our cemetery. As we wish to know nobody, so we desire that nobody shall ever know us; and being beyond the reach of pride or shame, we live entirely in memories of the past, through which we enjoy a keener torture than any creed or sect can promise us hereafter. If you have the understanding, you might write the book of our misery, and, believe me, you’d have an inexhaustible reservoir upon which to

draw.

“Before you came out you had a different notion of Australia? Exactly! Folk who live sixteen thousand miles away, and own bank–books and fat stomachs, have one idea of it; while we, who exist like Esau, in the Red Sand itself, if you approached us properly, would give quite another. Now, I knew of a case once—but I beg your pardon!

“That old hut at the Creek Bend you passed at mid–day? Three black posts and a wreck of charred timber, yellow boulders against an umber cliff, and two dingoe pups rioting on the threshold—isn’t that the picture?

“Well, if you think it dreary and lonesome to–day, try and imagine it when it was the furthest boundary west, with only the Great Unknown between the ranges at our back and the Timor Sea.

“For reasons which could not interest you, I was the first to live there. Curiously enough, my hut–keeper was also of our caste. By nationality he was a Hungarian, and in addition to other things, he was a studious disciple of Goethe, and the finest zither player I have ever heard. It’s about his connection with that hut that I wish to tell you.

“As men seldom quarrel when ambition has gone out of their lives, for a year we came as near a certain sort of happiness as a remorseless Heaven would permit. Then everything suddenly changed.

“One day, after a long stretch of dry weather that looked almost like settling in for a drought, welcome storm–clouds gathered in the west, and night closed in with a vigorous downpour. The creek, which for months past had been merely a chain of half–dry waterholes, began to trickle briskly round its bends, and in the morning had risen to the size of a respectable torrent. Next day, Thursday, it was a banker, and still the rain continued. By Friday evening the flood was upon us. And such a flood as you never in your life saw or dreamed of!

“To give you some idea of its size, you must imagine this plain, from the mountains behind you to the scrub yonder, one vast sheet of foaming, roaring, rushing, eddying water.

“Opposite the old hut we are talking of it was many miles in width, and for more than a week we were hemmed in upon a tiny island (the hut stands on a slight elevation, as you perhaps have observed), with the waters drawing a line of yeast–like foam daily closer and closer to our door. There was no escape, and I doubt if either of us would have taken advantage of it if there had been.

“Morning, noon, and night, the flood went roaring and rushing by, carrying on its bosom forest trees, and hopeless beasts of all sorts, sizes, and descriptions. And each moment saw us waiting for the lip–lap upon the threshold which should signal the destruction of the hut and our immediate departure for Eternity!

“Now you must remember that in life there is no such thing as chance. Every existence has its allotted span, and to avoid the pre–ordained termination is impossible for any man. You may smile, but I am convinced that what I say is correct, and this is a case in point.

“On the ninth night of our imprisonment we were sitting in our one room, trying to keep

warm, and listening to the storm outside. The wind, moaning through the logs, played with the firelight and threw a thousand fantastic shadows on the rough–hewn walls.

“When life carries no future for a man, you will readily understand that he becomes callous, even as to the means of his death; so, even with destruction hovering over him, Yadeski sought company in his music. Drawing his zither from its case, he laid it on the table and allowed his fingers to stray across the strings. The sweet, sad melody that followed lent an air of almost reverence to the bare walls and homeless aspect of the room.

“The storm outside yelled and muttered by turns; but, heedless of it, he played on, wandering from the folk–songs of the old grey Magyar villages to the pæans of victorious hunters, from mighty trampling war–chants to tender, crooning cradle–songs.

“Suddenly a shout rang out clear and distinct above the storm. It was the cry of a man who, feeling the hand of Death clutching at his weasand, knows that unless help comes quickly that grip will tighten and his life go from him. Before he could call again, we had rushed into the storm.

“The wind blew a hurricane, the waters snarled at the tiny hill and rolled in black waves, that might almost have been taken for the sea, to our feet. Battling in the direction whence the sound proceeded, Yadeski called with all the strength of his lungs. His voice, however, was lost in the general turmoil. But at the same instant, as if in answer, a white face rose through the foam not a dozen paces from our feet. Yadeski instantly plunged in, the face vanished, and for a moment I lost sight of both. Then they rose within an arm’s length of where I stood, and I went in and dragged them out—the working of Fate, mind you!

