

Due East of Friday

H. De Vere Stacpoole

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H. DE VERE STACPOOLE

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GREEN CORAL
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THE MAN WHO LOST HIMSELF
THE ORDER OF RELEASE
VANDERDECKEN
TOTO
THE HOUSE OF CRIMSON SHADOWS
THE REEF OF STARS
THE CITY IN THE SEA
ETC. ETC.

DUE EAST OF FRIDAY

by

H. DE VERE STACPOOLE

5th Thousand

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Due East of Friday

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The *Dimbula* was a cargo boat of six thousand seven hundred tons, and she carried no passengers as a rule, but this trip she had one, picked up at Cardiff and bound for Sydney, New South Wales.

Harding was his name, and he was enjoying the trip.

If you want to enjoy a sea voyage, go on a cargo boat, and, if possible, alone. There you will have no deck games, no smoke-room bores, no old familiar faces to be met with at every turn, and none of that Whipsnade feeling which comes on finding oneself caged with one's fellow-animals, even though the cage be as large as the *Queen Mary*.

You will also come to understand better the sea and its ways and the ways of sailors and stokers and engineers, their ideas and their language.

Harding was one of the happy-go-lucky sort who mixes well and gets along easily with all sorts and conditions of people, and more especially sailors, and he wasn't in the least less happy owing to the fact that he had only eighty pounds in the world, which was in his pocket, and no earthly idea of what he was going to do with himself on landing in Sydney.

He was mentioning this latter fact tonight to Mr. Snodgrass, the bosun, as they leaned on the starboard rail chatting whilst the *Dimbula* pushed her steady way across a tranquil and starlit sea.

"Well, I don't know," said Mr. Snodgrass, "but it seems to me from what you're saying that you'll be in a tight fix. How old are you, may I ask?"

"I'm twenty-six."

"And what's your business?"

Harding laughed.

"Playing the fool mostly," said he. "You see, I had money. My father died just at the end of the war and left me enough money in trust to live on. I was at a public school, and then I went to Oxford and had a good time.

People were always asking me what I was going to do; there were only four things to do: become a parson or a doctor or a lawyer or a soldier."

"How's that?" asked Mr. Snodgrass.

"Well, it's this way—of course, there were other things to be done. One might have got into a bank, or a business office; for the matter of that, one might have opened a shop—but, you see, the thing is, when a chap has been through a public school and a university he's expected to join one of the professions: either that or become a schoolmaster. Of course, nowadays a good many university men go into business—but they haven't Victorian-minded aunts."

"What's them?"

"Old ladies with ideas of what a young man like myself ought to do in the way of work. I had two aunts like this. They knew I had enough money to live on, but their opinion was that a young man ought to go into some profession, or business that isn't a trade, and when I left Oxford without taking a degree those old dames worked so on my feelings that I went into business. I had a friend in the rubber business and I joined him. We were doing well, then we went bust and I lost nearly all my money. That's what I got for taking to work, and I couldn't throw the fact in the face of the old ladies because they were dead. They'd died only a month before the bust came, leaving all their money to charity; thinking, maybe, that I had enough. I only had two hundred and fifty or so to my name when affairs were settled."

"What did you do then?"

"I went into an office at two pounds ten a week. It was a stockbroker's office, and I hated the job, but I stuck it because it made me feel I had a keel to me. My two-fifty was in the bank, nearly all of it, and I used it to speculate with. You see, I was in the way of getting tips; but I wasn't supposed to speculate, it was against the rules of the office. Anyhow, I did, and made a couple of hundred, and then a big chance came.

"We dealt a lot in gold shares, and I got to know by accident that an old East African mine had struck it rich. The shares were standing at only five shillings, and I put every penny into it, and in a fortnight I'd made two thousand pounds. I took it and chucked clerking, and after that I did a lot of things in the way of trying to make money, and losing it all the time."

"It's easier to lose than come by," said the bosun. "What were the things you tried, may I ask?"

“All sorts. The last was a chicken farm, and that finished me.”

“Have you any relations?” asked the other.

“Not a soul—or only an uncle I’ve never seen. He lives in Sydney; that’s not why I’m going to Sydney—I don’t want to see him, in fact, for I’ve heard he was a beast to his wife; but he’s rich—made a fortune in wool or something.”

“Well,” said Snodgrass, “I’ve never heard of relations being much good to a man; the only relations I’ve had have been only good for trying to borrow money off me; not that I’ve ever had anything to lend. However, there you are; but it gets me, your coming to Sydney to look for work and not knowing what you want to work at. Work isn’t laying about like potatoes waiting to be picked up; however, you aren’t the first chap on the job-huntin’ business, and maybe you’ll make out if you can keep your money long enough, which you won’t if you go to any of the hotels or posh boarding-houses. You’ve got to get a room and go quiet.

“I can put you on to a woman who lets lodgings—Mrs. Summers, an old sea captain’s wife living in Theresa Street. I’ve lodged with her twice, and she’s cheap and clean, but I don’t know if she’s empty just now. However, if she isn’t she’ll maybe be able to put you on to someone else. Great thing is to steer clear of hotels.”

“Thanks,” said Harding. “The Captain told me we would be in tomorrow. What time do you think?”

“Well, I can’t tell you to an hour,” replied the other, “but, things going as they are, we ought to tie up at Circular Quay before noon.”

As a matter of fact they berthed at eleven, under a cloudless sky.

Sydney Harbour is the most wonderful harbour in the world, and on a perfect morning like this the most beautiful. With the warm wind from the Pacific ruffling the blue water, fluttering the flags and filling the canvas of white-sailed yachts, there is nothing like it.

Harding, absorbed in his surroundings, forgot himself, his condition and his absolute and complete loneliness. He was breathing the air of a new world and of a new life.

That is the extraordinary thing about Australia, and more especially Sydney, a vital something in the air, the sky, the sea and the sunlight, a something that rejuvenates the mind and fills the blood with the oxygen of adventure and endeavour, a something that seems materialized at Sydney in the great moving city and the Gargantuan bridge sky reaching, an exhibition to the gods of the daring of man.

All the same, when the moment came to leave the ship and say good-bye to the men who had been his friends, Harding was seized with a depression, momentary perhaps, but acute.

It takes a strong and brave swimmer to face effectively the sea of life when it shows without horizon and with no sign of help should help be needed; however, when his foot touched land he had no time to think of his general position. The immediate considerations of his luggage, the customs and a cab to take him to his destination were enough for him.

Summers was the name of the landlady and her address was in Theresa Street, and when he arrived there the externals did not displease him.

One of the most extraordinary things about Sydney and New South Wales is not the size of the harbour, or its beauty, or the dimensions of the great bridge, but the fact that England of a long-gone age clings here in the most unexpected places. In Mossvale, for instance, you will find old Georgian houses spacious and comfortable, houses in direct connection with St. James' Street and the days of the Regency, and in Theresa Street, one of the oldest in Sydney, you will find houses with little front gardens, small houses with bow windows, houses recalling Miss Betsy Trotwood, the days of Dickens; Miss Honeyman and the days of Thackeray.

Mrs. Summers, when she opened the door to the visitor, might have stepped out of *The Newcomes*. The early-Victorian age still clung to her in her dress and manner; she wore a cameo brooch in her dress-front and her shoulders were covered with a light Shetland wool shawl.

Harding took to her at once, also to the house into which he was shown. The sitting-room which a lodger could use, and which gave upon the front garden, was furnished somewhat in the manner and style of the 'forties. One could almost fancy David Copperfield wilting from the gaze of Mr. Murdstone behind that horsehair sofa, on which Miss Trotwood would be seated, giving battle to the enemy; a picture of Captain Summers, a life-sized tinted photograph done by Barret, of William Street, being on the mantelpiece.

The Captain had a beard and a shaven upper lip after the fashion of the late Paul Kruger. He looked as though he might have been quite as obstinate.

There was a comfortable arm-chair by the fire-place, and near it a shelf of books. The *South Pacific Directory*, *Navigational Warnings*, *Sailing Ships and Their Ways*, and some novels and volumes of travel. *Midshipman Easy*, for instance; also *Omoo*, and *Du Baty's 15,000 Miles in a Ketch*.

"He was very fond of reading," said Mrs. Summers, referring to the departed, "and then he went like that. . . ."

She broke off and sighed as though the going of Captain Summers held something painful or saddening to the recollection. Then she took Harding to see the bedroom he could have; it was adjoining the sitting-room, at the back, and with a window opening upon a back garden and the backs of the houses in Mulgrave Terrace. There were hens pecking about in the garden, a hen-house, a dog-kennel without a dog in evidence, and there were clothes drying on a clothes-line, but no rubbish or litter. Like Mrs. Summers herself, like the bedroom, the sitting-room and the front garden, it was clean and neat.

"You can have the entire use of the sitting-room," said the lady, when the inspection was over. "My daughter and I have a sitting-room of our own; you will be the only boarder, and my charge is two pounds a week inclusive."

He closed at once on this and, going out, had his luggage brought in from the waiting taxi.

He had arranged to meet Mr. Snodgrass for a chat that evening at the “Three Crowns”, by the wharves. Eight o’clock was the time appointed, and at eight o’clock the bosun was there in the inner bar and with a pint of ale before him.

There was no one else in the place just at that moment, so they could talk at ease—Mr. Snodgrass developing, to the surprise of Harding, a grouse against his ship and her officers.

On board no more loyal man was to be found, but ashore it was different, and that’s often the case with old sailors. However, it didn’t last long, and after a short diatribe against drink, during which he finished his pint and had another, he passed to the subject of Sydney and Mrs. Summers.

“Know him? Should think I’ve known her and the old Captain over ten years and more, ever since they came out here from England. He wasn’t so old, neither, the Captain; he wasn’t turned fifty when he went off. You see, they came out here from England to live and brought all their sticks with them—the Cap, his wife and their darter.

“He’d retired from the Shireman Line with a pension, and she had money of her own, and they had always agreed to settle in Sydney when they retired, and out they come, selling up their house in Ramsgate but bringing their furniture with them and taking that place in Theresa Street, and happy they seemed till the Captain he fell in with a chap who led him astray.”

“Astray?”

“Yes, sir. Got him on the speculating business. What it was no one knew, but it was a sure fortune and to be kept a secret till it developed.

“The Cap had some money in the bank beside what come to him regular in the pensions way, and he drew it out, and prepared to start on an expedition with this chap I was telling you about, but he would not say where they were going, not even to his wife. He would only say it was up north; that’s all he’d say, and that when he come back he’d buy her a diamond tirara, whatever that was, and a silk dress for Mary—that’s the darter. Then one bright morning he was gone. Him and the chap whose name was Strangeways.”

“What happened then?” asked Harding.

“Nuthin’. He never come back.”

“How long ago was that?”

“Two year.”

“And the poor old lady was left to look after herself?”

“That’s so. But she has the house which he’d bought and a bit of money of her own; not much, but there’s only the two of them, and women are like canaries, they can live on next to nothing if they’re put to the pinch.”

Mr. Snodgrass finished his pint and ordered a gin.

“They’re not like men,” he went on. “I reckon what a woman saves from not drinking and smoking would keep a man. You mark that and get it into your head.”

Mr. Snodgrass, taking a sip of his gin, embarked on a temperance lecture which Harding cut short with more inquiries as to the Captain and his fate.

“Didn’t they send out to search for him?” asked he.

“Who?” asked the other.

“The authorities.”

“Lord! What do the authorities care for an old sea captain? Not they. No, he just went off north and disappeared, as you may say. Many another man has done the same, for I tell you, son, the north of this blessed country is hell flattened out and filled with niggers with spears, which is worse than devils with pitchforks, and it’s not only that, it’s ha’nted with goldmines which aren’t there.”

“How do you mean?”

“I mean tales of them. I don’t know how they get about, but they do; and all sorts of mugs with ears as long as asses’ get to hear them and start off gold-finding, and get lost, and then their friends start off to rescue them, and get lost, and so it goes on—and so it goes on,” said Mr. Snodgrass, calling for another gin. “But no gold comes out of it that I’ve ever heard of—but there’s a chap that can tell you more than me.”

He nodded towards a man who had just entered the bar and who had called for a whisky—a man six feet tall, thin as a rake and with a hard-bitten face almost the colour of saddle leather.

“That’s Cheke,” said Snodgrass; “he’s a prospector, and what he doesn’t know of the job isn’t worth knowing.” He made a signal and Cheke came over to them and took a seat at their table.

“I’ve been telling this gentleman,” said Snodgrass, “that what you don’t know of prospecting isn’t worth knowing; we’ve been talking of Cap Summers, and his going off north the way he did and never coming back. He went with that chap Strangeways, if you remember.”

“He did,” said Mr. Cheke, “and you were right, they never came back.”

“The way I know all about it,” said Snodgrass, “is just that I was here, you remember. Some two years ago on the beach, as you may say; I was one of the men belonging to the *Fastnet*, that old tanker that went ashore on the Midwaybank and broke her back, and all through Stevens being drunk—he was her first officer. I lost my job through no fault of my own, and there I was stranded in Sydney. I’d known Cap Summers and his wife and daughter before that, and the Cap did me a service by getting me a job with the ferry people which lasted me all winter. Then one day I met him and this chap Strangeways, and the next day, as you may say, he was gone.”

“I know,” said Cheke; “and they wanted me to go with them, and I’d have gone, only business held me in Sydney, and maybe if I had gone they would have pulled through, for if I’m not mistaken they were on to a sure enough thing.”

“How’s that?”

“Well, I had it from Strangeways when he was trying to pull me into it. I’ll tell you what it was, seeing that the news is no one’s property and nothing to be got out of it. It was an old river-bed Strangeways had got the location of lying up there in the north in a place where there aren’t no rivers any more. Strangeways said that all that bit of coast must have been raised somehow so there was no fall for the water of this thing that was once a river, and he said that the raise in the coast-line had probably blocked its source; anyhow, there the thing was, an old river-bed.”

“Yes, you was saying that,” said Snodgrass, calling for another drink, “but I’m not getting your meaning yet. Why should the Cap and Strangeways go up north huntin’ for an old——”

“Haven’t you any knowledge of things?” cut in the other. “Don’t you know gold is found in rivers as well as mines? Don’t you know a river can be a gold-miner same as if it had a pick and shovel? Well, this river’s bed was paved with gold, so Strangeways said—gold nuggets brought down

since twenty thousand years ago and left for the picking up. He said that river tapped most likely the biggest gold-producing region in the world, let alone Australia, or had done so twenty thousand years ago. He said you only wanted a shovel and a big enough sack to do the job and hive a fortune before the crowd broke in on you, and he asked me to go with him, but, as I was saying, I couldn't. I had another deal on."

He finished his drink, and Harding supplied him with another.

Mr. Snodgrass, who was pretty boozy by this time, was trying to turn the talk towards temperance and the evils of alcohol if a man let himself be lured one inch over the border-line, but Harding interposed; he was interested in the gold talk and also in Cheke, who, it seemed to him, might have stepped straight out of a story-book.

"Do you think the Captain went searching for that river?" he asked.

"I do so," replied the other.

"Does Mrs. Summers know anything of this?"

"Why, sure she does; at least, she knows in a general way what took him off."

"Well, maybe I'm right or maybe I'm wrong," soliloquized Mr. Snodgrass, "but it seems to me he would have been worse if he'd been took off by liquor; seems to me there's no gainsaying he would."

"Well, anyhow," said Cheke, "there's dam' little liquor in the place where he went, which is beyond Cape Flattery, if I'm not mistaken—dam' little liquor, or water to put into it."

"That's up far north, isn't it?" said Harding.

"Far north is right," replied the other, "and the farther you go the hotter."

"Do you know all that part?"

"No, sir, but I know bits of it. I was wrecked there—opposite Quain Island it was—that was seven years ago, and I'm still haunted at night by the crabs and the sand, to say nothing of the thirst of that bit of coast. I'd have been there now as a skeleton only a Jap fisher-boat took us off. I've been friends with the Japs ever since then."

"And they'll be the ruin of Australia," said Mr. Snodgrass, putting his nose into another drink. "You mark my word, they'll be the ruin [*hic*]—ruin of Australia."

“Ruin of your grandmother. China is their game—not here. Anyhow, and however that may be, it’s in my bones that if I had the time and money, and wanted to find the skeletons, I’d find them somewhere along the coast up there, and I’d find them with their pockets full of nuggets.”

“You seem sure there’s gold up there. Did you get any indications?” said Harding.

“Only what my nose told me,” replied Cheke. “Did you ever see one of them gun-dogs? You can’t see the birds, but he sees them with his nose; well, it’s like that with yours affectionately and truly.”

“You can smell gold?”

“Smell is right, and why not? The stuff is powerful enough to give off a smell, anyhow. Say, now, haven’t you heard that a compass can smell iron, as you may say, even though it’s a long way off? Well, I reckon some chaps have a compass in their heads that does the same with gold. I can’t say where it is up there, but it’s there beyond a line I could draw on a map.”

“Have you ever tried to find it?”

“Not being a fool, no. First of all, an expedition to those parts would mean more money than a chap like me would be likely to have; second, the location isn’t clear, which would mean hunting hundreds of square miles of territory without a pointer or a plan; but I believe Strangeways had one.”

“Well, if he had,” said Harding, “it was evidently of no use, since he never came back.”

“Don’t be so sure of that,” replied the other. “There’s a dozen things may have happened to him to stop him coming back; he may never have got there, he may have got there and died of thirst, him and the Cap, or they may have been wrecked coming home. Anyhow, whatever may have happened to them, it’s likely no one will ever know. Well, here’s to you, and now how about getting Uncle Snod back to his ship?”

Uncle Snod was nodding in his chair, and when roused and told to get his legs under him declared that he didn’t want to shift his anchorage. This bar was good enough for him, a statement that Cheke did not attempt to refute, but countered by the suggestion that they should all get along to “The Dog” in Lion Street and have hot rum and water, where it was to be had best.

The allurements were enough to detach the barnacle from its rock. Then, in the street, they took the nearest way to the waterside, Mr. Snodgrass

giving little trouble except at one or two street corners, where he would have stopped to give temperance lectures to all and sundry had he been permitted.

They gave him in charge of a watchman and friend, and then Cheke walked part of the way home with Harding.

They parted at the corner of William Street.

“I hope I’ll see you again,” said Harding.

“Oh, most likely,” replied the other. “Sydney may be a big place, but somehow it’s a frequent one. Stand in Macquarie Street for an hour, and if you don’t meet half your friends, to say nothing of your wife’s relations, something must be wrong.”

Then he went off, but he did not give an address, nor did he express any special desire to continue the acquaintance.

Yet he was friendly and evidently interested in the other.

Sydney is a queer place.

The weather was warm and the sky cloudless, the city attractive and the harbour its beautiful self.

Rotten conditions for a man who ought to be hunting for work—unless one chose to disregard work, or at least put it out of one's mind for the moment.

That is what Harding did.

He had eighty pounds, he did not require to buy clothes, and board and lodging at Mrs. Summers' cost little. Snodgrass had done him a good service by that introduction, for Sydney hotels are none too cheap. On top of all this he told himself that it would be wiser before seeking a job to look round and see the condition of things.

So he would start in the morning, first of all through the city streets, making for the centre of the city and absorbing the brightness and life of Macquarie Street and Martin Place, on which opens the great Australia Hotel. Then he would as likely as not gravitate towards the harbour, going even as far as Double Bay or Rushcutters, from which one gets such a wonderful view of the bridge.

But the place he liked most was a cove without any name to it, possessing a tiny beach, and for all buildings two shacks before which nets were often drying.

The second time he came here he encountered one of the inhabitants seated on an up-ended tub before one of the shacks and engaged in mending a fishing-line.

This individual had one eye and a face enough to scare children. What was visible of his skin was so pictorial with tattoo marks as to suggest an art gallery if he were stuffed.

He wore a peaked cap, an old blue guernsey and a pair of trousers held up by a belt, also shoes of sorts, but no stockings.

His name was Jake.

At least, that was the name given to him by what seemed his partner, an evident ex-mariner of liberal proportions, who, emerging from the other shack, a beer-jug in hand, made off up the beach towards a tiny pub half

visible amidst the wattles, calling directions over his shoulder to the fish-line mender—directions that had to do with somebody called Murphy and something about a boat.

“That’s Sam Bolin all over,” said Mr. Fishuck—for that, as afterwards turned out, was his other name—interrupting a conversation in which Harding had engaged him, and talking as though they were old acquaintances. “Off with a beer-jug and shovelling all the dirty work on to me shoulders; leaves me mendin’ this bloody fish-line, rotten as the heart of the bastard that made it, and off he goes. I wish I had the chap,” said Mr. Fishuck, with cold deliberation, “that made this junk and sold it for good money over a —— counter and I’d cut his —— —— off and make him swaller them. Ever since the war it’s been the same, from whisky to knittin’-needles, as you may say; from a canned kipper to a kedge anchor—junk.”

“That’s pretty true,” said Harding, “and it’s the same in England. I didn’t know much of before-war time, for I wasn’t old enough, but I’ve heard chaps saying that everything is about twice as expensive and twice as rotten.”

Mr. Fishuck grunted, put away the line, now mended, and going into the shack came back with some knitting; a ball of blue worsted—what seemed a stocking in the making—and some needles. Then he took his seat again on the tub and started on this new work without reference to Harding or the universe in general, and with an intentness and dispatch that suggested him as a competitor in a knitting Marathon.

He looked, Harding thought, like a rather vicious old maid who hadn’t got back the last word, but who was searching to find it in the work she was engaged on. It came at last.

“Junk.” Then, after a considerable pause: “And what are you doin’ in Sydney, may I ask?”

“Well, I came to look for work.”

“Found any?”

“Not yet. I’m just looking round me.”

The other did not reply in words, but it seemed to the work-seeker that his silence was a reply as he sat there with lips pursed, knitting. Harding had once possessed an aunt who was great on that game—talking without speaking—and it seemed to him that Mr. Fishuck might have been her returned, in a critical and rather condemnatory mood, with one eye gone and dressed in a blue guernsey as to the upper part. Then came the question:

“What’s you been used to?”

“Me—oh, I’ve done a lot of things.”

“And nothing much.”

“Yes—you may put it like that. I had money of my own——”

“And how did you get it?” asked Mr. Fishuck.

“It came to me from my father.”

“Then it wasn’t your own.”

“How’s that?”

“ ’Twere your father’s.”

“It was his before he died and left it to me.”

“Well,” said Mr. Fishuck, pausing for a moment to contemplate his work and then going on, “I may be right or I may be wrong, but if I had a son to leave money to I’d turn it into a bag of gold and tie it round his neck and chuck him into the harbour with it. He’d be sure to drown, anyhow, and it would be better to do it quick. The harbour-side from here to Bondi is rotten with chaps who’ve been left money by their fathers. Money, b’gum! It’s not money that was left them, but a free pass into every drink-shop and brothel in the city, and if they haven’t the guts for drink and the other game it’s a sure mark on them for every snide share-pusher and designin’ female to know them by.

“There’s yourself. I’m not saying this and I’m not saying that, but look at yourself; full of money, I bet you were, and now huntin’ for a job in Sydney.”

“That’s true,” said Harding.

“The question is,” said Mr. Fishuck, taking one up-and-down look at the other, “what job? You aren’t no use for a docker nor for rough work. You’re a gentleman, aren’t you? And that’s your trouble. Why didn’t you stick in England?”

“I don’t know.”

“Well, you’d have been better off there, and I’ll tell you for why: there’s no jobs to be had here for one of your sort that aren’t to be had where you’ve come from, and you’ve travelled all them miles to find it out.”

Harding laughed.

“Well, you’re a Job’s comforter,” said he.

“I’m not no one’s comforter,” replied the other. “I’m telling you the truth.”

“Just so, and now that I’ve told you all about myself, what, may I ask, do *you* do for a living?”

Mr. Fishuck cocked his one eye at the questioner as though suspicious of sarcasm, then he answered: “I’m in the boat trade.”

“And what’s that, may I ask?”

“If you want to know, it’s getting hold of old tubs and selling them to mugs as yats. Cast your eye over the harbour and you tell me if ever you’ve seen so many yats in one stretch of water—big ones and little ones, good ones and bad ones, and if you know anythin’ about that sort of work you’ll know there’s a trade to be done buying and selling and exchanging them; bigger than the horse trade ever was. You see, yats and horses are pretty much the same; they’re young to begin with and then they grow old—and you buy an old horse and doctor him and ginger him up and sell him or swop him, and it’s the same with a yat. Not that I’m in a big way of business,” said Mr. Fishuck, “else I wouldn’t be sitting on this tub talking to you same as I am. I’m just a man who knows the business inside out, and the dealers, same as Murphy.”

“Is Murphy a dealer?”

“Yes, he’s a dealer, and here he comes,” said Mr. Fishuck, putting away his knitting in a basket by the tub and rising to greet an incoming boat, a black-painted motor-boat with a stove-pipe funnel and an exhaust with a voice like a sheep’s cough.

“Disreputable” seemed written on her from stem to stern, and yet one could not place a finger on any salient feature in her lay-out that made her differ in appearance from an ordinary boat.

It was the all-together that condemned her or seemed to do; the dirt of her funnel, the rake of her single mast, the dinginess of her paintwork, her low freeboard amidships—handy for getting contraband over—the dirt of her deck: all these and maybe other things combined against her.

Her name was painted in white-gone-yellow letters on her starboard bow:

“*IRISHMAN*”

Mr. Murphy, a broad-faced person with a scar on his right cheek, and a nose not suggestive of a temperance sign, having shut off the engine and put it in reverse, came forward and stood judgmentally watching till way was nearly off the boat. Then he dropped the little anchor.

He was the only person on board, and, having seen that she was well and truly moored, he pulled up the dinghy that had been towing behind, got in, cast off, and rowed ashore. He was dressed in an old frock-coat and a bowler hat that had seen brighter days.

He was chewing tobacco, and as he talked he spat.

“You’ve come in time,” said Jake. “I’ve got a message for you.” They walked away a bit and conferred on some matter or other—other, anyhow, than religion, one might judge by the occasional oaths that came on the breeze.

Then, the conference over, they walked slowly back to where Harding was waiting, and Jake, suddenly remembering him, made the introduction:

“Young feller from England come out to hunt for a job.”

“Well, he isn’t alone in that business,” said Mr. Murphy. “What have you been used to doing?” he inquired, turning to the job-hunter.

“Office work mostly,” replied Harding.

“Well, I’m damned!” said Mr. Murphy. Then, after a moment’s pause: “Come out here to hunt for office work!” That was all he said, and, having said it, he fell silent in a curious way, as though he had cut himself completely off from Harding and Jake and the whole wide world. Standing there with his lips slightly parted and his eyes fixed seemingly on the old tin bucket, yet beyond the regions of distance, he gave Harding pause. Then he came out of his dream and, turning to Jake, said:

“They’ve been bothering me again.”

He seemed to have forgotten Harding’s existence, but Jake hadn’t, and, making faces at him, he drew him a bit away to where an old board propped between two gum trees offered itself a seat. Here they sat down and began to talk, and Harding would have gone away and left them, only that they were the first people in this new place to whom he had broached the subject of work.

They didn’t seem promising; all the same they were evidently, despite any irregularities in the “yat” business, fairly honest. Not city crooks, at all

events; and Mr. Fishuck, with his knitting and one thing and another, was quaint, and seemed honest in speech, anyhow.

Meanwhile, as he watched them talking, Harding could not help wondering what or who had been bothering Mr. Murphy. The face of the bothered one as he conversed with his companion told nothing, but suggested duns, officers of the law, Customs House men, as possible creators of bother—anything but Love. When the conference was over, and they stood up, Mr. Murphy's gaze fell again on Harding, and he seemed to remember him and also his quest for work. Anyhow, he said, apropos of nothing except maybe his recent statement about damnation:

“Sydney's stuffed with chaps hunting office jobs. Try the open, young feller, and if you're any good with boats look me up some day—Jake here will tell you where.”

Then he turned, got into the dinghy and rowed back to the *Irishman*, fastened up and, getting on board, started the old engine, steering straight out from the shore with the dinghy in tow.

Jake watched him for a moment and then, turning his back, with a laugh sat down again and resumed his knitting. Then he began to talk, half to his knitting and half to the world in general, including Harding:

“Fairies, b'gosh!” said he. “As if there wasn't enough to be doin' without botherin' about fairies!”

Harding could scarcely believe his ears. Jake evidently referred to Mr. Murphy, their conversation and Mr. Murphy's obvious upset about something.

“Was that what he was talking about?” he asked.

“Yes,” said the other, “that's what he was talking about, though he never gives them the name.”

“What does he call them, then?”

“The Good People is what he calls them, for fear of bringing bad luck.”

“But look here,” said Harding, “there are no fairies in Australia—at least, I've never heard of the idea connected with Australia.”

“Well, I don't know what you've heard or what you haven't heard,” said the other; “and anyhow, the bother with him is the news that came in a letter from the old country. It was from his old father. The old chap was turned out of his house by the County Council and made to live in a Council house, and

he says he can't go on living there, for the fools that built it had built it on a fairy-run, between the road to Innishboffin and a football field, and he says what between them running in and out all times of the day and night, and the noise of the football playing when there's a match on, he can't get any peace or contentment, so he's written to ask Murphy for a hundred pounds to get himself into a new house away from it all."

"Do you mean to tell me," said Harding, "that he was talking of a fairy football ground?"

"I do. He said the noise of the puntin' about, leave alone the row of the matches, kep' him awake at night and would drive him into his coffin if he couldn't get shut of it."

"Well, I'm hanged!"

"Yes, that's what he said."

"And he wants a hundred pounds, you say, to get into a new house?"

"Yes, that's what he said."

"Will Mr. Murphy send it to him?"

"I don't know—and if you've done with your talking I'll be getting on with my work," said Mr. Fishuck, suddenly discarding his knitting and turning to a potato-sack by the door. "I've got to do me cooking, but if you turn over in your mind what he was saying to you, just nip along here again and I'll tell you where he lives. Maybe, if you can't get anything better, you might like to try the harbour-side."

He began to peel potatoes, casting them into an old bowl which he had filled with sea water, and Harding went off, taking the road by which he had come towards the city, and wiser about the curiosities of Sydney than he had been in the morning. Mr. Fishuck was a curiosity, anyhow, and to match and complete him Mr. Murphy would have been hard to beat.

The picture of Mr. Murphy's face framed in his declared belief in fairies was enough to keep the mind of Harding interested till he reached the main streets and their traffic problems.

It was on that day that he first fully met Mary Summers, only daughter of his landlady.

He had seen her about the house and in the little garden at the back, but he had not spoken to her. She had seemed a pleasant-looking girl, but nothing much out of the ordinary—but that was because he had not spoken to her.

Mrs. Summers always had brought him up his meals, and she did so today when he returned for his early dinner; but it was Mary who came up to clear the things away, explaining that her mother was suddenly down with a headache.

“And the woman who comes in to help every day hasn’t turned up,” said Mary, “so I just have to clear away for you. You don’t mind, do you? . . . No, I can do it myself, but you can fold the cloth if you like, and open the door while I take the tray out.”

When she had done this she returned to put away the salt and pepper castors in a little cupboard situated in one corner of the room, and then she hung talking for a while about the weather and Sydney and what not, till, steered by her, the talk turned in the direction of his own affairs and prospects.

The fact that he was in search of work seemed to come to her as a surprise and rather a shock. She was a very practical person, helping to keep the house going by typewriting for small business people and an occasional author. She charged a shilling a thousand words and threepence extra for carbon copies: it wasn’t much, but it helped, and it was better than working as a typist for a firm.

“That’s a dog’s life,” she said, when explaining these things to him. “Ragged if you’re late in the morning, and nagged at if there’s a woman over you. I tried it for three months and turned it down. I don’t like business people, men or women, and the women are the worst. And so you have come here to find a post in some business house—poor you!”

“Oh, I’m ready to do anything,” said he, visions of Mr. Fishuck and Mr. Murphy rising before him.

“That’s no use,” said Mary. “If you’re ready to take any sort of a job you’ll get nowhere. You must have something fixed to go for—office work, you said. Can you do typewriting?”

“A little.”

“Shorthand?”

“I once learned shorthand, but I think I’ve forgotten it. You see, the office work I did was mostly in the city, interviewing and getting clients and keeping an eye on things generally.”

“Well, I don’t know,” said Mary, “but I don’t think that sort of office work is to be had much here. It’s mostly a grind, taking down from dictation, typewriting letters, keeping accounts—are you any good at keeping accounts?”

“Well, I can’t say I am good at the business; you see, the bother with me is I wasn’t sent to a commercial school. I’m beginning to see more and more that a lot of the stuff that’s being taught in the public schools and colleges isn’t much use these days unless a man has enough money to live on. Of course, if he’s going into a profession like the Church or Law it’s different _____”

“Just so,” said she, cutting him short; “but there the fact remains that you are not much good at accounts. What *can* you do?”

He gave her a short résumé of his past activities. He also supplied the information that he had an uncle living in Sydney, an uncle whom he had never met or corresponded with, but whom he believed to be in a big way of business.

“What’s his name?” asked she.

“Smith. He was my mother’s brother. She is dead. He was a sort of legend in the family as the rich uncle who lived in Australia.”

“Well, I expect there are a lot of Smiths in Sydney,” said she. “Do you know where this one lives?”

“Yes,” he replied. “I’ve got his address written down; it’s in my writing-case. It was among some old family papers and I brought it with me on chance, though I never thought actually of applying to him.”

“And why not?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I hate the idea of asking for help—even help to get work.”

“Why?”

He couldn't quite explain. Very few people can explain themselves when it comes to a question of inclination or motive.

It may have been that there was something essentially self-reliant in Harding's nature, something that made the idea of dependence on another repulsive to him.

At all events, whether or no Mary Summers seemed to feel that this was the case, she regarded him with a new interest, and put the idea in words.

“Do you know what I think?” said she. “I think you are too proud. I don't mean the stuck-up sort of pride, I mean the let-me-alone-to-do-it-myself sort. You are just like Dad in that way.”

Harding laughed, remembering the picture of the Captain and all he had heard about him.

“Tell me about your father,” he said. “I know a good deal from what your mother said, and I met a man the other day who spoke of him——”

“What was the man's name?”

“Cheke.”

“Yes, I know something about him. He was a friend of Dad's and he used to come here when Dad was—with us, but I haven't seen anything of him for a long time. He was a friend of Mr. Strangeways, too.”

