



THE MIRROR OF THE SEA

JOSEPH CONRAD

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**THE
MIRROR OF THE SEA**

**BY
JOSEPH CONRAD**

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The Mirror Of The Sea By Joseph Conrad.

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impenetrable at night, like the face of a forest, is the London waterside. It is the waterside of watersides, where only one aspect of the world's life can be seen, and only one kind of men toils on the edge of the stream. The lightless walls seem to spring from the very mud upon which the stranded barges lie; and the narrow lanes coming down to the foreshore resemble the paths of smashed bushes and crumbled earth where big game comes to drink on the banks of tropical streams.

Behind the growth of the London waterside the docks of London spread out unsuspected, smooth, and placid, lost amongst the buildings like dark lagoons hidden in a thick forest. They lie concealed in the intricate growth of houses with a few stalks of mastheads here and there overtopping the roof of some four-story warehouse.

It is a strange conjunction this of roofs and mastheads, of walls and yard-arms. I remember once having the incongruity of the relation brought home to me in a practical way. I was the chief officer of a fine ship, just docked with a cargo of wool from Sydney, after a ninety days' passage. In fact, we had not been in more than half an hour and I was still busy making her fast to the stone posts of a very narrow quay in front of a lofty warehouse. An old man with a gray whisker under the chin and brass buttons on his pilot-cloth jacket, hurried up along the quay hailing my ship by name. He was one of those officials called berthing-masters — not the one who had berthed us, but another, who, apparently, had been busy securing a steamer at the other end of the dock. I could see from afar his hard blue eyes staring at us, as if fascinated, with a queer sort of absorption. I wondered what that worthy sea-dog had found to criticise in my ship's rigging. And I, too, glanced aloft anxiously. I could see nothing wrong there. But perhaps that superannuated fellow-craftsman was simply admiring the ship's perfect order aloft, I thought, with some secret pride; for the chief officer is responsible for his ship's appearance, and as to her outward condition, he is the man open to praise or blame. Meantime the old salt ("ex-coasting skipper" was writ large all over his person) had hobbled up alongside in his bumpy, shiny boots, and, waving an arm, short and thick like the flipper of a seal, terminated by a paw red as an uncooked beef-steak, addressed the poop in a muffled, faint, roaring voice, as if a sample of every North-Sea fog of his life had been permanently lodged in his throat: "Haul 'em round, Mr. Mate!" were his words. "If you don't look sharp, you'll have your

topgallant yards through the windows of that 'ere warehouse presently!" This was the only cause of his interest in the ship's beautiful spars. I own that for a time I was struck dumb by the bizarre associations of yard-arms and window-panes. To break windows is the last thing one would think of in connection with a ship's topgallant yard, unless, indeed, one were an experienced berthing-master in one of the London docks. This old chap was doing his little share of the world's work with proper efficiency. His little blue eyes had made out the danger many hundred yards off. His rheumatically feet, tired with balancing that squat body for many years upon the decks of small coasters, and made sore by miles of tramping upon the flagstones of the dock side, had hurried up in time to avert a ridiculous catastrophe. I answered him pettishly, I fear, and as if I had known all about it before.

"All right, all right! can't do everything at once."

He remained near by, muttering to himself till the yards had been hauled round at my order, and then raised again his foggy, thick voice:

"None too soon," he observed, with a critical glance up at the towering side of the warehouse. "That's a half-sovereign in your pocket, Mr. Mate. You should always look first how you are for them windows before you begin to breast in your ship to the quay."

It was good advice. But one cannot think of everything or foresee contacts of things apparently as remote as stars and hop-poles.

XXXII.

The view of ships lying moored in some of the older docks of London has always suggested to my mind the image of a flock of swans kept in the flooded backyard of grim tenement houses. The flatness of the walls surrounding the dark pool on which they float brings out wonderfully the flowing grace of the lines on which a ship's hull is built. The lightness of these forms, devised to meet the winds and the seas, makes, by contrast with the great piles of bricks, the chains and cables of their moorings appear very necessary, as if nothing less could prevent them from soaring upwards and over the roofs. The least puff of wind stealing round the corners of the dock buildings stirs these captives fettered to rigid shores. It is as if the soul of a ship were impatient of confinement. Those masted hulls, relieved of their cargo, become restless at the slightest hint of the wind's freedom. However tightly moored, they range a little at their berths, swaying imperceptibly the spire-like assemblages of cordage and spars. You can detect their impatience by watching the sway of the mastheads against the motionless, the soulless gravity of mortar and stones. As you pass alongside each hopeless prisoner chained to the quay, the slight grinding noise of the wooden fenders makes a sound of angry muttering. But, after all, it may be good for ships to go through a period of restraint and repose, as the restraint and self-communion of inactivity may be good for an unruly soul — not, indeed, that I mean to say that ships are unruly; on the contrary, they are faithful creatures, as so many men can testify. And faithfulness is a great restraint, the strongest bond laid upon the self-will of men and ships on this globe of land and sea.

This interval of bondage in the docks rounds each period of a ship's life with the sense of accomplished duty, of an effectively played part in the work of the world. The dock is the scene of what the world would think the most serious part in the light, bounding, swaying life of a ship. But there are docks and docks. The ugliness of some docks is appalling. Wild horses would not drag from me the name of a certain river in the north whose narrow estuary is inhospitable and dangerous, and whose docks are like a nightmare of dreariness and misery. Their dismal shores are studded thickly with scaffold-like, enormous timber structures, whose

lofty heads are veiled periodically by the infernal gritty night of a cloud of coal-dust. The most important ingredient for getting the world's work along is distributed there under the circumstances of the greatest cruelty meted out to helpless ships. Shut up in the desolate circuit of these basins, you would think a free ship would droop and die like a wild bird put into a dirty cage. But a ship, perhaps because of her faithfulness to men, will endure an extraordinary lot of ill-usage. Still, I have seen ships issue from certain docks like half-dead prisoners from a dungeon, bedraggled, overcome, wholly disguised in dirt, and with their men rolling white eyeballs in black and worried faces raised to a heaven which, in its smoky and soiled aspect, seemed to reflect the sordidness of the earth below. One thing, however, may be said for the docks of the Port of London on both sides of the river: for all the complaints of their insufficient equipment, of their obsolete rules, of failure (they say) in the matter of quick despatch, no ship need ever issue from their gates in a half-fainting condition. London is a general cargo port, as is only proper for the greatest capital of the world to be. General cargo ports belong to the aristocracy of the earth's trading places, and in that aristocracy London, as it is its way, has a unique physiognomy.

The absence of picturesqueness cannot be laid to the charge of the docks opening into the Thames. For all my unkind comparisons to swans and backyards, it cannot be denied that each dock or group of docks along the north side of the river has its own individual attractiveness.

Beginning with the cosy little St. Katherine's Dock, lying overshadowed and black like a quiet pool amongst rocky crags, through the venerable and sympathetic London Docks, with not a single line of rails in the whole of their area and the aroma of spices lingering between its warehouses, with their far-famed wine-cellars — down through the interesting group of West India Docks, the fine docks at Blackwall, on past the Galleons Reach entrance of the Victoria and Albert Docks, right down to the vast gloom of the great basins in Tilbury, each of those places of restraint for ships has its own peculiar physiognomy, its own expression. And what makes them unique and attractive is their common trait of being romantic in their usefulness.

In their way they are as romantic as the river they serve is unlike all the other commercial streams of the world. The cosiness of the St. Katherine's Dock, the old-world air of the London Docks, remain

impressed upon the memory. The docks down the river, abreast of Woolwich, are imposing by their proportions and the vast scale of the ugliness that forms their surroundings — ugliness so picturesque as to become a delight to the eye. When one talks of the Thames docks, “beauty” is a vain word, but romance has lived too long upon this river not to have thrown a mantle of glamour upon its banks.

The antiquity of the port appeals to the imagination by the long chain of adventurous enterprises that had their inception in the town and floated out into the world on the waters of the river. Even the newest of the docks, the Tilbury Dock, shares in the glamour conferred by historical associations. Queen Elizabeth has made one of her progresses down there, not one of her journeys of pomp and ceremony, but an anxious business progress at a crisis of national history. The menace of that time has passed away, and now Tilbury is known by its docks. These are very modern, but their remoteness and isolation upon the Essex marsh, the days of failure attending their creation, invested them with a romantic air. Nothing in those days could have been more striking than the vast, empty basins, surrounded by miles of bare quays and the ranges of cargo-sheds, where two or three ships seemed lost like bewitched children in a forest of gaunt, hydraulic cranes. One received a wonderful impression of utter abandonment, of wasted efficiency. From the first the Tilbury Docks were very efficient and ready for their task, but they had come, perhaps, too soon into the field. A great future lies before Tilbury Docks. They shall never fill a long-felt want (in the sacramental phrase that is applied to railways, tunnels, newspapers, and new editions of books). They were too early in the field. The want shall never be felt because, free of the trammels of the tide, easy of access, magnificent and desolate, they are already there, prepared to take and keep the biggest ships that float upon the sea. They are worthy of the oldest river port in the world.

And, truth to say, for all the criticisms flung upon the heads of the dock companies, the other docks of the Thames are no disgrace to the town with a population greater than that of some commonwealths.

The growth of London as a well-equipped port has been slow, while not unworthy of a great capital, of a great centre of distribution. It must not be forgotten that London has not the backing of great industrial districts

or great fields of natural exploitation. In this it differs from Liverpool, from Cardiff, from Newcastle, from Glasgow; and therein the Thames differs from the Mersey, from the Tyne, from the Clyde. It is an historical river; it is a romantic stream flowing through the centre of great affairs, and for all the criticism of the river's administration, my contention is that its development has been worthy of its dignity. For a long time the stream itself could accommodate quite easily the oversea and coasting traffic.

That was in the days when, in the part called the Pool, just below London Bridge, the vessels moored stem and stern in the very strength of the tide formed one solid mass like an island covered with a forest of gaunt, leafless trees; and when the trade had grown too big for the river there came the St. Katherine's Docks and the London Docks, magnificent undertakings answering to the need of their time.

The same may be said of the other artificial lakes full of ships that go in and out upon this high road to all parts of the world. The labour of the imperial waterway goes on from generation to generation, goes on day and night. Nothing ever arrests its sleepless industry but the coming of a heavy fog, which clothes the teeming stream in a mantle of impenetrable stillness.

After the gradual cessation of all sound and movement on the faithful river, only the ringing of ships' bells is heard, mysterious and muffled in the white vapour from London Bridge right down to the Nore, for miles and miles in a decrescendo tinkling, to where the estuary broadens out into the North Sea, and the anchored ships lie scattered thinly in the shrouded channels between the sand-banks of the Thames' mouth. Through the long and glorious tale of years of the river's strenuous service to its people these are its only breathing times.

PART 11: IN CAPTIVITY

XXXIII.

A ship in dock, surrounded by quays and the walls of warehouses, has the appearance of a prisoner meditating upon freedom in the sadness of a free spirit put under restraint. Chain cables and stout ropes keep her bound to stone posts at the edge of a paved shore, and a berthing-master, with brass buttons on his coat, walks about like a weather-beaten and ruddy gaoler, casting jealous, watchful glances upon the moorings that fetter a ship lying passive and still and safe, as if lost in deep regrets of her days of liberty and danger on the sea.

The swarm of renegades — dock-masters, berthing-masters, gatemen, and such like — appear to nurse an immense distrust of the captive ship's resignation. There never seem chains and ropes enough to satisfy their minds concerned with the safe binding of free ships to the strong, muddy, enslaved earth. "You had better put another bight of a hawser astern, Mr. Mate," is the usual phrase in their mouth. I brand them for renegades, because most of them have been sailors in their time. As if the infirmities of old age — the gray hair, the wrinkles at the corners of the eyes, and the knotted veins of the hands — were the symptoms of moral poison, they prowl about the quays with an underhand air of gloating over the broken spirit of noble captives. They want more fenders, more breasting-ropes; they want more springs, more shackles, more fetters; they want to make ships with volatile souls as motionless as square blocks of stone. They stand on the mud of pavements, these degraded sea-dogs, with long lines of railway-trucks clanking their couplings behind their backs, and run malevolent glances over your ship from headgear to taffrail, only wishing to tyrannize over the poor creature under the hypocritical cloak of benevolence and care. Here and there cargo cranes looking like instruments of torture for ships swing cruel hooks at the end of long chains. Gangs of dock-labourers swarm with muddy feet over the gangways. It is a moving sight this, of so many men of the earth, earthy, who never cared anything for a ship, trampling unconcerned, brutal and hob-nailed upon her helpless body.

Fortunately, nothing can deface the beauty of a ship. That sense of a dungeon, that sense of a horrible and degrading misfortune overtaking a creature fair to see and safe to trust, attaches only to ships moored in the

docks of great European ports. You feel that they are dishonestly locked up, to be hunted about from wharf to wharf on a dark, greasy, square pool of black water as a brutal reward at the end of a faithful voyage.

A ship anchored in an open roadstead, with cargo-lighters alongside and her own tackle swinging the burden over the rail, is accomplishing in freedom a function of her life. There is no restraint; there is space: clear water around her, and a clear sky above her mastheads, with a landscape of green hills and charming bays opening around her anchorage. She is not abandoned by her own men to the tender mercies of shore people. She still shelters, and is looked after by, her own little devoted band, and you feel that presently she will glide between the headlands and disappear. It is only at home, in dock, that she lies abandoned, shut off from freedom by all the artifices of men that think of quick despatch and profitable freights. It is only then that the odious, rectangular shadows of walls and roofs fall upon her decks, with showers of soot.

To a man who has never seen the extraordinary nobility, strength, and grace that the devoted generations of ship-builders have evolved from some pure nooks of their simple souls, the sight that could be seen five-and-twenty years ago of a large fleet of clippers moored along the north side of the New South Dock was an inspiring spectacle. Then there was a quarter of a mile of them, from the iron dockyard-gates guarded by policemen, in a long, forest-like perspective of masts, moored two and two to many stout wooden jetties. Their spars dwarfed with their loftiness the corrugated-iron sheds, their jibbooms extended far over the shore, their white-and-gold figure-heads, almost dazzling in their purity, overhung the straight, long quay above the mud and dirt of the wharveside, with the busy figures of groups and single men moving to and fro, restless and grimy under their soaring immobility.

At tide-time you would see one of the loaded ships with battened-down hatches drop out of the ranks and float in the clear space of the dock, held by lines dark and slender, like the first threads of a spider's web, extending from her bows and her quarters to the mooring-posts on shore. There, graceful and still, like a bird ready to spread its wings, she waited till, at the opening of the gates, a tug or two would hurry in noisily, hovering round her with an air of fuss and solicitude, and take her out into the river, tending, shepherding her through open bridges,

through dam-like gates between the flat pier-heads, with a bit of green lawn surrounded by gravel and a white signal-mast with yard and gaff, flying a couple of dingy blue, red, or white flags.