“Between us we carried the stranger to our hut and laid him before the fire.

“For more than an hour, despite our exertions, he remained unconscious; then his eyes slowly opened, and in a few moments his power of speech returned to him. Two words escaped his lips, and when he heard them my hut–keeper fell back against the wall with ashen face.

“A soft sleep followed the return to consciousness, and I turned into my bunk. Yadeski, however, sat gazing into the fire with an expression on his face I could not, for the life of me, understand. All night he must have kept the same position; but when the sun rose he shook himself together and set about his preparation of the morning meal.

“By the light of day I saw that the stranger was a young man of prepossessing appearance. He explained that he was a Hungarian, and had only been in Australia a month. From what I could gather he was travelling to some new country that had lately been taken up further to the north–west. When crossing the river, which, by reason of the floods, was very much congested, the waters had separated him from his party and had washed his horse from under him. He was carried mile after mile battling for life, spent half a day in a tree, which was eventually washed from under him, was borne out into the main stream, and, but for our timely assistance, would soon have been a dead man.

“I hope I am not wearying you?

“Well, day after day the flood continued, and for more than a week our chance guest was compelled to remain with us. Then the waters fell as quickly as they had risen, and when the safety of the track was once more assured, he decided to resume his journey.

“The night before he left us we were sitting round the fire listening to Yadeski’s music. As was his custom, he wandered from air to air, seemingly unconscious of our presence.

“The stranger listened with his eyes full of an insatiable hunger.

“From gentlest pianissimo the music rose to a wild, fierce note of despair. An unearthly pathos seized the instrument—an inexplicable, yet intense longing, a vague desire for something unattainable, took possession of us. Then the music ceased abruptly, the spell was broken, and the younger man, springing to his feet, cried, in a voice tremulous with excitement,—

“‘Oh, where, tell me where you learned that dreadful air?’

“The musician did not answer, but sat gazing into the fire. Shaking him by the shoulder, the younger man repeated his question till, as one in a dream, Yadeski muttered,—

“‘Many years ago, far from here. What does it matter?’

“‘Matter! Why, man, it was that air that brought me out here; it was that cursed air that killed my—’ But he stopped, and leaned against the wall.

“‘Let me tell you why I asked you that question,’ he said at length, when he had recovered his calmness. ‘We spoke to–night of Buda. I was born within ten miles of it, the eldest of a family of eight. Our farm was as good land as any in the district, and we had held it under the Counts Romanyi for centuries. My father, I must tell you, died when I was only nine years old, and so my mother, who was famous through the district for her beauty and her zither–playing, was left alone to look after us.

“‘One evening while she sat playing, as was her custom, at our cottage door, the Count passed, and, hearing her music, stopped to buy a glass of milk. He was an accomplished musician himself, and at his request she played to him. Then, after saying many pretty things, and distributing a handful of coins from his pocket among us children, he rode away.

“‘Next day he came again, and the next, and so on, day by day, till we children, who had hitherto feared his name more than God’s, grew so bold that we could quite look upon him as one of ourselves.

“‘Ah, how well I remember the night he played that hellish air for the first time! I can see the drift–smoke lying low upon the land, and smell the smell of the pines floating down the mountain–side. I can see my mother sitting, watching, and listening like one spellbound. It must have been the music of the devil, for it ate into her heart, and the same day a week later, a neighbour came to tell us that our mother would not come back to us again.

“‘Six years after, when I was almost a man, she returned. I can remember that homecoming as if it were but yesterday.

“‘It was a night late in winter, and the young moon was shining faintly above the snow. A knocking came to the door, and I opened it upon a heap of rags—my mother!

“‘She died with the dawn, but not before she had told me everything. I want now to meet the Count. I have sworn that the hour I come face to face with him shall be his last!

Wouldn’t you do the same?’