“Strangeways is the man who went with your father up north—am I right?”

“Yes; and it was Strangeways who induced him to go on the expedition.”

“After gold, wasn't it?”

“Yes, a river of gold.”

“But see here,” said Harding jokingly. “How could such a thing be unless the gold was molten? It couldn't make a river, and even though it's hot enough up north, by all accounts, it's hardly hot enough for that.”

The girl looked at him. He could see that she had not taken his remark in good part; for the moment the question of his receiving the snubbing of his life seemed to hang in the balance. Then she said:

“Can't you understand that rivers bring down gold sometimes just as they bring down sand and gravel? Well, Dad's river wasn't a river of flowing

gold, but an old river-bed where for hundreds of years the water had been bringing down gold-dust and nuggets. Strangeways was not a liar; besides, why should he lie about the business?"

"No," said Harding. "Now that you have explained to me, the thing seems quite possible. Besides, Australia is the land of gold, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is, in a way," said Mary. "Anyhow, a good lot of it has been found here."

"Did you ever hear Strangeways telling about it to your father?"

"Goodness," said Mary, "yes! In this very room. He used to come at night, and Dad and he would smoke and talk. I'd be here doing my knitting, and Mother would be half asleep in her chair; but they didn't mind us. Mother did not bother; she never quite believed in Strangeways' stories, but I listened and I was interested a lot. You see, Strangeways was a good hand at talking and he could make you see things, at least he could me—not that he ever talked to me," said Mary, "but I used to overhear what he said. You know," said she, after a pause, "Dad and Mother got on well enough, but somehow or another he never used to talk to her about things same as he did to me. He always said I had lots of sense and he could talk to me same as to a man, and when at last he agreed to go off with Strangeways it was me he told all about the business, saying nothing much to Mother, except that he was going on a traverse that might make us all rich. You see, he was afraid of the word 'gold' getting about; he said he did not want half Sydney after him, same as he might if people knew what he was going for. And the funniest thing is that, notwithstanding all that, he seems to have told people."

"Yes, that's true," said Harding. He explained about Cheke, and she went on.

"Well," she said, "he did more than talk to me—he showed me a map of where they were going. It was very small, not bigger than a sheet of writing-paper, but he said there was everything on it to show where the river was. It didn't seem much to me, just a bit of coast-line and a few words, but he said it would be enough to tell where his bones were if he did not come back. Honestly and truly, he had been talking so much of going and never going that I was fed up with the business, so I never asked him to give me the map to keep. He said it was only a copy of the original, which Strangeways had, so that perhaps made him careless about it. Anyhow, when he went off he must have either taken it with him or hid it somewhere, for I saw no more of it."

“Were you fond of him?” asked Harding, prompted to the question by the business-like tone of the girl.

“He was a good father,” said she; “that is to say he gave us all we wanted and never spoke cross, and I was fond of him for that; but he was not a man to make people love him. I never got really close to his heart, as you may say. There are people like that, quite good people, but cold.”

“Well, anyhow,” said he, “you did not feel the shock of losing him as much as you would have done if he had been different.”

“I don’t know,” said Mary; “but I felt it pretty bad, and so did Mother. You see, it’s not even as if he had died. That would be bad enough, but it’s just not knowing what has become of him that is the trouble. You see, up there north is like another world. I’ve heard Strangeways telling of the natives, and people getting caught by them and kept prisoners. That may have happened to Dad for all we know.”

“Tell me again about that map,” said he. “You said it was just the map of a bit of coast-line and a few words. You can’t remember the words, can you?”

“It was something about Friday,” said she.

“Well, that doesn’t seem sense,” said he.

“No, it doesn’t,” she replied, “and still there must have been sense in it or Dad would not have set store by it.”

“Now, see here,” said he. “Can you remember the exact words he said when he showed you the thing?”

“No, I can’t,” said Mary. “But I do remember him saying that it might help to find his bones if he never came back.”

“Have you searched the house for it?”

“Should think I have, me and Mother. There’s not a drawer we haven’t turned out and turned out again; we’ve been through all the old letters and certificates and things—he kept them in a tin box, but we found nothing. And now I must be getting about my work.”

She took up the tray, which had been standing on the table all this while, and went off with it, whilst Harding, having lit a pipe, sat down in the easy chair that once had been the chair of Captain Summers and looked about him on the pleasant little room, so modestly furnished yet so comfortable and homy. There were antimacassars on the chairs, and beside the picture of

the Captain there were several little old photographs of men, either friends or relations or shipmates of his; and there was on the mantelpiece a glass bottle containing a ship under full sail, and flanking it two enormous coloured shells picked up, no doubt, by the Captain on some uproarious tropical beach. Bits of coral helped out in this humble decoration, and at one corner of the mantel a Dutch tobacco-jar, backed by a clay pipe with a coloured bowl, spoke of the departed one who had forsaken the quiet and pleasant room for the lure of gold, and who was possibly now a bleached skeleton under the sun or a prisoner of black fellows.

In England Harding had always been an eager reader of that delightful monthly, the *Wide World Magazine*, and he had recollections now of tales about explorers in Northern Australia getting lost and dying of thirst; some of those explorers, he remembered, might have fallen into the hands of aboriginal natives, but he was not quite sure on this point.

Anyhow, the remembrance of those stories stirred his imagination and added to the romance of the tale told by Mary.

Next morning found him up early and out buying newspapers at the little shop at the corner of Milsom Street close by. He studied them as he breakfasted, at least he studied the “situations vacant” columns, pencil in hand to mark anything that seemed possible.

But he did not use it. There were situations vacant and waiting for shopmen, bar-keepers, men with knowledge of sheep, men with knowledge of boat-building. There were jobs seemingly waiting for aviators and chauffeurs, but there was nothing amongst the lot that offered him any prospect of employment.

He recognized this with a chill at the heart; a feeling he had never experienced before.

In England it was different. He had come down in the financial world by a gradual descent, with optimism always beckoning from around corners; but the descent lying before him now was not a gradual path, but a drop that threatened to destroy him.

To put it another way, he was like a man suspended over an abyss at the end of a rope, the rope consisting of the money still in his possession; a rope the strands of which were parting day by day.

Every shilling he spent meant a strand gone.

A day would come when he would be unable to pay for his board and lodging—after that, what?

Of course, there was manual labour to be had at the docks and on the railways, but he scarcely envisaged that idea, no more than he did the idea of death.

He was seated, his head in his hands and the scattered newspapers littering the floor, when the idea came to him, why, after all, not try the uncle? Uncle Charles, his mother had always called him.

Well, why not try Uncle Charles?

As a matter of fact, the thing that made him shy of Uncle Charles was that he would have to explain himself. Explain just how it came about that he had descended from comparative affluence to his present position.

He had not in the least minded telling Mr. Snodgrass, and he would not have minded telling it to any stranger, but to tell it to a relative was different—a relative, moreover, from whom he was seeking assistance.

Relatives are not too often ready to help but they are always ready to criticize.

That was why he resisted the idea of Uncle Charles.

Asking himself this question, he took out his pocket-book and counted the money in it. His original eighty pounds had shrunk to sixty-six. The fact came as a shock to him. He had paid Mrs. Summers, it is true, and he had bought a few things and had spent money on taxis and meals at a restaurant. Still, it came as a surprise to him that he had spent fourteen pounds with so little to show for it.

He realized, and not for the first time, that it is the small sums that really matter in the problem of balancing one's budget.

Well, if things went on like this there would be soon no budget to balance, and with that reflection he put the pocket-book away and, taking his hat, left the house, walking towards Colles Street. Sydney had never looked more beautiful, more prosperous or more happy than on this bright morning beneath a cloudless sky, and breathed upon by a tepid sea-scented wind.

In Colles Street he walked along looking at the shops, till he reached a post-office, where he went in to consult a city directory.

He had Uncle Charles' address as it had been written down by his mother many years ago, but the question was whether he had altered it—why, he might even be dead or gone out of business. He might even have left Australia and gone to England.

But no, here he was, surely, Charles Smith, Broker, at the same address. Well, that settled it. It would be absurd not to make use of this indication—and besides, the help he required was not money assistance but assistance to obtain work. He left the post-office and struck off at once in the direction of the address given in the book, that is to say Charles Street.

Bank Building, Charles Street, was the full address, and Harding was quite prepared to find Bank Building a skyscraper, or at least a palatial business building; but when he reached Charles Street he found it to be rather a narrow old street with nothing palatial about any of its buildings.

It is, in fact, one of the oldest streets in Sydney, a left-over from the city that once was, an alien in the midst of the new splendour and the opulence

of the present age. Bank Building was to match. There was nothing suggestive of a bank about it, at least of a bank where people would willingly deposit money. It was frankly dingy, and the brass plate at the side of the hall door gave only one name:

CHARLES SMITH. BROKER.

Harding came into a passage on to which the hall door opened; a stairway fronted him, and on either side of the passage was a door. To the right-hand door was stuck a card with the word "Inquiries" on it. He knocked at this door, opened it, and found himself in a room lined with tin deed-boxes, littered with papers smelling of dust and mildew, and inhabited by an old gentleman who might have come out of a novel by Dickens. At least, he looked as though Cruikshanks had drawn him.

Harding was unconscious of the fact that this individual seated at a desk and writing with a quill pen—a quill pen, as sure as I live by bread!—was a noted character in Sydney.

James Mulberry, no less, chief clerk and factotum in the Smith business.

Mr. Mulberry was perhaps more than a noted character in Sydney. He was by way of being a treasure. He belonged to the past. He belonged to the age that produced "characters". He was like an old picture or tea-caddy in a house of modern furniture and adornment. Sydney, with the aid of a few millions, could have produced a new bridge, but all the millions in the world would not have helped her to produce a new Mulberry.

It was even hinted that a project for the pulling-down and rebuilding of Charles Street had been put aside on recognition of the fact that it was the true and only frame for the picture of Mulberry. This sounds fantastic, but Sydney is fantastic if you scratch beneath her powder and paint.

Mr. Mulberry, looking up from his writing and beholding the intruder, said nothing; he just raised his eyebrows, or what was left of them.

"I wish to see Mr. Charles Smith," said Harding.

"Then ask at the inquiry office," snapped the other. "This room is private. What do you mean by coming here and disturbing me? It's the room opposite with a notice on the door. Haven't you eyes in your head?"

"Yes, I have," replied Harding, "and they told me this was the room for inquiries——"

The old gentleman bounded from his chair, went to the door, opened it and saw the card on it; it was fixed with a drawing-pin.

“Curse those boys!” said he, tearing it off and fixing it on the opposite door, to which it evidently belonged. “This is the third time they have played this trick on me.”

“Why don’t you paste it on?” said Harding, taking in the position. “Then they couldn’t change it.”

“When I want advice I ask for it—I didn’t ask for yours,” said the elder, and back he went to his room and shut the door with a bang.

In the inquiry-room Harding found three rather elderly and dowdy girl clerks and a typewriter, on which one of them was performing.

He had brought his card with him and he handed it to the nearest of the trio, who went off with it, having indicated a chair to him.

She came back in a moment or so and asked him to follow her, which he did up a dingy staircase to a landing wallpapered with an appalling paper of bird’s-eye maple pattern and with a large map on one of its walls. This was a map of the Ballarat goldfields, many years old.

Now, Charles Smith, like James Mulberry, was also a “character”, but of a different sort.

He had the reputation of being one of the richest men in Sydney, a reputation greatly enhanced and pictorialized by the fact that his business premises were what they were and that he lived over them. There is something at once fascinating and repellent to the imagination in the idea of a man capable of drawing a cheque for a million, yet of hoarding or saving a halfpenny, but however that may be there is no doubt that such a reputation is a great business asset.

The girl clerk, having knocked at the door, opened it, and Harding found himself standing in the presence of his uncle. Uncle Charles, seated in a swivel chair before a desk, had half turned to greet the visitor. He was a ponderous old gentleman with bushy eyebrows, a clean-shaven face and a scar extending from his left ear nearly to his chin.

“Come in and shut the door,” said he. “And what can I do for you?”

“Well, it’s just this,” said Harding. “I believe I’m your nephew.”

“You believe you are my nephew,” said Uncle Charles. “There—take a seat, take a seat—which nephew?” Then suddenly: “You aren’t Sarah’s son, are you?”

“Yes,” said the other. “My mother’s Christian name was Sarah; she died some years ago. She always spoke of you to me as Uncle Charles, and as I have just come to Australia I thought I would look in and see you.”

“Your father is dead?” said Uncle Charles.

“Yes.”

“Well, I never saw him, and it was only by accident I heard of Sarah’s death. I knew little of her, for she was a schoolgirl when I left England and came out here. What’s your business in life?”

“I haven’t any at present,” said Harding. “In fact, I came out here to look for a job.”

This announcement produced a remarkable change in Uncle Charles. It seemed to freeze him. His face seemed to grow smaller.

“What’s your age?” he asked.

Harding told him.

“And haven’t you ever had a job?—I mean you haven’t lived on air, have you?—or did you inherit money from your parents?”

Harding told him.

It was the same story that he had told Mr. Snodgrass, and when he had finished Uncle Charles sat dumb for a moment as if he were digesting it.

“And that’s what comes,” said he at last, “of young men having money. If I had a son I’d as soon shoot him as leave him money.”

“Why?” asked Harding, who was becoming a bit nettled by the manner as well as the words of the other.

“Because I would,” said the old gentleman, “and that’s why. And if you had seen as much of the world as I have, and lived the length of years that I’ve done, you’d know why.

“Money! Gosh! Hunt through the bars of Sydney and you’ll see. I tell you this—there’s not one in five thousand young men to be trusted with money, and I’ll tell you why: money doesn’t mean bank rates or gold coins, it means champagne-bottles and girls given away for nothing. It means gambling and horses——”

“I suppose there is truth in what you say,” cut in Harding, “but I can tell you one thing. Money didn’t mean champagne and girls to me, nor horses, nor gambling—at least, in the ordinary way.”

“Then why the blazes did you go bust?” asked the old man, suddenly irritable. “And don’t excuse yourself by saying, like a young feller said to me the other day when he came to try and raise a loan without security: ‘I don’t drink, and don’t smoke and don’t gamble and don’t go after the girls . . .’ And I said to him: ‘Lord! What do you do? . . . You don’t do any of these things,’ I said to him, ‘yet you’ve gone broke and come to me for a loan. Now I’ll tell you,’ said I to him: ‘if things are as you say, you’ve just gone broke because you are slack-twisted.’”

“Yes,” said Harding.

The implication in the words of the other was plain enough. Did it contain the truth? Was he, in fact, slack-twisted?

Casting back over his life, he asked himself this question for the first time. After all, a man’s job is to get on in life, not to stay put or recede. Men may fail to get on for various reasons, amongst them weakness. He had condoned his want of success, putting it down to this or that, bad luck and so forth. Had Uncle Charles put his thumb on the real reason?

Slackness! The want of that rapidity and decision and tenacity in affairs which had evidently been possessed by Uncle Charles.

“That’s what I said to him,” continued Uncle Charles, “and I didn’t say it out of my own head; I said it from experience, and I say it again; there’s only one way to success, and it can be said in two words: ‘Stick it!’”

“Whether it’s a pork butcher’s shop you’re running or a steam laundry it’s all the same—or a bank, or a blessed State; stick it even if the pigs get measles—and don’t look back; some chaps’ heads seemed fixed on swivels; that’s maybe why they walk backwards instead of forwards.”

“All the same,” said Harding, “how can one see one’s faults if one doesn’t look back?”

“Damn your faults!” burst out the other. “What do you want to see them for? Of course you’ve got faults; every man has faults; he wouldn’t be a man if he hadn’t; but he doesn’t want to be always cocking an eye back at them. What’s this they call it—‘introspection’, that’s the word; it’s the modern disease, seems to me. I was reading the other day of a new society, young chaps confessing their sins to one another. I tell you, those sort of chaps want a job of work with Jim Satan behind them, prodding them along to get on with the job.”

“Well, I don’t know,” said Harding; “but I do know one hasn’t much time for introspecting, if you’re like me, hunting for a job.”

“I expect that’s so,” said Uncle Charles; “but I can’t talk from experience. I never had to hunt for a job; they came to me rushing, except the two gold-rushes I was in, and then it was me that did the rushing, not the job.”

Harding said nothing. He was beginning to appreciate and understand the absolute callous indifference to all men, nephews included, that seemed to make up the main streak of Uncle Charles’ character. Not the faintest interest did he show in the prospects of his nephew, not the faintest inclination to stir a finger to give him assistance.

Harding had come with the vague idea of stating his case to this man of money and asking for his help. That idea had vanished.

All the same, he did not feel resentment. The thing fascinated him in a curious way, for Uncle Charles did not show any of the chilliness of a rich man to a poor nephew, or a prospective lender to a prospective borrower.

Now that the facts of Harding’s case were before him he conversed with his visitor as if the latter had been a well-to-do man who had just dropped in for a call and a chat about things in general. He seemed to have quite forgotten his strictures and remarks and his query, “Why the blazes did you go bust?” He seemed to have forgotten that he was talking to a nephew, not a fellow Australian. They chatted, or rather he chatted, about things as they were and things as they ought to be in Sydney, and when Harding rose to go held out his hand, saying:

“Well, good day to you, and come and see me again some time.”

Harding descended the stairs, frozen to the bone, and with the determination that rather than accept help from the man he had left he would break stones, if any were to be got for breaking, or take a header off the famous bridge and a dive into the more famous harbour. In the hall below he noticed the card marked “Inquiries”, which Mr. Mulberry had fixed to the clerk’s door. Unable to resist the temptation, he took out the drawing-pin and stuck the thing on Mr. Mulberry’s door again.

Just as he was going out a man came in, evidently in a hurry and bent on making inquiries.

Harding paused for a moment to listen, and was rewarded by the sounds of the row that suddenly broke out, the voice of Mr. Mulberry riding the storm.

Then he went on his way feeling a bit happier—or rather more cheerful. Anyhow, he had done something in a business way at last.

He returned to his lodgings feeling almost cheerful, notwithstanding his failure to find even the hint of an opening in this strange new world of Sydney, and his cheerfulness had for basis, perhaps, the feeling that this new world was not so very strange after all, once one scratched beneath the surface, turning up Mr. Mulberrys and Mrs. Summerses, gentlemen like Mr. Fishuck, to say nothing of his friend and believer in fairies, Mr. Murphy.

If he had studied the matter more clearly he would have come to the extraordinary fact that the new England of today is in some respects farther removed from the past than is Australia—or at all events New South Wales.

Arrived home, he found luncheon waiting for him, served by Mary Summers, and when things were being cleared away she lingered over the business whilst he told her of his adventures of the morning and Uncle Charles.

“You can’t expect anything more from relatives,” said she, “except good advice—at least, I read that in a book somewhere, but I believe it’s true. Anyhow, I’d keep good friends with him because he may come in useful to you; though he didn’t offer to help, it’s sometimes that sort that turn up trumps in the end—at least, that’s my experience with charwomen,” said she with a laugh. “I often find the ones that lay themselves out to please generally end by breaking the dishes or failing to turn up on a Saturday, and that the ones that offer to do nothing but just their work generally do it.”

“Well, he offered to do nothing,” said he. “Maybe you are right. Anyhow, I have no grouch against him and we parted on good enough terms.”

She went out with the things, and presently returned; she was carrying a folded newspaper. It was the *Sydney Morning Star*.

“I read something in it this morning that might do for you,” said she, indicating a short advertisement on the front page. “It sounds easy.”

He took the paper and read the paragraph she indicated.

Secretary wanted; light work and good pay for a suitable applicant. Apply Brown, The Gables, Mossvale.

“Where’s Mossvale?” he asked.

“Oh, some distance from here,” said she, “away in the country.”

He re-read the advertisement. Then he said: “It’s good of you to have thought of me. I’ll write.”

“Don’t write—go,” said she. “It’s this morning’s newspaper, and ten to one a hundred people will be writing. Get in before them.”

“But how can I? I can’t get there till tomorrow, and by tomorrow morning I expect the hundred people will have got their letters in.”

“Go today,” said she. “It’s only half past two; you have plenty of time.”

“But the trains——”

“You don’t want trains. Jackman, who lives next door, has an old Ford, and he could run you over; he’d do it for a sovereign, I should think—run you there and wait an hour and bring you back. He’s in, for I saw him working in his garden just now, and I know he’d be glad of the job. It’s risking a sovereign,” she finished with a laugh, “but you can’t fish without bait.”

He hung just for a second, undecided, then he said: “All right—I’ll go.”

She left the room hurriedly, as though afraid he might change his mind, and he finished the pipe he had just lit, reading again the paragraph in the paper and turning over in his mind its possibilities.

Secretary! Well, yes, he fancied that he could do the job if he could get it. He could typewrite, but not quickly, and he had once done shorthand, but he was a bit rusty in both arts.

However, the advertiser, living as he did in the country, was evidently not a high-speed man, and the whole thing on review and under the influence of tobacco began to assume a rosy colour, to hint of a promise of a durable as well as an endurable job; for, frankly, the jobs that had hinted of themselves in the columns of the Sydney papers had given promise neither of endurance nor of durability. The very wording of the advertisement was enough, coupled with the statement of the advertiser’s requirements.

Young man, smart and up to date, wanted for book-keeping and clerical work. Apply so-and-so, or simply box No. so-and-so.

That was the sort of thing, and they weren’t always white-collar jobs, these possibilities in the newspapers. Cellar-men were wanted, and bar-men

and road-men, to say nothing of chauffeurs and men capable of attending to electrical plant. No; beside the advertisement of Mr. Brown, of Mossvale, all other advertisements seen up to this were impossible.

Mary Summers had evidently recognized this fact in picking the thing out; she had also evidently come to the sure conclusion that the man who applies first has the best chance of getting a job, and she had evidently worked out in her mind the whole business of transport in the quickest time and come to the selection of Jackman's old Ford as the means.

She had done a lot of thinking for him. He felt grateful. Even if the thing fell through he would feel grateful. As he finished his pipe he could hear the sound of an engine being started, evidently in the yard next door. It sounded an unwilling engine, but after a while, and as though coming to a better understanding with the starter, it took on tempestuously and vigorously. A minute or two later Mary appeared with the news that Mr. Jackman had got his engine to start. "And I've arranged with him about the price," said she: "it's there and back for a sovereign, and he'll wait for you there an hour and a half. He wanted to make it an hour, but I made him see it different. Besides, it will do the engine good to have a rest."

The car was an antique, as cars go in that most up-to-date car city, Sydney—but it went.

It was an open car, so he had a view of things denied to people travelling in the up-to-date box-car with a roof cutting off the sky, and windscreen and windows shutting in the fumes of petrol.

It seemed to him, as they drove, threading their way through the tangle of traffic and being held up by traffic jams quite in the London style, that he had never seen Sydney before; never seen its wealth, its power, its population and its restrained and careless magnificence.

The cars alone were an evidence of the first factor.

In England Australia had been a geographical expression, helped out for the mind by the novels of Rolf Boldrewood and Charles Reade. In England the attitude of Japan towards Australia had raised no feeling of uneasiness, no doubts for the future.

But today, driving through the teeming streets, past hotels and stores, great business houses and private residences, old Blucher's words about the City of London came back to him: "What a city to sack!"

And this was not the only city in Australia; and Japan was only just round the corner, nursing a lap full of cities made of cardboard and scantling, with her eyes cast over the sea and a navy ever growing in the number and power of its ships.

Mr. Jackman, who was driving, concurred in this view of things. He seemed a knowledgeable man and of some education.

"There's only one thing keeps the Japs down," said he, "and that's fear of America. Gosh! Look at England, stripped to the skin, as you may say, by the League of Nations, laying down on her bed, as you may say, and saying to other nations, 'I rely on you to protect me'; forgetting that she had by rights to help protect Australia if need be.

"Australia was her child; New Zealand too. Matter of fact, her blessed children are scattered all over this earth, and depend on her if attacked; and that's what makes the strength of the Empire—I mean to say," said Mr.

Jackman, “that’s what makes the strength of each lot of the Empire—which is the same thing.”

He was silent for a while as they threaded the suburbs and outskirts of the city, then when the country was reached, a country that was a revelation in itself of the desirability that is grandfather of war and robbery, Mr. Jackman broke out again. He was one of those men who always seem to think in general and abstract terms; his facts had to be regiments, his outlook continents, the sky his limit. One could not fancy him frying bacon or engaged in humble jobs, yet he drove the old Ford all right, even whilst he seemed to forget its existence in discussing the general state and constitution of Australia.

“The people have been going out of Australia,” said Mr. Jackman. “English-bred folk, I mean, and English-bred folk haven’t been coming in.”

“How’s that?” asked Harding.

“Well, y’see, what’s been coming in has been mostly the left-overs and out-of-works and drunks, and so on, and the Government, up to this, has put a ban on them; at least, made a rule not to let anyone in unless they had relatives who would go bail for them—relatives living in Australia. They put a stopper on the immigration business, as you may imagine. Then the Government got frightened and took the ban off a little while ago—you’ve come here recent, haven’t you? Well, you’ll know for yourself the easiness of getting in if you’ve got a clean bill of health and a bit of money to keep you going till you get on to a bit of work—and work has been swinging round.”

“How do you mean?”

“Well, from sheep and such to manufacturing. Mark you, the manufacturing age is just beginning in Australia. Why, God bless my heart, she has been just spoon-fed with goods by the world in return for the wheat and wool and such that she exports, but that ain’t going to last; young Australians are opening their eyes to the fact that making their own goods would be a more profitable and comfortable way of living than what they’re doing now. Why, look at the cars coming into the country, either whole or in parts. What the hull is to stop them being made here—yes, sir, and exported? Why should the Yanks and the British and the French and the Germans have the car market of the world between them? But, mind you, don’t get it in your head from my saying the manufacturing age is just beginning in Australia; don’t get it in your head from that that Australia isn’t manufacturing already. Indeed she is, from a hundred to a hundred and fifty

million pounds' worth of goods are being put out every year. What I'm getting at is the fact that possibly she'll go clean commercial, go all factory, as you might say, and level up with Birmingham and Manchester, as far as her cities go."

"That would be a pity."

"Well, maybe—and it will be a long time yet, in any case."

They arrived at Mossvale at about tea-time, and they found it easy to discover the house of Mr. Brown, a house solidly built, with a courtyard—that is to say the front and two wings formed two sides of a square space paved with cobblestones.

Two moss- and lichen-spotted stone dogs guarded the hall door, one on each side, and as Harding pulled on the door-bell handle and listened to the far-off clang of it, muffled by distance and passages, he found it hard to believe that he was not in England.

He remembered a house in Buckinghamshire built after this fashion. Seton was the name of the man who owned it, and he remembered calling on a warm summer afternoon, an afternoon just like this, and ringing the bell, and the sound of the bell faint but clearly to be heard; he remembered the door being opened to him by a tidy English parlourmaid in a white cap and apron and—— Oh, gosh! The door in front of him split open and a golliwog appeared before him.

"Yes, sah?" said the golliwog. He was evidently also a servant. He was jet black, or nearly so, and his face was different from the face of any other black man that Harding had ever seen: less thick in the lips, less squashed as to the nose, broader, wilder, funnier.

"Is Mr. Brown at home?"

"Yes, sah," replied the other. "Come in, sah. I take your hat. This way, sah."

Never was there such a bustling creature or one showing more good-humour. He hung the hat up on a peg and led the way down a passage whose walls were lined with maps. Here and there the maps gave place to a stand of arms—shields and stabbing-spears and clubs, bows and arrows.

Mr. Brown, if nothing else, was evidently a collector of native weapons.

Harding's obsession about the Englishness of Australia had got a jolt from the golliwog; it got another when the latter flung open a door at the end of the passage and announced:

“Genlum to see you, sah!”

It was a large room, and the walls were covered with books, or rather lined with book-shelves, and the place was more impressive owing to the fact that there were empty spaces here and there on the shelves, and books lying on the floor that evidently had occupied the empty spaces.

At a desk-table sat a man working, who turned his head at the announcement of the visitor, and this time Harding got a real jolt, for the man at the desk seemed to be wearing a mask—a bluish mask.

Then almost at once the truth broke on Harding that the mask appearance was due to tattooing.

Mr. Brown’s face, if this was indeed Mr. Brown, was covered with blue lines arranged in curlicues and spirals. One of the strange facts of life is the evolution of art as it expresses itself tribally and nationally.

No one can mistake Egyptian art or Greek art of the best period, or Roman art, which is Greek art bloated; cave-man art is a thing by itself; no one could ever draw a woolly rhinoceros or a sabre-toothed tiger to beat the contributors to that salon. Red Indian art—now, alas, almost no more—spoke of the mind and life of the Red Indian as no book could speak.

Mr. Brown’s face did not speak, it simply shouted of Polynesian art. It was distinctive as a carved war-club or canoe-paddle. He had caught it, just as a man might catch smallpox, on a certain small island which shall be nameless. Blown ashore there, the sole surviving member of an ethnological expedition that had started to investigate certain racial differences in a special group, he had been unfortunate enough to land when there was a war on, a war between two tribes, conducted mostly with fish-spears and old viterli rifles.

Mixed up in it somehow, he had been taken prisoner by the conquering tribe, but saved from boiling by the daughter of the chief, who wanted him for herself—not to boil but to marry.

He had first, however, to be made “one of them”.

The tattooers saw to that for her, and it is to be supposed that she chose the pattern just as a woman chooses the pattern of a wallpaper, with anxious deliberation.

It was all wasted, for just as the decorations were finished an American gunboat called and rescued the decorated one. Incidentally, the marriage never took place. Things would have been bad for Mr. Brown if he had been

a poor man with his way to make in the world. However, he was wealthy, and the thing after all turned out not so badly, for, as his chief passion in life was ethnology, he was able to pursue it now in seclusion, without the bother of having to go to parties and things. Girls never bothered him, and, indeed, after his experiences in that line he had no inclination to bother girls.

He had turned in his chair to greet the newcomer, and, not recognizing him, looked puzzled.

“I have come in reply to your advertisement,” said Harding.

“My advertisement!”

“Yes. You advertised for a secretary in the *Morning Star*.”

“Well, I’m damned!” said Mr. Brown. “Why, it was only printed this morning. Where have you come from?”

“Sydney.”

“All that distance and back!” said the tattooed one. “And back!” he repeated reflectively, but with a certain emphasis.

“Yes, and back,” said Harding.

“Why didn’t you write?” asked the other.

“Because a personal interview is always more satisfactory than writing,” replied Harding.

“Is that your experience?”

“No. It was a tip given me by the young lady who pointed out your advertisement.”

“So you have a young lady?”

“No. She is my landlady’s daughter, and it was her idea that I should come along straight today so as to get in before anyone else.”

The other laughed.

“Well, you certainly have done that,” said he. “Can you typewrite?”

“Fairly well.”

“As a matter of fact,” said Mr. Brown, “the typewriting wouldn’t be much, only for letters. What I want is a man to attend to my letters. I don’t get so many, but I get quite enough to be a nuisance. To me an unanswered letter is like a grit in the eye. You would also have to look up subjects for reference.”

“Yes.”

“I’m interested entirely in ethnology, which is the science that accounts for racial diversities. I got my face like it is when studying it in the islands. I hope you don’t object to it.”

“Which?”

“My face.”

“Oh, not in the least—I mean, of course not. Why should I?”

“Well, as a matter of fact, my last secretary got fed up with it—seeing it from day to day——”

“Oh, what rubbish!” said Harding. “He must have been badly off for something to complain of——”

“It wasn’t a he, it was a she.”

“Oh!”

“I’d had enough of her. You see, a man secretary is all right in an office, where he’s kept hard at it, but with me there’s too much idle time, and they tend to take to drink and things like that. So I got a Miss Bryan. Did you ever see a mandrill?”

“No.”

“Well, her face was like the face of a mandrill—yet she had the impudence to object to mine. Have you any testimonials?”

“No.”

“Well, there’s nothing to rob, and if there were, Jimbo, the chap that let you in, would slit your throat if you tried it. Can you come tomorrow morning?”

“Yes.”

“And bring your luggage along with you. And—— Oh, the terms are three pounds a week, with board and everything found.”

“Thanks,” said Harding. It wasn’t much, but it was a beginning, and, with board and lodging at present prices in Sydney, worth at least seven pounds a week.

“That suit you?”

“Yes.”

“Then be here tomorrow, and—— Oh, I’ll pay your fare and also for the car today.”

On the drive back Mr. Jackman was not dumb. His talk, ranging from labour leaders and trade disputes, covered a multitude of subjects, including Sydney Harbour and Mary Summers: his admiration for these two latter was clearly expressed.

“The chap that gets her will be a lucky man,” said he, referring to Mary. “When I look at those painted trollops in Sydney pretendin’ to be women, and when I look at little Mary,” said Mr. Jackman, “I could wish her to be my darter, and you can’t say more for her than that. Send that girl out with a halfpenny and she’ll bring back more marketing than any other with thrippence. Look at the way she bargained for you over the jaunt in this car, and look at the way she helps her old mother. They’ve got a rotten hard time sometimes, but Mary does it, keeps all along trotting like a pony and all the good misfortune does by hitting her is to make her trot the faster.”

“I didn’t know they were so badly off as that,” said Harding.

“Well, they aren’t alone these times,” said the other. “There’s others worse off; not but what they might have been better if that old fool of a Captain hadn’t fallen to the gold-digging business and put his money into the venture.”

“How much did he put in?” asked Harding.

“Well, I don’t know, but he helped to rig the expedition, some say, and others say he sold his shirt to pay all expenses; but, however it was, Mary and her mother, if they aren’t on the rocks, are pretty near them. I reckon it’s a mercy you came along as a lodger. My wife was saying that only yesterday. She said: ‘It’s a mercy that young English chap happening along, for he looks clean and honest, which is more than most lodgers is these days.’”

Harding laughed.

All the same, the fact of the poverty of the Summerses was new to him and caused him seriously to think.

Mary and her mother had become for him more than a landlady and her daughter; their friendliness and interest in him had begun to spin bonds almost like family ties. They were the first real friends he had come across

in years; their friendship had no ulterior motive. It was just goodness of heart made manifest.

To be unable to pay his way with them would mean parting from them, for he would never take credit or run up a bill if there was the slightest chance of his inability to meet it.

For these reasons he blessed the name of Brown as he paid off Jackman willingly and without grudging the money.

“I’ll want you again tomorrow,” said he, “to run me out to the place. I’ll have some luggage.”