This New South Dock (it was its official name), round which my earlier professional memories are centred, belongs to the group of West India Docks, together with two smaller and much older basins called Import and Export respectively, both with the greatness of their trade departed from them already. Picturesque and clean as docks go, these twin basins spread side by side the dark lustre of their glassy water, sparsely peopled by a few ships laid up on buoys or tucked far away from each other at the end of sheds in the corners of empty quays, where they seemed to slumber quietly remote, untouched by the bustle of men's affairs — in retreat rather than in captivity. They were quaint and sympathetic, those two homely basins, unfurnished and silent, with no aggressive display of cranes, no apparatus of hurry and work on their narrow shores. No railway-lines cumbered them. The knots of labourers trooping in clumsily round the corners of cargo-sheds to eat their food in peace out of red cotton handkerchiefs had the air of picnicking by the side of a lonely mountain pool. They were restful (and I should say very unprofitable), those basins, where the chief officer of one of the ships involved in the harassing, strenuous, noisy activity of the New South Dock only a few yards away could escape in the dinner-hour to stroll, unhampered by men and affairs, meditating (if he chose) on the vanity of all things human. At one time they must have been full of good old slow West Indiamen of the square-stern type, that took their captivity, one imagines, as stolidly as they had faced the buffeting of the waves with their blunt, honest bows, and disgorged sugar, rum, molasses, coffee, or logwood sedately with their own winch and tackle. But when I knew them, of exports there was never a sign that one could detect; and all the imports I have ever seen were some rare cargoes of tropical timber, enormous baulks roughed out of iron trunks grown in the woods about the Gulf of Mexico. They lay piled up in stacks of mighty boles, and it was hard to believe that all this mass of dead and stripped trees had come out of the flanks of a slender, innocent-looking little barque with, as likely as not, a homely woman's name — Ellen this or Annie that — upon her fine bows. But this is generally the case with a discharged cargo. Once spread

at large over the quay, it looks the most impossible bulk to have all come there out of that ship along-side.

They were quiet, serene nooks in the busy world of docks, these basins where it has never been my good luck to get a berth after some more or less arduous passage. But one could see at a glance that men and ships were never hustled there. They were so quiet that, remembering them well, one comes to doubt that they ever existed — places of repose for tired ships to dream in, places of meditation rather than work, where wicked ships — the cranky, the lazy, the wet, the bad sea boats, the wild steerers, the capricious, the pig-headed, the generally ungovernable — would have full leisure to take count and repent of their sins, sorrowful and naked, with their rent garments of sailcloth stripped off them, and with the dust and ashes of the London atmosphere upon their mastheads. For that the worst of ships would repent if she were ever given time I make no doubt. I have known too many of them. No ship is wholly bad; and now that their bodies that had braved so many tempests have been blown off the face of the sea by a puff of steam, the evil and the good together into the limbo of things that have served their time, there can be no harm in affirming that in these vanished generations of willing servants there never has been one utterly unredeemable soul.

In the New South Dock there was certainly no time for remorse, introspection, repentance, or any phenomena of inner life either for the captive ships or for their officers. From six in the morning till six at night the hard labour of the prison-house, which rewards the valiance of ships that win the harbour went on steadily, great slings of general cargo swinging over the rail, to drop plumb into the hatchways at the sign of the gangway-tender's hand. The New South Dock was especially a loading dock for the Colonies in those great (and last) days of smart wool-clippers, good to look at and — well — exciting to handle. Some of them were more fair to see than the others; many were (to put it mildly) somewhat over-masted; all were expected to make good passages; and of all that line of ships, whose rigging made a thick, enormous network against the sky, whose brasses flashed almost as far as the eye of the policeman at the gates could reach, there was hardly one that knew of any other port amongst all the ports on the wide earth but London and Sydney, or London and Melbourne, or London and Adelaide, perhaps with Hobart Town added for those of smaller tonnage. One could almost

have believed, as her gray-whiskered second mate used to say of the old Duke of S— — that they knew the road to the Antipodes better than their own skippers, who, year in, year out, took them from London — the place of captivity — to some Australian port where, twenty-five years ago, though moored well and tight enough to the wooden wharves, they felt themselves no captives, but honoured guests.

XXXIV.

These towns of the Antipodes, not so great then as they are now, took an interest in the shipping, the running links with "home," whose numbers confirmed the sense of their growing importance. They made it part and parcel of their daily interests. This was especially the case in Sydney, where, from the heart of the fair city, down the vista of important streets, could be seen the wool-clippers lying at the Circular Quay — no walled prison-house of a dock that, but the integral part of one of the finest, most beautiful, vast, and safe bays the sun ever shone upon. Now great steam-liners lie at these berths, always reserved for the sea aristocracy — grand and imposing enough ships, but here to-day and gone next week; whereas the general cargo, emigrant, and passenger clippers of my time, rigged with heavy spars, and built on fine lines, used to remain for months together waiting for their load of wool. Their names attained the dignity of household words. On Sundays and holidays the citizens trooped down, on visiting bent, and the lonely officer on duty solaced himself by playing the cicerone — especially to the citizenesses with engaging manners and a well-developed sense of the fun that may be got out of the inspection of a ship's cabins and state-rooms. The tinkle of more or less untuned cottage pianos floated out of open stern-ports till the gas-lamps began to twinkle in the streets, and the ship's night-watchman, coming sleepily on duty after his unsatisfactory day slumbers, hauled down the flags and fastened a lighted lantern at the break of the gangway. The night closed rapidly upon the silent ships with their crews on shore. Up a short, steep ascent by the King's Head pub., patronized by the cooks and stewards of the fleet, the voice of a man crying "Hot saveloys!" at the end of George Street, where the cheap eating-houses (sixpence a meal) were kept by Chinamen (Sun-kum-on's was not bad), is heard at regular intervals. I have listened for hours to this most pertinacious pedlar (I wonder whether he is dead or has made a fortune), while sitting on the rail of the old Duke of S—— (she's dead, poor thing! a violent death on the coast of New Zealand), fascinated by the monotony, the regularity, the abruptness of the recurring cry, and so exasperated at the absurd spell, that I wished the fellow would choke himself to death with a mouthful of his own infamous wares.

A stupid job, and fit only for an old man, my comrades used to tell me, to be the night-watchman of a captive (though honoured) ship. And generally the oldest of the able seamen in a ship's crew does get it. But sometimes neither the oldest nor any other fairly steady seaman is forthcoming. Ships' crews had the trick of melting away swiftly in those days. So, probably on account of my youth, innocence, and pensive habits (which made me sometimes dilatory in my work about the rigging), I was suddenly nominated, in our chief mate Mr. B——'s most sardonic tones, to that enviable situation. I do not regret the experience. The night humours of the town descended from the street to the waterside in the still watches of the night: larrikins rushing down in bands to settle some quarrel by a stand-up fight, away from the police, in an indistinct ring half hidden by piles of cargo, with the sounds of blows, a groan now and then, the stamping of feet, and the cry of "Time!" rising suddenly above the sinister and excited murmurs; night-prowlers, pursued or pursuing, with a stifled shriek followed by a profound silence, or slinking stealthily along-side like ghosts, and addressing me from the quay below in mysterious tones with incomprehensible propositions. The cabmen, too, who twice a week, on the night when the A.S.N. Company's passenger-boat was due to arrive, used to range a battalion of blazing lamps opposite the ship, were very amusing in their way. They got down from their perches and told each other impolite stories in racy language, every word of which reached me distinctly over the bulwarks as I sat smoking on the main-hatch. On one occasion I had an hour or so of a most intellectual conversation with a person whom I could not see distinctly, a gentleman from England, he said, with a cultivated voice, I on deck and he on the quay sitting on the case of a piano (landed out of our hold that very afternoon), and smoking a cigar which smelt very good. We touched, in our discourse, upon science, politics, natural history, and operatic singers. Then, after remarking abruptly, "You seem to be rather intelligent, my man," he informed me pointedly that his name was Mr. Senior, and walked off — to his hotel, I suppose. Shadows! Shadows! I think I saw a white whisker as he turned under the lamp-post. It is a shock to think that in the natural course of nature he must be dead by now. There was nothing to object to in his intelligence but a little dogmatism maybe. And his name was Senior! Mr. Senior!

The position had its drawbacks, however. One wintry, blustering, dark night in July, as I stood sleepily out of the rain under the break of the poop something resembling an ostrich dashed up the gangway. I say ostrich because the creature, though it ran on two legs, appeared to help its progress by working a pair of short wings; it was a man, however, only his coat, ripped up the back and flapping in two halves above his shoulders, gave him that weird and fowl-like appearance. At least, I suppose it was his coat, for it was impossible to make him out distinctly. How he managed to come so straight upon me, at speed and without a stumble over a strange deck, I cannot imagine. He must have been able to see in the dark better than any cat. He overwhelmed me with panting entreaties to let him take shelter till morning in our fore-castle. Following my strict orders, I refused his request, mildly at first, in a sterner tone as he insisted with growing impudence.

“For God’s sake let me, matey! Some of ’em are after me — and I’ve got hold of a ticker here.”

“You clear out of this!” I said.

“Don’t be hard on a chap, old man!” he whined pitifully.

“Now then, get ashore at once. Do you hear?”

Silence. He appeared to cringe, mute, as if words had failed him through grief; then — bang! came a concussion and a great flash of light in which he vanished, leaving me prone on my back with the most abominable black eye that anybody ever got in the faithful discharge of duty.

Shadows! Shadows! I hope he escaped the enemies he was fleeing from to live and flourish to this day. But his fist was uncommonly hard and his aim miraculously true in the dark.

There were other experiences, less painful and more funny for the most part, with one amongst them of a dramatic complexion; but the greatest experience of them all was Mr. B— — our chief mate himself.

He used to go ashore every night to foregather in some hotel’s parlour with his crony, the mate of the barque Cicero, lying on the other side of the Circular Quay. Late at night I would hear from afar their stumbling footsteps and their voices raised in endless argument. The mate of the Cicero was seeing his friend on board. They would continue their

senseless and muddled discourse in tones of profound friendship for half an hour or so at the shore end of our gangway, and then I would hear Mr. B—— insisting that he must see the other on board his ship. And away they would go, their voices, still conversing with excessive amity, being heard moving all round the harbour. It happened more than once that they would thus perambulate three or four times the distance, each seeing the other on board his ship out of pure and disinterested affection. Then, through sheer weariness, or perhaps in a moment of forgetfulness, they would manage to part from each other somehow, and by-and-by the planks of our long gangway would bend and creak under the weight of Mr. B—— coming on board for good at last.

On the rail his burly form would stop and stand swaying.

“Watchman!”

“Sir.”

A pause.

He waited for a moment of steadiness before negotiating the three steps of the inside ladder from rail to deck; and the watchman, taught by experience, would forbear offering help which would be received as an insult at that particular stage of the mate’s return. But many times I trembled for his neck. He was a heavy man.

Then with a rush and a thump it would be done. He never had to pick himself up; but it took him a minute or so to pull himself together after the descent.

“Watchman!”

“Sir.”

“Captain aboard?”

“Yes, sir.”

Pause.

“Dog aboard?”

“Yes, sir.”

Pause.

Our dog was a gaunt and unpleasant beast, more like a wolf in poor health than a dog, and I never noticed Mr. B—— at any other time show the slightest interest in the doings of the animal. But that question never failed.

“Let’s have your arm to steady me along.”

I was always prepared for that request. He leaned on me heavily till near enough the cabin-door to catch hold of the handle. Then he would let go my arm at once.

“That’ll do. I can manage now.”

And he could manage. He could manage to find his way into his berth, light his lamp, get into his bed — ay, and get out of it when I called him at half-past five, the first man on deck, lifting the cup of morning coffee to his lips with a steady hand, ready for duty as though he had virtuously slept ten solid hours — a better chief officer than many a man who had never tasted grog in his life. He could manage all that, but could never manage to get on in life.

Only once he failed to seize the cabin-door handle at the first grab. He waited a little, tried again, and again failed. His weight was growing heavier on my arm. He sighed slowly.

“D——n that handle!”

Without letting go his hold of me he turned about, his face lit up bright as day by the full moon.

“I wish she were out at sea,” he growled savagely.

“Yes, sir.”

I felt the need to say something, because he hung on to me as if lost, breathing heavily.

“Ports are no good — ships rot, men go to the devil!”

I kept still, and after a while he repeated with a sigh.

“I wish she were at sea out of this.”

“So do I, sir,” I ventured.

Holding my shoulder, he turned upon me.

“You! What’s that to you where she is? You don’t — drink.”

And even on that night he “managed it” at last. He got hold of the handle. But he did not manage to light his lamp (I don’t think he even tried), though in the morning as usual he was the first on deck, bull-necked, curly-headed, watching the hands turn-to with his sardonic expression and unflinching gaze.

I met him ten years afterwards, casually, unexpectedly, in the street, on coming out of my consignee office. I was not likely to have forgotten him with his “I can manage now.” He recognised me at once, remembered my name, and in what ship I had served under his orders. He looked me over from head to foot.

“What are you doing here?” he asked.

“I am commanding a little barque,” I said, “loading here for Mauritius.” Then, thoughtlessly, I added: “And what are you doing, Mr. B——?”

“I,” he said, looking at me unflinchingly, with his old sardonic grin — “I am looking for something to do.”

I felt I would rather have bitten out my tongue. His jet-black, curly hair had turned iron-gray; he was scrupulously neat as ever, but frightfully threadbare. His shiny boots were worn down at heel. But he forgave me, and we drove off together in a hansom to dine on board my ship. He went over her conscientiously, praised her heartily, congratulated me on my command with absolute sincerity. At dinner, as I offered him wine and beer he shook his head, and as I sat looking at him interrogatively, muttered in an undertone:

“I’ve given up all that.”

After dinner we came again on deck. It seemed as though he could not tear himself away from the ship. We were fitting some new lower rigging, and he hung about, approving, suggesting, giving me advice in his old manner. Twice he addressed me as “My boy,” and corrected himself quickly to “Captain.” My mate was about to leave me (to get married),

but I concealed the fact from Mr. B——. I was afraid he would ask me to give him the berth in some ghastly jocular hint that I could not refuse to take. I was afraid. It would have been impossible. I could not have given orders to Mr. B— — and I am sure he would not have taken them from me very long. He could not have managed that, though he had managed to break himself from drink — too late.

He said good-bye at last. As I watched his burly, bull-necked figure walk away up the street, I wondered with a sinking heart whether he had much more than the price of a night's lodging in his pocket. And I understood that if that very minute I were to call out after him, he would not even turn his head. He, too, is no more than a shadow, but I seem to hear his words spoken on the moonlit deck of the old Duke —:

“Ports are no good — ships rot, men go to the devil!”

PART 12: INITIATION

XXXV.

“Ships!” exclaimed an elderly seaman in clean shore togs. “Ships” — and his keen glance, turning away from my face, ran along the vista of magnificent figure-heads that in the late seventies used to overhang in a serried rank the muddy pavement by the side of the New South Dock — “ships are all right; it’s the men in ’em. . .”