“Yadeski’s head had sunk on his outstretched arms, and, but for a certain tremulous movement of his shoulders, he might well have been asleep. I lay in the shadow of my bunk, wondering what it all might mean.

“‘I commenced my search in Vienna, where he had a house; but it seems he was in serious trouble with the Government, and had fled from Austria. I followed him to Italy, to England, and to America, but in vain. I have continued it all over the world; but I do not despair, for I am certain that, sooner or later, God will lead me to his side.’

“Controlling his voice with an effort, Yadeski asked,—

“‘And what then?’

“‘Ah! what then? But I fear I have wearied you with my story. I am sorry. Good–night!’

“He dropped on to his blankets, curled himself up, and spoke no more. Only the crackling of the burning logs disturbed the silence.

“Just before dawn I was awakened by the sound of gentlest music—the same weird melody we had heard earlier in the evening. It began, but was never finished.

“Unseen by us, a thick glaze was creeping over the player’s eyes, and his supple fingers were stiffening in the grasp of Death. The music grew fainter, and still more faint, until finally it merged itself into a thick, monotonous drip—drip—drip, which caught the first red signs of day as they stole into us under the old hut door.

“Then there was a curiously heavy sob, and a half–turn of the musician’s figure. After which a long, keen–bladed knife fell from the table, and the clatter roused us both to action.

“But Yadeski was beyond the reach of human vengeance. He had severed a vein in his arm, and so bled peacefully to death. *Quo cunque nomine de mortuis nil nisi bonum loqua.*

“See, here comes the moon, and the wind with her. You’d better take this extra blanket. It will be cold before dawn.

“Hark! The horses have crossed the creek and are making towards the hut we’ve just been talking of. They will be miles away in the morning. Never mind! Good–night!”

Mr. Aristocrat

"'Shepherd, what's love? I pray thee tell.'
'It is that fountain and that well
Where pleasure and repentance dwell;
It is perhaps that sauncing bell
That tolls us all to heaven or hell,
And this is love as I heard tell.'"

—Sir Walter Raleigh.

The Australian Bush is pre–eminently a charnel–house of human lives, and therefore of the affections. Innumerable histories, neatly folded up and hidden away in the by–places of the great island continent, labelled *Not wanted till the Judgment Day*, will prove this indisputably. When Gabriel's trump shall call the sleepers from their resting–places in the shadows of the frowning mountains, in the long, grey gullies, and from the deserts and hopeless open plains, Australia's Bush contingent will be among the saddest and most miserable to face the Judgment Throne. "Mr. Aristocrat" will be there, and his case alone will be worth hearing.

At the time I'm going to tell you about we were pushing out to new country at the head of the Flinders River, in Northern Queensland, and when three camps this side of our destination, horses and men knocked up, things began to look the very reverse of cheering. Night was coming on; the cold wind murmured among the rocks, and the high cane–grass bowed its head before it, whispering, "Weep, weep, weep." Then the full moon soared over the gaunt shoulders of the hills that peaked up into the lonely sky, and as she rose, we saw in front of us the lights of Mintabera Head Station.

To come across a dwelling in such a wilderness was a stroke of good fortune we did not expect. We rode up, made ourselves and our errand known, and were hospitably received. The manager, who came out to greet us, was a middle–aged man, very tall and broad–shouldered. He was also very quiet and reserved, which may or may not have been because he had been cut off from the doubtful advantages of civilization for so many years. He took me into the house and set his best before me. After dinner we lit our pipes, and sat talking in the verandah until about nine o'clock, when I craved permission to retire. My host accompanied me to my room, and before saying "good–night," surprised me by inquiring if I was to be easily frightened. Asking "By what?" he replied, "By anything; by noises you might hear, or things you might see."

On my assuring him that I thought my nerves were equal to a considerable strain, he left me to puzzle it out alone.

I was more mystified than I cared to own, and to tell the honest truth, I crawled into bed, half wishing that, after all, we had camped in the gully, as had been at first proposed. But, as nothing out of the common occurred for fully half an hour, I rolled over, and was soon in the land of dreams.