“Are you leavin’ Mrs. Summers, then?”

“Yes.”

The fact that his good fortune in getting work would put thirty miles between him and these friends had not occurred fully to him till now, when it came accompanied by the newly learned facts about their difficult financial position. However, he forgot everything but his good fortune when he came into the house and found supper waiting for him, and Mary anxious to hear the result of his expedition.

“I knew, somehow, it would turn out all right,” she said, “and that’s why I made you go right away. All the same, I’ve been as nervous as a cat all day lest I’d made you spend all that money for nothing.”

All that money!

Next day he started to take up his appointment, the start being delayed a bit by the fact that he had to go shopping to buy a few extra things, a necessity pointed out to him by the females who had taken an interest in his business and affairs. He wanted new collars, they declared, and new socks, since the ones he had were almost past mending.

The name of the golliwog that had answered the door on Harding's first arrival, and who let him in again today, was Jivenny—shortened by Brown to Jimbo.

"I've had him twenty years," said Brown. "I got him from his father for a pair of patent-leather boots. He was only six then. It was on the West African coast. I bought him just as you'd buy a monkey. I heard afterwards that his father couldn't get the boots on because his feet were too big, so he just got an axe and trimmed his feet till the boots fitted. But I expect that was a yarn. Anyhow, he was a bargain. I'm not a poor man, but I do loathe the bother of servants; besides, with my face, servants tend to take advantage of one. I don't know why, but they don't show the respect they might otherwise do.

"Jimbo is the only servant I've got. He cooks and does everything, and I pay him no wages. He wouldn't know what to do with them if I did. I tried him once with a five-pound note just to see what he would buy. I explained the value of money to him and let him loose. He was gone three days and came back looking like his own grandfather. Two policemen came with him. He had nothing on but a girl's pink silk undergarment and a police overcoat. They'd found him in Dover's Alley at two in the morning, and it took the police doctor till six pumping the alcohol out of him. I put him to bed, but he couldn't tell me all that had happened. All he could do was to try and tell me what a hang-over felt like. He didn't succeed. I reckon the job was too big for him; but if you showed him a five-pound note now I reckon he'd go into fits. No, he doesn't want wages."

Harding's work, when he settled down to it, was easy enough as regards hours and interesting once the letters were done with.

Brown was engaged on his big work, the Australian aborigines, and besides making his secretary root out facts and statements he was informative in a story-telling way—which is the best way, when all is said and done.

One day, resting from his labours and over a pipe, he told about the wreck of the *Douglas Mawson*, which occurred in 1923. To illustrate his story he unrolled a vast map of Australia and pointed to the Gulf of Carpentaria.

The Gulf of Carpentaria is ill-named; it is really a sea, a sea bounded by Cape York Peninsula on one hand and on the other by Arnhem Land, and stretching from the latitude of Thursday Island to the latitude of Burketown.

The *Douglas Mawson* was an old schooner employed by the Queensland Government on the run from Burketown to Thursday Island, and on May 26, 1923, she left Burketown for Thursday Island with a full cargo and seven passengers.

The passengers consisted of the Willet family—father, mother and five children, including two girls, one fourteen years of age and the other four.

The weather was fine, the Gulf calm and the sky blue with summer.

Burketown is not much of a place, and one may fancy the pleasure of the children, anyhow, in getting away from it and out on to the blue sea; however, to use Brown's phrase, what was coming was coming, and two days later it came; the morning brilliant with promise gradually darkened, and then, as though to the signal of a trumpet, came the cyclone.

The schooner met it bravely bow on and tried to fight it, till the captain, recognizing that she had only one chance, managed to turn her in an endeavour to make back for Burketown.

A little pearling lugger, tossing dismasted on the mountainous waves, saw the whole thing; saw the schooner going about, saw her running before the storm and then saw her disappearing into the storm haze and darkness of evening.

The pearling lugger was thrown ashore on Wellesley Island, and its crew, miraculously saved from death, carried news of the *Douglas Mawson* to Burketown.

She had vanished into the storm steering due south, and if she had not been sunk, and if she had not turned up at Burketown, then it was clear that she was lying a wreck on the coast of the Gulf, and the bit of coast where she lay must be that between a spot somewhere north of Wellesley Island and a spot a little bit south-east of Borooloola.

A little time passed and then a search began for the wreck and possible survivors of the schooner, but nothing was found, and time passed on till a man named Horney discovered some wreckage which he identified as part of the *Douglas Mawson* at a spot on the coast near Caledon Bay. Caledon Bay is just at the entrance to the Gulf of Carpentaria on the west side and facing Cape York Peninsula.

Now, the *Douglas Mawson*, when last seen, was driving before the storm down south, over three hundred miles away from Caledon Bay.

“Then, how did it happen that her wreck was found north, where you say?” asked Harding, who had been listening attentively to the story.

“Well,” said Brown, “there is supposed to be a current running north-west across the Gulf that might have carried her north if she had been dismasted; but, honestly, notwithstanding Horney and his find, I can’t quite understand the business; to drift like that she must have been dismasted and a total wreck all but the beaching, yet she is supposed to have travelled all that distance, and—this is the point—to have carried with her, not only the captain and crew, but also the Willet family, as you will find when I have finished my yarn.

“Horney and his companion found some natives who told of a shipwreck, but couldn’t say what had become of the ship’s crew or passengers. However, a little later news began to come in making it pretty clear that the *Douglas Mawson* had busted herself on the shore, and that the whole ship’s company had been murdered by natives with the exception of Mrs. Willet and the two girls, who were in the hands of the natives.”

“What are the natives on that part of the coast like?” asked Harding.

“Frightful; about as bad a lot as you could find; treacherous, murderous, fawning if they are outnumbered, damned insolent if they are numerous enough, lustful and cruel. Well, you can fancy the fate of women falling into the hands of these beasts.

“That they did, taking all things into consideration, I am fairly certain; also that they are still in the hands of the natives.”

“Hasn’t an attempt been made to rescue them?” asked Harding.

“Gosh! Yes, more than one; but without result. Once lost up there, you’re lost.”

Now, the little story told to Harding by his employer had its result.

There is, perhaps, nothing in this world in the form of action or incident or statement without its shadow, the thing that we call Result.

The story, told in an idle moment, at once recalled the fate of Captain Summers to Harding, and he mentioned the matter. Brown seemed interested. He asked for details. The thing had caused a little stir in Sydney, and had received a few paragraphs in the papers, but Brown had heard nothing of it.

Harding told all he knew, the other listening intently.

When the story was over he asked some questions.

“This chap never told his wife where he was going; at least, that’s what I gather from what you say. What’s the wife like?”

“A dear old lady—at least, not so very old, but, still, getting on. He did tell her he was going north, but he gave no clue as to exactly where.”

“Silly fool. That’s gold all over. There you have a man with a good wife—or so she seems to be—and he goes off with a stranger, or comparative stranger, and he doesn’t give her details of where he is going. Oh no! The thing must be kept an absolute secret for fear of the claim being jumped. Why, it’s as likely as not he’s been murdered by the chap he went with; that’s to say if they found what they were looking for. But there are lots of other things may have happened to them; they may have been wrecked on the Barrier Reef going up, they may have been caught by the natives and murdered, or kept prisoners. You have no clue, you say—nothing but the statement that they went north, otherwise something might be done to find them and maybe rescue them. You said something about a river of gold. That, of course, is nonsense; strictly speaking, the thing, if it exists, is evidently a river that has gold in its sand, or amongst its boulders. It would, up there, be a river bone-dry in the rainy season, then you would find it easy enough to work the thing, and in a month two men working hard would be able to hive enough stuff to make it pay to come back to get rid of it at Sydney before starting on another shift, or selling the thing to a syndicate.

“They’ve been gone two years and over; that’s too long.”

And so thought Harding.

As time went on, Harding got over the impression produced on all newcomers by Brown’s face. After a while, in fact, he no longer noticed it; it became part of Brown, and somehow seemed to accentuate points in his personality.

Brown was an explorer as well as a scientific man, a climber of mountains and surmounter of difficulties as well as an ethnologist.

He was even more than that.

The savage dies hard in the human race; that it was still alive in Brown was a fact not exhibited by his tattooing, but a fact accentuated by it when temper brought his savagery up for exhibition. For he had a temper—a temper that had gained him his nickname of Beelzebub Brown in the old

days. But he never showed his temper to his secretary, and they got on so well together that it seemed to Harding that he had struck a life-job if only Brown continued to last and not outlive his interest in bookwork.

A month had gone by, and Harding, wishing to settle some small business in Sydney, asked for two days off and got them.

He stopped with the Summerses, and on the morning of his return he went out to make some small purchases, when, as he was walking down Coleman Street, the world suddenly began to fade, then everything went black and he lost consciousness, only to awake in bed with Mrs. Summers talking to a doctor, who was standing by the bedside and in the act of putting a clinical thermometer in its case.

Harding had fallen to the influenza of that year, which had an unpleasant habit of tripping people up in the street or felling them at their desks.

Fortunately he had on him a letter Mrs. Summers had sent to him at Mossvale saying that his room was ready, so that the ambulance which had been sent for to pick him up drove him to her address instead of a hospital. The doctor said that if pneumonia did not intervene he would be all right in a few days, and Mary and her mother, dispensing with nurses as too expensive, stood between him and pneumonia till, on the third day, the temperature fell and he was declared out of danger.

It was a week, however, before he was downstairs on a sofa in the pleasant little sitting-room, with its old-English suggestion and its vague aroma of adventure and Captain Summers.

It was now that he really found out all that the two women had done for him, for it would seem that Mary, not content with telegraphing the news of his illness to Brown, had gone herself to Mossvale to explain fully how things were, thus saving the patient's job as well as his life.

"I can't ever repay you," said he.

"Rubbish!" said Mary.

Convalescence, after an illness that has left one uncrippled, is a pleasant business, take it by and large—pleasant as the spring days that come immediately after winter.

Lying on the couch in the sitting-room, he had the people in the sunlit street to watch, the *Sydney Herald* to read, and to amuse himself the library of Captain Summers.

The Captain's library, as hinted before, smelt of the sea, but just as a beach has a tide-mark, so, in a way, had the little library. A mark beyond which the tide of Time left no deposit.

There was nothing later than Bullen, and even between him and the others there was a pretty broad space of years. Marryat, Melville, Hakluyt and De Foe were the chief authors represented, and Marryat seemed the Captain's choice by the way the volume was thumbed, especially *Peter Simple*.

One afternoon, during the last few days of his convalescence, Harding was lying on the couch of the little sitting-room reading *Peter Simple*. He had just reached, perhaps, the first thing in marine literature, the story of the club-hauling of the frigate, when Mary Summers' canary, hanging in its cage by the window, broke into song in a full-hearted way.

When that canary broke into song in the way described there was only one remedy—the cage-cover.

He dropped *Peter Simple* on the floor whilst he got up to restore order, and on his return to the couch he found by the book a piece of paper that had evidently dropped out of it.

It was covered with writing, yet there were few words, the handwriting being so big and sprawling. As there was nothing to hint that the thing was not a book-marker, or a piece of paper that had got between the leaves by accident, Harding read it:

Dear Summers,

Concerning the gold I told you of, and which lies due east of Friday (this is to be read backwards). If I don't hear from you by tomorrow noon I'll have to look elsewhere for a partner. Tomorrow noon is the latest I can fix, and at the stroke you're out of it.

*Yours,
S.*

“Gosh!” said Harding. “That must be Strangeways.”

He sat on the couch for a moment looking at the piece of paper. This was evidently a communication about the “Golden River” and the expedition from which Summers had never returned; the only trace left by the Captain

to indicate where he was going, and by accident, apparently, stuck between the leaves of a favourite book.

Harding had never seen the Captain, yet all the same he had been coming to a very definite opinion about him, an opinion backed by his picture hanging on the wall.

The opinion was not complimentary to the Captain's mentality.

The find, with its cryptic utterance, added nothing to improve matters; indeed, it added an irritation all its own. Here was a man who had left wife and daughter to hunt for fortune with a stranger, and the only address indicating where he had gone . . . this:

“Due east of Friday (this is to be read backwards).”

All the same, the thing was a find, and going to the door he came out on the little landing, in search of Mary. He heard her voice below stairs, evidently in the kitchen, and calling her she came, her sleeves rolled up and flour clinging to her hands. She had been making a pie and said so.

“Look here,” said he, handing her the paper. “I found this in a book . . . read it.”

She did.

“Whatever is the meaning of that?” asked she.

“It was evidently written to your father by that man he went away with, Strangeways, and it was evidently the last message your father received from him and the message that determined him to join Strangeways in this gold business. Your father evidently stuck it between the pages of this book and forgot it.”

“Yes, that's clear enough,” said she, “but what on earth is the meaning of it—east of Friday—what's it *mean*?”

“If I could say that,” replied he, taking his seat on the couch, “I could probably tell you where they went. I think the thing is a sort of cryptogram.”

“What's that?”

“A writing with a hidden meaning. You see, it says that it has to be read backwards.”

“Well, that doesn't make much sense,” said she; “backwards or forwards, it's just rubbish to me.”

“Maybe,” he said.

It rather surprised him, the little interest she showed in the thing considering the connection of it with the Captain, and it came to him that her practical mind had at last become indifferent to this parent who had gone off into the unknown, vanished without trace till the discovery of this trace pointing to nowhere.

She had been fond of him. He knew that from her words when she had told him the story first; no doubt she was fond of him still; all the same, this document seemed to leave her indifferent, perhaps because she looked on it as a last evidence of his folly, not as evidence of his possible whereabouts.

She had her pie to attend to, and she went back to it, leaving Harding to re-peruse the mysterious message and to make what he could out of it. He determined, with Mary's permission, to show it to Brown.

Brown, amongst his other accomplishments, had a knowledge of cryptography; at least, he had held forth on the subject one evening for about an hour, the thing being led up to by a reference to Edgar Allan Poe's story of the Gold Bug.

Yes. He would show the thing to Brown, and on the morning of his return, with Mary's consent, he took it with him.

Life often seems a haphazard affair, a congregation of accidents and incidents; all the same, the accidents seem often to link together to form what seems strangely like purpose—the purpose of the dramatist, or storyteller, who is telling the story of the world.

If Harding had not caught 'flu by accident he would not have come across the letter from Strangeways, and if Brown had not scratched his hand and got blood-poisoning the Strangeways letter might never have been deciphered.

It was really an old arrow from the Solomon Islands that nearly did for Brown. Handling it, he scratched his thumb, and when Harding arrived back he found his employer in the hands of two doctors. It wasn't a poisoned arrow, or only poisoned by original filth, which is nearly as bad as curare. However, forty-eight hours later the patient was declared out of danger, and a day or two after that he was able to sit up and talk and curse the Solomon Islanders and their arrows.

“Poisoned,” said he, “of course it was, but not intentionally. I mean the chap I took that arrow from (he had it in his hand ready for the bow-string when I shot him dead), well, that chap did not have the trouble of grinding down roots and stuff to make poison. The poison was there ready made. The Solomons are like that, as you'd know if you ever had the pleasure of having a Solomon Islands boil. Poison is everywhere, from the minds of the natives down to the sting of the mosquitoes.”

Three days later, when Brown was up and about—at least, up and resting on a sofa—Harding, who had remembered the Strangeways letter, broached the matter at tea-time.

“Let's see it,” said Brown.

Harding had it in his pocket-book and produced it. Then he sat watching Brown's face as the latter read the thing, sipping his tea the while. He seemed to find it interesting. He turned the paper round and about, and at last handed it back to the other.

“Seems crazy, doesn't it?” said he. “Reading it on its surface, it seems bug-house—but I'm not so sure that somehow or another it isn't a pretty clever dodge for hiding a meaning and leaving a clue.”

“That’s what cryptography amounts to. Have you ever studied it? Well, I don’t know if it’s worth the time, unless you have a specially constituted brain. I don’t know that my brain is much, but it has a leaning that way. I wrote an article once on the subject for the *Toronto Star*, and that started me off digging into the thing and turning up all sorts of funny tricks and ideas. I planned to write a book about it—not a small book, either. Something comprehensive. Sort of thing you might call a tome. ‘Brown on Cryptographs’, or simply ‘Cryptography by Brown’; other things shouldered it aside, and that was that; but one thing was left sticking out in my mind: you know all those yarns about pirates hiding gold and jewels and stuff, and leaving the whereabouts written out in secret writing same as in Poe’s story of the Gold Bug. Well, I’ll tell you for a fact that idea is still going round the world, and chaps are putting up good money time and again to hunt for stuff that isn’t there. The old buccaneers, as they call them, didn’t put their takings in the cold ground. No, b’gad!—pubs and knocking-shops and gambling hells were good enough for them. Besides, they hadn’t the brains to think out things, beyond navigating with a back stick, or careening for a calk, or to scrape the barnacles off their bottoms.

“All the same,” continued Brown, “there may be something in this paper of yours. You see, it doesn’t refer to stuff that’s been hidden. So far as I can make out, this chap Strangeways chanced on an old river-bed where the waters had brought down gold deposits for the taking, and not being able to deal with the matter himself, and looking about for some partner who could be trusted and who had enough money, or credit, to get hold of a ship of some sort, lit on your Captain Summers. Summers would be that sort of man, judging from what you have told me.”

“What sort?”

“The sort to fall into a venture like this at the pull of a chap like Strangeways.”

“Yes, I think he would be that sort.”

“And on top of all,” said Brown, “he was a sailor. Trust a sailor set ashore to fall into the hands of sharks; not that I say Strangeways was a shark. Anyhow, there you are, and there you have the complete story without knowing the ending. I’m going to think this thing out. I’ve never been done at this game yet, and unless there’s no meaning in that paper, I believe I’ll get on the trail of something. Do you mind letting me have it to study? Of course, I can memorize it—have done so, it’s so short—but it helps concentration to have touch of the thing.”

Harding handed over the paper, which Brown put in his pocket, and then they talked of other matters whilst Jimbo removed the tea things.

That evening Brown, who had been thoughtful and rather abstracted all dinner-time, retired to his library, and Harding, dropping in to say good night, found him in an arm-chair, pencil and paper in hand. He had evidently been studying Strangeways' letter, for it lay on an occasional-table by his elbow.

Salter was the name of Brown's doctor. He had pulled him through his illness and was ready to discharge him cured, when, calling one morning for a last visit, he found his patient not as well as he had been two days before.

"What's up," said Salter.

"Kept awake last night by a beastly riddle I was trying to solve," replied Brown.

"What was the riddle?"

"I can't tell you because it has to do with gold and is another man's property."

"A riddle a property?"

"Why not, if it holds, so to speak, the title deeds of a fortune?"

"H'm," said Salter. He prescribed a harmless sleeping-draught and went off.

Just outside, in the road, he met Harding, who had been for a walk, and discussed the patient with him.

"Says he's been kept awake trying to solve a riddle," said Salter. "Dammit, he was getting on all right, and now this nervous tache develops."

"You don't mean to say——"

"No, I don't mean to say his mind is affected in the sense you are thinking of; it's just hypersensitized, not quite normal, and it doesn't do to let that sort of thing go unchecked. He wants a holiday."

"Yes, but where's he to go?"

"You mean his face? Well, I can't see him holiday-making with the Sydney crowd with that face of his, but a pleasure resort would be no good to him, face or no face; his idea of a nice quiet holiday would be fighting alligators in a swamp or chasing savages through the bush to get hold of their genealogies, or whatever it is he's always after."

This conversation rather bothered Harding. If Brown went off on a long holiday it was not likely that he would want to take a secretary with him. It would mean a lost job. However, he need not have worried. Two nights later

he was awakened at about two in the morning by his light being switched on.

Brown had come into the room and was standing in pyjamas and dressing-gown and slippers, a pipe in his hand and his hair tousled.

He was a weird sight.

To say nothing of his tattooing, his eyes were blazing—at least, staring with triumphant light. Whatever was affecting him had in it something of laughter as well as triumph.

“I’ve found it,” said he.

“What on earth have you found?” asked the other.

“It.”

“It—what?”

“Hop out of bed and shove on your dressing-gown and come to the library and I’ll show you. The night’s warm and you won’t catch cold.”

He led the way from the room and down the stairs to the library. The lights were on, the table showed a confusion of papers, and there was a large map lying on the floor beside the arm-chair generally used by Brown when resting or reading.

He wheeled another arm-chair close to the table and they sat down. Harding kept his tobacco and pipes in this room, and he filled and lit up whilst Brown, leaning back in his chair and chuckling as though at some good joke, started to explain matters.

“It’s that cryptogram,” said he. “I expect you’ve guessed it. Well, I’ve been tormented by that blessed thing ever since you showed me it, and I expect my illness helped. I’ve got a mind like that. It worries over trifles if they have to do with memory. I’ve spent half a night trying to remember a name I’d forgotten; not that I had any business reasons for doing so, it was just the irritation of not being able to remember it.

“Just the same with this paper of yours and its seemingly tomfool message. I knew it wasn’t tomfool, for there was no reason for a chap to write a clear enough letter like that and yet being in what seemed clear craziness, for ‘Due east of Friday’ is craziness, unless it means something other than what it seems to mean—which is due east of a day in the week.

“I said to myself, let’s think this out. Friday either refers to a given time or a given place. Now, funnily enough, I once had a talk with an asylum

doctor about the association of ideas, and he told me of a woman patient who'd got mixed in this matter. For instance, he showed her a key once and asked her what it was, and she answered Christmas Day; but that was a lunatic, and Strangeways wasn't. So I said to myself, Friday must refer to something concrete, and the only concrete thing having compass bearings is a place. Either a town or a mountain, or an island or a district. Now, to begin with, Strangeways had taken the Captain up north to hunt for a gold deposit which, presumably, wouldn't be near a town . . . however, let's see. I got the gazetteer; there was no such place as Friday mentioned. Then I did some more thinking.

"I tried to fit the word Friday on to a place. A district was ruled out; even if there was such a district—which there wasn't—it would be too large to give a compass bearing on a particular spot. Friday Town didn't seem to fit. Men don't name towns after days in the week. Then suddenly Thursday Island jumped into my head; that was named after a day in the week.

"I said to myself, Friday Island, that's what you're looking for, most probably. Now, if Uncle Strangeways' golden river was due east of an island it wouldn't be in the sea, but on land. Rivers are generally found on land. Friday Island would, therefore, be off the coast, and presumably pretty near to the coast—let's hunt.

"I have a set of the best charts of the North Australian coast-line—Robertson's—and I started to work tracking the coast from Cape Flattery north and passing Claremont Islands, Night Island, Hannibal Island to Cape York; then south down the west side of Cape York Peninsula, where there are next to no islands. Then past the Wellesley Islands and on till, look . . ."

He took the section of chart lying on the floor and, placing it on the table in the full light of the electric lights, pointed to a dot off the coast-line of Arnhem Land.

Harding, looking closely, read the tiny letters naming the dot "Friday Island".

"Well, I'm dashed!" said he.

"Wait a moment," said the other. "The matter isn't straight yet—think what's wrong with it."

"How do you mean?"

"The clear directions are that the gold deposit lies in a straight line due east of Friday Island. Then the deposit can't be on the coast."

“Why?”

“Because the coast is west of the island.”

“That does us.”

“No, it doesn’t. It’s only a trick of Uncle Strangeways to cloud matters for fools, for you will see that he says further on ‘This is to be read backwards’.”

“Then you think——”

“I don’t think, I’m sure. Sure as that chart’s on the table. Here’s the place those two chaps went to, and where their bones are lying now—that is to say if they aren’t lying at the bottom of the sea.”

Harding turned from the chart to a map of Northern Australia, which Brown was unrolling. It showed the Gulf of Carpentaria in its full extent, North Queensland and the Northern Territory as far west as Anson Bay, also Thursday Island at the top of Cape York Peninsula.

“You see,” said he. “Those chaps would have gone first to Thursday Island to refit and fill up. Then they would have made a cut across the Gulf; it’s only a matter of four or five hundred miles. That was their plan, I’m certain; the only question is: did they find the gold?”

“If they had found it the Captain would have been back before this,” said Harding.

“Maybe—unless something happened to him on the way back, or on the spot. They may have been ambushed by blacks. Remember that’s the country where the Willet women were taken prisoners by all accounts; again, the Captain and Strangeways wouldn’t have gone alone, they’d have wanted hands to help them work their boat. That always opens possibilities of foul play.

“Anyhow,” finished Brown, “there’s no use speculating on the matter, but it’s interesting, and it’s more than that else I wouldn’t have roused you out of your bed to hear about it. Upon my soul, I had to tell someone, and there wasn’t anyone to tell but Jimbo and you—yes, it’s more than interesting, for it seems to me that it’s not only a tale that would do for a story-book, but also a practical proposition.”

“How do you mean?” asked Harding.

“I mean a Stock Exchange proposition.”

Brown got up and picked a pamphlet off a shelf and opened it.

“Here’s a Stock Exchange proposition that a lot of men put money into besides myself. It’s the Mam Guyam Gold Mine. They issued a million five-shilling shares. The thing was all right, but it was a gamble, and went wrong because the reef they depended on petered out.”

He threw the pamphlet on the table and turned to the chart.

“Now, here we have a gold-mine,” said he, “a gold-mine in the land of probability—or shall I say possibility?—but,” and he rapped his knuckle, “I tell you this is as likely to be a profitable concern as half of the gold propositions that are being offered every week on the Stock Exchange. That’s not saying much; it’s saying dam’ little for it; still, I think it would be worth putting a little money into it—for the fun of the thing and the gamble.”

“But how can you do that?” asked Harding. “It’s not a company.”

“No, but it would darned soon be made into a company,” said the other with a laugh. “Only, I’m not thinking along those lines. What I mean is it would be worth, for the fun of the thing, running up there to look. Mail-boats run to Thursday Island, and one could hire a lugger—there’s lots of pearling luggers and small craft to be had there—and cut across the Gulf. Once on the spot, it wouldn’t take long to search.”

“There’s something in that,” said Harding.

When he went back to bed the idea started by Brown had got no farther; all the same, no sooner had he fallen asleep than Harding was pursuing it.

He and Brown were in a bar collecting men for an expedition up North. Mr. Fishuck was one of the men being collected, and Mr. Murphy, also Cheke—a pretty tough company to take on a gold-hunting expedition. Then they were on a bleak, barren coast hunting for the skeleton of old Captain Summers, then they were in a swamp full of alligators.

The alligators were evidently supplied by a recollection of the doctor’s statement that fighting alligators in a swamp would be Brown’s idea of a quiet holiday.

It was at breakfast next morning that the holiday idea developed itself, not in connection with alligators but with Friday Island, and all that it might imply. Brown suddenly spoke:

“The doc said that I wanted a holiday—well, what about it?”

“What about what?” asked Harding, who was cracking an egg.

“What we were talking of last night. If I went hunting up there, would you pack your bag and come along?”

“It’s not a question of packing a bag,” said the other, “it’s a question of money.”

“Don’t bother about the money,” said Brown. “If I took this thing up I’d take it up as a speculation, the same as if I were putting money into a company, or as if I were playing a game of roulette or poker. I’ve seen a man risking a thousand pounds at poker. Well, this would be a sort of card game, but played in God’s good air instead of a stuffy room.”

“You’d pay my expenses?”

“Yes; if we went.”

“But, see here, we’d have to get help. Two hands would be no use in working a thing like that.”

“Yes, as you say, we’d have to get help. I’ll tell you what’s in my mind. I thought it all out in the night. We’d have to take a mail-boat to Thursday Island. When we got there we’d have to hire or buy a craft to take us across the gulf, and we’d want two hands at least to work her, and there’s not only the working of her, there’s the handling of the stuff if we find it.”

“Yes, there’s all that,” said Harding, “and on top of everything, aren’t the Thursday Island crowd a rather tough lot? I’ve always heard so.”

“Well, you’ve heard a mistake; Thursday is as quiet as anywhere else. In the old days, I don’t say it mayn’t have been different, but these times the pearl-fishing is nearly all in the hands of the Japs, and their idea isn’t fun, it’s fishing. They come there to make enough to live on ever afterwards, which isn’t much. All they want is a band-box to live in and a handful of rice to eat.”

“We might get two Japs,” said Harding incautiously.

“No, *sir*,” said Brown. “No Japs in mine, if you please, and not on an expedition such as I’m proposing. We’ll have to get whites.”

“Yes, maybe you are right,” said Harding; “but would you get them there or here?”

“To tell you the truth,” said Brown, “I haven’t had time to think over that. You see, the thing has come like a bomb-shell. I’ve had no time to make plans. But the question is this: if I decided to go, would you go with me?”

“Yes, of course I would; the only bother is the money.”

“How?”

“Well, you know how I’m placed.”

“That doesn’t matter. If I took this thing up I’d run it—you would be just as you are now, taking your salary, but you’d have to travel; b’gosh, yes, you’d have to travel.”

“I don’t mind that, but look here—here’s a point you have forgotten. This thing isn’t ours.”

“How do you mean?”

“I mean the Summerses have to be considered. I came on that paper by accident, and Miss Summers let me take it away. The secret you have discovered is really hers.”

“I haven’t discovered a secret,” replied Brown. “I’ve discovered a pointer which may be absolutely wrong as far as I know. I am prepared to risk money on the chance of finding money in the direction where the thing points, that’s all. And look here, talking about certainty—last night, after you’d gone off, I was taking another glance at the big map of Cape York and I found there was something I’d missed before. Close up to Thursday Island there is a Friday Island, a tiny place I’d missed because the writing against it is so small.”

“Oh, gosh!” said Harding. Brown laughed.

“Don’t you worry,” said he. “The real Friday Island is the one on the Arnhem Land coast, I’ll stake my hat on that. The other one is too much on the populous side. Up there the place is crowded with settlers and God knows what, to say nothing of Chinks and Japs, who would have smelt the thing out long before this. Anyhow, we’ll gamble on Arnhem Land.

“Suppose we go, suppose we find the stuff, suppose we hive it, suppose we aren’t killed, suppose we get it back to Sydney, suppose we are able to realize on it, then I’d agree to give Miss Summers a share in the profits—say a third. That would be one for me, one for you and one for her. It’s this way: you and she have supplied the indications, I would supply the capital. What do you say to that arrangement?”

“It seems fair enough to me,” replied the other; “a bit on our side if anything, but then, of course, you would have the fun of the thing and the holiday. That doctor man told me the sort of holiday you wanted.”

“What sort was that?”

“Fighting alligators in swamps. That was your idea of a restful holiday, he said.”

Brown smiled grimly.

“Well,” said he, “if things turn out as they may turn out, alligators won’t be in it.”

With this cryptic remark he went off to light a pipe, but presently, just as Harding was preparing to go out, he called him back.

“There’s just one thing I want to tell you,” said he. “I spoke of realizing on the stuff if found. You have no idea of the difficulties gold puts in one’s way, or diamonds when it comes to bringing them to market.” He laughed as he spoke, and it came to Harding that he spoke from experience.

“You told me,” he went on, “that Charles Smith was an uncle of yours. He didn’t give you a very warm welcome, so you said—that’s him, by all accounts; but he’s the most knowledgeable man in Sydney, and he might be a whole lot of use in helping to clear a cargo that wasn’t absolutely O.K. in the strict sense of the word. Mind you, I’m not talking of illegality, I mean botheration, bureaucracy, publicity and all the trials and tribulations such as reporters and photographers that fall on anyone making a noise in the world louder than the blowing of a tin whistle.

“I don’t know Smith personally, but what I know of him tells me that he would be a most useful man to save us bother and give advice, in case we pull the thing through.

“You say he was cool with you. Well, that’s him, I should think, from what I know of him. You weren’t a success, if you will excuse me for saying so, and that’s why he gave you the frozen mitt. It would be different if you

proved to him that you were making your way and had this business in prospect.”

“If you think it would do any good,” said Harding, “I’ll go and see him.”

It will be observed that the whole idea of this expedition had passed a bit beyond suggestion. It had started with difficulty, but it was moving and beginning to increase its momentum.

“I’ll go and see him,” said Harding, “and whilst I am in Sydney shall I go and see another individual who might be useful?”

“Who’s that?”

“A sailorman I picked up on the waterside; Fishuck’s his name, and he seemed a downy sort of bird, and I think pretty straight. I only saw him once, but I had a long talk with him; he’s in with a man named Murphy, who does a lot of the small yacht business.”

“Well, if you do, don’t get talking too much. I mean, it’s all right saying that we are thinking of going north, but don’t get too close to the spot, and don’t name names.”

“Think I’m a fool?” said Harding, and next day he started for Sydney on a three days’ leave of absence to see about things.

The room he had occupied at Mrs. Summers' was no longer available, a sea captain having turned up as lodger, but he was given a room nearly as good, but looking out on hen-coops and chicken-runs instead of the street, also he had the parlour to himself, as the sea captain was a gentleman who spent most of his time by day on the wharves and who boarded out.

The first thing to be done was to explain the whole thing to Mary Summers. Mrs. Summers was a bit deaf, and her mind was not as good as it had been, to use Mary's phrase, so he left her out whilst he told his story in the little sitting-room, and sitting almost under the shelf that still held *Peter Simple* and the rest of the literature dear to Captain Summers' heart.

Mary opened her mouth at the tale, then she shut it as though trying to swallow the idea; failing, she said: "I don't believe it."

"I don't blame you, either," he said; "all the same, there's just the ghost of the fag-end of a chance that there may be something in it. There was a horse-race here the other day. I read of it in the papers, and the winner was a horse that started at a hundred to one. This business is pretty much like that. You see, Brown's idea is a holiday with excitement thrown in—at least, with something to do thrown in—and this hunt for the gold dreamed about by your father and Strangeways will be something to do, if I am not mistaken."

"You'll very likely all be shipwrecked," said Mary, "or caught by the savages. I never heard of anything madder," said she, after a pause as though she were measuring the dimensions of this business with a yardstick. "Never. Well, there it is, and I suppose nobody can stop you if you are determined about it."

Her seeming callousness as to the fate of her father struck him, and he took it as the measure of her indignation at the old man's own callousness and his stupidity; the callousness that had led him to desert his wife and daughter for a dream and the stupidity that had led him to leave no clue to his whereabouts, except the cipher letter—and that by accident.

Harding did not, however, reckon that attempt to throw cold water on the business might have been caused by her anxiety for his own safety, by the fact that she cared for him more than a little. This may possibly have been

the case, for she was one of those undemonstrative people who yet can feel deeply and suffer acutely without showing it.