Fifty hulls, at least, moulded on lines of beauty and speed — hulls of wood, of iron, expressing in their forms the highest achievement of modern ship-building — lay moored all in a row, stem to quay, as if assembled there for an exhibition, not of a great industry, but of a great art. Their colours were gray, black, dark green, with a narrow strip of yellow moulding defining their sheer, or with a row of painted ports decking in warlike decoration their robust flanks of cargo-carriers that would know no triumph but of speed in carrying a burden, no glory other than of a long service, no victory but that of an endless, obscure contest with the sea. The great empty hulls with swept holds, just out of dry-dock, with their paint glistening freshly, sat high-sided with ponderous dignity alongside the wooden jetties, looking more like unmovable buildings than things meant to go afloat; others, half loaded, far on the way to recover the true sea-physiognomy of a ship brought down to her load-line, looked more accessible. Their less steeply slanting gangways seemed to invite the strolling sailors in search of a berth to walk on board and try “for a chance” with the chief mate, the guardian of a ship’s efficiency. As if anxious to remain unperceived amongst their overtopping sisters, two or three “finished” ships floated low, with an air of straining at the leash of their level headfasts, exposing to view their cleared decks and covered hatches, prepared to drop stern first out of the labouring ranks, displaying the true comeliness of form which only her proper sea-trim gives to a ship. And for a good quarter of a mile, from the dockyard gate to the farthest corner, where the old housed-in hulk, the President (drill-ship, then, of the Naval Reserve), used to lie with her frigate side rubbing against the stone of the quay, above all these hulls, ready and unready, a hundred and fifty lofty masts, more or less, held out the web of their rigging like an immense net, in whose close mesh,

black against the sky, the heavy yards seemed to be entangled and suspended.

It was a sight. The humblest craft that floats makes its appeal to a seaman by the faithfulness of her life; and this was the place where one beheld the aristocracy of ships. It was a noble gathering of the fairest and the swiftest, each bearing at the bow the carved emblem of her name, as in a gallery of plaster-casts, figures of women with mural crowns, women with flowing robes, with gold fillets on their hair or blue scarves round their waists, stretching out rounded arms as if to point the way; heads of men helmeted or bare; full lengths of warriors, of kings, of statesmen, of lords and princesses, all white from top to toe; with here and there a dusky turbaned figure, bedizened in many colours, of some Eastern sultan or hero, all inclined forward under the slant of mighty bowsprits as if eager to begin another run of 11,000 miles in their leaning attitudes. These were the fine figure-heads of the finest ships afloat. But why, unless for the love of the life those effigies shared with us in their wandering impassivity, should one try to reproduce in words an impression of whose fidelity there can be no critic and no judge, since such an exhibition of the art of shipbuilding and the art of figure-head carving as was seen from year's end to year's end in the open-air gallery of the New South Dock no man's eye shall behold again? All that patient, pale company of queens and princesses, of kings and warriors, of allegorical women, of heroines and statesmen and heathen gods, crowned, helmeted, bare-headed, has run for good off the sea stretching to the last above the tumbling foam their fair, rounded arms; holding out their spears, swords, shields, tridents in the same unwearied, striving forward pose. And nothing remains but lingering perhaps in the memory of a few men, the sound of their names, vanished a long time ago from the first page of the great London dailies; from big posters in railway-stations and the doors of shipping offices; from the minds of sailors, dockmasters, pilots, and tugmen; from the hail of gruff voices and the flutter of signal flags exchanged between ships closing upon each other and drawing apart in the open immensity of the sea.

The elderly, respectable seaman, withdrawing his gaze from that multitude of spars, gave me a glance to make sure of our fellowship in the craft and mystery of the sea. We had met casually, and had got into contact as I had stopped near him, my attention being caught by the

same peculiarity he was looking at in the rigging of an obviously new ship, a ship with her reputation all to make yet in the talk of the seamen who were to share their life with her. Her name was already on their lips. I had heard it uttered between two thick, red-necked fellows of the semi-nautical type at the Fenchurch Street Railway-station, where, in those days, the everyday male crowd was attired in jerseys and pilot-cloth mostly, and had the air of being more conversant with the times of high-water than with the times of the trains. I had noticed that new ship's name on the first page of my morning paper. I had stared at the unfamiliar grouping of its letters, blue on white ground, on the advertisement-boards, whenever the train came to a standstill alongside one of the shabby, wooden, wharf-like platforms of the dock railway-line. She had been named, with proper observances, on the day she came off the stocks, no doubt, but she was very far yet from "having a name." Untried, ignorant of the ways of the sea, she had been thrust amongst that renowned company of ships to load for her maiden voyage. There was nothing to vouch for her soundness and the worth of her character, but the reputation of the building-yard whence she was launched headlong into the world of waters. She looked modest to me. I imagined her diffident, lying very quiet, with her side nestling shyly against the wharf to which she was made fast with very new lines, intimidated by the company of her tried and experienced sisters already familiar with all the violences of the ocean and the exacting love of men. They had had more long voyages to make their names in than she had known weeks of carefully tended life, for a new ship receives as much attention as if she were a young bride. Even crabbed old dock-masters look at her with benevolent eyes. In her shyness at the threshold of a laborious and uncertain life, where so much is expected of a ship, she could not have been better heartened and comforted, had she only been able to hear and understand, than by the tone of deep conviction in which my elderly, respectable seaman repeated the first part of his saying, "Ships are all right. . ."

His civility prevented him from repeating the other, the bitter part. It had occurred to him that it was perhaps indelicate to insist. He had recognised in me a ship's officer, very possibly looking for a berth like himself, and so far a comrade, but still a man belonging to that sparsely-

peopled after-end of a ship, where a great part of her reputation as a "good ship," in seaman's parlance, is made or marred.

"Can you say that of all ships without exception?" I asked, being in an idle mood, because, if an obvious ship's officer, I was not, as a matter of fact, down at the docks to "look for a berth," an occupation as engrossing as gambling, and as little favourable to the free exchange of ideas, besides being destructive of the kindly temper needed for casual intercourse with one's fellow-creatures.

"You can always put up with 'em," opined the respectable seaman judicially.

He was not averse from talking, either. If he had come down to the dock to look for a berth, he did not seem oppressed by anxiety as to his chances. He had the serenity of a man whose estimable character is fortunately expressed by his personal appearance in an unobtrusive, yet convincing, manner which no chief officer in want of hands could resist. And, true enough, I learned presently that the mate of the *Hyperion* had "taken down" his name for quarter-master. "We sign on Friday, and join next day for the morning tide," he remarked, in a deliberate, careless tone, which contrasted strongly with his evident readiness to stand there yarning for an hour or so with an utter stranger.

"*Hyperion*," I said. "I don't remember ever seeing that ship anywhere. What sort of a name has she got?"

It appeared from his discursive answer that she had not much of a name one way or another. She was not very fast. It took no fool, though, to steer her straight, he believed. Some years ago he had seen her in Calcutta, and he remembered being told by somebody then, that on her passage up the river she had carried away both her hawse-pipes. But that might have been the pilot's fault. Just now, yarning with the apprentices on board, he had heard that this very voyage, brought up in the Downs, outward bound, she broke her sheer, struck adrift, and lost an anchor and chain. But that might have occurred through want of careful tending in a tideway. All the same, this looked as though she were pretty hard on her ground-tackle. Didn't it? She seemed a heavy ship to handle, anyway. For the rest, as she had a new captain and a new mate this voyage, he understood, one couldn't say how she would turn out

In such marine shore-talk as this is the name of a ship slowly established, her fame made for her, the tale of her qualities and of her defects kept, her idiosyncrasies commented upon with the zest of personal gossip, her achievements made much of, her faults glossed over as things that, being without remedy in our imperfect world, should not be dwelt upon too much by men who, with the help of ships, wrest out a bitter living from the rough grasp of the sea. All that talk makes up her "name," which is handed over from one crew to another without bitterness, without animosity, with the indulgence of mutual dependence, and with the feeling of close association in the exercise of her perfections and in the danger of her defects.

This feeling explains men's pride in ships. "Ships are all right," as my middle-aged, respectable quartermaster said with much conviction and some irony; but they are not exactly what men make them. They have their own nature; they can of themselves minister to our self-esteem by the demand their qualities make upon our skill and their shortcomings upon our hardiness and endurance. Which is the more flattering exaction it is hard to say; but there is the fact that in listening for upwards of twenty years to the sea-talk that goes on afloat and ashore I have never detected the true note of animosity. I won't deny that at sea, sometimes, the note of profanity was audible enough in those chiding interpellations a wet, cold, weary seaman addresses to his ship, and in moments of exasperation is disposed to extend to all ships that ever were launched — to the whole everlastingly exacting brood that swims in deep waters. And I have heard curses launched at the unstable element itself, whose fascination, outlasting the accumulated experience of ages, had captured him as it had captured the generations of his forebears.

For all that has been said of the love that certain natures (on shore) have professed to feel for it, for all the celebrations it had been the object of in prose and song, the sea has never been friendly to man. At most it has been the accomplice of human restlessness, and playing the part of dangerous abettor of world-wide ambitions. Faithful to no race after the manner of the kindly earth, receiving no impress from valour and toil and self-sacrifice, recognising no finality of dominion, the sea has never adopted the cause of its masters like those lands where the victorious nations of mankind have taken root, rocking their cradles and setting up their gravestones. He — man or people — who, putting his trust in the

friendship of the sea, neglects the strength and cunning of his right hand, is a fool! As if it were too great, too mighty for common virtues, the ocean has no compassion, no faith, no law, no memory. Its fickleness is to be held true to men's purposes only by an undaunted resolution and by a sleepless, armed, jealous vigilance, in which, perhaps, there has always been more hate than love. ODI ET AMO may well be the confession of those who consciously or blindly have surrendered their existence to the fascination of the sea. All the tempestuous passions of mankind's young days, the love of loot and the love of glory, the love of adventure and the love of danger, with the great love of the unknown and vast dreams of dominion and power, have passed like images reflected from a mirror, leaving no record upon the mysterious face of the sea. Impenetrable and heartless, the sea has given nothing of itself to the suitors for its precarious favours. Unlike the earth, it cannot be subjugated at any cost of patience and toil. For all its fascination that has lured so many to a violent death, its immensity has never been loved as the mountains, the plains, the desert itself, have been loved. Indeed, I suspect that, leaving aside the protestations and tributes of writers who, one is safe in saying, care for little else in the world than the rhythm of their lines and the cadence of their phrase, the love of the sea, to which some men and nations confess so readily, is a complex sentiment wherein pride enters for much, necessity for not a little, and the love of ships — the untiring servants of our hopes and our self-esteem — for the best and most genuine part. For the hundreds who have reviled the sea, beginning with Shakespeare in the line

“More fell than hunger, anguish, or the sea,”

down to the last obscure sea-dog of the “old model,” having but few words and still fewer thoughts, there could not be found, I believe, one sailor who has ever coupled a curse with the good or bad name of a ship. If ever his profanity, provoked by the hardships of the sea, went so far as to touch his ship, it would be lightly, as a hand may, without sin, be laid in the way of kindness on a woman.

XXXVI.

The love that is given to ships is profoundly different from the love men feel for every other work of their hands — the love they bear to their houses, for instance — because it is untainted by the pride of possession. The pride of skill, the pride of responsibility, the pride of endurance there may be, but otherwise it is a disinterested sentiment. No seaman ever cherished a ship, even if she belonged to him, merely because of the profit she put in his pocket. No one, I think, ever did; for a ship-owner, even of the best, has always been outside the pale of that sentiment embracing in a feeling of intimate, equal fellowship the ship and the man, backing each other against the implacable, if sometimes dissembled, hostility of their world of waters. The sea — this truth must be confessed — has no generosity. No display of manly qualities — courage, hardihood, endurance, faithfulness — has ever been known to touch its irresponsible consciousness of power. The ocean has the conscienceless temper of a savage autocrat spoiled by much adulation. He cannot brook the slightest appearance of defiance, and has remained the irreconcilable enemy of ships and men ever since ships and men had the unheard of audacity to go afloat together in the face of his frown. From that day he has gone on swallowing up fleets and men without his resentment being glutted by the number of victims — by so many wrecked ships and wrecked lives. To-day, as ever, he is ready to beguile and betray, to smash and to drown the incorrigible optimism of men who, backed by the fidelity of ships, are trying to wrest from him the fortune of their house, the dominion of their world, or only a dole of food for their hunger. If not always in the hot mood to smash, he is always stealthily ready for a drowning. The most amazing wonder of the deep is its unfathomable cruelty.

I felt its dread for the first time in mid-Atlantic one day, many years ago, when we took off the crew of a Danish brig homeward bound from the West Indies. A thin, silvery mist softened the calm and majestic splendour of light without shadows — seemed to render the sky less remote and the ocean less immense. It was one of the days, when the might of the sea appears indeed lovable, like the nature of a strong man in moments of quiet intimacy. At sunrise we had made out a black speck

to the westward, apparently suspended high up in the void behind a stirring, shimmering veil of silvery blue gauze that seemed at times to stir and float in the breeze which fanned us slowly along. The peace of that enchanting forenoon was so profound, so untroubled, that it seemed that every word pronounced loudly on our deck would penetrate to the very heart of that infinite mystery born from the conjunction of water and sky. We did not raise our voices. "A water-logged derelict, I think, sir," said the second officer quietly, coming down from aloft with the binoculars in their case slung across his shoulders; and our captain, without a word, signed to the helmsman to steer for the black speck. Presently we made out a low, jagged stump sticking up forward — all that remained of her departed masts.

The captain was expatiating in a low conversational tone to the chief mate upon the danger of these derelicts, and upon his dread of coming upon them at night, when suddenly a man forward screamed out, "There's people on board of her, sir! I see them!" in a most extraordinary voice — a voice never heard before in our ship; the amazing voice of a stranger. It gave the signal for a sudden tumult of shouts. The watch below ran up the forecandle head in a body, the cook dashed out of the galley. Everybody saw the poor fellows now. They were there! And all at once our ship, which had the well-earned name of being without a rival for speed in light winds, seemed to us to have lost the power of motion, as if the sea, becoming viscous, had clung to her sides. And yet she moved. Immensity, the inseparable companion of a ship's life, chose that day to breathe upon her as gently as a sleeping child. The clamour of our excitement had died out, and our living ship, famous for never losing steerage way as long as there was air enough to float a feather, stole, without a ripple, silent and white as a ghost, towards her mutilated and wounded sister, come upon at the point of death in the sunlit haze of a calm day at sea.

With the binoculars glued to his eyes, the captain said in a quavering tone: "They are waving to us with something aft there." He put down the glasses on the skylight brusquely, and began to walk about the poop. "A shirt or a flag," he ejaculated irritably. "Can't make it out . . . Some damn rag or other!" He took a few more turns on the poop, glancing down over the rail now and then to see how fast we were moving. His nervous footsteps rang sharply in the quiet of the ship, where the other men, all

looking the same way, had forgotten themselves in a staring immobility. "This will never do!" he cried out suddenly. "Lower the boats at once! Down with them!"

Before I jumped into mine he took me aside, as being an inexperienced junior, for a word of warning:

"You look out as you come alongside that she doesn't take you down with her. You understand?"

He murmured this confidentially, so that none of the men at the falls should overhear, and I was shocked. "Heavens! as if in such an emergency one stopped to think of danger!" I exclaimed to myself mentally, in scorn of such cold-blooded caution.

It takes many lessons to make a real seaman, and I got my rebuke at once. My experienced commander seemed in one searching glance to read my thoughts on my ingenuous face.

"What you're going for is to save life, not to drown your boat's crew for nothing," he growled severely in my ear. But as we shoved off he leaned over and cried out: "It all rests on the power of your arms, men. Give way for life!"

We made a race of it, and I would never have believed that a common boat's crew of a merchantman could keep up so much determined fierceness in the regular swing of their stroke. What our captain had clearly perceived before we left had become plain to all of us since. The issue of our enterprise hung on a hair above that abyss of waters which will not give up its dead till the Day of Judgment. It was a race of two ship's boats matched against Death for a prize of nine men's lives, and Death had a long start. We saw the crew of the brig from afar working at the pumps — still pumping on that wreck, which already had settled so far down that the gentle, low swell, over which our boats rose and fell easily without a check to their speed, welling up almost level with her head-rails, plucked at the ends of broken gear swinging desolately under her naked bowsprit.