It must have been about midnight when I was suddenly awakened and brought up to a sitting posture by a scream, so terrible, so unearthly, that I could compare it to nothing I had ever heard before. Three times it rang out shrill and distinct upon the still night–air, and at each repetition my heart thumped with a new violence against my ribs, and the perspiration rolled in streams down my face. Then came the words (it was certainly a woman's voice), "They're coming! they're coming! Will nobody save me?" Leaping out of bed, I huddled on my clothes, seized a revolver, and rushed across the verandah in the direction whence I thought the sound proceeded.

It was a glorious night, and the moon shone full and clear into the room where we had dined; but, before I could look in and satisfy my curiosity, my arm was seized from behind, and turning, I confronted the manager.

"Hush, hush!" he whispered. "Not a word, for God's sake. Watch and listen!"

He pointed into the room, and my eyes followed the direction of his hand.

In the centre, looking straight before her, rigid as a marble statue, every muscle braced for action, stood the most beautiful and majestic woman I have ever seen in my life. To the stateliness of a Greek goddess she united the beauty of a Cleopatra. Her eyes rivetted my attention; they seemed to blaze from their sockets; her expression was that of a tigress wounded and waiting for the death–stroke. But her hair was the most weird part of her appearance, for it hung in glorious profusion down to her waist, and was white as the driven snow.

When we looked she had paused for a moment, as if listening, and then came that awful blood–curdling cry again:—

"They're coming! they're coming! Will nobody save me?"

It was so horrible that my blood felt as if it were freezing into solid ice. However, before I could pull myself together, her whole demeanour had changed, and she was kneeling on the floor kissing and caressing something she believed to be beneath her. Then, gradually, her voice died away in heart–rending sobs, and at this juncture my host went in and lifted her up. She seemed to have lost all power of recognition, and allowed him to lead her in a dazed sort of way to her room.

As he passed me the manager whispered, "Wait here!"

On his return, he led me across the verandah and into the garden. When we were out of hearing of the house, and leaning on the slip–rails of the horse paddock he told me the following extraordinary story, and the glorious night and the long sighing night–breeze sweeping down from the mountains seemed a fitting accompaniment to his tale.

"Fourteen years ago," he said, "by God's ordinance and with the blessing of the Church of England, I married that woman whom you saw just now in there.

"All my family were against it from the beginning. They had no name and no story bad enough for her. One said she bore a most suspicious character; another, that she had a temper like a fiend; but the principal charge against her was that she had been a governess in a certain nobleman's household, and had been the cause of the eldest son's leaving home. However, I didn't care for anything they said; I was madly in love, and I believe I

would have married her if she had been proved to have been the vilest wretch unhung.

“After we’d been married a month or so she begged me to sell my bit of a farm in Somersetshire and take her to Australia.

“Accordingly, I got rid of the place that had been in our family for centuries, and having packed up, set off, nearly breaking my old mother’s heart by doing so.

“Arriving in Sydney, I took a small house down Bondi way, and made myself comfortable; but I couldn’t be idle long, so after properly providing for her happiness there, I said good–bye to her for a while, and came into the Bush. Every time I could get a holiday I’d run down to Sydney, and I believe, in a way, she was glad to see me, though her manner was never anything but cold.

“By–and–by I drifted into Queensland, worked my way north, and then got the management of this place. You must remember that it was almost unknown country out here then, and what with blacks and wild dogs, want of water, and ignorance of the lay of the land, I had troubles enough to drive a man crazy. Before we had been here a year we were very hard pushed for men, and the owner sent me up a young Englishman, who, he said, was anxious to get as far out of the ken of the world as possible. I didn’t ask any questions, but made him as welcome as I could. He was a decent enough young fellow, tall, graceful, and very self–contained. Somehow, the hands took to calling him ‘Mr. Aristocrat,’ and the name fitted him like a glove. He came up with pack–horses, and among other letters he brought me one from my wife.

“‘She had grown hopelessly tired of Sydney and the south,’ she said, ‘and after mature consideration, was coming out to join me in the Bush.’

“I didn’t know what to do. We were too rough out here then for any decent woman. But as she had evidently started and couldn’t be stopped, we had to make the best of it, and accordingly up she came with the next bullock–teams.

