MR. HORROCKS, PURSER

Cutcliffe W. Hyne (1866–1944)
Illustrated by Harold Piffarrd

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Die erste Geschichte, *The Looting of the Specie-Room*, ist als Teil der Anthologie The Rivals of Sherlock Holmes 2 als Hörbuch by LibriVox erhältlich:

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Cutcliffe Hyne

Charles John Cutcliffe Wright Hyne (1866–1944) was an English novelist who was also known by the pen names Weatherby Chesney and Nicholson West. He is perhaps best remembered as the author of *The Lost Continent: The Story of Atlantis.* He is also remembered for his ›Captain Kettle‹ stories and for *The Recipe for Diamonds.*

Cutcliffe Hyne would probably have been forgotten but for the American science fiction fans such as Lyon Sprague de Camp. They republished *The Lost Continent* without permission, possible because of the then American copyright law, an act, which led, however, to the republishing of his other stories.

Mehr Informationen unter https://sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/hyne_c_j_cutcliffe

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Chapter 1

The Looting of the Specie-Room[1]

There was a thump at the door, which was ajar on the ventilating hook, and the voice of Clayton, who was the ›Birmingham's‹ chief officer, called out: "You in there, Purser?"

"Come right in," said Mr. Horrocks, and, when Clayton had unhooked the door, he was invited to take the sofa and help himself to a drink. However, he said he hadn't come for whisky. He was looking tired and serious. For some time he grumbled on vaguely about the discomfort of the officers' quarters, the vileness of Atlantic weather, the slowness of promotion in the Town S.S. Co.'s boats, and the smallness of pay and the absence of pickings that a chief officer could lay his hands upon; and then, by an easy transition, he got to his own financial embarrassments. Up till this the Purser had been putting in comments in his sharp, bright, jerky way, but when Clayton started hinting at the woes and needs of impecuniosity, his stout friend began to examine the roof of the cabin with interest, and refrained from further speech. Mr. Horrocks was a bachelor, and reputed wealthy. It was known for a fact that an uncle had bequeathed him a considerable sum, because three Liverpool papers had given extracts from the will and congratulated the legatee in print. (It was one of Mr. Horrocks' professional duties to keep on amiable terms with all journalists.) He was in receipt of good pay and a liberal allowance from the Company, and, moreover, he was known to be one of the artfullest pursers in all the Western Ocean passenger trade at making 'bits for himself' by various well-recognised methods.

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[1] Zuerst erschienen in Pearson's Magazine im Juli 1900.

"If you could see your way to making me a bit of a loan," said Clayton, "I should never forget it."

"I'm at my wit's end," said Clayton. "There was a bill of sale on the furniture when I left."

"Hard luck," said Horrocks.

"My wife, poor girl, was driving me pretty nearly wild by the way she kept asking me for money."

"Beastly it must be," said the Purser with feeling.

"If you could see your way to making me a bit of a loan," said Clayton, "I should never forget it."

"I'm sure you wouldn't. Nor would you ever forgive me. No, old chap, I like you too well to let you start hating me because you owe me money. Go and borrow from your enemies. Besides, come to that, I've empty pockets myself."

"Rats! You'd skin beautifully, and by gad I've three-quarters of a mind to do it. I tell you, Purser, I'm about desperate."

"Don't be absurd. Slow down the pace ashore to suit your income. And presently you'll get promotion, too."

"It doesn't look like it. I think the skippers of all our boats have got the secret of eternal life. There's not one of them resigned, or died, or been sacked these last twenty months, and there doesn't seem to be the smallest chance of a vacancy on ahead. It's simply cruel having to drag on all these years on a mate's screw. I haven't the heart to blame my wife for spending more than we have. She must keep up her position.

With a captain's pay we could do it and save, but, as things are now, I feel like jumping overboard or robbing you of the ship's petty cash."

"Much better loot the specie-room," said Horrocks laughing. "We're on for a double advertisement this trip. We're trying to cut the time-record from New York to Liverpool, and we've got on board the biggest shipment of gold that's been made this year."

"How much?"

"More than $1,250,000. Now, there's your chance. Clayton. Only a Chubb lock between you and a fortune; and the key's on the bunch in my pocket."

The Chief Officer jumped up from the settee as though someone had pricked him, and stood facing the Purser with gripped hands and gritted teeth.

"What's wrong now?"

He pulled himself together a bit. "If you only realised how hard up I am, and how I'm begged and threatened for money by my—by people ashore, you'd understand I'm about desperate, and not the man to be tempted with a big bait like that. A million and a quarter dollars! Good Lord! And we could do the thing comfortably, I know we could, on a steady $3000 a year."

Clayton took himself off after that, and Mr. Horrocks was not sorry. He was tired, and wanted rest. He considered himself a prince amongst pursers, and to maintain that position did not spare himself work when at sea. He served both himself and his employers loyally, and if he did make more solid cash out of his opportunities than strict people might say was his exact due, he salved his conscience by remembering that he always rendered to the Town S.S. Company full service for the salary they paid him.

But though he lay down on his bedplace, sleep would not come to him, and in his mind he grumbled heavily over the load of responsibility that rested on his shoulders both afloat and elsewhere. "Outside people think that everything on these big boats rests on the skipper," he mused, "and if anything goes wrong they say: 'Poor chap, but what a heap of responsibility he has to carry.' No one looks at the Purser in that light. Passengers think the Purser is just the man to throw complaints at if they don't like the mashed potatoes, or to get yarns from if they're feeling dull. It never dawns upon them that a Purser's answerable for a sight more than any Captain that ever wore uniform, and when some day luck does get up and trip him, and the Company gives him the sack, passengers who know the boat say: 'Hallo, the old Purser gone?' and

swallow some yarn about his having resigned to take up a baronetcy and 850,000 a year. And besides, I'm not like an ordinary Purser, with just a wife and family depending on him. There's always the Institution to be thought of."

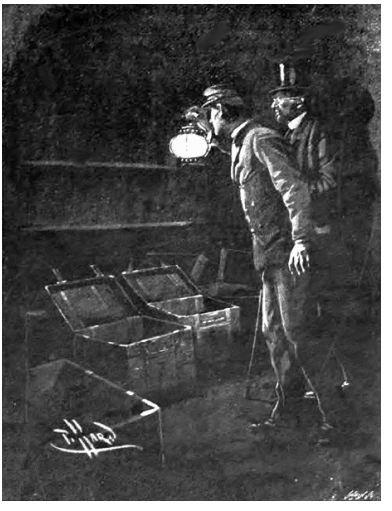
It was not often that Mr. Horrocks let his mind go in this strain, but Clayton's look when he spoke to him about that specie had made him uncomfortable, and from that moment on, he began to have a foreboding that there would be trouble about it somehow.

However, he did not have much time for brooding on board, because a Purser is kept pretty well on the run at sea, but when they got rid of the passengers at Liverpool, and docked, and the bank messenger came on board, I am free to own he took a good, stiff, three-finger peg to get a brace on his nerves. In his own words he "could have prophesied trouble ahead like Job."

The bank messenger was an old fellow he had known for years, just as formal and precise and drily civil as they make them. He made Mr. Horrocks read through his authorisation note as if they met then for the first time, and then they went below with the messenger's two porters at their heels. The specie-room was under the saloon, and badly ventilated, and what with the heat and his foreboding that something was wrong, the sweat stood on the Purser's forehead as he unlocked the door. There was no electric light inside, for some reason best known to the builders, and his fingers shook as he fumbled with a match to light the old-fashioned candle-lamp. The prim old bank messenger pulled a long upper lip as he watched him. He somewhat naturally put down Mr. Horrocks' trembling fingers to undue conviviality.

But when at last the match lit the wick, and the light flared up and showed the room, it was plain that the messenger promptly altered his mind, and put the Purser's shakiness down to sheer unadulterated guilt. He was hardly to be blamed. The forebodings had come off to a nicety. The place had been looted clearly enough, and the gold boxes lay brazenly open about the floor. "Looks as if somebody'd been hurried over this job, Mr. Horrocks," commented the old messenger nastily. "It's the general custom to fill up the boxes with an equal weight of lead and get the bank's receipt for them, so as to try and locate the robbery on shore."

"Then I wish to Heaven they'd done it here. We've cut the Western Ocean time-record this trip, and that's done the boat a lot of good; but if this affair conies up to light, it will do us a precious sight more harm. Look here ; I shall go straight up to our office and report, and I suppose



The place had been looted clearly enough.

you will go and tell your bank people. Probably the police will be called in. But I don't suppose we either of us want the matter gabbled over in the papers."

"I know you don't," said the old fellow drily.

"Why should your bank? It won't improve their credit to let all the world know they've been robbed. And if there's no fuss made about it, the thief won't be scared, and there'll be all the more chance of catching him."

The messenger looked at the Purser coldly. "With the thief's feelings I have no concern, Mr. Horrocks. And as to what action my bank may take, I can give you no guarantee. Speaking without prejudice, I should say it will be a matter for our directors, and they will probably fend your directors their decision in writing. And now, if you please, I will go back and make my report."

"Go ahead, you old fool," said Horrocks to himself, and moved towards the door. But in the dim light of the candle-lamp he did not see a box which lay in his way, and stumbled against it heavily. His figure was portly and not adapted to stumbling without doing himself personal damage. Probably he never felt pleasure over stubbing his toe before.

"Great Caesar!" he shouted, "they haven't looted the place clean after all. If there's one full box left, there may be others."

The messenger took the announcement stolidly. He was a most wooden messenger. All he said was:

"Whatever you give over into my charge, I shall be pleased to give you an accurate receipt for."

Mr. Horrocks rapped out a few remarks that were intended to get through that messenger's skin somewhere, and then set to work to go through those boxes himself. He had neither patience nor trust to let anyone else do the job, and in the end, when it appeared that only about a third of the boxes had been looted, he could have sung for sheer joy. Perhaps there was not much to be pleased about; there was some $500,000 gone anyway; but for the moment he thought no more about it than if it had been a dollar, and snapped his fat fingers before old wooden-face's nose in sheer delight. "Now where do we stand ?" said he.

"Let my porters take the full boxes off the steamer and I'll give you a receipt for them." said the messenger, and so he did, carefully writing with his stylograph, after the word 'boxes' in the printed form, the addition of 'said to contain gold.'

"You'll remember what I mentioned about the newspapers," the Purser said to him as he buttoned up his coat to go.

"And you, Mr. Horrocks, will equally remember my answer," he replied.

The afternoon was getting on for late, and by the time the Purser had walked out of the docks to the electric railway, and run up to the land"-ing-stage station, and reached the office, the Firm's principals had gone away, and there was no getting hold of them for the night. There are strict orders that neither of the partners are to be rung up in the evening, but Mr. Horrocks thought the occasion sufficiently out of the ordinary to break the rule. So he went to the telephone, and presently got a snubbing for his pains.

There was nothing for it but to write out a report for them to see tomorrow morning, and in the meanwhile try if the police could do anything to find the thief.

The Purser was more at home there. Officers in the Western Ocean passenger trade are so constantly carrying shady customers back and across the Atlantic, that the police find it suits their purpose to be very civil to them, and keep as close in touch as circumstances will permit. They see the great liners off, and they see them in; they very often do the trip across; and ashore, both in Liverpool and New York, it was: "Any little service we can do for you, Mr. Horrocks, only too delighted if you'll name it."

So the Purser had only to find out who were on duty in the police station, and in two minutes he was sitting in a room with two smart de-

tectives who had a personal acquaintanceship with half the rogues in creation.

They heard his story, and Trent, the senior of the two, jerked in questions as he went along. When Mr. Horrocks had finished, Trent asked for the ›Birmingham‹'s passenger list.

"First thing I thought of," said the Purser, and laid it on the table.

"Now, if you had asked me, I should have said the crew list would have come sooner into your thoughts."

"I've got that, too. But you must remember that I've got no evidence against anyone."

"Meaning Clayton? Well, I must confess, he seems the likeliest bird so far. But let's look and see if there are any of our friends amongst the passengers. Ah, there's this Devine. His real name's Scott. New York wired us to say he was coming. But Devine-Scott's line is high-class forgery, and like a sensible man he sticks to it and does a sound conservative business. No, Scott-Devine's not stolen your gold, Mr. Horrocks. Wouldn't know what to do with it if it had been given him. Paper's the only thing he can handle.

"This fellow Schneider here in the second-class, real name Plunket, is another shady one. I saw him off from the landing-stage in '91, and he nodded to me as he went aboard the tender. I was there on the stage as usual to-day, and he nodded to me as he came ashore. Seemed to expect me, like. Arson and insurance frauds are his specialities, and he's not at all likely to try anything fresh. Your criminal of to-day knows his limitations, or thinks he knows them, very nicely, and never dares to out-step his bounds. For instance, either of these two men would take an impression in wax of your specie-room key if they saw it lying about, because such a thing might have its eventual uses, but neither of them could make a duplicate key, and neither of them, as I say, would have tackled the game of getting all that big weight of gold out of the ship and through the customs."

"You seem to take it for granted that I leave my keys perpetually lying about for anyone to get at. I'm not quite new to shipboard pilfering, Mr. Trent."

"My dear sir, I know you and your methods with an accuracy that would surprise you. It's my trade to know everybody and everything. For instance, I know exactly the construction of the ›Birmingham's‹ specie-room under the saloon. Walls, floor, and roof are all made of chilled steel plates that would turn any drill in creation. The lock's a Chubb and unpickable, and, in fact, nothing short of dynamite would open

that specie-room to a man who hadn't a key. The thing's been done with quiet and caution, so dynamite and those high explosives are out of the question, and if you've any theory, Mr. Horrocks, as to how the place could possibly have been looted without the help of a key, I'd like to hear it."

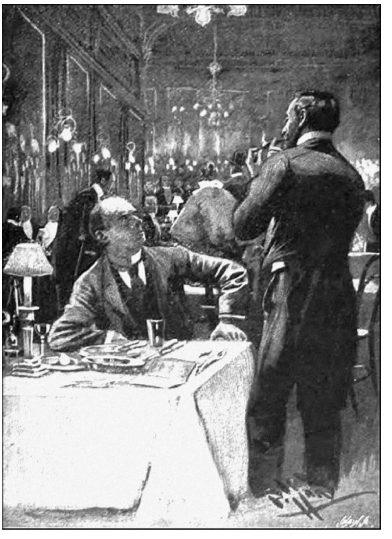
"If I'd a notion of how the robbery was worked, I should have told you at once. I'll not swear that my keys were never out of my pocket. As they were in use twenty times a day, that would be impossible. But as for their being habitually left lying about, that's all twaddle. I can tell you I look after that bunch very shrewdly."

"Quite so," said Trent, "but as a man with a lump of wax in the palm of his hand could take an accurate cast of the one he wanted in an instant, and file another to match it in a matter of a couple of hours, you must see the force of my point. Now you've done all you can for us, Mr. Horrocks, and my humble advice is, go home and have a good dinner, and forget your worries for the time being. We'll work through these passenger and crew lists more carefully for likely operators, and meanwhile we'll set all our machinery going to keep the gold from being carried further away. It's the weight of it that will handicap the thief more than anything else. You might call in, or ring us up at midnight, if you're still in Liverpool."

So Mr. Horrocks with a sigh left the office, and went out into the lamplit street. He did not allow himself the luxury of a home. In his official capacity he was one of the best known of men, and cultivated notoriety as a professional asset. At sea, and ashore in New York, he was always the Purser, but ashore at the Liverpool end, where tor a short period his duties closed between voyages, he became a personage wrapped in some mystery. He was occasionally reported as prowling in Liverpool slums. But for the most part he disappeared entirely from the ken of his associates. When he was asked in chaff where he bestowed himself at these intervals, he would reply that he had a quiet business as a burglar. When he was asked seriously, he would answer with equal seriousness that he was away enjoying himself.

He denied himself even a bedroom ashore, making his shipboard cabin his headquarters when he was in Liverpool, and taking nomadic meals in restaurants of the cheaper sort.

But just now he felt it was no time for the mortification of the palate. By nature he was something of a gourmand and a judge of vintages, though it was rarely that he allowed himself to launch into these ashore. This night, however, seemed sufficiently momentous for exceptional



"Hullo, Horrocks, letting yourself go and having a decent meal for once in a way?"

treatment, and instead of the cheap and nasty eating-house of his more ordinary wont, he betook himself to the Adelphi, and spread a napkin across his knees to face the *table d'hôte*.

Little enough satisfaction did he get out of it. A noisy party at the next table took all his mind. There, at the head, sat Clayton, evidently the giver of the feast. There were two other men the Purser did not know, and three women in extravagant evening dress. Mrs. Clayton decorated the end of the table with a presence that was florid and bejewelled. They were drinking their champagne by the magnum, and making a good deal of clatter.

The scale of the entertainment should have been well above the purse of a mere chief officer of an Atlantic passenger boat at the best of times, but when Mr. Horrocks thought of Clayton's confession at sea, and of the bill of sale on his furniture, he was filled with a discomfort he could not get over. Where had the money come from for this spread? Yes, where? Where?

Course after course came and left him untempted. The wine soured in his throat. The maddening facts danced before him: Clayton had been in desperate straits; the specie-room had been looted; Clayton was now possessed of ready cash.

But at last the noisy party got up to go, and Clayton came across with an affable greeting. "Hullo, Horrocks, letting yourself go and having a decent meal for once in a way? Tired of your usual slums?"

"I thought you'd a bill of sale on your furniture?" said the Purser bluntly.

"So thought I. But it appears I haven't. In fact I gather that my rich uncle has died, and so we've been having a bit of a jamboree to wish him a pleasant journey. The Missis fixed it all up as a surprise. We're going to finish up at the theatre. We've got a box—will you come?"

"Thanks, but I've got to finish up at the police-station. We're trying pretty hard to find who looted the specie-room, and by all appearances I expect we shall succeed."

"Hullo, has somebody been getting at your gold boxes? Well, I wish the criminal luck, anyway. A poor man could find a lot more amusement out of that money than any bank would—especially if the poor man was married. Well, good-night, Purser, unless I see you again. But come along and join us in the box if you change your mind. You needn't waste time hunting for the gold. You'll never see that any more. But I shouldn't leave the specie-room keys loose in your jacket pocket again after this, if I were you. It's so easy for anyone to borrow them for half a minute and take a squeeze of them in wax. Well, good-bye. I mustn't keep the ladies waiting any longer."

"Well," thought Mr. Horrocks, as he watched him go away, "I've no exact proof that you did the actual stealing yourself, but you've not got the knack of advertising your innocence. Under the circumstances, this spread to-night strikes one as distinctly bad taste."

Few men in Liverpool spent a more uncomfortable time than Mr. Horrocks did that night. As he viewed the affair, whether the thief or the gold ever turned up again did not seem to matter much to the case. Whatever happened, the Firm would say the initial fault was his for leaving the keys about, and though, as a point of fact, he had stuck to the bunch as closely as any Purser could, if directors once get a notion that one of their officers is "careless," they have their knife into him at once. And so that night as he walked about the streets to pass the time, he pictured himself dismissed from the company and blacklisted so that he should never get further employment anywhere else.

It was not for himself as Mr. Horrocks, the Purser, that he feared. As that official, his wants were small, and his private income covered them easily. But he was a man with an alias; a man who led a double existence. Throughout all his life he had carried an infinite tenderness for those wretched children of the slums, in which Liverpool is so prolific, and of late he had contrived to found an Institution in a village near Chester for their maintenance and relief. It pleased him to pose as a portly local philanthropist. Down there he was Mr. Rocks, of Rocks'

Orphanage, a somewhat pompous personage, who was very different from the affable Purser in the Town S.S. Co.'s employ. It was lest the power to continue being Mr. Rocks should be taken away from him, that he was so full of dread.

However, next morning, when he went to the office, the directors were not so severe as they might have been. Nothing about the trouble had got into the papers; but, on the contrary, there were flattering paragraphs about the Birmingham's cutting the record, her luxurious accommodation, and the celebrities she had carried during her race across, just as Mr. Horrocks arranged it. A wonderful thing, the power of the press, if it is used the right way. So the directors told Mr. Horrocks to turn the boat over to the shore Purser in the usual routine, and get on with his ordinary work.

The time the ship was in the shore gang's hands, working cargo and getting ready for the next trip, passed miserably enough. Mr. Horrocks was at the office every day, and he saw the police every day, but nothing turned up. He quite believed they would have dismissed him out of the ›Birmingham,‹ or, at any rate, suspended him, if the Line had not just then happened to be short of pursers. But the Leeds man was down with typhoid, and they had to discharge the Purser from the Stockport as he had too short a way with passengers. And so it was, Mr. Horrocks went to sea again in his old berth. But he had a near shave of it. The police got something against Clayton the very day they sailed, and locked him up as being the thief, and the wretched affair bubbled over into the papers at once. They were full of it. "Robbery of £100,000" makes a good scare-heading for the contents bills, and because they had not been given the story at once when it was fresh, the newspaper men were naturally a bit vicious, and gave the boat and the Company an unpleasant time of it.

As Mr. Horrocks expressed it afterwards: "Our Mr. William Arthur, who came to see us off, was in a proper fury about it, and he as good as said that if he'd anyone else to take my place, he'd have sent me ashore then and there. 'They've made our boats fairly stink up and down England,' said the old fellow. 'They've as good as said, if we had can't transport bullion safely, we aren't fit to carry even a down-at-the-heel Polish emigrant. There's a nice advertisement for you! And I gave all those pressmen a spread that cost me $2000 not three weeks ago, and this is the way they pay me back.'"

But he had another tongue-hammering before they sailed, that was worse even than their Mr. William Arthur's. Mrs. Clayton came off

"You have read what my poor darling says?" asked the lady.

in the London train-tender, desolated, so she said, with grief and horror. As Mr. Horrocks put it: "You wouldn't have thought it to look at her. She'd a wonderful array of clothes on view, with the latest thing in hats on top, and jewellery of sorts wherever it would stick. I don't know whether she thought she was dressing the part, but to my mind she overdid it. However, when it came to talking, she was sound there, all along. She got me down to my room, and ranted a bit about her poor dear boy, and the disgrace that it would bring on him, and her, and their eminent lines of ancestors. But she had a note from Clayton which she'd managed somehow to smuggle out that was very much to the point."

"Dear Horrocks," the letter ran. *"it seems you've let me in for this by repeating that silly talk we had that afternoon in your room. Now, I no more stole the money than the Emperor of China did, and you know that perfectly well. But at the same time, from what the police said today before the magistrate, they seem sure they've got evidence that can convict me. So what you've just got to do, is either to find the right man, or anyway clear me. If you don't, and if I get sent to jail, I give you my solemn word of honor I'll kill you when I get out."* After which followed the statement that the writer was Mr. Horrocks' very truly, Godfrey Clayton.

"You have read what my poor darling says?" asked the lady. The Purser told her that he had, and that he would make a note of it.

"You'd better," said she, "and you'd better get him clear, or you'll have

me and my two sisters pretty sharply at your heels. I can tell you. Mr. Horrocks, we aren't going to have our bread-winner taken away from us for nothing."

"Right," said Mr. Horrocks, "you may depend upon me to do my best, Mrs. Clayton, and now, if you don't want to come with us to New York, you'd better get on board the tender." So he got rid of her. "And now," thought he, "it's just my day. If anybody else wants to take it out of me, let them come. Yes, let them all come. I'm made to be trampled on."

Come they did, too. He never saw such a lot of hard-to-please passengers in all his life. It was no use saying "See your bedroom steward," or "Won't you see the head steward about that?" They knew Mr. Horrocks was in authority, and they came to the fountain head, and (as he put it) "they said straight what they wanted, and saw that they got the exact article, and no inferior substitute." He could have read the burial service smilingly over several of them.

One portly old lady wanted him to change her room. "My dear madam," said the worried man, "I'm afraid you're too late."

"This is pleasant sort of treatment! Surely you must remember me?"

"We had the honour of bringing you out from New York in this very boat some ten days ago."

"Well, and aren't I entitled to some particle of consideration, then? All I'm asking for is the room I came over in. It isn't occupied."

"You should have told the agent ashore when you bought your ticket. You see, madam, the stewards are very pressed just now. That the room is unoccupied is nothing to do with the case. It is not prepared. And, besides, you're in an outside room now, which is in every respect better than the one you came out in, which happens to be one of our worst."

"Look here, Mr. Purser, am I going to have that room or am I not?"

"Madam, I can only repeat my former decision."

"Very well, Mr. Purser, if you choose to be awkward, we'll see if your superiors can't teach you civility."

With that she took herself off, as Mr. Horrocks thought, to have a try at the skipper, and he wished her joy of her attempt. The Captain of the ›Birmingham‹ was not the sort of man who stood much interference from passengers, and he knew well how to back up his officers. But it seems she was clever enough to go direct to Mr. William Arthur, and let him have such a taste of her tongue, that presently that great man came fuming down to the saloon in a fine state.

"Why the dickens am I pestered like this, Horrocks? Don't you know the most elementary duties of a purser, or have you completely taken

leave of your senses? Kindly attend to the passengers' wants instead of gossiping with questionable females from the shore in your own room. This lady is, of course, to have the stateroom she wants. It can be got ready in five minutes."

Mr. Horrocks felt that it was little trifles like these which make one enjoy life.

However even passengers can grumble themselves dry, if one only gives them time, and the great steamer got off at last, and things soon shook into place once she began dropping down the river. Mr. Horrocks had a lot of handshaking and talk to do with passengers who crossed regularly, and he made the most of these. Getting the likings of constant passengers—business men, many of them, who cross as many as five or six times a year—are counted by pursers as a regular asset, as if they leave one ship and go to another, they can often take these passengers with them, and the companies know it. And just then Mr. Horrocks was feeling that the more weight of this kind he could carry, the better it would be for a certain institution in which he was so deeply interested. There had been a look in Mr. William Arthur's eye that he did not like.

"Funny old geezer, that one you had the fuss with over her room," said the chief steward to the Purser that night before dinner, as they were going over some accounts. "Vanrenen's her name. She's got hands like a washerwoman, and yet she seems well off. Drinks champagne every meal. She came back with us last time, if you'll remember, and she brought on board enough weight of baggage in New York to sink a lifeboat. I saw the fellows staggering below with it, and told them to carry some of it off lo the baggage room. She was down on me like a fury. 'Can't you see it is marked with your Company's label, ›Wanted on Voyage?‹' 'I was only thinking of your own convenience,' I told her. 'If we have a rough passage, that heavy stuff will probably take charge, and you may have a serious accident with it.' 'You mind your own business and leave me to mine,' says she. 'I'm not going to have that baggage out of my sight, and I've taken the room to myself so that I can have plenty of space for it.'"

"What was in her baggage?"

"Lead ballast I should think by the weight of it, but I don't know for certain, and as a point of fact I asked Taylor, her bedroom steward, and he didn't know either. However, she got rid of it in England, whatever it was, and she's come back flying light."

"Well," Mr. Horrocks said, "passengers were sent into this world to an-

noy those who are appointed to shepherd them. And now let's get to business."

There is a saying in the Navy that if your ship is in action, and a shot strikes her, and you want to be safe, your best plan is to stick your head in that first shot-hole, as it is a sure thing that a ship never gets hit again in the same place. On this principle the Purser tried to prove to himself that because the ›Birmingham‹ had been looted during her last trip, she was safe this.

Last trip the specie-room was full of big, heavy boxes which were awkward to handle, and yet thieves had managed to take their toll. This time the only thing it contained was a small sealed parcel, smaller than an ordinary cigar-box. But that small parcel held a consignment of diamonds which were being taken across to a New York gem merchant, and it had an intrinsic value of something very near to that of the previous cargo of gold.

Now when they left Liverpool, Mr. Horrocks never gave these diamonds a thought; but as they cleared from Queenstown he was beginning to get anxious about them; and by the time they had got half-way across, he had worked himself to such a pitch of nervousness that he could neither eat, sleep, nor even drink as a Purser ought if he wants to be popular. A new lock had been fitted to the door of the specie-room, and he kept the key in his pocket all day long, usually with his hand on it to make sure it was there; and at night he put it into the breast pocket of his pyjamas, and fastened it with a safety-pin.