“Well,” he said, laughing, “now we have settled that, I want to talk about the money side of the business. If we get there, if we find gold, if we manage to get it back, you have got to have a half-share in whatever there is to be made out of it. I’ve been thinking the thing out, and that seems to me a fair deal, considering all things—what do you say?”

“Oh, I don’t mind,” said she. “You can do exactly as you think right.”

“Well, we’ll leave it at that,” said he, and then he began to discuss the whole business as a practical proposition, and here he found a mind more clear-sighted even than Brown’s, and more practical than his own. Once she had the hang of the thing and could view it all in proportion, ignoring the fantasy of it and regarding it as a practical proposition, she pointed out amendments to the plan such as buying a boat at Thursday Island and laying in stores there.

“I wouldn’t,” said she. “To begin with, you two go there, let us say, and start getting a boat and hands, to say nothing of provisions. Well, you will be the talk of the place in a week. You don’t know how gossip spreads among the shore-along crowd; they are like old women, and once the news goes about that you are on some secret venture up will go the prices, to say nothing of the fact that you may be followed.”

“That’s true,” said he; “but where on earth did you get so much knowledge of things?”

“You forget Dad was a sailor, and I know something about sailors, and I know more about longshoremen and ships’ chandlers, and people like that. I may be wrong, but I think I’m right when I say that you had better start from here, and if you decide I’ll tell you what I’ll do, and that’s help you to make out your list of provisions and see that you are not swindled over them.

“I remember Dad saying that the provisioning of a ship was a woman’s job, and it is, only women are too honest, as a rule, for most shipowners to employ them. Now tell me, have you any idea what hands you want?”

“Two besides myself and Brown,” he replied, “and I have an idea where I can probably find one of them.” He told her about Mr. Fishuck, and the day when he had met him by the little cove and of their conversation, and of Mr. Murphy and his doings and sayings.

“I don’t know,” said Mary, “but it seems to me that those two would be better helping to fit out a comic opera than an expedition. However, from

what you say of them they may help you to get hold of a boat cheap. I used to hear a lot from Dad about these Sydney boat-owners and builders, and though they produce the best stuff they aren't cheap, and, anyhow, a second-hand boat is far the best. You see, it's been tried out."

"I'll go and interview Uncle Fishuck," said he, "and I'll let you know the result."

Ten minutes later he was in the street, and, turning into Montgomerie Road, whom should he meet but Cheke.

Cheke has not been fully described. I doubt if it would be possible to do so. Long and lantern-jawed, tanned to the colour of an old saddle, this product of the sun, the wild, the wind and the peculiar desolation of the places where gold is to be found, where opals are to be found and where death by thirst is generally the hanger-on and patient follower of expeditions, was a figure individual enough, but without its true significance unless seen against the background of the bush, just as a camel is a figure without its true significance unless seen against the background of the desert.

The meeting came as a shock of surprise to Harding. He had almost forgotten Cheke, and now all at once the scene in the tavern where he had sat with Mr. Snodgrass came back to him, and the entry of Cheke and the introduction—and then the conversation about the Captain and the river of gold.

Also came up the fact that Cheke knew as much of this business as was to be known before the discovery of the letter, and also the fact that he was a friend of the family, so to speak.

“Hullo!” said the prospector. “Where are you off to—and how are you doing?”

“Oh, I’m doing all right,” replied Harding. “I’ve got a job. You remember I was hunting for a job. Well, I’ve got one.”

“And what’s the job, may I ask?”

“I’m secretary to a man named Brown who lives out at Mossvale. He was an explorer.”

“Brown! Not Beelzebub Brown, chap all tattooed?”

“Yes, that’s him.”

“Well, I’m scotched!” said Cheke.

“You know him?”

“Should think I did.”

“Is he a friend of yours?”

“Yes, but I’ve dropped out of acquaintance with him. I didn’t know he was here. I’d got it in my head, somehow, that he’d gone to live in Adelaide.”

“Well, he’s living at Mossvale, and I’m staying with him. He’s doing a big book, and I’m acting as secretary to him.”

Whilst talking Harding was thinking hard and swift. They were approaching the Montgomerie Street post-office, and at the door he stopped.

“Will you wait for me a moment?” said he. “I’ve got a ’phone-call to make, and then we can go somewhere together and have a talk.”

“O.K.,” said Cheke, and in he went.

He rang up Mossvale and got right on to Brown.

“Say,” said Harding, “I’ve just run into a man who may be useful. Explorer, name’s Cheke, says he knows you.”

“Tall chap?”

“Yes.”

“Did you give him my address?”

“Yes; at least, I said you were living at Mossvale; you see, he asked me what I was doing and I said I was acting as secretary to you.”

The reply came after a pause.

“Well—did you tell him of this gold business?”

“No. Funny thing is, he knows the Summerses, and knew the old Captain and all about him going north with Strangeways. The very first time I met him he told me all about it. I had only just landed, and the bosun of our ship had given me Mrs. Summers’ address as a lodging-house, and we were sitting in a bar and I’d told him I’d got lodgings there, when Cheke came in. He knew the bosun and chummed up, and we got talking of the Summerses and that’s how he came to talk of the Captain. Seems to me he wouldn’t be a bad man to take along with us, if you think he’s trustworthy.”

There was a long pause on the part of Brown, so long that Harding thought for a moment that he had rung off. Then came his voice, and it seemed hurried, as though the mind of the speaker were disturbed.

“You’re right; get him with us by all means; tell him all about it up to a point, but don’t give the exact locality away; say that it’s my secret—got me?”

“Yes.”

“Then push it through; get him with us, and—say, I’ve changed my plans. Instead of going to Thursday to hire or buy a boat I’ll do it here, so be on the look-out for one. ’Phone me tonight all news.”

He rang off, and Harding returned to the street where Cheke was waiting for him.

Somehow he felt a bit upset; it was as though some emotion of Brown’s had travelled to him across the wires, disturbing him. There was something in Brown’s voice and in those pauses, something . . . Then for a moment, as his eyes fell on the waiting Cheke, it came to him to go contrary to orders, to say nothing, take Cheke off for a drink at some tavern and then drop him.

The mood lasted only for a moment. The thing was absurd. The instinctive prompting to cut Cheke out of the business was just “an instinct”, so he told himself, and instead of dismissing the other after they had had a drink at the nearest bar, he said to Cheke: “Look here, I want to tell you something.”

Then he told the story that we know, giving everything but the name of Friday Island and its position off the coast, and Cheke, after having absorbed the tale, sat for a moment in silence as if digesting it.

Then he said:

“Yes?”

“Well, Brown’s getting up a little expedition to try and find the Captain.”

Cheke smiled.

“And he asked me to get things together,” went on Harding.

“Yes?”

“I’m going to get a boat big enough to take us up inside the Barrier Reef to Cape York and round to the Gulf of Carpentaria.”

“On the chance of finding the Captain?”

“Yes; and, of course, on the chance that we may find gold.”

“Now you’re talking,” said Cheke.

“Well, see here,” said Harding. “If we go, will you go with us?”

Cheke paused for a moment before he answered. Then he said:

“How about Brown?”

“He’ll be all right,” replied Harding.

“Yes. Maybe. All the same, I’d like to have it from his mouth, also the conditions and pay—tell me, was it by any chance to him you were ’phoning just now?”

Harding determined on a bold stroke.

“Yes,” he said. “I thought of you in connection with the affair and thought I’d put the thing before him.”

“What did he say?”

“Oh, he was quite agreeable—in fact, he seemed anxious for you to come.”

Cheke smiled.

“Well, that’s as maybe,” he said. “I’ll see him; and meanwhile how about the boat?”

“I was going to see a man about it when I met you; he’s a chap that lives by the harbour-side, but it’s a great way from here and we’d have to take a taxi to save time.”

“As long as you pay,” replied Cheke, “I don’t mind.”

They hailed a taxi. Beyond general directions Harding was at a loss, but the taxi-man, putting things together like a crossword puzzle, did the trick.

“Beyond Halkin Street and right out along the harbour-side, past the wattles—why, that’s Tinker’s Cove you’re wanting. Anyone there, may I ask, you’re wishful to see? There’s only two that lives there, to my knowledge.”

“I want a man named Fishuck,” said Harding.

“Gosh! You do? Why, sure I know Jake Fishuck. Him as goes about with Murphy.”

“Yes, that’s him.”

“Well, in you get and I’ll drive you.”

They got in and the thing started. At the cove Harding told the driver to wait. An old boat had been hauled on to the little beach near the shack. It lay keel up, and seated upon it was a figure. The figure was Mr. Fishuck. A net, which he had evidently repaired, was stretched out on the sand, and Mr. Fishuck, seated on the upturned boat, was enjoying a moment’s ease and dignity, also he was improving the shining hour by knitting.

He seemed to be engaged on a jumper, and as he cocked his one eye at the approaching strangers he did not pause in his occupation; then when he had recognized Harding it was he who opened the conversation.

“Hullo, young feller-me-lad,” said Mr. Fishuck. “Got a job yet?”

There was a streak of insolence in the manner and tone of Mr. Fishuck, insolence and acidity. Something had evidently turned him sour this morning, and he looked more than ever like an old maid of narrow views, and a vicious one.

“What the blazes has that to do with you?” fired Harding, losing his temper.

“Nuthin’,” said Mr. Fishuck, going on with his knitting and pursing out his lips at it. “Nuthin’. I only arsked.”

“Well, if you want to know particularly, I have.”

“And what sort of job, may I ax?”

“At the moment it’s the job of looking for your friend Murphy.”

“Look here, Granny,” cut in Mr. Cheke, “we’re looking for a boat; can you get that into your head? B-O-A-T, and not a row-boat, but a sizable deep-sea craft that two or three chaps can handle, and no dry rot about her, forty foot overall and with a motor that will work, water-tanks to hold a hundred gallons, and with a dinghy.”

Harding was amazed by the way Cheke had suddenly taken the matter into his own hands, but he felt no resentment. They were evidently capable hands.

Mr. Fishuck evidently felt no resentment either. Having turned his one eye on the speaker, he got up, folded his knitting, placed it on a ledge by the shack, and going to the waterside hailed a scow that was anchored a bit out with a fellow in her fishing. He wore a faded blue guernsey. The fisherman drew in his line and got out his oars.

“You want a boat,” said Mr. Fishuck, turning to Cheke. “I can fix you; that’s to say Murphy can. You’d better turn that taxi-cab off, for I’ll be taking you by water. When you want to get back, Murphy will run you down to Circular Quay.”

Harding went to the taxi-cab and dismissed the driver, and getting into the boat they pushed off, Mr. Fishuck steering and the gentleman in the guernsey at the oars.

If you want to see the true beauty of Sydney Harbour you must take a boat—not a yacht, or a speed-boat, or a ferry-boat—just an ordinary old row-boat, like the one they were in, and rowed, if possible, by an individual like the man in the guernsey, powerful yet tortoise-slow, the creak of the oars in the rowlocks measured, hypnotic and mixed with the vague harbour sounds and the crying of distant gulls; then the great bridge glimpsed far away becomes a bridge of Dreamland, and the white sails of the yachts on the blue water recollections of summer days and the summer-lit Solent.

They creaked along undisturbed, unless once by the wash of a speed-boat, till rounding a little spit of land they came upon a creek where a ketch lay at anchor close by a barge; the barge was covered in and showed a stove-

pipe chimney; the chimney was smoking and a smell of red herrings came on the wind telling of food in preparation.

If Harding had been an Irishman all this would have had for him a touch of Ireland; as it was, English though he might be, he could not mistake the Irish accent that came in answer to Mr. Fishuck's hail.

Then Mr. Murphy's torso appeared guernsey-clad and collarless.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Murphy.

"Man to look at the boat," replied Mr. Fishuck.

The entertainer of fairies and so forth vanished. They could hear him taking the frying-pan off the primus stove. Then he reappeared.

"Lay alongside," said he.

They did, and he got into the boat, which sank a strake or two under his weight, and not a word was said till they were on the deck of the ketch. She was thirty-nine feet over all and her deck ran flush from the steering-well forward, except for the cabin skylight.

Cheke took a clasp-knife from his pocket and opened it. He stuck the point into the mainmast. He examined the spars within reach in the same manner, searching for dry rot; evidently he found them sound, and, turning to the steering-well, led the way below.

Not a word was said during all this, and the uncanny silence of the parties to the business struck Harding. It was like the silence of priests engaged in some mysterious ceremony, and it was pretty much the same below.

The cabin had six feet of standing-room, with bunks on either side and a centre table; there were two more cabins forward, a lavatory, and then a small galley beyond which was the fo'c'sle. Mr. Murphy and Mr. Fishuck took their seats on the starboard bunk side, Mr. Murphy producing a black clay pipe, which he lit. Mr. Fishuck would have doubtlessly produced his knitting if he had brought it. Neither spoke, except occasionally in answer to some query of Inspector-General Cheke.

Now half bent, now on his knees, now poking into lockers, he seemed like a questing hound, only dumb. He got right into the lazarette, then he went forward and they heard him examining the water-tanks and so forth. Then he came back and examined the petrol-paraffin auxiliary engine. As he finished this business, and stood wiping his hands with a piece of cotton waste, he said to Mr. Murphy:

“How much do you want for her?”

“Eight hundred,” said Mr. Murphy.

“Bucks?”

“No, pounds.”

“Eight hundred my eye,” said Cheke.

He walked up and down the cabin for a moment, his head a bit bent owing to the low pitch of the roof. Harding saw him take one of the porthole curtains between finger and thumb to examine the texture. It was like a woman at a bargain sale examining some fabric before buying.

Then he said:

“If the copper sheathing is right and the garboard strake isn’t rotten I’d advise the friend I’m acting for to give you six hundred down for her as she stands including all fittings, bunk bedding, lamps, pots and pans and all.”

“Why not say thrippence?” replied Mr. Murphy.

Then they began.

Like the Rampur dogs that want acres to fight over, the battle raged between them.

Nearly everything seemed drawn in from the price of copper sheathing to the politics of Lang, and the astounding thing was that at the end of the battle Cheke, so far from having made an advance on his offer, had reduced it, pointing out that it was not really an offer at all, but a tentative proposition made on behalf of a friend, and adding that the friend would almost certainly jib at six hundred and that for policy’s sake it would be well to reduce it a bit, just as shopkeepers sell stuff at one and elevenpence three-farthings a yard instead of two shillings, the farthing being put out as a bait.

So it came about that Mr. Murphy, nearly deafened and addled by the eloquence of the other, agreed that if a firm offer of five hundred and ninety pounds was put forward by midday on the morrow he would accept it, agreeing also that this was dependent on the fact that it passed an examination in dry dock.

The name of the boat was the *Catch Me Up*.

When everything was settled Murphy had them rowed to Circular Wharf by the man in the guernsey. Here they parted, Cheke arranging a meeting for the next morning at ten.

“You can ’phone Brown,” said he, “and tell him from me it’s a good bargain, though I have still to see her dry-docked. Well, so long.”

Returning home, after having given Brown a call on the telephone and received his assent to the bargain for the ketch, Harding ran into no less a person than Uncle Charles. Uncle Charles *en fête*; at least, with a flower in the buttonhole of his coat and what was evidently a new hat on his head. He was also flushed and in a state of agitation.

There are meetings that matter. A lot of things had been happening to Uncle Charles that day, and to give an idea of the force and impact of them it is necessary to go back a bit.

Uncle Charles was wealthy, but not so wealthy as rumour made him out to be; still, if you consider nearly a hundred thousand pounds invested in first-class securities as wealth, he was wealthy. He had also some real estate and five thousand lying loose in the Bank of Australia. Wealth does not constitute happiness. Still, he was happy enough in his way, and despite his manner of living he had a number of acquaintances whom he called friends.

But he had a grievance.

It dwelt mostly in his subconscious mind like a rock submerged in the sea, only showing when the sea surface was disturbed, as, for instance, when liver disturbance caused a swell or some fancied slight or injury a commotion. The grievance was that he felt himself not as big a man in Sydney as he ought to have been.

Sometimes functions occurred to which he did not receive an invitation—you know the sort of thing—or his name was omitted in the Press, as, for instance, when the *Sydney Morning Clarion* gave a list of the most notable Sydneyites who had done most for the credit of the city.

It was his own fault really, living as he did.

In reality he and Mr. Mulberry were well-known characters, but they were regarded more in the nature of jokes than citizens, more in the nature of curiosities than worthies, and so it came about that in the communal life of the city he figured, but not prominently.

One morning a dark-haired, earnest young man called upon Uncle Charles with regard to the foundation of a Marine Biological Institution, to be bigger than anything done in that way yet. The young man held out the advantages to science of a Super Marine Biological Institution, considering

the richness of Australian waters in specimens of the rarer forms of marine life. There would also be an aquarium attached which, if the money were forthcoming, ought to beat all known aquariums.

It was the ambition of the young man and his confrères to have, for instance, a full-sized grey nurse shark swimming in a tank for all to observe, also what he called a sizable squid, about twenty feet across the body and with tentacles to correspond.

“We hope to do big things,” said he, and certainly this prospectus seemed to back his words.

He was a character, this young man, for, besides being a scientist well in the running for the fellowship of the Royal Society, he was an excellent salesman. It was only an idea he was selling, but he did the business so well that Uncle Charles rose to the bait. He would really have liked to build a town hall, but town halls are expensive, and Sydney didn’t want one; but here was something worth attaching one’s name to.

“We hope to have a public luncheon,” said the young man, “and to have the pleasure of your company, if you approve of the idea when you have considered it. You would, perhaps, be one of our speakers.”

“I’ll see,” said the tempted one; “I’ll let you know, there seems to be something in the idea. I’ll write.” And the salesman of ideas departed.

Later that day Mr. Mulberry was called upstairs, and found his employer in his shirt-sleeves—the weather was hot—and with a cigar in his mouth.

Mr. Mulberry was liverish that morning, and the heat had not improved his temper.

“Sit down, Mulberry, sit down,” said the other. “Have you sent those accounts to Holmes? . . . That’s right. But I had something else on my mind I wanted to talk to you about. I’ve been going over things in my head lately. You know, I’ve got no children——”

“Well, that’s not my fault,” snapped Mr. Mulberry, who was quite accustomed to vent his liver on his employer, being an independent individual with lots of money of his own. “I’ve told you often you ought to have got married. It’s too late now,” he finished, taking a pinch of snuff, “but there it is.”

“You’re a nice sort of person, talking like that. Why haven’t you got married yourself?”

“I’ve been too busy keeping your books, that’s maybe why, and looking after your clerks. . . . But you haven’t sent for me to ask why I’m not married.”

“No; but I have an idea of doing something in a public way, and, as I said, I have no children to leave my money to, so I might as well be doing something with some of it.”

“There are lots of poor people about,” said Mulberry, “and the hospitals are always ready to take what you can give them.”

“I’m not thinking of poor people and hospitals. I’m thinking of the scientific advancement of Australia.”

Mulberry scratched his ear.

“There’s a scheme on foot,” went on the other, “to found a Super Marine Biological Institution.”

“Did you say submarine or super marine?”

“Super. The biggest thing ever.”

“What’s it for?”

“To study the sea.”

“Oh!”

“Yes; and there will be an aquarium attached to it that will beat all the aquariums in the world.”

“How’s that?”

“The things they’ll have in it—full-grown sharks and cuttlefish and so on.”

“Yes.”

“Well, you see how it is. Here’s something new and something that seems to me worth doing, and I’d like to give it a lift. Here’s the fellow’s name that brought me the plan of the thing. I want you to make inquiries as to his bona fides and so forth.”

“You mean to say you are going to put money into this thing?”

“I mean to say nothing until I have made inquiries into it.”

Now, what his employer did with his money was quite outside the district of Mr. Mulberry’s interest, or you would have fancied so. However that may be, he objected to this new business.

“Right or wrong, bona fides or no bona fides,” said he, “if you put your money into this affair they’ll only say you are doing it to show off.”

“Huh! Show off—what do you mean?”

“I mean what I say.”

“Then don’t say it again. I tell you what’s wrong with you, Mulberry, and it’s not youth; the older you get the crustier you are, and crustiness is all right in old port, but it’s a dam’ sight different in men. There, take the address and ask about the chap—that’ll do, Mulberry.”

The Ancient went off in a huff. Nothing would have pleased him better than to discover that the whole thing was wild-cat and the earnest young man a rogue.

However, the earnest young man turned out to be Professor Holmes-Sidbury, the world’s greatest authority on plankton.

This being ascertained, Uncle Charles blossomed out. He accepted the luncheon invitation, also the suggestion that he should be a steward (stewards paid a fee of five guineas for the privilege of so acting). He went to his tailor and ordered a new morning coat, also a waistcoat of dove-coloured vesting; also he sent home a new hat and a pair of patent-leather shoes. It was almost like a trousseau.

On the morning of the great day he rose early, to get through his correspondence in time. Then he dressed, and, dressed, he tried to smuggle himself out of the building without clerks and observers spotting him. Spruced up, he felt awkward and almost wanting to hide himself. He had felt the same as a boy when condemned to wear a new suit on going to school. However, he smothered the feeling.

Just as he reached the ground floor Mr. Mulberry came out of his room, like the old man in the weather-propheying gadget who comes out before rain. His hands were filled with papers and his mind evidently with business, for he scarcely noticed his employer as he crossed to the opposite room where the clerks were engaged in their avocations.

Uncle Charles got into the hired car he had ’phoned for (he always hired, reckoning that to keep a chauffeur was more expensive than to keep a horse) and, having disposed himself in the back seat, and the vehicle having started, fell into thought.

He had arranged in his own mind as to what he would say when called upon to speak. Fortified by a fortuitous and brightly illustrated article on the

Great Barrier Reef in a Sydney paper, together with a book on marine exploration, he had mugged up the subject of marine biology and found it not uninteresting. Anyhow, he was primed to speak with a certain amount of authority and with a good deal of champagne-assisted enthusiasm on the subject, and on the collateral subject of the benefit to Sydney, to New South Wales, to Australia itself that would accrue from the foundation of a laboratory second to none—*nulli secundus*—for the exploration of the deep waters off the Australian shore.

“. . . Or shall I say shores, ladies and gentlemen?—for our vast country might be compared to a collection of countries bound together only by a natural fellowship, each having a shore of its own and every shore varying as vary the climates that make up the climate of Australia.

“Take the map, ladies and gentlemen, and look at your possession, for it is your possession, won for you by the labours of your forefathers, this vast continent set beneath the Austral stars . . .”

Fine stuff which had given him interest and occupation during the evenings of the last week. He had a good memory, and once having committed the thing to it there only wanted just a little polishing, which could be done in the cab.

Whilst doing it there ran at the back of his mind the subscription which he proposed to give. He had thought at first of a thousand to start with, with promises of more to come. But he knew Sydney well enough to know that a scheme like this would most likely attract big money, and it was indicative of his nature that, recognizing this, he made a mental jump, not from one to five but from one to ten.

“Feeling the importance of this business, and the size of the job we have put our hand to, I shall be glad to help to the extent of ten thousand pounds (Cheers), and, Mr. Chairman, let me say here and now that I hope, as the scheme progresses, to have the opportunity of further assisting its growth and maintenance as far as my small resources will permit.” (Loud cheers.)

Arrived at the hall where the luncheon was to be held, he paid off his taxi with a big tip (the first trickle from the dam that was about to burst and flood gold on the prospectus of the new institution).

The ante-room to the hall where the luncheon was to be held had been converted into a cocktail bar; it was already filled. The earnest, dark-haired young man had done his work so well that the crowd included few bespectacled followers of Science. Wool, mutton, gold, rabbit-skins, timber

and wheat were represented, also Stock Exchange buying and selling, and the racecourse.

It was perhaps less Marine Biology that had drawn the crowd than the idea of the biggest aquarium ever, where full-sized sharks would be exhibited like gold-fish, not to speak of cuttlefish from the great depths and conger eels of giant proportions.

Uncle Charles, in this atmosphere of cocktails and good fellowship, would have been rather out of it all but for an acquaintance he met, an old gentleman by name of Hobson, with a flower in his coat, who was drinking sherry and was seemingly bent on having a good time.

“And what are you doing here?” said he.

“Oh, I’m one of the stewards,” replied the other, not sorry to show his importance.

Hobson laughed.

“So’m I,” said he; “so are we all, I reckon. It’s a dodge to get your money. N’matter, it’s in a good cause. We want things like this done. Cause of Science, you know.”

Then a move was made to the great hall, where a number of tables were set out, presided over by a long table—the High Table where the nobles were to be seated.

There were twelve of them.

The dark-haired, earnest young man was unfortunately not responsible for the selection of the High Tableites, otherwise perhaps Uncle Charles would have been included in that august company. He had been allotted a seat at a table somewhere in the middle of the room, and a wool-broker, a doctor, a Pressman and a shipping agent were his table companions.

Excellent people in their way.

At first Uncle Charles felt that some mistake had been made, but a reference to a plan of the room and the seats put that idea out of his head. No. He had just been given a position amongst the ordinary folk. In the ordinary way of things he would not have minded so much—perhaps he would not have minded at all—but this luncheon was not in the ordinary way of things.

For the last fortnight he had been priming himself up, adding to his determination day by day; the determination to strike a figure and to leave

behind him, after death, a record that would hold his name.

The desire to be remembered evermore to so many people is a thing not to be laughed at. It is the instinct for procreation in a sublime form, and it may lie latent, like the other instinct, for years, only to be roused, as in the present case, to express itself vividly.

No. In the ordinary way of things he would not have bothered, perhaps, at the seat allotted to him; but, as before said, this was not in the ordinary way of things, and he fumed.

All the same, he consumed his oysters avidly and smacked his lips over the iced champagne. He had paid for it, anyhow, five times over; he reckoned, from the menu and the vintage of the wine, that he could have got a better feed at Tortoni's for a sovereign, and the blighters had mulcted him of five.

No use worrying, no more than there is after backing the wrong horse, so he packed up his worries in the old kit-bag of forgetfulness and devoted himself whole-heartedly to the food—as the others were doing.

These three others were strangers to Uncle Charles, evidently known one to the other, and they held the conversation chiefly between them. They talked of wool, of Bradman, and of Caruso's win in the Melbourne Cup. Not a word of Marine Biology till, coming towards the end of the meal, someone said something about an aquarium. It was at this moment that the uncle of Harding woke up from eating to do some thinking.

When at last the first toast was proposed his thoughts clarified, and he recognized that the thing like a betting-slip, just handed to him by an attendant, was a card on which each guest was supposed to write down his subscription.

Then came the speeches, and as they went on his anger rose, so that towards the end of the proceedings, and as the guests were being invited to express themselves financially, the chairman declaring himself the donor of two hundred and fifty guineas (thunders of applause), Uncle Charles rose to his feet and said he would like just to say a word as one of the stewards at this excellently served luncheon. (Hear, hear!)

Well, it was just this way. No one had more respect for science than himself, a plain business man, and feeling that this thing would be for the good of Australia as well as humanity, he had come that day prepared to back it heavily (Applause); but, from what he had heard, he felt that he must enter one objection. It seemed to him that there was too little of science and

too much aquarium in this affair. (Murmurs of protest, and a voice: “What is the old josser getting at?”) *He remembered, as a boy, the old Westminster aquarium in London. (Laughter.) He had seen a girl shot out of a cannon there. (Wild laughter and applause.) It was a show place and chiefly a meeting-place for young men and women. (Uproar.) That had given him a dislike to the word “aquarium”, and there was too much of it in this business, and he wouldn’t subscribe; though he had been prepared to back it to the tune of ten thousand pounds, he wouldn’t subscribe (Yells of “Sit down!”), not a cent!*

And up he got and out he went, and a minute and a half later was in the street, where, as before mentioned, he ran into the arms of his nephew.

“Hullo!” said Harding.

“Damned asses!” replied the other, still boiling. Then he simmered down and, taking his nephew’s arm, turned in the direction of Fore Street.

“What’s the matter?” asked Harding.

“Matter? Those asses . . .” He gave an expurgated account of the late proceedings. They turned into a bar, Uncle Charles leading, and here, under the soothing influence of a highball, the old gentleman relaxed and came to earth again.

“And what are you doing?” said he suddenly and sharply, as though someone had pricked him. “Got a job yet?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, you have, have you! And what is it, if I may ask?”

“I’m working as a secretary.”

“Who to?”

“A Mr. Brown.”

“There are several Browns in Sydney.”

“Well, this one doesn’t live in Sydney, but in Mossvale. He’s an ethnologist.”

“A which?”

Harding explained.

“What’s he paying you?”

Harding told him.

“Well, that’s better than nothing, but there’s not much prospect in it.”

“I’m not so sure of that,” said Harding. “There’s a big prospect that I may strike it rich if we’re lucky. It’s gold.”

“What’s gold?”

“The prospect before me. In fact I’m going, I believe, with this chap Brown on an expedition up north.”

“Hunting for a gold-mine?”

“No, a gold river.”

The other snorted.

“Or at least an old river-bed where the gold is lying in chunks, washed down by the water. It’s a dry river now; there’s never any water there.”

“That’s rubbish,” said Uncle Charles. “You’ll get the seasonal rains.”

“Well, Brown worked the thing out from the information we received, and he thinks it’s likely that the river changed its course in the old days and this is the old bed. Anyhow, he thinks it’s good enough to hunt for.”

“Maybe. Do you know anything of the place where you’re going?”

“Only that it’s hot as hell and filled with mosquitoes, to say nothing of black fellows ready to jab spears into one.”

“That sounds like the Gulf of Carpentaria—and you’re not afraid?”

“You bet I am, but that won’t stop me.”

Uncle Charles looked at his nephew anew.

Harding had changed since they had last met. Maybe it is the air of Australia, or some vitalizing principle in the soil, or some influence of the Austral stars—who knows?—but the fact remains that for the European Australia is a tonic, the effects of which can be seen even within a few months of landing.

“I bet it won’t,” said the old gentleman. There was almost admiration in his tone. “I bet it won’t! Well, you’ve turned up a lot different from the day I saw you first, and if you go on hitting it you’ll get somewhere. Where’s this you said you were staying?”

Harding gave two addresses, Brown’s at Mossvale and Mrs. Summers’. The other made a note of them in his pocket-book and then they left the bar and strolled along till they reached Cannon Street, where the elder man

stopped before an open door with a brass plate beside it bearing the inscription: “Danks, Elders & Danks” on it.

“Well, so long,” said he; “and let me know how you get on. I have your address, anyhow. . . .”

Then he turned to the open door and vanished, leaving Harding to continue his interrupted journey, little knowing how much his future depended on the scene at the Marine Biological Society’s luncheon and his fortuitous meeting with Uncle Charles.

He turned his steps towards Theresa Street.

Theresa Street, as before hinted, is less a street than an extraordinary fact, the fact of the existence of a bit of old-fashioned England in the suburbs of a city ten thousand miles from England; a bit of old-fashioned England hardly to be matched in the England of today, where the motor-car, the petrol pump, the chicken-run and the depressed bungalow have replaced the old-time things once the pride of rural England.

Dickens could have been quite at home in Mrs. Summers' lodgings in Theresa Street. His mind would have seized upon all the things that made up the Betsy Trotwood atmosphere of the little sitting-room.

The antimacassar on the arm-chair, the pictures on the walls, and the work-table with its bag receptacle of puce-coloured silk, accordion-pleated; not to mention the canary bird in its cage by the window, and the pot of musk—scentless, it is true, yet helping to keep up appearances by its presence.

And to Dickens, sitting in the arm-chair by the fire-place, the picture of Mary Summers entering the room would have been quite in keeping with the scene.

I am sure he would have loved her, so healthy, frank, honest, yet not commonplace. Commonplace qualities, those, you will say, yet not commonplace when grouped together and found in one individual—these days.

Harding, when he reached the house, found Mary waiting for him expectant of news.

He told about his meeting with Uncle Charles, and then he got down to business about the expedition, and she listened and listened, scarcely saying a word, yet evidently noting closely all the details of his story, especially those to do with the fitting-out of the ketch.

She seemed to have an instinctive distrust for Mr. Murphy; the fact that he believed in fairies did not seem to help him at all in her estimation. Neither did the description of Mr. Fishuck inspire her with confidence.

She seemed to have an instinctive knowledge of harbour-side characters of that description; no worse in Sydney than anywhere else, and not so bad, maybe, after all, when contrasted with the characters to be met with in the streets.

“Anyhow,” said she, “there’s you and Mr. Brown and that man Cheke and Mr. Brown’s nigger—what do you call him?”

“Jimbo.”

“Yes, that makes four of you. I don’t see what you want taking anyone else. I know all about boats, and the *Catch Me Up* isn’t too big for four to handle—she’s a ketch, you said?”

“Yes,” he replied, “she’s a ketch.”

He fell into thought, and Mary saw that something was perplexing him.

“What is it?” she asked.

“What’s what?”

“You’re puzzling over something.”

“That’s true. There’s something about Cheke and Brown I can’t make out. They’ve known each other before, and when I rang up Brown and told him that a man named Cheke, who knew him, would like to go with us on the expedition, I could hear him catch his breath—then he was silent for a moment, and then he was himself again. Said he knew Cheke and would be glad to have him in the business.”

“Well, what is there in that?” asked Mary.

“Oh, nothing, maybe; all the same, I got the impression that there is something between those two more than appeared on the surface. Cheke’s manner helped to make it, maybe—I could almost have thought they were enemies pretending to be friends.”

Mary, thinking over these words, seemed disturbed.

“I don’t know what it is,” said she. “I suppose anyone else placed like me would be urging you to go on the expedition on the chance that you would find Father, or at all events bring back gold; but, so far from urging you, I am the reverse.”

“You want to tell me not to go?”

“No,” she replied, “because I know it would be useless.”

“Why?”

“Because you are one of the people who don’t turn back once their minds are made up.”

“Well, maybe I am,” said he. “Pig-headed is another word for it, so we’ll leave it at that. There is one thing, however, I want to talk about. When I am gone I’d like to know that you and your mother were all right. How are you off financially?”

“Oh, we’ve got enough to scratch along on,” said she, “unless anything happens, and I don’t suppose it will.”

“If you like,” said he, “I’ll get an advance from Brown and leave it with you so that if you want money——”

“Oh no,” she said, cutting him short. “I wouldn’t dream of it; but thank you all the same—you are a real friend.”