“Poor idiot that I was, I thought it was the beginning of a new era in my life, and certainly for a week or two she seemed pleased to be with me again. But I was soon to be undeceived.

“About a month after her arrival I had reason to go out on the run for a few days, and it was necessary for me to take all the available hands with me. While rolling my swag close to the corner of the verandah, to my astonishment I heard my wife’s voice in the room within raised in tones of which I had never thought it capable. She was evidently beside herself with fury, and on stepping into the verandah, I could see that the object of her anger was none other than the young Englishman, ‘Mr. Aristocrat.’

“I tell you, sir, she was tongue–lashing that man as I never heard a woman do in my life before, and by the time I had stood there two minutes I had learnt enough to shatter all my hopes, to kill my happiness, and to convince me of her double–dyed treachery to myself.

“She paused for breath, and then began again:—

“‘So, you cowardly, snivelling hound,’ she hissed, with all the concentrated venom of a snake, ‘you thought you could sneak out of England, so that I shouldn’t know it, did you? But you couldn’t. You thought you could crawl out of Sydney so quietly that I shouldn’t

follow you—did you? But you couldn't. You thought you could run away up here to hide without my discovering and following your tracks—did you? But you couldn't. No! No!! No!!! Go where you will, my lord, even down to hell itself, and I'll track you there, to mock you, and to proclaim it so that all the world shall hear, that this is a pitiful coward who ruined a woman's life, and hadn't manhood enough in him to stand up and make it good to her.'

"The young fellow only covered his face with his hands, and said, 'O God! when will all this end?'

"'When you've done what you—' she was beginning again, but I could bear it no longer, so pushed my way into the room between them.

"When she saw me the expression on her face changed at once, and she came smiling to greet me like the Jezebel she was. But I wanted to have nothing to say to her, so I put her on one side and closed with *him*. He looked at me in a dazed sort of way for a moment. But only for that space of time. Then a sort of Baresark madness came over him, and he sprang upon me like a fiend. All the time we fought she sat watching us with the same awful smile upon her face. When I had nearly killed him I ordered him off the station, and, without a word to her, fled the house.

"That day we made a good stage on our journey, and by nightfall were camped alongside the Cliff Lagoon (you'll probably camp there to–morrow evening). I sought my blankets early, and, about an hour before daylight, being unable to sleep, went out into the scrub to find and run in the horses. On my return to the camp, I discovered one of the station black boys, alongside the fire, jabbering and gesticulating wildly to an excited audience. As I came up he was saying,—

"'So, my word, I look; him *baal budgerie* black fellah along a' station. Bang—bang—bang! him plenty dead white fellah.'

"There was no need for him to say more. I knew what it meant. And in less time than it takes to tell we were on the road back, galloping like madmen over rough or smooth country, regardless of everything but the need for haste. In less than two hours we dashed up to the yards, those you see down yonder, just in time to drive off the black brutes as they were rushing the house.

"You will understand for yourself what a close shave it was when I tell you that when we arrived the roof of the homestead was half burnt through, while the hut and outhouse had long since been reduced to ashes. The bodies of the old cook, and a tame black boy, named Rocca, lay dead in the open—speared while running for the hut. It was a horrible sight, and enough to turn a man sick, but I hadn't time to think of *them*. I was looking for my wife; and until I heard a cry and recognised her voice I thought she must be dead. Then, as I pushed open the half–burnt door of the station–house (the brutes had thrown fire–sticks everywhere), she shrieked out as you heard her to–night.

"'They're coming! they're coming! Will nobody save me?' When I entered the room she was kneeling in the centre, surrounded by broken furniture and portions of the smouldering roof, wringing her hands, and wailing over a body on the floor.

"Though she was begrimed with dirt, smoke, and blood, she looked surpassingly beautiful;

but—I don't know whether you will believe me—the terrors of that night had turned her hair snow–white, just as it is to–day. The overseer led her to a seat, and I knelt beside the body on the floor. It was 'Mr. Aristocrat.'

"He was well–nigh dead; it needed no doctor's knowledge to see that. He lay in a large pool of blood, and breathed with difficulty; but after I had given him water he revived sufficiently to tell me what had happened.