We could not, in all conscience, have picked out a better day for our regatta had we had the free choice of all the days that ever dawned upon the lonely struggles and solitary agonies of ships since the Norse rovers

first steered to the westward against the run of Atlantic waves. It was a very good race. At the finish there was not an oar's length between the first and second boat, with Death coming in a good third on the top of the very next smooth swell, for all one knew to the contrary. The scuppers of the brig gurgled softly all together when the water rising against her sides subsided sleepily with a low wash, as if playing about an immovable rock. Her bulwarks were gone fore and aft, and one saw her bare deck low-lying like a raft and swept clean of boats, spars, houses — of everything except the ringbolts and the heads of the pumps. I had one dismal glimpse of it as I braced myself up to receive upon my breast the last man to leave her, the captain, who literally let himself fall into my arms.

It had been a weirdly silent rescue — a rescue without a hail, without a single uttered word, without a gesture or a sign, without a conscious exchange of glances. Up to the very last moment those on board stuck to their pumps, which spouted two clear streams of water upon their bare feet. Their brown skin showed through the rents of their shirts; and the two small bunches of half-naked, tattered men went on bowing from the waist to each other in their back-breaking labour, up and down, absorbed, with no time for a glance over the shoulder at the help that was coming to them. As we dashed, unregarded, alongside a voice let out one, only one hoarse howl of command, and then, just as they stood, without caps, with the salt drying gray in the wrinkles and folds of their hairy, haggard faces, blinking stupidly at us their red eyelids, they made a bolt away from the handles, tottering and jostling against each other, and positively flung themselves over upon our very heads. The clatter they made tumbling into the boats had an extraordinarily destructive effect upon the illusion of tragic dignity our self-esteem had thrown over the contests of mankind with the sea. On that exquisite day of gently breathing peace and veiled sunshine perished my romantic love to what men's imagination had proclaimed the most august aspect of Nature. The cynical indifference of the sea to the merits of human suffering and courage, laid bare in this ridiculous, panic-tainted performance extorted from the dire extremity of nine good and honourable seamen, revolted me. I saw the duplicity of the sea's most tender mood. It was so because it could not help itself, but the awed respect of the early days was gone. I felt ready to smile bitterly at its enchanting charm and glare viciously at

its furies. In a moment, before we shoved off, I had looked coolly at the life of my choice. Its illusions were gone, but its fascination remained. I had become a seaman at last.

We pulled hard for a quarter of an hour, then laid on our oars waiting for our ship. She was coming down on us with swelling sails, looking delicately tall and exquisitely noble through the mist. The captain of the brig, who sat in the stern sheets by my side with his face in his hands, raised his head and began to speak with a sort of sombre volubility. They had lost their masts and sprung a leak in a hurricane; drifted for weeks, always at the pumps, met more bad weather; the ships they sighted failed to make them out, the leak gained upon them slowly, and the seas had left them nothing to make a raft of. It was very hard to see ship after ship pass by at a distance, "as if everybody had agreed that we must be left to drown," he added. But they went on trying to keep the brig afloat as long as possible, and working the pumps constantly on insufficient food, mostly raw, till "yesterday evening," he continued monotonously, "just as the sun went down, the men's hearts broke."

He made an almost imperceptible pause here, and went on again with exactly the same intonation:

"They told me the brig could not be saved, and they thought they had done enough for themselves. I said nothing to that. It was true. It was no mutiny. I had nothing to say to them. They lay about aft all night, as still as so many dead men. I did not lie down. I kept a look-out. When the first light came I saw your ship at once. I waited for more light; the breeze began to fail on my face. Then I shouted out as loud as I was able, 'Look at that ship!' but only two men got up very slowly and came to me. At first only we three stood alone, for a long time, watching you coming down to us, and feeling the breeze drop to a calm almost; but afterwards others, too, rose, one after another, and by-and-by I had all my crew behind me. I turned round and said to them that they could see the ship was coming our way, but in this small breeze she might come too late after all, unless we turned to and tried to keep the brig afloat long enough to give you time to save us all. I spoke like that to them, and then I gave the command to man the pumps."

He gave the command, and gave the example, too, by going himself to the handles, but it seems that these men did actually hang back for a

moment, looking at each other dubiously before they followed him. "He! he! he!" He broke out into a most unexpected, imbecile, pathetic, nervous little giggle. "Their hearts were broken so! They had been played with too long," he explained apologetically, lowering his eyes, and became silent.

Twenty-five years is a long time — a quarter of a century is a dim and distant past; but to this day I remember the dark-brown feet, hands, and faces of two of these men whose hearts had been broken by the sea. They were lying very still on their sides on the bottom boards between the thwarts, curled up like dogs. My boat's crew, leaning over the looms of their oars, stared and listened as if at the play. The master of the brig looked up suddenly to ask me what day it was.

They had lost the date. When I told him it was Sunday, the 22nd, he frowned, making some mental calculation, then nodded twice sadly to himself, staring at nothing.

His aspect was miserably unkempt and wildly sorrowful. Had it not been for the unquenchable candour of his blue eyes, whose unhappy, tired glance every moment sought his abandoned, sinking brig, as if it could find rest nowhere else, he would have appeared mad. But he was too simple to go mad, too simple with that manly simplicity which alone can bear men unscathed in mind and body through an encounter with the deadly playfulness of the sea or with its less abominable fury.

Neither angry, nor playful, nor smiling, it enveloped our distant ship growing bigger as she neared us, our boats with the rescued men and the dismantled hull of the brig we were leaving behind, in the large and placid embrace of its quietness, half lost in the fair haze, as if in a dream of infinite and tender clemency. There was no frown, no wrinkle on its face, not a ripple. And the run of the slight swell was so smooth that it resembled the graceful undulation of a piece of shimmering gray silk shot with gleams of green. We pulled an easy stroke; but when the master of the brig, after a glance over his shoulder, stood up with a low exclamation, my men feathered their oars instinctively, without an order, and the boat lost her way.

He was steadying himself on my shoulder with a strong grip, while his other arm, flung up rigidly, pointed a denunciatory finger at the

immense tranquillity of the ocean. After his first exclamation, which stopped the swing of our oars, he made no sound, but his whole attitude seemed to cry out an indignant "Behold!" . . . I could not imagine what vision of evil had come to him. I was startled, and the amazing energy of his immobilized gesture made my heart beat faster with the anticipation of something monstrous and unsuspected. The stillness around us became crushing.

For a moment the succession of silky undulations ran on innocently. I saw each of them swell up the misty line of the horizon, far, far away beyond the derelict brig, and the next moment, with a slight friendly toss of our boat, it had passed under us and was gone. The lulling cadence of the rise and fall, the invariable gentleness of this irresistible force, the great charm of the deep waters, warmed my breast deliciously, like the subtle poison of a love-potion. But all this lasted only a few soothing seconds before I jumped up too, making the boat roll like the veriest landlubber.

Something startling, mysterious, hastily confused, was taking place. I watched it with incredulous and fascinated awe, as one watches the confused, swift movements of some deed of violence done in the dark. As if at a given signal, the run of the smooth undulations seemed checked suddenly around the brig. By a strange optical delusion the whole sea appeared to rise upon her in one overwhelming heave of its silky surface, where in one spot a smother of foam broke out ferociously. And then the effort subsided. It was all over, and the smooth swell ran on as before from the horizon in uninterrupted cadence of motion, passing under us with a slight friendly toss of our boat. Far away, where the brig had been, an angry white stain undulating on the surface of steely-gray waters, shot with gleams of green, diminished swiftly, without a hiss, like a patch of pure snow melting in the sun. And the great stillness after this initiation into the sea's implacable hate seemed full of dread thoughts and shadows of disaster.

"Gone!" ejaculated from the depths of his chest my bowman in a final tone. He spat in his hands, and took a better grip on his oar. The captain of the brig lowered his rigid arm slowly, and looked at our faces in a solemnly conscious silence, which called upon us to share in his simple-minded, marvelling awe. All at once he sat down by my side, and leaned

forward earnestly at my boat's crew, who, swinging together in a long, easy stroke, kept their eyes fixed upon him faithfully.

"No ship could have done so well," he addressed them firmly, after a moment of strained silence, during which he seemed with trembling lips to seek for words fit to bear such high testimony. "She was small, but she was good. I had no anxiety. She was strong. Last voyage I had my wife and two children in her. No other ship could have stood so long the weather she had to live through for days and days before we got dismasted a fortnight ago. She was fairly worn out, and that's all. You may believe me. She lasted under us for days and days, but she could not last for ever. It was long enough. I am glad it is over. No better ship was ever left to sink at sea on such a day as this."

He was competent to pronounce the funereal oration of a ship, this son of ancient sea-folk, whose national existence, so little stained by the excesses of manly virtues, had demanded nothing but the merest foothold from the earth. By the merits of his sea-wise forefathers and by the artlessness of his heart, he was made fit to deliver this excellent discourse. There was nothing wanting in its orderly arrangement — neither piety nor faith, nor the tribute of praise due to the worthy dead, with the edifying recital of their achievement. She had lived, he had loved her; she had suffered, and he was glad she was at rest. It was an excellent discourse. And it was orthodox, too, in its fidelity to the cardinal article of a seaman's faith, of which it was a single-minded confession. "Ships are all right." They are. They who live with the sea have got to hold by that creed first and last; and it came to me, as I glanced at him sideways, that some men were not altogether unworthy in honour and conscience to pronounce the funereal eulogium of a ship's constancy in life and death.

After this, sitting by my side with his loosely-clasped hands hanging between his knees, he uttered no word, made no movement till the shadow of our ship's sails fell on the boat, when, at the loud cheer greeting the return of the victors with their prize, he lifted up his troubled face with a faint smile of pathetic indulgence. This smile of the worthy descendant of the most ancient sea-folk whose audacity and hardihood had left no trace of greatness and glory upon the waters, completed the cycle of my initiation. There was an infinite depth of

hereditary wisdom in its pitying sadness. It made the hearty bursts of cheering sound like a childish noise of triumph. Our crew shouted with immense confidence — honest souls! As if anybody could ever make sure of having prevailed against the sea, which has betrayed so many ships of great “name,” so many proud men, so many towering ambitions of fame, power, wealth, greatness!

As I brought the boat under the falls my captain, in high good-humour, leaned over, spreading his red and freckled elbows on the rail, and called down to me sarcastically, out of the depths of his cynic philosopher’s beard:

“So you have brought the boat back after all, have you?”

Sarcasm was “his way,” and the most that can be said for it is that it was natural. This did not make it lovable. But it is decorous and expedient to fall in with one’s commander’s way. “Yes. I brought the boat back all right, sir,” I answered. And the good man believed me. It was not for him to discern upon me the marks of my recent initiation. And yet I was not exactly the same youngster who had taken the boat away — all impatience for a race against death, with the prize of nine men’s lives at the end.

Already I looked with other eyes upon the sea. I knew it capable of betraying the generous ardour of youth as implacably as, indifferent to evil and good, it would have betrayed the basest greed or the noblest heroism. My conception of its magnanimous greatness was gone. And I looked upon the true sea — the sea that plays with men till their hearts are broken, and wears stout ships to death. Nothing can touch the brooding bitterness of its heart. Open to all and faithful to none, it exercises its fascination for the undoing of the best. To love it is not well. It knows no bond of plighted troth, no fidelity to misfortune, to long companionship, to long devotion. The promise it holds out perpetually is very great; but the only secret of its possession is strength, strength — the jealous, sleepless strength of a man guarding a coveted treasure within his gates.

PART 13: THE NURSERY OF THE CRAFT

XXXVII.

The cradle of oversea traffic and of the art of naval combats, the Mediterranean, apart from all the associations of adventure and glory, the common heritage of all mankind, makes a tender appeal to a seaman. It has sheltered the infancy of his craft. He looks upon it as a man may look at a vast nursery in an old, old mansion where innumerable generations of his own people have learned to walk. I say his own people because, in a sense, all sailors belong to one family: all are descended from that adventurous and shaggy ancestor who, bestriding a shapeless log and paddling with a crooked branch, accomplished the first coasting-trip in a sheltered bay ringing with the admiring howls of his tribe. It is a matter of regret that all those brothers in craft and feeling, whose generations have learned to walk a ship's deck in that nursery, have been also more than once fiercely engaged in cutting each other's throats there. But life, apparently, has such exigencies. Without human propensity to murder and other sorts of unrighteousness there would have been no historical heroism. It is a consoling reflection. And then, if one examines impartially the deeds of violence, they appear of but small consequence. From Salamis to Actium, through Lepanto and the Nile to the naval massacre of Navarino, not to mention other armed encounters of lesser interest, all the blood heroically spilt into the Mediterranean has not stained with a single trail of purple the deep azure of its classic waters.

Of course, it may be argued that battles have shaped the destiny of mankind. The question whether they have shaped it well would remain open, however. But it would be hardly worth discussing. It is very probable that, had the Battle of Salamis never been fought, the face of the world would have been much as we behold it now, fashioned by the mediocre inspiration and the short-sighted labours of men. From a long and miserable experience of suffering, injustice, disgrace and aggression the nations of the earth are mostly swayed by fear — fear of the sort that a little cheap oratory turns easily to rage, hate, and violence. Innocent, guileless fear has been the cause of many wars. Not, of course, the fear of war itself, which, in the evolution of sentiments and ideas, has come to be regarded at last as a half-mystic and glorious ceremony with certain

fashionable rites and preliminary incantations, wherein the conception of its true nature has been lost. To apprehend the true aspect, force, and morality of war as a natural function of mankind one requires a feather in the hair and a ring in the nose, or, better still, teeth filed to a point and a tattooed breast. Unfortunately, a return to such simple ornamentation is impossible. We are bound to the chariot of progress. There is no going back; and, as bad luck would have it, our civilization, which has done so much for the comfort and adornment of our bodies and the elevation of our minds, has made lawful killing frightfully and needlessly expensive.

The whole question of improved armaments has been approached by the governments of the earth in a spirit of nervous and unreflecting haste, whereas the right way was lying plainly before them, and had only to be pursued with calm determination. The learned vigils and labours of a certain class of inventors should have been rewarded with honourable liberality as justice demanded; and the bodies of the inventors should have been blown to pieces by means of their own perfected explosives and improved weapons with extreme publicity as the commonest prudence dictated. By this method the ardour of research in that direction would have been restrained without infringing the sacred privileges of science. For the lack of a little cool thinking in our guides and masters this course has not been followed, and a beautiful simplicity has been sacrificed for no real advantage. A frugal mind cannot defend itself from considerable bitterness when reflecting that at the Battle of Actium (which was fought for no less a stake than the dominion of the world) the fleet of Octavianus Caesar and the fleet of Antonius, including the Egyptian division and Cleopatra's galley with purple sails, probably cost less than two modern battleships, or, as the modern naval book-jargon has it, two capital units. But no amount of lubberly book-jargon can disguise a fact well calculated to afflict the soul of every sound economist. It is not likely that the Mediterranean will ever behold a battle with a greater issue; but when the time comes for another historical fight its bottom will be enriched as never before by a quantity of jagged scrap-iron, paid for at pretty nearly its weight of gold by the deluded populations inhabiting the isles and continents of this planet.