She fell into a moment’s thought, and then she said:

“What’s bothering me is whether you’ll be able to fit out this business properly without help. I mean without someone who knows the ropes in Sydney you may be done over the provisions and things. There’s nothing wants more thinking-out than the lazarette, Father used to say; he remembered once when twelve dozen tins of herrings in tomato sauce were wished on him by a ship’s chandler, and another time when tins of glue were sent on board instead of soap. So let me give you a hand, will you, in the ordering of the things? And there’s no better person you can go to than Milligan, in James’ Street. He fits out all the yachts, and Father had a great opinion of him.”

“Right,” said he. “I’ll make for there then; and what’s more, I’ll insist that you shall give an eye to the ordering of the things.”

Next morning he returned to Mossvale to find Brown no longer up to his eyes in writing, but busy making preparations for departure.

He was standing with a pipe in his mouth in the library, contemplating an assortment of fire-arms laid out on the desk-table, the couch and the chairs.

There was an elephant-gun of the old type, shod with a heel of Para rubber an inch thick; two express rifles—sleek and deadly—had the place of honour on the couch; a twelve-bore shot-gun stood against a chair, and several automatic pistols, one of the Luger type, lay on the desk-table.

“You see, I have been rubbing up acquaintance with my best friends,” said Brown. “None of these has ever let me down except that pistol, the one there on the desk beside the Luger. It misfired at a very wrong moment—or rather the cartridge did the business—it was a dud.”

“Give us the story of it,” said Harding.

“Story is right,” said the other. “I’ve read worse stories in magazines.” He sat down on a chair, re-filled and lit his pipe, fell for a moment into thought, and then went on:

“I was one of a hunting party; there were seven of us—leaving out the porters and two native guides—seven of us: six men and a girl; the girl was a half-native; she was my wife, though I was not married to her. I had picked her up at Mombasa, and she was the child of a Portuguese trader, I believe, and a Masai woman. Her name was Numa—a shred of a girl. I could have picked her up with one hand, but she had the heart of a lioness; she knew nothing of fear, and she was a dead shot with rifle or pistol.

“We were in the Masai country, or rather I might call it the Elelescho country, for it is spread with the Elelescho plant, a silver-grey coloured bush with a perfume you never forget once you smell it.

“The natives wear sprigs of it, just for the sake of its perfume. Numa had a sprig of it in her hair the day the thing happened.”

He stopped short. Then he went on:

“The Elelescho is not the only tree or bush in Masai land. On the fourth day, after we had crossed the border, we came on a patch of true forest.

Euphorbias and trees that you could not expect to find at that elevation, and beyond that high grass.

“Have you any experience of high grass? Men talk of the jungle and of being lost in it, of mazes and so forth, but high grass beats the lot.

“You see, in the jungle there’s always a few feet between you and the nearest trees, and though I have never seen a maze like the one at Hampton Court, I expect it is the same; but in high grass you are like in a fog that touches your face, the spears of grass are so close to you; it isn’t a good experience.

“Natives don’t like it. They have an idea that it’s haunted, and, upon my word, that idea has come into my head when I’ve been bush-whacking through it, even with porters before and behind, and a compass and all.

“Alone amongst it’s worse, as you may imagine.

“Well, to come to what I am going to tell you: we had been on the spoor of elephant, for there were a few then left in that part of the country, and we had camped beyond the patch of forest, when one day, having shot a bull elephant, there were the usual doings and a feast. Late in the afternoon of the next day, when the chaps were sleeping off their gorge of elephant meat, lying in my tent, I heard a scream far off, the scream of a woman.

“I was in the northernmost tent, and the wind was coming from the north, so that’s why I heard it and no one else.

“Numa was not in the tent, though she had lain down close to me before the siesta. I got up and came out.

“Again I heard the scream, fainter this time.

“It came from the north.

“I stepped into the tent and got that automatic pistol and started, heading in the direction the sound had come from. Elelescho bushes and thorns made the seeing bad, but at last I got to a clear spot on the edge of some high grass, and there, sure enough, was a woman lying on her back with her right knee upraised and her right arm flung out on the ground.

“She was Numa, and she was dead—strangled!

“She had evidently been trying to defend herself, and the brute attacking her had strangled her in his rage.

“And there he was. As I knelt beside her I saw him in the long grass, peeping at me and her. I couldn’t see his face to recognize, only a glimpse of

it, enough to tell it was the face of a white man, not a nigger.

“Next second I’d whipped the pistol out of my belt and fired, only to find that I had drawn the trigger on a dud cartridge.

“Before I could fire again he was gone down on his hands and knees, most like crawling away through the grass.

“I emptied the remains of the clip, hoping to fetch him, then I went into the grass. I couldn’t tell which way he’d gone. He might have been crawling in any direction for all I knew, but I had to keep moving; I had to do something if only to keep me from going off the deep end.

“My failure to get the brute, the luck that had been with him owing to that cartridge, and the memory of poor Numa, had roused such a storm in my mind that I was more or less insane, I reckon. I searched here and there blindly and trusting to luck, but luck was not with me.

“Once I thought I heard him, and sure enough the sound grew closer as though he were creeping towards me, and then suddenly the thing that was making it rushed past me. It was a wild pig.

“I must have been hours beating about in that grass, and I might have been lost for good if I hadn’t come on a track made by animals evidently, and used as a short cut from the forest to the water, which lay on the other side of the grass.

“Anyhow, it was sundown when I came out and got back to camp. The body of Numa was gone. It had evidently been carried off by hyenas into the grass. I told my story, and as I told it I looked round at my companions. The whole six were there. They had all scattered during the day, some on one job, some on another—we were collecting butterflies as well as skins and tusks—and I knew that one of these men was the one who had done the business; but I could see nothing in any of their faces to give me a hint. I hadn’t said positively that it was a white man; besides us seven there wasn’t another white man for a hundred miles. I just left it so that it might have been a native, otherwise it would have been an accusation against one of my six companions, and an accusation against one in a case like that is an accusation against all.

“Besides, there was one man I suspected, and I didn’t want to put him on his guard.

“Several times on our journey back to the coast I tried to catch him suddenly by a reference to Numa, and the first time I fancy I almost got him,

but he was very crafty, and I couldn't absolutely be sure. Yet I was sure enough in my mind.

"Now, a funny thing happened. One day we were alone. He had left the camp to go after buck by a lake that also gave us the promise of wildfowl. He was carrying his rifle; I had a Westley-Richards shot-gun, the right-hand barrel choke bore.

"He was walking in front of me through some trees, I was only a step or two behind, and all at once the surety came on me—sure as if I had heard Numa speak—that he was the man, that I could never bring him to justice, and with that I brought the muzzle of the gun to his back. The charge of the right-hand barrel at close range would have blown a hole in him, but I didn't draw the trigger.

"I found out suddenly I wasn't a murderer.

"No. I couldn't do it that way, but some day I promised myself that I would find some means of making him speak, making him tell the truth, and then I would kill him with my naked hands, man to man and in fair fight.

"But the day never came.

"Our expedition broke up at Mombasa and we parted; but I was sure we should meet again; something told me that the thing was only put off. I told him that. I said to him, 'We'll meet again,' and he laughed, and it came to me that possibly he suspected that I suspected him.

"I'm not sure; that was just my idea. And there you have the story."

Brown, who had been fingering the automatic pistol and polishing it on his coat-sleeve, put it down and lit his pipe, which he had let go out. Then he went off to see about some matter, leaving Harding alone with the arms and the lurid thought: "Can Cheke be the man he was referring to, the man he would meet again?"

He recalled Brown's voice when he telephoned saying that he had met a man named Cheke who might come on the expedition. Brown's voice registered surprise and hesitation. It was almost as though he were saying to himself, "Can this thing be true? Can Fate have thrown him into my hands like this?"

However that might be, there was at least the possibility that Brown had at last got the man he was after into the net of close contact offered by the expedition, and if that were so, what might not be the result?

For a moment it occurred to Harding to tax Brown about the matter, and say to him, "Look here, is Cheke the man you suspect of that business?" But he put the idea aside. He felt it wasn't a thing he could say.

Also, on re-considering the matter, he put the idea down to a possible over-stretch of imagination.

Would Brown have mentioned a thing like that under the circumstances?

Anyhow, there was no use in bothering about the matter. After all, it was Brown's affair.

During the several days that followed, the idea that he had been unduly imaginative was confirmed by the attitude of the two men one to the other.

They met as men who had met before, not exactly as friends but as acquaintances. There was nothing in their manner to hint of hatred on one side or suspicion on the other. Cheke, coming out to Mossvale, brought his report on the condition of the *Catch Me Up* as revealed by dry docking. It was favourable, and Brown made out his cheque for Murphy without a murmur. Cheke, who had been making all the arrangements, had decided to take along Mr. Fishuck, who had consented to leave his knitting and his fish-line mending, bait digging and other activities for a wage of two pounds a week and all found.

During a long confabulation with Brown, Cheke had come to cut-and-dry terms as to the sharing-out of the treasure if found. He contributed nothing to the expedition; on the other hand, he received no pay for his work.

The final conditions were roughly these: one half of any profit to go to Harding, who would give one half of what he received to the Summerses; the remainder would be divided equally between Brown and Cheke, Cheke paying Brown the cost of the boat, but not the cost of provisions, stores or the wages of Mr. Fishuck; such payment to be made only if the profit accruing to Cheke should exceed one thousand pounds.

There was also the provision that, should the thing turn out a fiasco, Cheke would be paid for his help and services the sum of two pounds a week (same as Fishuck), dating from the start to the return, or to shipwreck, should such occur. Harding would be paid the wages he was already receiving as secretary, such wages to be deducted from any sum over two thousand pounds accruing to him, should the expedition meet with success.

There was no written contract. It was a gentleman's agreement.

The *Catch Me Up* was anchored at Fisherman's Cave, and the day of departure had been fixed for the Wednesday following the day of the agreement.

On the Tuesday night Harding stopped with the Summerses, and for the first time had a discussion with Mrs. Summers over the matter. The old lady knew all about it from Mary. She wasn't an optimist by nature, and she wasn't an optimist over this affair. She was, as a matter of fact, rather a wet blanket.

The fact is that she considered the Captain well and truly dead. The gold did not seem to interest her at all. It was all the Captain, and it struck Harding as strange that the departed mariner should still fill the old lady's mind, such as it was, and yet occupy so small a place in that of her daughter.

But he knew quite well it was not because the latter had a cold heart. All the same, he went to bed a bit depressed.

The start was for seven o'clock in the morning, and he had arranged for a taxi to take him to the boat. It would call at six.

He came down at half past five. Mary had arranged to go with him to see him off, and he found breakfast waiting for him in the little sitting-room. It was strange sitting down to breakfast in this commonplace little room just before starting on an expedition that might end who knew where?

His suit-case was packed and strapped, and stood by the door. Some private papers, a bundle of letters, an evening suit, some shirts and a few odds and ends he had packed in another suit-case, bought for the purpose. He had left it in charge of Mary, to be kept till his return.

"It's not likely I'll want a dinner-jacket where I'm going," said he, "and not, maybe, even when I come back."

"All the same," said Mary, who didn't believe in heroics, "I'll put moth-balls with it in case you do."

She came in now to say that the taxi was at the door, and together they went down, switching off the electric lights behind them, Harding carrying the case and she a rug.

She had bought it yesterday for him, pointing out in her practical way the truth that though poetry, philosophy and science often fail at a pinch, a rug is always useful.

She had bought it out of her own money, which was none too plentiful, and no doubt she would have to deny herself a good many small things in

consequence.

He knew this and he felt it. He knew that she had bound herself to him and that he was bound to her by extraordinary ties that had nothing to do with love as represented in story-books, but a lot to do with affection as it can exist between two simple-minded and clear-minded people.

They scarcely spoke during the drive, or only to remark on the things they passed, and the people.

Sydney at this early hour is strangely different from Sydney at noon. Somehow the city seems vaster and, because of the comparative silence and want of movement, less real.

It was a glorious morning, an absolutely cloudless sky stretching above the city and harbour, and a breeze, warm and steady, blowing from the Heads.

The *Catch Me Up*, moored out a bit, was swinging to her anchor chain like a thing restive and impatient to be off. She seemed worth what she had cost, well rigged and hardy-looking, and to a sailor's eye a good sea boat.

Now, it will be remembered that on Harding's first visit to the cove he had seen a man come out of the shack next that of Mr. Fishuck, a man with a bottle in his hand, who had disappeared, evidently in the direction of some pub. He had not appeared again till this morning, and there he was, standing by the waterside, with his eyes on the ketch and his mouth full of oaths.

They came out blanketed, it is true, owing to the presence of Mary, when Harding drew up alongside of him and asked about a boat to row him off with his luggage to the ketch.

Bolin was this gentleman's name, and he was a sort of partner of Mr. Fishuck. Fishuck doing the cooking and he the eating—that sort of thing—and now the partner was going off in this cursed ketch under sealed orders to heaven knows where, and Mr. Bolin would be left to fend for himself, do the cooking and, worse still, provide single-handed the materials for the art.

The dinghy was now putting off from the ketch, rowed by Cheke, who, deaf as an image to the lamentations of the deserted one, beached the boat, helped Harding to put the dunnage in, and then pushed off with him.

It was all nearly as quick as that, and in the hurry there was no time for Harding to say a proper good-bye. He compressed the business into a kiss, a sudden warm-hearted kiss with nothing of the passion of love in it but with a

lot of real affection—a kiss which the girl took as nothing out of the way or unexpected.

Then she stood watching as the ketch shook out her sails and the anchor came in, watching whilst the little craft took the wind and, leaning to it, turned in the direction of the Heads, watching till it dwindled to a fly's wing on the dancing blue.

“No use in cryin’,” said Mr. Bolin. “Look at me, and my pardner gone and me left to carry on be meself.”

The half-crown she gave him helped in the job, maybe. Anyhow, it helped him to carry on to the nearest pub and the consolation to be had in beer.

The crew of the *Catch Me Up*, at the moment of starting, consisted of five persons: Brown, Harding and Cheke forming the after-guard, Fishuck and the negro the crew. I say at the moment of starting, for once outside the Heads Jimbo ceased to be one of the crew.

He had seen the sea before, but only from the deck of a ten-thousand-ton liner. Close up to it, it frightened him to death, and he made a dive for the fo'c'sle. It was not sea-sickness, but sea-fright. Cheke went down and tried to drag him out, but he clung to everything he could clutch hold of and they had to leave him.

There was a tiny porthole on either side of the fo'c'sle, and Harding, going down later, found him peeping through it at the heavy swell as one might peep through the bars of a cage at a tiger. Brown said he would come right in time, and he did, but not before the latitude of Great Sandy Island was reached. Until then he remained below and did the cooking.

Brown did the navigating, assisted by Cheke—a matter simple enough till they reached the Capricorn Channel and the beginning of that world of reefs, islands, banks and straits known as the Great Barrier Reef.

The Great Barrier Reef is the eighth wonder of the world, or rather one might say the first, for there is nothing like it. There are mountains almost as tall as Everest; rivers almost as long as the Mississippi; seas almost as big as the Pacific; but there is no sea barrier like the Queensland reef and no reef or collection of reefs like this great barrier stretching from the Tropic of Capricorn (nearly) to Torres Straits.

Brown, who had an intimate knowledge of it as far as its general lay-out was concerned, had a deep respect for its intricacies.

Great liners go up north from Sydney to Thursday Island, keeping close to the Queensland coast, but they have pilots bred to the work.

The old Mississippi pilot of Mark Twain's time was a wonderful piece of human mechanism, but the Barrier Reef pilot would have beaten him hollow by contrast. The Mississippi pilot had at least the banks to go by, even though they were always changing in form, even though the river was frequently changing its course. But the Barrier Reef pilot has no banks for

his guidance, unless you call the rugged Queensland coast, often invisible, a bank.

He has to bring his ship through a sea which is practically a collection of vast lakes, of reefs, of runways, often steering, as the old Greek sailors steered, by the colour of the water and instinct, often bringing his ship to anchor at night.

The reef has its people and its industries. Aborigines, whites, Chinese, who come to collect *bêche-de-mer*; Japanese, who come to hunt for pearl and trochus shell; even Italians, to help in the canneries that have been established.

Brown called at one of them, a cannery for making turtle soup out of the green turtle that are to be found, chiefly at the southern extremity of the reef. Farther along and more to the northward you will find the hawksbill turtle and the loggerhead, but it is chiefly at the southern end and among the Capricorn Islands that the green turtle is found.

They stopped at the island long enough to see the work of the cannery, also the great pen where the turtles, when taken from the sea, quietly abide their fate. Then Brown, altering the helm, left the reef and laid a course outside it, sailing north with the reef on the port side and the blue Pacific to starboard.

The alteration, of course, was made about the latitude of Bowling Green Bay, where the Barrier begins to come closer to the shore. Between here and Torres Straits the Pacific runs deep and safe, except for the groups of reefs and islands—Flinders, Holmes, Herald Cays, Herald Surprise and the rest of them—that lie to the east, but far enough away to be out of danger to navigation.

It was a pity in some ways, for, unable to keep close to the shore, they were denied a close-up view of the amazing Queensland coast-line, its promontories, its cliffs, and its bays ever surging to the sea, a coast-line the frontier of an amazing country that remains almost unwritten about, quite unsung; almost unwritten about the vast ranches and the teeming millions of cattle and sheep that make up part of the country's wealth, the corn, the gold, and all the things that the name "Queensland" expresses to those who know. To say nothing of the men, weather-browned and hard-bitten and tough as leather, who own or tend the flocks of sheep and keep toll of the innumerable cattle.

At night sometimes, before turning in, the after-guard would smoke and talk in the cabin, leaving Mr. Fishuck to attend to the steering, assisted by Jimbo, who had recovered from his sea-fright and was able to keep a lookout. These talks ranged over a good bit of the world, and there was something about them that Harding noticed and was unable to explain, till at last he gathered the fact that Brown and Cheke rarely addressed their remarks one to the other. When talking, they talked as a rule to Harding, or as though they were talking to a general audience.

This fact, established in his mind, did not make for much peace. There was something vaguely uncanny in this seeming division between the two men; this hint of antagonism, more disturbing than open warfare.

He tried to reason the thing out. Cheke had been with Brown on that expedition during which Brown's so-called wife had met her death. From what Brown had said it almost seemed to Harding that he suspected Cheke of the murder of the girl. Well, if so, why had he not acted, gone for Cheke openly? Why, anyhow, had he elected to take him on this expedition—if not to lay some trap for him? On the other hand, if Cheke were guilty he would without doubt suspect some danger from Brown's manner. Why, then, had he come, trusting himself alone or almost alone with this man, far from law and civilization? Did he come following his fate, hypnotized by the other, or did he come, made heedless of danger, by the attraction of the hunt for gold—or was the whole idea of enmity between the two men a matter of fancy?

Harding could not tell, but deep down in his mind was an uneasiness not to be got rid of by reason or calculation.

Keeping well away to the east, till the latitude of Osprey Reef was reached, Brown then steered nor'-nor'-west from the Olvida entrance, that passage in the reefs and shoals giving entrance to the sea off the Jardine and Somerset provinces of Cape York. Here squally weather kept all hands busy, so that Harding had no time for speculating on the problem of Brown and Cheke for the moment.

Beyond the Olvida entrance and the clear water to the eastward of it the navigation is by no means without difficulty, owing to isolated reefs and cays; but Brown's charts were equal to the occasion, backed by his intelligence. It was just now that Harding began to have an admiration of the mind qualities of the man such as he had never had before. There was a patience and an attention to detail rarely found linked with recklessness of danger and daring. It seemed to Harding that if Cheke had anything to fear from this man it would be well for him to walk exceedingly cautiously—

either that or get out; and there was a moment when he half thought of sounding Cheke very cautiously on the chance that he might find an opening to give him a hint.

The moment occurred on the evening when Cape York came in sight, backed by a wild red sunset and with, to north of it, the dark waters of Torres Straits.

Though red is the good colour for sunsets, this sky of cirrus cloud and flaming ruby seemed a danger-signal to the mind of Harding, easily open to impressions. It seemed to him that after Thursday Island the real business of the expedition would begin in the vast loneliness of the Gulf of Carpentaria, and who knew what might not happen if these two men were really antagonistic one to the other? But he gave the idea up.

Cheke was not a man to be warned.

He was thinking this as he stood close to Cheke, who was at the wheel. Then he came forward to where Mr. Fishuck was squatting on a coil of rope near the fo'c'sle hatch.

Mr. Fishuck had brought his knitting along and was engaged on it now, just as he had been on the day when Harding saw him first, only now the article he was engaged on seemed to be an endless strip, too narrow for a muffler, yet offering no suggestion of what else it could be designed for.

“Well,” said Harding, “we won't be long now. We ought to get to Thursday Island tomorrow morning.”

“Maybe,” replied the other, “and maybe not; and if we do it's more than a maybe against our ever gettin' back to Sydney Harbour—there's not a rat on board this hooker, and you know what that means! No, sir, there ain't a rat aboard her, and if I hadn't signed on for the round trip I'd be off her tomorrow if she makes Thursday Island beach.”

“Now, don't talk nonsense,” said Harding. “How on earth could rats know that something was going to happen to a ship?”

“You must ask someone cleverer than me,” replied the other; “but I tell you, and Murphy would tell you too, that it's the fack. Why, I've seen 'em do it. Seen them with me own eyes. It was the *Bolero*, and she was by the wharf at Sydney; it was war-time, and she was loading up with a full cargo for England, and the moon was shinin' that night or I wouldn't have seen them. The *Bolero* was due to sail on the morrow, and it was gettin' near twelve as I was coming down the wharf, being hired as an extra watchman, since the wharves were short-handed, and there I saw me gentlemen and

they leaving the *Bolero* by the fore hawser, same as passengers leave a ship by the gangway. You could almost see them carrying their dunnage and lookin' over their shoulders to see that nothing had been left behind.

“Ben Travers, the chap I was relieving, was standing watching them, and, ‘Saw you ever a sight like that?’ says he. ‘I heard them squeakin’ and makin’ up their minds the last hour or more,’ say he, ‘and then they fell silent, as if they was packing their trunks and then—you saw them. And look,’ says he, ‘there’s the old grandfather that’s stayed behind to settle up things’; and, sure enough, an old grey chap twice the size of a kitten came along the hawser after the rest had gone, following after them into the dark of the wharf. ‘And that’s fixed it,’ says Travers; ‘and I wouldn’t be sailin’ in the old *Bolero* not for a widow’s pension and a bottle of rum. You’ll see,’ he says; and sure enough she was sunk with all hands but one when she was two days out. They said some chap put a bomb on board her that went by clockwork, but, whatever it was, she sunk—and they knew.”

“Anyhow,” said Harding, “there’s no evidence that this old hooker had rats on board her before she started. What’s that you’re knitting?”

“It’s a quilt,” replied the other.

“Pretty narrow for that.”

“Maybe, but it won’t be too narra when it’s stitched on to twenty others like itself. No, it won’t be too narra when it’s done—if it’s ever done.”

Cheerful!

Of all natural hunting-grounds for wealth, Thursday Island is the strangest—or I should say was, for the pearling industry has fallen of late years almost entirely into the hands of the Japanese, and the pearling industry was the chief business of the place.

What made it strange in the old days was the crowd that congregated there, a mixture of all races: English, Irish, Scots, men from the four quarters of France, Malays, Chinese, Japanese.

But it was Japan that stuck. Not only have the Japanese got the pearling business into Japanese hands, but they have other businesses as well, and the whole problem of Japan's relationship to Australia, as exhibited at Thursday Island, is enough to give one pause.

There is an organism called an aweeto that alights on the head of a caterpillar and grows there, thrusting roots into its host until the caterpillar becomes turned from a member of the animal kingdom into a caterpillar of wood.

Japan has lit on this top-knot of Australia and she has all the power of penetration possessed by an aweeto. The Australian caterpillar seems to have recognized this fact, also the fact that the Japanese workman (who is the boring apparatus of the Japanese aweeto) is made of chilled steel as compared with workmen made of flesh and blood; that is to say he is regardless of hours, of comfort, even of life itself, so long as he is at work and so long as the work brings him a profit, however small, as reckoned by our standards.

It was a blazing-hot morning when the *Catch Me Up* dropped her anchor off a salt-white beach, ruined and desecrated by tin shanties and godowns, a desecration protested at by palm trees but unnoticed by the crowd: whites, pseudo-whites, Malays, Chinks and Japanese; a crowd engaged in all sorts of activities from sun-bathing to sea-bathing, from storekeeping of a sort to net-mending.

Brown's unfortunate face caused a sensation when they landed, leaving Mr. Fishuck and Jimbo to look after the ketch. Even the Japanese turned to have a look, but it was a face that never evoked laughter, covert or open; there was something grim about its suggestions. It appealed immensely to a

long American with a goatee beard, who, leaving the upturned boat on which he had been sitting, chummed up with the new arrivals, offering to show them the sights.

Haggerstein was his name.

“Up from Sydney in that dough-dish?” said Mr. Haggerstein. “Well, you take some beating! And what’s your business, may I ask? No matter, it’s none of mine, but it’s good to see fresh white faces on this black-and-yella beach. Oh, Lord, yes, there are lots of whites on Thursday, but the best of them keep pretty well away from the beach crowd; very exclusive they are—traders and lugger owners, most of them. I came here on business of my own. I’m in the circus and general show business. No, *sir*, I’m no circus owner and no showman; I’m the supply man, anything from Burmese giraffe-necked women to baby pandas and white elephants; that’s my job, and it takes me into some places. Just come along here from Papua.”

He led the way into a shanty where liquor was sold, and called for drinks. A Jap served them with Bourbon whisky, and Mr. Haggerstein spread himself. He had won money the day before on a horse-race—the Thursday Islanders are keen on horse-racing, even though the horses employed could scarcely be called race-horses.

“Still, they run,” said Mr. Haggerstein, “and you can bet on anything that runs from a cockroach up. I won fifty dollars once on a cockroach race on board ship, and the chap that lost was so peeved he bashed the winner with a belaying-pin, dirty swine, but he paid up—at the end of a belayin’-pin! Well, here’s to you boys and here’s to all of us, amen. Say, what’s your special business, anyhow? But I reckon I asked you that before—but you know mine.”

“Well, if it’s any interest to you, we are out for a cruise,” said Brown; “but we aren’t above keeping our eyes open as far as shell and *bêche-de-mer* goes.”

“Shut them,” said the other, “they’re all gone; there’s not a reef big enough to hold a sea-slug that isn’t pre-empted; there’s nothing to be done loose-handed these days on the seven seas. The old traders have been swallowed by syndicates and the syndicates by corporations; barratry’s gone blind, gun-runnin’ has gone ditto, and the bloody old pirates are dead—or beatin’ drums in the Salvation Army. However,” mused Mr. Haggerstein, looking into his glass and stirring it round in his hand, “it’s not for me to put chaps off their game if they have any idea of what they are after, which, I take it, you have, more special than just keepin’ your eyes open in case you

sight indications of *bêche-de-mer* or shell; so we'll leave it at that. I'm no prod-nose." He finished off his drink and had another, and Brown and Harding went out, leaving him and Cheke at it.

They went for a walk to stretch their legs and have a look at their surroundings. Thursday Island, when you get away from the beach and the atmosphere of tin shanties, is quite different; not lovely, but endurable, and only spoiled by the evidence of money and successful business emanating from the bungalows of the traders and other residents.

It didn't take long to inspect all the possibilities of the place, and then they came back to the beach.

They hoped to leave on the morrow; there was nothing really to be done here except to fill the water-tanks and take on fruit and vegetables to supplement the tinned stuff, and, having reached the beach, they went to the store of Mr. Ah Wong, that had been pointed out to them on landing as the place they required.

Mr. Wong did not look a bit like a Chinaman; more like an old Frenchman in a blue silk blouse. He took their order and their money and declared that everything would be on board by sundown. Then he recommended them to a place where they could get luncheon and, more than that, sent his assistant, a boy of ten or so, to show them the way.

As they went they looked about for Cheke, but could see no sign of him. They called at the bar where they had had drinks, but the polite Japanese attendant could give them no information. The gentlemen had gone out together; possibly they had gone to the Japanese Club, of which the shorter gentleman was a member.

Over chop-suey at "the place where they could get luncheon" they discussed Haggerstein and Cheke, and what they were possibly doing—incidentally, the answer to that conundrum was already being prepared. Then, the meal over, they visited the store of the trader who dealt in the island's products: green snail-shells and pointed trochus-shells, coloured coral, swords of sword-fish, great oyster-shells, models of junks and luggers, chanks, dried *bêche-de-mer*, sea-horses in bottles—everything, not being a perfumery, except the island's main produce—goats.

Then they went on board for a siesta. At five o'clock Cheke was still missing.

Dark came, and with it a boat rowed by two aborigines, and in it the missing one, so drunk that it took Jimbo, Mr. Fishuck, Harding and a tackle

to raise him on board and lower him into the fo’c’sle, Brown refusing to have him in the cabin.

“That’s what he was doing with that chap Haggerstein,” said Brown.

He said no more, but, going off, stood, his hands in his pockets, looking at the beach lights—everything from flare lamps to Japanese lanterns.

Later that night Harding awoke in his bunk to see Brown entering the cabin from the forward doorway that led to the lavatory, galley and fo’c’sle. Brown, who was in pyjamas, took his place on the edge of his bunk and sat for a moment in the position of Rodin’s Thinker. It was evident that something was weighing on his mind, and it was evident that his mind was disturbed, to judge by the way his right fist was clenched.

The *Catch Me Up*, swinging to her moorings with a gentle motion, had brought a moonbeam through the opposite port to light the seated figure; then, as she gently swung again, the moonbeam shifted, leaving the figure in obscurity.

Harding, closing his eyes, tried to imagine the object of the other’s meditations, but failed. It had something to do with Cheke most probably—but what could it be? It didn’t matter a button, presumably, to Brown whether Cheke was drunk or sober, so why should he bother over the matter? Unable to solve this question, he went to sleep again, to wake with the early-morning sun shining through the skylight.

When he reached the deck Brown was ashore, gone to make some final purchases, and on the deck was Cheke, fresh as a daisy after his night’s oblivion, attired only in the bathing-suit given him by nature and with Jimbo flinging buckets of water over him.

Australia is the land of big things, and the Gulf of Carpentaria is one of the biggest.

It is colossal.

You could pack the whole of the Solomon Islands into the Gulf of Carpentaria and there would be room and to spare; and the same might be said about Tasmania.

This great bite in the land completes its strangeness by the fact that the land it bites into is a land of desolation, of thirst and of death—in other words, the Northern Territory and Queensland.

All along down the east coast of the Gulf there is nothing to be found in the way of towns, nothing to be found in the way of civilization, nothing to hint that in another world there are railways and motor-cars, aeroplanes and the wonders of wireless.

You have to get to the pocket of the Gulf before you find two towns, Burketown and Normanton. Not only do you find two towns, but you find two lengths of railway. You say to yourself, what on earth are those towns doing here, and why the railways?

The answer is “Gold”.

The railway from Normanton taps the Croydon Goldfield, just as the railway from Cairns farther down south taps the Etheridge Goldfields.

To know the full power of gold you must go much farther down south, to the Cloncurry Goldfields and the railway connecting them with Cloncurry, which strikes east, tapping the Cape River Goldfields, and from there away to Townsville on the east coast. Coming round the bottom of the pocket of the great Gulf one passes the Wellesley Islands, and then comes a coast, the most desolate in the world, from Bayley Point to the Van Alphen River. And still the desolation goes on as you follow the coast till the Sir Edward Pellew Islands break the monotony of the sea, and on and on past Port Roper and the vision of Groote Eylandt to the Wessel Islands—and beyond.

Harding, who had studied the Gulf on the map, knew all this, but he had not in the least visualized the reality, the loneliness, the sense of being lost, the monotony of this world where nothing is ever doing except by the winds

that blow the sands, and the kite that flies in the air, and the shark that swims in the sea. And this morning, as he stood on the deck of the *Catch Me Up*, before she weighed anchor, looking at the brilliant beach and the pearling luggers anchored on the outshore blue, he felt no trepidation in his heart, no premonition of danger, no desire to remain where he was.

The water and stores had come on board, and now Brown could be seen pushing off, rowed by Mr. Fishuck, who had gone with him. When he was on board with his purchases they got the boat in, and now there was nothing to be done but pick up the hook and start.

But the wind had dropped to an absolutely dead calm. They could have got out with the engine, but where was the use of wasting petrol that might be required in an emergency?

They were not bound to time.

Brown was saying this when they saw a boat pushing off from the shore. It came towards them across the satin-smooth sea, and in it, seated in the stern sheets and being rowed by a black, was someone they knew:

Haggerstein—no less.

He was coming straight for them and had by him what looked like luggage of sorts.

Cheke had gone below, so Brown was left to receive the visitor.

“Hullo!” cried he. “Caught you in time. I overslept, and that’s the truth. Where’s that gay boy of yours?”

“He’s below. What about him?”

“Well, he invited me to join this cruise of yours, and here I am, all complete. Give us a hand with the dunnage.”

“I’m sorry,” said Brown, “but we have no room for another hand on board.”

“But I’d be a passenger,” said the other. “Willing and able to pay.”

“It doesn’t matter; we are full up, and there’s not a spare bunk.”

“Well, he said I could come. Where is he?”

“He’s below.”

“Nursing his head?”

“I should think so.”

“Well, well, well, if there’s nothing doing there’s nothing doing. Well, good day to you, mister, and a pleasant voyage.”

He pushed off, but he did not make for the shore. He gave directions to his man and the boat, threading its way through the small craft around, approached a pearling lugger lying a little way out.

He boarded her.

It was a distinctive craft, white-painted and handy-looking, and evidently a good sea boat as all these luggers are. He boarded her and the boat hung on evidently waiting to take him ashore again.

“I hope Cheke didn’t tell him what we are after,” said Harding. “They must have been drinking together for hours, and when people are like that you never know what they may let out.”

“I hope not,” said Brown.

That was all he said, and not for the first time did Harding feel the disturbing something in the relationship of these two men.

There is something natural and healthy about open enemies, but a concealed feud has in it something akin to the diabolical; and yet between these two it was impossible to say that any serious enmity existed.

The only sign of trouble was in the attitude of Brown, polite and freezing towards the other. It was impossible to believe that Cheke did not perceive it, but he did not resent it, so far as Harding could see. Anyhow, there was nothing to be done but to wait and see and hope that nothing would happen between these two, anyhow till the expedition was over.

