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I

MR. GEORGE PELLEW

HAVING perfectly recovered my health after a term of sick-leave that had run into many months, I went on board the *Light of Asia* at Plymouth. In this ship I had taken my passage to Calcutta to rejoin my regiment. I am writing of thirty years ago, when the road to the East lay by way of the Cape of Good Hope, and when a voyage to India signified a residence of four, sometimes of five, months on board ship.

The *Light of Asia* was a large Blackwall liner, as a certain class of vessels which sailed from the Thames used to be called. She rose to a burthen of about fifteen hundred tons, which in those days constituted a big ship. I have the picture of her before me now as she

floated that September day on the silk-smooth surface of Plymouth Sound, blue Peter languidly swaying at the fore, her house flag of brilliant dyes clothing, as with a coat of fire, the head of the royal mast at the main, and a great brand-new crimson ensign drooping from the gaff end, and streaking the water under the stern with a dash of red as though a soldier had fallen overboard and was slowly settling to the bottom. I am no sailor, yet I believe had I commanded that ship I could not preserve a clearer recollection of her. A broad white band broken with black-painted ports ran along her side, and you looked for the tomponed muzzles of guns, so frigate-like did she float. The thick rigging of hemp rose black and massive to the tops and cross-trees, and upon the yards lying square across the masts the sails were stowed white as sifted snow, and they resembled sifted snow moulded to the image of furled canvas by cunning hands. The morning sunshine was on her, and the lambencies of the circular windows along her sides trembled in prisms and stars in the water that brimmed to a hand's breadth above her yellow sheathing.

Several boats were congregated at the foot of her gangway ladder; her forecastle was rich with the scarlet of the tunics of some three or four scores of soldiers. Many people, ladies and gentlemen were in motion upon her poop-deck, some looking at the boats over the side, some taking farewell glances at the land through binocular glasses. The figures of sailors running about could be seen in the open gangway, and the delicate breathing of the morning air was made vocal by the shrill whistling of a boatswain's pipe, though for what purpose *that* music was played I cannot tell. A number of the passengers had come round in the ship from Gravesend, but there were others who, like myself, were joining her at Plymouth, and when I mounted the gangway ladder I found the quarter-deck full of people. The bustle was disordering to the spirits. It is hard enough to take leave of one's native land for one's self; but to witness the distress of departure in others, the dejected countenance, the swimming eyes, the clinging of hand to hand, to hear the broken utterances of farewell, the "God bless you, my darling," the "Write soon

and often," the heart's grief in each syllable taking new and piteous accentuation from the lip quivering as it forms the words—these are things to convert one's own personal emotion into a real burden of wretchedness, and I was glad to scramble as best I could through the crowd, and through the boxes and bundles which littered the deck, into the comparative repose of the saloon, or cuddy as it was then called, in search of a steward who should convey my bags below and show me where my bedroom was.

All my baggage had been put aboard in the London Docks, and so when I met with a steward, there was no more for him to convey to my berth than a small portmanteau and one or two bundles. He was one of the under-stewards, a young flat-faced man in a camlet jacket and a strawberry mark on his cheek. I gave him my name,—Captain Swift,—and he at once seemed to know where my berth was.

"Is the gentleman who is to share my cabin on board?" said I.

"He is, sir."

"Where did he join the vessel?"

"In the Docks."

"Humph!" said I. "He seems to wish to make a longer voyage of it than need be. What sort of gentleman is he—old or young? And his calling, do you know?"

"He's young, sir. Can't tell you his calling, I'm sure. A gent, I take it; simply a gent, sir. Certainly he's no sailor, for he's kept his bed ever since we hauled out, and there he's still a-lying."

I was vexed to hear this, for the association of a man chronically sea-sick as a bedroom companion threatened a truly awful condition of the voyage if I should be unable to exchange my berth.