XXXVIII.

Happy he who, like Ulysses, has made an adventurous voyage; and there is no such sea for adventurous voyages as the Mediterranean — the inland sea which the ancients looked upon as so vast and so full of wonders. And, indeed, it was terrible and wonderful; for it is we alone who, swayed by the audacity of our minds and the tremors of our hearts, are the sole artisans of all the wonder and romance of the world.

It was for the Mediterranean sailors that fair-haired sirens sang among the black rocks seething in white foam and mysterious voices spoke in the darkness above the moving wave — voices menacing, seductive, or prophetic, like that voice heard at the beginning of the Christian era by the master of an African vessel in the Gulf of Syrta, whose calm nights are full of strange murmurs and flitting shadows. It called him by name, bidding him go and tell all men that the great god Pan was dead. But the great legend of the Mediterranean, the legend of traditional song and grave history, lives, fascinating and immortal, in our minds.

The dark and fearful sea of the subtle Ulysses' wanderings, agitated by the wrath of Olympian gods, harbouring on its isles the fury of strange monsters and the wiles of strange women; the highway of heroes and sages, of warriors, pirates, and saints; the workaday sea of Carthaginian merchants and the pleasure lake of the Roman Caesars, claims the veneration of every seaman as the historical home of that spirit of open defiance against the great waters of the earth which is the very soul of his calling. Issuing thence to the west and south, as a youth leaves the shelter of his parental house, this spirit found the way to the Indies, discovered the coasts of a new continent, and traversed at last the immensity of the great Pacific, rich in groups of islands remote and mysterious like the constellations of the sky.

The first impulse of navigation took its visible form in that tideless basin freed from hidden shoals and treacherous currents, as if in tender regard for the infancy of the art. The steep shores of the Mediterranean favoured the beginners in one of humanity's most daring enterprises, and the enchanting inland sea of classic adventure has led mankind gently from headland to headland, from bay to bay, from island to island,

out into the promise of world-wide oceans beyond the Pillars of Hercules.

XXXIX.

The charm of the Mediterranean dwells in the unforgettable flavour of my early days, and to this hour this sea, upon which the Romans alone ruled without dispute, has kept for me the fascination of youthful romance. The very first Christmas night I ever spent away from land was employed in running before a Gulf of Lions gale, which made the old ship groan in every timber as she skipped before it over the short seas until we brought her to, battered and out of breath, under the lee of Majorca, where the smooth water was torn by fierce cat's-paws under a very stormy sky.

We — or, rather, they, for I had hardly had two glimpses of salt water in my life till then — kept her standing off and on all that day, while I listened for the first time with the curiosity of my tender years to the song of the wind in a ship's rigging. The monotonous and vibrating note was destined to grow into the intimacy of the heart, pass into blood and bone, accompany the thoughts and acts of two full decades, remain to haunt like a reproach the peace of the quiet fireside, and enter into the very texture of respectable dreams dreamed safely under a roof of rafters and tiles. The wind was fair, but that day we ran no more.

The thing (I will not call her a ship twice in the same half-hour) leaked. She leaked fully, generously, overflowing, all over — like a basket. I took an enthusiastic part in the excitement caused by that last infirmity of noble ships, without concerning myself much with the why or the wherefore. The surmise of my maturer years is that, bored by her interminable life, the venerable antiquity was simply yawning with ennui at every seam. But at the time I did not know; I knew generally very little, and least of all what I was doing in that GALERE.

I remember that, exactly as in the comedy of Moliere, my uncle asked the precise question in the very words — not of my confidential valet, however, but across great distances of land, in a letter whose mocking but indulgent turn ill concealed his almost paternal anxiety. I fancy I tried to convey to him my (utterly unfounded) impression that the West Indies awaited my coming. I had to go there. It was a sort of mystic conviction — something in the nature of a call. But it was difficult to state

intelligibly the grounds of this belief to that man of rigorous logic, if of infinite charity.

The truth must have been that, all unversed in the arts of the wily Greek, the deceiver of gods, the lover of strange women, the evoker of bloodthirsty shades, I yet longed for the beginning of my own obscure Odyssey, which, as was proper for a modern, should unroll its wonders and terrors beyond the Pillars of Hercules. The disdainful ocean did not open wide to swallow up my audacity, though the ship, the ridiculous and ancient GALERE of my folly, the old, weary, disenchanted sugar-waggon, seemed extremely disposed to open out and swallow up as much salt water as she could hold. This, if less grandiose, would have been as final a catastrophe.

But no catastrophe occurred. I lived to watch on a strange shore a black and youthful Nausicaa, with a joyous train of attendant maidens, carrying baskets of linen to a clear stream overhung by the heads of slender palm-trees. The vivid colours of their draped raiment and the gold of their earrings invested with a barbaric and regal magnificence their figures, stepping out freely in a shower of broken sunshine.

The whiteness of their teeth was still more dazzling than the splendour of jewels at their ears. The shaded side of the ravine gleamed with their smiles. They were as unabashed as so many princesses, but, alas! not one of them was the daughter of a jet-black sovereign.

Such was my abominable luck in being born by the mere hair's breadth of twenty-five centuries too late into a world where kings have been growing scarce with scandalous rapidity, while the few who remain have adopted the uninteresting manners and customs of simple millionaires. Obviously it was a vain hope in 187 — to see the ladies of a royal household walk in chequered sunshine, with baskets of linen on their heads, to the banks of a clear stream overhung by the starry fronds of palm-trees.

It was a vain hope. If I did not ask myself whether, limited by such discouraging impossibilities, life were still worth living, it was only because I had then before me several other pressing questions, some of which have remained unanswered to this day. The resonant, laughing voices of these gorgeous maidens scared away the multitude of

humming-birds, whose delicate wings wreathed with the mist of their vibration the tops of flowering bushes.

No, they were not princesses. Their unrestrained laughter filling the hot, fern-clad ravine had a soulless limpidity, as of wild, inhuman dwellers in tropical woodlands. Following the example of certain prudent travellers, I withdrew unseen — and returned, not much wiser, to the Mediterranean, the sea of classic adventures.

PART 14: THE TREMOLINO

XL.

It was written that there, in the nursery of our navigating ancestors, I should learn to walk in the ways of my craft and grow in the love of the sea, blind as young love often is, but absorbing and disinterested as all true love must be. I demanded nothing from it — not even adventure. In this I showed, perhaps, more intuitive wisdom than high self-denial. No adventure ever came to one for the asking. He who starts on a deliberate quest of adventure goes forth but to gather dead-sea fruit, unless, indeed, he be beloved of the gods and great amongst heroes, like that most excellent cavalier Don Quixote de la Mancha. By us ordinary mortals of a mediocre animus that is only too anxious to pass by wicked giants for so many honest windmills, adventures are entertained like visiting angels. They come upon our complacency unawares. As unbidden guests are apt to do, they often come at inconvenient times. And we are glad to let them go unrecognised, without any acknowledgment of so high a favour. After many years, on looking back from the middle turn of life's way at the events of the past, which, like a friendly crowd, seem to gaze sadly after us hastening towards the Cimmerian shore, we may see here and there, in the gray throng, some figure glowing with a faint radiance, as though it had caught all the light of our already crepuscular sky. And by this glow we may recognise the faces of our true adventures, of the once unbidden guests entertained unawares in our young days.

If the Mediterranean, the venerable (and sometimes atrociously ill-tempered) nurse of all navigators, was to rock my youth, the providing of the cradle necessary for that operation was entrusted by Fate to the most casual assemblage of irresponsible young men (all, however, older than myself) that, as if drunk with Provencal sunshine, frittered life away in joyous levity on the model of Balzac's "Histoire des Treize" qualified by a dash of romance DE CAPE ET D'EPEE.

She who was my cradle in those years had been built on the River of Savona by a famous builder of boats, was rigged in Corsica by another good man, and was described on her papers as a 'tartane' of sixty tons. In reality, she was a true balancelle, with two short masts raking forward and two curved yards, each as long as her hull; a true child of the Latin lake, with a spread of two enormous sails resembling the pointed wings

on a sea-bird's slender body, and herself, like a bird indeed, skimming rather than sailing the seas.

Her name was the Tremolino. How is this to be translated? The Quiverer? What a name to give the pluckiest little craft that ever dipped her sides in angry foam! I had felt her, it is true, trembling for nights and days together under my feet, but it was with the high-strung tenseness of her faithful courage. In her short, but brilliant, career she has taught me nothing, but she has given me everything. I owe to her the awakened love for the sea that, with the quivering of her swift little body and the humming of the wind under the foot of her lateen sails, stole into my heart with a sort of gentle violence, and brought my imagination under its despotic sway. The Tremolino! To this day I cannot utter or even write that name without a strange tightening of the breast and the gasp of mingled delight and dread of one's first passionate experience.

XLI.

We four formed (to use a term well understood nowadays in every social sphere) a “syndicate” owning the Tremolino: an international and astonishing syndicate. And we were all ardent Royalists of the snow-white Legitimist complexion — Heaven only knows why! In all associations of men there is generally one who, by the authority of age and of a more experienced wisdom, imparts a collective character to the whole set. If I mention that the oldest of us was very old, extremely old — nearly thirty years old — and that he used to declare with gallant carelessness, “I live by my sword,” I think I have given enough information on the score of our collective wisdom. He was a North Carolinian gentleman, J. M. K. B. were the initials of his name, and he really did live by the sword, as far as I know. He died by it, too, later on, in a Balkanian squabble, in the cause of some Serbs or else Bulgarians, who were neither Catholics nor gentlemen — at least, not in the exalted but narrow sense he attached to that last word.

Poor J. M. K. B., AMERICAIN, CATHOLIQUE, ET GENTILHOMME, as he was disposed to describe himself in moments of lofty expansion! Are there still to be found in Europe gentlemen keen of face and elegantly slight of body, of distinguished aspect, with a fascinating drawing-room manner and with a dark, fatal glance, who live by their swords, I wonder? His family had been ruined in the Civil War, I fancy, and seems for a decade or so to have led a wandering life in the Old World. As to Henry C— — the next in age and wisdom of our band, he had broken loose from the unyielding rigidity of his family, solidly rooted, if I remember rightly, in a well-to-do London suburb. On their respectable authority he introduced himself meekly to strangers as a “black sheep.” I have never seen a more guileless specimen of an outcast. Never.

However, his people had the grace to send him a little money now and then. Enamoured of the South, of Provence, of its people, its life, its sunshine and its poetry, narrow-chested, tall and short-sighted, he strode along the streets and the lanes, his long feet projecting far in advance of his body, and his white nose and gingery moustache buried in an open book: for he had the habit of reading as he walked. How he avoided falling into precipices, off the quays, or down staircases is a great

mystery. The sides of his overcoat bulged out with pocket editions of various poets. When not engaged in reading Virgil, Homer, or Mistral, in parks, restaurants, streets, and suchlike public places, he indited sonnets (in French) to the eyes, ears, chin, hair, and other visible perfections of a nymph called Therese, the daughter, honesty compels me to state, of a certain Madame Leonore who kept a small cafe for sailors in one of the narrowest streets of the old town.

No more charming face, clear-cut like an antique gem, and delicate in colouring like the petal of a flower, had ever been set on, alas! a somewhat squat body. He read his verses aloud to her in the very cafe with the innocence of a little child and the vanity of a poet. We followed him there willingly enough, if only to watch the divine Therese laugh, under the vigilant black eyes of Madame Leonore, her mother. She laughed very prettily, not so much at the sonnets, which she could not but esteem, as at poor Henry's French accent, which was unique, resembling the warbling of birds, if birds ever warbled with a stuttering, nasal intonation.

Our third partner was Roger P. de la S— — the most Scandinavian-looking of Provençal squires, fair, and six feet high, as became a descendant of sea-roving Northmen, authoritative, incisive, wittily scornful, with a comedy in three acts in his pocket, and in his breast a heart blighted by a hopeless passion for his beautiful cousin, married to a wealthy hide and tallow merchant. He used to take us to lunch at their house without ceremony. I admired the good lady's sweet patience. The husband was a conciliatory soul, with a great fund of resignation, which he expended on "Roger's friends." I suspect he was secretly horrified at these invasions. But it was a Carlist salon, and as such we were made welcome. The possibility of raising Catalonia in the interest of the REY NETTO, who had just then crossed the Pyrenees, was much discussed there.

Don Carlos, no doubt, must have had many queer friends (it is the common lot of all Pretenders), but amongst them none more extravagantly fantastic than the Tremolino Syndicate, which used to meet in a tavern on the quays of the old port. The antique city of Massilia had surely never, since the days of the earliest Phoenicians, known an odder set of ship-owners. We met to discuss and settle the plan of

operations for each voyage of the Tremolino. In these operations a banking-house, too, was concerned — a very respectable banking-house. But I am afraid I shall end by saying too much. Ladies, too, were concerned (I am really afraid I am saying too much) — all sorts of ladies, some old enough to know better than to put their trust in princes, others young and full of illusions.

One of these last was extremely amusing in the imitations, she gave us in confidence, of various highly-placed personages she was perpetually rushing off to Paris to interview in the interests of the cause — POR EL REY! For she was a Carlist, and of Basque blood at that, with something of a lioness in the expression of her courageous face (especially when she let her hair down), and with the volatile little soul of a sparrow dressed in fine Parisian feathers, which had the trick of coming off disconcertingly at unexpected moments.

But her imitations of a Parisian personage, very highly placed indeed, as she represented him standing in the corner of a room with his face to the wall, rubbing the back of his head and moaning helplessly, “Rita, you are the death of me!” were enough to make one (if young and free from cares) split one’s sides laughing. She had an uncle still living, a very effective Carlist, too, the priest of a little mountain parish in Guipuzcoa. As the sea-going member of the syndicate (whose plans depended greatly on Dona Rita’s information), I used to be charged with humbly affectionate messages for the old man. These messages I was supposed to deliver to the Arragonese muleteers (who were sure to await at certain times the Tremolino in the neighbourhood of the Gulf of Rosas), for faithful transportation inland, together with the various unlawful goods landed secretly from under the Tremolino’s hatches.

Well, now, I have really let out too much (as I feared I should in the end) as to the usual contents of my sea-cradle. But let it stand. And if anybody remarks cynically that I must have been a promising infant in those days, let that stand, too. I am concerned but for the good name of the Tremolino, and I affirm that a ship is ever guiltless of the sins, transgressions, and follies of her men.

XLII.

It was not Tremolino's fault that the syndicate depended so much on the wit and wisdom and the information of Dona Rita. She had taken a little furnished house on the Prado for the good of the cause — POR EL REY! She was always taking little houses for somebody's good, for the sick or the sorry, for broken-down artists, cleaned-out gamblers, temporarily unlucky speculators — VIEUX AMIS— old friends, as she used to explain apologetically, with a shrug of her fine shoulders.

Whether Don Carlos was one of the "old friends," too, it's hard to say. More unlikely things have been heard of in smoking-rooms. All I know is that one evening, entering incautiously the salon of the little house just after the news of a considerable Carlist success had reached the faithful, I was seized round the neck and waist and whirled recklessly three times round the room, to the crash of upsetting furniture and the humming of a valse tune in a warm contralto voice.