Then suddenly like a shot came to him a horrible thought suggested by some detective novel he had once read. Supposing, in spite of all his care, he was hypnotised or chloroformed, or by some other means rendered temporarily unconscious, and a wax impression squeezed from this new key just as before? Of course the idea was absurd, and at any other time he would have scouted it utterly. But just now his nerves were in rags, and the notion rode him like an incubus.

He bore it for a day. He bore it for a second day till the smoke room rallied him on his absentmindedness and haggard looks, and said his waistcoat was beginning to hang in loose folds. And then he gave in. He sent for the chief steward to come with him as witness, and they went down to the specie-room, and he unlocked the door with the new key, and the chief steward lit the candle-lamp.

"They should be on the shelf at the far side," said the Purser.

"Well, they're not," said the chief steward.

"My God! They've been stolen too. This means ruin for me."

"Wait a bit, Mr. Horrocks, and let's look about the floor. There was a big sea running yesterday, and she's so light she rolled a good deal, and may have shot them off."

So they set to work and hunted. But the place was as bare as Mother Hubbard's bone cupboard, and the Purser felt like going up on deck and jumping over the side.

"It's no use being too down about it," said the chief steward. "You've done your best, and I guess that is all you were paid for. But I'd like to know if there's no other way out of this coffin. That duplicate key tale is a bit too simple for my taste."

He went outside, and presently came back with a big incandescent lamp and a coil of wire which he had coupled on to the terminals of one of the electrics in the gangway.

"Now." he said, "we can see what we are doing."

The specie-room was an oblong box of steel, some ten feet by eight, fitted with wooden shelves. There was a steel deck overhead and a steel deck underfoot, and there was no gap or hole anywhere. There was not even a ventilator, and the air inside was close and hot. The plates that made the walls were flush - jointed everywhere except in one place, and there there was a plate about two feet by three, lap-jointed on to the rest. It was at the side opposite to the door, and underneath a shelf which kept it well in shadow, and Mr. Horrocks remembered noticing it when he came in with that dry old bank messenger, and got his first shock.

But even now, when he was hunting the place over inch by inch, panting and blowing as he crawled about the floor in his search, it did not give him much concern at first. The ways of shipbuilders and safe-makers are too mysterious for any layman to follow. But when for the third time he crawled round to that part of the specie-room on his new inspection, holding the incandescent lamp, and dragging the loose wire behind him, he noticed that the paint at the edge of that plate did not seem to have quite run up to the paint on the walls where they joined. There was barely enough gap to swear to, only the faintest crack, as it were. But it gave him the idea that this overlapping plate had been added after all the rest of the room was built—and painted. Still there were rivet heads in it all complete, and at any other time these would have satisfied him.

Just now, however, he was brimful of suspicion, or, if you like, of desperation; it was all creation to a tin-tack that he got professionally ruined unless he caught this second thief; and a tight place like that sharpens a man's wits.

"She came blustering to me about it."

"What's the other side of this plate?" he asked the chief steward.

"One of those mid-ship $50 rooms."

"Yes—but whose?"

"That fat Mrs. Vanrenen's, who came back with us last trip."

"Is she in her room now?"

"I'll find her bedroom steward."

"No, don't. If the game I think of is on, he'll have a finger in it. I wonder if there's a stewardess in it too?"

"No, I'm sure there. She isn't, anyway. Mrs. V. had quarrelled with the stewardess last back trip before we dropped the pilot, and forbidden her the room. She came blustering to me about it. Either the bedroom steward, Taylor, should look after her entirely, or she'd have no attendance at all. So as they all three seemed agreed over the matter, I let it stand at that. You know what passengers are. Well, I'll slip round myself and see if she is in."

She was not, so the Purser went round too, and examined the room with care. The electric light was on, and he could see it thoroughly. It was eminently unsuspicious. But then, of course, it would be—especially if anything was wrong. However, he had got an idea in his head that was too good to be thrown away in a moment. So he fetched a long tape measure, and reckoned up accurately round the blocks of cabins till he found to an inch where that lap-jointed plate would back on Mrs. Vanrenen's room.

He decided it was at the other side of the panelling which formed the side of her bed. Was there another paint crack here? No such thing. He rapped it with his knuckles; nothing wrong still. It was as ordinary a bedside panelling as there was in the ship.

"Get a hammer and chisel from the carpenter, and we'll see what there is at the other side," he said doggedly.

"Ay, ay, sir," said the chief steward, and presently brought the tools.

It was kill or cure now, and the Purser did not mince matters. The chisel ripped out great splinters of the wood, and, when it got thin enough, he beat in the rest with the hammer.

"My Great Washington! look here!" said the Purser. "Look what there is behind this woodwork!"

"Phew! It's a back door into the specie-room right enough, but how the mischief did they make it? People say these steel plates are too hard to be touched by a drill. Besides, that doesn't look like drill work."

"There's been no drill at this. This hole in the plate has been just melted out, and I'm mechanic enough to know how it's done, and that's by an oxy-hydrogen flame."

"Beyond me."

"It's what they use in magic-lanterns. But how they got their gas I don't know."

The chief steward snapped his fingers. "Then I do. It's all as clear as daylight. They have magiclantern gas now in steel cylinders, and that's what'll have made the excellent Mrs. V.'s cabin baggage so infernally heavy."

"Yes, by Jove, and I suppose she could have taken a good lump of gold ashore inside the empty cylinders, though not all But that can wait for the present. What I want just now is that parcel of diamonds. Has she got them on her? Are they hidden in this room? Or has somebody else got them?"

"Somebody else is likeliest. Takes away evidence in case anything goes wrong."

"I think so, too. Now, who's the assistant? Mrs. Vanrenen may have melted out the manhole in the side of the specie-room, and even have slipped this false plate inside, with its sham rivets and clever paint, and clamped it on this side here with these thumb-screws. Look, aren't they beautifully made? But that's all shore work. That was brought on board in New York, finished and ready.

"What I want to know is, who fitted fresh panelling and repainted it so perfectly? That's been done by a clever carpenter, and he's on this ship."

"Taylor, the bedroom steward of this block of cabins, is the handiest man on my staff."

"Then we'll have Mr. Taylor in irons within the next five minutes," said Horrocks; and that is exactly what they did. Taylor seemed surprised, and he looked very ugly, but the Purser who, in spite of his bulk, was powerful and active, slipped the bracelets on his wrists before he could hit, and the man contented himself with saving nothing. Mr. Horrocks took the liberty of going down to the glory hole and searching his effects. A more innocent and blameless kit never existed. But borrowing a hint from his past cleverness, the Purser got his hammer and chisel again, and set to work smashing up the woodwork of the man's bunk, and there, in a series of little slots in the wood, magnificently hidden, was a collection of diamonds that made one's mouth water. The Purser counted them: the number tallied with the invoice. And then he slipped them into his pocket in an ecstasy.

Of course Mr. Horrocks could not arrest a passenger on his own responsibility, but the Captain soon gave him power when he had heard the story, and then they invited Mrs. Vanrenen into an empty room and told her she would have to stay there under lock and key till the police took her over in New York. She was game to the end.

But if Mrs. Vanrenen intended to fight to a finish, Taylor, the bedroom steward, knew when he was beaten. He owned up to the whole tale from start to end. Mrs. Vanrenen came on board at New York with all her apparatus made and ready. It was she who had fused the hole with the oxy-hydrogen flame jet. and fitted the plate, and in fact done all the metal work. Taylor, who was an ex-cabinet maker, concealed the traces of her handiwork after it was finished.

The gold had gone ashore through the Customs under cover of compressed gas cylinders, as Mr. Horrocks had guessed. But not in the original filled cylinders which came on board openly with Mrs. Vanrenen's baggage. They were too heavy, and needlessly strong. So some other lighter cylinders, in fact mere shells of iron, were smuggled on board by Taylor, also in New York, and the gold was stowed in these, and the heavier cylinders were quietly slipped overboard. And out of a hundred guesses, how was the gold prevented from jingling? The clever Mr. Taylor stole jellies from the pantry, and they melted these and poured them in to fill up the crevices between the coins and the

cylinders.

Now if Mr. Horrocks had been content with getting hold of this tale, and writing a simple report to the company, all would have been well. But as part had been in the papers already, he thought there would be no harm in writing out an "Interview with Mr. Horrocks, by our representative," and it was that which tripped him. Indeed, Mr. Wilfred told him that if Mr. William Arthur had got his own way entirely at the board meeting, he would have been dismissed from the Company's service. But as it was he was sent down the list to the ›Ambleside,‹ which was the smallest ship the Line has on the New York run.

Many of his acquaintances thought he was a fool to take it. But Mr. Horrocks was a shrewd man and knew what he was doing.

Whatever happened, Rocks' Orphanage must not have its supplies cut off. With Mr. Horrocks out of employment afloat, Mr. Rocks could not pursue his philanthropic courses in the Cheshire village, and would be a man entirely miserable.

Of course, on the Ambleside his salary would be reduced. "But," as he put it to me in confidence, "a Purser can find pickings."

But Clayton was the man who scored principally out of the affair. Clayton had been hustled by the Company into jail, and they were forced to make the insult of that up to him somehow. It seems they had known all along that he was heavily dipped financially, and when he suddenly splashed out into extravagant dinners at the Adelphi, and proceeded in other ways to have a good feverish time of it, they naturally made a theory that he was doing it on plundered capital. Once, of course, one has an idea like that in one's head, it is easy enough to make proofs, and so the police soon found suspicious things against the poor fellow, and arrested him before, as they said, he could have a chance of bolting.

His own explanation of affluence was that his wife had raised ready money from a Jew, being so certain that he soon must be promoted and get Captain's pay. Of course such a tale was far too thin to be believed, and into jail he went. But as it happened to be exactly true, the Town S.S. Co. felt that they owed him something by way of reparation, and their apology took a form that suited Clayton down to the ground. They brought their senior captain ashore as superintendent, made a move up all through the fleet, and appointed Clayton to the command of the ›Ambleside.‹

Mr. Horrocks was the first to congratulate him, and to compliment him delicately on having the best Purser in the Western Ocean passenger trade to make the ship popular for him. But it would have eased Mr.

Horrocks' mind much if he could have known that Captain Clayton would take a lenient view on the subject of Pursers' perquisites. He had a very keen anxiety for the future welfare of Rocks' Orphanage.

• Rezension des Bloggers TomCat vom 11.11.2024

Blog: moonlight detective at https://moonlight-detective.blogspot.com

C.J. Cutcliffe Hyne was a British writer who was "one of the most prolific and successful producers of early magazine SF" and novels like ›The Lost Continent‹ (1899), but also wrote short stories of action, adventure and mystery – like his once popular "Captain Kettle" series in Pearson's Magazine. So a fictioneer in the tradition of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle who himself had a series of pirate stories published in Pearson's Magazine and authored the famous science-fiction novel, ›The Lost World‹ (1912).

Fittingly, Hyne contributed one of those so-called, turn-of-the-century ›Rivals of Sherlock Holmes‹ in *'one of the artfullest pursers in all the Western Ocean passenger trade,'* Mr. Horrocks.

Mr. Horrocks appeared in a short series of six short stories, "Tales of a Steam Hotel," published between July and December 1900 in, where else, Pearson's Magazine. "The Looting of the Specie-Room" is the first story and introduces Horrocks as the experienced purser on the Liverpool-New York line of the Town S.S. Company. A purser, Horrocks reminds the reader, is not only the man for passengers to throw complaints at or tell them stories of the sea at dinner, but *'answerable for a sight more than any Captain that ever wore uniform'* – whose latest responsibility is 1.25 million dollars in gold bullion. A precious cargo stored in the ship's specie-room, tucked away under the saloon, walls, floor and roof made of steel plates and an unpickable lock on the door. So '*nothing short of dynamite would open that specie-room to a man who hadn't a key.*' And the person in possession of the only key to the specie-room is Horrocks.

That becomes something of problem when half of the gold bullion disappears from the supposedly securely locked specie-room. So the assumption is Horrocks had been careless enough with the key to allow someone to make an impression of the key and make a duplicate, which places his job in peril. But not to his personal detriment.

"The Looting of the Specie-Room" is very much a first in a series and gives Horrocks a sketchy backstory. Horrocks is a bachelor who was

bequeathed a considerable sum from a late uncle, *'his wants were small, and his private income covered them easily,'* who uses his income as a purser to secretly finance a personal charity project. Horrocks created a false identity, Mr. Rocks of Rocks' Orphanage, to provide a home for *'those wretched children of the slums.'* It's their *'maintenance and relief'* that's really at stake. However, Horrocks is not an entirely saintly character as it's made very clear he supplemented his income on the side by *'various well-recognized methods'* of the passenger trade.

Another troublesome aspect confusing the matter is the Chief Officer of the ›Birmingham,‹ Godfrey Clayton, who desperately needed a large sum of money. Horrocks had teased him about the shipment of gold in the specie-room. But when Clayton gets arrested, Horrocks receives a letter begging him to clear up the case or get killed when he gets released.

The solution, or the key towards the solution, is more or less dropped in Horrocks lap. Simply works out the whole scheme from there. You have to keep in mind this short story was published a 124 years ago and barely resembles the traditional, fair play detective story that would emerge over the next twenty, thirty years – an acceptable enough excuse for breaking a few cardinal rules. That being said, I enjoyed Horrocks mildly toying with the idea of false-solutions as he considered and rejected the idea of having been hypnotized or chloroformed in order to make an impression of the key as absurd. No duplicate key was employed in the theft of the gold nor [of] the parcel of diamonds that disappeared under similar circumstances during the voyage to New York.

Not that the actual locked room-trick is blistering original, but how it was done, and where, certainly counts for something this early in the game. [Hier wird die Lösung beschrieben.] That's not bad at all for a short, borderline detective story about an impossible theft from 1900!

Chapter 2

The Derelict[1]

"You are my skipper now," said Mr. Horrocks, "and I've got to call you 'sir.'"

"Of course, you must when we're on board here," said Clayton, the new captain of the ›Ambleside.‹ "Discipline's discipline, and neither you nor I, Purser, are big enough to override it. But I don't know that we shall be any the worse friends for that. True, when we were on the old ›Birmingham,‹ you as Purser and I as chief mate, our relative positions were somewhat different, but now even if I have taken a step above you, we can still be friends."

The Purser laughed. "I don't see why not," he said. "The billet was a long time coming to you, but that shouldn't make you uppish."

Clayton shook his head.

"No, indeed," he replied, then after a pause, he added: "Horrocks, if you only knew how I have longed to find myself in command of a big liner, I believe even you'd be astonished. A chief officer's nobody, even if he is R.N.R.; a Captain's somebody; and I've had that drilled into me every hour I've been ashore since I was married. And, of course, there's increase of pay."

"Well," said the stout Purser drily, "I hope the berth comes up to your expectations. You've no watch to keep like you had when you were chief officer, but you'll find yourself voluntarily keeping both watches out of sheer nervousness. You'd no truck with passengers before, but you'll see presently what a joy and a blessing they can be when they are in the mood. A passenger who gave me a tract when he boarded the boat has been at me already about you.

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[1] Zuerst erschienen in Pearson's Magazine im August 1900.

"He said, did I think it safe to cross with a Captain who'd never commanded the boat before? Would you know the road? If you failed to find New York Harbor, would you at least strike Boston? He didn't want to be dumped down in St. Johns, as he'd heard was often the habit of new and inexperienced captains, because Newfoundland was foggy, and the smell of fish made him ill. And did I think you'd keep the engines from breaking down? He'd heard that young captains were very careless about engines; they left too much to the engineers."

"You'd better tell the old chief that."

"I did, but he seemed to see nothing funny in it. I said I was going to bring that passenger down to call on him in the engine-room, and leave a few tracts. He said if I did, he'd set on a greaser to tip a can of warm oil over him and spoil his clothes. And in the meanwhile he gave me a lecture on the inefficiencies of the mess-room steward. I'm afraid there's varra sma' sense o' humour about McDraw."

"They say he's the most careful engineer in the Western Ocean trade," said Clayton, with a sigh, "and that's principally what I care about. He won't press engines much, and so he's missed a lot of promotion, and was passed over for the newer boats, but he's never had a breakdown yet, and won't if grand-mothering his engines will do it."

"Well, that's a comforting thing for you to go upon as a groundwork, anyway."

"I want all the backing up I can get now, Purser. I'm never going to return to what I was. And if anything happens to the boat—well, I'm not going back to shore to get sacked. You know what I mean."

"Pooh," said the stout man. "'All saved except the Skipper, who went down on the bridge,' is melodramatic and out of fashion. Our company isn't one of those mean Jew companies that just run tramps, and blacklist a skipper if a Dago pilot scrapes her over a sandbar. They stick by you honestly enough if you come foul of an accident just by luck, and not through any glaring fault of your own."

Captain Clayton laughed. "I've a sort of memory that you got Irishman's promotion for a bit of a mistake just recently. You used to be on the Birmingham which was the best they'd got. And now you're with me on the Ambleside which is the smallest boat on the line, and—well, I'm a lucky man to get such a right good purser."

"Thanks. You keep the old packet going nicely, with the blue ensign wagging out behind her, and I'll see she's popular and comfortable inside, and we'll soon work up the line to the Birmingham again, yes, and

past her. I'm a man that's made it my business to be liked by passengers, and they'll come to whatever ship I'm on whenever they want to cross. You must do the same, sir. That's the way for us to get on in this trade, always supposing we handle the press ashore correctly."

The Doctor came in then, and they went round the ship for inspection, and, when that was over, Mr. Horrocks thought he would go and cheer them up in the smoke-room a bit, and let those that did not know it quite understand what lucky people they were to be on board of the ›Ambleside.‹ But on the way there, the tract man once more waylaid him.

"Oh, Purser," said he, "did you read that booklet I gave you yesterday?"

"Haven't had a chance yet, Mr. Steinberg. And, besides, I lent it for the time being to the chief engineer, and he hasn't returned it."

"Ah," said he, and brought another from his pocket. "Then read that in the meantime. You'll find it will give you inward comfort. Oh, and wait a minute before you go. There's another point I want to ask your advice upon. I see by the route chart you supply, that the steam-lane we're on now differs from the homeward track."

"Well, Mr. Steinberg, I'm no navigator, but I believe that that's a bedrock fact. The homeward route's about twenty or thirty miles away from where we are now."

"That's rather a long distance, isn't it?"—he tapped the Purser's arm confidentially—"But I must tell you that I am a strong swimmer, and it is my intention to take one of the life-belts from my stateroom when I make the attempt."

"Thoughtful of you."

"Of course, if there is anything extra to pay for the life-belt, Purser, I should be pleased to settle it with you now."

Mr. Horrocks was beginning to think that Steinberg was one of those people who can do with a bit of care. "Not at all, my dear sir. The fees for life-belts are always the perquisite of your bedroom steward. Pay him before you start on your swim. When do you think of leaving us?"

The man looked at the Purser sharply. Mr. Horrocks bit the end of a cigar, and blew through it carefully. "Got a match?" he asked.

"No," said Steinberg, and dropped his suspicion. "When do I think of leaving this boat? Well, that I can't tell you. But I've got a notion in my mind that she isn't safe, and I want to swim off to one of the homegoing boats, and get back to England again. I've spoken about it to Levison. He says it's quite the proper thing to do. You see, I'm a life-governor

"I want to get back to England again," said Steinberg.

of the Porter Mines, and it's due to myself that I should take care of myself."

"You are acting most naturally," said the Purser, and made a mental note that Mr. Steinberg should be watched with remarkable accuracy.

The intending suicide on Atlantic liners is a much more common personage than the general public suppose. The sea and its mystery have the effect of developing the latent madness in some folks into active mischief, and many a man who is sane enough, and entirely capable ashore, becomes on shipboard a wholly irresponsible maniac.

As it is practically impossible to guarantee that nobody shall jump overboard unless you keep the whole passenger list in irons, steamer officers are apt to take suicides as they come, and confine their energies to keeping details out of the papers as far as may be. But if they do gather a hint that a passenger is contemplating a jump over the side, they tell off men to watch him even at the risk of overworking several already fully-strained departments.

Steinberg tapped the Purser's arm confidentially. "Oh, I say, Mr. Horrocks, you won't mention what I've told you to the other passengers?"

"No, sir."

"Because, you see, if I gave a lead, they'd guess the reason, and all be trooping after me, and the other steamer we swam to might make a difficulty about taking in so large a crowd."

"Great Washington! What a head you must have to think out all these details! Now, myself, I should never have foreseen a complication like that."

He sniggered, "Well, to tell the truth, I oughtn't to claim all the credit. It was Levison's idea. Levison said: 'Look here, old man, go off on your swim if you think it advisable, but don't talk too much about it, or else the ship people will stop you.' 'Why should they?' said I. 'Why, don't you see, if you give a lead, all the other passengers would want to follow, and then the Captain would stop the lot of you? It would never do for him to go into New York with no passengers at all. It would ruin his credit.'"

"Cute man, Levison."

"Yes, isn't he?"

"Levison coming with you?"

"Oh, no. You see, he suffers from cold feet, and he thinks a twenty-mile swim might give him a chill."

"It would. But say—is Levison some relative or partner of yours? Is he sort of companioning you anyway?"

"Well, you know, not officially. But he's very anxious about me because I'm a life-governor of the Porter Mines, and so, of course, I've got to be taken care of. They're very much sought-after things, those life-governorships."

"Shouldn't wonder. Levison in that line of business at all?"

Mr. Steinberg drew himself up. "Rather not. He's merely a director, and that's a very different thing. He'll not be made a governor till there's another vacancy, and that's not likely to happen during his time. All the present life-governors of the Porter Mines are younger and more healthy men than Levison. He eats too much. I'm always telling him so. And, besides, he will drink champagne."

"You don't?"

"Always stick to port and lithia water, mixed half and half. You get all the fun of the port and none of the gout."

"Look here, Mr. Steinberg," said the Purser, wagging a thick finger at him, "you're a man of ideas, and I want to steal some of them. Where do you sit in the saloon? Oh, I remember; down at the end of the Doc's table. Well, will you do me a big favour and shift and I'll find you a seat at mine?"

"Purser," said he, rubbing his hands, "you honour me. I shall be delighted."

Mr. Horrocks left him there, slipped round some of the houses till he was out of sight, and gave the deck steward and quartermaster strict orders to keep an eye on the man and see he did not get over the side. And then he went down below and sent about a few other instructions that might be conducive to Mr. Steinberg's health and welfare.

A Purser like Mr. Horrocks does not have a lunatic next him at meals from choice, but it appeared to him that this one had got to be looked after. It came to his memory that the Porter Mines were a remarkably big concern, and if one of their life-governors got into the water off the ›Ambleside,‹ there would be a nasty splash ashore, as well as in the Atlantic. Such little episodes are apt to reflect discredit upon a steamship line, and directors are not in the habit of favouring pursers who are so unfortunate as to lose passengers under such circumstances. It therefore behooved him to exercise care in the present instance, not only for the passenger's sake but for his own as well.

It was not for himself as Mr. Horrocks, the Purser, that he feared. As that official, his wants were small, and his private income covered them easily. But he was a man with an alias; a man who led a double existence. Throughout all his life he had carried an infinite tenderness for those wretched children of the slums in which Liverpool is so prolific, and of late he had contrived to found an Institution in a village near Chester for their maintenance and relief. It pleased him to pose as a portly local philanthropist. Down there he was Mr. Rocks, of Rocks Orphanage, a somewhat pompous personage, who was very different from the affable Purser in the *Town S.S. Co.*'s employ.

It was lest the power to continue being Mr. Rocks should be taken away from him, that he was so anxious.

So he thought it useful to have Mr. Steinberg near him so as to be kept posted up in his latest views; and also, it was beginning to dawn on him, that Levison's conversation was bad for his morals. He could not quite decide whether persuading a cheerful lunatic to drown himself was actual murder, but considered that anyway it was something uncommonly near it, and stood by to trample on Mr. Levison's toes in a way that would have made that diplomatist nervous if only he could have known it.

They were mostly old travellers at the Purser's table, as was only natural, and knowing that they would soon guess what was up if he did not tell them, he affected the confidential, and let them know the delicate state of Steinberg's health, and so persuaded them all to bear a hand. The Doctor got to hear about it from one of these, and came to

And then Mr. Horrocks would say "S-s-sh!" and the table would cough.

Mr. Horrocks, and said he supposed he'd better take over Steinberg into his own charge, rather hinting that the Purser might find him above his capacity to deal with.

There was a smouldering enmity between Mr. Horrocks and Dr. O'Neill, and as the Purser detected in this proposal a scheme on the Doctor's part to make fees out of a profitable patient, he replied curtly enough that he felt himself quite competent to manage this dangerous passenger.

The men at the Purser's table entered into the spirit of the thing with zest. They were busy commercial men, all of them, who did, perhaps, their six crossings a year, and to whom an Atlantic voyage was holiday and time for relaxation. So they were quite open for a frolic.

But at the same time, the talk as a whole tended towards the gruesome. Steinberg, it seemed, had made a study from his youth up of the literature of Atlantic disaster, and as the others were willing to humour him they had the full history of all the accidents which actually had happened, which might have happened, and which could not possibly have happened since ever the seas were first poured out. They had some fine active liars amongst them at the Purser's table, and they competed for the palm with spirit.

"Yes, but look here," Steinberg would begin every now and again, "with inexperienced Captains like—"

And then Mr. Horrocks would say "S-s-sh!" and the table would cough, and Steinberg would collect himself, and wink at the Purser, and go on

pleasantly. He only wanted a little humouring to keep him straight, and when someone suggested that it was cruel of the Purser to play with the fellow's infirmity, he bade the objector look at the other alternative. "I might have locked him up in his room, and then we'd have had a howling, scrabbling lunatic disturbing half the ship, and he would probably have ended up by choking himself painfully to death with the soap. Sounds a bit unlikely, doesn't it? But I knew that soap trick actually done once by a Third Class, and saw the beggar when he was stiff, and I can tell you he wasn't pleasant to look at."

But with all the badinage, there was one thing the diners at the Purser's table were quite solid on, and that was the strength of modern ships, and the ›Ambleside‹ in particular. Short of trying to hit the Tuskar Rock out of the water, or having them rammed fairly on the broadside, you could not sink them they said.

"Remember how the 'What's-her-name' went ker-smash full speed into that iceberg?" said Van Sciach. "Lost a few feet off her bows, and a man that I know that was in the smoking-room got a poker hand so mixed up by the shock that he showed four queens, and won the biggest jack-pot of the voyage. But there was no serious damage done, except that she steamed into a port a day late, and the company had to stand another three meals gratis."

"Iceberg's nothing," said Bisbee. "Remember the Blue Cross boat working in for her wharf the other day in the East River? She'd a bit too much way on, and didn't answer her helm quick enough, and she sliced off the corner of that quay as though it was so much margarine. Did she sink? No, sir. Didn't crumple a plate. Scarcely so much as scratched her paint. 'N't that so, Horrocks?"

"Gospel," said the Purser. "The Lord help anything that gets in front of one of these packets when she's got a move on her."

"Yes, that's all right," said Steinberg, "But you've all missed out the thing that's going to make the biggest steamer smash of this century. How about an old wooden timber-ship, packed with lumber, dismasted, and lying square across your track, and just awash? Given it was an ordinarily black night with no moon out to shine on her, no mortal lookout could see her till she was hit, and then that's the time where the steamer's big momentum the Purser was telling us about would come in. She couldn't cut through that loosely packed mass of wood same as she could through ice or a granite wall, and it would just rasp off half her bottom before it was done with her, and then she'll sink before the crew had time to fight for the boats."

"Skittles," said the Purser. "She'd cut through it like a box of matches."

Steinberg nodded his head. "So you say. But it's got to be proved. And it's my belief that the ›Ambleside‹ will test it." He leaned forward and wagged his finger solemnly at the table. "Do you know, I've dreamed every night since I've been on board that she would smash into a timber-laden derelict this trip, and that's why I've been so anxious to leave her."

"Why be in such a hurry?" asked the Purser. "You'll find it much more comfortable to go off in one of the life-boats when the time comes. If you'll say which boat you'll choose, I'll see she's stored with a few bottles of port and a case of lithia water."

"And it'll be a sight more sociable," said Van Sciach, "than cruising in the Atlantic by yourself."

"Ah, but you haven't foreseen," said Steinberg, "like I did in my dream, what a rush there'll be for those boats."