It was getting towards noon when a violet shadow spreading fanwise across the water from the east announced the wind at last, a breeze hot and murky as the breath of a tiger’s mouth, yet gentle as if born of the waving of a fan.

But it was enough. The canvas of the ketch was shaken out, and now the winch was set going and the anchor coming in she lay over to the freshening wind.

The beach, with its motley crowd, tin shanties and palm-tree backing, began to draw away; pearling boats at anchor gave them a salute as they passed, and now, looking back, Harding’s attention was drawn to the pearling lugger that had been boarded by Haggerstein.

Her canvas was on her. She also was putting out.

Brown had gone below and there was no one on deck but Fishuck, who was at the wheel.

“That chap we wouldn’t take on board went on board one of the luggers,” said Harding.

“I know,” said the other. “I saw him, and I saw him take his dunnage on board.”

“Well, she is putting out also.”

The steersman swung his head round for a moment.

“Yes,” said he, “that’s so.”

“Do you think they are following us?”

“I shouldn’t wonder.”

Mr. Fishuck, after another glance over his shoulder, said nothing more, but he had said a lot. As much as to say that he believed Cheke, getting drunk like that, had given the show away.

Meanwhile, looking back, Harding watched the lugger. Whether following or not, she was sailing in the same direction, and from what he could judge she was as fast a boat as the *Catch Me Up*, if not faster.

However that might be, one thing was sure: if good luck has anything to do with good weather, good luck was with them. It was one of those days rarely met with in the tropics, a day when the sky loses its brass and blueness and the sea, delicately tinted, becomes reminiscent of England and summer.

And now far ahead a dingy spot in the sky spoke of a steamer, which disclosed itself almost at once as a vessel of considerable size coming east. It was the *Port Darwin*, Thursday Island mail-boat, or so Mr. Fishuck opined.

Now she was passing half a mile away and then she was gone, a speck on the horizon to eastward.

But the sail of the lugger was still there, and even closer now, or so Harding thought.

The sun set and the stars came out.

It was impossible to tell if the lugger was still there or if she had changed her course.

She got on Harding's nerves. There is nothing more upsetting than the sensation of being followed; possibly it is a reflex from old jungle times, when being followed was often the prelude to being slain; however that may be, Harding was disturbed in his mind. He went over the incidents of yesterday and he recalled the picture of Haggerstein. The picture as remembered of that hawk-like face, with curiously flattened cheekbones, that tall, lank, yet evidently powerful figure, those hands that seemed made to grip and hold if not to choke—that picture was not reassuring.

It is astonishing how much the human mind notes without knowing it.

Now that he had to think of the man, Harding had a complete picture of him, and of what would have been forgotten, or half forgotten, in the ordinary way of things.

Yes, Haggerstein, as he came up from the halls of memory for exhibition and consideration, did not make a favourable impression.

That pearling lugger which he had boarded was evidently owned by some acquaintance or friend of his; if the friend was anything like Haggerstein they would make a formidable combination.

When he went below he found Cheke and Brown in the cabin; they were seated opposite to each other at the table playing cards.

Brown seemed to have forgotten the other's delinquencies. The fact that he had picked up with the Yankee, evidently as a drinking companion, the fact that he had come back in the condition in which they had seen him, the fact that he had possibly talked—everything seemed forgotten. Also any grudge he may have had against him, any hatred such as Harding fancied might have inspired him against the man who had once been on safari with him in Africa.

Cheke, on the other hand, was just as cool and indifferent in his manner as the other. There seemed nothing else in the world for these two but the cards.

All the same, as Harding, who had taken his place half lying in the port bunk, watched the play it seemed to him that this appearance of detachment and indifference, whilst in no way put on, was scarcely natural.

These two men engaged in a friendly game seemed unconscious of the presence of the other. They had the faces of patience-players, not picquet-players.

And yet, somehow, it seemed to Harding that their minds were engaged on something else besides the exigencies of the game.

It is easy to read all sorts of motives into men's conduct and all sorts of intricacies into their thoughts as expressed by their faces.

He knew this, as a matter of common sense, and going to his bunk he turned in, leaving the players still at their game. But they pursued him into dreamland, that unsatisfactory land where all the perplexities of earth are to be found unsolved and most of the conundrums unanswered. It seemed to the dreamer that these two men had put their natural differences aside and were conspiring against him.

The ketch had anchored off a beach, plain to be seen through a vague mist that covered whilst half revealing the hills of the land; at one point mangrove trees came down to the water's edge, and a bit to northward of the trees a rock stood out of the beach sand just at high-tide mark, a rock sharp-pointed and slightly bent at the top like a little Matterhorn.

The boat was out and Brown and Cheke were preparing to leave the ketch for shore. He was to go with them, and was preparing to step into the boat, when Mr. Fishuck, who was standing a bit forward, caught his eye and made a grimace, plainly to be translated into the warning, "Don't go." Almost at the same moment, and as though informed of the thing by telepathy, Brown turned on him, a quite different man from the man he had known, a quite different man from any man he had ever known, for the expression of Brown's face, helped by the tattooing, was the expression of a demon.

If you can imagine a demon of hatred pure and simple you can imagine what the dream-world showed to Harding in what purported to be a human face.

Then he was in the boat with the pair of them and with Terror. Terror so great that the dream broke up and he awoke half in, half out of his bunk and his head nearly touching the floor.

If a man sleeps with his head in this position he must expect dreams of a disturbing sort.

Harding recognized this fact, yet, all the same, the thing left an impression on his mind not easily shaken off. When he came on deck it was after sunrise of a perfect morning with the wind still holding fair, a gentle sailing breeze sufficient to fill the canvas with a little over. He looked into

the dazzle of the east and at first could see nothing but sea beaten to gold by the wind and sun.

Then, all at once, he saw her—the lugger. Just a fly’s wing on the brilliant picture, but enough to spoil it.

Jimbo was at the wheel. He had been trained, once his sea-fright had departed, to handle ropes and spars and take the wheel on occasion in calm weather. He was steering now, the strangest sight, for most of the time his golliwog face was turned to the sky, his eyes staring and rolling.

Yet the ketch never went off her course.

Every now and then his eyes would shoot down to the compass in obedience to orders to keep a watch on the needle, but the compass had little to do with his steering. Once a course was set, and Jimbo given the wheel, the ship would not go off that course.

Like the pigeons, he seemed to have a compass in his brain, which did not lessen the fact that for the real compass he had a respect amounting to reverence. He never said a word about this, though it might have been gathered by the way he kept its brasswork polished.

But, good helmsman or not, he was a strange figure at the wheel, and it seemed to Harding that the whole fantasy of the business, from the face of Brown to the object of their hunt, was focused for a moment in the face of Jimbo, that jet-black face, those rolling eyes, that expression crazy yet intent.

At this moment Mr. Fishuck came up, stretched, and spat over the starboard rail.

Harding drew his attention to the sail astern.

“Ay, that’s her,” said the other after a prolonged scrutiny, first with his eyes sheltered by his hand, then with them unsheltered, just screwed up. “That’s her.”

Having made sure of this fact, he dived below and brought up the glass that was hanging in the cabin and focused it on the stranger.

“That’s her,” said he, “or if it isn’t it’s her twin image, which it ain’t. Take a look.”

Harding took a look. Honestly, he could form no opinion. The little vessel was head on to them, and that made a lot of difference. Beyond that it was fore and aft he could not tell her rig. He said so as he handed back the

glass, but Mr. Fishuck was not shaken in his first opinion. Like many of his class, he was a pessimist. He took another look as if to fortify his pessimism.

“Yes, it’s her sure enough, and it’s my opinion, she being a faster boat than us, she’s towin’ a drogue. It’s this way: she doesn’t want to come to no clash with us till we’ve hived the stuff or shown him where it is; then she’ll come tooth and nails, and mostly nails if you ask me, for I’ve got it in my mind she’s Jap owned and manned.”

“Even so,” said Harding, “it doesn’t follow that they are pirates. From what I’ve seen of the Japs on Thursday they seem a quiet, hard-working lot.”

Mr. Fishuck laughed a dismal sort of laugh.

“Put gold under the nose of a Jap, or a Chink for the matter of that, and you’ll see what a quiet, hard-working chap he’ll turn into.”

“You might say the same of white men.”

“Well, that’s not proving anything.”

Which couldn’t be denied.

Harding, disinclined for further doses of pessimism, looked over the side into the blue deeps, whose surface was scarcely disturbed by the light breeze and the bow-wash of the ketch.

Fish darted away, arrow-swift and as if propelled by some marine archer in the bow, a bowman shooting always at the same acute angle to the keel. Fish passed, not darting away, but undisturbed by the shadow and sound of the ketch as though blind and deaf. Then nothing but depths of sapphire showing, here and there, far down a ribbon of seaweed drifting in the current. The nothingness would suddenly and magically materialize as the submarine light caught a jellyfish like a crystal melon, holding it for a moment and then handing it back to nothingness.

Mr. Fishuck was not interested; for him the sea, apart from his trade, was something to spit into and little more. All the same, his attention drawn by the other, he consented to look, a loggerhead turtle glimpsed just awash being the object pointed out to him for his attention. Then the sea suddenly became vacant as though all the life in it had been swept away at a stroke. The phenomenon, impressive enough to Harding, and caused maybe by the ketch entering some cross current or zone of lower temperature, left the other unmoved.

His only answer to Harding’s remark was to point to a small, brightly coloured fish, the only one left from the general exodus; it was flitting about

in the shadow of the ketch, in and out like a needle in fabric.

“Pilot fish,” said he, pointing his thumb aft, where, sure enough, could be seen the inevitable shark. A thing natural enough, considering the scraps and rubbish thrown overboard, but clearly not to the liking of the pessimist, who said nothing, however, but, turning on his heel, went below.

There is not a sizable stretch of sea in the world that has not a character of its own; from the nasty, nagging, cross-running Channel, which seems to have been designed by Providence to make Frenchmen sick, to the Bay, whose bad character, however, exists mostly as a reputation, based on slander.

But the Gulf of Carpentaria does not require the help of slander in putting up a reputation second to none of its kind; a reputation for violence when roused and, worse still, for treachery.

All that day as the ketch kept on her course the wind held, a steady sailing breeze blowing across a sea half asleep with the warmth of summer.

About noon they were passed, but a long way off, by a steamer, this time making west; evidently the Thursday Island-Port Darwin mail-boat.

Brown had just altered the course more to the south. The ketch had been in the jaws of the Gulf; this alteration would bring her full into the throat and aiming for the coast that runs from Cape Arnhem to Limmon Bight.

Looking back, an hour after noon, Harding saw that the faithful lugger had also altered her course without diminishing her distance.

Then he had it out with Brown, taking him forward to get out of earshot of the others.

“Well, what do you propose to do?” said Brown.

“I’d lie to and wait for them.”

“And if they came up?”

“I’d go for them—at all events, that chap Haggerstein. Ask him what he is doing following us.”

“Very well,” said Brown, but with the impatient air of a man persuaded against his will or reason.

A minute or so later the *Catch Me Up* was hove to, her mainsail snatching at the wind and spilling it again and the murmur of the bow-wash gone.

Almost as much at rest as though she were anchored, she waited for the lugger to overhaul her.

At first, and for at least three minutes, nothing happened. Then, as though the lugger had digested and pondered the situation, she altered her course, almost imperceptibly at first, making more for the north.

“She’ll hang on and off like that,” said Brown. “Never lose sight of us, unless we can give her the slip at night, and that won’t be much use if she knows the bit of coast we’re bound for.”

That was the main question: had Cheke let out this piece of information when he was drunk? But there was no use in trying to answer it.

Brown, instead, ordered the ketch to be put on her course again and the voyage resumed.

An hour later the lugger was in her old place, farther off but still following.

Harding and Brown had another talk.

“What do you think she proposes to do?” asked Harding.

“Fight us when we get the stuff,” promptly replied the other. “I figure it out this way. That Yank, when he came off thinking to join us, came armed. (I’m just stating the possibilities.) And why I think so is this: if he hadn’t a gun with him he’d have gone ashore to get one before going on board the lugger to follow us as he’s doing. I’m just stating the possibilities. He’s got an automatic, maybe two. The chaps with him are sure not to be without weapons, but there you are. They’re following us, and when the time comes, and they manage to meet us at the fountain, so to speak, they’ll try a palaver first and then start a sudden quarrel, or maybe if we get the stuff they’ll claim shares, telling some lie that they were after it themselves.”

“Anyhow, if it comes to fighting,” said Harding, “we’re pretty well armed.”

Brown went below for a turn in and Mr. Fishuck, who had been listening, took up the theme in his own peculiar way.

“Hasn’t it come into your mind,” said he, “that there’s something funny in the name of this hooker, we being fixed as we are?”

“No,” said Harding. “What do you mean?”

“Well, ain’t she named the *Catch Me Up*, and them chaps doing their level to catch up with us?”

“Which they aren’t,” said Harding, delighted for once to get even with this prophet of evil. “That’s just what they’re trying to avoid.”

“Yes,” replied the other, “but they will; you wait and see. *They* don’t want to catch up with us and we empty-handed; it’s their plan to hang on as long as they can before putting their bucket under the spout.”

“Oh, well, let them,” said the other, sick of all these moanings and misgivings. “If it comes to a fight it will come to a fight, and that’s all about it.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Fishuck—“if they fight fair.”

With that he went below to go on with his knitting, possibly, and think out worse things to come.

On the next day, the ketch under all plain sail and the lugger still pursuing, a change came in the weather.

At eleven o'clock it was that, Harding being on deck and Mr. Fishuck at the wheel, a long line of what seemed cloud on the eastern horizon drew Harding's attention. It was the most curious-looking cloud he had ever seen, for clouds, however dense, have a certain tenuousness about them to the eye. This line of cloud had a strange and uncanny appearance of solidity, as though a strip of land had been displaced and lifted by djinns into the upper air.

The steersman, when his attention was drawn to it, gave his opinion at once.

"That's not a cloud," said he, "that's birds."

"Birds!"

"Yep, and it means big weather comin'. Either that or there's been an earthquake or sumpin'."

"Gosh!" said Harding.

He was addressing the cloud, not the statement; the living line that was approaching with the speed of an express train. Dun-coloured now, now altering in tint, now showing a whitish flash like the belly of a mackerel as the line lifted for a moment to a slightly higher level. Now they could be heard; a sound like wind amongst trees, loudening and deepening to a sound like continuous gun-fire heard from a great distance, only with a pulsating quality quite distinctive. Directly overhead, in some curious way, the sound lessened, almost died, increasing again as the great flock passed, followed across the sea by the line of its own shadow, dying again to silence in the vacant blue day that was marked now only by a trace, a pencil-line above the horizon.

Brown, who had come up, attracted by the sound, gave no opinion on the matter beyond saying that big bird migrations were common and did not necessarily connote a change in the weather. The glass was steady, with an upward lift, and there was no reason for the moment to anticipate a change.

An hour later he had cause to alter this opinion.

Glancing at the glass, he saw that it had fallen; not much, but still it had fallen.

That night Harding dreamt that he was at a General Election meeting and that the speaker on the platform was being howled down; trying to intervene for the sake of justice and fair play, he was thrown out.

He found himself on the floor of the cabin. The *Catch Me Up* was on her beam ends for a moment and he was jammed against the locker that ran beneath the starboard lower bunk. Cheke occupied this bunk, and next moment, the ketch righting herself, he was flung out on top of Harding. They scrambled on deck, to find Brown at the wheel and beside him Jimbo. Mr. Fishuck was crawling out of the fo'c'sle companionway.

The whole scene as viewed from the deck filled Harding with horror.

Not a cloud in the sky, brilliant moonlight—and the world gone mad. The sea, flogged to fury by the wind, had not yet time to steepen. The waves, sharp and hard and spitting spume from their summits, had about them a curious illusory appearance of solidity. One seemed to be looking over a moonlit country carved from obsidian touched with snow, not a moonlit sea.

It was this fact that produced a feeling akin to horror in the mind of Harding, a fact so close to the impossible that, recognizing it, the mind said to itself: "What next?" But he had little time for his feelings. The *Catch Me Up* was before the wind. Brown, who had been kept on deck by anxiety following his reading of the barometer, had fortunately reduced sail; he had her now before the wind, which was blowing almost dead from the east.

It was impossible to alter her course or heave to; to have attempted it would have meant almost certain capsize. They had to run and trust to Providence. Unfortunately, they hadn't a clear road before them. Right ahead, placed like a target for them to hit, lay the coast of Arnhem Land.

How far was it away?

They had already made a good distance across the mouth of the Gulf, and Brown had reckoned yesterday that about noon on the day after the morrow they ought to reach Friday Island.

This fact gave them the time-space as well as sea-space before them, but the time was not enough to bring any certainty or ease of mind. A gale like this might blow for a week; again, at this season and in these latitudes, it might pass over in twelve hours.

Brown shouted all this to them as they lay on the deck like the crew of a racing yacht.

Meanwhile the cry of the wind never ceased or varied; standing rigging, running rigging, the very spars themselves—all formed part of a great violin with only one tune, one note.

The men on deck seemed lying under the lash of this sound, as dogs crouch beneath the whip; a sound varied, or rather conquered, at times by the smashing of spray-drops on the deck following a pooping sea.

Then Brown, shouting to the others, drew their attention to something on the starboard quarter.

It was the lugger.

She, too, in the grip of the storm, was running with no choice but to run and face what was coming.

She was about a quarter of a mile away.

Sundown had left her a good bit astern; possibly she had been towing a drogue to lessen her speed; anyhow, in the grip of the wind she had decreased her distance and seemed promising to draw ahead of them. But this did not happen. She held now just as she was, and as they watched it seemed to them that she was even falling astern a bit, as though her crew by some means or other had decreased her speed.

Cheke, lying side by side with Harding, said nothing.

Ever since leaving Thursday Island it seemed to Harding that Cheke had been under a cloud—and even before that. Ever since the beginning of the expedition, in fact, Cheke had lost personality, as though Brown had eclipsed him gradually but surely.

It is extraordinary how the mind sometimes, and under what seem adverse circumstances, will grip and wrestle with and maybe master a problem insoluble under quiet circumstances.

Lying now beside Cheke under the lash of the wind, and with the prospect of destruction ahead, Harding asked himself some questions that had only vaguely hinted of themselves before this. They might be stated like this:

1. Did Cheke kill that woman of Brown's when they were on safari in Africa?

2. Leaving that aside, did Brown suspect Cheke of being the killer? If so, had he invited him to join this expedition for purposes of revenge?

3. If Cheke were guilty, was it probable that he would have put himself into Brown's hands in this manner? Even if he had no idea that Brown suspected him, surely there would be some instinctive antagonism to the business?

These questions, put to reason and common sense, brought back the one answer:

“No reply.”

But that did not allay uneasiness. He played with the ideas brought forward by suspicion.

But, even as these matters occupied the mind of Harding, matters of immediately greater moment were taking place.

The monstrous, placid stare of the moon on a maddened world became vague. The heavens had thickened. The rain was coming, and before it a driving mist filled the upper air, dimming the moon till, with the suddenness of a shut door, darkness closed down.

The ketch, still running before the wind, seemed to halt and trip up for a moment. The wind, increasing, had beaten the sea to an almost level surface. When the wind leans its elbow on the sea, properly, there is nothing for the sea to do but submit; once the pressure is relaxed for a moment the waves may jump up again, but not till then. Up to this the wind, despite its continuous voice, had been in a way intermittent, or rather coming in long waves; now the waves had shortened.

Every wind has its own wavelength, long for a gentle stirring of the air, short for a sharp breeze.

This basic fact has not been fully recognized, though every flag proclaims it, as you will agree if you watch one coiling gently to a light wind, the visible wavelength becoming shorter as the wind “stiffens”.

The wind that was holding the sea down for a moment released its pressure as, following the darkness, came the rain, and it came with a flash of lightning that lit the world from horizon to horizon, showing the levelled snow-white sea, the sea that had been hills and valleys carved from obsidian, now a Christmas country vanishing in blackness and to an outcry and tearing of thunder breaking above the downpour of the rain; the sea springing to life again as if to meet the deluge from above.

It lasted twenty minutes or less and passed, leaving the wind and the sea to do their worst under a sky now broken so that there was no longer complete darkness.

Great patches of sky showed here and there amidst the racing clouds, lighting in broad swathes the racing sea; sea, sky and wind all bound for Arnhem Land and watching over and taking with them the ketch and the lugger—for the lugger could be glimpsed now ahead, she who had chosen the part of pursuer now condemned to be leader in the race for death.

“She’s faster before the wind than we are,” cried Brown in answer to a question from Harding. “She can’t help herself—turn—no more than we can. It’s run or capsize.”

He would not leave the wheel, and Harding, creeping below, turned in. There was nothing to be done on deck, there was no immediate danger; the danger lay ahead, if wind and sea did not moderate.

He fell asleep on this thought, and awoke to find daylight coming through the skylight and Mr. Fishuck making coffee over a primus stove he had brought in from the galley, which had been flooded out (according to Mr. Fishuck). In reality a little water was washing about on the floor, but that was enough for the creator of unhappy impressions and forebodings.

He came on deck without waiting for coffee.

Cheke was at the wheel, Brown forward as though on the look-out; Jimbo was not visible—down in the fo’c’sle most likely.

The sea had moderated and the wind, though still fierce, had lost something of its intensity. The lugger was nowhere to be seen, hidden perhaps by the thick weather ahead.

All that day, from hour to hour, the wind grew less, yet the sea in some extraordinary way kept up its kick till a couple of hours before sundown, when, the wind dropping suddenly, the waves decreased as if at some unheard order.

Brown said that it was due to the current running from south-east to west across the Gulf, one of the half-known factors that go to make Gulf of Carpentaria weather.

He reckoned that with the speed they had been making the coast ought to be sighted on the following day, and he was right. On the following day, an hour before noon, it showed, stripped of morning haze; far-distant hills, low hills, blue grey, cutting the western sky and with a look of lonesomeness impossible to picture and born perhaps partly of the knowledge that they are the wardens of a desolation great as the territory of which they are the sign and warning.

If you were to cross them and move south you would go on and on, from one desolation to another, for a thousand miles, passing at last over the Macdonnell Range and the James Ranges, only to find yourself at the beginning of No Man's Land and the great Victorian Desert.

The sea was now summer smooth, and the wind that had veered to south of east had fallen to a full sailing breeze.

The morning had broken cloudy, but now not a cloud showed, and the sky had taken on a blue like the blue of the Mediterranean sky in June. An extraordinary and happy-coloured sky, to be associated with holidays, merriment, sand castles and the music of bands, here where desolation had lasted for a million years.

As they drew closer to the coast sea birds began to fleck the air, diving-birds and gulls adding an extra touch of life and summer to the scene.

Away on the port bow the sharp eyes of Mr. Fishuck caught sight of a gathering of birds, birds flying and wheeling and resting on some object hard to define, but which he opined to be a dead whale.

Brown levelled the glass at it.

“It’s a wreck,” said he. “Masts gone and water-logged.” He took the wheel and altered the course of the ketch, steering towards the wreckage and the birds.

It was the lugger almost to a certainty, to judge by the size and by the fact that the disaster was a recent one. The fact was clearly demonstrated by the birds, or at least by the great burgomaster that had lit on the dead body of a man. It was lying on the deck tangled in some of the gear, and the bird was perched on the shoulders attacking the head. These birds, like the birds of the Galapagos, seemed absolutely fearless of man. The approach of the ketch did not drive them away, nor did it deter the burgomaster from its work.

Attacking the skull, the strokes of its beak came clear through a silence broken only by the bow-wash of the yawl. It was like the sound made by a woodpecker.

Brown, handing the wheel over to Cheke and dropping below, came up with a rifle. Next moment the bird dropped headless by the body.

“And now you’ve done it,” said Mr. Fishuck.

He did not explain what had been done other than the killing of a carrion bird. Maybe the fate of the Ancient Mariner, heard of at some penny reading or concert recitation, was in his mind. It would have been enough. But Brown was not listening to him. He was looking at the wreckage drawing astern.

“There’s no boat,” said he; “it would have been battered to pieces by the sea. The whole giddy lot went down, except that chap on deck there—and serve them right, putting their noses into our business.”

But there was something other than the wrecked lugger to be attended to. The coast, now close up, showed a beach broken to the south by a mangrove forest, but running northward into the heat-haze and destitute of everything but sand.

Sand, silence, solitude and sunlight. These were the four presiding deities of this great land, unless we add a fifth—thirst.

The ketch was sailing now dead on for this beach, which lay scarcely three miles away.

Friday Island, their true destination and the pointer for the gold, should lie off this beach, unless the charts lied and unless Brown had been seriously wrong in his navigation.

But now, northward, the heat-haze lifting a bit, something could be seen, something that seemed floating on the sea, something that was not a ship. It was an island.

Friday Island.

“Yes, that’s it,” said Brown. “I’ve been steering for it, and I haven’t hit the bull’s-eye, but it’s it for certain.” He had re-taken the wheel, and he altered the course of the ketch for the north.

Cheke seemed as though he were going to make some remark, but he evidently thought better of it. He went forward and, shading his eyes, gazed at the apparition before them, for in some curious way the island, owing perhaps to a clinging of the haze, seemed now more tenuous than the sea. Now, as they came closer, it became smaller, resolving itself into a mass of rock with two crags cutting the sky.

The whole mass was grey in colour, and in parts white. It seemed to have been negligently whitewashed, an appearance due to the droppings of innumerable sea birds through the years. It was this greyness that had contributed largely to its ghostly and tenuous appearance from a distance, and now could be seen the birds that haunted the place.

Seated in long lines, they proclaimed that it was of basalt formation, for only in basalt do you get shelves. A few of the birds were in the air. As the ketch drew closer these latter ceased wheeling above the rocks and came to challenge her. Close now, the whole company broke out in complaint—a wheezy cry rising to bagpipe shrillness and evidently inspired by animosity. A sound enough to have raised the hair on the head of Mr. Fishuck, only that gentleman was below, having turned in for a well-deserved sleep.

Cheke, at the request of Brown, got the sounding-lead going when they were under the lee of the island. The lead gave fifteen fathoms, and at that they dropped the anchor, the ketch swinging to her moorings a gun-shot from the basalt cliff and a quarter of a mile from the shore.

And now as Harding stood casting his eyes about him there seemed something familiar about that beach, those clumped mangroves to southward and that parched country desolate as the distant hills; a mile away along the beach to northward there was a rock jutting up out of the sand like the horn of a rhinoceros. The sight of it brought everything together and explained the familiarity of the scene. It was the beach he had seen in his dream. Or nearly so. There was just enough difference between the remembered dream scenery and the reality to allow Doubt to have its say; all the same, the thing

came as a slight shock to him, especially when he remembered how in the dream he had been going ashore with Brown and Cheke, and his feeling of foreboding. However, the impression, such as it was, did not last long, and presently he was discussing with Brown the immediate position of things.

Due east of the island lay the beach where the long-dried river was supposed to be, the river of Captain Summers' dream.

Due east would mean a bearing taken from the centre of the island, to be absolutely correct. But absolute correctness was not essential; they were not in search of a cache, but a river-bed, which, if it existed, would be easily found.

As it was late in the day they determined to put off landing till the following morning, and the arrangement was that Brown, Cheke and Harding should form the landing party, leaving Mr. Fishuck and the negro to keep ship. They would take a tent, provisions and all the tools necessary; not forgetting water.

That night, left alone on deck to keep an anchor watch, Harding had time to review the whole position in which he found himself, its commitments and its possibilities in the way of gold. Strangely enough, the present scarcely occupied his thoughts. Against that background of lone sea and desolate country, he saw neither adventure nor gold. He saw Sydney, with its skyscrapers and teeming crowds, Bondi and its bathing-beach, Uncle Charles, and in the centre of the picture Mary Summers, that faithful little figure, the first friend he had met since leaving England, and maybe the truest.

The story of the modern world is mainly the story of gold.

The world has almost completely ignored the fact that in the years before 1848 it was comparatively a poor world. In 1848 San Francisco Bay lay desolate and with no sign of habitation except a few fishermen's huts. That was only ninety years ago. Then gold was found in the Sacramento River. Almost at once California leapt alive. Men trekking across the plains for the promised land and ships turning their prows towards the Golden Gate.

The gold that was to give life to trade and a new impetus to industry, the gold that was to build cities and bridge continents, did not come into the world after the fashion of a god. The real gods who preside over the real things, Demeter of the harvests and Jupiter of the rains, would have nothing to do with it, one would imagine. There was no public entry heralded by trumpets, it had to sneak into circulation by the only doors open to it—the doors of the drink-shops, the brothels and the gambling hells. No wonder it was tainted.

All the same, it made California; it spread energy through the States; an energy that, further spreading, invigorated Europe and the world.

Exactly the same may be said of the Australian gold, which, leaving the ground as a metal, at once caused champagne fountains to spout in the thirsty desert, houris to materialize in the form of whores and Fortune in the guise of card-sharpers.

It seems a fixed law that the finding of gold by man stirs to life, at once, all that is most evil in him. Afterwards it may be different. Gold, once it has begun to change hands and to travel, may build hospitals and churches and endow charities as if to make up for its first wild fling; but it is born a rake, or at least with all the misleading powers of a rake.

The South African gold added its flood to that from California and Australia. Klondyke came along with its contribution, and in 1914 the flood had reached its height and the western world its peak of prosperity.

The world was prepared for war.

The Great War was largely fought on tick based on the promise of gold. It vitalized the war just as in the old days it had vitalized trade. Then, when the war was over and it was preparing to vitalize peace, they took it and

made it a prisoner in the cellars of the central banks of America and England. That which had been so carefully dug out of the earth was buried again; the labour of the miners of Australia, California, South Africa and Klondyke had produced the stuff; it required no labour to bury it again—only the stroke of a statesman's pen.

However all that may be, the history of Australia has been written with a golden pen.

Brown, long ago, and before the discovery of Captain Summers' document, had impressed this fact on Harding, also he had given him a brief sketch of the gold-mining industry and the methods of obtaining the metal, which one might summarize in this fashion!

There are two forms of gold in the rough: gold that is found in veins in some rock formation, and alluvial gold, that which is produced by the action of water on the rock formation.

The banks and beds of rivers close to the auriferous rock formations are the places to hunt for alluvial gold. The river may have dried up or changed its course and ceased to exist for centuries; all the same, in its once bed the gold that it once carried will be found in the form of nuggets or as dust. Captain Summers' golden river was, from all accounts, of this nature.

An hour after sunrise next morning the boat put off laden with tent, provisions, tools and a compass. These having been put ashore, it came back to fetch the three members of the land expedition.

The beach just here is of sand, dun-coloured with dark patches telling of some mineral admixture—possibly iron. To Harding it was quite a different beach from the beach seen from the deck of the yawl; vaster, more lonely, more impressive in a tragic way.

People talk glibly about desolation just as they talk glibly about death. These things, so closely allied, have to be seen to be believed in. Harding had never seen desolation before, or so it seemed to him.

Gulls' voices came on the wind with the sound of the small waves breaking along a league of shore; as they came up to where the beach was softer and more friable another voice joined with those of wind and gull—the whisper of the sand blown by the wind, a sound suggestive of secrecy, as though the whisperer were telling something behind a hand to the ear of the listener.

The beach was not a place to linger upon if one were alone. It rose swiftly to meet the scrub and bay cedar bushes of the true land and the infinite-seeming plain that stretched away to the distant hills; rising and falling, it is true, and marked here and there with hillocks, yet all the same, and from its vastness giving the impression of a flat surface, lonely as the surface of the moon.

An extraordinary feeling came for a moment to Harding as he recognized that this strange ground which he trod on was all the same in direct physical connection with Sydney, its crowds, its streets, its skyscrapers. That he would only have to walk to meet Uncle Charles and Mary Summers and the rest of the people he had known. However, he had no time to indulge in dreams and speculations. The tent had to be put up and the camp arranged, but even before that they had to take a glance at the ground of operations.

Friday Island, a quarter of a mile long, lay across the sparkling sea, and from where they stood seemed to challenge them, saying: "Well, there you are; due east of me was the position given you by the document that brought

you here; you are now due east of me. The river-bed you are hunting for will be found, if your document is correct, within the length of my length. Quarter of a mile of beach is all you have to search—well, get to it.”

And they did, after having first raised the tent and put the provisions and water under its shade. They had pitched the tent a hundred yards from the beach and almost in the middle of a line corresponding to the length of the island, and now they began their search for any indication that might lead to the location of the once river-bed.

Placer mining (as surface mining is called) is full of surprises. You are hunting for the bed of a river, or at all events for earth close to where a river has been, and you may find what you want on a hill-top, owing to the fact that the centuries have raised the old river-bed to this position.

Again, you may find alluvial gold where no river has ever been; that is to say on a sea beach where the sea washed up auriferous sands; such places are known as “ocean placers” or “beach diggings”. They are neither numerous nor important in the history of mining.

Again, though a river as a rule is the mother of most alluvial gold, some placer deposits have been caused by ice, and their position indicates where glacial moraines have been.

Others are produced by the effect of frost, and thaw breaking up rocks and the vein gold in them.

Again, others have been produced by deposits of volcanic mud containing gold.

But the old river-bed cause of placer deposits is the one most frequent.

Brown was well up in this theory, and he had kept his companions informed in conversations on board the ketch. But there was a point about placer mining—indeed, about any gold-mining—on which Brown had not yet touched, and that point was this—in gold-mining water is essential. Whether it is a stamp-mill crushing quartz or a humble old placer miner washing pay-dirt in his dish, water is essential to separate the gold from the lighter stuff with which it is mixed.

And this coast had a reputation for being waterless.

It seemed to him that despite this reputation water might be found either in the form of a river or a lake, and the reason he gave was that the original river that had left the placer deposits (according to Captain Summers’ information) would, changing its course, not have removed itself to a great

distance; on the other hand, it might, owing to a recession of the ground, have formed a lake.

But neither lake nor river was to be seen this morning; nothing but the desolate country stretching to the far hills under the hot blue morning sky. The ketch had a condensing apparatus on board, so that the expedition would have enough water in the event of a prolonged stay, but there would be none available for gold-mining purposes. Captain Summers had doubtless intended to peg out a claim after having scooped all the stuff he could find in the way of dust or nuggets, but though nuggets might have been possible to collect, dust of the ordinary fine sort would have been impossible—without water. And there was no indication of surface water.

