

being in the ship saving the man who waited upon him. Such a foregone conclusion of dislike or apprehension as his behaviour suggested was not to be received. I wondered that he was not to be coaxed from his immurement by the little picture of ocean splendour that the porthole framed—a miniature that was warrant enough of the glory of the wide canvas without; for through the thick but clear glass the blue, glittering and foaming heights of brine showed clearly with clouds of prismatic spray swept off them by the rush of the clear gale, whilst to the roll of the ship the noble ocean sky of flying white vapours came and went, putting by its coming and going a deep and a wild vitality into that free, radiant, and windy morning.

I quitted the cabin leisurely, conceiving from a sudden inquiring look he fastened upon me that he had some question to ask, but the expression of his face was swiftly chased away by another, and finding him mute, I left him.

Shortly after twelve that day the wind moderated, the sea subsided, studding-sails were run aloft, and the ship floated in beauty and tran-

quillity through as fair an afternoon as ever waned over the sea; the soft brimming run of the surge to her quarter was as a caressful help to her progress, and her three stately spires swayed with a regularity as rhythmic as though they were keeping time to some solemn music audible only at the mastheads. The poop was filled with passengers; the temperature was delightful; the ladies sat here and there in chairs reading or sewing; some of the younger fellows amongst us hung about them, and the "Yaases," "By Geds," and "By George's" were doubly plentiful under the inspiring influence of the agreeable weather. Sir Charles and Colonel Mowbray paced the deck together, and so far as I could gather their talk seemed to chiefly concern soldiers' rations.

I missed Miss Primrose till on having occasion to enter the saloon I saw her seated at the extreme end of it on a little sofa near the piano, with an open book on her lap, over which her beautiful face drooped as though she slept. I would have given much for an excuse to address her; but no excuse could have been permissible in the face of her manifest desire to

be alone. Once again the idea that had before occurred to me half formed itself in my mind, spite of its having *then* been a conjecture that had scarcely entered my head before it was dismissed as ridiculous. Was that melancholy and beautiful girl yonder the answer to the conundrum submitted by Mr. Pellew's behaviour? I could only mentally shrug my shoulders, so to speak, in response to this suspicion. What was it all to me? Be the affair what it might it was none of mine. And so little was I prone to concern myself in other people's business that but for the circumstance of my being Mr. Pellew's cabin associate, I should never have wasted an instant's thought in speculating about him.

A fine night followed the lovely afternoon that had shone over us; a night of cloudless sky rich with trembling stars more thickly strewn than ever I had beheld, and many of them shining in greens and reds, and of an icy whiteness of light that made one think of a splintered diamond, each fragment preserving the dye its facet had sparkled with before the gem was shattered. There was a young moon

in the west, but without power. The sea flowed in dark and foamless lines, and the light breeze had just enough of weight to hold every sail motionless.

I sat somewhat late at the dinner-table that evening talking with a young officer with whose family I was slightly acquainted, though it was enough that I should have met them to establish a sort of bond between the young fellow and myself all that way distant from home. It was about half-past seven when I stepped out of the saloon into a recess formed by the cabin-front and the bulkhead of a projecting cabin on either side, and lighted a cigar, for we made a kind of smoking-room of this recess, and here a few of us would muster after meals, pipe or cigar in mouth, and chat away an hour or so. The time was what is termed at sea the second dog-watch, when if the weather be fine and the ship demands little or no attention, the crew are at liberty to amuse themselves. They were doing so now; out of the gloom that shrouded the fore-castle came the strains of a concertina accompanying the manly notes of a seaman singing. The song

was "Tom Bowling," and the sailor's clear and powerful voice fell back again upon the deck in a soft echo out of the stirless concavities of the sails. Here and there stood or lounged a group of the dusky figures of soldiers talking in subdued accents, with an occasional flash of a lucifer match lighting up some whiskered face for a minute as it sucked at a pipe, and glancing a faint illumination upon the adjacent fellows, so that it was like peering into a camera-obscura.