"Guess you dreamed wrong all the way there, sir. This packet isn't German, nor is she French." He turned and grinned at Mr. Horrocks. "You can tell that by the grub. But, on the other hand, passengers hold an option on the life-boats. And if by chance they are wanted, Horrocks and the rest of the ship's company will see us all nicely tucked into the best, with a feeding-bottle and a clean pair of cuffs for each passenger, and then if they've time and there are boats left, they start fixing for themselves. But not before. That's American and English fashion, Mr. Steinberg, and don't you forget it. I guess it's pious thoughts like those that help down every meal that I have on these boats. Otherwise some of the grub might stick in my throat."

They switched off then to talk of food and accommodation on the Hamburg and Havre boats, and followed the general theory of the Western Ocean that those companies do treat their passengers considerably better than the English think needful. But Mr. Horrocks was not going to be drawn too much.

"All right," he said, "go by the Germans if you like them best. But please remember that we contract to feed and carry you all the way across, and they only guarantee to do it as far as they go. And I guess they save by now and again only going half-way."

"Gentlemen," said Bisbee, "the Purser! May nothing ever choke him!"

Which toast they all drank very pleasantly.

Then happened one of those strange coincidences which look so unlikely, but which life is so constantly yielding up.

"I dreamed last night—" Steinberg was beginning again, but what he dreamed they had to guess. Probably everybody who had been within

earshot of his previous talk did guess too, and got a bad shock to the nerves. On a sudden, all the glass and silver and crockery shot along the tables of the saloon as though it was alive; the paint shelled off from the deck above and fell in little flickering clouds; and from the night outside, and from all through the ship, there came noise enough to supply a battle. For the moment the passengers were dazed, and made feeble grabs at their plates and glasses, or instinctively picked off the food that had fallen on to their clothes. But this was all the affair of a moment; and when that moment ended, there were screams, and yells, and shouts, and curses, and all the makings of a very ugly panic. All got out of their swivel chairs, and half of the people in the saloon commenced to rush for the companionways.

Now, at the first alarm, the Purser had instinctively turned his head, and was just in time to see Captain Clayton leave his chair as though the shock of the cascading dishes had shot him out, and disappear up the companion with the speed of the quick man in the pantomime. He had gone to take charge on deck, and Mr. Horrocks was left in command below. So the stout man strode smartly across, and got on the bottom step of the companion before the rush had fairly started, then put his hands in his pockets and cocked his big, good-humoured head on one side and laughed. He was full in the glare of the electric lights, and all the passengers looked up and saw his portly figure, as he intended they should; and the rush broke and presently stopped.

Then they began to ask questions.

"What's happened?" "Is there any immediate danger?" "How long before we sink?" "Shall I go to my room and get some things together?" "Are they sending up rockets yet—the Captain ought to be made to, if he hasn't." "Will the stewards provision the boats, or ought we to put stuff in our pockets?"

"My dear good people," said the Purser, "I'm sorry you've had a bit of a shock, but there's not the smallest danger, believe me. If there had been I should have been told officially long before this. But as things are, I do wish you'd go back to the tables."

"I want to go on deck first," said someone.

"I daresay. And there you'd stay for half an hour watching the rain, and then come down again to finish your dinner and complain that it was bitterly cold. Now, please do consider my feelings. When passengers complain about their meals I'm the man who's harrowed."

There was a bit of a worried laugh at that, and a long lean Yankee drummer from the Doctor's table backed up Mr. Horrocks capitally.

"What's happened?"
"Is there any immediate danger?"

"Yes, that's all very well, Purser, but you don't simmer some of us down like that. I had a glass of claret flung over my nice clean shirt, and what I want to know is, will your company pay the laundry bill?"

There was another laugh at that, and the passengers began to settle back in their places.

"Sir, I'd like to have your answer," said the drummer.

"If you forward your application in writing, it will receive full consideration within the next ten years," said the Purser, and the passengers roared.

It was poor enough wit, but their nerves were a bit raw just then, and anything tickled them. If the Purser could joke, surely the danger could not be great. Jennings, the chief steward, backed him up finely. He got his crew in hand again—they had been just as scared as everybody else—and they set about putting things shipshape on the tables.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Mr. Horrocks, "there have been a lot of bottles spilt, and the boat is fined for being careless. If you'd kindly give your orders to the stewards?"

Half-a-dozen voices shouted out the obvious retort. "Better simplify matters and serve out champagne all round. That's what we take just now if there's going to be free wine." They were getting their coolness back finely now.

Van Sciach rubbed the Purser's fat shoulder as he was going back to his place. "It's a bad smash," he murmured, "isn't it? You can tell she's down by the head already. Look at the slant of the floor."

"I know no more than you. The Skipper will send if we're wanted. Don't let them talk about it here more than you can help."

"Oh, I'm not going to make a fool of myself," said Van Sciach.

Mr. Horrocks had given the wink to the chief steward to go and quieten down the Second Class passengers, and if the chief steward's methods were likely to be a trifle rough, well, so much the worse for the Second Class. The main thing was to keep them from stampeding. Anyway, if they complained ashore it would not matter seriously. Second Classes seldom amount to much, even with the newspaper men. As for the Thirds, well, any officer or quarter-master on deck would know enough to keep them from coming up till they were invited.

But the First saloon was the critical place from the Company's point of view, and the Purser knew he had his work cut out to keep them quiet, and at the same time pleased with themselves. But with his cool assurance, and his fine brazen affability, he shamed and humoured them out of any tendency to panic.

Presently a quartermaster came, and stood for a moment at the foot of the companionway nursing his cap and fingering a scrap of paper. A steward was on to him in the instant. "The Purser, you want? He's there."

The fellow came across to Mr. Horrocks quickly enough. "The Captain sent this, sir."

Of course the saloon could not hear what he said; but it did not take much art to guess that the man had come down to deliver verdict as to whether the ship was to sink or swim, and they would have been more than human if they had stifled their curiosity. And as it was, the chatter snapped off as short as one might break a wine-glass stem.

It did not take the Purser long to read Clayton's scrawl.

> *"That was a derelict we hit, and it splayed old Harry. We smashed clean through her, and it looks as if she's smashed off half our bottom. Keep the passengers quiet. I've got boats swung out ready. But I'm not going to let them leave her while there's a chance she can swim. It's life and death for me, this, so keep them quiet and down below."*

The note was not signed, and you may say it could have been more clearly put. But it told Mr. Horrocks what he was wanted to do, and he did it without another thought. Each of all that large mob of passengers was watching him with eyes that had a whole life behind them, and so there was no room for him to make a mistake. He knew words alone

would not satisfy them. So he folded the paper and put it in his pocket-book, and delivered himself of a really good sigh of relief, right from the bottom of his ample waistcoat.

"Well, that's all right," he said. "There's no big damage done. But you may thank your stars, ladies and gentlemen, you're on a strong, well-found steamer, and have a Skipper like Captain Clayton. We've hit a derelict," he explained, and told them what that was, and how the whole thing had occurred, spinning out the yarn purposely. "And there's only one thing the Captain wants you to do," he finished up, "and that is to let him and the crew have the deck to themselves to-night. The men are working at getting things shipshape again, and it's a dark, rainy night, full of wind, and, if passengers were about outside, there's a chance they might get injured. Now, I should suggest that we get up a scratch concert right here in the saloon, and, if the ladies don't object, we'll break through the usual rule, and make it a smoking concert."

Steinberg, whom, to tell the truth, he had forgotten, tapped him on the arm.

"Purser," he murmured, "you'll excuse my staying, won't you? I think I'd like to be off now. I'll square up with my bedroom steward for that life-belt."

"Why so much hurry?" said Mr. Horrocks. "There isn't the least use in going just now." He shut his eyes and pretended to work out a sum. "No, not the least use. The Blue Cross homeward boat is the only one in this neighbourhood, and she isn't due for another eight hours yet. If you went off now you'd only have to wait about for her."

"Sure? You aren't humbugging me?"

"Mr. Steinberg," said the Purser stiffly, "it's my duty, as an officer of this boat, to give information to passengers when it's asked for. And I know my place too well to tell them anything that won't be of use to them."

"My dear Horrocks, believe me, I didn't mean to be in the least offensive."

"All right, then. Let's say no more about it."

"Only, you see, I know my scheme for leaving this steamer is a little out of the ordinary, and once or twice I've not been quite sure whether you liked it."

"My dear sir, your wishes are most natural."

"I really think so. You see, I dreamed of this collision every night since we left Liverpool, and here it is. And I dreamed of the horrible scramble there'll be for the boats when she sinks. So naturally I want to have swum a good distance away before the rush comes."

"Want the Purser?" said a steward. "He's over there at the end of that table." And up came another quartermaster with a second note from Captain Clayton.

> *"Send stewards to provision boats. Keep passengers below. There's a bad sea running; it will be a poor chance."*

"All right" said Mr. Horrocks. "Hand that to Mr. Jennings and ask him to attend to it for me. Now, you stewards, be quick and have those tables cleared, and then get out of the saloon."

Probably no man ever had much more keen curiosity to slip out on deck and see how things exactly were than Mr. Horrocks had just then; but he did not see his way to it. It was his duty to keep the passengers well in hand, and so far he had succeeded; but he did not flatter himself that they would keep good if he did not stay too to humour them.

It was not exactly that he dreaded getting drowned; that detail did not occur to him once. But, as most men's minds do on these occasions, Mr. Horrocks' thoughts went off to his orphanage in Cheshire. By an odd inversion of thought, the personal danger of Mr. Horrocks, the Purser, did not worry him in the least, but the thought that Mr. Rocks, of the Institution, might be cut off from his usefulness and glory, made him wince and curse luck and Captain Clayton under his breath with unbenevolent point and vigour.

It was Captain Clayton who made him nervous. It was a case, as Clayton said, of life and death to him, and certainly it was of professional life and death. Let him lose this boat, and he would never get another sea billet as long as he lived. The Firm would blacklist him to all eternity, and so for that matter would Lloyd's. And so, where an older captain, with more standing to fall back upon, would say, "Out boats, leave her," Mr. Horrocks knew that Clayton would hang on a lot longer than he ought to, and probably make a dreadful disaster of it.

It did not take much knowledge even for those below to see that the steamer was in a bad way. The floor listed till the after-end of the saloon stood up above the forward-end like a mountain back above a valley. The forecastle head must have been pretty nearly under water. They knew that everything must be holding by one slender bulkhead, and if that gave, down she would go like a stone. Then might come Steinberg's "terrible rush for the boats" unless Mr. Horrocks was careful, and the thought of the disgrace of that—from the professional point of view of a Purser—made him hot with foreboding.

However, when all was said and done, Captain Clayton was the man in supreme command, and in moments like these there was no room for argument. Sink or swim, the responsibility was the Captain's, and the Purser recognized his limitations and set himself to his task of keeping the passengers cool and satisfied to the best of his art. If word was given, he had all arrangements ready in his mind for drafting them out in batches for the boats without hurry, bustle, or panic; and, on the other hand, if the danger did not come to that climax, he was doing his best to keep them amused and satisfied, and to prevent them from making ugly demonstrations in the papers when they got ashore, which might do harm to the Town S.S. Company.

So whilst the executive on deck worked for the lives of all by shoring up the plates and stringers of the buckling bulkhead, Mr. Horrocks in the First saloon played the genial master of ceremonies, and organized a scratch concert in aid of the Sailors' Orphan Home.

The usual bed hour slipped by and was ignored. People think little of temporary rest when they expect shortly to be drowned. But when three o'clock passed, and there was no further message, Mr. Horrocks began to remember that to keep his passengers up any longer would be an open confession that the boat was in danger, and that presently they would see this, and, being very tired, would probably grow nervous and troublesome.

So in his pleasant way he announced that the evening was at an end, and the passengers went to their rooms; and although there was little undressing that night, there was no trouble, and no more questioning. In Mr. Horrock's own words: "At an awkward time like this, First Class passengers are the most reasonable people imaginable, if only you treat them right. But, of course, they want a man over them who does understand how they should be handled. They take it for granted that the ship's officers are doing their best, and they don't handicap matters by interference—once they have simmered down. It's the Third Class crowd you can't trust, and to make sure of them at times like these, we clap on the hatches, and leave them shut up below to scrap and squall as they please. They can't expect too much individual attention on a £3 fare, with everything found."

The Purser got out on deck at last, and had a chance to see for himself how things were. A couple of big cargo lights were slung up forward to help the deck-hands at their work, and he went and stood in the glare of one of these so that Captain Clayton could see him. Presently he did this, and called for Mr. Horrocks to come to him on the upper bridge.

"She seems to be keeping afloat, sir," said the Purser.

"There's about twenty-five feet of her gone below the water-line forward, and everything depends on the bulkhead. She's full of water up to there. We shored it up from inside as well as we could, and with luck it may stand. But if a breeze springs up, or if we meet anything of a sea, she'll go to everlasting glory."

"I've kept my passengers quiet. Saw them all turned in before I came on deck."

"Good man. I suppose most skippers would have had them off boat-cruising before this."

The Purser said nothing. He knew his place, and was not going to take off any weight that belonged elsewhere on to his own shoulders. Clayton deduced all this clearly enough. "Hang it," he blurted out, "a man does owe himself some consideration. I'm not going to leave my own women-kind to starve without a fight for it. If I take her in, there'll be nothing said."

"No, sir."

"Curse you, Horrocks, don't let off a parrot answer like that. I tell you if I'd been on deck instead of at dinner it wouldn't have made any difference. The officers on the bridge, and the look-outs forward weren't looking ahead at all when it happened. And for why? Because out of the rain and the mist and the night there suddenly loomed out an old bark making straight for our broadside. She wasn't showing any lights, and they seemed all asleep aboard of her. Her people hardly woke to our whistle, and either they thought they'd clear us, or they were too much asleep to change her course. She crept on us like a big grey ghost, and if she'd hit us in the broadside, even with her slow pace, she'd have cut us almost in two.

"I guess every man on deck watched her with bulging eyes, and in the end she cleared us by so little that her foreyard scraped the rail stanchions off our after turtle back. It was at that precise moment that we flogged into the old timber drogher that's so precious nearly done for us. There's a nice healthy piece of luck for you! It seems as though the devil himself intended to sink us whether or no just then, and only got bilked by Providence and a firm of God-fearing Clydeside shipbuilders."

"It should like this to have happened to one of the other Lines."

"You've to take what's given you. By Jove! I very nearly had a mutiny here at first. The officers and the deckhands seemed to take it for granted I should leave her. Someone was even brute enough to remind me that there were 800 people on board of her, and that I was responsible

for the lives of all of them, and looked like murdering the lot. But if she swims long enough, I'll surprise some of them yet, and if she doesn't—"

"Man overboard!" came a shout from one of the decks below.

"Away aft there."

"On the port quarter."

Captain Clayton ran over to the port side of the bridge. The Purser went at his heels.

"There he is, right in the glare of that light!"

"He's got a life-belt on!"

"He's swimming away from the ship!"

The Captain had given sharp orders to the fourth officer who was with him on the bridge, and the fourth officer had repeated them with prompt speed. Mr. Horrocks guessed on the instant who the man overboard was, when he heard the word "life-belt," but he said nothing. He did not particularly want to confess that Mr. Steinberg had been too sharp for him. A boat's crew came running up, and one of the slung-out life-boats screamed quickly down towards the water. She unhooked, shoved off, and the oars straddled out. An officer stood up at the tiller in the stem, a man stood up with a boat-hook forward. The seas hustled her about like a cork. It was all done with discipline and precision. The chief officer ran down aft, caught sight of the man in the water, and directed the boat with a lusty voice. No one else shouted: they had been ordered to keep silence. The bowman jammed in his boat-hook shrewdly, and the swimmer protested as he was dragged in over the gunwale.

Then the boat came back alongside, hooked on, and was hauled up.

"Smartly done," said Captain Clayton. "Pass that man below to the Doctor."

And then he turned, keenly enough, to the carpenter, who had brought him a report from the holds.

Mr. Horrocks slipped away then, and Steinberg met him with a storm of reproaches. He was not a bit tamed by his swim. Most uncalled-for, he said, was the interference with his personal movements. But all he got out of the Purser was "Captain's orders, sir," and then was escorted down into one of the rooms aft, which was officially called the hospital, and which the Doctor used as his personal suite, the lucky dog.

The ›Ambleside's‹ Doctor had his failings, or he would not have been aged fifty and still at sea; but he knew how to deal with a case like this.

"Tut, tut," he said. "You've been swimming in the water at this temperature? Most injudicious, sir, unless you oiled your body first to keep out the cold, and I'll lay two sovereigns to a brick you forgot that."

The swimmer protested as he was dragged in over the gunwale.

"Tell, to tell the truth, I did," said Steinberg.

"Then it's lucky you came back to me, or you'd have had a chill for certainty, with pneumonia to follow. All people do who swim in the Atlantic at this time of the year if they aren't well rubbed with oil. Here, try one of my patent drinks, and see if that doesn't warm you."

Steinberg took it like a lamb, and in two minutes he was snoring.

"He'll stay like that," said the Doctor, "for twenty-five hours. You see my way of treating suicidal lunatics differs somewhat from yours, Purser. I like to make sure of them."

"Your beans," said Mr. Horrocks, and went forward again about his business. He felt very sore that the Doctor had scored over him in this matter of Mr. Steinberg.

They got steam on the ›Ambleside‹ next morning, and went on towards New York at a slow half speed. The weather was not exactly kind to them; it blew fresh out of the northwest, and there was an ugly sea running, and it was the Purser's private impression that they risked foundering every mile they ran.

But all the damage was below the water line, where it did not show, and when passengers came out on deck again next morning, everything so far as they could see was just the same as it always had been. Of course

boats were swung outboard, but they hung high above the awning deck, and did not show especially, and the newly filled water beakers, and the food in their lockers were also comfortably out of sight. The Purser organized athletic sports that day, and a deck quoit championship, and they had about the most exciting auction sweep on the run that he ever remembered playing auctioneer at.

Mr. Horrocks did also another thing that pleased him. He got hold of Levison and asked him to give £200 towards an institution known as "Rocks' Orphanage."

The man seemed a bit surprised at first, and was inclined to bully.

"Are you mad?" he asked.

"No, sir," said the Purser drily; "But Steinberg is. Do you want any further information?"

It seemed he did not, and he handed over the money at once, and kept out of the stout Purser's sight for the rest of the trip. Of course that was small enough fine for attempted murder, but Mr. Horrocks did not want to be too hard on the wretch—and have him refusing to give anything. He pictured to himself the good the money would do to Rocks' Orphanage, and the pleasure he himself would have (as Mr. Rocks, the philanthropist) in making the gift.

Thanks to the skill of Mr. Horrocks, the ›Ambleside's‹ passengers were all a happy and contented family for the rest of the trip, and if they did come into New York three days overdue, they did not specially mind. The old boat had to be nursed delicately. She surged along with her nose in the water, and with her propeller racing as it did, she showed the pace of a dumb-barge. She carried three-quarters of her rudder in the air, and she sheered about more or less as she chose. But, what was most to the point, she kept afloat, and the other incidentals did not matter.

They got a tug to straighten her up a bit in the steering off Sandy Hook, and when they came up to the wharf, Clayton shoved her in stem first till she grounded, as there was not water enough to let her go in bows first at all.

They were long overdue, of course, and there was a lot of excitement ashore, and, in the words of Mr. Horrocks, "there were enough reporters on the wharf to populate an entire suburb in the hot place where they'll eventually go to when they die." But he was ready for these gentlemen of the nimble pencil, and he had the whole crew of them down below, and most of the champagne that was left in the ship was set on the table. "Business first, certainly, gentlemen. But your first and obvious

business is to drink to the health of our arrival," which they did to the tune of about a magnum apiece.

Afterwards, well, the Purser had got a nice compact yarn nicely typed out and duplicated, and that was all he had to tell. He refused to make any further statement, and those newspaper men would have been more than human if they had rejected all the ready-made copy.

Mr. Horrocks had made up a most thrilling story.

"Splendid ship. No real danger thanks to the masterly way in which Captain Clayton had handled her. Clayton thoroughly deserving the purse of £300 the passengers presented. Had it been a boat of any of the other Lines which sacrifice strength and construction to speed, undoubtedly all hands would have been drowned"

"But there's nothing about yourself here, Purser," said one of the newspaper men.

"Well, boys, if you will have it, there's just this paragraph more." And he distributed round the duplicated sheets.

"The passengers speak very highly of the kindness and attention they received from Mr. Eli Horrocks, the Purser, and we understand that there is a movement on foot to present him with a substantial testimonial."

"There," he said, "now you have that, and you have the general account, and you have the three 'Accounts from a Passenger,' which I wrote for you to take your choice from, and I guess you have as good a 'story' as any paper could want to print."

They went off satisfied with that, and Mr. Horrocks intended to go ashore and make his report to the office. But somehow his eyes got shut, and he went to sleep with his head on the saloon table, and there he stayed for eight solid hours.

The passengers were ashore now, and the ship's honour and credit had been cared for as tenderly as might be; and now that the strain was gone, there were a good many men on the ›Ambleside‹ who were thoroughly worn out.

But there was a pleasant smile on the large plump face of Mr. Horrocks, the Purser, as he slept with his head on the First saloon table. He dreamed sweetly of the philanthropic triumphs of that good man Mr. Rocks, who was so much admired by the public in a certain Cheshire village, and who knew nothing whatever about the sea and steamboats.

And a tear or two of pity and gladness found their way out through his eyelids and gleamed on his eyelashes as he pictured to himself the additional waifs from the slums who could be helped with the £200 which

He dreamed sweetly of the philanthropic triumphs of that good man Mr. Rocks.

had been so skilfully extracted from Mr. Steinberg's friend, and would-be-murderer, Mr. Levison.

Chapter 3

The Eloping Princess[1]

The first thing Mr. Horrocks knew about it was from Draycott, the ›Ambleside's‹ fourth officer, who told him he had seen two fellows plainly trying to hoist one of the passengers overboard.

"They'd have done it, too, Purser," said Draycott, "if I hadn't run out along the boat deck, and slipped over by a davit, and jabbed one of them on the head with the heel of my boot. They quit trying to murder the fellow then, and scooted, and by the time I'd swung myself down on to the promenade deck, they were away out of sight. Funny thing was, the fellow they'd been trying to put over the side scooted, too. He went down the first-class companion."

"Told the skipper?" asked Mr. Horrocks.

"He was on the bridge at the time and saw about as much as I did. He didn't seem to think considerable of it. I fancy that taking the old packet along through this fog gives him all the headwork he's any use for. He was there on the bridge when I came on watch, and he was there when I was relieved. They're pretty bad for all of us, these fogs, but they're killing for a skipper. Well, I've given you the news, and now I'll be off to the mess-room and get a mouthful of grub, and then turn in."

"Wait a bit, my young friend. You've either told me too much or too little. I'm nursery maid to the passengers on this boat, and if they smash one another about I'm the man that gets blamed. What were your friends like?"

"Too dark to make sure of any of them. But the two who were trying to put the other fellow over the side had black clothes, I think, and they ran away towards the second-class; and the victim, if that's what he

[1] Zuerst erschienen in Pearson's Magazine im September 1900.

was, had a beard. Bit odd, wasn't it, that he didn't choose to stop to explain what their little game was with him? Oh, yes, and there's one more thing, they were cursing one another in French—or it might be German."

"Sure it wasn't Spanish?"

"Of course it might have been. But anyway it wasn't English!"

"Great Washington! What a thing it is to be a linguist."

"Steady on, Purser. Don't get stuffy. I'm paid to help to navigate this packet, not to act as assistant *majordomo*."

"You're paid to do your duty by the Town Steamship Line," said the stout Purser sharply, "and the older you get, the more you will find what that includes."—Draycott had just come from command of a barque, and of course, starting on steam for the first time, he found it a trifle hard to begin at the bottom over again, and to do as he was told. But then all the Town Line's junior officers hold master's certificates, and the Purser was used to a bit of uppishness in them from time to time when they first joined—"You were quite right to report this to me. We can't have these Donnybrook games going on amongst the passengers; they injure the boat's reputation. The three passengers you saw must be found, and warned, and watched, and if necessary put under restraint. The responsibility of finding them rests upon you."

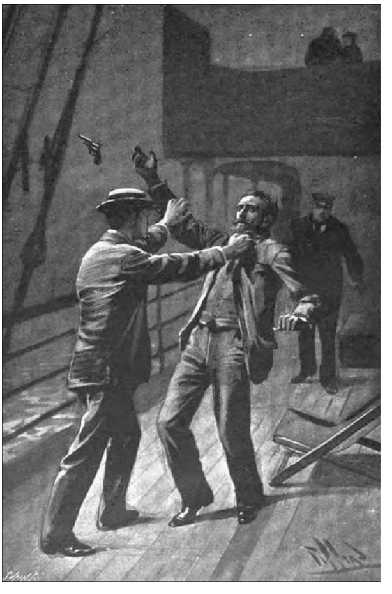
"I can't do impossibilities."

"You'd get on a heap better in this Company if you could. Let me tell you it's the officers who show brains who get promoted here. Those that can just stand and watch and eat their biscuit aren't specially wanted. Here, have a cigar. And just keep a bright look-out to-morrow for your friends of the scrimmage. If you like, come down into saloons with messages for someone during meal-times. Do it how you like, only anyway do it."

"Right-ho," said the fourth officer, and took himself off.

Now so far, the matter did not worry Mr. Horrocks much. Captain Clayton had evidently thought very little of it, and he was quite as keen to keep the passengers orderly as the Purser was; and what Mr. Horrocks had said to Draycott was more to impress that young man with a proper sense of his responsibilities than for any other reason. The officers which the big Atlantic passenger lines take from tramps, and freighter lines, and sail, need a good deal of breaking in that way before they are any real use to that higher branch of the mercantile marine.

But the next morning there was a row on deck which brought this other scuffle pretty sharply back to the Purser's memory. The deck steward



A nickel-plated revolver was sent flying overboard.

called him out of the smoking-room with a could-he-speak-to-him-a-minute, and a look on his face that meant business.

When Mr. Horrocks' portly form was outside in the fog, "You'd better be sharp, sir," said the man. "There's a pair of them quarrelling away aft there, and they mean ugly business. They won't take any notice of me. One's a foreign gentleman with a beard who came on board with two ladies, and the other's a younger gentleman, clean-shaved, that I rather fancy is American. It seems they fell out about a deck-chair that—"

However the Purser had not time to hear details. They came up in sight of the scuffle, and Mr. Horrocks saw a nickel-plated revolver that the foreign gentleman had produced from somewhere, tweaked suddenly out of his fingers and sent flying overboard, where it vanished like a conjurer's trick in the fog, and then his collar was taken in a good firm grip, and a sharp-toed American boot was several times kicked hard into his foreign tail. As this latter proceeding, in view of the revolver, seemed to carry some elementary justice with it, the Purser slowed his pace, so as not to unduly cut short the dose. After that, of course, he had to assume the dictator over them with due dignity and weight.

They took his lecture like a couple of schoolboys caught stealing apples. "As for you, sir," he said to the man with the beard, "I don't know what may be the custom in your own country, but let me tell you that here on this boat I could put you in irons for attempted murder, on the evidence

of my own eyes alone, and hand you over to the police ashore. And as for you, Mr. Austen, I don't think much of Harvard if they teach you there to brawl with foreigners in a public place like this."

No answer from either of them.

"And look here, sir," he said to the man with the beard, "it's beginning to come to my mind that this isn't the first disturbance you've made on board here. What about last night?"

This was a sheer outside shot of Mr. Horrocks. Draycott had only told him about a "man with a beard" whom he seemed to think vaguely was a "foreigner." But it seems he hit the mark. The culprit started as if someone had stuck a pin into him.

"But that was different," he stammered. "This is different."

"I forget you name, sir?"

"Merliner."

"Then, Mr. Merliner, let me tell you that you are a very quarrelsome fellow, and understand, once and for all, that this brawling is not to occur again. If it does, whatever is the excuse, you travel the rest of the way to New York in irons. I will not have the rest of the passengers scandalized and made uncomfortable by this sort of behaviour."