They discussed all this now. The difficulty was new to Harding; but it had been in the minds of Brown and Cheke all along—without, however, putting them off. There were always difficulties where gold was concerned. Even if they failed to collect more than a small quantity of stuff for sample, that would be enough to cause a gold-rush to the Northern Territory, then artesian wells would be sunk or methods of using sea water would be devised.

The great thing was to locate a mine. They divided, Brown walking south and Cheke north, prospecting the ground as they went, Harding accompanying Brown.

It was a fact indicative of the curious relationship between these three people that Harding had fallen away from Cheke in companionship and in favour of Brown. The suspicions that had entered into his mind as regards Cheke and the killing of Brown's woman may have been the cause; at all events, the fact remained, and now as they roved the plain in search of gold-bearing indications he was with Brown.

In the very centre of the terrain they had set about to explore a tract of sand lay stretching east and west. It was beach sand; at least, there seemed no difference between it and the sand of the beach where it was not discoloured by iron filtration, and it seemed to hint of a depression in the ground.

“Look at it,” said Brown. “There must be some sort of depression in the soil to hold the sand like that, and it's running east to west just as a river-bed would run; let's follow it.”

They walked along by the sand track as they might have walked along by a river-bed; for nearly half a mile it led them and then it gave out.

Beyond, the ground showed nothing to indicate the bed of a once river. Still, as Brown well knew, when dealing with geology one is dealing sometimes with catastrophe.

The vein of metal running through the quartz, which Geology predicts will continue to run for a certain distance, may be interrupted by subsidence or earthquake, and just the same may be said of a river-bed, which may be lifted or lowered or broken in its trend.

“The first thing I’ll do,” said Brown, “is to see how deep this sand goes and what sort of ground it covers. We’ll have to dig into it; that will do tomorrow. Today we’ll just look around for more indications.”

They did, striking away for miles into the country, a country empty of all signs of life and silent as a dream. Later in the day, as they stood for a moment before turning to come back, they saw something to the north, a thin wreath of smoke snaking its way up through the almost windless air—the smoke from some black fellows’ camp-fire, telling that the appearance of desolation and emptiness of this strange land was elusive, also conveying a warning against leaving the camp unguarded when they slept that night.

Harding kept second watch that night, beginning after twelve o'clock, to be relieved at four in the morning by Cheke. Some time just after one o'clock the temperature fell. The night was absolutely cloudless, and the nearly full moon cast her light on the desolate land and the empty sea.

Then a breeze came blowing from the north, then veering to the nor'-nor'-west and increasing in force; the change in the compass direction seemed to have given it a vicious twist, for as it increased it seemed less a wind than a collection of whirlwinds, for suddenly in the moonlight came marching down the beach, like a grotesque figure in a carnival, a sand-devil. He was made of all the loose sand within reach of the fingers of his particular wind, and in a moment he was followed by his brother.

Sand-devils and water-spouts occur generally as family groups; there are generally two or more in the area of disturbance, and there were more than two in this instance, for, as Harding watched, his attention was attracted by a third. It had risen from the loose sand of the sand track that Brown had considered as possibly covering the once river-bed; it ran to a height of forty or fifty feet, and it was not opaque. Harding could see the moon through the upper part of it. It was like looking at the moon through a rotating brown muslin curtain. Then a curious thing happened; as though sighting its fellows, and trying to follow them, it attempted to leave the sand surface that had given it body, if not birth, with the result that it instantly collapsed. The rough ground and sage bushes seemed to have tripped as a kink in a carpet may trip a man; only it did not fall face forward, so to speak; it fell by sinking, concertina-fashion, so that its component sand was scattered at large but retained in the area from which it had risen.

The wind, as though exhausted by the construction of these sand-devils, began to die down, and presently the night fell to an almost dead calm.

When Cheke took on watch Harding was so tired that he did not bother to mention the occurrence, and at breakfast he just spoke of it, but with indifference. However, the sand tract beyond the tent was not so indifferent. It spoke quite clearly of the trampling of the whirlwind in mounds and ridges of sand, and a couple of white objects that had been sanded over and were disclosed.

One was a bone—the temporal bone of a human skull; the other was a piece of paper.

“Hullo,” said Brown when, called out of the tent by Harding, he cast his eyes on these things. “That’s the wind; it’s dug them up.” He glanced at the paper, on which were scrawled a few words, and tried to decipher these, but failed; then he put the paper in his pocket and returned to the tent, and came back in a few minutes bearing a shovel, and followed by Cheke carrying a spade over his shoulder. Then, choosing the spot where the skull-bone had been found, they began to dig. They had not far to go. Almost at once things began to turn up—things that had been lightly sanded over and things hidden more deeply; an axe came to light, and a spade of the heart-shaped variety common in Spain and some foreign countries. Then came a cash-box, heavy as though filled with gold; it was unlocked, and when they opened it it was filled with sand.

“Now, what in the nation were those fools doing that it could have got filled like that?” asked Cheke. “Where’s the sense in it?”

“There’s no sense in it, only sand,” said Brown. They were the first words he had spoken to Cheke for a long time past; there had been nothing in his manner to indicate enmity, only in some curious way he avoided speech with him, yet did it in such a manner that no offence could be inferred or taken.

“Sand has a habit of getting in anywhere,” said Brown, “and here’s a hole in the side. It must have got in through there.”

“Hullo!” said Cheke. He had unearthed something strange, a mummified arm and hand. They went on digging and a whole body came to view; it seemed made of brown leather. It had no head. A cord was tied round its middle and to the other end of the cord a sack. The sack seemed filled with stones. Brown, on his knees, made a slit in the sack-cloth, put in his hand and produced a nugget of almost pure gold.

“Now we’re getting at things,” said he.

“Looks like it,” said Cheke. He was kneeling in front of the other.

Something about the size of a child’s head and covered in sack-cloth drew his attention. It was a bag tied at the mouth and containing what seemed sand. But the weight told a different tale. The bag held gold-dust, and to confirm the business Brown pointed to several specks of gold at the point where the cord—it was a lanyard—tied the sack.

Now continuing to dig and search, they unearthed a tent-pole and the canvas of a tent. The canvas was twisted round the pole in an extraordinary manner recalling a half-furled umbrella. Deeper down they came on a pick and shovel, a pan that had evidently been used for washing gravel and some cans of food. Sardines and bully beef by the shape of the larger tins, for the labels on them had vanished.

They worked on this job of unearthing, or rather unsanding, the remains of a once expedition in silence, but after the first hour, and when they had explored a considerable space, there was nothing more showing. Then, almost sure that they had uncovered all there was to be found of value, they sat around and smoked.

Mr. Fishuck, who had been watching operations from the ketch, had rowed off, leaving Jimbo in charge of the ship. He made scarcely any comment on the finds, but, true to form, he dealt with what ought to have been found.

“Where’s the other man?” asked he.

“What other man?” asked Harding.

“The chap that was with this chap,” replied Mr. Fishuck, pointing with his thumb over his shoulder at the headless mummy. “He wouldn’t have been here alone, this chap wouldn’t, and where’s his clothes?”

“He wouldn’t have had much clothes in this sweltering place,” said Brown. “I make it out in this way. He surely had other people with him; they may have gone sick and died. Who knows but when the thing happened that left him like this he was alone? There may have been a big storm—the tent points to that; but there’s one thing I can’t understand, and that is why he tied that bag of nuggets to his waist. Men do funny things sometimes, but, if you ask me, I’d say that this was a thing no sensible man would have done. I work it out this way: he wasn’t sensible when he did it.”

“How do you mean?” asked Harding.

“Well, why tie a thing like that to himself in a place like this? Why tie it, anyhow, seeing the weight of it? As I seem to read the business, he was alone here, going a bit dotty, and then a storm came—the same that twisted the tent and sanded it over—and to keep a tighter clutch on the gold he tied it to himself. That’s how I read it, but it doesn’t matter; what really matters is we’ve got the gold, such as it is.”

“But there’s something else that matters, seems to me,” said Cheke. “It’s plain that this chap and his mates were placer mining on the bed of that old

river. What became of his mates I don't know, and how he came to his end I don't care; what I'm thinking of is the sand that covered him; there must have been a big wind to bring the sand up like that, but, however that may be, the fact is that the mining ground is covered, and covered for good, or until another wind gets up to blow the stuff back where it came from—and that mightn't be for years."

Brown was examining the bit of paper he had picked up. At first sight there had seemed nothing on it, so he had thrust it into his pocket. But now, looking at it attentively, vague indications that it had been written upon showed up in the strong sunlight. The ink had almost completely faded away, but one word, or rather ghost of a word, could just be made out: "Friday".

"I bet that's a copy of the paper I found at old Summers'," said Harding after he had examined it. "Look here, just before 'Friday' there has been a word that's nearly gone, but the last letter, if you hold it in the light like this, is 'f'—most likely it was 'of', and the probability is that the two words before it were 'due east'. 'Due east of Friday' would be the whole reading. If that's so, it is clear that we have hit on the remains of the Summers expedition."

"It doesn't matter," said Brown. "What's more to the point is how that mummy there lost its head. The body may have been sanded over all but the head, and the birds would do the rest. Maybe that's how it was, but it doesn't matter. We've got to bury that mummy, and after that it seems to me there is nothing more to be done here, though I'd like to have one more scratch round in the sand on the chance of finding something else."

"Friday," said Mr. Fishuck, who had picked up the paper and was gazing at it. "Friday—can't get away from it."

"Get away from what?" asked Harding.

"Friday—you can't get away from it, and here it turns up again wrote plain."

"What are you driving at?" asked Brown. "Do you mean luck or what?"

"I ain't giving it no name," replied the omen-teller, "not till we get back to Sydney in our skins, which I'm doubting."

"Oh, go and hang yourself," said Brown. "Here, lend a hand with that shovel. We've got to get that thing buried before we do anything else. Come along, shift yourself."

They did not bury the body in the sand; they dug a permanent grave on the northern border of it, and, having placed the body in it, covered it over and left it there to lie for all eternity by the breaking sea, unknown, unnamed, but guessed to be the body of the lost mariner Captain James Summers.

Then, under the direction of Brown, the gold was shipped on board the ketch.

He and Harding did the job, making one trip of the business and storing the bag of nuggets in the lazarette and the little bag of gold-dust in Brown's bunk.

That done, they came on shore.

They brought ashore with them a bottle of whisky, part of the stores that had been taken on board at Thursday Island—Brown expressing the opinion that now everything was done they ought to have a drink to celebrate things, and Harding agreeing they brought the thing ashore—but they did not open it. It was left in the tent while supper was being prepared.

The sun, now getting down into the west, painted sea and island and the long line of beach stretching into the warm evening haze.

The ketch showed like a child's toy afloat on the glassy swell coming in round Friday Island to break in gentle rollers on the beach, where the three men sat before their tent smoking after supper and looking towards the ketch, where Jimbo and Mr. Fishuck could be seen, the latter seated on the hatch combing, knitting.

For a long time past, as I have said, the relationship between Brown and Cheke had been causing anxiety to Harding. There was nothing much to show. Sometimes the two men seemed almost friendly; never at any time had there been a word of dispute between them; yet Harding sensed an antagonism that threatened tragedy should it develop.

Did Brown suspect Cheke as the killer of that woman he had spoken of?

This question had several times occurred to the mind of Harding, evoking no answer.

But there was one thing certain: if he did there would be trouble yet before the expedition returned to Sydney. Brown was not the man to conclude matters and part with Cheke, maybe not to find him again, without satisfying himself about this business. However, this evening had nothing to show pointing to any danger ahead in this way. It is true that Brown did most of the talking, but there was nothing in his conversation hinting of animosity or even of tension.

They were discussing the find and the possibility of the dead body being that of Captain Summers. Brown thought it possible.

“But, anyhow,” said he, “it doesn't matter much so far as that girl, his daughter, is concerned; she'll have her share in the finding same as if it was proved to be her father, since the document that gave us the clue came from

her—or, at least, from that book of the old Captain's which was in her mother's possession."

"Yes," said Harding; "and what do you think that gold will be worth when it's weighed and assayed?"

"All of ten thousand," replied the other.

"Well, here's another point," said Cheke: "how about the place?"

"In what way?" asked Brown.

"Selling the claim to a syndicate; that is to say, claims. We can stake this place out with claims between me and you and Harding here, not to mention the hands on board ship."

"Yes," said Brown, "claims on disappointment. Old Summers and his pals raked in all the surface stuff before that sand-storm took them—or whatever it was took them, leaving him and the tent sanded over—and by the same token it has just occurred to me that the whole of this business can be explained."

"How?"

"Black fellows. Natives may have raided the camp, done in old Summers' companions—either that or carted them off into the interior——"

"Maybe," said Cheke; "but that's beside my point, which is that our yarn and our findings are quite good enough showing to found a syndicate upon. Sydney is aching to spend money on this sort of thing—and why shouldn't she?"

"Why shouldn't she? Even if one could invent a dredger to lift all this sand, there would be nothing to find. The old river-bed was broken, as far as I can see, away up beyond there, and only this beach part was left, and that was skinned by the Summers crowd—and we have the skin."

"You say as far as you can see," cut in Cheke.

"I meant as far as an honest man can see," corrected Brown.

Cheke made no reply. For a moment he seemed on the point of speaking, and to Harding it seemed that the explosion he had always dreaded was about to shatter things, but nothing happened, and he took the moment's silence as an opportunity to propose drinks. The bottle of whisky was fetched out of the tent, also three glasses and the stone jar of water.

The whisky was a spirit labelled “Whisky” by a Chinaman, and the label had been printed in Japan. That was the nearest it ever got to Scotland, even though it was labelled “Scotch”. However, well diluted with water, it was not bad, according to Brown, and after the strains and stresses of the day it induced the feeling of heedlessness to worry, which is the fleeting gift of alcohol, even though it is labelled “Scotch” by a Chink. It affected Harding more than the others, even though he diluted it more with water.

The evening became all at once transformed, and the island and the ketch, caught by the light of sunset, spiritualized, also the gull-flocks spreading and contracting in the sky as they made up their minds about roosting.

Later on the three men were talking the language of the camp, and what they were talking about Harding afterwards could not remember, or only broken details about hunting happenings in Africa. Then, helped by the “Scotch”, the sleep of the desert and the plain fell on him and held him like chloroform, whilst the night wind whispered to the sand and the sea sang to the great white moon drifting westward, pursued now by the dawn breaking over Queensland.

Harding awoke, the cry of a swooping gull bringing him to his senses. It was almost day in the east, though the sun had not yet risen above a line of morning bank stretching on the horizon.

The ketch, outlined against Friday Island, swung to her moorings on an oily sea, a thin wreath of smoke rising from her galley flue. This wreath of smoke spoke of activities on board and also of the mentality of Mr. Fishuck.

As a rule, he cooked, or incited Jimbo to cook, with the aid of a primus stove; but under the stress of certain moods he would light the galley fire; scouring and cleaning moods mostly, but sometimes just moods. This morning he had probably made up his mind to start Jimbo on a washing job. However that might be, the thin wreath of smoke rising from the galley flue touched the scene with an extraordinary magic, giving what they used to call in the old days a “living touch” to the picture of island solitude and desolate blue-grey sea.

It was pleasant to lie on one’s side and look at it, calculating at the same time the number of miles it all was from Sydney and the nearest point of civilization. It brought up quiet and touching memories: Mrs. Summers and the sitting-room, with its reminiscences of the Captain, Mary Summers, the tiny garden, the cat. It brought up also the question: “How are they?”

The question came to Harding now sudden and sharp. Now that the expedition was almost over, and the gold, such as it was, secured, his mind seemed freed from an obsession, an obsession that had weighed upon thought and blinkered his eyes. He could think clearly now, even with the remains of the hooch slightly clouding his brain, and see clearly the faces and forms of his friends and befrienders.

He recognized what he owed to the Summerses. Had he fallen into bad hands on his arrival at Sydney, what might not have happened to him? Leaving all that aside, the people themselves appealed to him with a power enhanced by distance and the desolation of the picture before him, a desolation relieved only by the ketch and the wreath of smoke rising from her galley flue, a desolation that told him that in Sydney, or any great city, people could be as remote from help and human sympathy as here on the shores of the Gulf of Carpentaria, with for companions only the Molly Mawks and the skuas fierce in beak and wing.

The Summerses had been none too well off; not on the rocks exactly, but in very shoal water, in such a condition that a small disaster of any kind might mean shipwreck.

A great anxiety suddenly filled his mind; it came coupled with a craving to get back to Sydney at once, a craving to see Mary and to assure himself that she was all right. Perhaps her image had been growing in his mind, as the old writers used to say; whether or not, it was there very fully developed and calling to him to return to the reality.

He shifted his position, lying more on his right side, and in the daylight, grown stronger, he could see the land from where he lay to the distant hills. He could also see the tent close up to him and from the tent a foot protruding. It was Brown's, evidently, to judge by the hobnailed boot it was wearing. Brown was asleep and snoring, and away a good bit off, lying by the sand near where it had been disturbed by their digging, Cheke was lying.

Harding remembered the Scotch, and how he had left Brown and Cheke at it, being too tired himself even to take pleasure in drink. He got up and, stretching himself, came along to where Cheke was lying. He was resting on his right side and his left arm was stretched out. It was the attitude of exhaustion, or seemed so, till Harding, quite close now, stopped short before the fact that the man on the ground was not asleep, but dead.

The cause of death was as evident as the fact. He had been struck on the head with a flint stone. The stone lay close to the body.

For a moment Harding stood before the fact unable to formulate his thoughts. Then, turning, he came running back to the tent.

Brown was already astir. He had come out of the tent. The drink that he had taken the night before had produced little effect on him. He had come out of the tent to see Cheke lying in the distance, and Harding approaching him. He saw Harding stop and stare at the recumbent figure. Now he was running back, waving his arms and shouting. Brown did not wait for him. He started at a run to meet him, and the two, without a word except the one word "dead", came to the body and stood.

Brown went down on his knees and examined the wound in the head. Then he cast his eyes about as though looking for traces, examining the soil carefully and calling out to the other not to move about and disturb the ground.

Harding watched intently and without a word until the investigator, still on his knees, though at a distance from the spot where he had first knelt, pointed to something just on the border of the sand. Harding looked. He could not distinguish anything much at first till the other pointed out some marks. Then, once exhibited like this, they were clearly the imprints of toes and the ball of a foot.

"Recent," said Brown. "The sand tells that."

He got on to his feet and, walking with bent head, studied the ground carefully, but without discovering any more footprints; a fact accounted for by the hardness of the soil. Then he stood up and, shading his eyes, stared over the country towards the spot where they had seen the smoke of a fire, and sure enough in the haze of the hot and opal-tinted sky of early morning a thin thread of smoke was rising, but at a greater distance than that seen yesterday.

"Black fellows," said Brown.

They were almost the only words he had uttered since starting to investigate.

Harding made no reply.

What had really happened in the night? He had left those two together with that bottle of whisky and, he suspected, a deadly enmity on the part of Brown towards Cheke.

Cheke was lying there dead, his head battered in by a stone; there was no trace of the disturbance of sand that would have been caused by a fight.

Suspicion pointed her finger at Brown, so did common sense. And yet, on the other hand, Brown's manner had been quite natural, just in accordance with the manner of an ordinary man who is facing the tragic and sudden death of a man he does not care for, to put it mildly. If Brown had exhibited horror or sympathy in his manner Harding's vague suspicion would have been strengthened tenfold.

Then, again, there was the footprint—the print left by a naked foot that had most evidently never worn shoe or sandal. Brown went to the stone and picked it up. It was no ordinary stone; it was a disc-shaped flint, but it showed no sign of having been worked or attached to any instrument or weapon.

Leaving the body where it lay for the moment, they returned to the tent carrying the stone. The first thing to be done was to attract the attention of the people on the ketch, and there sure enough on deck was Mr. Fishuck laying out a jumper to dry. He had evidently been washing, and this was the first of the wash; before they could signal him he had dived below and now reappeared with another jumper and a lot more articles, which he proceeded to string out whilst Brown waved and shouted to him. But, unfortunately, the distance was too great for the voice to bridge distinctly, and the washerman, not being a lip-reader, could not tell that Brown was shouting:

“Come off at once! Mr. Cheke has been killed! Leave Jimbo in charge of the boat and come off! Come *off*, you diddering idiot, and don't stand staring at me!”

Instead of coming off, the figure on deck, leaving the laundry to dry, vanished below, having raised a hand as much as to say, “Yes, I hear you, but there's no hurry.”

Brown cursed him and they returned to the tent, outside of which they sat, Brown facing the plain, and with an eye on the form of the man lying over there as if asleep.

No birds had appeared yet, but they would surely come as soon as the telegraphy of the desert wirelessly the fact that Cheke was not shamming. Brown kept watch.

Harding, who had been silent up to this, was seated now nearly opposite the other. His mind had been too deeply disturbed for talk, but now, his ideas having formulated themselves, he spoke what was in his mind.

“Look here,” said he. “Something is worrying me, and I'm going to say it straight out.”

“Yes?”

“I’ve felt for a long while that you have had a down on Cheke.”

“That is not entirely correct,” replied Brown.

“In what way?”

“The word ‘down’ does not exactly fit the case. It’s too trivial a word, anyway. You remember what I told you about that woman when I was on safari in Africa years ago?”

“The woman who was murdered?”

“Yes. ‘Murdered’ is the word. Well, it was Cheke who did the business.”

“Are you sure?”

“No.”

“Well, what do you mean by saying he did the business if you are not sure?”

Brown laughed.

“I was talking of my own mind. I am sure in my own mind, but the surety does not—or I should say did not—carry with it the exact evidence to convict him in a court of law. When I took him on this expedition I wanted to have him close to me and away from what they call civilization. I had hoped that something would occur to bring us to a conclusion over this matter. I watched him carefully, but couldn’t find a flaw in his armour that I could get a dirk into. Once—that night when he came back drunk at Thursday Island—I tried to prize his mind open with a question; I mentioned her name. His reaction to it, drunk as he was, gave me nothing exact to go on, though it confirmed what was in my mind. I never have been able to come to grips with him over the matter. A direct accusation would have brought me nowhere; he would have denied it. I had always hoped that somehow, in some manner, he would have given himself away. I felt that Providence would trip him up. Well, it did, and there he lies.”

“You had nothing to do with it?”

“With what?”

“The killing of him.”

“I had everything to do with it.”

Harding drew back and gazed at the other. Brown laughed.

“But not in the way you think,” said he. “I brought him to his death by letting him join this expedition. Providence—or God, if you like the word better—did the executing.”

“That relieves me,” said Harding. “I had it vaguely in my mind that you two might have quarrelled, and that in spite of everything—that footprint in the sand, for instance—you might be accountable somehow.”

“Well, I’m not,” replied the other. “I’m glad you told me what was on your mind. If I’d killed him it would have been a fair fight, not with a foul blow on the back of his head. What must have happened was this. He was pretty well tanked, and wandered off, lay down and got his dose from some black fellow. I expect the camp has been watched by one of those beasts always ready for loot. He had nothing on him to take, which must have been a disappointment for the chap, but he was fair game, lying there dead to the world.”

Harding felt relieved; the bare suspicion of the thought that Brown might have caused Cheke’s death was removed. It was impossible not to believe him. They sat for a moment in silence, and then turned their heads, attracted by a sound from seawards.

Mr. Fishuck was coming off. He had dropped into the boat, and he now came sculling her from the stern and with his back to them. He seemed in a temper about something, probably at being called off in this manner, but they gave him no time to develop whatever grouse it was. Pointing to the body in the distance, Brown told his tale. The listener’s lower lip projected.

That was all he said.

To Harding his face was like nothing so much as the face of a rather soured nursemaid who has left children to play and come back to find them in mischief.

“Come and have a look at the body,” concluded Brown.

They went, and standing over the body Mr. Fishuck broke silence.

“Well!” said he. Then to Brown: “Was he stiff when you found him?”

“I found him,” said Harding. “At least, I woke first and saw him lying like this. No, he wasn’t stiff—just as he is now.”

Mr. Fishuck, hands on knees, bent down to examine what could be seen of the dead man’s face. Then he examined the stone. Then he scratched his head, and then he gave his opinion on the matter.

“He’s dead,” said he, “and there’s no crowner’s jury to tell if he killed hisself or was done in by some other party, so there’s nothing to be done but bury him.”

“How on earth could he have killed himself?” asked Harding, the picture of Cheke bashing himself on the head with a huge flint almost making him laugh.

“I don’t know,” replied the other, “but that’s what they says in the newspapers when a chap’s found like the likes of him. Where’s that spade?”

He went off to the tent and returned with the spade under one arm and the broad-bladed shovel over his shoulder. He mightn’t be able to do much in the talking line, but when it came to action he was not wanting. And at the moment he was almost a necessity.

Harding was experiencing what he had never read of in adventure books or imagined in practice—the horror of having to bury a comrade with one’s own hands. He had never been especially friendly with Cheke; still, Cheke had been a comrade, and however Brown had felt about him he had always been on friendly terms with Harding.

Brown seemed quite unaffected by Harding’s feelings on this matter; whilst Mr. Fishuck dug with the spade he helped with the shovel, so that in half an hour the hole was deep enough, the body placed in it, and the filling-up began.

Whilst this was going forward Harding, standing by and chancing to look towards the sou'-east, saw something moving in the distance—something that resolved itself almost at once into the form of a man. A far line of mangrove trees cut off the view of the beach beyond a distance of four miles or so. The figure that had suddenly appeared might have come from beyond the mangrove trees, advancing unnoticed, till now it was only some half a mile away.

The others stopped work when Harding called to them and stood now looking at the approaching form.

“White man,” said Brown; “but where the blazes has he come from?”

Fishuck the practical spat on the palms of his hands and re-started work.

“Better get this job over,” said he. “We’d better keep our mouths shut on this business; we don’t want no blasted inquiries dragging us maybe back here to dig this chap up again. I tell you, once the law gets hold of the tail end of a suspicion of foul play it keeps at it like a terrier with an old slipper, you mark me.”

“Foul play?” cried Harding. “There hasn’t been any, unless you mean the killing of him by a native, and that’s a plain tale and doesn’t want going into.”

“Maybe not,” replied the grave-digger; “but you put it to the Sydney police that a man has been murdered up here in the Northern Territory and ask them what they think of it. They’ll say they think they want to see for themselves what’s been done; and then on top of the police you’ll have the Pressmen. You’ll find yourself in the news. That gold will make you more in the news. You don’t want no bother, so just say nothin’ to this chap when he comes. Keep your mouths shut. It ain’t no business of anyone but us.”

This long speech was delivered almost without seeming effort, despite the energy the operator was putting into his work.

It was so just and sensible that Harding took the shovel from the tired Brown and fell to helping Mr. Fishuck. He saw in a flood the truth of what had been said. There was not a bit of good in advertising the news of Cheke’s death. On getting back to Sydney a statement might be made regarding the business, but for a stranger to get hold of the story and publish

it first, that was a different business. And for the first time Harding got, through Mr. Fishuck's words, something of the possible reaction of public opinion to this matter.

Foul play!

Might not the suspicion of foul play be cast on Brown or himself? When the story was told it would come out that he and the two others were put ashore for the night; that they had a bottle of whisky with them. The fact would come out that they had salvaged the gold and stowed it on the ketch; the suggestion might be made that in some dispute or quarrel over the gold or its division Cheke had been killed. That was a suggestion that arose at once from the bare facts as smoke rises from burning sticks. It is true they had shown Mr. Fishuck the disappearing remains of the footprint in the sand, but then Mr. Fishuck would not be considered an absolutely unimpeachable witness; he might be interested, or a friend of the killer.

Taking everything into consideration, silence was the wisest course.

They worked hard, and when the grave was filled in and smoothed over, after a certain fashion, they stood watching the stranger as he came slowly along; he seemed to limp, and he had something like a bundle flung over his left shoulder.

"That chap must have been wrecked," said Brown as he watched him come. "He can't be from the interior; he's from the coast-line; there's likely a wreck of sorts beyond those mangrove trees."

As the stranger drew closer a suspicion tinged with dread came to the mind of Harding. That thin figure, that face recalling in some queer way the face of a horse without a horse's grace and kindness—could it be Haggerstein? The same thought had come to Brown. The next moment confirmed matters.

Haggerstein, for he it was, had escaped from the lugger when she struck a sunken rock in the gale and with another man had made the coast in the lugger's dinghy. The other man was drowned in landing when the dinghy was wrecked in its turn, and Haggerstein, flung ashore, found himself in the burst of sunshine that followed the storm on the shore of the Gulf of Carpentaria, and seemingly the most lonely person on earth.

He had forgotten the ketch, or, remembering her, thought her wrecked like the lugger. He had forgotten everything but his present position. Strict attention to the moment and to detail had been the ruling law of his life, and had carried him along pretty successfully through the years. His position for

the moment was that of a shipwrecked mariner, and the immediate details, exclusive of the scenery, included amongst them the bones of the boat and some of her contents.

She had fortunately been cast ashore at the very peak of high tide; a wreck occurring at this physical moment will deliver up to the shore more of herself and contents than would be possible at any other time.

There wasn't much. The bottom boards, some planks, an oar, a small breaker containing water and a tin of Japanese biscuits—those biscuits they make in Osaka, with rice for a foundation. The tin was hermetically sealed, but Haggerstein was a Yank, and with the aid of a nail from the boat's planking he had opened the tin. Tin and water-breaker were part of the boat's emergency supply; the other articles had been washed away. With the pair of binoculars he always carried, and which were strapped to him when he escaped in the boat, he surveyed the country and its desolation; then, having fixed up matters as regarded food for the moment, the ingenious Haggerstein proceeded to think about a camp.

He had no canvas to make a tent, so he would have to sleep under the stars. That did not trouble him; nor did the fact that when his breaker of water was empty he would be in a bad position. He hollowed out a trench in the sand for sleeping purposes and had the good fortune to catch a crab that had ventured along the beach, left wet by the receding tide.

Next morning early, having breakfasted on the crab (uncooked), he proceeded on an expedition in search of water and supplies. The mangrove trees cut off his view of the great beach to northward, also of Friday Island and the ketch, and it was not until this morning that, having explored all the visible beach and country, he made his way through the trees and discovered the view of Friday Island, the ketch and the camp.

He had forgotten the ketch. When he had been refused admission on board her at Thursday Island there was more in the refusal than a rebuff. Cheke the day before had, under the influence of drink, told all about the expedition and the fact that it was a gold-hunt. Once put on the scent, nothing stopped Haggerstein. He inspired his disreputable friends on the pearling lugger with his own enthusiasm for the chase, and even the storm had not quite damped it; but the shipwreck drowned it, or seemed to for the moment.

For the moment Cheke, gold, the ketch—the whole business was swept from his mind, only to come back with a rush as he stood now shading his

eyes from the sun and staring at the distant picture embracing Friday Island, the ketch and the tent of the gold-seekers.

So the ketch had not been sunk by the gale; there she was without a spar lost, and there, somewhere by the tent, would surely be the chap with the tattooed face and the others of the party. Recognizing this, Mr. Haggerstein did a characteristic thing—sat down on the sand to consider matters.

The water-breaker, which he carried slung to a piece of rope, he placed beside him. The biscuit-tin he had cached before starting, taking with him enough to sustain him till his return, then with the binoculars which he had brought with him he surveyed the tent and the group of figures close to it. Three figures engaged in some work—digging. Yes, he could see the action of the two men delving with shovels whilst the third man looked on.

The idea “Gold” sprang at once to his mind.

These chaps must have located, or fancied they had located, the gold of which Cheke had spoken. That seemed quite clear, and having watched for a few moments he closed the binoculars, rose and resumed his way towards them. He would be in on this. He chuckled to himself at the way in which he had surprised them, and felt as satisfied as though the matter had been brought about by his own cunning and not by blind chance.

When he had shortened the distance by about half a mile he took another look.

The working party had ceased digging and were lifting something and carrying it towards the hole in the ground; he watched them putting it in, and as they did so he recognized the fact that it was a body. Then he resumed his way, walking as quickly as the ground permitted, his sharp mind wrestling with the problem presented by what he had seen. Without the binoculars now he could tell that they were working with their shovels to complete the burial. They had not seen him yet evidently, and as he came closer he dropped the binoculars, to be lost for ever, an action in keeping with his astuteness. Closer now, he saw them finishing their business, and now, as he drew closer still, he could tell that they had seen him.

They had all turned facing towards him, and they seemed consulting together.

When he had got within speaking distance Brown hailed him.

“Hello!” said he. “You here?”

“Yes, it’s me,” replied the other. “Funny, ain’t it, us meeting up again like this? Last saw you at Thursday Island, and now here we are again, as you might say.”

“Yes,” said Brown, “looks like it. Was that lugger that was following us your boat?”

“I came into the Gulf in a lugger,” replied Haggerstein, “and your boat kept ahead of us, but we weren’t following you that I know of. We were wrecked in that gale, and I managed to get ashore alone away down the coast there, and here I am.”

He put the breaker on the ground and sat down beside it, examining his left foot. He had light shoes on, and he kicked the left shoe off, revealing a stockingless foot and a sore heel. He dabbed at the heel with an old red handkerchief which he took from his pocket, then he replaced the shoe on his foot and produced a packet of “Lucky Strikes”.

“Anyone got a match?” he asked.

Brown gave him one and he lit up.

Harding had been watching all this with a chill at his heart. The very sight of the Yankee had started the chill. His presence was easily explainable: he had escaped in some way from the wreck of the lugger; all the same, his presence at this moment had a touch of fate about it, and also his position, sitting there almost on the grave of Cheke, the man he had known and chummed up with and got drunk with at Thursday Island.

Cheke had been in a way his friend; the death of Cheke would have to be explained, or, at least, his absence would have to be accounted for, and there was no time for consultation with Brown.

Brown, as he stood with his hands in his pockets looking down at the Yankee, was evidently thinking hard. Then he spoke.

“You wanted to join in with us at Thursday Island,” said he.

“Yes,” replied the other, “that’s so, but you weren’t keen, I remember.”

“Maybe not,” said Brown. His eyes were on the spade and shovel lying there and telling their tale of digging.

“I had it in my mind,” said Haggerstein, exhaling a lungful of smoke, “that you were after buried treasure; did you find it, may I ask?”

“Yes,” said Brown, “we did.”

Harding gasped, then he saw Brown's drift. The spade and shovel and the disturbed sand had to be accounted for; all the same, he doubted the wisdom of that admission. He could stand it no longer; he took Brown by the arm.