Colonel Mowbray joined us, a gentleman whose propensity to argue speedily rendered him a bore, and I quitted the little group to stroll forward, with a notion of obtaining a better hearing of the music, and of overhearing the conversation and jokes of the Jacks. As I advanced, stepping along the deck on the lee side, I noticed a couple of figures standing against the galley or ship's kitchen, where their forms were so mingled with the deeper shade of darkness cast by the deck erection as to be indistinguishable at a little distance. I supposed them to be a couple of soldiers—indeed I scarcely glanced at them—and was pressing

yet a little nearer to the fore-castle front when I heard my name uttered. This caused me to stop and look, and now being very close to the two men, I made out that one of them, standing over six feet high, was swathed in a cloak of true melodramatic build, the collar of which was upturned, whilst a large black wide-awake drawn low over his forehead disclosed the merest glimmer of his face. The man at his side was a seaman, who, on my pausing, passed round to the other side of the deck by way of the long-boat and disappeared.

This tall, becloaked, obscure figure could be nobody else than my cabin-fellow, Mr. George Pellew.

"I am glad to see you on deck," said I, "your long confinement must certainly end in punishing you."

"Why, no," he exclaimed, speaking in a somewhat muffled voice, as though lifting his lips above the edge of a shawl about his neck to articulate; "I have merely to open the port to get all the air I require. How finely that fellow sings! I know no melody that harmonizes so perfectly with the thoughts which come to

one out of old ocean—when one is upon it—as ‘Tom Bowling.’ There is something in the tune that makes a man feel he ought to be a sailor.”

He paused, and I waited, not doubting he would make some apologetic reference to his strange theatrical garb. But nothing of the sort left his lips. He proceeded to talk of the beauty of the night, of the cloudlike faintness of the sails sweeping through the liquid dusk, in a manner and in a voice as though he was absolutely insensible to the oddity of his appearance, and to the notions which his mysterious behaviour must excite. Piqued by his cool indifference I could not help saying:

“Why not join us aft, Mr. Pellew? You will find some of the men very good fellows. They are not *all* General Primroses.”

“But why are *you* not aft, Captain Swift?” he rejoined, and I knew that he was smiling by the tone of his voice.

“I came forward to listen to the fellow singing.”

“Own now that you were bored.”

This was so pat that I could find no better answer to it than a short laugh.

“The long and short of it is,” he exclaimed abruptly and with energy, “I do not choose to mingle with the cabin passengers. All the society I may happen to require I shall be able to find in the forward part of the ship.” He added with a note of haughtiness, “I trust that my taste or desires are sufficient to satisfy you as *reasons* for my choosing to hold aloof.”

I was about to answer, when the figure of a man who, as Mr. Pellew spoke, had been approaching us from the direction of the poop, came to a halt immediately abreast of us with a suggestion of surprise in his manner of stopping. It was the chief mate, Mr. Freeman. He peered close into my face and exclaimed, “Oh, it is you, Captain Swift,” and immediately added, “Pray, who is your friend? I believe I have not before met the gentleman.”

“I am Mr. George Pellew,” exclaimed my tall companion. “And who are you?”

“I am Mr. Freeman, chief officer of the *Light of Asia*, sir,” rejoined the other in a rough sea voice of dignity and irritation. He seemed to reflect, then added in a changed tone, “I must apologize to you, sir. You are, of course,

a cabin passenger? I did not instantly recollect the name."

"Mr. Pellew and I share a berth between us," said I.

The dusky hand of the mate rose to the peak of his cap. "I truly beg your pardon," he began.

"No need whatever," interrupted Mr. Pellew, in a voice whose note of high breeding was sweetened by the cordiality he infused into it. "Not having before seen me, why should not you have imagined me a stowaway? The fact is, Mr. Freeman, I have kept my cabin partly because I have been sea-sick, and partly because I have no desire to join the company in the saloon. My amiable fellow-passenger, Captain Swift, is astonished that I should not haunt the decks as the rest do, and no doubt considers me in consequence as decidedly *wanting*."

"No, no," said I.

"But, surely, Mr. Freeman," he continued, "passengers are privileged to keep their cabins if they choose?"

"Certainly," exclaimed the mate.

"There is nothing in the Shipping Acts,

I believe, to compel a passenger to eat at the saloon table?"

"Not a syllable," replied the mate with a laugh.

"And," continued Mr. Pellew, "though I know the master of a ship is invested, and very properly invested, by the law with the most absolute, the most despotic powers, he cannot, even if he would, compel a passenger to mix with his fellows."

"A passenger has the right to do what he likes, sir," answered the mate, "subject of course to the rules which provide for the safety of a ship and for the security of the lives of the people on board of her."

"There is no menace to a vessel's safety in a passenger keeping his berth," said Mr. Pellew.

"None whatever," answered Mr. Freeman heartily. "But still, sir, you know, as a matter of health—and then again the voyage to India is a long one, and dull enough, heaven knows, even at its liveliest."