Mr. Merliner clicked his heels together, bowed, and took himself off, and the Purser turned to give Austen the balance of his dressing. "And I should like to know, Mr. Austen, if you were one of the rowdies who were reported to me as trying to murder that gentleman last night."

"No, I was not."

"Well, anyhow, you are tarred with the same brush. You are brawling here now, and if that's Harvard manners let me tell you—"

Austen got red. "Look here, Purser, I've taken my dose quietly, but any further hectoring I've got no use for. And let Harvard alone. That man's a quarrelsome brute—deliberately quarrelsome. Why, by your own showing, he is. You say you caught him kicking up a row last night. Well, there you are. And let me tell you this; anything he's got from me he jolly well deserves."

"Well, we'll take it so. But you must give me your word this does not occur again."

"I shall give you nothing of the sort."

"Very well then, you force me to report the matter to the Captain. I can tell you offhand what his decision will be. If it's foggy weather, he's on the bridge night and day, and he's got no time to worry with troublesome passengers. He'll say: 'Lock the fellow into his room till we've tied up at New York!'"

"What did you quarrel with him about?"

"My father would raise a pretty wasp's nest round somebody's ears if his son came home to him that way without adequate cause. Now look here, Purser, don't be absurd. If you want to lock up anybody, put the chain on Merliner. That man's dangerous, and it's my private opinion he's mad."

"What did you quarrel with him about?"

"I didn't quarrel. It was he who made himself absurd."

"It takes two to build a quarrel."

"Here's the tale then. I was sitting on deck smoking, and looking into the fog, and thinking. Then who should come along but the very girl—I mean a lady that I'd noticed at one of the tables in the saloon came along, and there was a good roll on as you see, and she was evidently hard put to it to keep her footing. She seemed to be looking for a chair, and, as there wasn't another one about, I offered her mine. Couldn't do less."

"Of course not, if she happened to be the very girl you were thinking about as you looked into the fog. So she took the chair?"

"Well, yes. But she said she didn't want to rob me, so we compromised matters by my sitting down on the deck beside her. Of course, on shipboard one isn't very formal about introductions and that sort of thing. She's a Miss Schmidt, and she comes from Vienna."

"You seem to have been making good use of your time."

"I tried to," said the young fellow simply. "I've never come across a girl I admired more. But that's my own private affair, and I don't want to bother you with it. Here's what caused the row: We'd been chatting for half-an-hour, when that infernal siren wasn't boo-hooing above us, when up came that fellow, Merliner, from somewhere out of the fog, and promptly proceeded to make an ass of himself. Of course, I couldn't do anything before Miss Schmidt. He seemed to know her pretty intimately, called her by her Christian name, in fact; and away she went down below, either to get out of the way of his tongue, or to save a further scene. I thought it was very sensible of her. And when she was gone Merliner clicked his heels and bowed and grinned, and was going to take himself off, too. Naturally I stopped him."

"And began the quarrel."

"Hadn't he begun it already? You don't suppose I was going to sit tight after being insulted in front of a lady? We weren't taught that at Harvard anyway. Purser. He'd the nerve to say he forbid me—he, I'll trouble you, forbid me to speak to Miss Schmidt again. On which I told him that America was a free country, and the high seas belonged to Americans as much as to anybody else, and I shouldn't quit speaking to the lady unless I saw her own particular wishes ran that way. Why then he made a great fuss and pulled out a gun, and after that of course I couldn't do less in reason than take the gun away from him, and just teach him it was an argument he shouldn't have brought forward. See?"

"Mr. Austen," said the Purser, "you've been ill-treated by birth. You shouldn't have been born the son of a railway millionaire. You ought to have been a newspaper man. You've a grand knack of reporting a scuffle."

Austen laughed. "Well, Purser, I was real mad with the fellow, and when he did give me a chance of kicking him, I guess I kicked hard. Say, what's he to Miss Schmidt? I've a reason for asking."

"Well, what's your reason?" queried the Purser. He could guess that without being told, but he liked to see the lad blush when he mentioned her. Austen got very nicely red, and laughed.

"Never you mind. Be a good boy, now, and just tell me all I want to know."

"Can't. We print the passengers' names down on our lists, but not their pedigrees."

"Oh, I know the passenger list says—Merliner, Mrs. Müller, Miss Schmidt. Merliner sits next to her at table, and there's a vacant place on

her other side presumably for Mrs. Müller. I say, Purser, couldn't you give me that vacant place?"

"Certainly not. That's Mrs. Müller's place when she's through her seasickness."

Austen shoved his fingers into a waistcoat pocket and blushed redder still. "Say, I wouldn't mind making it worth anyone's while—"

Mr. Horrocks pulled him up before he plunged too far. "Mr. Austen," he said majestically, "remember you're not speaking to a steward," and there he left him.

The dignity of a Purser is not always sufficiently obvious to the lay mind, and as a consequence it is a property which is guarded with nice care. Passengers might be in Mr. Horrocks' society for a whole voyage, and think him the most free and easy creature imaginable. But once let them overstep the bounds, and he would chill into very icicle of pride. No man liked a valuable present better than Mr. Eli Horrocks. But it had to be given him in the proper way.

Now steamer flirtations are no very new thing to a Purser, who sees on the average eight every voyage; and most of them he does not interfere with. They please both sides when they are at sea, and once ashore they are usually forgotten. But it seemed to Mr. Horrocks that this particular entanglement was one which would bear watching. As he put it to me afterwards: "Old-man Austen, the Railway King, was a party who put a lot of business in the way of our Firm, and if Boy Austen, who was all the son he'd got, contrived to get badly mussed up with an undesirable woman whilst he was on the ›Ambleside,‹ Old-man Austen was just the sort to take it out of the Line by way of revenge. You see when a strong man of his type gets mad, he must hit somebody before his temper simmers down, and naturally he likes to do his hitting on something where he won't be sorry for afterwards."

So a good deal seemed to depend on who this Miss Schmidt might be. All the Purser knew then was her name, that she was chaperoned by a Mrs. Müller who had been persistently seasick, and whom he had not seen, and that the man Merliner, who appeared to be a shady customer, had some sort of hold or proprietorship over her. They see funny things on the Atlantic ferry which rich young men get mixed up in, and Mr. Horrocks would not have been a bit surprised to find out that Miss Schmidt was an actress—he detested actresses—or somebody no better than she might have been, and that the whole gang of them were artistically laying for Boy Austen, with a view to harrying Old-man Austen's check book. As I say the thing is done regularly.

By good luck he happened to come across the young lady just after lunch sitting in the head of the companion, and had a spell of talk with her. She was a trifle cold, and inclined to be distant, and did not seem over and above pleased with Mr. Horrocks' offer of conversation; but he had not been a Purser all those years without finding out the knack of making a passenger talk to him civilly, whether he or she liked it or the reverse, that is if talking suited his book.

I must say, though, with this one he could not quite make her out. If there is anything at all wrong or shady with them, they are only too pleased to propitiate the Purser, but Miss Schmidt had got the art of making him see she regarded him as a ship's official and nothing beyond. She spoke quiet, cultivated English, with just the least flavour of some sort of accent, and if she was not a genuine lady, the Purser considered that she acted the part very well. He saw all grades of femininity, and considered himself a bit of a judge.

In his own words: "She wasn't what you'd call pretty, but she'd a pleasant enough face, and one that I should call strong, but I still couldn't be sure, of course, that she wasn't on for blackmailing. In short, I'm free to own she rather puzzled me, and I made up my mind I'd apply for the further information I needed from Merliner. If Merliner refused to tell me what I wanted, I knew how to put the screw upon him."

However, as it turned out, the Purser got his next news of the matter from quite a different source. They had on board an American bishop, who was returning home after doing a tour in Palestine at the expense of his congregation. According to Mr. Horrocks' view, "He hadn't the class of an English bishop, as was only natural from a man who knew he could get the sack any moment he didn't please his flock, but he was a fellow of some head, and he was about as anxious to make himself known and popular as any creature I ever came across."

"Oh, Purser," said he, "can I see the Captain?"

'Well, I shouldn't recommend it," said Mr. Horrocks, "unless it's something mighty important. Captain Clayton's been kept on the bridge by this fog ever since we left Queenstown two days ago, and when a man's been held awake for all that time, he usually doesn't care to be bothered unless it's for something pretty big."

"What I want to consult him about, is a point in nautical law. But perhaps you can quote me a leading case. Are weddings at sea legal and binding when performed by a properly ordained clergy-man like myself?"

"Depends entirely upon circumstances."

"Did you ever come across one before in your own experience?"

"H'm. Can't say I ever did. But I've heard of them."

"'Authorities,'" quoted the Bishop, "'doubtful.'" He frowned and looked annoyed. "I may mention that this is an exceptional case."

"It would be. In an ordinary way people would have many objections to being married at sea. But if you'd give me a few more details, I can probably offer you a more definite opinion."

"The question is how much can I tell? The information I am acting upon was delivered, as Rome would say, 'under the seal of the confessional.' But in confidence—am in speaking of confidence?"

"Certainly."

"In confidence I may tell you that a Mr. Merliner is the prospective bridegroom, and he has quite satisfied me as to the urgency of his reasons for marriage."

"That's sufficiently vague. May I hear the lady's name?"

"Miss Schmidt."

The Purser felt a small glow of pleasure. Here was a very simple way of insuring that Old-man Austen did not get angry, and fall foul of the line, and if Boy Austen was not pleased—well, that would not affect Mr. Horrocks much. He would probably be grateful enough over the escape in six months' time. However, the Purser had his natural curiosity still, and did not yield to the Bishop at once.

"You'd much better give me the whole tale, and then I can tell you more decisively what is best to do. Is the lady a ward in Chancery that Merliner's running off with, and he is frightened at being arrested at the other side?"

The Bishop laughed rather nervously. "No, she isn't a ward in Chancery, and I don't think Mr. Merliner fears anything the police can do to him in the States. I'm afraid you must be satisfied with this, Purser; the danger he dreads is on board here, and it's no less than assassination. He says there have been about six attempts to get rid of him already."

"Ah! And, come to think of it, I've seen something of this myself. Well it's got to be stopped, and quick. I can tell you we don't allow that sort of continental game on the Town Company's boats. If Mr. Merliner isn't safe at large, I'll have him put somewhere under lock and key where he can't be got at. We don't allow Anarchists of his description to bring their quarrels here for settlement."

"Tut, tut," said the Bishop. "The man isn't an Anarchist. In fact, you may take it from me he's someone very different. He's very highly placed indeed."

"I don't care if he was a shoemaker. He's got no right to be murdered, or to anyway dabble in murder on this boat. And look here. Bishop, as you've undertaken to act in some degree as his sponsor, I may tell you I'll have him put somewhere out of harm's way right now unless further explanations are forthcoming."

Well, there was the Bishop, a man who wanted to please everybody and do well for himself, fairly cornered. "My hands are tied, Purser. I much regret giving Mr. Merliner my promise of secrecy, seeing how you take what I have told you already. But there it is, and a promise has to be observed. I will go and see him again and make fresh representations, and get him to release me. He must release me."

"I'll lock him up if he doesn't," said the Purser shortly, "to keep him out of harm's way."

They had this talk in Mr. Horrocks' room, as the Bishop said when he first tackled him on the subject that he did not want to be overheard. No sooner had he gone, and the Purser had settled down to some ship's accounts, than there came another knock at the door, and he had to say "Come in" again. It was only a second-class passenger, so Mr. Horrocks said "Yes?" to him pretty sharply.

He was a seedy-looking individual—some sort of a German, the Purser guessed—but when he spoke, his voice was a gentleman's. He stepped inside without being invited, and shut the door behind him.

"That short, stout clergyman who was in here just now was talking to you about Herr Merliner?"

"Ah?" said the Purser, "was he? May I ask what the devil my private conversation has got to do with you?"

"Oh, it was easy to guess what it was about, and we are interested in Merliner. We do not intend to let him marry that lady, and if there are no other means of separating him from her, we shall use violent ones."

"The deuce you will! May I ask if you were one of the two rowdies who tried to put him overboard the other night?"

"Which time was that?"

"The fourth officer smacked one of you on the head with the heel of his boot."

"No, I did not touch him that time. I merely directed. Look," he said, and pulled up a coat sleeve, and showed the Purser a forearm in bandages. "He split that up for me. He wears a chain shirt himself, and that saved him several times."

"Well, you're a cheerful crowd, anyway. But why come to me? Can't you see that after what you've said, the least I can do is to ring for the

"Look," he said, and pulled up a coat sleeve.

master-at-arms and have you locked up out of harm's way for the rest of the trip?"

"Oh, I've reckoned on your doing that. But I've got five friends on board, who can do the work quite as well without me now that I'm wounded. What I came for was to see if you wouldn't help us, and so avoid unpleasantness. I know you pursers do not like to have fusses on your boats, and we on our side are equally anxious to avoid publicity. May I sit down?"

"No. Please remain standing. I do not choose to put criminals at their ease in this room."

"What! Have you no more idea than that about the matter yet? Why, sir, it's political, not criminal at all."

"I suppose you're a pack of beastly Anarchists, and you're pleased to call your murdering little ways political eccentricity." Mr. Horrocks put a fat finger on the bell. "More decent people have different ideas. I shall hand you over to the master-at-arms."

"You had better hear the whole truth of the matter first. You need not fear that I shall trespass on your hospitality by sitting down."

The man came out with his yarn then, and though queer things come to a Purser's ears pretty frequently on the Atlantic ferry, Mr. Horrocks never heard anything much more unexpected. Miss Schmidt was not Schmidt at all, but an Austrian Princess, an only child and an heiress to one of the biggest houses in that Empire. She was a cousin of the Emperor, and Mr. Horrocks, who was new to Court etiquette, was given to understand that the Emperor arranges all the marriages of this class of

his subjects just as he himself sees best, and without in any way consulting their wishes or inclinations. This girl was ordered to marry a certain Archduke Fritz, and objected. The man hinted that her objections had been discourteously violent.

"By the way, isn't your Archduke Fritz an idiot, or hasn't he got a hump?" asked the Purser.

"I don't know. But he's an Archduke, and a good match. And, besides, the Emperor ordered it."

"Well, there is something wrong with him I know, but I forget exactly what it is. I saw all about it in a magazine article. Go on, Mr.—er, I forget your name."

"I am down on your passenger list as Mr. C. E. Meyer. So pressure was brought to bear on her—"

"What kind of pressure? Thumbscrews, or red-hot pincers?"

"Pressure. I know no details. But the Emperor is accustomed to having his own way in these matters, and always gets it sooner or later. Her Highness is a young lady of strong ideas, and refused to submit. With an older lady to act as chaperone, the Countess of-well, she is Mrs. Müller here—she managed to get across the frontier, and thought she would be able to do as she liked about Europe. She soon found the Emperor's messengers were close after her, and how she managed to keep out of their hands and avoid being taken back is marvellous."

"How do you work it in your pleasant country? Drug them, and stick a sack over their heads?"

"I know no details. I only know what I have told you, and that afterwards, when she began to get frightened, and went to England, she was very nearly caught and carried away from there also. I know that, because the affair had by then been placed in my hands."

"Nice chivalrous person you must be, Mr. C. E. Meyer. Don't you sometimes kick yourself for taking up this kind of occupation?"

"The orders came from the Emperor, and so I obey them. If the lady thinks she has cause to complain, she must remember that her own disobedience started the trouble in the first instance. At present she has an idea that if she marries this Baron Merliner, whom apparently she has a liking for, our pursuit will cease. I am bound to say the move will have points in her favour. Of course such a marriage would be morganatic and illegal, and whether or not the Emperor will still wish Her Highness brought back to marry the Archduke Fritz, I do not know. I should have to await instructions before acting further. But anyway my present obvious duty is to prevent this marriage."

"Oh, is it?" said the Purser. "And do you think you are boss on this ship?"

The man shrugged his shoulders. "I have five subordinates, who are entirely devoted to their orders. Merliner will be shot as he sits at dinner if there is no other way out of it. They will draw lots as to who is to shoot him. One man will do the business and blow his own brains out afterwards, and the others will receive promotion. It will be an exhibition (shall we say) of discipline, loyalty, and subsequent reward."

The Purser shoved his finger home on the bell push. "Forewarned is forelegged, and I'll put my right foot forward at once. You shall be in irons, Mr. C.E. Meyer, and in a safe place very much out of the way before two minutes are over."

The fellow flushed. "I beg your pardon, Purser, but is it necessary? I am an officer and (so my folks told me) a gentleman. I may have a code different to yours in some matters, but, at any rate, I am a man of honour. I offer you my parole."

"Perhaps you had better define the exact scope of it."

"I interfere in this matter neither by word, deed, nor look till I am clear of this ship."

"That seems comprehensive enough. You promise that?"

"I give you my word of honour."

"Very well, I take it." A steward came in in answer to the bell. "Oh, steward, bring in a small bottle of Pommery '87."

Mr. Horrocks judged that his visitor would know good wine, although he was masquerading in the second-class, and followed an occupation which was, to say the least of it, questionable. Besides the man was undoubtedly in touch with the high ones of this earth, and some day might be able to do Mr. Horrocks a good turn. You never know your luck about these matters.

"Here's to the Princess," he said, when the champagne came and was poured out, "and may she have all her own way."

"Here's to Her Highness," said Meyer, and they finished the half bottle very pleasantly between them.

"Now Mr. C.E. Meyer," said the Purser, "if you'll kindly go and imbibe the fog on deck, I shall be obliged to you."

"I'm entirely at your orders," said he, and took himself off, and Mr. Horrocks found the Bishop and told him that he had procured all the explanation he needed. The affair should have the Purser's professional benediction, but the Bishop must marry his man before the next meal.

"But you're sure it'll be legal?"

"Legal, my dear sir, it will be legal fast enough if you are a *bona fide* Bishop. The only thing I was hesitating about before was, would it be desirable? But I am quite satisfied on that point now. If Merliner isn't married out of their reach, his friends the enemy will shoot him dead at the luncheon table. They're the kind of fanatics that quite mean business. You may use my room for your cathedral, and now please go and fetch the lady, and I'll round up Merliner. The sooner we get this business off our chests, the sooner I shall feel easy."

Mr. Horrocks fetched Baron Merliner to his room, rang for the steward to take away the empty bottle and glasses and bring another magnum of the same, and then felt that his preparations for the wedding were complete.

He experienced no inclination to talk with the prospective bridegroom, but fell to conning over in his mind how he would dish up the story for the newspaper men in New York. These were gentlemen who always waited upon him on arrival to be told anything of interest which had occurred on board during the passage, and it was seldom that they were allowed to get hold of unvarnished truths, for fear lest they would damage the credit of the Line. In fact, these gentlemen of the press were the bane of Mr. Horrocks' life, and he would have cheerfully witnessed the whole newspaper world of New York and Liverpool put to death by torture.

But it was essential that he should keep on good terms with them, and there were times when they had distinct uses. For instance, this present excitement might be worked out into a really good advertisement for the Line if the press was properly handled. And it was part of Mr. Horrocks' professional equipment to possess the skill and diplomacy necessary to manage these things.

Meanwhile the time kept moving on. Mr. Merliner fidgeted and brushed at his moustache till it bristled like a cat's, and presently Mr. Horrocks began to grow impatient also. A Purser on board a boat like the ›Ambleside‹ values his time and importance far too highly to wait very long on the pleasure of a mere Bishop who runs up no wine bills. And besides, he had as yet found no leisure to look in at the smoke-room during the whole of that morning. Indeed, be was on the point of going to hurry him up when in the Bishop came, looking dejected and annoyed.

"Well," said Mr. Horrocks, "something else wrong now?"

"It's the lady. I approached her on the subject. She refuses to entertain it."

"Great Washington! Is this a harlequinade I've been dragged into?"

"I have done my best," said the Bishop, bristling up, "and I may say I am as much annoyed as yourself. I went out on deck, and found her there wrapped up in a chair, and talking to Mr. Austen. They seemed intimate, and when I asked if I might have a few moments' private conversation with her, she showed annoyance. However, Mr. Austen had the politeness to leave us. He comes from the States, and knows what is due to my position. His father—"

"Yes, yes. And so she would not come. Please get to the point, sir."

The Bishop glared at Mr. Horrocks, who imagined that he used the ecclesiastical equivalent of a silent swear.

"I consider I am being very badly treated over this matter on all sides. I approached the lady with pleasantries at first, and she snapped back replies straight from the ice chest. She seemed to resent my being brought into the matter at all. I pointed out to her how affairs had developed, and laid especial stress on the danger to the Baron's life which her—er—refusal to play the desired part would entail. She mentioned her idea that it would have been more chivalrous of him to have taken his risks in silence."

Merliner wanted to give out his views of the matter here, but Mr. Horrocks stopped him sharply.

"Look," he said, "you either wait till you're given leave to speak, or get outside this room. Your reverence has the platform still."

"I did my best to persuade her, but it was no use. The original idea of marrying the Baron here was, so she said, for her own protection, not for his; but thanks to this new light which I had thrown on the matter, she saw she was making a mistake, and would cease to look to him for protection. 'And that, sir,' she said, 'solves, I think, the point you raised about danger to Baron Merliner's life. If I refuse to marry him, none of these assassins on board here will wish to do him harm.'

"'You put me in a very awkward position,' I said.

"'I believe you came into the matter, sir, without my invitation,' was her 00answer, and then she formally bowed the interview to an end.

"Very good," said the Purser, "then we'll consider the whole of this foolishness over and forgotten. You're with me there, Bishop?"

"Certainly, there's no good advertisement in it for me."

"The consequences appear to fall on my shoulders," said Merliner.

"Then tell your friends, the enemy, your wedding's off."

"They wouldn't believe me. However, I do not care. Under the circumstances the excitement will be stimulating."

"No, you don't," said the Purser. "We're going to have no more excitement of that kind on this boat, so you may go and take off your chain shirt, and simmer down into a peaceful citizen. I'll go and tell the man who calls himself C. E. Meyer to switch off his cut-throats."

The Purser went out on deck then and found Meyer. At first he was inclined to be awkward.

"You must make your own dispositions, Mr. Horrocks. I gave you my parole that I would not interfere with the matter you speak of neither in word, deed, nor look till I am clear of the ›Ambleside,‹ and I find the state of rest sufficiently agreeable, although I must say the food you give us down there in the second saloon is very inferior. Now on the German boats they feed one very differently."

"I wish to Heaven you'd crossed by one. But let me tell you they feed one a precious sight worse in the New York Penitentiary, and that's where you'll be studying the menu next if you worry me any more here."

Meyer looked annoyed. "But I took it for granted that there was a truce between us?"

"So there is, till we touch our wharf. But once there, I can remember or not to give you up for attempted murder, as I choose. Whether you are convicted or not is another matter. But I bet you have a sweet time in the police cells waiting trial."

The Austrian drew an imaginary sword and offered the Purser the hilt.

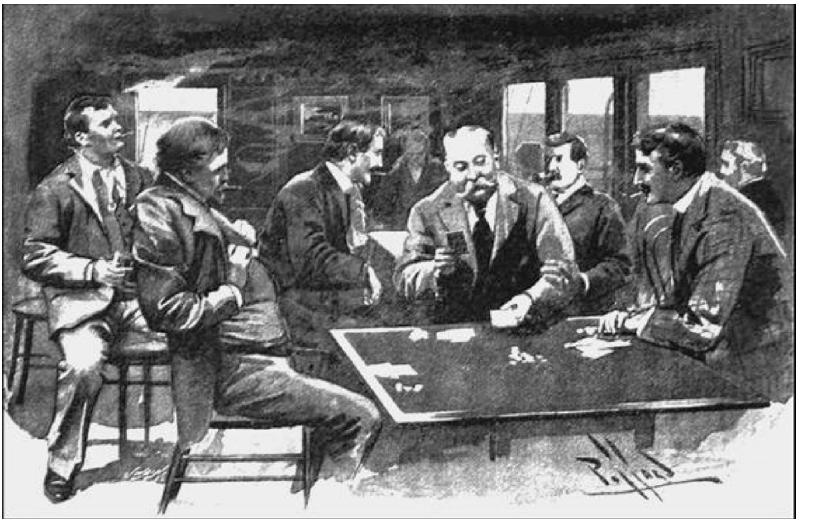
"Mr. Horrocks, I surrender. You are invincible, and, it is only the thought of a good meal ashore which makes the idea of your dinner in the second class saloon here tonight at all endurable. Merliner's well-being shall have my best attention."

"Thanks. That's quite sensible of you. I'll tell him to drop that absurd mail shirt overboard."

"On the whole I should advise him, if I were you, to place it at Her Highness's disposal to lend to his possible successor. Purser, I have the honour to wish you good morning."

"Now what," thought Mr. Horrocks to himself, "did he mean by that?"

And presently, walking forward along the deck to dice someone for cigars or cocktails in the smoke-room, he was able to read the answer with his own eyes. Boy Austen's deckchair was drawn up alongside this



The men were grinning over the flirtation in the smoke-room.

dangerous lady, and if ever Mr. Horrocks saw a couple that had fallen thoroughly in love with one another, there they sat.

Now did Mr. C. E. Meyer mean to imply that his merry men had got their eye on Boy Austen, and were prepared to murder him if necessary? It was beginning to look very much like it.

The flirtation between the pair was too obvious to be missed. The men were grinning over it in the smoke-room.

"Boy Austen's hooked for sure this trip," said one. "I wonder how Poppa'll take to his only daughter-in-law?"

"Bad deal for Boy Austen if the old man isn't pleased," said another.

"He'll be cut out of the will, and'll have to fire an engine on one of Poppa's roads for a living."

"Old-man Austen married when he was young," said another, "and took what he could get. But he's got a notion the Heir of the Austens should marry about the highest grade article there is on the market."

Then someone caught sight of Mr. Horrocks.

"Here's the master of the ceremonies. He's responsible for all social events on this ferry boat. What's wrong with asking the Purser for the latest betting on the result?"

"Better apply to Captain Clayton," said that portly person. "He's the expert on board here who can see furthest through a fog."

"No flies on the Purser," said someone else, and then a table of them set to amusing themselves with the dice-box for drinks and cigars till lunch time.

The Purser saw Boy Austen in the course of that afternoon, and managed to get him alone. "Look here," he said, "I wish you'd take a hint from me. You'll find it a lot healthier if you left Miss Schmidt alone till we get to New York. After you've quitted the boat, of course, you can do as you please."

"Now, what the devil do you mean by that, Purser?"

"Neither more nor less than what I've said."

Boy Austen looked at Mr. Horrocks rather queerly. "I've had a couple of anonymous letters giving me the same advice."

"Quite likely. There seem to be a whole regiment of ragamuffins on board here watchdogging her."

"Of course I chucked the letter over the side."

"You would do. Told the lady?"

"No."

"Well, be wise, and let her alone till you meet ashore."

"I tell you flatly I shall do no such thing." He got very red. "I want to see as much of her as I can. Always."

"Do you know who she is?"

"Miss Schmidt."

"No such person," said Mr. Horrocks, and told him her exact titles and position, and concluded that that would choke him off.

He seemed to guess the Purser's scheme. "Well," he said thoughtfully, "I guess there's enough of the American about me not to let that make any difference. I've not noticed that the ladies in my country are adverse to marrying titles, and I don't see what's wrong with some of the men following their example. Anyway, I'm a better bargain than Archduke Fritz, except, perhaps, for his accumulation of grandfathers, and as for Merliner, well I call him small beans, anyway."

Mr. Horrocks laughed. "You've got a pretty cool and commercial way of totting up the chances."

"And why shouldn't I have? Great Jones! Purser, isn't marriage a thing that should last a whole lifetime? First you get very fond of a girl, and then you proceed to reckon her up and see if she's adapted to the position. It's the men that don't fulfil both those requirements that bring fees to the divorce court."

He proposed marriage to the Princess there and then.

"He knew what he wanted, did Boy Austen," so the Purser told me afterwards; "and I'd a notion he knew also what Old-man Austen would like, and he set about getting it without any extra delay. He went straight away from me and proposed marriage to the Princess there and then. He mentioned he'd found out exactly who she was, and how she was circumstanced, and I suppose he brought forward the other items in his own way; as I have said before, it was plain to the naked eye that they were as fond of one another as a couple could be; and as a result she accepted him as her future husband, and promptly began to have horrid fears for his safety."