When released from the dizzy embrace, I sat down on the carpet — suddenly, without affectation. In this unpretentious attitude I became aware that J. M. K. B. had followed me into the room, elegant, fatal, correct and severe in a white tie and large shirt-front. In answer to his politely sinister, prolonged glance of inquiry, I overheard Dona Rita murmuring, with some confusion and annoyance, "VOUS ETES BETE MON CHER. VOYONS! CA N'A AUCUNE CONSEQUENCE." Well content in this case to be of no particular consequence, I had already about me the elements of some worldly sense.

Rearranging my collar, which, truth to say, ought to have been a round one above a short jacket, but was not, I observed felicitously that I had come to say good-bye, being ready to go off to sea that very night with the Tremolino. Our hostess, slightly panting yet, and just a shade dishevelled, turned tartly upon J. M. K. B., desiring to know when HE would be ready to go off by the Tremolino, or in any other way, in order to join the royal headquarters. Did he intend, she asked ironically, to wait for the very eve of the entry into Madrid? Thus by a judicious exercise of tact and asperity we re-established the atmospheric equilibrium of the room long before I left them a little before midnight,

now tenderly reconciled, to walk down to the harbour and hail the Tremolino by the usual soft whistle from the edge of the quay. It was our signal, invariably heard by the ever-watchful Dominic, the PADRONE.

He would raise a lantern silently to light my steps along the narrow, springy plank of our primitive gangway. "And so we are going off," he would murmur directly my foot touched the deck. I was the harbinger of sudden departures, but there was nothing in the world sudden enough to take Dominic unawares. His thick black moustaches, curled every morning with hot tongs by the barber at the corner of the quay, seemed to hide a perpetual smile. But nobody, I believe, had ever seen the true shape of his lips. From the slow, imperturbable gravity of that broad-chested man you would think he had never smiled in his life. In his eyes lurked a look of perfectly remorseless irony, as though he had been provided with an extremely experienced soul; and the slightest distension of his nostrils would give to his bronzed face a look of extraordinary boldness. This was the only play of feature of which he seemed capable, being a Southerner of a concentrated, deliberate type. His ebony hair curled slightly on the temples. He may have been forty years old, and he was a great voyager on the inland sea.

Astute and ruthless, he could have rivalled in resource the unfortunate son of Laertes and Anticlea. If he did not pit his craft and audacity against the very gods, it is only because the Olympian gods are dead. Certainly no woman could frighten him. A one-eyed giant would not have had the ghost of a chance against Dominic Cervoni, of Corsica, not Ithaca; and no king, son of kings, but of very respectable family — authentic Caporali, he affirmed. But that is as it may be. The Caporali families date back to the twelfth century.

For want of more exalted adversaries Dominic turned his audacity fertile in impious stratagems against the powers of the earth, as represented by the institution of Custom-houses and every mortal belonging thereto — scribes, officers, and guardacostas afloat and ashore. He was the very man for us, this modern and unlawful wanderer with his own legend of loves, dangers, and bloodshed. He told us bits of it sometimes in measured, ironic tones. He spoke Catalonian, the Italian of Corsica and the French of Provence with the same easy naturalness. Dressed in shore-togs, a white starched shirt, black jacket, and round hat, as I took

him once to see Dona Rita, he was extremely presentable. He could make himself interesting by a tactful and rugged reserve set off by a grim, almost imperceptible, playfulness of tone and manner.

He had the physical assurance of strong-hearted men. After half an hour's interview in the dining-room, during which they got in touch with each other in an amazing way, Rita told us in her best GRANDE DAME manner: "MAIS IL ESI PARFAIT, CET HOMME." He was perfect. On board the Tremolino, wrapped up in a black CABAN, the picturesque cloak of Mediterranean seamen, with those massive moustaches and his remorseless eyes set off by the shadow of the deep hood, he looked piratical and monkish and darkly initiated into the most awful mysteries of the sea.

XLIII.

Anyway, he was perfect, as Dona Rita had declared. The only thing unsatisfactory (and even inexplicable) about our Dominic was his nephew, Cesar. It was startling to see a desolate expression of shame veil the remorseless audacity in the eyes of that man superior to all scruples and terrors.

“I would never have dared to bring him on board your balancelle,” he once apologized to me. “But what am I to do? His mother is dead, and my brother has gone into the bush.”

In this way I learned that our Dominic had a brother. As to “going into the bush,” this only means that a man has done his duty successfully in the pursuit of a hereditary vendetta. The feud which had existed for ages between the families of Cervoni and Brunaschi was so old that it seemed to have smouldered out at last. One evening Pietro Brunaschi, after a laborious day amongst his olive-trees, sat on a chair against the wall of his house with a bowl of broth on his knees and a piece of bread in his hand. Dominic’s brother, going home with a gun on his shoulder, found a sudden offence in this picture of content and rest so obviously calculated to awaken the feelings of hatred and revenge. He and Pietro had never had any personal quarrel; but, as Dominic explained, “all our dead cried out to him.” He shouted from behind a wall of stones, “O Pietro! Behold what is coming!” And as the other looked up innocently he took aim at the forehead and squared the old vendetta account so neatly that, according to Dominic, the dead man continued to sit with the bowl of broth on his knees and the piece of bread in his hand.

This is why — because in Corsica your dead will not leave you alone — Dominic’s brother had to go into the MAQUIS, into the bush on the wild mountain-side, to dodge the gendarmes for the insignificant remainder of his life, and Dominic had charge of his nephew with a mission to make a man of him.

No more unpromising undertaking could be imagined. The very material for the task seemed wanting. The Cervonis, if not handsome men, were good sturdy flesh and blood. But this extraordinarily lean and livid youth seemed to have no more blood in him than a snail.

“Some cursed witch must have stolen my brother’s child from the cradle and put that spawn of a starved devil in its place,” Dominic would say to me. “Look at him! Just look at him!”

To look at Cesar was not pleasant. His parchment skin, showing dead white on his cranium through the thin wisps of dirty brown hair, seemed to be glued directly and tightly upon his big bones. Without being in any way deformed, he was the nearest approach which I have ever seen or could imagine to what is commonly understood by the word “monster.” That the source of the effect produced was really moral I have no doubt. An utterly, hopelessly depraved nature was expressed in physical terms, that taken each separately had nothing positively startling. You imagined him clammily cold to the touch, like a snake. The slightest reproof, the most mild and justifiable remonstrance, would be met by a resentful glare and an evil shrinking of his thin dry upper lip, a snarl of hate to which he generally added the agreeable sound of grinding teeth.

It was for this venomous performance rather than for his lies, impudence, and laziness that his uncle used to knock him down. It must not be imagined that it was anything in the nature of a brutal assault. Dominic’s brawny arm would be seen describing deliberately an ample horizontal gesture, a dignified sweep, and Cesar would go over suddenly like a ninepin — which was funny to see. But, once down, he would writhe on the deck, gnashing his teeth in impotent rage — which was pretty horrible to behold. And it also happened more than once that he would disappear completely — which was startling to observe. This is the exact truth. Before some of these majestic cuffs Cesar would go down and vanish. He would vanish heels overhead into open hatchways, into scuttles, behind up-ended casks, according to the place where he happened to come into contact with his uncle’s mighty arm.

Once — it was in the old harbour, just before the Tremolino’s last voyage — he vanished thus overboard to my infinite consternation. Dominic and I had been talking business together aft, and Cesar had sneaked up behind us to listen, for, amongst his other perfections, he was a consummate eavesdropper and spy. At the sound of the heavy plop alongside horror held me rooted to the spot; but Dominic stepped quietly to the rail and leaned over, waiting for his nephew’s miserable head to bob up for the first time.

“Ohe, Cesar!” he yelled contemptuously to the spluttering wretch. “Catch hold of that mooring hawser — CHAROGNE!”

He approached me to resume the interrupted conversation.

“What about Cesar?” I asked anxiously.

“Canallia! Let him hang there,” was his answer. And he went on talking over the business in hand calmly, while I tried vainly to dismiss from my mind the picture of Cesar steeped to the chin in the water of the old harbour, a decoction of centuries of marine refuse. I tried to dismiss it, because the mere notion of that liquid made me feel very sick. Presently Dominic, hailing an idle boatman, directed him to go and fish his nephew out; and by-and-by Cesar appeared walking on board from the quay, shivering, streaming with filthy water, with bits of rotten straws in his hair and a piece of dirty orange-peel stranded on his shoulder. His teeth chattered; his yellow eyes squinted balefully at us as he passed forward. I thought it my duty to remonstrate.

“Why are you always knocking him about, Dominic?” I asked. Indeed, I felt convinced it was no earthly good — a sheer waste of muscular force.

“I must try to make a man of him,” Dominic answered hopelessly.

I restrained the obvious retort that in this way he ran the risk of making, in the words of the immortal Mr. Mantalini, “a demnition damp, unpleasant corpse of him.”

“He wants to be a locksmith!” burst out Cervoni. “To learn how to pick locks, I suppose,” he added with sardonic bitterness.

“Why not let him be a locksmith?” I ventured.

“Who would teach him?” he cried. “Where could I leave him?” he asked, with a drop in his voice; and I had my first glimpse of genuine despair. “He steals, you know, alas! PAR TA MADONNE! I believe he would put poison in your food and mine — the viper!”

He raised his face and both his clenched fists slowly to heaven. However, Cesar never dropped poison into our cups. One cannot be sure, but I fancy he went to work in another way.

This voyage, of which the details need not be given, we had to range far afield for sufficient reasons. Coming up from the South to end it with the important and really dangerous part of the scheme in hand, we found it necessary to look into Barcelona for certain definite information. This appears like running one's head into the very jaws of the lion, but in reality it was not so. We had one or two high, influential friends there, and many others humble but valuable because bought for good hard cash. We were in no danger of being molested; indeed, the important information reached us promptly by the hands of a Custom-house officer, who came on board full of showy zeal to poke an iron rod into the layer of oranges which made the visible part of our cargo in the hatchway.

I forgot to mention before that the Tremolino was officially known as a fruit and cork-wood trader. The zealous officer managed to slip a useful piece of paper into Dominic's hand as he went ashore, and a few hours afterwards, being off duty, he returned on board again athirst for drinks and gratitude. He got both as a matter of course. While he sat sipping his liqueur in the tiny cabin, Dominic plied him with questions as to the whereabouts of the guardacostas. The preventive service afloat was really the one for us to reckon with, and it was material for our success and safety to know the exact position of the patrol craft in the neighbourhood. The news could not have been more favourable. The officer mentioned a small place on the coast some twelve miles off, where, unsuspecting and unready, she was lying at anchor, with her sails unbent, painting yards and scraping spars. Then he left us after the usual compliments, smirking reassuringly over his shoulder.

I had kept below pretty close all day from excess of prudence. The stake played on that trip was big.

"We are ready to go at once, but for Cesar, who has been missing ever since breakfast," announced Dominic to me in his slow, grim way.

Where the fellow had gone, and why, we could not imagine. The usual surmises in the case of a missing seaman did not apply to Cesar's absence. He was too odious for love, friendship, gambling, or even casual intercourse. But once or twice he had wandered away like this before.

Dominic went ashore to look for him, but returned at the end of two hours alone and very angry, as I could see by the token of the invisible smile under his moustache being intensified. We wondered what had become of the wretch, and made a hurried investigation amongst our portable property. He had stolen nothing.

“He will be back before long,” I said confidently.

Ten minutes afterwards one of the men on deck called out loudly:

“I can see him coming.”

Cesar had only his shirt and trousers on. He had sold his coat, apparently for pocket-money.

“You knave!” was all Dominic said, with a terrible softness of voice. He restrained his choler for a time. “Where have you been, vagabond?” he asked menacingly.

Nothing would induce Cesar to answer that question. It was as if he even disdained to lie. He faced us, drawing back his lips and gnashing his teeth, and did not shrink an inch before the sweep of Dominic’s arm. He went down as if shot, of course. But this time I noticed that, when picking himself up, he remained longer than usual on all fours, baring his big teeth over his shoulder and glaring upwards at his uncle with a new sort of hate in his round, yellow eyes. That permanent sentiment seemed pointed at that moment by especial malice and curiosity. I became quite interested. If he ever manages to put poison in the dishes, I thought to myself, this is how he will look at us as we sit at our meal. But I did not, of course, believe for a moment that he would ever put poison in our food. He ate the same things himself. Moreover, he had no poison. And I could not imagine a human being so blinded by cupidity as to sell poison to such an atrocious creature.

XLIV.

We slipped out to sea quietly at dusk, and all through the night everything went well. The breeze was gusty; a southerly blow was making up. It was fair wind for our course. Now and then Dominic slowly and rhythmically struck his hands together a few times, as if applauding the performance of the Tremolino. The balancelle hummed and quivered as she flew along, dancing lightly under our feet.

At daybreak I pointed out to Dominic, amongst the several sail in view running before the gathering storm, one particular vessel. The press of canvas she carried made her loom up high, end-on, like a gray column standing motionless directly in our wake.

“Look at this fellow, Dominic,” I said. “He seems to be in a hurry.”

The Padrone made no remark, but, wrapping his black cloak close about him, stood up to look. His weather-tanned face, framed in the hood, had an aspect of authority and challenging force, with the deep-set eyes gazing far away fixedly, without a wink, like the intent, merciless, steady eyes of a sea-bird.

“CHI VA PIANO VA SANO,” he remarked at last, with a derisive glance over the side, in ironic allusion to our own tremendous speed.

The Tremolino was doing her best, and seemed to hardly touch the great burst of foam over which she darted. I crouched down again to get some shelter from the low bulwark. After more than half an hour of swaying immobility expressing a concentrated, breathless watchfulness, Dominic sank on the deck by my side. Within the monkish cowl his eyes gleamed with a fierce expression which surprised me. All he said was:

“He has come out here to wash the new paint off his yards, I suppose.”

“What?” I shouted, getting up on my knees. “Is she the guardacosta?”

The perpetual suggestion of a smile under Dominic’s piratical moustaches seemed to become more accentuated — quite real, grim, actually almost visible through the wet and uncurled hair. Judging by that symptom, he must have been in a towering rage. But I could also see that he was puzzled, and that discovery affected me disagreeably.

Dominic puzzled! For a long time, leaning against the bulwark, I gazed over the stern at the gray column that seemed to stand swaying slightly in our wake always at the same distance.

Meanwhile Dominic, black and cowled, sat cross-legged on the deck, with his back to the wind, recalling vaguely an Arab chief in his burnuss sitting on the sand. Above his motionless figure the little cord and tassel on the stiff point of the hood swung about inanely in the gale. At last I gave up facing the wind and rain, and crouched down by his side. I was satisfied that the sail was a patrol craft. Her presence was not a thing to talk about, but soon, between two clouds charged with hail-showers, a burst of sunshine fell upon her sails, and our men discovered her character for themselves. From that moment I noticed that they seemed to take no heed of each other or of anything else. They could spare no eyes and no thought but for the slight column-shape astern of us. Its swaying had become perceptible. For a moment she remained dazzlingly white, then faded away slowly to nothing in a squall, only to reappear again, nearly black, resembling a post stuck upright against the slaty background of solid cloud. Since first noticed she had not gained on us a foot.

“She will never catch the Tremolino,” I said exultingly.

Dominic did not look at me. He remarked absently, but justly, that the heavy weather was in our pursuer’s favour. She was three times our size. What we had to do was to keep our distance till dark, which we could manage easily, and then haul off to seaward and consider the situation. But his thoughts seemed to stumble in the darkness of some not-solved enigma, and soon he fell silent. We ran steadily, wing-and-wing. Cape San Sebastian nearly ahead seemed to recede from us in the squalls of rain, and come out again to meet our rush, every time more distinct between the showers.