"But how much duller may it be made," exclaimed Mr. Pellew, "by the society of in-

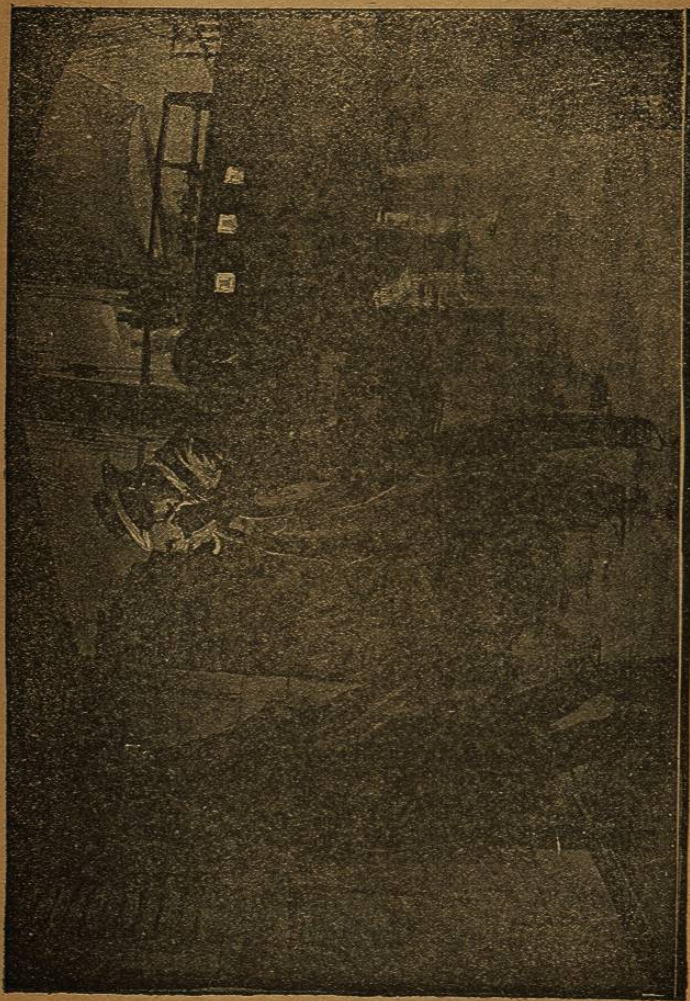
insipid or stupid or argumentative or quarrelsome people?"

The mate could not stay to converse; he saluted again with another polite flourish of his hand to his cap, and disappeared in the obscurity forward on the errand that had brought him from the poop.

Through the illuminated windows of the cuddy front we could witness dimly the shapes of people seated or in motion; but we stood too far forward to discern faces. The brightness of those windows rendered profounder by contrast the gloom of the deck overhead, and I could only tell that there were people up there approaching the rail and then marching aft again in the regular sea patrol by hearing their voices coming and going. Eight bells were struck; the clear chimes swept past the ear and died out in faint music upon the starry distance over the side; the strains of the concertina ceased, there was the bustle of a change of watch, of a man going aft to relieve the wheel, of the soldiers descending to their quarters in the 'tween decks.

Mr. Pellew lighted another cigar, but showed

no disposition to quit the spot where I had found him. The mystery of his conduct made him better society to my mind than the people in the saloon, of whom, to be sure, I had scarce as yet made the acquaintance of more than half a dozen. I therefore filled my pipe afresh and lingered at his side with some hope of courting him into a sentence, however evasive, which should sharpen or satisfy the suspicion that was now a mere vexation for its vagueness; but so often as I directed the conversation to the passengers, so often indeed as I uttered any remark that was not of an absolutely impersonal character, the tendency of which threatened to swerve us in the smallest degree from conversation more or less idle and commonplace, his pause, his silence, was the completest hint of recoil, and once or twice of quiet resentment; and then he would go on talking of such stuff as the duties of a merchant mate, the worth of such a cargo as the *Light of Asia* carried, the height of the topmost sail, the main-royal, from the deck on which we stood. Once I asked him how long he proposed to remain in India, and he answered by calling my attention to the



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flight of a shooting-star, which on its vanishing left behind it a long wake or scoring of floating silver dust, that lingered for some moments. Half an hour of this sort of thing sufficed me, and emptying my pipe I left him stationed like a sentry by the side of the galley and strolled aft into the saloon.