Boy Austen, as was perhaps natural, had a profound contempt for the idea that any mere foreigner on a British passenger steamboat would dare to assault a free American citizen, and "only hoped they'd dare to try it." He had learned the noble art of self-defence, and would enjoy heartily the chance of pounding anyone who annoyed either himself or

his ladylove.

"To get hitched up on board would be a mere confession of funk." They would be married with due form and ceremony ashore, and if the lady was keen on the Bishop, he might tie the knot for them.

He told Mr. Horrocks all this himself, and that worthy man got very scared about him and had him looked after a lot more narrowly than Boy Austen guessed about. The Purser was profoundly impressed with the business-like intentions of the enemy, and was sure that they would be after Boy Austen as enthusiastically as they had been after Baron Merliner.

Merliner the Purser did not want murdered on board for the credit of the boat; but if they shot Boy Austen, Mr. Horrocks felt that he would have Old-man Austen to reckon with as well. He put this to Boy Austen, but that young man would not listen to reason. Boy Austen said that if he was willing to take his risks, the Purser might surely take his. In fact, he was a bit above himself. Young men often are during the early days of their first engagement.

But if Boy Austen would not take danger seriously, the Princess judged her fellow countrymen better, and she it was who put on the screw. She was a young woman who had got a good deal of her own way, and, if one might judge, intended to have more of it. Her ultimatum was that unless she was married there and then on the ship the engagement would be broken off. So, naturally, on that the bridegroom gave in.

Mr. Horrocks' room was used after all, and, failing anyone else, he was best man. Mrs. Müller, or whatever her name was, a fluttering old lady who was still very qualmy, sat on the settee and gave the bride away, and the Bishop went through the service with unction and skill. The Purser wanted Captain Clayton to come down and lend it his official countenance, but the fog was still very bad, and Clayton said he could not leave the bridge. He said he would enter the event in the log, when the Purser asked for that. But it was Mr. Horrocks' private belief he wanted to be clear of the business if anything went wrong. Captain Clayton made it a habit to be very careful about the feelings of millionaires and people with titles. So Mr. Horrocks felt that if anything went wrong it would be "Blame the Purser."

He fetched out the magnum after the event, and, with the exception of the Bishop, who was a teetotaller, they all did well at it, and felt cheered, and Boy Austen gave his views on Emperors who tried to dragoon their female subjects into distasteful marriages. "However, they'll not play any more kidnapping games now," said he, confidently enough.

"I quite agree she's worth pulling down the whole of the United States to get, but there's no European nation will try that. We should make war quicker'n you can think on any country that tried to steal one of our citizens that way."

They both seemed very pleased with what they had done, and went out into the fog for their honeymoon, and the Bishop escorted Mrs. Müller back to the couch in her own room, poor old lady.

Mr. Horrocks found Meyer then and told him what had taken place. Meyer showed a great deal of annoyance, but he took the sensible part.

"I tell you frankly," said he, "that after we'd done with Merliner, I thought the coast was clear. I'd no idea she'd marry the other fellow in such indecent haste. Of course anyone of Royal blood can't marry a commoner legally. It's only a morganatic union."

"I bet American courts won't take that view," said the Purser cheerfully.

"Time will show. Time will show, too, whether my Emperor still wants her back. But in the meantime our hands are tied, and must remain so till we get ashore, and wire for further instructions."

"That's all right," said Mr. Horrocks. "Come and have a glass of fizz. Once off this ship, I don't care, though personally, I should say you will find that the pair of them, with the American nation at their back, will be a bit above your weight to handle."

One way and another Mr. Horrocks had got a story which would suit the newspapers down to the ground, and he spent a good many hours knocking it into shape that would do best credit to the Line and bring the boat a sound advertisement. He typed out his fair copy nicely, and manifolded it so that each of the reporters could have it as a groundwork; and when the boat got in and the newspaper men clustered round him, they took the sheets from him with howls of delight. Mr. Horrocks had a fine journalistic instinct.

"My hat!" said the Globe man, "what a scrumptious story. But is this honest Injun, Purser?"

"Real live Princess," said Mr. Horrocks. "Silk all the way, no cotton tops. And if you don't know Boy Austen for yourselves, that's not my fault."

"He's all right. Two years my junior at Harvard. Pushing young pup. Say, Purser, what's this I heard on deck about your engines getting a hot bearing, and the hose running on it all the trip, and the engineer staff going on watch in oilskins? We could get a bit more copy out of that."

"No such thing on this boat. Engines run like a watch. That happened to the Blue Moon boat in the next berth."

"Old-man Austen ought to give them a Palace car and a private train as a wedding present. I'll say he has done anyway. I see you're in on schedule time. We've had fog here. Been clear with you?"

"Oh, yes. Not sunshine, y'know, but nice passage."

"That all? Not passed any whales, icebergs, derelicts, or notions of that kind?"

"Been too busy looking after the Princess affair to see."

"That's a good point. 'Too busy sheltering Princess.' Well, good-bye, Purser. Wave long and bring us good stories."

And so the yarn got sent the round of the American press, and in due time was cabled back to England and the Continent. In Germany and Austria it made considerable stir, and this, of course, got reported back again in the English papers, and did Mr. Horrocks a good turn. Mr. William Arthur, manager of the Line, saw it, and it suited his mood finely. What with the competition of the German passenger boats against the Town Line, and the food they give which has forced the Town boats to improve their catering, he naturally hated Germany and everything German pretty poisonously. Nothing was said about the Princess affair when the ›Ambleside‹ got back on the return trip, till all the ordinary routine matters were gone through. Business always came first with Mr. William Arthur.

But when the Purser was leaving his private room to go to the outer office, he said:

"I've been told what you did about Austen's lad and that Dutchwoman."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, you're not such a dam'd fool as I've often thought."

"No, sir."

"That's all."

Mr. Horrocks went away well pleased. It was not often the head of the firm condescended to praise.

Moreover he had another cause for complacency. Austen senior had shown his gratitude by making Mr. Horrocks a present of £200. But he had more *savoir faire* than his son; he ministered to the Purser's pocket without hurting the Purser's pride. His present took the form of a single-stone emerald pin, which Mr. Horrocks naturally returned to the jeweller from which it had been bought, and received the cash equivalent.

There are decencies about these matters which all well-trained and decently-travelled people know how to observe.

Chapter 4

Diamond Cy[1]

My dear Purser," said Captain Clayton, "if I thought you were smuggling, or giving help to smuggling, I tell you candidly I'd send the Customs' people a hint at once."

"You weren't always so particular," suggested Mr. Horrocks.

"Some bits of history are better forgotten. And besides, I was only chief officer then. Now I'm in command, and the boat stands for more to me than, perhaps, you'd imagine; and, anyway, I'm very jealous of her chastity. We'll have no smuggling, please, Horrocks."

"Well," said the Purser rather crossly, "you know where I dined last night, and with whom?"

"You dined with me at the Adelphi."

"You and I weren't the only people at the table. You'd got ten of a party, hadn't you, to square up for when the bill came?"

Captain Clayton set his teeth. "Well, Horrocks, my wife likes entertaining, and so do her sisters."

"What I meant to suggest was, that your wife was there. It was she that gave me the first hint that there was some stuff somebody very much wished to be helped through the New York Customs, and, 'pon my life, I thought you knew all about it too, or I'd have kept my head shut. Mrs. Clayton said she stood to win a diamond crescent, if it came off. She said she'd seen the crescent, and it was a beauty, and she mentioned that she adored diamonds. She wears a good many, I've noticed."

"Yes," said Clayton shortly. "She got them when she was on the stage. You know that as well as I do. But she has to be content with what she's

[1] Zuerst erschienen in Pearson's Magazine im Oktober 1900.

got, and I trust is content. My means don't run to diamonds. It's hard enough to keep to windward of ordinary expenses."

"You've got a fine notion of spreading yourself ashore. But if it was my wife, I'd get her that crescent the cheapest way. She intends to have it somehow."

"Look here, Horrocks. Will you kindly leave me to my own private thumbscrews?"

The Purser laughed. "That's snubbing me. Well, I took the risk with my eyes open. I guessed you'd tell me to mind my own business when I mentioned your wife, and that you'll mind yours. But you see, in a way it was made my business too, and I wanted you quite to know how we stood."

"Look here, you nuisance, will you shut up?"

"Yes. And now come and have a bit of cheap lunch. We'll consider we've tossed for it, and it's on me."

Perhaps it takes a very high-minded man to see black crime in smuggling diamonds into the United States, and one must confess that anyway Mr. Horrocks' conscience was easy about the matter. All pursers do it, or wink at it for a consideration, or help at it—if only they get the chance. As Mr. Horrocks put the matter to me:

"It all depends on a tariff. If there's no duty on importing diamonds into New York, you may bring in all that you've money to buy, without declaring them, and nobody objects; but if some renegade Irishman, who's a member of Congress, gets paid to make a tariff which claps on a heavy *ad valorem* duty, why then, if you try to slip through the Customs, there are people who want to make out you are first cousin to a thief and a forger.

"Smuggling," he went on to say, "is mostly done for vulgar profit, and some people will say it is much like gambling on stocks and shares, or on a horse, where you take a big risk in the one hope of making a big return without earning it. You want brains and artfulness there if you're going to make anything like a habit of winning.

"Smuggling diamonds always strikes me as no more iniquitous and much more sporting. If you put your money on a horse or a gold mine, you stand either to lose it or to skin the other fellow. But your liability's limited. If you buy a stock of diamonds this side, with the intention of running them through free of duty, it's a different thing. You've got your work cut out for you right along. You've got some of the brightest intellects in the United States against you. And you've to manoeuvre

like a chess player if you want to get round them. Remember the one-eyed man who tried to smuggle diamonds through in his hollow glass eye? They got him, first shot. It is no use trying to smuggle them in your boot heel, or to make your dog swallow them, or to have them stuck inside a real original Greek antique statue. These games only make the Customs tired, and they smell out the diamonds as though they were onions, and the result is you not only lose the original capital you've sunk in the venture, but you find yourself let in for further liability in the shape of fines, and costs, and so on.

"So you see the game's raised above the level of mere stock exchange or racecourse speculation into a very sporting enterprise indeed; and if you ask me, it's as much that as the mere profit of the thing which drags so many people into it. This is the way: a fellow gets a smart idea: he finds he owns a hollow tooth that's an ideal hiding-place, or it occurs to him that no Custom House officer would search a bottle of salts, and he goes into the smuggling business out of sheer pride to prove that his theory's right. And there's another thing. Diamonds have a fascination for some people, especially women, just as horses have for others. They love them for their own sakes alone, and will do a lot just for the chance of being near and handling them."

The man who was at the bottom of the little game Mrs. Clayton wanted Mr. Horrocks to join in, was an old practitioner. He travelled for a Connecticut firm in England and the Continent, and his line was agricultural machinery, and he made a very good thing out of it. His tale was that none of the English firms could turn out a reaper and binder, or any other machine, either in price, weight, or effectiveness to compete with those produced by the American Trust, and apparently the tale had enough truth about it to be swallowed, and he was annexing the trade as fast as his works could fill the orders. He was one of the best-known passengers in the Western Ocean, and as he always took an expensive room, and ran up big wine bills, Mr. Horrocks made it his business to see that he liked him, and did most of his travelling on the ship on which he was Purser.

The man had got a surname stowed away somewhere, but no one ever heard it—at least on board ship. Even if he came on to a boatload of strangers, it slipped out before she was clear of the Mersey that he was Diamond Cy, and that was all the name he ever got. No one ever lengthened it out to Cyrus, and no one ever gave him the surname, much less a Mister. One could not possibly be anything but familiar with him.

Diamond Cy.

As the Purser described the man to me: "I've seen stiff, starched English, who would have made chilly corners on an iceberg, thaw down straight away when Cy chummed up with them. I even saw a bishop once drink champagne with him in the morning before luncheon, though you could tell all the time he was wondering why the blazes he did it. Common wasn't the word for him. He'd an accent you could take away and drive in as a railroad spike, he'd clothes like a music-hall comic, his hats and boots and linen were varnished till they shone like glass, and he'd diamonds all over him wherever they'd stick. He was a little meagre bit of a chap, about the build of a jockey, and I tell you he'd a way about him that no one could snub if he intended to be friendly.

"As a matter of fact, it was few enough people who ever tried the snubbing game. We always have our constant passengers between Liverpool and New York, and these get to know one another with an intimacy that would surprise those folks who only understand meeting one another every day in a train ashore."

Cy, as the stout Purser explained to me, was worried by no nice feelings. Let him have plenty of people staring at him, and talking to him, and valuing up his diamonds, and he was as happy as a brewer with a brand new baronetcy. Ashore he sold agricultural machinery for all he was worth. But on shipboard was his holiday, and he played at it a hundred and ten cents to the dollar. He felt that he was top of his own particular line, and he wouldn't have changed his billet to become second man

anywhere.

"I often pity your Prince of Wales," Cy said to the Purser once, "he's such a very poor taste for jewellery. Now if I were a man in his position I'd wear a band of brilliants round my hat at the very least. I'd set the fashion. Guess I hain't enough gall about me just now to hoe a new row like that, though I'll allow the idea's occurred to me, and I've been very much tempted more'n once. No, s'r, I could do with being King of Britain, but, if anything less was offered, I reckon I'd rather stay as what I am. I've got no use for being cramped like your Prince of Wales."

It was Cy, then, who offered the diamond crescent to Mrs. Clayton in return for a little help, and it was Cy who told Mr. Horrocks that there was a check for a nice round sum waiting all ready made out in his name, and the Purser knew that if he was going to make a run of diamonds through the New York Customs, it would not be for a mere nutshell full of stones. If Cy did anything at all it would be big, even if it was only for the sake of boasting about it afterwards.

Besides, rumour went about that Cy was retiring from the active pursuit of commercial travelling. He had been so successful that he had pulled together a competency, and was going to be made a director of the Trust, so that he could stay in one place and show off his diamond watch-chains and other decorations to a home audience. Eccentrics of his description meet with more general appreciation in the United States; in England people seem to lose the humour of them after the first look.

Of course there are one thousand ways in which a purser like Mr. Horrocks can help a little game of this sort, and Cy knew that well enough, and looked upon the check he offered just as so much money spent in insurance. It would have been all worked smoothly, too, if he had left the matter in Mr. Horrocks' hands. But the man was too loose-lipped. He had gabbled and boasted and promised to Mrs. Clayton, and insisted on having the Skipper bear a hand, and here was the Skipper unexpectedly cutting up rusty. The worst of it was from Mr. Horrocks' point of view, if a Captain takes that line, a purser is seriously handicapped; he dare not take the risk of being reported.

So on the whole Mr. Horrocks decided to keep out of the affair, and to give Cy notice to that effect.

He found him with some difficulty, and got him on one side with more.

"Take the cinch from me," he said, "and leave those shiny goods of yours in the bank. Skipper's got his back up, and it's quite on the cards he'll

give the office to the Customs himself. Wait till you're across next time, and have your flutter then."

"Shucks! Clayton's a white man. And besides, his wife'll have gotten him talked round by this. Guess she means having that crescent."

"Look here, Cy. Do you know Captain Clayton best, or do I? Remember he's new to command, and he's very high flown notions about the purity of the boat!" And so the Purser went on at him, and in the end came to the conclusion he had convinced him to a certain degree. Cy said he would not try to run his diamonds this trip. But at the same time he was perfectly convinced that the Purser was wrong about Captain Clayton, and said so with enough emphasis to ruffle Mr. Horrocks' dignity. He was a bit too authoritative for Mr. Horrocks' taste, was Diamond Cy when he'd been dining, and he had been dining that evening rather copiously.

A purser like Mr. Horrocks is pretty well harassed with work on the day of sailing, and so next morning he gave Master Cy little thought. Old hands do not seek much attention from the Purser when they come aboard. They know their names are ticked, and their bedroom stewards are waiting for them, and they are put down already for the best table places available; and so they just clap their hand baggage in their rooms and lock the door, and go off for a smoke till the bustle is over and the boat is down river.

As Mr. Horrocks said: "It's your tourist, or your theatrical, who wants what's set aside for his betters, and tries to turn the ship upside down to get it, and drains the Purser of his soothing powder. We'd an extra consignment of the tourist class that trip, including two lords and a member of Parliament, and a Jew chap who wrote novels and lectured upon them, and each seemed to think that the Atlantic Ferry was run for his especial benefit. So I had to let each see that I understood that this was so, and to tell him in confidence that the firm had given special instructions to see that he got extra attentions.

"'It's always better to tickle a fool than tease him,' is what our Mr. William Arthur is always rubbing into the Firm's Pursers, and there's no denying it's a splendid motto to work on. For instance, by blarneying that slobbery novelist, I got out of him that he had sneaked a free pass out of one of our agents—who ought to have known better—and had promised to write up the boat in one of the papers.

"'Could I come to you, Mr. Horrocks, for my matter? Of course I want information about things which passengers usually do not see.'

"'You've just come to the right man, sir, for that,' I told him. 'There's

lots of things I know about this trade that ought to be exposed in print, but it takes a man like you to write them up. Spicy things.' And so I got rid of him, and made a mental note to load him up with as much fiction as he'd carry, and to take care he didn't see anything through his own silly spectacles that was intended to be hid. Men like that novelist are the bane of a purser's life. They are always nosing around for 'articles,' and 'yarns,' and 'paragraphs,' and if you don't take care, and let them print everything they come across, they'd scare half the passengers off the Atlantic."

So what with one thing and another Mr. Horrocks was pretty well run to keeping his peace and getting his passengers stowed away, and he was none too pleased when a message came from the Captain to him in the saloon that Cy wanted to see him on deck.

If it had come from Cy alone (who ought to have known better) the Purser would have taken it for a joke, and refrained from going; but when Captain Clayton backed up the message by compliments and a request that meant an order, the Purser had no choice. So he smiled at the new batch of passengers who had come up to pester, and cursed at the back of his teeth, and went up the companion with the most rapid steps his portliness and dignity would permit of.

The matter happened in the days before the big boats came alongside the landing stage, and there was the tender grinding against the ship's side in the tideway, and Captain Clayton and doctor and first officer standing at the place of reception in full uniform. Captain Clayton had the knack of making passengers think that he felt lonely without a sword thumping against his hip, and if any of them did not notice the ›Ambleside's‹ blue ensign, and find out what it was there for, it was not the fault of her commander. "And after all," as the Purser used to remark, "What's the use of being E.N.E. if you don't let people know it? You get precious little out of the Reserve, except complacency."

However, there was Captain Clayton, but there was no Cy; so Mr. Horrocks went up sharply enough and said, "Yes, sir," in a tone calculated to suggest that he was a very busy man, and was much needed elsewhere.

"Sorry to call you away, Purser, but one of the passengers—er—I forget his proper name—well, it's Diamond Cy—has had a big smash, and insists 0that you as an old friend should go and help him aboard. I sent the doctor to him, but he—er—wasn't amenable."

"Used most infernal language to me," said the doctor. "Told me he was too broke up to take any extra chances from a—"

"Very well, sir," said the Purser sharply, "I'll see to him," and away he

"Thank whiskers you've come, Purser," he gasped out.

went across the gangway on to the tender. Sure enough there was Cy on the deck laid out on a hospital stretcher, all covered up by a rug, looking very ill.

"Thank whiskers you've come, Purser," he gasped out. "I'm all broke up into five-cent sections. Only held together by splints—oh!—and sticking plaster. For God's sake, old man, make them carry me gently to my room. The brutes nearly killed me when they brought me on this beastly tender. You had a broken leg yourself once. You told me about it. That's why I wouldn't let that butcher of a doctor help."

"You've sent for just the right man," said Mr. Horrocks. "You shall be taken to your room as easy as a conjuring trick. You shut your eyes now, and put your money on the Purser. I'll have you wafted across in half a pig's whisper, and you shall never know what's happening. Wish I may break my own leg if you're hurt. There, shut your eyes, and from when I give the word you won't jolt against anything else till you touch your bed. Now, you bearers, both together, lift!"

The bearers certainly showed abominable clumsiness; and then they had some trouble in clearing the alley-ways, so that the wounded man should not be jostled; and next, some timorous creature got the notion that Mr. Horrocks was bringing a small-pox patient on board, and he

had to explain to most of the passengers individually that it was no such thing, and that a broken leg is not catching. Indeed, a Purser on one of these big boats requires a high coefficient of tact and placidity if he is to preserve his temper, and keep the peace, when she is getting started.

However they got Cy down to his room at last, though whilst they were shifting him from the stretcher to the settee he used language that would have made a Spanish inquisitor stop and think.

The man had a tongue in him, when he chose to use it, like the mate of a cargo tramp.

Mr. Horrocks could stand a good deal of this sort of thing, but felt it due to his position that he should draw the line somewhere. "You seem to have got it bad," he said stiffly, "in everywhere except your voice."

"Guess you'd loose off a bit if you'd your bone-ends grating together like mine. And where I'm not broke I'm bruised."

"I'll send the Doctor to you."

"If you do, I'll use language to that man that's calculated to wound. Guess I've only been practicing up to now. No, s'r, I've got no further use for doctors. I've been put to the torture sufficiently these last few hours to fill me up for the rest of my natural life, and, kill or cure, your ship's Doctor doesn't put his breath into this stateroom. Henry still bed-room steward here?"

"Yes."

"Henry's part of the boat. Henry'll fix me, with the help of that chap that's just gone out. He's a hospital attendant I brought along, and he can have the spare berth and sleep in here with me. Never thought I'd come down to not having a room to myself. I'll square up with you for his passage afterwards."

Mr. Horrocks dipped away then, and saw the hospital attendant in the alley-way outside. "Cy seems to have got it bad," he said.

"Yes, sir. Knocked down by a cab."

"Pretty full at the time."

"I think he was, in a manner of speaking, inebriated, sir."

"He was getting on that way when I saw him last night. You know you're to sleep in his room?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's first-class. So you meal in the first-class saloon. I'll tell the chief steward to put your name on a place."

"Begging pardon, sir, but I should be in a manner of speaking out of my element with the society. If you could make it second-class?"

"Certainly," said the Purser. "Very proper feeling on your part. I'll see to it."

Mr. Horrocks took a liking to that hospital attendant. As he explained it to me afterwards: "He saved me a lot of trouble by his sensible action. Wherever I'd put him in the first-class saloon I should have had some shirty passenger coming up to me and want to know what the devil I meant by giving him a flunkey as his dinner companion. 'They never do that on the Blue Moon line, or the German boats, and I don't think your directors would approve of it here if only they knew about it.' And mentioning that somebody paid full first-class fare for the poor beggar, and that therefore he was entitled to his full privileges, was no argument. Put him next somebody else, then. Put him next yourself if you're so keen on him,' was what they'd reply. There's no getting passengers to see the balance of things."

However, Mr. Horrocks had no time for moralizing then. Back he had to go to the saloon to get the passengers sorted and settled. The member of Parliament bombarded him with stilted abuse because he was put at the doctor's table, and the novelist offered to run him in as a character in one of his books if Mr. Horrocks put him next to a lord. He certainly did only have three people that day who wanted an assurance that their sheets were properly aired, but on the other hand he had no fewer than four different brands of clerical gentlemen, who wanted the loan of the saloon for daily prayers. Moreover, a record number of fools pestered him that day to guarantee them a smooth passage and no seasickness. "The Red Funnel boats do it, and why can't you?" – "The German boat came across the other day with no one ill." – "Can't the Captain go round some other way if this one's rough?" And fancy having to give a civil and soothing answer to each of them.

Indeed the Purser was about worn out by the time the smoke-room lights were switched off that night, and when a steward brought word that the Captain would like a chat with him in the bridge charthouse, he began to wish he had a billet ashore with only fourteen hours work a day. However, at sea, being tired does not come into the scheme.

"Sit down, Purser. Have you seen our friend Cy again? Do you think he's really hurt? Or is it a little game he's trying to have on?"

"If you heard him swear, sir, you'd believe he's genuine enough."

"Well, that may be. But anyway he's still sticking to his scheme of smuggling those diamonds into the States without paying duty."

"But he told me plainly, sir, that he'd given it up."

"Told you wrong then, Purser. You know the New York Customs have their men over in Liverpool, and they're hand in glove with our Customs. Now Master Cy is a pretty notorious person, and they've been having him pretty shrewdly watched. He's got the parcel on board here with him."

"Oh."

"Now you'll please understand, Mr. Horrocks, that no officer of this ship is to have any dealings with those gems otherwise than to assist the New York Custom House in performing its proper functions."

"You've mentioned that to me before."

"I know, when we were ashore. But our relations were slightly unofficial then, and I don't want any mistake. So I tell you now quite officially."

"Very good, sir. I quite understand."

"Then that's all, Purser. Good night."

"Good night, sir."

Mr. Horrocks was tired enough, as I have said, and he was not long in getting turned in. But it was well on into the morning before he found any sleep. What was Cy's game? And could he have a finger in it, and touch his profit without getting burned? Mr. Horrocks felt that it was all very well for Clayton to be puritanical. As he put it to me: "The Skipper had lots to gain indirectly by being in with the Customs. And, besides, he'd other legitimate pickings.

"To be sure, he wasted a lot of time over lords and that class, out of sheer vanity (as I called it) at being able to say he knew them. But at the same time he mostly contrived to let his room each run for a tidy sum. You know, there's a type of passenger that takes a delight in saying: 'The Captain gave up his own cabin to me.' And likewise he naturally had the sense to make himself civil to that class of American millionaire that gives a Captain silver salvers and services of plate, which sell, if you go to the shop where they were bought, for very nearly what they cost.

"I won't say altogether, too, that his wasting of time over the folks with the titles was not capital well sunk, because the millionaire class love dearly to hear about them at second-hand—and hence the presents of salvers. But, anyway, what I mean to point out to you is that Captain Clayton had lots of pickings, whether he made the most of them or not, whereas I, as Purser, had precious few. It's annoying enough to see twenty-dollar bills going to chief stewards, and valuable scarf pins to captains, when it's really you that's managed all the passengers' comfort; and, of course, you'd have too much proper pride to accept them

if they were offered; but that's one of the penalties of the position, and so you've got to use your wits to find dividends in other ways."

Mr. Horrocks had no time to look in on Cy till after the ›Ambleside‹ had left Queenstown, and when he did go in, the invalid was inclined to be resentful at not being called on before. However, the Purser was not fool enough to apologize.

"You've got your language stop out too much for my taste," he told him. "But if you don't want me now, I can go right off to the smoke-room."

"Oh, I weaken. Sit down, Purser, and help yourself to rye. There's a bottle in my gripsack. Guess if you knew how mighty sick I was, you'd sling a bit more sympathy round. I'm feeling as if I couldn't take a pride in anything, not even in dress."

"Did you get robbed when you were knocked down? With all those diamond watch chains, and studs, and bootlaces—or is it braces-buckles—that you sport, you are worth looting as a general thing."

"No, I was lucky there. I suppose an honest man must have picked me up. I should like to have rewarded him. I've an affection for a man that's kind to my diamonds."

"Then you may prepare to love me, Cy. I came along here to give you another straight tip about that parcel of gems you want to smuggle into the States. You were a fool not to leave them behind in the bank as I advised you. But as it is, just be a wise man, and declare them and pay the duty. You'll find it cheapest."

Cy looked considerably upset. He said he had been a good deal shaken up by his accident, and naturally his nerves were not in the best order.

"Cute bluff of yours, Purser. But what's wrong with their being in the bank?"

"This. They've had a detective on you in Liverpool, and it is known you brought the diamonds on board here. Captain Clayton knows, anyway, and he's warned me officially not to help you. I should say it's just a moral certainty he lays information about you himself."

"Most natural thing for him to do if he's soured on the idea of standing in. No, sir, I don't blame the Captain any for fiddling out the tune for his own benefit. But, all the same, I don't think my great and glorious country is going to scoop a lump of duty out me this trip. Guess I'd feel real mean if I couldn't walk my little lot round them."

Mr. Horrocks shook both his sides in a pleasant laugh.

"Well, Purser, I don't mind owning to you that I have that parcel of stones right here in my baggage. When you saw me that night before we sailed, and gave me the cinch, I'd a mind to weaken and shove them

Mr. Horrocks pulled out the Saratoga, unlocked it, and threw back the lid.

in the bank next morning to wait over for another trip. But I guess I got a bit on the ra-ta that night, and after the accident I was too crumpled up to think of anything except how it hurt. So my trunks were packed by that hospital attendant with what was there in my room, and I'm taking it on trust that the diamonds are in the Saratoga under the settee you're sitting on. But, to tell the truth, I'd like to make sure."