I had thus questioned the under-steward whilst we stood at the head of the staircase which conducted to the quarters I was to occupy; and let me here explain the structure of the after-part of this ship, for it is the stage on which was enacted the singular drama it is my business to communicate, and it is desirable for due appreciation of the performance that the scenery should be very clearly submitted. The saloon, then, of this ship con-

sisted of a long interior, the deck or roof of which was called the poop. A row of cabins went down on either hand of it, and in the centre was a long table with a cross table at the after-end, the two forming the shape of the letter T, and there were fixed benches at the sides of the table for the people to sit upon at their meals. The huge trunk of the mizzen-mast pierced the deck and might have passed for a colossal column designed wholly for the support of the roof of this saloon. Everything was in good taste, with something of pomp in the decorations. There were many mirrors; the carpets were rich; the lamps were numerous and of brilliant metal; there was a handsome piano, and, fore and aft, the place was abundantly sweetened and illuminated by the perishing beauties of flowers. Close against the front of the saloon, where the windows of it overlooked the main-deck, was a large square hatchway, down which fell a flight of broad steps that conducted to a row of cabins similar to those above them. My berth was there—my half-berth as I may call it, and thither I now followed the under-steward, anx-

ious to establish myself speedily that I might get on deck again and see what sort of people I was to have as fellow-passengers.

The cabin I was shown into was somewhat dark. This was partly due to my entering it fresh from the bright light above. A degree of gloom, however, absent in the other cabins, was occasioned by the overhanging ledge of the mizzen-channels, a wide platform projecting from the ship's side for spreading the rigging of the mast. The cabin porthole looked directly out from under this channel, which served to shade it from the light as the peak of a cap protects the eyes. There was, nevertheless, plenty of light to see by, and I found myself in a small compartment furnished in the usual seagoing fashion with a couple of bunks or bedsteads, one on top of the other, the top one close under the porthole, a contrivance of basin, glass, and the like in a corner for purposes of toilet, two small fixed chests of drawers, and a small heap of luggage marked with the letters G. P. I noticed a scent of tobacco, as though a pipe or cigar had been recently extinguished.

In the lower bunk lay a young fellow completely dressed in a suit of tweed, with varnished boots and red silk socks. His hands were folded upon his waistcoat, and there was a flash of gems upon them as he breathed. I could not very clearly distinguish his face in the gloom of the hole in which he reposed, but what little I saw instantly struck me as remarkable. It was a revelation of manly beauty—a slow stealing out, from the dimness, of physical lineaments of considerable grace and charm. To say this is perhaps to say all that I have it in my power to communicate, for any effort of description would impair in the reader the impression which I desire to reflect from my own sense and memory of this young man's beauty. This much, however, I may say, that he differed from the fashion that was at that period current in the wearing of his hair. The whisker was then almost universally worn; but the cheek and chin of this young man were as smooth as a woman's, whilst his dark auburn moustache was not so heavy but that it allowed his very perfectly formed mouth to be seen. Though recumbent, his stature was to be known

by the measurement of his bunk—that was six feet six inches—from whose bottom board his feet rested at a distance of about half a foot.

I stood looking at him for a little breathing while, scarce conscious of the incivility of such a stare in the singular fascination I found in his appearance. He eyed me in return with a clear, keen gaze that gave the lie direct to the drowsy droop of his eyelids. Sea-sick he certainly was not; nor did he discover the least appearance of indisposition of any sort; and I was astonished to find him lying in the comparative gloom of this cabin instead of being on deck where the weak sweet breath of the morning air, charged with the autumnal aromas of the land, was to be tasted, and whence a noble spectacle of English scenery was to be viewed: the sloping greenery of Mount Edgumbe, the little emerald-like gem of Drake's Island, the pleasant slope of the Hoe, and the fifty details of marine beauty betwixt the ship and the shore in the shape of the line-of-battle ship straining at her anchor with her three tiers of batteries overhanging the smooth waters, the dark-winged smack languidly seeking an offing,

a Symondite brig-of-war delicate as a carving of tinted ivory.