For my part I was by no means certain that this GABELOU (as our men alluded to her opprobriously) was after us at all. There were nautical difficulties in such a view which made me express the sanguine opinion that she was in all innocence simply changing her station. At this Dominic condescended to turn his head.

“I tell you she is in chase,” he affirmed moodily, after one short glance astern.

I never doubted his opinion. But with all the ardour of a neophyte and the pride of an apt learner I was at that time a great nautical casuist.

“What I can’t understand,” I insisted subtly, “is how on earth, with this wind, she has managed to be just where she was when we first made her out. It is clear that she could not, and did not, gain twelve miles on us during the night. And there are other impossibilities”

Dominic had been sitting motionless, like an inanimate black cone posed on the stern deck, near the rudder-head, with a small tassel fluttering on its sharp point, and for a time he preserved the immobility of his meditation. Then, bending over with a short laugh, he gave my ear the bitter fruit of it. He understood everything now perfectly. She was where we had seen her first, not because she had caught us up, but because we had passed her during the night while she was already waiting for us, hove-to, most likely, on our very track.

“Do you understand — already?” Dominic muttered in a fierce undertone. “Already! You know we left a good eight hours before we were expected to leave, otherwise she would have been in time to lie in wait for us on the other side of the Cape, and” — he snapped his teeth like a wolf close to my face — “and she would have had us like — that.”

I saw it all plainly enough now. They had eyes in their heads and all their wits about them in that craft. We had passed them in the dark as they jogged on easily towards their ambush with the idea that we were yet far behind. At daylight, however, sighting a balancelle ahead under a press of canvas, they had made sail in chase. But if that was so, then —

Dominic seized my arm.

“Yes, yes! She came out on an information — do you see, it? — on information. . . . We have been sold — betrayed. Why? How? What for? We always paid them all so well on shore. . . . No! But it is my head that is going to burst.”

He seemed to choke, tugged at the throat button of the cloak, jumped up open-mouthed as if to hurl curses and denunciation, but instantly

mastered himself, and, wrapping up the cloak closer about him, sat down on the deck again as quiet as ever.

“Yes, it must be the work of some scoundrel ashore,” I observed.

He pulled the edge of the hood well forward over his brow before he muttered:

“A scoundrel. . . . Yes. . . . It’s evident.”

“Well,” I said, “they can’t get us, that’s clear.”

“No,” he assented quietly, “they cannot.”

We shaved the Cape very close to avoid an adverse current. On the other side, by the effect of the land, the wind failed us so completely for a moment that the Tremolino’s two great lofty sails hung idle to the masts in the thundering uproar of the seas breaking upon the shore we had left behind. And when the returning gust filled them again, we saw with amazement half of the new mainsail, which we thought fit to drive the boat under before giving way, absolutely fly out of the bolt-ropes. We lowered the yard at once, and saved it all, but it was no longer a sail; it was only a heap of soaked strips of canvas cumbering the deck and weighting the craft. Dominic gave the order to throw the whole lot overboard.

I would have had the yard thrown overboard, too, he said, leading me aft again, “if it had not been for the trouble. Let no sign escape you,” he continued, lowering his voice, “but I am going to tell you something terrible. Listen: I have observed that the roping stitches on that sail have been cut! You hear? Cut with a knife in many places. And yet it stood all that time. Not enough cut. That flap did it at last. What matters it? But look! there’s treachery seated on this very deck. By the horns of the devil! seated here at our very backs. Do not turn, signorine.”

We were facing aft then.

“What’s to be done?” I asked, appalled.

“Nothing. Silence! Be a man, signorine.”

“What else?” I said.

To show I could be a man, I resolved to utter no sound as long as Dominic himself had the force to keep his lips closed. Nothing but silence becomes certain situations. Moreover, the experience of treachery seemed to spread a hopeless drowsiness over my thoughts and senses. For an hour or more we watched our pursuer surging out nearer and nearer from amongst the squalls that sometimes hid her altogether. But even when not seen, we felt her there like a knife at our throats. She gained on us frightfully. And the Tremolino, in a fierce breeze and in much smoother water, swung on easily under her one sail, with something appallingly careless in the joyous freedom of her motion. Another half-hour went by. I could not stand it any longer.

“They will get the poor barky,” I stammered out suddenly, almost on the verge of tears.

Dominic stirred no more than a carving. A sense of catastrophic loneliness overcame my inexperienced soul. The vision of my companions passed before me. The whole Royalist gang was in Monte Carlo now, I reckoned. And they appeared to me clear-cut and very small, with affected voices and stiff gestures, like a procession of rigid marionettes upon a toy stage. I gave a start. What was this? A mysterious, remorseless whisper came from within the motionless black hood at my side.

“IL FAUL LA TUER.”

I heard it very well.

“What do you say, Dominic?” I asked, moving nothing but my lips.

And the whisper within the hood repeated mysteriously, “She must be killed.”

My heart began to beat violently.

“That’s it,” I faltered out. “But how?”

“You love her well?”

“I do.”

“Then you must find the heart for that work too. You must steer her yourself, and I shall see to it that she dies quickly, without leaving as much as a chip behind.”

“Can you?” I murmured, fascinated by the black hood turned immovably over the stern, as if in unlawful communion with that old sea of magicians, slave-dealers, exiles and warriors, the sea of legends and terrors, where the mariners of remote antiquity used to hear the restless shade of an old wanderer weep aloud in the dark.

“I know a rock,” whispered the initiated voice within the hood secretly. “But — caution! It must be done before our men perceive what we are about. Whom can we trust now? A knife drawn across the fore halyards would bring the foresail down, and put an end to our liberty in twenty minutes. And the best of our men may be afraid of drowning. There is our little boat, but in an affair like this no one can be sure of being saved.”

The voice ceased. We had started from Barcelona with our dinghy in tow; afterwards it was too risky to try to get her in, so we let her take her chance of the seas at the end of a comfortable scope of rope. Many times she had seemed to us completely overwhelmed, but soon we would see her bob up again on a wave, apparently as buoyant and whole as ever.

“I understand,” I said softly. “Very well, Dominic. When?”

“Not yet. We must get a little more in first,” answered the voice from the hood in a ghostly murmur.

XLV.

It was settled. I had now the courage to turn about. Our men crouched about the decks here and there with anxious, crestfallen faces, all turned one way to watch the chaser. For the first time that morning I perceived Cesar stretched out full length on the deck near the foremast and wondered where he had been skulking till then. But he might in truth have been at my elbow all the time for all I knew. We had been too absorbed in watching our fate to pay attention to each other. Nobody had eaten anything that morning, but the men had been coming constantly to drink at the water-butt.

I ran down to the cabin. I had there, put away in a locker, ten thousand francs in gold of whose presence on board, so far as I was aware, not a soul, except Dominic had the slightest inkling. When I emerged on deck again Dominic had turned about and was peering from under his cowl at the coast. Cape Creux closed the view ahead. To the left a wide bay, its waters torn and swept by fierce squalls, seemed full of smoke. Astern the sky had a menacing look.

Directly he saw me, Dominic, in a placid tone, wanted to know what was the matter. I came close to him and, looking as unconcerned as I could, told him in an undertone that I had found the locker broken open and the money-belt gone. Last evening it was still there.

“What did you want to do with it?” he asked me, trembling violently.

“Put it round my waist, of course,” I answered, amazed to hear his teeth chattering.

“Cursed gold!” he muttered. “The weight of the money might have cost you your life, perhaps.” He shuddered. “There is no time to talk about that now.”

“I am ready.”

“Not yet. I am waiting for that squall to come over,” he muttered. And a few leaden minutes passed.

The squall came over at last. Our pursuer, overtaken by a sort of murky whirlwind, disappeared from our sight. The Tremolino quivered and

bounded forward. The land ahead vanished, too, and we seemed to be left alone in a world of water and wind.

“PRENEZ LA BARRE, MONSIEUR,” Dominic broke the silence suddenly in an austere voice. “Take hold of the tiller.” He bent his hood to my ear. “The balancelle is yours. Your own hands must deal the blow. I— I have yet another piece of work to do.” He spoke up loudly to the man who steered. “Let the signorino take the tiller, and you with the others stand by to haul the boat alongside quickly at the word.”

The man obeyed, surprised, but silent. The others stirred, and pricked up their ears at this. I heard their murmurs. “What now? Are we going to run in somewhere and take to our heels? The Padrone knows what he is doing.”

Dominic went forward. He paused to look down at Cesar, who, as I have said before, was lying full length face down by the foremast, then stepped over him, and dived out of my sight under the foresail. I saw nothing ahead. It was impossible for me to see anything except the foresail open and still, like a great shadowy wing. But Dominic had his bearings. His voice came to me from forward, in a just audible cry:

“Now, signorino!”

I bore on the tiller, as instructed before. Again I heard him faintly, and then I had only to hold her straight. No ship ran so joyously to her death before. She rose and fell, as if floating in space, and darted forward, whizzing like an arrow. Dominic, stooping under the foot of the foresail, reappeared, and stood steadying himself against the mast, with a raised forefinger in an attitude of expectant attention. A second before the shock his arm fell down by his side. At that I set my teeth. And then —

Talk of splintered planks and smashed timbers! This shipwreck lies upon my soul with the dread and horror of a homicide, with the unforgettable remorse of having crushed a living, faithful heart at a single blow. At one moment the rush and the soaring swing of speed; the next a crash, and death, stillness — a moment of horrible immobility, with the song of the wind changed to a strident wail, and the heavy waters boiling up menacing and sluggish around the corpse. I saw in a distracting minute the foreyard fly fore and aft with a brutal swing, the men all in a heap, cursing with fear, and hauling frantically at the line of the boat. With a

strange welcoming of the familiar I saw also Cesar amongst them, and recognised Dominic's old, well-known, effective gesture, the horizontal sweep of his powerful arm. I recollect distinctly saying to myself, "Cesar must go down, of course," and then, as I was scrambling on all fours, the swinging tiller I had let go caught me a crack under the ear, and knocked me over senseless.

I don't think I was actually unconscious for more than a few minutes, but when I came to myself the dinghy was driving before the wind into a sheltered cove, two men just keeping her straight with their oars. Dominic, with his arm round my shoulders, supported me in the stern-sheets.

We landed in a familiar part of the country. Dominic took one of the boat's oars with him. I suppose he was thinking of the stream we would have presently to cross, on which there was a miserable specimen of a punt, often robbed of its pole. But first of all we had to ascend the ridge of land at the back of the Cape. He helped me up. I was dizzy. My head felt very large and heavy. At the top of the ascent I clung to him, and we stopped to rest.

To the right, below us, the wide, smoky bay was empty. Dominic had kept his word. There was not a chip to be seen around the black rock from which the Tremolino, with her plucky heart crushed at one blow, had slipped off into deep water to her eternal rest. The vastness of the open sea was smothered in driving mists, and in the centre of the thinning squall, phantom-like, under a frightful press of canvas, the unconscious guardacosta dashed on, still chasing to the northward. Our men were already descending the reverse slope to look for that punt which we knew from experience was not always to be found easily. I looked after them with dazed, misty eyes. One, two, three, four.

"Dominic, where's Cesar?" I cried.

As if repulsing the very sound of the name, the Padrone made that ample, sweeping, knocking-down gesture. I stepped back a pace and stared at him fearfully. His open shirt uncovered his muscular neck and the thick hair on his chest. He planted the oar upright in the soft soil, and rolling up slowly his right sleeve, extended the bare arm before my face.

“This,” he began, with an extreme deliberation, whose superhuman restraint vibrated with the suppressed violence of his feelings, “is the arm which delivered the blow. I am afraid it is your own gold that did the rest. I forgot all about your money.” He clasped his hands together in sudden distress. “I forgot, I forgot,” he repeated disconsolately.

“Cesar stole the belt?” I stammered out, bewildered.

“And who else? CANALLIA! He must have been spying on you for days. And he did the whole thing. Absent all day in Barcelona. TRADITORE! Sold his jacket — to hire a horse. Ha! ha! A good affair! I tell you it was he who set him at us”

Dominic pointed at the sea, where the guardacosta was a mere dark speck. His chin dropped on his breast.

“ . . . On information,” he murmured, in a gloomy voice. “A Cervoni! Oh! my poor brother! . . .”

“And you drowned him,” I said feebly.

“I struck once, and the wretch went down like a stone — with the gold. Yes. But he had time to read in my eyes that nothing could save him while I was alive. And had I not the right — I, Dominic Cervoni, Padrone, who brought him aboard your fellucca — my nephew, a traitor?”

He pulled the oar out of the ground and helped me carefully down the slope. All the time he never once looked me in the face. He punted us over, then shouldered the oar again and waited till our men were at some distance before he offered me his arm. After we had gone a little way, the fishing hamlet we were making for came into view. Dominic stopped.

“Do you think you can make your way as far as the houses by yourself?” he asked me quietly.

“Yes, I think so. But why? Where are you going, Dominic?”

“Anywhere. What a question! Signorino, you are but little more than a boy to ask such a question of a man having this tale in his family. AH! TRADITORE! What made me ever own that spawn of a hungry devil for our own blood! Thief, cheat, coward, liar — other men can deal with that. But I was his uncle, and so . . . I wish he had poisoned me —

CHAROGNE! But this: that I, a confidential man and a Corsican, should have to ask your pardon for bringing on board your vessel, of which I was Padrone, a Cervoni, who has betrayed you — a traitor! — that is too much. It is too much. Well, I beg your pardon; and you may spit in Dominic's face because a traitor of our blood taints us all. A theft may be made good between men, a lie may be set right, a death avenged, but what can one do to atone for a treachery like this? . . . Nothing."

He turned and walked away from me along the bank of the stream, flourishing a vengeful arm and repeating to himself slowly, with savage emphasis: "AH! CANAILLE! CANAILLE! CANAILLE!. . ." He left me there trembling with weakness and mute with awe. Unable to make a sound, I gazed after the strangely desolate figure of that seaman carrying an oar on his shoulder up a barren, rock-strewn ravine under the dreary leaden sky of Tremolino's last day. Thus, walking deliberately, with his back to the sea, Dominic vanished from my sight.

With the quality of our desires, thoughts, and wonder proportioned to our infinite littleness, we measure even time itself by our own stature. Imprisoned in the house of personal illusions, thirty centuries in mankind's history seem less to look back upon than thirty years of our own life. And Dominic Cervoni takes his place in my memory by the side of the legendary wanderer on the sea of marvels and terrors, by the side of the fatal and impious adventurer, to whom the evoked shade of the soothsayer predicted a journey inland with an oar on his shoulder, till he met men who had never set eyes on ships and oars. It seems to me I can see them side by side in the twilight of an arid land, the unfortunate possessors of the secret lore of the sea, bearing the emblem of their hard calling on their shoulders, surrounded by silent and curious men: even as I, too, having turned my back upon the sea, am bearing those few pages in the twilight, with the hope of finding in an inland valley the silent welcome of some patient listener.

PART 15: THE HEROIC AGE

XLVI.

“A fellow has now no chance of promotion unless he jumps into the muzzle of a gun and crawls out of the touch-hole.”