"Anything I can do?"

"If you would, old man. I know I can trust you. As for the hospital attendant, he may be all right, but I've only his word for that, and £10,000 worth of diamonds is a big temptation. Here are the keys."

Mr. Horrocks pulled out the Saratoga, unlocked it, and threw back the lid.

"Steady on," said Cy, "this isn't a game of hide-and-seek. There should be a pair of yellow-topped patent leather boots with lasts in them?"

"They're here."

"Take out the middle tongue of the last in the right boot."

"So?"

"That's it. Now screw out the ring at the top."

The Purser did that. There was a brass washer underneath the ring, but instead of a mere rod of mental beneath, there was a solid screw plug the size of the washer, and inside was chamois leather which rose up gently when the pressure was taken away from it.

"Good man, Cy. That's a brand-new and original kind of hiding-place, and I believe it's almost good enough to bluff a New York Customs' sharp."

"Pull 'em out, siree, and see my stock. There should be just sixty-three stones. I guess you'll know me for enough of an expert to take my word for it that there isn't a flaw in any of them."

Mr. Horrocks picked out an end of the chamois leather, and drew out a neat little case, wound up into cylinder form with silk. He undid this, and spread it out carefully on Cy's counterpane. A great blaze of cut diamonds twinkled and shimmered before him like some essence of rainbows.

"Aren't they things to say your prayers to, Purser? Guess you never saw a parcel of stones like that before. Look at the colour of them."

"They seem nice and white."

"White! They're blue Brazilian diamonds, every one of them. Why, they don't show yellow even on that shammy leather. None of your off-colour stones for me. I've a reputation to keep up, and I know how to pick diamonds that'll do it. Yes, sir. I've an eye for colour in stones that'd surprise most men that think themselves experts."

"All your sixty-three are here by my count."

"Then let's put 'em back again. T'aint over healthy letting this kind of real estate smell too much daylight aboard ship here. You never know who may come to pay a polite call, and think it more genteel to stay just in earshot outside the door. There you are. Valet my boot for me again, Purser, will you?"

Mr. Horrocks rolled up the diamonds in the chamois leather, served it round with the silk, and slipped it in place. He screwed in the plug, crammed down the middle tongue of the last into its place in the patent leather boot, and put it back in the Saratoga trunk, and then, with a sigh, he closed the lid.

"Now, Purser," said Cy, "you see how I'm fixed. The diamonds are here on board, and they've got to be run. The question is, who's going to do it? Would you like to have an invitation to dine ashore, after we get in, and take off a bag with you to dress at a hotel, and carry those boots in your bag?"

"It would be a big risk."

"No, sir. I don't think it. In fact I guess the risk is so small that the fee for porterage doesn't seem to me to foot up to more than £40."

Mr. Horrocks got up majestically and reached for his cap. "It seems to me," he said unpleasantly, "that you've made a mistake. I'm not a

steward, Cy, to pick up your paltry tips. I took you for a gentleman, and I'm sorry I made a mistake. If people don't offer to deal reasonably and fairly with me, I don't do business with them at all."

"Say now, Purser, don't go and lose your hair over it. I offer a fair price, and if you don't choose to take it, there's an end of the trade."

"So far as I'm concerned."

"And all that's been said is in confidence."

"Of course. I know nothing about any diamonds except the half-pint or so you wear in sight; and as for lasts in patent leather boots, I never heard of such things."

"You're a white man right through, Horrocks," said Cy, and there the Purser left him. If Master Cy chose to be so injudicious as to run up against the Purser's dignity with so small a bribe, it was somewhat natural that the Purser should nourish a slightly vicious hope that Cy might be led to see the error of his ways. The boot with the hollow last was a very clever scheme no doubt, but the New York Customs officer had smelt out hiding places as canny before, and, moreover, this time they would start with the advantage of knowing almost for a certainty that illicit diamonds were in Cy's luggage somewhere, and so it was probable that they would go on searching till they found them.

However, Mr. Horrocks had little enough time to waste on Diamond Cy and his affairs for the rest of the trip. As he put it to me: "There was that Jew novel writer to be attended to. He was sick for the first two days, and I tried to get the Doctor to give him something that would keep him sick till we got to New York. But the Doctor, malicious old fool, wouldn't; laughed and said that what I was paid for was to keep passengers of this sort in talk; and that is just what I had to do. The nasty slobbering mouth of the fellow nearly made me sick, and the way in which he talked about himself, and his fame, and his books, was disgusting. But there was no doubt about his ability for mischief, and so I had to take my precautions.

"I sent word round amongst the stewards that I'd sack any man who yarned to him, with a 'Decline to report' on his discharge ticket, and I set myself to gain his affections. Lord! In two days the beast began to think that I regarded him as a long-lost brother, and I loaded him with enough stuff to go on advertising the Line for all his remaining days. He wanted to know about everything, and he was by no means a fool in his questioning; but I hadn't been handing over reports to newspaper men all my years without knowing exactly what to give them. with safety,

and exactly what looks safe but can be distorted, and exactly what must be kept away from them at all hazards.

"These writing animals do catch hold of a tramp's skipper or an old deck-hand occasionally, and get to know about what goes on aboard the class of vessel that carries no passengers; but on the big liners it's another thing; and it's an officer's chief duty to see that nothing leaks over into print that can do the boat or the Company that employs him harm."

Especially was this person desirous of knowing how diamonds were smuggled, and Mr. Horrocks gave him a lot of useful information on that subject which he piously hoped would tempt him to get credit for a consignment, and then find himself caught and in jail. It was one of the great draw-backs of Mr. Horrocks' professional life that he had to supply his smiles, and his jests, and his genialities free gratis to certain passengers whom he cordially wished at the bottom of the sea.

"I hear there's a celebrity called Diamond Cy on board," the novelist said to him one day. "Couldn't I get to see him?"

"Impossible, my dear boy," (Mr. Horrocks explained to me that he always called theatricals, acrobats, and authors, and that lot "dear" because he said "they seemed to expect it.") "Cy's all crumpled up and don't receive visitors. But I can give you his full particular history if you wish it."—And he did so.

"I was told privately that he's going to run a big lot of diamonds through the Customs this time."

"Very likely. There's mostly that yarn floating about any boat Cy decorates with his presence. But I should say it's never true. 'Tisn't his line, any more than it's mine or yours. A few blessed Dutchmen from Hatton Garden keep the monopoly of that trade in their own hands."

"H'm," said the novelist, but Mr. Horrocks did not think he was convinced, because he went on so quickly to other topics. So he looked in at Cy's room again that evening, and told him people were talking about him.

"You'll be nabbed as sure as Heaven made little apples," said Mr. Horrocks, "if you don't cut your profits and declare your stuff in the usual way." But Cy was feeling grave and cantankerous, and the most he would do was to take an omen from the Fates.

"Is there a pool on the run to-day?" he asked.

"Certainly."

"Very well. Then will you buy for me the middle three numbers?"

"At what kind of price?"

"Bid till you get 'em. If I win either of those, or if any of the three numbers on either side of them pull it off, my luck's going to be clear. If not I may have to look out."

"Poor sort of way of making omens," said the Purser, and left him. He went to his room again after lunch. "Cy," he said, "you're a gloomy prophet. Those three middle numbers were run up to an extravagant figure, and you owe me £20 for them."

The sick man handed over the money, and Mr. Horrocks deposited it in a place of safety against his rotundity.

"And you haven't won with either of them. The pool was pulled off by 'Highest number and above.' We happened to make a record day's run."

"Well!" said Cy, "I never set much store on omens anyway. Guess they were all right for the Ancient Greeks, but I'm too modern for them. But I can't tell you what I shall do. It will all depend on the mood I'm in when we come within smell of East River mud again."

And that was all Mr. Horrocks could get out of him. Cy had turned very queer-tempered since his accident. Perhaps the fact of being shut up in his room with only the hospital attendant as company most of the time was a trifle trying for him after being used, as he was, to being stared at, and pointed at, and talked to as one of the celebrities of the North Atlantic. And, moreover, his hurts kept him down below all the time they were at sea.

However, when the ›Ambleside‹ had passed Sandy Hook, and the New York Customs' officers came on board from their tug, and went down into the saloon to make the passengers sign their declarations, in hobbled Cy on his crutches, looking very shaken and white, but with all his diamond studs and watch-chains and tie-pins in full blaze. He lowered himself down into a chair with the help of the hospital assistant, and took up a blank declaration form and a pen.

"Hullo, Cy," said the Customs' officer at the end of the table. "You back again?"

"I'm too fond of my country and too proud of her bright, cute guardians," said Cy, "to leave her shores for long."

"No, I know your little ways. Brought back anything in my line? I'd like to see the colour of your money."

"Not a cent's worth," said Cy, and filled in his paper with blanks, and signed it.

"Better think again. You've a diamondiferous look about you."

"Guess I'm not going to declare wearing apparel I bought in the States, and those are about all the diamonds you'll find in my possession."

"Oh, don't let me press you any," said the Customs' man. "I was only chucking around a pleasant hint, and if there's a funeral to follow, I guess it won't be mine."

The Purser was called away then to the Second Class, but he took it for granted that Cy would be sensible and give in, and declare his merchandise. But no such thing. And as a consequence the Customs' people opened all his trunks when they got ashore to the shed, and gave them such a searching that of course the diamonds had to turn up at last. It was only natural that this should be so, because if you start with a more or less certain foreknowledge that the thing you want is there—and it seems that the fiction writer who had next cabin to Cy let the cat out of the bag, so Captain Clayton said—it is only a case of time before you find it.

Cy, of course, was in weak health, and cursed them with viperish tongue for keeping him standing round there with aches all over him, whilst they did their tedious search. He called them all the kinds of brute that occur in America, and would really have bluffed them out of their search if they had not been so entirely sure about it. In fact he stuck out gamely till the very end. But when the hollow last was found, and, the diamonds pulled out, he just broke down and crumpled up. It was quite pitiable to see him. He was crying, and sobbing, and laughing all in one, and at last the Custom House officers, out of sheer humanity, bundled him into a hack, hospital attendant and all, and told him to drive away to his hotel. They knew they could always find Cy when they wanted him, and meanwhile, of course, they held on to his unlucky parcel of diamonds.

Personally Mr. Horrocks did not pour out much unnecessary sorrow over Cy, because if you give a man a lot of sound advice, and he deliberately puts it aside and gets hurt, you naturally cannot help feeling that he should have paid more attention to your valuable words. And as for Captain Clayton, as Mr. Horrocks puts it: "He was being entertained at the Waldorf-Astoria by one of his lords and the M.P., and never gave a thought to anything as common as Cy and smuggling. He had a knack of doing quite the naval officer ashore, and you'd never have connected him with commerce. But from what came out afterwards, he might have had a bit more to do with Master Cy and his affairs than he chose to appear."

However, when the ›Ambleside‹ had just about finished unloading, and they were beginning to work cargo in-board, a messenger came down with a note from Cy, inviting the Purser to dine with him at uptown

Cy cursed them with viperish tongue for keeping him standing round there with aches all over him.

Delmonico's. Of course, he went. Not only is the keeping on friendly terms with regular passengers one of a purser's professional assets, but Mr. Horrocks was a man who thoroughly appreciated a good dinner.

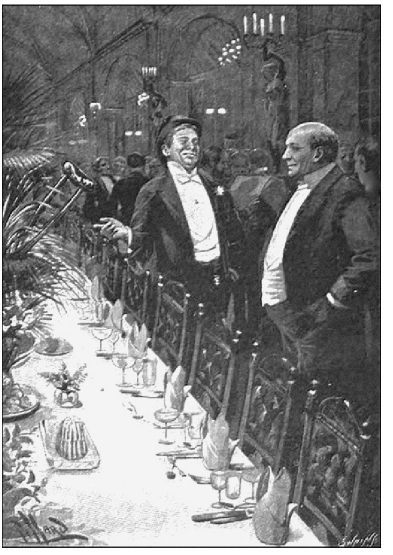
Ashore he practiced austerities for reasons of purse alone, and if he did violence to his palate by patronizing the baser kinds of restaurant, he solaced himself by the thought that the money so saved was more profitably employed in the up-keep of "Rock's Orphanage" an institution in which he was vitally interested.

But if Mr. Horrocks had pictured Cy as doing the honours on a couch packed with pillows, he was very decidedly mistaken. Cy was dancing about as full of activity as a be-decorated monkey, and the crutches were fantastically thrust out as ornaments amongst the flowers in the centre of the table. He had a lot more gentlemen of his own kidney in the room when Mr. Horrocks arrived, and they were roaring over a smart story in one of the evening papers. "How the brightest Custom House officers on earth bought a sell," it was headed. "All that glitters is not diamonds!" And a bit lower was: "Diamond Cy adds fresh laurels to his fame," and so on.

The Purser looked through a paragraph or so. "Look here, Cy," he said, "were those diamonds you showed me duffers?"

"You bet," said Cy cheerfully. "Best paste that's made. Cost me a Croesus of a lot. Didn't they shine?"

"Splendidly."



Cy was dancing about as full of activity as a be-decorated monkey.

"Those Customs' sharks sucked them down like rye. Say, Purser, weren't those toney tears of mine when I broke down at the—let's see, how does the paper put it—at the disgrace and ruin of discovery?"

"But I don't see yet how you—"

"Crutches, old man. Crutches with a hole up the middle of the shank, with the real brilliants dropped in, and set tight with glue. Crutches by themselves wouldn't have stood a cat's chance. But crutches, and an accident, and a hospital attendant do the thing together more in style. And then, when you plant a nice hollow last in a patent leather boot, why, there, I guess you load up the mind of any Customs' officer that walks with all it will carry. Nothing wrong in bringing paste brilliants inside the last of a patent leather boot. No duty on them. Don't have to declare them. Look here: the papers all say so. Lord! haven't they been rubbing it into the New York Customs in this evening's editions!"

"Well," said one of the others, "if you've done preening yourself like an absurd peacock, Cy, what's wrong with starting dinner? Guess well get to work seriously, drinking your honoured health later on."

So they fell to and proceeded to enjoy themselves. Diamond Cy was nothing if not gorgeous, and he had given Delmonico's a free hand. He felt he could afford it. He had smuggled in £10,000 worth of gems free of duty, which pleased him vastly, and he had set all New York laughing at his cuteness, which pleased him far more.

Mr. Horrocks would have liked much to have fingered a share of the profits for the benefit of "Rock's Orphanage," but as a matter of fact that dinner was all he got out of the business. But he had a vague notion that Captain Clayton somehow or other fared better. Clayton looked wise, and laughed when the Purser hinted at this latter, but he said nothing. He was not a man who cared to commit himself. But Mrs. Clayton got that diamond crescent, and wore it openly in Liverpool in the daytime, and one does not see how Clayton could afford to have bought it out of his ordinary pay as Captain.

Mr. Horrocks told me that he intends to get to the bottom of that matter yet; but up to the moment of going to press he has not done so, and this tale, therefore, as regards that point, must necessarily remain incomplete.

Chapter 5

The Pirate[1]

Captain Clayton rather twitted Mr. Horrocks afterwards at the ease with which the man Cragie had managed to strike up an acquaintance with him; but looking at the matter impartially, one does not see very well how it could have been avoided. It is part of a purser's professional duty to know as many people as he can possibly get at, and be liked by the highest possible percentage of them. On a little matter like this often hangs a passenger's choice between two rival steamer lines.

A purser cannot consult his own feelings on this subject. He may hate to be a humbug, but he has no remedy as long as he remains in his firm's employ. In Mr. Horrocks' case there were scores of persons who said "that fat Purser is a right good sort, and I like him no end," whom he would cheerfully have seen hanged. But he had to be civil and attentive and amusing to them, and swallow all trace of dislike.

In fact it was in a large measure for doing this that he drew his salary. Cragie, too, knew his game, and played it like a man. He came up to the Purser when that worthy man had just looked in for his "morning" at down-town Delmonico's, and caught hold of his hand, and shook it heartily.

"I'm very pleased to meet you again, Mr. Horrocks," said he. "You'll have forgotten my name, but I'm Charles L. Cragie."

Mr. Horrocks returned the hand-shake. "Ah," he said, "Let me see—"

"Don't apologize," said Cragie. "You'll meet some five hundred fresh faces every trip, and I know it will be hard enough to remember them,

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[1] Zuerst erschienen in Pearson's Magazine im November 1900.

let alone the names. But don't you recollect my winning that auction sweep on the run?"

If he had asked if the Purser did not recall him through his habit of taking pepper with his vegetables, it would have been equally to the point. But it was not Mr. Horrocks' habit, for reasons already laid out, to deny acquaintanceships, so he said, in his genial way: "Oh, of course; I've got you clearly enough now," and the pair of them fell very naturally into talk. The Purser's description of the man showed insight. "The way this Cragie lowered whiskey sours," he said, in telling of him afterwards, "made me think that his next trip would be to the Keely Cure Institute; but he seemed to be a man well used to business in a small way, from the glib knack he'd got of bringing figures and prices into his ordinary chatter.

"Your big business man, or your swell, or your ordinary tourist, will take a drink and stand at the bar, and just talk about the weather, or people he's met; but fellows like this Cragie, who are as keen as knives on dollars, and not over-successful at catching them, can't help dragging money into the most ordinary conversations. They'll guess at the price of the prints behind the bar, and smack their lips over the figures, and they'll want to know how much the liquor cost a dozen before they've got a glass-full comfortably down their throats."

Mr. Horrocks still did not remember the man in the very least. But that was nothing strange. It is a physical impossibility for a purser to keep in mind all the tens of thousands of passengers with whom he comes in official contact. However, he made out incidentally that Cragie was a man who always took one of the best rooms on the boat in which he crossed, and ran up a heavy wine bill, and was over and back between Liverpool and New York some three or four times every year. It seemed, too, he had a way of sampling all the different lines, and so Mr. Horrocks took pains to point out to him that the way to secure comfort and attention was to stick to one boat, and get known and liked on her. If he did not quite understand, also, that the Town Line was the smartest on the North Atlantic Ferry, and the ›Ambleside‹ was the pick of the Town Line's fleet, it was not the fault of the ›Ambleside's‹ Purser.

But Cragie did not accept all this without demur.

"What I complain of about your Town boats," said he, "is that you're so unpunctual. You advertise you'll arrive on the 15th, say, and I cable to make my appointments accordingly; and then either you don't turn up till the 18th, and I miss a lot of business, or you have some fancy game of cutting a record and get in on the 14th, and I have a day loose on my

hands, and naturally get a bit on the whiskey crawl. See what I mean?"

"Mr. Cragie, let me tell you, you never made a bigger mistake. You're thinking of the Blue Moon boats. We run like a train. We're always on schedule time."

"Well, I know the last time I crossed by one of your Town Line boats—it was the ›Glasgow,‹ by the way—she set me down on the Liverpool stage a day and a half before time, and I can tell you it was a beastly nuisance. I'd nothing on earth to do for that time, and got on a deuce of a jamboree in consequence. Took me a matter of three days more to get straight again, and so I lost four-and-a-half days' business all through your fault."

"It might be an interesting case for the Courts, but I don't think you'd get compensation from our Company over that."

Mr. Cragie grinned. "Oh, I know my way about. But it's a fact she did come in sooner than I'd reckoned on, and I'd got a time-table from a tourist bureau to make sure of the date."

"There you are, then. Why don't you go to headquarters for what you want? We don't guarantee any time-table except our own: in fact, most of them are inaccurate. We give out a list of approximate departures and arrivals at the beginning of the year, but circumstances often arrive which make us modify them."

"I see. Your directors suddenly get up a notion they'd like to try and break a record with one of your boats for the sake of the extra advertisement, and so put more coal on board, and let the old time-table go hang. But where's one to find out about that?"

"At our own office right here in New York. Where else? They're always delighted to give any information to passengers."

"I see. And could they tell me the exact dates when you sail with the ›Ambleside,‹ and when you arrive?"

"Of course. But I can do that myself if you want it. To-day is Friday. We pull out from here next Tuesday at 1.30 middle day, and put you in the London train at Liverpool at 3 o'clock in the afternoon of Wednesday week. Run you up to town in time for a theatre."

"Or breakfast the next morning, which?"

"Exactly as I have said."

"Will you bet on it? Will you bet you don't vary six hours on either side of that time?"

The Purser stared at the man curiously. His face was working with excitement. There seemed to be something out of balance here. Why

should it matter to Mr. Cragie so vastly whether the ›Ambleside‹ ran on schedule time or not?

"You seem very keen on it," said Mr. Horrocks. "By the way, I forgot to ask. Are you crossing by us?"

"No, I'm sorry, but you won't get there till too late for me. I must take tomorrow's boat. But about that bet. Is it on? Look here. I'll lay you five to three in thousand dollar bills you're not there within eight hours of the time you mentioned."

"I'm not a gambler," said the Purser, "and, moreover, I'm a man with very little loose cash. But I'll take you in hundreds."

Cragie's excitement grew. His face was white and sweating. He was bending up an ash-tray in his fingers till the barman took it away. "Look here," he snarled, "you're trying to get out of it. If your old boat's worth a copper for reliability, the money'd have been a cert to you, and you'd have snapped up the bet like winking."

The Purser tried to puzzle out what the man's motive might be in all this violence. Was this Cragie trying to fasten a quarrel on him? Mr. Horrocks had every intention of avoiding that. He was not a man who saw any amusement in a fracas with an ex-passenger in a public bar-room. He was always majestically conscious of the reputation he had to keep up. So he gave a fat, easy laugh, and pretended not to see that there was anything wrong. "My dear Mr. Cragie," he said, "I have not the smallest idea of losing three hundred dollars to you, and your five is as good as earned for me if you persist in making the bet."

"Persist!" shouted the man. "This will show you whether I persist!" He lugged out a pocketbook and thumbed five hundred-dollar bills. He slammed them noisily down on to the counter. "Now!" he cried, "dare you take those, with the barman here for a witness?"

"Certainly, my dear sir." Mr. Horrocks doubled the notes neatly and slipped them into a pocket over one of his curves. "And if the ›Ambleside‹ fails to get in at the time I said, why then I shall owe you eight hundred."

"You're beginning to see yourself paying it already."

"If I thought there was the smallest likelihood of that, you would not have noticed me pick up your money. I didn't want to bet with you, because I've been taught it's wrong to bet on a certainty, but as you insisted, well, I guess it's your funeral."

"Have another drink on that?"

"No, I should say we've both about had our load. Besides, I've to go back to the office again." So there they parted.

Mr. Horrocks gave a fat, easy laugh.

The Purser stumbled across Captain Clayton getting out of a Broadway cable-car half-an-hour afterwards, and it struck him that it would not be a bad thing to underwrite part of his risk So he told him about Cragie and his bet. "I suppose it's a safe enough thing. Captain?" said he.

Captain Clayton licked a leaf that was loose on the end of his cigar, and shut one eye thoughtfully. "Delays might happen, of course. And, on the other hand, old McDraw might by accident burn fifty tons of coal too much, and get her there before time, unless I gave him word to keep on the normal. And then there's Queenstown. It's a ticklish job getting off your mails at Queenstown, and time's very easily picked up there—or dropped. How much was it you said you stood to win over this little game, Horrocks?"

The Purser laughed. "Look here," he said, "I'm open to betting you two hundred to fifty you don't get her in on time. Here's two hundred."

Captain Clayton winked pleasantly, and put the notes in his pocket.

"After all, why shouldn't I have a share? I'm the man who will really do the winning. You merely stand by to pouch the result."

"Well, don't lose, that's all. I don't want to pay Cragie."

"And I don't want to pay you. Which way are you going? Back to the office? Well, I'm just going in here to buy a tie, and then I'm off to the Fifth Avenue for a luncheon. So long."

The ›Ambleside,‹ thanks to Mr. Horrocks' personality and exertions, was always a popular boat, but that return trip she was exceptionally

full. A great exhibition on the Continent of Europe was drawing Americans sightseers across the Atlantic, and berths were booked weeks beforehand. On the ›Ambleside‹ their first-class passengers had overflowed into the second-class rooms, of course at unreduced fares, and, moreover, express freights were exceptionally good just then, and she was loaded down to her marks.

The dividends on the run would be princely, and Mr. Horrocks thought that, under the circumstances, the Board could scarcely avoid seeing what an excellent servant they had in him, and would raise his salary there and then by way of cementing his connection with the line.

Mr. Horrocks was badly in need of additional funds just then. The orphanage which he ran in a Cheshire village under the pseudonym of "Mr. Rocks" was draining his resources to the uttermost copper. In a moment of exceptional prosperity he had built on a new wing, opened it himself with a thrill of pompousness and pride, and then, with all his feelings of humanity aroused, bought and stole wretched waifs from the Liverpool slums to people it.

He had promised himself that the additional mouths should be filled somehow: and that he would make money to pay the increasing bills by getting hold of extra "pickings," or from increase of salary, which he felt that the Town S.S. Co. could not much longer withhold from him. But the pickings evaded his keen grasp, and, though surely no purser ever worked more diligently in a firm's interest, his salary remained stationary.

In this particular voyage, then, of the ›Ambleside,‹ he saw possibilities of profit for the company and advertisement for the Line, and intended to push both to the furthest limit. Never should there be such a happy, contented crowd of passengers; never should the wine bills be so big; and if Rocks' Orphanage did not come by its due reward, well, Mr. Horrocks felt that Providence would scarcely be giving proper attention to its legitimate business.

But in an ocean voyage there are infinite possibilities, and it is the unforeseen which usually trips the modem mariner. With the high scientific appliances of these latter days, the sounding machines, the Thompson's compasses, and all the other perfect utensils of navigation, it is seldom that, on the known routes, a well-found liner is cast away, either through fog, current, or bitter gale. She is driven full speed ahead through whatever weather is sent down upon the seas, and, though her officers may suffer from strain and exposure, she runs between her ports with the regularity of a railway train. Her vital point is in the

engine-room. No amount of outlay and care make boilers and steam-pipes and machinery absolutely infallible.

So it came to pass that on the morning of the fourth day out of New York, instead of the passengers being awakened by nimble bedroom stewards carrying biscuits and well-boiled tea, a sudden rump, bump, whizz of the engines brought them into sharp wakefulness. Then, for a second or two more, there was an uncanny grinding, which some half-dozen observers said reminded them of the crepitation of a broken bone, and then the engines stopped, and a new sound of waves slapping against the steamer's flanks took the place of the swish-h-h of rapid transit. The passengers turned out from their bedplaces, and began hurriedly to dress.

Then upon the scene appeared the burly form of the Purser, giving instructions to the stewards with tongue, elbow, and hand. The stewards, being human, were as much startled as everyone else, and wanted to go on deck and see for themselves what was the matter. But Mr. Horrocks soon brought them back to routine.

"Away with you, now, and see to your rooms. You can pass the word it's only a broken shaft, and we'll soon have that fixed up. Nothing in a broken shaft. And breakfast's at the usual time. No alteration in anything. Oh, yes, and it's fine weather on deck, but rather cold."

The stewards spread the placid message. Mr. Horrock's diagnosis was guess-work, of course, but it happened to be correct, and presently news was brought down to this effect. The passengers, after the first shock of alarm, were disposed to take things coolly enough, and the stout Purser went round from room to room paying early morning calls with easy familiarity. There was not the least occasion for alarm. Already a steamer had come up to their assistance, and arrangements were being made for towing. They might be a few days late in arriving, but as for safety, they stood a precious sight less chance of danger on the ›Ambleside‹ than they did ashore with all those nasty cab-accidents, and gas explosions, and earthquakes knocking about.

The Purser found opportunity for going on deck presently and found the ›Ambleside‹ looking much as usual, except that she sat down rather emphatically on her tail, and had her bows rather further out of the water than seemed quite necessary. McDraw, the Chief Engineer, came up from below about the same time, and trotted briskly towards the upper bridge ladder, exuding a thin stream of dirty water from his clothes as he ran. Mr. Horrocks would have liked much to follow him, but he knew that on these occasions a purser, be he ever so magnificent, is apt

to be snubbed by the executive. So he planted himself at a point where Captain Clayton could not fail to see him, and waited for an invitation. In the meanwhile he could clearly hear the old Chief make his report.