The steward put my traps into my bunk and was about to quit the cabin.

"When do we sail?" exclaimed the young fellow in a soft and quiet voice.

"At noon, sir."

The young man produced a large magnificent gold watch. "How many passengers have come on board since we dropped anchor here?" said he.

"I cannot tell, sir," answered the steward in a tone of mingled respect and astonishment. "I will inquire, sir."

"Do so, and get me a list of the passengers if you can," exclaimed the young fellow, speaking with some increase of energy, and in anything but a sea-sick voice.

"Very good, sir." Again the steward was making as if to go, when he suddenly paused and said, "Shall you lunch in the saloon, sir?"

"No," replied the young fellow with a sudden drop in the note of his voice, the artificiality of which was instantly distinguishable by my ear, "I am not well, and here I shall con-

tinue. Let me have my meals as hitherto—the leg of a chicken, a pint bottle of champagne—the merest trifle will serve my turn until I feel better. If I give trouble I hope there is nothing unusual in it. People cannot help feeling squeamish at sea."

"No trouble, sir," answered the man. He paused, and, finding the young fellow silent, went out.

"I am to share your berth," said I, struck by his talk to the steward as though my presence were unheeded by him; "I hope I shall not inconvenience you?"

"No. It cannot be helped. I wished to have a cabin to myself, but the ship is full. May I inquire your name?"

"Swift—Captain Swift." I added the name of my regiment, and asked if he was in the Army.

"No." There was an energy in his *no's* that to the ear corresponded to the beat of a strong pulse to the finger. "My name is Pellew—Mr. George Pellew."

As he spoke I glanced at the initials upon a portmanteau of his that lay close by. Was it

because of his way of pronouncing the words George Pellew? Was it because of some instinctive incommunicable reason, unintelligible to myself perhaps, that I could not find it in me to fit the name to the man who pronounced it? This much I recollect: I was as certain at that moment that George Pellew was *not* his name as that mine *was* Graham Swift. His large eye was resting full, keenly and intelligently upon me as I turned afresh to view him; but the lids drooped in a moment, and he suddenly averted his face whilst he pocketed the watch which he had continued to hold and toy with.

I was in no temper to express sympathy with an indisposition which seemed to me entirely feigned; and however much my curiosity was to be presently tickled, just now I was too full of thoughts of the leave-taking I was fresh from—of the beloved mother I had said good-bye to, perhaps for ever—of the old country which it might be my destiny never again to behold—for my mind to feel actively interested in this extraordinarily handsome and mysterious cabin companion of mine. I briefly inquired if I could be of any use to him; there

were boats alongside—had he letters to send, any communication to make with the shore? He thanked me with a graceful smile which swiftly faded as to a sudden emotion of despondency, and there being nothing to detain me in the cabin, I slightly bowed to him and quitted the berth.

I escaped the crowd on the main deck by arriving on the poop by the steps conducting through the companion-way. As I passed through the saloon I observed a busy coming and going of people, little knots in earnest conversation, doors suddenly opening and closing, with figures of ladies and gentlemen at the table eagerly scratching some final missive for the shore. There was a good number of persons assembled on the poop, a large proportion of them friends of the passengers, and it was impossible to tell who was and who was not going out in the ship. It was about eleven o'clock; we were to sail, if the under-steward was to be believed, at noon. The captain however was not apparently on board, and at present there were no signs of the ship getting under way. I lighted a cigar and planted my-

self right aft, close against the deserted wheel, and with folded arms contemplated the picture of the fabric that was to be my home for the next four or five months.