He who, a hundred years ago, more or less, pronounced the above words in the uneasiness of his heart, thirsting for professional distinction, was a young naval officer. Of his life, career, achievements, and end nothing is preserved for the edification of his young successors in the fleet of to-day — nothing but this phrase, which, sailor-like in the simplicity of personal sentiment and strength of graphic expression, embodies the spirit of the epoch. This obscure but vigorous testimony has its price, its significance, and its lesson. It comes to us from a worthy ancestor. We do not know whether he lived long enough for a chance of that promotion whose way was so arduous. He belongs to the great array of the unknown — who are great, indeed, by the sum total of the devoted effort put out, and the colossal scale of success attained by their insatiable and steadfast ambition. We do not know his name; we only know of him what is material for us to know — that he was never backward on occasions of desperate service. We have this on the authority of a distinguished seaman of Nelson’s time. Departing this life as Admiral of the Fleet on the eve of the Crimean War, Sir Thomas Byam Martin has recorded for us amongst his all too short autobiographical notes these few characteristic words uttered by one young man of the many who must have felt that particular inconvenience of a heroic age.

The distinguished Admiral had lived through it himself, and was a good judge of what was expected in those days from men and ships. A brilliant frigate captain, a man of sound judgment, of dashing bravery and of serene mind, scrupulously concerned for the welfare and honour of the navy, he missed a larger fame only by the chances of the service. We may well quote on this day the words written of Nelson, in the decline of a well-spent life, by Sir T. B. Martin, who died just fifty years ago on the very anniversary of Trafalgar.

“Nelson’s nobleness of mind was a prominent and beautiful part of his character. His foibles — faults if you like — will never be dwelt upon in any memorandum of mine,” he declares, and goes on — “he whose

splendid and matchless achievements will be remembered with admiration while there is gratitude in the hearts of Britons, or while a ship floats upon the ocean; he whose example on the breaking out of the war gave so chivalrous an impulse to the younger men of the service that all rushed into rivalry of daring which disdained every warning of prudence, and led to acts of heroic enterprise which tended greatly to exalt the glory of our nation.”

These are his words, and they are true. The dashing young frigate captain, the man who in middle age was nothing loth to give chase single-handed in his seventy-four to a whole fleet, the man of enterprise and consummate judgment, the old Admiral of the Fleet, the good and trusted servant of his country under two kings and a queen, had felt correctly Nelson’s influence, and expressed himself with precision out of the fulness of his seaman’s heart.

“Exalted,” he wrote, not “augmented.” And therein his feeling and his pen captured the very truth. Other men there were ready and able to add to the treasure of victories the British navy has given to the nation. It was the lot of Lord Nelson to exalt all this glory. Exalt! the word seems to be created for the man.

XLVII.

The British navy may well have ceased to count its victories. It is rich beyond the wildest dreams of success and fame. It may well, rather, on a culminating day of its history, cast about for the memory of some reverses to appease the jealous fates which attend the prosperity and triumphs of a nation. It holds, indeed, the heaviest inheritance that has ever been entrusted to the courage and fidelity of armed men.

It is too great for mere pride. It should make the seamen of to-day humble in the secret of their hearts, and indomitable in their unspoken resolution. In all the records of history there has never been a time when a victorious fortune has been so faithful to men making war upon the sea. And it must be confessed that on their part they knew how to be faithful to their victorious fortune. They were exalted. They were always watching for her smile; night or day, fair weather or foul, they waited for her slightest sign with the offering of their stout hearts in their hands. And for the inspiration of this high constancy they were indebted to Lord Nelson alone. Whatever earthly affection he abandoned or grasped, the great Admiral was always, before all, beyond all, a lover of Fame. He loved her jealously, with an inextinguishable ardour and an insatiable desire — he loved her with a masterful devotion and an infinite trustfulness. In the plenitude of his passion he was an exacting lover. And she never betrayed the greatness of his trust! She attended him to the end of his life, and he died pressing her last gift (nineteen prizes) to his heart. “Anchor, Hardy — anchor!” was as much the cry of an ardent lover as of a consummate seaman. Thus he would hug to his breast the last gift of Fame.

It was this ardour which made him great. He was a flaming example to the wooers of glorious fortune. There have been great officers before — Lord Hood, for instance, whom he himself regarded as the greatest sea officer England ever had. A long succession of great commanders opened the sea to the vast range of Nelson’s genius. His time had come; and, after the great sea officers, the great naval tradition passed into the keeping of a great man. Not the least glory of the navy is that it understood Nelson. Lord Hood trusted him. Admiral Keith told him: “We can’t spare you either as Captain or Admiral.” Earl St. Vincent put

into his hands, untrammelled by orders, a division of his fleet, and Sir Hyde Parker gave him two more ships at Copenhagen than he had asked for. So much for the chiefs; the rest of the navy surrendered to him their devoted affection, trust, and admiration. In return he gave them no less than his own exalted soul. He breathed into them his own ardour and his own ambition. In a few short years he revolutionized, not the strategy or tactics of sea-warfare, but the very conception of victory itself. And this is genius. In that alone, through the fidelity of his fortune and the power of his inspiration, he stands unique amongst the leaders of fleets and sailors. He brought heroism into the line of duty. Verily he is a terrible ancestor.

And the men of his day loved him. They loved him not only as victorious armies have loved great commanders; they loved him with a more intimate feeling as one of themselves. In the words of a contemporary, he had "a most happy way of gaining the affectionate respect of all who had the felicity to serve under his command."

To be so great and to remain so accessible to the affection of one's fellow-men is the mark of exceptional humanity. Lord Nelson's greatness was very human. It had a moral basis; it needed to feel itself surrounded by the warm devotion of a band of brothers. He was vain and tender. The love and admiration which the navy gave him so unreservedly soothed the restlessness of his professional pride. He trusted them as much as they trusted him. He was a seaman of seamen. Sir T. B. Martin states that he never conversed with any officer who had served under Nelson "without hearing the heartiest expressions of attachment to his person and admiration of his frank and conciliatory manner to his subordinates." And Sir Robert Stopford, who commanded one of the ships with which Nelson chased to the West Indies a fleet nearly double in number, says in a letter: "We are half-starved and otherwise inconvenienced by being so long out of port, but our reward is that we are with Nelson."

This heroic spirit of daring and endurance, in which all public and private differences were sunk throughout the whole fleet, is Lord Nelson's great legacy, triply sealed by the victorious impress of the Nile, Copenhagen, and Trafalgar. This is a legacy whose value the changes of time cannot affect. The men and the ships he knew how to lead lovingly

to the work of courage and the reward of glory have passed away, but Nelson's uplifting touch remains in the standard of achievement he has set for all time. The principles of strategy may be immutable. It is certain they have been, and shall be again, disregarded from timidity, from blindness, through infirmity of purpose. The tactics of great captains on land and sea can be infinitely discussed. The first object of tactics is to close with the adversary on terms of the greatest possible advantage; yet no hard-and-fast rules can be drawn from experience, for this capital reason, amongst others — that the quality of the adversary is a variable element in the problem. The tactics of Lord Nelson have been amply discussed, with much pride and some profit. And yet, truly, they are already of but archaic interest. A very few years more and the hazardous difficulties of handling a fleet under canvas shall have passed beyond the conception of seamen who hold in trust for their country Lord Nelson's legacy of heroic spirit. The change in the character of the ships is too great and too radical. It is good and proper to study the acts of great men with thoughtful reverence, but already the precise intention of Lord Nelson's famous memorandum seems to lie under that veil which Time throws over the clearest conceptions of every great art. It must not be forgotten that this was the first time when Nelson, commanding in chief, had his opponents under way — the first time and the last. Had he lived, had there been other fleets left to oppose him, we would, perhaps, have learned something more of his greatness as a sea officer. Nothing could have been added to his greatness as a leader. All that can be affirmed is, that on no other day of his short and glorious career was Lord Nelson more splendidly true to his genius and to his country's fortune.

XLVIII.

And yet the fact remains that, had the wind failed and the fleet lost steerage way, or, worse still, had it been taken aback from the eastward, with its leaders within short range of the enemy's guns, nothing, it seems, could have saved the headmost ships from capture or destruction. No skill of a great sea officer would have availed in such a contingency. Lord Nelson was more than that, and his genius would have remained undiminished by defeat. But obviously tactics, which are so much at the mercy of irremediable accident, must seem to a modern seaman a poor matter of study. The Commander-in-Chief in the great fleet action that will take its place next to the Battle of Trafalgar in the history of the British navy will have no such anxiety, and will feel the weight of no such dependence. For a hundred years now no British fleet has engaged the enemy in line of battle. A hundred years is a long time, but the difference of modern conditions is enormous. The gulf is great. Had the last great fight of the English navy been that of the First of June, for instance, had there been no Nelson's victories, it would have been wellnigh impassable. The great Admiral's slight and passion-worn figure stands at the parting of the ways. He had the audacity of genius, and a prophetic inspiration.

The modern naval man must feel that the time has come for the tactical practice of the great sea officers of the past to be laid by in the temple of august memories. The fleet tactics of the sailing days have been governed by two points: the deadly nature of a raking fire, and the dread, natural to a commander dependent upon the winds, to find at some crucial moment part of his fleet thrown hopelessly to leeward. These two points were of the very essence of sailing tactics, and these two points have been eliminated from the modern tactical problem by the changes of propulsion and armament. Lord Nelson was the first to disregard them with conviction and audacity sustained by an unbounded trust in the men he led. This conviction, this audacity and this trust stand out from amongst the lines of the celebrated memorandum, which is but a declaration of his faith in a crushing superiority of fire as the only means of victory and the only aim of sound tactics. Under the difficulties of the then existing conditions he strove for that, and for that alone, putting his

faith into practice against every risk. And in that exclusive faith Lord Nelson appears to us as the first of the moderns.

Against every risk, I have said; and the men of to-day, born and bred to the use of steam, can hardly realize how much of that risk was in the weather. Except at the Nile, where the conditions were ideal for engaging a fleet moored in shallow water, Lord Nelson was not lucky in his weather. Practically it was nothing but a quite unusual failure of the wind which cost him his arm during the Teneriffe expedition. On Trafalgar Day the weather was not so much unfavourable as extremely dangerous.

It was one of these covered days of fitful sunshine, of light, unsteady winds, with a swell from the westward, and hazy in general, but with the land about the Cape at times distinctly visible. It has been my lot to look with reverence upon the very spot more than once, and for many hours together. All but thirty years ago, certain exceptional circumstances made me very familiar for a time with that bight in the Spanish coast which would be enclosed within a straight line drawn from Faro to Spartel. My well-remembered experience has convinced me that, in that corner of the ocean, once the wind has got to the northward of west (as it did on the 20th, taking the British fleet aback), appearances of westerly weather go for nothing, and that it is infinitely more likely to veer right round to the east than to shift back again. It was in those conditions that, at seven on the morning of the 21st, the signal for the fleet to bear up and steer east was made. Holding a clear recollection of these languid easterly sighs rippling unexpectedly against the run of the smooth swell, with no other warning than a ten-minutes' calm and a queer darkening of the coast-line, I cannot think, without a gasp of professional awe, of that fateful moment. Perhaps personal experience, at a time of life when responsibility had a special freshness and importance, has induced me to exaggerate to myself the danger of the weather. The great Admiral and good seaman could read aright the signs of sea and sky, as his order to prepare to anchor at the end of the day sufficiently proves; but, all the same, the mere idea of these baffling easterly airs, coming on at any time within half an hour or so, after the firing of the first shot, is enough to take one's breath away, with the image of the rearmost ships of both divisions falling off, unmanageable, broadside on to the westerly swell, and of two British Admirals in desperate jeopardy. To this day I cannot free myself from the impression that, for some forty minutes, the fate of

the great battle hung upon a breath of wind such as I have felt stealing from behind, as it were, upon my cheek while engaged in looking to the westward for the signs of the true weather.

Never more shall British seamen going into action have to trust the success of their valour to a breath of wind. The God of gales and battles favouring her arms to the last, has let the sun of England's sailing-fleet and of its greatest master set in unclouded glory. And now the old ships and their men are gone; the new ships and the new men, many of them bearing the old, auspicious names, have taken up their watch on the stern and impartial sea, which offers no opportunities but to those who know how to grasp them with a ready hand and an undaunted heart.

XLIX.

This the navy of the Twenty Years' War knew well how to do, and never better than when Lord Nelson had breathed into its soul his own passion of honour and fame. It was a fortunate navy. Its victories were no mere smashing of helpless ships and massacres of cowed men. It was spared that cruel favour, for which no brave heart had ever prayed. It was fortunate in its adversaries. I say adversaries, for on recalling such proud memories we should avoid the word "enemies," whose hostile sound perpetuates the antagonisms and strife of nations, so irremediable perhaps, so fateful — and also so vain. War is one of the gifts of life; but, alas! no war appears so very necessary when time has laid its soothing hand upon the passionate misunderstandings and the passionate desires of great peoples. "Le temps," as a distinguished Frenchman has said, "est un galant homme." He fosters the spirit of concord and justice, in whose work there is as much glory to be reaped as in the deeds of arms.

One of them disorganized by revolutionary changes, the other rusted in the neglect of a decayed monarchy, the two fleets opposed to us entered the contest with odds against them from the first. By the merit of our daring and our faithfulness, and the genius of a great leader, we have in the course of the war augmented our advantage and kept it to the last. But in the exulting illusion of irresistible might a long series of military successes brings to a nation the less obvious aspect of such a fortune may perchance be lost to view. The old navy in its last days earned a fame that no belittling malevolence dare cavil at. And this supreme favour they owe to their adversaries alone.

Deprived by an ill-starred fortune of that self-confidence which strengthens the hands of an armed host, impaired in skill but not in courage, it may safely be said that our adversaries managed yet to make a better fight of it in 1797 than they did in 1793. Later still, the resistance offered at the Nile was all, and more than all, that could be demanded from seamen, who, unless blind or without understanding, must have seen their doom sealed from the moment that the Goliath, bearing up under the bows of the Guerrier, took up an inshore berth. The combined fleets of 1805, just come out of port, and attended by nothing but the disturbing memories of reverses, presented to our approach a

determined front, on which Captain Blackwood, in a knightly spirit, congratulated his Admiral. By the exertions of their valour our adversaries have but added a greater lustre to our arms. No friend could have done more, for even in war, which severs for a time all the sentiments of human fellowship, this subtle bond of association remains between brave men — that the final testimony to the value of victory must be received at the hands of the vanquished.

Those who from the heat of that battle sank together to their repose in the cool depths of the ocean would not understand the watchwords of our day, would gaze with amazed eyes at the engines of our strife. All passes, all changes: the animosity of peoples, the handling of fleets, the forms of ships; and even the sea itself seems to wear a different and diminished aspect from the sea of Lord Nelson's day. In this ceaseless rush of shadows and shades, that, like the fantastic forms of clouds cast darkly upon the waters on a windy day, fly past us to fall headlong below the hard edge of an implacable horizon, we must turn to the national spirit, which, superior in its force and continuity to good and evil fortune, can alone give us the feeling of an enduring existence and of an invincible power against the fates.

Like a subtle and mysterious elixir poured into the perishable clay of successive generations, it grows in truth, splendour, and potency with the march of ages. In its incorruptible flow all round the globe of the earth it preserves from the decay and forgetfulness of death the greatness of our great men, and amongst them the passionate and gentle greatness of Nelson, the nature of whose genius was, on the faith of a brave seaman and distinguished Admiral, such as to "Exalt the glory of our nation."