"It appeared he had left the station as I had ordered him; but, as he went, his suspicions were aroused by the number of smoke–signals going up from the surrounding hills. Knowing they meant mischief, he kept his eyes open, and when, before dark, he saw a tribe of blacks creeping up the valley, he remembered that, save the cook and a black boy, the woman was alone, and made back on his tracks as fast as he was able. But he was too late; they had already surrounded the building, and had killed the two men we found lying in the open. Then he heard the woman's shriek, and forgot everything but the fact that she must be saved.

"Racing across the open, he made a dash for the house. She saw his sacrifice and opened the door, but not before two spears were sticking in his side. Plucking them out, he set to work to defend her.

"Fortunately, I had left a rifle and plenty of ammunition behind me; so all through that sweltering, awful night he fought them inch by inch, with his wounds draining his life–blood out of him, to save the woman who had wrecked his life. By God, sir! whatever he may have been earlier, he was a brave man then, and I honour him for it! By his own telling he killed three of them. Then as day was breaking, a part of the roof fell in, and he received another spear through the broken door. This brought him to the ground; and at that moment we arrived, and drove the devils off.

"With his last strength, he drew me down to him and whispered that on his dying word he had always acted honourably towards me; and that, in spite of her tempting, he had never yielded to her. By the God before whose throne he was just about to stand, he swore this; and upon my honour, sir, I believe he spoke the truth.

"When he had finished speaking, she rose and mocked him, calling me fool and idiot for listening to his raving. Then, for the first and last time in my life, I threatened her, and she was silent.

"As the sun rose and pierced the smouldering roof, 'Mr. Aristocrat' whispered, "I want you to do me a favour. I want you to tell them at home that I forgive them. They misjudged me, you see, and it will make things a bit easier for my mother."

"Then, with that sacred name upon his lips, he passed quietly away from the scene of his sacrifice into the mysteries of the world beyond.

"When he was dead, the woman that is my wife crawled from the place where she lay, and threw herself upon the body, moaning as if her heart would break. We took her away. But from that day forward her reason was gone.

"Ever since that time, at the same hour, night after night, year after year, she has gone through that awful tragedy in the old room yonder; and with the loneliness of this life around me, I have to hear and bear it. The strangest part of it is that I haven't the heart to

put her away from me.

“Now you understand the meaning of the scene you witnessed to–night, and you can see in my case the fulfilment of the Church’s order, ‘Whom God hath joined, let no man put asunder!’”

We walked back to the house together, and he left me at my bedroom door; but though I went back to my bed, had I been offered the gold of all the Indies I could not have slept a wink.

Next morning our horses were run up, and after breakfast we set off on our way again. When we had travelled about a mile, the manager, who was riding a short distance with us for company’s sake, led me off the track to a grassy knoll beside a creek bend. Here, under a fine coolabah, I discovered a neatly fenced–in grave.

Beneath the tree, and at the head of the little mound, was a small white board, and on it were these two words,—

”*Mr. Aristocrat.*”

This Man and This Woman

"What matters Life, what matters Death,
What boots of vain remorse?
When days are dead, wherein we lived,
Our hearts should die—*of course*!"

—*Song of the Vain Regret.*

First and foremost it must be understood that when men and women cross the Borderland of Discretion into that Never–never Country where wedding–rings are forgotten and family correspondence abruptly ceases, they do so, believing it to be unlikely that they will ever meet any one out of the old life again.

This fallacy may be attributed to one of two things: either to an insufficient knowledge of their world, or to an exaggerated idea of their own exclusiveness. The first is the more common, but the one is as fatal as the other.

It is quite possible, after such a lapse of time, that no one will remember the "Clitheroe, Gwynne–Harden" episode. Yet it made a great stir at the time. Clitheroe, I fancy, was in the army; while the woman was the wife of Gwynne–Harden, the banker. She came of good family, was intensely proud, and, among other things, of more or less account, had the reputation of being the acknowledged beauty of that season.