I confess I had never felt lonelier. It was not wholly the reactionary emotion of leave-taking and the mere sense of *being* alone; there was in addition that deep and burdensome feeling of solitude that visits a man who is solitary in a crowd. Whilst I stood in a melancholy mood blowing a cloud of tobacco-smoke, and watching with dull interest the various gestures and facial expressions of the knots of people and surveying with languid admiration the combined effect of this picture of almond-white decks, of burnished glass skylights, of sparkling brass-work, of the soft and various hues of women's apparel, of the scarlet of the soldiers' uniforms, blending with the striped shirts or rough blue jackets of the seamen, the whole framed by the tall line of the bulwarks from which ascended the heavy black mass of the shrouds and gear, carrying the eye upwards to the starry altitudes of the trucks whose white buttons gleamed against the misty blue as

though they were formed of frosted silver; whilst, I say, my eyes and thoughts were thus despondently busy, there arose through the companion-hatch, the yawn of which immediately confronted me as I stood abaft the wheel, the figure of a stout, fiercely-whiskered military man, who on putting his foot upon the deck turned to extend his hand to a young lady who was immediately following him.

I seemed to know the gentleman by sight: I had probably met him at a club; some fleeting view of him perhaps as he sat at table or passed through a room had left upon my mind the impression of his handsome, striking, but haughty, fierce, and forbidding face. He was above six feet in height, erect as a ramrod, with that sort of figure which when witnessed in men of my calling instinctively makes one think of the thunder of a charger's gallop, of the gleam of a brandished sabre, and of some motionless confronting ranks of men, massed into a hedge of gleaming blue steel. His whiskers were white, and stood out formidably from either cheek; his large moustache lay like a roll of cotton wool under his nostrils, and either

side of it went with an angry curl that reached very nearly to the ear. There was a fixed air of frowning in his eyes, which were of the deadness of unpolished jet, suggesting black blood not very many generations back. The dark hue of his cheek was made darker yet by the contrast of his white hair.

It was easy to guess that the young lady whom he handed through the companion-way was his daughter. The subtlety of the resemblance eludes description, yet I at once said to myself, she is his child. Of the several types of female beauty I have beheld in my time and can recall there is none that I can remember to compare this girl's with. It was not the amazingly delicate complexion of her skin, nor the dull bronze of her hair, nor the liquid softness and fire of her large, dark-brown eyes; there was nothing in lip, nose, or ear, in form of face or grace of brow, that created for her that individuality of charm and separate wonder of beauty which my sight, on going to her, instantly witnessed. What was it then? The pen of a Hawthorne or of a De Quincey alone could expound the mystery. That it was

character I do not doubt; an active blending of informing qualities of mind which wrought in her face, as by some delicate miracle of the painter's art the likeness of a woman whose beauty is wholly material might be infinitely raised by the involvement of a sweet impassioned character with its physical loveliness and made a marvellous thing of.

Never could one figure the melancholy of resignation expressed in the same degree as one found it in this girl's countenance. I met her glance, and the idea suggested to me by it was that she was always seeing something beyond the object at which she directed her eyes. Her father, for her father it was, addressed her, as he stood a moment sending a sweeping look over the people, then gave her his arm, and together they went forward, where he was immediately accosted, and was presently towering amid a little group that gathered round him.

A sailorly-looking man with a sunburnt face, a naval peak to his cap, and dressed in a suit of serge came with a deep sea lurch to the binnacle, behind which I was sitting on a grating that formed a little deck abaft the wheel. I

guessed him to be one of the mates of the ship and carelessly asked him at what hour we sailed.

"Very shortly, sir," he answered. "I'm expecting the captain aboard every minute, and the moment he arrives we shall get our anchor."

"You have a great number of passengers?"

"Yes, sir, we are a full ship."

"Pray," said I, "can you tell me the name of that tall gentleman yonder with the white whiskers—that man who stands there with the charming young lady on his arm?"

"Major-General Sir Charles Primrose, K.C.B., and as much more of the alphabet going to his name as would steady a big kite if they were made a tail of," he responded with a laugh in the light-blue eye he turned upon me.

The name was of course perfectly familiar to me, and I could now recollect having read or heard that Sir Charles was about to proceed to India to take command of a district the name of which has escaped my memory. I asked the mate if the young lady who leaned upon the General's arm was his daughter, and he an-

swered, yes: she was Miss Primrose, as it stood in the passengers' list.