"I was in my berth when it happened. She runs that sweetly there's vara sma' occasion for me to turn oot every watch. Besides, I've three good watch officers that I'd trust to tend her as weel as you or mysel'. It was my Senior Second's watch when it happened, an' he reports to me he heard the shaft break with a gr-reat noise, and that the bedplates buckled and knocked him over. She raced a bit before he could get her throttled down. But there's naething broken in the engine-room. They're graand engines, thanks to the care that's been given them. There was water coming in pretty free from the shaft tunnel, so I dropped down the slide door mysel' and cut it off. Ye mind that slide operates from the top platform?"

"Yes, yes," said Clayton. "But is the smash past repair? You carry a spare section of shafting; can't you fit that in? You say your engines are all sound. Can't the break be got at? Is it the tail shaft or where?"

"Tail shaft or intermediate. I neither know, nor does it matter. The shaft tunnel's pairt an' parcel o' the broad Atlantic just noo, an' it's my belief that when the shaft went jimmy, it peeled off a square fathom or two of plating as remembrancer. Our future help cometh fra' the Lord, Captain, an' fra' yonder steamboat He has sent with a tow-rope sticking out of her rump. My engines do no more work till we've been through a dry dock."

"I see you're blowing off steam."

"All but what's wanted for ma bilge pumps. There's a good sup o' water come through into my engine-room before the shaft tunnel was shut off. But we're getting it under nicely. I shall set my chaps on to tallow down the main engines when they're cool."

"Very well," said Clayton shortly, "that will do," and as McDraw went down off the bridge, he beckoned the Purser up. "That old fool's philosophy jars on me a bit just now, Horrocks," he said.

"I don't think the philosophy is more than skin-deep, sir," said Horrocks. "His eyes were full of tears when he came down the ladder. Anything wrong with McDraw's engines goes very near to McDraw's best feelings. At a rough guess, I should say he feels this mess-up more than any of us, and that's saying a good deal, because, personally speaking, it seems I shall be due to pay $300 hard cash, not to mention handing back $500 I've pouched already. Heaven knows where I'm to find it."

"She's precious little cargo in her."

"I shall owe you $250, too, and I'm afraid you'll have to wait for it. We're that hard up at home I hardly know how to turn. My wife, poor girl, and her sisters, are always dinning into me that I ought to make more, and I suppose they're right. But this job here doesn't look like doing it. Probably all the officers in the ship will get reduced or fired over this smash."

"Probably," said the Purser gloomily. "That's our Mr. William Arthur's way. He thinks that if you sack officers every time one of your boats has a smash, you don't have so many smashes."

"In a way he's right."

"Our Mr. William Arthur's a splendid man of business," said the Purser, with reluctant admiration. "He always makes a point of hanging somebody if anything goes wrong. Pity they don't try that game in the Navy."

"You let the Navy alone, please, Mr. Horrocks," said Clayton, with sudden temper, and the Purser civilly said "Yes sir," and remembered too late that Clayton was an E.N.B. man, and absurdly touchy about the prestige of his service.

"That steamboat that's coming up looks to me like an old tramp. Not likely to be of much use to us, sir."

"Two thousand five hundred tons," said Clayton, looking at the oncoming steamer, "and if she isn't exactly flying light, she's precious little cargo in her. Just enough coal to see her home, and not even enough over to fire the bogie in the forecastle. She'll offer to report us."

"Then there'll be some big gambling amongst the under-writers when she does get in. I suppose with all this mob of passengers, we'll be worth a million."

"All that," Clayton admitted. "I wonder," he said drearily, "will we be picked up? We're in the steam lane now, but the weather's not over clear, and we may drift out of it in a day."

"Every steamboat in the North Atlantic will be on the look-out for us, if we aren't picked up inside of a week. We're not a poor wind-jammer or an old tramp. We're far too valuable a plum to be neglected."

"Well, you can impress on the passengers that we shan't sink, whatever the weather is that comes, that's one comfort."

"And we shan't starve, notwithstanding the crowd on board, under a month and a week at full rations. That's the blessing of one of the Company's grand-motherly regulations about carrying extra stores. I used to think it a fool regulation before."

Captain Clayton was watching the other steamer, which was just being brought to a standstill alongside. "By Jove, Purser, but the skipper of that old water-pusher yonder handles her smartly. What steamer is that?"' he hailed. "This is the ›Ambleside,‹ Captain Clayton."

"›Coronet,‹ of Whitby, Captain Crump, New York to Liverpool in ballast. You're a goodish bit by the stern, Captain. Have you happened an accident? Can I give you a pluck in anywhere?"

"Broken shaft. But if you're going homewards you'll not have coal sufficient to tow us."

"Got coal enough to tow you to St. Petersburg, Captain," shouted the man, and was instantly checked by a companion who was with him on the tramp's bridge. The pair of them had some hasty talk, which could not be heard from the liner, and then in a grumbling tone, he sang out: "Well, anyway, I've enough coal to pull you into Queenstown, and I guess that'll be all you'll want. Now how much am I going to get for my salvage?"

"No use our going into that," Clayton hailed back. "Whatever bargain you and I made, the courts would be called in ashore to settle up the figure. If you think you can tow, the sooner you get started, the better for both parties. If not, there's a Blue Moon freight boat due here in about half-a-dozen hours. We're right on her track."

From the ›Ambleside‹ they saw Captain Crump's companion seize him excitedly by the arm, and Captain Crump impatiently turn to listen to another conversation which was beyond their earshot. "Well, I've said I'm quite ready to tow you," he bawled at length. "Will you send me

The lifeboat crept away over the shifting hill and dale of ocean.

your rope? And say, I've a new thick wire that will most probably beat anything you've aboard there for towing. We'll want something that'll hold presently. I see the glass is falling, and there's a breeze coming away. We shall put a big strain on what we tow by."

The tramp steamer began to bustle with ragged men and the yell of orders. The liner preserved her dignity even in this time of stress. With her abundant officers, there was at least one to look after each knot of working seamen, and as all were highly skilled specialists in their profession, each knew exactly what to do, and was ready at the least nod or gesture of a superior to do it.

The passengers had turned out by this time, and were watching anxiously. The lack of noise or bustle impressed them. They saw a lifeboat, manned by a life-belted crew, drop from the davits and become the plaything of violent green waves. Oars straggled out from her sides, and she crept away over the shifting hill and dale of ocean, and the passengers felt comfortable and secure through contrast between their own case and that of the men who were carrying the line across to the rescuing steamer.

Mr. Horrocks drew a happy parallel. "Looks small, doesn't she, that lifeboat? But let me tell you she's more tonnage than the packets that Columbus and the Pilgrim Fathers and those old people used to cross in. Let me tell you, too, you're still in luck's way for comfort here on the old ›Ambleside,‹ even if she has chanced to stumble on a bit of an

accident. If she'd been one of those light-plated foreign boats, or one of the other lines I could mention out of Liverpool—you'd all be swimming this minute, or drowned. It's only a stout-built boat like this that could have stood the shock she's had. But as it is, things'll go on just the same as usual, except that I'm afraid there won't be strawberries down on the menu every day for dessert. I'll own up frankly we may run a bit short of strawberries. But there's lashings of everything else—including breakfast, which is now ready. I say, good people, the gong's gone for breakfast. Am I going to eat it down there all by myself?"

The more hardened of the passengers went down to breakfast; the more curious, and the few who were nervous, missed that meal and watched on whilst the Coronet steamed ahead, and tautened on the wire till the heavy liner surged along reluctantly in her wake. They were annoyed, many of them, at being made to miss some of their appointments in England and Europe; they were madly thrilled, some of them, at being on a steamer that had 'broken down' in mid-Atlantic, but none of them were in the least degree terrified, which speaks a good deal for the consistent teaching of Mr. Horrocks on the text of "Nothing could sink in the ›Ambleside.‹"

Mr. Horrocks himself, however, was the uneasy man; and deep down in his massive breast there smouldered a suspicion that this mishap which had befallen the ›Ambleside‹ had been invited in some considerable measure by his own thoughtless act. It was only a suspicion, to be sure, because he could not be certain that it was his acquaintance, Mr. Cragie, he had seen prompting the tramp steamer's skipper on her bridge.

The man had worn a peaked cap drawn down well over his eyes, and a muffler pulled up high above the collar of his coat. He was all but unrecognizable—"still, there was a something about him which tried hard to betray his identity, some small characteristic trait which could not be eliminated by disguise, and the Purser hung about the decks glaring through a pair of binoculars, trying to make suspicion into a certainty. In lesser degree Clayton and McDraw also had the glimmerings of uneasy theories that the ›Ambleside‹ had not come by her ailment merely by unaided chance; and though each had so slender a groundwork for the idea that he was afraid to share it for fear of ridicule, each hammered at his clue with a mind that was savagely eager for retaliation.

But it was the Purser who finally brought together the threads of suspicion into something that the three of them were pleased to consider certainty. Cold head gales and heavy seas made the towing tedious, and

the weather bitter wet. But Mr. Horrocks exposed his portly form to the elements, though he had all a purser's preference for the warmth and comfort of the smoke-room and saloons, and sought across the tumbling seas for a sight of Cragie somewhere on the other steamer. And at last he was rewarded. Cragie appeared on the Coronet's poop, unmuffled and plain for all to see.

The day was thick with driving sleet, and except for the officers and men of the watch, the ›Ambleside's‹ decks seemed deserted, and Mr. Horrocks was chilled and moist. But a glow went through him when he thought he saw a way of handing along those pocketed dollars to Rock's Orphanage after all, and he stepped briskly up to the chart house to lay his suggestion in the proper quarter.

He was bidden to come in in answer to his knocks and found there Captain Clayton in conference with his chief engineer.

"Well, Purser?"

"You remember that bet I told you about in New York, sir, with a person who said his name was Cragie?"

"Worse luck, yes."

"Well, Cragie excused himself from crossing with us, sir, because he said we should land in Liverpool too late for his business; said he'd have to take the Blue Moon boat, which sailed three days earlier."

"I remember."

"It seems Cragie lied. He's on that old tramp that's got hold of us ahead. You'll remember a man on the bridge prompting her skipper when he first hailed you? I'd my suspicions of him then. I've been watching for him ever since. He's been keeping very carefully out of the way. But just now I've seen him staring at us from the poop—gloating over his catch, I should say he was—and I'd swear to him anywhere."

"Yes?"

"What I want to know now, sir, is, first, why did Cragie force that bet on me, and second, why's he here?"

"Hear, hear," said Clayton, and thumped his fist on the chart-house table. "And what I want to know is, why's that tramp's skipper got more coal in his bunkers than's enough to carry him home? He's coming from New York, where steam coal's dear, to Liverpool, where it's cheap. It's contrary to reason that he should carry more back than would see him across. And there's another point. What did he bring along that hawser for that he's so keen on our using to tow with? It's brand-new, it's out of the way thick, and let me tell you it's an expensive length of rope. We're about as well fit out here on the ›Ambleside‹ as any boat I was

ever on. I'm denied nothing for her by the shore superintendent that my Chief Officer cares to indent for, but we don't carry a wire like that. And yet this rotten old tramp comes along with a coil in her boatswain's store all handy and useful.

"Both that and the coal are bang in the face of probability, but I'll not say they mightn't happen singly. There are amazing fools in this world. But when they come both together as they do here, it's clean past foolishness, and gets into a kind of superior wisdom that seems to spell something very like knavery. What do you say. Purser?"

"Looks to me, sir, as if somebody must have figured out this breakdown to a tolerable certainty. It may be Crump, it may be Cragie, or it may be someone else, but I put my money on Cragie all the time. This ›Coronet‹'s pace isn't anywhere equal to ours; she must have started at least two days ahead to meet us where she did, and yet, as we saw for ourselves, she came up out of the sea at the exact moment when we broke down, all ready and hungry to lick up the salvage. We're a big thing to go for."

"The fattest there's been floating about this Western Ocean this ten years," said Clayton.

"The only thing where the plan doesn't seem to hang together's here. If Crump and Cragie brought out the ›Coronet‹ to pick us up at a given spot in the North Atlantic Ocean, how the blazes did they know we'd be kind enough to break down there? I'm no mechanic, but I should say you can't figure out the breaking moment of a shaft by a rule of three sum. What do you say, Mr. McDraw?"

"I say, sirs, that I'm vara pleased to hear your theories," said the old man.

"Yes, yes," said Clayton testily. "But we haven't got at anything tangible so far."

"I was going to obsairve," said the Chief Engineer, "that I've theories o' my ain, scores of them, but till now I've kept them to mysel'. We're a cautious nation where I come frae, Captain Clayton, and no' wishfu' to be heckeled at for ower imagination."

"You've quite a reputation for it."

"Aweel, my chief second, that was on watch when the accident happened, put a tale into my ear about guncotton. Says he: 'Mr. McDraw, there was gun-cotton fired in that shaft tunnel to cause the break.' 'Stuff,' said I, not because I misbelieved him, seeing that he's a countryman o' my own, an' no gifted wi' imagination, but merely to hear his further arguments. 'I know what I talk about,' says he. 'When I was in the Chilian Navy I kenned fine the smell of fired guncotton an' its pheesical effects.'

"But ye've no real evidence," said McDraw.

'Then why,' said I, 'did I no catch the stench of it mysel'?' 'Because,' says he, 'when you came to the engine-room the shaft-tunnel was pouring out sea water like a six-foot sewer, and you were ower thronged wi' screwing down the slide door to think about a trifle o' bookay.'"

"It's beginning to fit together," said the Purser.

"But ye've no real evidence," said McDraw.

"We shall have to wait till the boat's dry-docked," said Clayton. "If there's been guncotton used, the marks should show plainly enough then."

"I'll no' think it," said McDraw. "Ye see it's this way. A sma' charge is all that's needed. Once you lift or depress a revolving shaft an inch or so out of the true, it does all the rest of the breaking for itself. It so to speak threshes round and devastates the surrounding scenery, if one may use a poetic seemily; and my notion is that when she's docked, we shall find that the hinder end of the boat has been bashed clean to jimmy."

"That seems to knock on the head all question of definite proof," said Clayton gloomily. "The most we seem to get at is what the Board will, call 'Negligence on the part of the Chief Engineer in not having the shaft-tunnel more carefully inspected.'"

"I'd thought of that same mysel'," said McDraw drily, "and it made me chary about speaking about the matter, except as I am doing now without prejudice and among friends. Ye'll note I'm just talking to Clayton and Horrocks. In my formal report of the matter to Captain Clayton, I wrote what I knew and could see, not what I might guess. I'd in mind

that the Town S.S. Company underwrite most of their boats' risk in their ain office, and will have to pay for most of the cost of salving us out of their ain pockets."

"Our Mr. William Arthur's bound to take it out of some of us if he has to fork up," said the Purser. "But at the same time if we can so contrive that there's no bill sent in for this bit of salvage, he'll be content not to ask too many questions. He's a splendid man of business. And he's not ungrateful; he'd certainly give us a rise all round if it came off."

"Well?" said Clayton.

"I'm quite satisfied with what we've found out as a start. Remember that Cragie didn't go into this business without quite convincing himself that he could carry it through without being dropped on. He's made one or two trifling mistakes which we've got hold of, and we flatter oursel's we've pieced together more or less of the whole yarn. We haven't done that yet. For instance, we haven't yet found out how the guncotton was worked. Was it put aboard in New York, with a clock-work 'devil' wound up to set it off at the right time? Hardly, I think. Has Cragie an accomplice in one of our greasers or stoke-hold hands who could slip the thing in place with a time-fuse at the right moment? Can't say. But I believe I know who can tell, and we'd do best to go to the fountain head."

"Meaning Cragie?" said Clayton.

"Yes."

"But he wouldn't speak."

"He would if he was made."

Captain Clayton drew a long breath. "And we three call ourselves respectable men!"

"Yes," said Horrocks, "and I personally should continue to do so after this little event. I don't advocate putting Mr. Cragie to the question in the public streets. I should suggest a private room, a pair of irons, a handkerchief to stuff in his mouth, so that he couldn't squall, a fire lit in the grate, and a poker between the bars. I believe he'd weaken when he saw we meant business, and if he didn't—well, so much the worse for him. We should have to see it through."

"He doesn't deserve gentle treatment, certainly."

"The man's a common pirate, no less, and he must take what treatment he can get. We don't want vengeance so much as our own profit. I should say our best way would be to compound with him. He must guarantee not to take a penny in salvage from the company and we'll give him a promise not to prosecute."

"That seems all right," said Clayton. "And the bets are to be cancelled? I simply can't pay out that $250 for the moment."

"Well," said Mr. Horrocks, "I should say that the money which has been passed already should be retained by present holders by way of a fine."

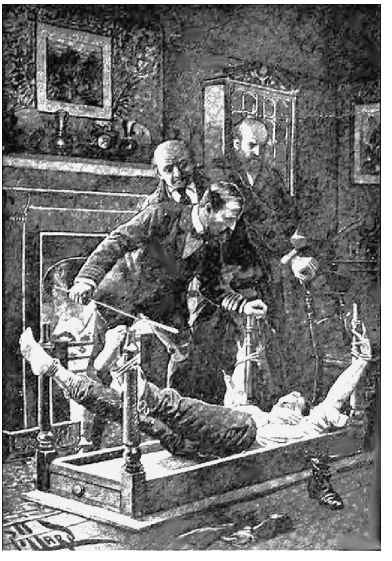
"It seems to me," said McDraw, "you're going ahead ower fast. First catch your hare!"

"I can't afford to let him slip," said Mr. Horrocks. "You may think me a savage over what I've proposed, but I've my reasons for it."—"Any living creature can be a savage," he told himself, "when it is defending its young." And it seemed to him he had either to defeat Cragie, or be content to be mulcted and see Rocks' Orphanage suffer.

Indeed, in all this business which followed, the stout Purser was undoubtedly the moving spirit. It was he who waylaid Cragie in Liverpool, pretending to have known nothing of his having crossed by the ›Coronet,‹ but letting the man suppose he took it for granted he was one of the last Blue Moon boat's passengers. It was he who callously betrayed the man with drink, lured him to a room in lodgings where no questions would be asked, left him in irons to become sober and nervous, and then brought up the Captain and Engineer to add to his informal court.

Cragie's boots were stripped off and the soles of his feet bared; a handkerchief was tied over his mouth so that he could not make outcry, and the poker was taken red-hot from the glow of the fire. The points of the count against him were recapitulated one by one, and he was invited to fill in some of the blanks. They did not want full confession from him; they did not want him to inculpate anybody else; but they desired a written assurance that he would not prefer any salvage claim against the Town S.S. Co. on account of their liner the ›Ambleside,‹ and, failing that document, they were prepared to make a certain unpleasant union between the red-hot poker and part of his anatomy.

Now the exact manner of Mr. Cragie's subjugation is hidden from me, as Mr. Horrocks flatly refuses to dilate upon it. But that a full and satisfactory document was left behind when the man limped out of the room, I do know, and I have it also on good authority that the three who were left felt sick and shaken, and went out to the nearest licensed house for brandy. As for Cragie, it does not seem that he deserves much pity. He was merely a vulgar pirate, the lineal business descendant of those broad-buckled, many-pistolled rascals that our grandparents used to hang in chains, when caught, with a coating of tar as a preservative. And really, on the other hand, Rocks' Orphanage, whatever be the value



The poker was taken red-hot from the glow of the fire.

of the mixed motives of its founder and patron, is an institution which does a considerable amount of good.

The redoubtable Mr. William Arthur probably felt surprised when so fat a claim for salvage was limply withdrawn. But he expressed no regret, and he was too good a man of business to exhibit surprise. He even, on a hint being given him, forbore to ask unnecessary questions, but stuck to the steamer's dry routine, and discovered that her Captain, Purser, and Chief Engineer had behaved exceptionally well under very trying circumstances.

It was not the custom of the Firm to make promotions from boats which had met with bad luck; but the ›Ambleside‹ would have to be laid up some time for repairs, and he did not intend to have any of the Firm's servants drawing pay for no work. So as a new boat had just being added to the line, they could go and run her. She was bigger than the ›Ambleside,‹ and they were going to christen her the ›Leeds.‹ Oh, yes, and pay would be in proportion to tonnage. Good morning!

Chapter 6

The Purser's Revenge[1]

Never heard of him before, sir," said Mr. Horrocks, the Purser.

"Why, he's the greatest musician in the world," said Captain Clayton.

"Did he tell you so himself?" asked Mr. Horrocks, "or did you read that on one of his handbills?"

"Pooh, Janocky is not the man to advertise."

"Then he's the first theatrical I ever came across who didn't."

"I tell you the man's not a theatrical, Horrocks. He's a pianist, and the ›Leeds‹ is honoured in having him for a passenger."

"Never knew any pro. yet bring either honour or profit to any boat," said the Purser stubbornly.

Mr. Horrocks was a fellow of infinite tact to passengers, but deep within his rotund exterior, and kept there solely for private consumption, was an assortment of very violent prejudices. And of all his strong dislikes, actors, actresses, musicians, and all those who made a livelihood by tickling the ears of the public held an easy first place.

Captain Clayton, however, who had married a wife from the stage, naturally looked upon the class from a different standpoint. He said rather sharply that they must take care that Janocky was given a good room.

"Certainly, sir. Of course, if you think a good deal of attention ought to be given him, the greatest compliment would be to let him have your room."

Mr. Horrocks knew quite well that the Captain had let his own room to a Californian millionaire at an exorbitant fee, and would, as usual, take

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[1] Zuerst erschienen in Pearson's Magazine im December 1900.

up his quarters in the chart-house; and, moreover, Captain Clayton was quite aware that his stout purser knew this.

"That's not convenient. He must have one of the best of the ordinary passengers' rooms."

"He shall, sir, you may depend upon me. I will see from his ticket what passage money was paid, and he shall have the best we ever do for the price."

Which, being interpreted, meant that Mr. Horrocks would give the pianist exactly the type of cabin he paid for, and no more. Indeed, if he had only paid for a single berth, the Purser was firmly determined that he should have a stable companion. The ship would be full enough to arrange this easily.

Captain Clayton knew that the Purser was practically supreme in these matters, and did not intend to give way, and made a mental note that Mr. Horrocks had not given up his habit of making repayment for value received. Some little while before, he had stopped the Purser from pocketing a commission which that worthy man considered a lawful perquisite. He now understood why at times it is advisable that shipmasters should wink at some of the habits of pursers.

"Of course, you'd like to have this Mr. John—what's his-name at your table, sir?"

"Yes," said Clayton, and sharply changed the conversation.

Now Mr. Horrocks explained his distaste for theatrical people as due to several things. As he viewed them, their excessive vanity gave him nausea; they always wanted better rooms than they were entitled to, and paid the lowest possible rates of fare; they sponged on the other passengers, and were always on the look-out to create scandals. And finally, he was bound to be civil to them, as they were always "in" with the gentlemen of the Press ashore, and, if they were not satisfied, had it in their power to get the boat a heavy adverse advertisement. As an inspirer of the Press himself, Mr. Horrocks thoroughly understood how this was managed.

Herr Janocky earned the Purser's detestation from the very first moment of meeting. The great pianist showed a vague, absent manner which Mr. Horrocks put down to unadulterated affectation. His pale face, which admirers went into raptures over, struck this critic as merely bilious. His Papuan-like mass of untidy hair seemed to the Purser (who was close-cropped himself) nothing more nor less than a display advertisement, and a very nasty one at that.

Herr Janocky, the great pianist.

Promptly also from the moment of their general recovery from seasickness—which took place after leaving Queenstown—thanks to Janocky, the first-class passengers of the ›Leeds‹ were divided into two violently opposing cliques. A move had been made by an ardent spirit named Pitcairn towards getting up the usual concert in aid of the Sailors' Orphan home. The usual list of amateurs were available, and Pitcairn made up a pleasantly assorted programme. But he was a man with ambition. He wanted Janocky to "do a turn."

He mentioned this to Mr. Horrocks, and suggested that that great man should formulate the wishes of the passengers to the pianist.

"I'll see you in—-melted first. Go and ask him yourself. You aren't shy."

"Oh, but aren't I?"

"Never knew but one drummer yet who was, and he didn't come from Bradford. But if you are scared of Mop-head himself, go to White, his agent."

"Which might White be?"

"That little black chap with the clothes that fit too well, and the diamonds."

"Oh, I know. Or I might get the Skipper to ask him."

"Great thought," said Mr. Horrocks. "I'd do it."

"I will," said Pitcairn, and he did.

Now Captain Clayton had no mean opinion of the position held by the commander of a crack Atlantic liner, especially if the letters E.N.E. stood after his name, and the corresponding blue ensign fluttered from the liner's poop-staff. Moreover, by reason of his own connection with the stage, he felt that if the request came from him, it was certain to be granted; and he said as much.

As a consequence, when, with a good deal of unnecessary offensiveness, Janocky refused flatly to play on anything so commonplace as a

steamer's piano, for a mere steamer's audience. Captain Clayton felt the slight pretty keenly. "You should not have come to me with a request like that," said the pianist, by way of winding up his refusal. "You should have approached my agent."

As this little scene occurred in Pitcairn's hearing, a full account of it was quickly common property, and, as I say, the first-class passengers of the ›Leeds‹ were forthwith split up into two strongly antagonistic bodies. About one-half of them chose to regard Janocky as a Heaven-sent artist, and as something more than human, and these quite approved of his attitude, said that the Captain ought to have known better than to make such a proposal to him, and that to ask him to play on an instrument like the saloon grand (which was not by his own favourite maker), and before an audience that tolerated comic songs and amateur recitations, was nothing short of a gratuitous insult. This party numbered in its ranks most of the ladies amongst the passengers, and as some slight reward for their adoration and loyalty, they prayed Janocky for autographs and locks of his hair and other keepsakes.

They found out that Janocky was a son of one of the oldest houses in Russia, and they raved about his high descent, his sublime art and his personal appearance rather more than was perhaps judicious in the face of such a strong opposition.

The other party, who had, perhaps, more humour about them, possessed an equal command of language. They described Janocky as a more-or-less-strongly-qualified mountebank, and analyzed his "antics" unkindly. They admitted that they might be Philistines, since, according to history, that nation had always held Jews at large in detestation—although Russian Jews are not particularly mentioned in the record. But at the same time they openly confessed their admiration for the pianist's advertising skill, and with mock solemnity formed a syndicate for taking over a certain patent medicine factory in the States, on condition that they could obtain the services of Janocky as manager, to push the sale of the company's pills. It was into the ranks of this clique that Pitcairn endeavoured to enlist the active assistance of Mr. Horrocks; but that wily man, though the direction of his sympathies may be guessed, naturally could not become an open partisan.

"Look here," he said, "you go to commercial-travel Bradford goods in the States. Would you go and mortally offend one-half of your customers at the expense of the others? Not much. Well, I guess you may look upon the passengers here as my customers. Somebody's set them by the ears enough already without my chipping in to help."

"But we've got a great game on, and we want somebody in authority to bear a bit of a hand."

"I daresay you do. Suppose you think it would be a sort of poetical justice if one of the officers decorated Janocky's flowing locks with a fool's cap."

"That's about the idea."

The Purser laid a fat hand on Pitcairn's shoulder. "You go and try the Skipper, my son."

"Shy."

"Oh, get on! You know him well enough."

"I've crossed with Clayton twenty-three times for the matter of that. In fact, I seem to know him a bit too well. If we were less intimate, he might see his way to being more civil. As it is, he snaps my head off when I so much as breathe the name of the great Janocky."

"Well," said the Purser, "if you've an ounce of sense you'll see which way the cat jumps, and you'll let things gently simmer down. If you go on, you'll probably get your fingers burned." With which he left Pitcairn, and made a mental note to watch the welfare of Herr Janocky with some tenderness. For the pianist's own personal feelings he did not care one rap. Once ashore he would be quite pleased to hear the man had been brought to derision; but the reputation of the ›Leeds‹ was a matter which touched Mr. Horrocks intimately, and he did not intend that this should be smirched by any outrageous pranks on Janocky, which he felt sure that objectionable person would wrest round into an advertisement.