Clitheroe and The Other Man's Wife were unwise to the borders of madness. For had they been content to worship each other according to society's certificated code—surely sufficiently elastic—no trouble would have ensued. But, for some reason or other, they were not satisfied to jog along in the ordinary way; but must needs meet in all sorts of hole–and–corner places, correspond in cipher, and send letters by hand, rather than by post. Naturally, people talked, and the scandal, by its obtrusiveness, became proverbial. All through the season they were in each other's pockets, and during Goodwood week, after a period of sentimental shilly–shallying, they disappeared for ever and a day.

Gwynne–Harden, though it was said he loved his wife with an exceeding great love, was a philosopher in his own way. After the first shock he made no attempt to find her; on the other hand, he put the money the search would have cost him into Bolivian Rails, a doubtful, but still a better, investment, he said. Having done this, he placed all the belongings she had left behind her in an attic under lock and key, bought a new brand of cigars, and endeavoured to forget all about her.

Four years later he went into the House, where he managed to interest himself in Colonial affairs. Moreover, he had the sense to stick to his work, and leave female society alone. He was a shrewd, cynical man, with taste for epigram, and said to himself, "I am matrimonial Mahomet, for the reason that, because I refuse to apply for a divorce, I hover between a possible heaven and an accomplished hell." Which was a bitter, but, under the circumstances, perhaps excusable speech.

Now, here comes the part of the story I am anxious to dwell upon. Three years after the exodus just narrated, being desirous of extending his political information, Gwynne–Harden set out for Australia with a sheaf of introductions in his despatch–box. Downing Street busied herself on his behalf, and, in consequence, Her Majesty's representatives were politely instructed to yield him all the assistance in their power. It is well to be a Somebody in the land, and, as any globe–trotter will inform you, a Vice–Regal introduction is a lever by no means to be despised.

When the Governor of a certain Colony had banqueted, fêted, and endeavoured to turn his guest inside out for his own purposes, he handed him over to the tender mercies of his Colonial Secretary, or whatever you call the leader of the gang then in power.

This gentleman had his own opinions on the subject of globe–trotters, and argued that the majority were shown too much in order that they might absorb too little. Therefore, he said he would take Gwynne–Harden under his protection, and enact Gamaliel in his own way.

To this end he lured his victim into a lengthy driving tour through the squatting districts, in order that he might see the backbone of the country for himself and form his own conclusions. The idea was ingenuous in the main, but because he had left all consideration of the past out of his calculations it failed entirely in its purpose. Even Colonial Secretaries are powerless against Fate.

As they proceeded from station to station on their route, they were received with that hospitality for which the Australian Bush is so justly famous. And, like the proverbial owl, Gwynne–Harden said little, but thought the more.

Between three and four o'clock one roasting afternoon, the travellers saw, on the rise before them, the charming homestead of Woodnooro Station. The Colonial Secretary looked forward to a pleasant visit, for he had stayed there before.

They resigned their buggy to the care of a black boy in the horse–paddock, and as they approached the house, the Secretary explained to Gwynne–Harden all the good things he knew of the owner and his wife. He devoted considerable space to his description of the latter, and in answer the banker smiled grimly.

* * * * *

Leaving the small flower–garden behind them, they enter a cool stone verandah, where a lady rises from a long cane chair to greet them. The Colonial Secretary dashes forward to take her hand….

Colonial Secretary … "Mr. Gwynne–Harden—Mrs. Chichester."

Mrs. Chichester (as white as a ghost, vainly feeling for the wall behind her with her left hand, while she fumbles at her collar with her right): "Mr. Gwynne–Harden!" (Then slowly and with prodigious exertion): "I—I—I'm—I hope you are very well."

Mr. Gwynne–Harden (with a curious expression in his face, which the Colonial Secretary attributes to nervousness): "Extremely well, I thank you!"

Colonial Secretary: "I am looking forward to having the pleasure of introducing Mr. Gwynne–Harden to your husband, Mrs. Chichester."

Mrs. Chichester (with a supreme effort): “I’m sorry to say my husband is camped on the run at present.”

Mr. Gwynne–Harden: “Then I must await his return with proper patience. *I shall be delighted to meet him, I am sure.* Mrs. Chichester, is anything the matter?”