"Is Lady Primrose on board?" I said.

He could not tell me; he believed not; he fancied that the general was a widower.

This mate, who turned out to be the chief officer of the ship, Mr. John Freeman by name, had very little information to communicate about the passengers. Yet we contrived to find topics enough for conversation to keep us leaning over the side some ten minutes or quarter of an hour, during which I spoke of my somewhat mysterious cabin-fellow, Mr. George Pellew; but he knew nothing of him; he did not even seem conscious that such a gentleman was aboard; until suddenly starting and fetching a telescope from the skylight and levelling it he exclaimed that the captain was coming and hurried away.

The name of the master of the ship was Stagg—Captain Stagg—a man whose low stature and bow legs caused him to present a very insignificant figure, spite of the careful manner in which he wrapped himself up in a cloth frock coat decorated with brass buttons, so that

he needed but a tall hat to resemble a harbour master rather than a blue-water mariner; his face however proclaimed his calling; his countenance was scored and furrowed with long years of hard-weather life, and one seemed to trace the word "ocean" scrawled all over it, as upon the trunk of a tree or the back of an old seat one witnesses a name rudely chiselled by some wanton knife, repeated over and over again. His head was singularly orbicular in shape, his eyes were large and protruding, of a dull and watery blue, his nose was twisted to the left as from a blow, whilst his mouth had a decided curl to the right as from perversity: and between them these perfidious features communicated to his countenance an expression of blunt and mirthful good-nature which was certainly foreign to the man's character.

He arrived on the poop, pulling off his cap with many grotesque contortions to the ladies and gentlemen assembled, and a few minutes afterwards a bell on the quarter-deck used for the sea-chimes of the hours was violently and alarmingly rung to the accompaniment of the shouts of mates and midshipmen dispersed

about the decks ordering those who were not sailing to India to immediately quit the ship. From the sternmost extremity of the vessel I watched the process of getting under way with interest. First of all the windlass was manned; a voice of storm began a song, the burden of which was regularly taken up by thirty or forty hurricane throats, for in those days ships went liberally manned. Strange was the effect of this wild sea chorus as one listened to it whilst watching those who were leaving and those who were remaining, bidding one another farewell. The poop was quickly thinned; a few passengers stood at the rail waving handkerchiefs and kissing hands to their friends as they entered the boats alongside; the General with his daughter upon his arm stood at the break of the poop, gazing down upon a scene of emotion and distress upon the quarter-deck with a face of wood. The little captain, with his pumpkin-shaped head and protruding eyes, as dim as jelly-fish, sidled athwart the deck on his rounded shanks with the rhythmic action of the pendulum, now gazing aloft, now sending a look

forward at the forecastle, where stood the mate gazing at the cable as it came in link by link, now directing his glance around the scene of bay and out to sea past the breakwater. A little wind was blowing; it blew direct from Plymouth town, and you heard the sounds of the life ashore in it, the noise of bells and the dim, thread-like hum of distant locomotion. There was weight enough in the air to tremble the water under the sun into a giant surface of blinding stars and diamonds, and, September as the month was, the land—the beautiful land of this most noble bay—seemed to gather to itself a dye of tropic softness and richness from the sudden brushing of the water into shuddering splendour.

Presently a number of figures raced aloft, orders were sharply given and as sharply re-echoed; all three topsails were let fall at once, and the white cloths flashed to the lower yard-arms as the clews were swiftly sheeted home; the hollow clanking of the windlass pawls ceased as the great yards mounted shaping the lustrous canvas into symmetric spaces and clothing the lofty fabric with the grace of white and

spacious wings. A little later and the long jib-booms of the *Light of Asia* were pointing seawards, with the windlass still clanking, the hoarse voices of men still chorusing, fold after fold of sail falling and then rising, passengers along the line of the bulwarks passionately gesticulating good-byes, and a crowd of boats with motioning people standing erect in them slowly settling away astern.