As he put it afterwards: "You see I knew the crowd. They were men, most of them, up to the neck in business ashore, and the time they were at sea was sheer holiday to them, and they'd go mad on anything that would help to fill in the time, and give them something to plan and think about. In fact, they were as ripe for mischief as any pack of school-boys."

However, except that the nickname of The 'Pillmaker' was given to Janocky, and bandied about delightedly by the opposition, no more active scheme of annoyance was invented; and if it had not been for the injudicious adulation of the pianist's admirers, Mr. Horrocks was satisfied that the incident would have been allowed to drop. But to see the man openly adored by all the women passengers, and fawned on by a section of the men, was obviously a deliberate exasperation for those who were out of sympathy with him, and the Purser, though he carried an indifferent face, stood by anxiously on guard.

The ›Leeds‹ was exactly in mid-Atlantic when the explosion came, and matters at once assumed a very serious complexion. The news spread amongst the first-class passengers like fire on a gunpowder train, but Mr. Horrocks did not hear it at once. He was arbitrating in the Third Class between two non-English speaking emigrants, each of whom accused the other of theft, and had patiently expended half-an-hour in the endeavour to arrive at a just settlement. But when a peremptory message came from Captain Clayton that he should go up to the chart-house at once, he adjourned his arbitration by clapping both emigrants in irons and ordering a thorough search of their effects. It is a recognized law on liners that the amount of attention received by each passenger from the officials varies directly in the ratio of the fares paid to the Company.

"You've heard what's happened to Janocky?" demanded Clayton.

"No, sir," said the Purser formally. He was always formal with his Captain when he scented trouble.

Afterwards, when hard words had passed, and the matter had been settled up, they could drop their official relations again, and become intimates once more in the space of a sentence.

"Then, Mr. Horrocks, let me tell you it is your business to have heard. You are here to prevent trouble amongst the passengers. And as it is, this scandal is all over the ship now."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, if you don't know," said Clayton angrily, "what's happened is this —" But at that moment the door opened, and in came the pianist himself.

"I understand," he said, "that my agent, Mr. White, gave you some account of the outrage of which I was made a victim last night."

"He did," said Clayton.

"Zo! I have thought well to come and give you the tale myself, so that there can be no shirking of your responsibility through want of knowledge. It is not my usual custom to interfere with matters personally. My agent makes all arrangements for—"

"Let me hear your tale, sir," said the Captain sharply, "if you have one. I don't want a history of your habits. They fail to interest me."

The pianist turned his pale face to Mr. Horrocks. "Ah, you are the principal steward, is not that so?"

"No, sir, I have the honour of being Purser here."

"Zo! Is there a difference?"

Mr. Horrocks kept his temper with an effort. Captain Clayton came to the rescue of his dignity.

"If you were a gentleman, Mr. Janocky, as you claim to be, you would not be so offensive. Now get on with your tale, sir. Our time is valuable."

Janocky was not accustomed to being spoken to like this. Amongst those who fawned upon him and flattered him, it was his time that was looked upon as precious. But he was shrewd enough to see that this grave ship's captain, and this stout purser before him would not put up with too many airs and graces. So, with his pale brows clouded with pettish resentment, he got on with his story.

"I woke up last night," he said, "with the feel of someone snapping something on one of my wrists, and before I was thoroughly aroused, or could resist, something was snapped on to the other, and I found that I was imprisoned by handcuffs. The electric light was switched off, and there is no porthole to my cabin. It is the first time I have ever been given an inside room. On other lines the authorities have always seen that I have had one of the best cabins on the boat."

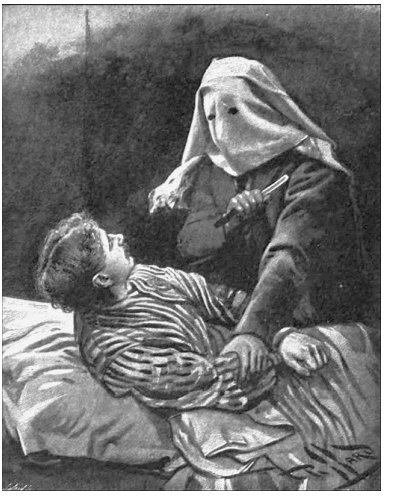
"This steamboat," said Clayton, "is run as a commercial speculation, not for charity. I feel convinced that the Purser has given you the exact class of room you paid for. If you wanted a better room you should have paid more."

Horrocks felt a pleasant glow, and made a mental comment that the outstanding account between him and Captain Clayton was thereby settled. Janocky looked sullen, and patted his mop of hair petulantly. He did not like this undeferential treatment. But a rap on the table, and a sharp, "Get along, sir," from Clayton, set him talking again. He was not a man of much nerve.

"I could see the fellow only dimly in the light which came from the door. He was of middle height. He had over his head and face and shoulders a towel with holes cut for his eyes, and when I attempted to speak he crammed a wooden gag into my mouth and tied it there with string behind my head. Then he took a razor from his pocket and opened it. I decided that he intended murder; here was some envier of my art!"

Unconsciously the pianist warmed up to his tale. The dramatic instinct was overcoming the sense of resentment.

"But no, murder was not threatened. A worse injury was brandished against me. My art, the touch which Heaven has given me to enrapture multitudes, was made into a vulgar commercial counter. The assassin approached his razor to my wrists. Either he would cut the tendons, and rob the world forever of the sound of my playing, or I should write



"He had over his head and face and shoulders a towel with holes cut for his eyes."

and sign a bond to ransom them by the payment of £10,000. With such an alternative, there was only one choice. I must make any sacrifice to preserve my art. So I wrote as he dictated, that on my honour as a gentleman I would pay him this money he demanded, at the close of my tour in America, and pay it, too, in such manner that he would never be detected. Then he went away, and I lay half fainting till next morning came, and with it a steward, who presently brought an evil-smelling mechanist, who filed the fetters from my wrists. That is all."

"Pooh!" said Mr. Horrocks, "there's nothing binding in a scribble written like that. It's only one of the passengers having a rise out of you. You lay yourself open to this sort of thing, my good sir, with your confounded affectations. If you'd more sense of humour, you'd have seen through it for yourself."

"It is evident that you cannot appreciate my point of view," said Janocky. "I am a gentleman; therefore I shall do as I have promised. The money must be paid, and it rests on my honour to find a means of doing this so that the recipient shall not be discovered. It is quite possible you and other people might have acted differently under the circumstances. I cannot understand your codes. I do not wish to understand them. I am a gentleman."

"I hear you say it," commented Mr. Horrocks, and shrugged his plump shoulders.

"Could you recognize the man who came to your room?" asked Clayton.

"I could not. It was dark, and he was covered as to the face with a towel.

He was short in height. That is all I know. It was so dark that I had to write on the paper by feel. The paper, too, was so thin that once the pencil went through it. But I wrote what was demanded, and I shall carry out my promise."

"Well," said Clayton, "I have heard your statement now, sir. May I ask if you have any proposal to make?"

Herr Janocky looked up at the roof of the charthouse with languid insolence. "I should say that if you cannot protect better the passengers who intrust themselves to your care, your Company should pay the blackmail which is levied."

"I will make a note of your suggestion. Is that all you have to say?"

"It is."

"Then don't let me detain you here any longer."

Actually this shipmaster was ordering about Janocky! The pianist gasped. His pale face almost flushed. But he went. There was a look about Captain Clayton of calm dignified command that sterner men than Herr Janocky had found embarrassing.

"He's rather a noxious animal," said Clayton, when the door closed, "isn't he?"

"Oh, I never made any secret of it to you that I mistrusted the whole breed of theatricals," Mr. Horrocks admitted.

Captain Clayton frowned, but he did not pursue that point for the present. "I've had this man's agent in to see me. He gave about the same tale with a few variations and additions. It seems a pretty bad case. Of course, they'll make out ashore that we are responsible for the whole thing."

"If I know anything about the New York papers, we're in for a hot time unless we can turn the tables on them. But, great Washington! I'd give something to have my knife into Mop-head."

"I can imagine it." Captain Clayton quite appreciated the depth of Janocky's insult in mistaking Mr. Horrocks for a steward. "Well, Purser, I think you're more capable of working out this affair than I am, and so I'll pass it over to you."

"Have I a free hand, sir?"

"If you can prove definitely and publicly that Janocky is trying to get at us—and I've somehow a suspicion of that—you can cut his hair for him for anything I care."

"Very well, sir," said Mr. Horrocks, and left the chart-house, and forthwith sought the society of the pianist's agent.

He was just the man to appreciate gratuitous champagne.

White, the agent, was an American Jew by nationality, and sufficiently well-travelled to have a full idea of the dignity of a big Atlantic liner's purser. He expressed gratification when invited down in Mr. Horrocks' room, and regret that he and his principal should have ruffled Mr. Horrocks' ease. He was just the man to appreciate gratuitous champagne, and he was given champagne of an eminent vintage. The Purser had an infinite tact over these details.

"Janocky is Janocky," said White, "and plays his own game. But I guess you and I are just plain, downright business men, Purser, and we only work on bedrock facts."

"That's so," said Mr. Horrocks. "Now, I told Mr. Janocky, when he gave the Skipper and myself his yarn, that the bond he talked of wasn't worth a farthing, and he'd no more call to pay than I had. You're with me there?"

"Not one millimetre."

"You're not?"

"Not any, siree. Why, don't you see, the man with a towel was playing my game all along? I get paid by results. So it's to my interest to make the great name of Janocky just hum, and I don't care a red cent how I do it. Why should I? I'm not in this agenting business just for my health."

"You wouldn't be. Let me fill up your glass."

"Thanks. I'll even go further with you, and own up straight that it's me to a very large extent that's kept Janocky up to the sticking point. If we

didn't take it seriously, it would lose him popularity at once. You see, we play a certain game. He's adapted for it by nature—hair, old family, pale face, live-for-Art, gentility, and all that—and I keep him up to it, hundred and ten cents to the dollar. But it's a difficult game, and it's easy broke down, and if there's one thing we couldn't stand more than another, it would be to be made ridiculous."

"Oh, I quite see that. But won't your man look a bit of a fool anteing up £10,000 when there's no earthly need for him to part with a farthing?"

"Nos'r. Who'll pay that money? Not the great Janocky! Not much! You see, between you and me, he's a Jew, and that nationality isn't fond of chucking away its hard cash." Mr. White shut one eye and looked appreciatively at his wine-glass. "Nos'r. But don't you see that his admirers in the States will hand round the hat and make up that £10,000 smiling? They'll just jump at the chance of proving their gratitude to the man who spared to the world of music the tendons of Janocky's wrists. You know all about working the newspapers, don't you?"

"Some," said the Purser.

"So do I. That's why I'm Janocky's manager. An' I guess I'll fix this up as easy as falling off a cable-car."

"Have you any idea who the blackmailer is?"

"Nope. Reckon I'm satisfied enough with things as they are. I'm not the man, sir, to quarrel with a good advertisement. But if you want me to give a guess, I should say it was a woman who held him up. Four of them have proposed marriage to him on board already. And the odds are, it's one of these that's done it out of spite."

"Who says they proposed to him?"

"Oh, it's fact enough. Women do. He gets about five proposals a week on the average, some of them in writing, some verbally. I've both read and heard them. It's all part of the outfit."

"Like the hair and the gentility?"

"I suppose so," said the agent pleasantly. "Great thing is to find out what your public likes, and then give it them. We do that. Why, I calculate eighteen per cent, of our receipts at concerts comes from front seats taken by ladies who are in love with that 'elegant, sweet Janocky.' Say, this is real nice wine."

Mr. White was all affability and frankness, but when the Purser summed up results afterwards, he found he had got very little out of him. Moreover he was not in the least to be turned away from his plan of campaign. "Of course, it's a purely business matter," he confessed, "and has

to be treated as such. Let alone I have my own percentage to look after, there's Janocky who wouldn't give way."

"Why, I thought he was far too big a gentleman to tarnish his mind with the idea of vulgar finance; I understood he left all, business entirely in your hands."

"Oh, does he?"—Mr. White shut one sharp eye—"I know he lets on to that in public; it's all part of the game; but between you and me, the man's a Jew by birth, and he's as keen as most of his tribe. There are no flies on Janocky when it comes to raking in the cash."

"I hate to have any boat I'm on mixed up with a thing like this."

"Natural, I guess. I'm sure you know. Purser, that I just hate to annoy you. But this racket's hard business with me, and one can't give way to sentiment about it."

"No," said Mr. Horrocks, "I suppose not. Well, what I must do, is to lay hands on that bond."

The agent laughed genially. "I wish you joy of your hunt. But, say, isn't it rather a big contract? The man or the woman who's savvy enough to think of such a piece of blackmailing, would have enough sand left over to hide their receipt pretty brightly."

"Oh, I don't say I'll stumble upon it without trouble."

"I should smile. Why, sir, you can't search the ship. You can't go and smell through all the trunks, and unstitch the soles off all the passengers' shoes, and examine their persons like they do the Kaffirs at Kimberley. That would make a worse scandal than leaving things as they are."

The bottle was empty, and Mr. Horrocks allowed his guest to depart then, and presently he himself went out for a tour in some of the passage-ways and cabins of the great liner, making exhaustive inquiries. He cast about here, there, and everywhere for a clue. He put questions right and left. He cross-examined half the stewards on the ship, and personally searched the great pianist's stateroom with a microscopical accuracy. And at last he got hold of a glimmer of suspicion, and worked on at it with grim, tireless persistence.

The purser did not err on the side of overscrupulousness in his methods; the occasion did not seem to him to demand too much niceness. To those of his intimates who talked on the subject, he said that he acted as ship's purser merely to earn his pay; but somewhere deep within his rotund exterior there was a strong love for the vessel on which he served, and a high regard for her chastity. Mr. Horrocks was a bachelor, but if he had possessed a wife he would naturally have been resentful

against anyone who brought scandal against her. He told himself that all his affections were concentrated on the institution called "Rocks' Orphanage," of which he was sole patron and autocrat, and that he cared for nothing in the wide world beside. But when it came to the point, he showed he could be as jealous of the reputation of the ›Leeds‹ as he had so often shown himself to be for his darling institution.

As a consequence, when the chance of revenge for the Janocky episode did come in his way, he was inclined to be vindictive. He might have called in the master-at-arms on board. He might have preferred a charge to the police ashore in New York, and given the culprit into their custody, and secured for him a spell of contemplation in the penitentiary; but he preferred his own to either of these methods.

White himself had pointed out that ridicule was the lash which Janocky dreaded most. Moreover, a great steamer line, like a pianist, lives and prospers to a great extent by the favour of the Press ashore, and Mr. Horrocks had a keen eye to the advertisement of the Town S.S. Co. The tale, if it came off as he intended, would be told humorously, but it would none the less show to intending customers that the Town Company took a most fatherly care of all their passengers, and that on the ›S.S. Leeds‹ in particular they were most keenly looked after. And finally, he had got in memory that Janocky had shown gratuitous offensiveness in that matter of his official dignity. Mr. Horrocks did not easily forgive anyone who mistook him for a steward.

With a grim appreciation of the dramatic fitness of things, Mr. Horrocks timed his exposure to take place when all the passengers were gathered together in the saloon on the occasion of the ship's concert.

As a general rule, the Purser took a very lukewarm interest in that usual incident of a transatlantic voyage, the ship's concert. The proceeds, by immemorial custom, went to the Sailors' Orphan Home, and people paid freely and cheerfully. As was natural, they only made outlay of a certain amount in charity during the voyage, and as a consequence, having paid up this at the concert, they invariably turned a deaf ear to the claims of that less-known institution, Rocks' Orphanage, however deftly its worthiness was urged.

But on the present occasion Mr. Horrocks threw himself with ardour into the task of making the concert a success. The first movement towards holding it had been originally set on foot, as has been mentioned before, by Pitcairn, principally because that worthy man wanted to boast afterwards in Bradford that once he had been the Great Janocky's impresario. Once the chance of doing this had been taken away, Pit-

cairn's interest dropped, and when he decided that he "wasn't going to bother about it any more," no one else saw fit to put on his discarded mantle.

The Purser, however, by a little judicious raillery, soon brought up Pitcairn once more to the scratch, and when on the top of this he whispered a certain little secret into his ear, that amateur manager snapped his fingers with vast delight.

"No, really?" he said. "It's a bit too good to be true. Are you sure you've got him?"

"On toast," chuckled the Purser. "Don't breathe a word. You're the only man on the boat I've told. Even the Skipper doesn't know."

"Catch me letting on. I'll do my share; that concert shall hum. But you'll have to guarantee that the Great Janocky shall be there, and you'll have to get his signature."

"I'll work that through White, easy enough. He's a great man, White, when you know how to deal with him. So free and open. Keeps on telling you in confidence Janocky is a Jew."

They both grinned.

"Can we have the Second Classers into the concert?" asked Pitcairn.

"Well, it's against our usual rule. But I'll make an exception this time."

"You ought to," said Pitcairn. "The larger the audience the better Janocky performs. He says so himself."

Mr. Horrocks, however, on second thoughts approached Herr Janocky himself, and proved himself an accurate judge of human nature.

Where anyone else would have been suspicious, the pianist's vanity helped him easily into the trap. Herr Janocky promised not only to attend the concert and sit in the front row, so that seats near him might be charged at double figures, but also he consented to sign one of the programmes, so that the precious autograph might be put up to auction for the benefit of the fund. He was even so unsuspicious that he could not forego the opportunity of being offensive.

"Let me see," he said in his vague, absent way, "you told me you were Purser here, didn't you?"

"Quite correct, sir," said Mr. Horrocks.

"I somehow thought you were head steward. You couldn't take a message for me, could you, to my bed-room steward? I want my pillow-case changed. The one I have to put up with at present is coarse and full of holes."

"I somehow thought you were head steward."

"I am not here to be your messenger boy," said Mr. Horrocks furiously, and turned away. He was angry with himself for allowing this pianist to draw him, but really his own proper pride had to be considered.

However, when the evening of that day came, and with it the concert, he was able to take as complete a revenge as any man could desire. Pitcairn was the man who was running the concert, and nobody could mistake the fact. Pitcairn had crossed between Liverpool and New York so many times that he felt he had a proprietary interest in the North Atlantic and in all amusements carried on upon its waters, and he let everybody know it. The passengers did not mind. They are apt to be good-natured on little points like these. They were quite ready also to encore every item on the programme, not because of its merits especially, but through deference to the performer's feelings. In fact a pleasanter audience than the one on a first-rate Atlantic liner which assembles for the usual concert, it would be hard to discover.

This concert, then, like all its thousand predecessors, went through its appointed course with friendly appreciation, and Pitcairn fussed about to keep himself thoroughly in evidence. But when the last song was sung, Pitcairn mounted the platform and made his final announcement.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "Mr. Horrocks will now do a turn. His talents are too well known to you to need any introduction from me. He himself will explain what he is going to do. Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you the fairy Purser."

Whereupon, amid a chuckle of amused laughter, Pitcairn got down, and the burly form of Mr. Horrocks took his place.

The Purser could make a good speech, and he knew it. He made a

The Purser grasped it between the tips of a fat finger and thumb.

good speech then, pleasantly humorous, delicately pathetic. He put forward the claims of the Sailors' Orphan Home, thanked the audience for coming to the concert, thanked them for what they had subscribed already, and hoped that they would bid well for the programme that he was now about to offer for auction, and that he would be able to knock it down at a price worthy of the name that was written on it. The programme would be one to be preserved. It would carry memories with it. It would carry also the signature of the best known pianist of the day.

Mr. Horrocks, with an effort, got a finger and thumb into his waistcoat pocket and fumbled there. "H'm, lost my pencil," he said. "Mr. White, will you lend me yours?"

Mr. White, all smiles and diamonds and glitter, handed up a gold pencil case.

The Purser grasped it between the tips of a fat finger and thumb, and drew back his shirt cuff and sleeve to expose a bare and brawny arm, after the fashion of a conjurer. He cast down his eyes on White, and that person moved in his seat uneasily.

"Now before we go on to ask Herr Janocky to put his valued signature

to the programme, I propose to show you another little matter that will interest you. I have here a gold pencil case given me by Mr. White. There is no deception, ladies and gentlemen; nothing up the sleeve; no palming. I haven't a cat's notion of sleight-of-hand, as Mr. Pitcairn or any other gentleman here who knows me will testify. But I can do one little conjuring trick just now. You all see this pencil case?"

"Yes, yes."

"Which belongs to Mr. White."

"But does it?"

"Mr. White, is that your pencil case?"

White cleared his throat and said in rather a strained voice that it was.

"Well and good." Mr. Horrocks laid the pencil case on the top of the piano. "Now, ladies and gentlemen, it will be fresh in your memory that Herr Janocky has been thrilling this boat with an account of how some ingenious person came to his room in the night, and offered him a choice between having his wrists hamstrung or paying up blackmail. It will not have escaped you that he chose to pay."

"Quite right of him," shouted someone.

"No doubt, no doubt. And so he entered into a bond to ante up £10,000, writing it out and signing it himself. He could not identify his visitor (so he says), and as a consequence you all lie under suspicion. So I thought it would be a fitting opportunity this evening to show who was the ingenious person who has caused so much excitement. Will any gentleman or lady oblige me by breaking up that pencil case?"

White stepped up.

"Other than Mr. White. Sit down again, sir. Great Washington, if you don't sit down I'll have you taken away and put in irons. Ah, I thought we should have peace and harmony again."

"You'd better open the pencil case yourself," said Pitcairn.

"Well, if the meeting wishes it," said Mr. Horrocks, and took up the pencil gingerly between his fingers. "You see, on close examination, those of you that are near enough, that the end is fastened with sealing wax. Now, I'll chip this off, and there you'll notice there's a little hollow inside stuffed with a roll of paper. Will someone oblige me with a pin?"

Mr. Horrocks held the pencil case at arm's length towards the audience, and picked at it clumsily with the pin. Every eye in that huge, gorgeous, sea dining-room hung on him unwinkingly. The eyes of Mr. White and Herr Janocky watched with something very nearly approaching terror in them. The Purser worked with vast deliberation. "I must not tear anything," he explained. And by degrees the end of a little tightly rolled

cylinder of paper showed itself, which at length he managed to grip with his stumpy fingers and pull out. He unfolded it with vast care, working with hands held far away from his round body, as a conjurer works before his audience, and in the end he pressed it out flat, and waved it towards Janocky.

"Do you recognize this?"

"Yes," said the pianist.

"Your handwriting?"

"Yes."

"The bond you gave to the fellow who called on you that night?"

"Yes."

"Would the caller be the height and build of your friend Mr. White?"

"Yes."

"Very well," said Mr. Horrocks. "As to whether Mr. White really intended to extract his blackmail, or whether you really intended to pay him, or whether the whole business is merely one of your advertising dodges, you can settle between yourselves. I don't know, and I don't care. What I'm pleased about is that this boat leaves the court without a stain on her character, and that you, ladies and gentlemen, are cleared of the suspicion that there is a blackmailer among you. That's all I've got to say."

Pitcairn jumped on to the platform. "Ladies and gentlemen! With musical honours, and as loud as you like it. 'For he's a jolly good Purser.'"

Which chant they sang very heartily.

"Say!" cried a voice at the other end of the room, when the roar of song had ended, "there's a syndicate been formed on board here to acquire a certain pill factory in the States, provided we could get a certain party who's with us to-night as advertisement manager. Well, he didn't seem to chip into notion before, but now that we've seen his skill, I'm empowered to double our original offer. I should say that he'd be wise to close. Seems to me he'll find the States have rather soured on his piano playing for the present."

With which piece of bitter mockery the concert broke up.

Now, at the hint of Mr. Horrocks, Captain Clayton had discovered that the duties of navigation would keep him all that evening on the bridge; but when the lights were switched off for the night, and the passengers had turned in, the Purser went to the chart-room and laughingly told what had happened. He was very pleased with himself, and made no effort to conceal his satisfaction. Indeed, Clayton was equally pleased,

and congratulated him cordially on his success. "But I want to know how it was done," he asked. "How did you work up to it?"

"That's my secret," said Mr. Horrocks grudgingly.

"But mayn't I share it?" asked the Captain.

"Well, I haven't told another soul on board and don't mean to. The result was quite enough to give them. It spoils a trick to tell how it's done. But I suppose you're Skipper. Well, you see it was this way. I examined the handcuffs which were filed off Mop-head's wrists: no result from them: then I went myself and searched his room; found nothing. Then I called a muster of all the stewards who serve that alley-way, asking them to look for any relics—key of handcuffs, you know, that towel with the eye-holes in it, or, in fact, anything suspicious. An hour afterwards his bedroom steward brought me the gag that had been used in Mop-head's mouth.

"I can't say I saw anything special in it at first. It was just wood and string. But presently I noticed that the string had got two different coloured strands in it, green and white."

The Purser paused gloatingly, so Clayton laughed again and said: "Oh, go on."

"Well, I had another muster of stewards and exhibited the string. Had they seen any more like that? Yes, one of them had swept up two bits from White's floor. Where were they? Flung overboard naturally. But the steward was sure it was the same string, white with a green strand.

"Now that wasn't much to go on, of course, but it gave me a tip. I'd had my eye on Master White before; so I got an opiate from the doctor, and slipped it into his bedside tea next morning, and let the steward take it in as usual. I'd Mr. White laid out and sleeping like a corpse in ten minutes. "I waited till he was sound off, and then I paid a morning call, and I guess I went through his traps as thoroughly as any professional burglar could have done it. Not a bit of luck. There was no bond, or anything like one.

"So I went through his effects a second time.

"Now you'll have noticed what a very smart, overdressed man he is. Too much shine everywhere, too many diamonds; things all too new and glittering. But in his waist-coat pocket was a gold pencil case that was out of keeping with his general gorgeousness. It was scratched, and newly scratched, all at one end. The top had been off—it struck me it had been wrenched off with a pocket knife, and it was fastened on again with red sealing-wax. The edges of the wax were new and shiny, not dull like they get if they had been carried in your pocket for a day

or two. And then I looked at his pocket knife, and one blade was nicely jagged."

"Good man, Horrocks."

"Pure deduction," said the Purser, rubbing his fat hands. "So I whipped off the top, and there was paper inside. I pulled it out: it was the bond right enough, signed Janocky.

"Now, it wouldn't do to own up that I'd loaded an opiate into a passenger's morning tea and searched his traps, so I put back the bond again, mended up the pencil case, and stowed it back in the pocket of his waistcoat. It had struck me that this sort of person likes the bright light of publicity on some of his doings, and, as I hadn't been spared much, I didn't see why I should be gentle on my part. So I worked up that busy ass, Pitcairn, into getting the concert going again, and when it was over I 'found' the bond inside White's pencil before all the passengers. I think most of them enjoyed it."

"Bravo! You're a great man, Horrocks."

"I don't know about that. But I'll bet I've made a slump in Janocky shares in the States for a bit. Perhaps it'll teach him to be a bit more civil to the next purser he meets. And, what's more, I can work the Press for a pretty good ad. for the boat."

Mr. Horrocks was right about that last aspiration. When the passengers got through the weariness of the New York Customs House, and reached their hotels, they were able to read in ten papers all about "Janocky's latest advertising dodge." "How they pamper their passengers on the ›Leeds,‹" and a spirited eulogy of "The brightest Purser on the Atlantic Ferry." Mr. Horrocks had a fine art in handling the Press when he possessed good material.

But the incident had a more far-reaching effect than the stout Purser dreamed of at the time. There was on board the ›Leeds‹ a little, unobtrusive man, whom no one honoured with much attention, but who watched matters that befell around him with a keen and kindly eye. His keenness had in recent years made him a millionaire. His kindliness prompted him to make inquiries concerning the work which was done by the remarkable institution, Rocks' Orphanage. His wealth enabled him, by the mere penning of a check, to endow the place with an opulence to which even its founder's dreams had never aspired.

His one proviso was that Mr. Horrocks should settle ashore and manage the Orphanage himself. And so the Western Ocean ferry is the poorer for the loss of its most popular and capable Purser, and the name of Horrocks no longer appears on requisitions and passenger-lists.

But in a certain Mr. Rocks, a personage of majestic port and somewhat pompous mien, old passengers think they sometimes trace a resemblance to one who, for a space of days, they were once proud to acknowledge as a friend.

THE END