Mrs. Chichester (still fumbling at her neck): “No, no—r—r—really nothing. I feel the heat very much, that is all. Won’t you come inside?” (Rises and leads the way into the dining–room, where she unlocks a sideboard, and puts whisky on the table.) “I’m sure you must need some refreshment after your long and hot drive.”

Colonial Secretary (enthusiastically, pointing to a creeper through the door)…. “By Jove! look here, Harden; isn’t this perfect? I challenge you to find its equal anywhere—the *Buginvillea Speciosa* in all its glory. Ah! I beg your pardon, Mrs. Chichester.”

Mrs. Chichester (passing him): “Thank you. If you will excuse me, I think I will go and see about your rooms.” [*Exits across verandah.*]

The Colonial Secretary solemnly takes to himself a whisky–peg, while Gwynne–Harden, turning his back, fixes his eye–glass and critically examines two photos on the mantelpiece.

Colonial Secretary (warmly, referring to their hostess): “Egad, Harden, what would many men give for a wife like that?”

Mr. Gwynne–Harden (dropping his eye–glass, and facing round): “What, indeed!”

They adjourn to the verandah, where enter to them a small and very dirty child, presumably a boy, who scrutinizes both men carefully before venturing near.

Mr. Gwynne–Harden: “Ah, my little man, and pray what may your name be?”

Child: “Jack ‘Ister.”

Colonial Secretary: “Anglisé—Jack Chichester. He is a fine boy, and typical of the country. Come here, Jack. How old are you?”

Child: “I’se free—Baby’s one.”

Mr. Gwynne–Harden: “So there’s a baby, too, eh?”

Mrs. Chichester (appearing at the end of the verandah): “Jack, it’s your bed–time. Say good–night, and come along at once.”

Jack goes to Gwynne–Harden, and holds up his face to be kissed; but the honour is declined. The Colonial Secretary accepts it effusively. Then mother and child disappear together.

Colonial Secretary (laughingly): “You don’t seem fond of kissing children!”

Mr. Gwynne–Harden: “Not other people’s children, thank you!”

Colonial Secretary (who has never heard the scandal, to himself): “I wonder if there’s a Mrs. Gwynne–Harden?”

* * * * *

The quarter of an hour preceding dinner. Gwynne–Harden is standing with his hands on the chimney–piece, looking into the empty fireplace. To him enter Mrs. Chichester.

Mrs. Chichester (advancing): “George! George—for myself I ask nothing; but for my children’s sakes. Oh, George, be merciful!”

Mr. Gwynne–Harden (turning): “Mrs. Chichester, I beg your pardon ten thousand times for not seeing you enter. This light is so deceptive, perhaps you thought I was your husband!”

Mrs. Chichester: “George, have you forgotten me?”

Mr. Gwynne–Harden: “My dear *Mrs. Chichester*, pray let me turn up the lamp, then you will see whom you are addressing. I am Mr. Gwynne–Harden, and if you will pardon my saying so, I don’t remember ever having seen your face before. If I have, I have been rude enough to forget the circumstance. *Your husband’s* acquaintance I shall—”

Mrs. Chichester: “What of my husband?”

Mr. Gwynne–Harden: “Only that I shall hope to meet him face to face very soon.”

Enter the Colonial Secretary simultaneously with dinner.

* * * * *

10 p.m., the same evening. Scene—Gwynne–Harden’s bedroom. He divests himself of his coat and waistcoat, and having done so, discovers a note addressed to himself upon the table. He reads it, and then looks long and fixedly at his own reflection in the glass.

Mr. Gwynne–Harden (tearing the note into a hundred pieces): “Humph! This is certainly the Nineteenth Century—well, I’ll sleep on it.”

* * * * *

Next morning the Colonial Secretary and his companion, without any apparent reason, changed their plans and continued their journey. When the buggy was at the door and the latter came to bid his hostess farewell, he said,—

“I am very sorry that we are compelled to go, for I shall not have an opportunity now of meeting your husband, Mrs. Chichester. And as I leave for England in a month, *it is improbable that we shall ever meet*!”

To this speech Mrs. Chichester, so the Colonial Secretary thought, rather illogically said, —

“God bless you!”