"Come to the tent," said he, "and help me to fix up those gadgets I was telling you of; meanwhile this gentleman can rest here till we come back."

When they were alone he turned to Brown.

"What made you tell him that?"

"The shovels, and more than that. We have got to get out of this place at once; leaving like that can only be explained to him by the fact that we have done our business and found what we were searching for."

"I see—but he is sure to ask about Cheke."

"I will tell him Cheke got drowned, washed away in that gale. It's just this. If I told him the truth—that Cheke had been done in by a native—he'd ask where was the body, and I'd have to say we buried it. That would give his mind a handle to work with. If he did nothing else he'd talk sure, and then you can fancy it getting into the newspapers: the question about aborigines, the inquiries sure to be made at Sydney, the suspicions that maybe we'd done him in during a quarrel. Fishuck's evidence would show that he went ashore with you and me; the bottle of whisky would come out; we'd be safe enough because we are innocent, but we wouldn't be safe from suspicion."

"Yes," said Harding, "I see all that."

"Leaving Cheke aside, we want to hide nothing more from this chap," went on the other. "I will show him the gold, and, what's more, I will declare it at Thursday Island. There's nothing like being clear and above-board."

Harding meditated a moment.

"Maybe you are right," said he, "but there's one thing you must do, and that is warn Fishuck on the business. Tell him your plan just as you have told me, and also Jimbo."

"Fishuck is all right," replied Brown, "but I'll tell him. I'll do so at once; and as for Jimbo, I'll tell him to answer no questions of any sort about anything."

“The irritating thing in the whole of this business,” said Harding, “is the fact that we have to take this chap with us; on any other coast in the world almost one could leave him to save himself, but you can’t do that here.”

They took down the tent that afternoon, Haggerstein lending a hand, and at a little before four o'clock, eight bells, everything was on board of the ketch; at four or slightly after the anchor was raised, and the ketch, spreading her sails to a sou'-west breeze, stood away from the island.

Haggerstein, who had helped in the embarkation, had never spoken a word with reference to Cheke; never asked after him or inquired what had become of him. Harding noticed this fact, more especially as he was waiting for the question. The Yankee's silence on this point seemed to him extraordinary. Had he forgotten the existence of Cheke? Surely not. During the time on shore he had studied Haggerstein and come to no favourable conclusion about him.

Physically Haggerstein had a long face, like the face of a horse, but wanting in a horse's kindliness of expression; mentally he had a mind with a turn for humour, of sorts. He had the American gift of humorous speech when talking of common everyday things; behind that gift his mind presented rather a murky problem.

He was seated now on the deck, as the ketch, all sail set and drawing away from island and coast, turned her bow to the open Gulf—seated with his legs spread out V-shape and holding something in his hand, something he had taken from an inner pocket.

Harding, watching, saw that it was a tiny pack of cards.

The horse-faced one, having shuffled the pack, spread the cards out on the deck between his legs and fell to studying them. He was engaged in a game of patience. He had come on board without a "by your leave" or "thank you"; evidently, looking on himself as a shipwrecked mariner, he thought thanks to be quite superfluous; however that may have been, looking at him now playing his game of patience, and apparently oblivious to everything else, one might have taken him for a first-class passenger who had paid his fare.

At supper that night he had only Harding for companion, Brown being on deck looking after things, and Harding found him not uninteresting. The Yankee was a good deal more than a showman and provider of freaks and

wild animals for circuses: he was a philosopher of sorts. He believed in the power of mind over matter.

“Why, look you here,” said he: “get a chap blind-folded and he can’t tell the difference between cheese and candle-ends; get him hypnotized and you can do pretty much as you like with him as far as his senses go.”

“You mean you can make him do things against his will?”

“No, sir,” said Haggerstein; “that’s pure bunk, put about by the dime-novel writers. You can’t make a man do what’s against his nature or what he don’t want to, but you can make him believe what isn’t true as far as his senses go. F’r instance, there’s the yarn of a man who opened a restaurant and hypnotized all the people who came in; he had a menu with all sorts of things on it, but he gave them nothing to eat but bread and nothing to drink but water; it did not cost much to feed them, and that’s how he made his money.

“Well, that’s a tale, but there’s some truth in it; there’s nothing easier to deceive than a man, unless it’s a woman. Why, animals have twice the sense in that way, and I bet if baboons had pockets to carry purses in there’s not a share-pusher or con man that wouldn’t be wasting his time in having dealings with them. Look at rats. You may poison one, but not any more once they get to know how he died. Get to know? Why, they have coroner’s juries, or nearly as good; and when Jim Rat dies of stomach-ache, and the relatives go into the question after they’ve fought the will, and find he’s been eating bread-and-butter with green paste on it, they publish the fact, and your phosphorous relish is at a discount.”

“Yes, they’re clever,” said Harding, not noticing how the conversation was drifting, “and I’ve heard all sorts of yarns from sailors about them. That chap Fishuck, the man with the red scarf who helped to bring the tent on board, was in a funk about this boat when we started because there were no rats on board of her. He said they must have left her on purpose.”

“Meaning?”

“Meaning that we’d meet with some bad luck.”

“And did you?”

“Well, look at us.”

“By the way,” said Haggerstein, “I haven’t seen that other fellow.”

“What other fellow?” asked Harding, an uncomfortable feeling at his heart.

“That chap who went on the binge at Thursday. What’s this his name was?—Face—no, Cheke—that’s the chap—Cheke.”

At this moment Brown’s voice came hailing Harding. Brown was in the steering-well.

Now, sailing close to the wind, if the wind were light a gentle draught from the cabin brought sounds clearly to the steering-well. Brown, who had been on deck, had come into the steering-well purposely to hear what the Yankee was saying to Harding.

The death of Cheke had brought a strange sense of relief and release to the mind of Brown. Absolutely certain in his mind as to Cheke’s guilt, yet without the confirmation that the event or the criminal alone could supply, he had considered Cheke’s offer to come on the expedition as a God-sent opportunity to get alone or almost alone with the criminal, prize a confession out of him by some means or another, and then kill him.

He had often killed Cheke—mostly by strangling, the death Cheke had meted out to the woman.

Well, all that was gone, and Providence had acted as executioner, and everything would have been on the credit side but for this confounded Yankee turning up like this.

He had arranged the story to be told to him, and yet, listening to the conversation in the cabin, and Haggerstein’s point-blank question, he had called Harding out before an answer could be given. To tell the truth, he had suddenly doubted the power of Harding to deal with the question.

Giving directions to Harding to have a look to the port light, which was burning badly, he went into the cabin, took a cigar from a box that was lying in the rack, lit it and sat down. The horse-faced one, who was picking his teeth meditatively with a pocket-knife, accepted a cigar and then they began to talk.

Haggerstein seemed to have forgotten his question about Cheke; his interest, now he had got Brown to a *tête-à-tête*, was centred in the gold.

Brown had not only told him about it but shown it to him, the sack containing the nuggets and the bag of dust. Not only had the Yankee forgotten—or seemed to have forgotten—the question about Cheke, but also after a few words on the subject he seemed to have forgotten the material qualities of gold; he spoke like a bishop on the evil effects of it.

“Once you get a chap thinking in gold,” said Mr. Haggerstein, stretching out one leg in the bunk he was sitting on and knocking the end off his cigar-tip, though the ash had grown only to a quarter of an inch, “Once you get a chap thinking in gold everythin’ else is copper to him, including morals and good behaviour, and without morals and good behaviour where’s the world? That’s what I want to know. Where’s the world? Right from the start it seems. You look at a gold-rush and the honest-to-God miners; for every one of them there’s a dozen drink-sellers and gambling-joint owners and loose women on the location. The gold, no sooner does it come out of the ground than it’s turned into dissipation before it can settle down to what they call honest business.

“That stuff you’ve got on board here, before it gets into the bakers’ and butchers’ hands, will see a lot of life. It seems to me if you chucked it overboard you’d be savin’ a lot of sinners from trouble and magistrates and suchlike from scratching their heads how to treat them.”

“I suppose I could,” said Brown, perplexed by this turn of the conversation.

“That chap Cheke I met at Thursday Island,” went on the other—“and, by the way, what’s become of him, or is he forrard?”

“We lost him overboard in that storm,” said Brown. “What about him?”

“Lost him in the storm! Well, such is life; and how did he go?”

“He was swept over by a wave.”

“Swept over by a wave. Well, it’s a pity. Nicest chap I’ve met in a long while—but what I was going to say of him was just this: he wasn’t built, in my opinion, to stand fortune—not, so to say, in any big amount—and it’s maybe just as well you buried—I mean it’s as well he went over in that wave as you were saying.”

Mr. Haggerstein paused to re-light his cigar, which had gone out, and Brown sat before the trifid proposition that Fate had suddenly put in front of him.

What did Haggerstein mean? How much did he know? How much had he guessed?

Also, was that supposed slip intentional? Was it possible that, observing them yesterday morning, from a great distance, his eyes had been keen enough to discover what they were doing. For a moment Brown re-visualized the scene, re-pictured the distance between the tent and the grave

of Cheke and the spot where Haggerstein's presence first had become known to them.

They had first seen him when the filling-in of the grave had been completed and he was then a long way off, too far off in Brown's estimation for him to have observed details that occurred before the filling-in. Brown cogitated for a moment. Should he let the slip pass or should he say, "What did you mean about Cheke being buried?"

He instantly negated the suggestion. If Haggerstein were playing a game of any sort it were far better to let the game develop on its own lines without assisting it by questions.

"Yes, sir," went on the Yankee, puffing at his re-lighted cigar, "he wasn't built for hitting it high, wasn't Cheke. Why, the effect of alcohol on that chap was phenomenal! After we left you that day I proposed a walk on the beach to show him the natural beauties of Thursday, but he said that saloon bars was beautiful enough for him and in we went, and there we sat and talked.

"There are some chaps wishful to be quiet when drunk and some chaps wishful to be noisy, there are some chaps dumb as crabs and others like foghorns, and I'm blest if this chap Cheke—who you said fell over in that gale—I'm blest if he wasn't a sample of the lot, each taken in turns, for he'd sit there dumb as if he was thinkin' of his mother—you know that sort of look—and the next moment he'd be roaring against President Roosevelt. Then he'd fall quiet while he was being served with another highball, and then maybe he'd be smashin' bottles, but he kept his talk-mill going pretty constant through rain and shine, as you may say, and he told me a lot about himself and you all and the expedition, and where it was going; a good publicity man he'd have made if he hadn't gone falling overboard, as you say, in that gale."

He stopped and, throwing his cigar stump into the bowl on the table that did duty as ash-tray, lit a cigarette.

Brown was thinking. What did Haggerstein mean by "this chap Cheke who you said fell over in that gale"? And then, "if he hadn't gone falling overboard, as you say, in that gale"?

Why refer to his death and in those terms?

Haggerstein, the horse-faced, suddenly, to Brown, seemed to take on the attributes of the playful cat whose game is with a mouse. This, he told himself, was fancy, but it was more or less unpleasant.

“Of course,” went on Haggerstein, “it was all right with me, but it wasn’t common sense talking to a stranger, which I was with him, and telling what you were all after.”

“Why?” asked Brown.

“Well, you were after gold, weren’t you, and there’s never any use in beating a big drum if you’re on the track of gold. Then, you hadn’t applied for miners rights, which meant that a hundred to one you weren’t out prospecting, but that you were out treasure-hunting, and if gold gets the grab on people, a treasure-hunt is enough to raise the quick ’n the dead to join in. No, it wasn’t common sense of him to be advertising the thing to all and sundry.”

“Did he tell you we had not applied for miners rights?”

“Well, I don’t know, but that was the idea he gave me; and I seemed to gather that you and him was none too friendly.”

Brown’s mind became electrified.

“How did you gather that idea?” he asked.

“Just in talk.”

“Can you tell me anything in particular he said on that point?”

“He said, as far as I remember, that he thought you had a down on him for some old business about a woman.”

“About a woman?”

“Yes, that’s how I understood it, and I asked him how came it that he was a partner in this venture of yours, if you had a down on him, and he said you’d got him into it pretending everything was O.K. between you, but that you hadn’t more than started when he guessed you had him up the garden path so’s to get a clutch on him here in the back blocks, as you may say.”

“Well, now look here,” said Brown. “I never asked him to join this expedition. Mr. Harding told him of it and he asked to join, then I found out that he was a man I had known years ago in South Africa.”

“Was there a woman?”

“How do you mean?”

“I mean, was he right in saying that there was a woman came between you?”

“No,” said Brown, “no woman came between us.”

He felt relieved to be able to answer directly and explicitly this question which conveyed such a lot. Numa had not “come between” him and Cheke, Cheke had come between him and Numa, eternally separating them. If Haggerstein had been another man he might have told the whole story made relevant by this question, but Haggerstein was Haggerstein and it was becoming more and more impressed upon the mind of Brown that Haggerstein was a character dangerous and subtle, and a person, moreover, holding the key of the future as far as he, Brown, was concerned.

It was true that Cheke was dead and buried on one of the loneliest beaches in the world; all the same that very fact, if suspicion were once aroused, would help to give the affair a touch of the so-called “romance” beloved by the newspaper-man. It would also rouse all sorts of fools into a fury of mind and all sorts of knaves into the making of concrete suggestions as to search-parties and so forth. And Haggerstein, were he evilly disposed, and had he a suspicion of the truth, might set all this swarm of bees buzzing—to say nothing of the wasps and hornets of the Law.

The point was, did Haggerstein suspect?

The hint of suspicion in those words, “if he hadn’t gone falling overboard, as you say”—was it more than a hint, and that slip about the “burial” of Cheke—was it more than a slip?

Unable to answer these questions, Brown turned the conversation into other channels. Then he came on deck for a breath of air before turning in.

Seas are the most temperamental things in the world. If you ask me for a definition of the word temperamental in this connection, I repeat that seas are the most temperamental things in the world because you never can be sure of them collectively and individually, each has its temper, its tricks of mind, its nastinesses and its pleasantnesses.

The gulf of Carpentaria is a sea and it is temperamental, ready to fly into a fury one moment and caress you the next, liable to sudden changes and occasionally monstrous calms when it seems lying in its bed, staring at the blue ceiling of the sky and trying to make up its mind what it will be up to next.

The Gulf now and during several days to follow was ideal as a sailing ground for a small craft like the *Catch Me Up*. It was the weather that gives one nothing to do. The ketch could have steered herself and not come to harm, as Mr. Fishuck remarked to Harding just as he was giving up to Brown his trick at the wheel. But though the weather caused no concern to the after-guard of the yawl, the presence of Mr. Haggerstein gave Harding and Brown plenty to think about of a not too pleasant nature.

Haggerstein was not static as a personality, he was, in fact, growing. They were coming to understand that there was a lot more in Haggerstein's make-up than the constituents of a Yankee showman, and beginning to suspect that there was more in his mind than a simple acquiescence in their story about Cheke. Not that he showed it, or only by the slightest indications, as in his conversation with Brown just recorded, and even these indications were only seeming indications—there might be nothing in them. All the same, he was growing as a menace in the minds of the people most concerned as regards the death and burial of Cheke and regardless of the fact that otherwise he was or might have been an amusing and interesting individual.

He had a sense of humour, the American humour that concerns itself mostly with the little and everyday things of life, and which contains in itself a complete philosophy that can touch with equal subtlety in the jocose spirit all things from everyday men to mouse-traps.

The day before they raised Thursday Island, recalling something he had said to Harding about mesmerism, he gave them a little lecture on the

subject.

The *Catch Me Up* had taken on with other provisions at Thursday Island a crate of fowls, six hens, of which Jimbo had sacrificed five in the cooking-pot.

The clucking of the remaining hen from the hen-coop attracted the lecturer's attention; he rose, took it out and holding it under his arm asked for a bit of chalk or pipe-clay. Mr. Fishuck supplied him with a piece of chalk used for the blackboard, and Mr. Haggerstein made a line of chalk on the deck planking. Then, holding the hen between both hands, he made circles with it in the air and placed it on the deck with its beak on the chalked line, and there it remained without movement, and as if dead or asleep. He let it lie for a while and then, picking it up, brought it back to consciousness and replaced it in the coop.

Jimbo, who had been watching all this with open mouth, broke into a laugh, the delighted laugh of a child.

"Come here, you black nigger," said the entertainer, "and I'll do the same with you—kim on!"

"No, you don't," said Brown, who knew Jimbo's mentality and didn't want it tampered with. "The hen's enough, if it's all the same to you."

Haggerstein laughed.

"I've never hypnotized a nigger," said he, "but I have it in my mind it would be easier than with a white; but maybe I'm doing the niggers wrong."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean that the ordinary white man can be led by the nose as few blacks can. Look at the papers." He took his seat on an up-ended tub and taking half a packet of chewing-gum from his pocket stuffed one cheek with gum and went on. "Look at the papers. Read them. Read the ad's of the chaps that sell the patent medicines. Why, them chaps have hypnotized one-half of the United States into the belief that it has got a liver that won't work unless drugged, and the other half into the belief that cow-dung and sawdust is tobacco when made into cigarettes by the So-and-So Company, and all the other cigarette companies' stuff is dried cabbage. Aren't I right? Look at the share lists; why, I've only to buy a few square miles of Africa, salt it a bit, and then put the British Public down with its nose to it, same as that hen had her nose to the chalk, and, what's more, the British Public will not only sit there but it will lay me eggs till the illusion is over and it flaps its wings and finds what a sucker it's been."

“Maybe,” said Brown.

“There’s no maybe about it,” said the other, “it’s as sure as I’m sitting on this bucket, as sure as that, guys are falling every day for the Spanish Prisoner swindle.”

“And what might that be, if I may ask?” said Mr. Fishuck, who was standing by.

“It’s a circular letter, a hundred thousand of them sent out asking for money to get hold of a fortune belonging to a Spanish prisoner who can’t get out to get it for himself, or some such bilge—enough to make a dog sick. Thing is put out like a net. When they haul the net in there’s sure to be something in it. There’d be more, only there’s two sorts of suckers, suckers who suck and suckers who don’t. The majority don’t. That’s why the take isn’t bigger.”

“You seem to know all about it,” said Harding.

“About suckers? Maybe I do. Ought to, seeing I’ve been travelling so long with my eyes open, but I will say your expedition has opened them wider.”

“In what way?”

“Well, if you’ll excuse me for saying so, it has all the colour and shape of a mug’s expedition. I said so to that chap Cheke. I said: ‘Why, this thing simply hums of Havana, where you can’t walk down the street without coming up against an old bosun’s mate trying to sell you a treasure-chart of gold sunk by Cap’ Kidd, or buried by Morgan.’ I said: ‘Why, dammit, man, it’s all there even to the old sailor,’ and he says: ‘No matter, it’s all *genuine*, right enough.’ ”

“He seemed to have been talking a lot to you about it,” cut in Brown, whilst Harding could not but admire the way the Yankee had brought the talk round to this point.

“He was,” replied Haggerstein, “and he was right, as you’ve proved to me; but what I’m wondering is how you’ll finish the business without the Government or someone making claims on you. You see, as you’ve told me and as Cheke told me—it’s not the question of a mining concession, it’s buried treasure with a big T. That stuff you’ve got here, if you’d mined it out of the earth yourselves, would be O.K. maybe; but, as I understand, it’s been mined by someone else, which makes it private property. I don’t know much about Australian Law, but Law, whether it’s Australian or American or French or English, is pretty much the same animal with the same big mouth,

so it's maybe you'll have had a lot of your trouble for nothing if the Law once gets wind of the business."

Brown made no reply. As a matter of fact, he felt the truth in what the other had said. At the start of this business he had not envisaged buried treasure, but a gold location that could be worked; he had fancied that miners rights could be obtained once the ground was prospected and claims pegged out, but, to tell the truth, the money to be gained had interested him less than the venture itself. Now that the venture had been successful his interest had transferred itself to the money to be gained. But he was thinking less of that now than of Haggerstein, and his mind was suddenly filled with resentment that just at the last moment, when everything had come to a fortunate conclusion, this scamp should have turned up to put his finger in the pie. This resentment was also tinged with a suspicion that Haggerstein was even a more formidable adversary than he had hitherto suspected. The subtle way that Haggerstein had shown his suspicions about Cheke, and the way he had worked the conversations up to the question of the gold and its disposal, seemed to Brown a preparation for a claim to share in it. The same idea had occurred to Harding. This idea was strengthened almost immediately.

The Yankee, who had been shading his eyes and staring straight ahead, pointed to the sea in the far east.

"Thought I saw a sail," said he, "but it's gone. Expect it's my eyes. Wish I had my binoculars, but I dropped them."

"Dropped them?"

"Yep. I had them when I sighted you first. They were good. Zeiss glasses, and they showed you up fine. Watched you for a long time through them and then, when I was coming closer up to you, I must have dropped them."

A chill went to the heart of Harding. He knew at once that if Haggerstein had been watching them through binoculars he had seen them burying the body of Cheke, not only that, but he would have noticed the place of interment. Now, if Haggerstein were to cut up rough and give information to the authorities with details, what would happen would be just this: an inquiry would be instituted, and, without doubt, a police boat sent down to explore the truth of the business. Cheke's body would be found with the injury to the head, Jimbo and Mr. Fishuck would be questioned and they would tell the truth—that Cheke had gone ashore with him (Harding) and

Brown to stay the night and had been killed by an alleged native. Harding could hear the prosecuting counsel tackling Mr. Fishuck.

“Tell me, did you see a native?”

“No.”

“Then why do you say you believe the killing was done by a native?”

“Because they said so.”

“Dear me; they said so. Three men go ashore, they have between them the possession of a large hoard of gold and the question of its sharing. They go ashore and spend the night, and next morning one of the men is found murdered, his head beaten in with a stone, and his two companions say that the deed must have been done by a native. Mark you, they do not even say they saw a native, a purely imaginary native is put forward as a possible explanation of a crime that seems easily explainable by the plain supposition that the three men quarrelled over the gold or its distribution, or that two of the men had a down on the third, or wished to exclude him from sharing in the prize, and so arranged, one with the other, to murder him.

“If that is so, the two men are the prisoners Brown and Harding. The negro and the man Fishuck are guiltless, it seems to me, of the actual killing; if they have had any part in this horrible business it was most probably a subsidiary part, that is to say, that, knowing of the death of the man Cheke, they assisted in his burial yet said nothing of the matter to Mr. Haggerstein when he joined the expedition.

“Now, mark you, Mr. Haggerstein had known the man Cheke, having met him at Thursday Island. When he joined Brown and the others he was surprised to find Cheke not with them. He asked about him and Brown put up the story that he had been swept overboard in a storm. Why tell that lie? Why not say openly that Cheke had been killed by a native? Why? I will tell you: because the whole story of the native was, and is, so preposterous that, invented no doubt in a hurry, it was discarded when the direct question came, ‘What has become of Cheke?’ Now, mark you, Mr. Haggerstein might have accepted the tale of the drowning of Cheke had he not, when wrecked, brought ashore with him sundry belongings, including a very excellent pair of binoculars. Now, on being wrecked, he was screened from sight of the gold-seeking party and their boat by a belt of mangrove trees growing down to the water’s edge.

“On the morning in question, wishing to explore the unseen part of the beach, he made his way through the mangroves, and what did he see a great

way off? He saw the tent of the gold-hunters, and their ketch anchored out near Friday Island. Moreover, he saw men moving near the tent; they seemed digging.

“As he drew closer to them he brought his binoculars into play. Too far off to be noticed, he could yet see clearly all the doings of these people. Having dug a grave, they were carrying to it the body of a man for burial.”

Harding, such a rapid thing is thought, saw in a few seconds the whole case that might be evolved from this business by a clever lawyer, and on the evidence of Haggerstein. He stood contemplating the business, his eyes fixed on the distant sea-line. Then, turning, he was about to speak to Haggerstein, but the Yankee had stepped aside to the starboard rail to spit into the sea; having done so, he went to the companionway and dropped below.

Harding turned to Brown.

Their eyes met, but they did not speak for a moment, and then only when they got forward and out of earshot of the cabin.

“Well,” said Harding, “what do you think of that?”

“Blackmail,” said the other, “that’s what I think of it, or rather, the overture to blackmail. He knows everything about Cheke except the truth, and that’s the damnable part of it.”

“Perhaps he was bluffing about the binoculars.”

“Not he—even if he were, it would show that he was more than suspicious.”

“Well, why doesn’t he come right out into the open? If it’s blackmail he’s after, he wants a share of the gold.”

“Or maybe all of it.”

“Yes, or maybe all of it. Well, why doesn’t he open his batteries right away? You can’t have without asking.”

“I don’t know,” said Brown. “Maybe he’s afraid we’d dump him overboard; maybe he’s waiting to make the grand slam when he’s safely anchored off Thursday Island; but he’s a queer fish, one of the queerest I’ve struck in a lifetime, and there’s no knowing what’s going on in that head of his—it’s a pity.”

“What’s a pity?”

“It’s a pity one has a conscience and things like that—otherwise I’d wait till Jimbo and old Fishuck had turned in and I’d get him on deck and chuck him over.”

“Yes, it’s a pity,” said Harding.

He had no sooner said the word than he drew back from it, even though it was half-spoken in jest.

Brown said nothing, but the feeling came to Harding that the other would have wanted very little leading to make him silence conscience as well as Haggerstein before the latter could act. However, the leading was not forthcoming, and they turned to other matters, leaving things to develop of their own accord, and sure of one thing—that Haggerstein would not open fire until he found himself under the lee of Thursday Island and within the protection of the Law.

Whilst they stood and talked Jimbo came up on deck from the galley; he had a tin bucket in his hand half-filled with rubbish such as potato peelings and odds and ends from the galley; he flung the stuff overboard, and then went down again.

Harding noticed a strange thing about him. His wool, here and there, was tied up into little tussocks with thread. This was something quite new. He must have done it in the last few hours, for when last seen his head was normal or as normal as it could be.

“Did you see his head?” asked Harding.

“Yes,” said Brown.

“What’s he done it for?”

“To keep away witches.”

“To keep away *what*?”

“I don’t know, but he calls them witches. I expect he means evil spirits.”

“But why should he suddenly take it into his head that they are about him?”

“Lord knows, unless perhaps maybe they are.”

“Oh?”

“Anyhow, there’s that chap Haggerstein, and he’s worse than a witch as far as we are concerned.”

But there were more on board than Jimbo disturbed by a premonition of danger. Mr. Fishuck, for instance, who, a little later on, relieved from the wheel which he handed over to Brown, took the opportunity for a heart-to-heart talk with Harding, a talk conducted in a half-whisper and beyond hearing of the cabin.

“I told you about them rats,” said Mr. Fishuck.

“What rats?” asked Harding.

“Lord-love-a-duck, them rats that ought to have been aboard but wasn’t. Why, this hooker, before she got her commission, was tied up beside the old *Kate Thomasson* that plies in Sydney Harbour provisioning ships and yachts and such; cheeses and butter and crackers and canned stuff she’s been used to carrying, and rats, you may bet. Why, it wasn’t any use tryin’ to get shut of them pumping poison gas into her. Clear her clear of rats and she’d be full again in a month; they tried cats and the rats got the cats; they tried traps and the rats took the cheese out of the traps; they tried poison spread on bread-and-butter—might as well have spread it with ma’melade.

“Well, as I was sayin’, this hooker was moored beside the *Kate*, and naturally the rats used her for their conveniences, camped in her at night to save over-crowding at home. Married in her and had their children and all. Then this blessed expedition started and, lookin’ about for a ship, pitched on her, and what did them rats do? Did they leave at once? No, sir. I come aboard her after you’d fixed it up with Murphy but before the money was paid over. I came aboard on behalf of Murphy to see if the extra mast winch which he hadn’t bargained to sell had been took or not, and what did I see but the head of an old gran’father rat peepin’ out of the paint-locker at me, impudent as they make them. Well, next time I come aboard, which was after the money was paid over, there wasn’t one on the ship.”

“You mean to say they didn’t go till the deal was concluded?”

“That’s the truth,” said Mr. Fishuck.

“But how could they have known?”

“Search me, but they did. How did they know that a ship would be sunk in the war? They did, and I’d bet my life that in all the sinkin’s by torpedoes there wasn’t a rat drowned, except the ones that were too deaf to hear the order to clear ashore. Yes, they knew, and I’ve often thought that if humans had the cleverness of rats this would be a mighty lot better world to live in.” Mr. Fishuck paused for a moment, then he said: “There’s somethin’ on board this hooker in my opinion worse than the want of rats.”

“And what’s that?” asked Harding.

“Haggerstein,” replied the other. “That chap’s all wrong, right from his teeth to his toes; he’s seen a lot of what we’ve been doing, and he’s been shown the gold. It’s like a tiger that’s been shown a butcher’s shop. There’s men gold-diggers as well as women,” went on Mr. Fishuck in a dreary voice, “and in my opinion the men’s the worse. However, we’ll see,” said Mr. Fishuck, “but in my opinion it would be better to heave him overboard than wait and see what he’s after, but it can’t be done.”

“No,” said Harding, with a regretful sigh, “it can’t be done.”

Next morning broke fair. The satin blue sea dancing against the dazzle of the new-risen sun carried with it no suggestion of the ebony black sea of the night before, the sea into which Haggerstein might have been cast “to save trouble”.

However, Harding, the first on deck, could not help remembering the conversations of the night before, and as he watched Jimbo, who was steering, recalled what the others had said, and as he did so he couldn't help feeling that had he, Harding, given a lead the other two would probably have followed, and Mr. Haggerstein, after a brief accusation and defence, might now be interviewing mermaids at the bottom of the deep blue sea.

Possibly he was wrong, but that is how he felt about the situation, a feeling that gave strength to the decision that whatever Haggerstein might do or threaten, force must be barred in their dealings with him—that is to say, force that might lead to killing. A superfluous decision as they were dealing not with a gangster but a master chess-player. The master chess-player had not yet turned out of his bunk, and was lying at that moment asleep on his back, and with his mouth open. Brown, who had risen and was nearly finished dressing, looked at him for a moment, and then came on deck, where he found Harding shading his eyes and staring ahead at a slight blur that had developed on the eastern horizon.

It was Thursday Island.

Harding might have seen it when he first came on deck had not his mind been occupied with other matters. However, there it was, and the wind which had strengthened and was blowing now out of the north of west promised to bring them there by noon, if not before. So Brown said, and, having said it, he drew Harding by the arm a bit forward.

“I've been thinking over this business,” said he, “and I've come to the conclusion there's not a bit of use in kicking. The chap is sure to ask for his share; the question is how much does he want.”

“Yes,” said the other, “that's the question.”

After breakfast, with Thursday Island well in view and the wind blowing a full sailing breeze, Brown and Harding, who had come on deck, dropped down again to the cabin, where Haggerstein was seated smoking.

“We’re drawing up to Thursday,” said Brown, lighting a pipe. “If the wind holds we ought to be there about noon, if not before; it’s now eight—yes, another four hours ought to bring us in and we’ll be parting with you.”

“And sorry I am that we are losing touch,” said Haggerstein. “You’ll be going back to Sydney, I presume. And what do you propose to do about that gold? It’s not my affair, but if you like I can put you in the way of disposing of it without bothering the authorities or having any trouble with them. You don’t want to be talking, do you? There are several newspaper-chaps on Thursday, and they’d be on you like lice if they knew you had a story to tell. That’s all the Press asks for—a story.

“If you take my advice, you’ll keep your mouths shut over the whole business. Least said soonest mended is a motto I learned as a boy, and I’ve always stuck to it, unless, of course, in advertising. But you aren’t advertising, it’s not your game, or oughtn’t to be. You give it out that you’ve struck it lucky in gold and you’ll have every bum on the continent of Australia tryin’ to borrow money from you or sell you wild-cat stock or mine locations, to say nothing of Government men questioning your rights and maybe seizing the stuff to hold for inquiry. No, take my advice and keep your heads shut.

“I’ll say nothing to get you into trouble and I’ll do more. I’ll introduce you to a chap that will take the stuff from you without robbing you. He’ll pay dollar bills down and he’s rich enough to be able to pay. He’ll want ten per cent. You’ll say that’s not much, but wait a minit, I’ll want fifteen per cent for the introduction and the handling of the business—what say?”

Brown, who was seated on a bunk edge nursing his foot and with a pipe between his teeth, considered this proposition for a moment in silence. Then he said:

“I’d like to have a word with my friend here on the business. Will you wait while we go on deck for a minute to have a talk?”

“O.K.,” said Haggerstein, “and don’t hurry, I can wait.”

On deck Brown was the first to speak.

“What do you think of it?” asked he.

“If you want to know my opinion,” said Harding, “I don’t like those terms.”

“Too high?”

“No, too low. He’s only asking a quarter and he’ll have to split that with a fence—according to his story. Now it seems to me that he has got all the essentials about Cheke into his ugly head except the essential fact that we had nothing to do with his death, a fact we can’t prove. This being so, I can’t fancy him asking for anything short of half for himself.”

Brown pondered for a moment on this.

“Maybe,” said he; “but I can’t see, for the life of me, why he should act like that if he feels sure he could have us over Cheke. Seems to me, from what I’ve heard of blackmailers, he’d more likely want three-quarters than half.”

“That’s just what I’ve been thinking,” said Harding, “and the only thing I can imagine is that he’s got something up his sleeve.”

“How?”

“Some trick to play on us if we agree to this suggestion, something that will, maybe, give him the whole of the gold instead of a half or even three-quarters.”

Brown thought for a moment over this.

“Maybe,” said he at last; “but what are we to do about it? We can either accept or refuse. Which is it to be?”

“I think we should accept. The proposition as it stands is a reasonable one. Even if there was no question about Cheke we don’t want inquiries and Government bothers. Yes, I should say accept and keep a close watch out for any trick he may play.”

“Do you know what I am thinking?” said Brown. “I’m thinking I’d like to dump the damned stuff in the sea.”

“The gold?”

“Yes, the gold; seems to me there’s a curse tied to it.”

“Well, you ought to talk to Fishuck about that, he’s been telling me that the whole expedition is dished because there are no rats on board. Honestly, I don’t believe in all that. I don’t think there’s any curse about the matter, and I’ll tell you why. The thing came to me through one of the best people in the world, or, rather, two of them—Mary Summers and her mother; curses don’t come through good people like that. No, I’ve got a conviction we’ll get the stuff home, or rather the worth of it. But let’s get to business. Do you agree with me that we had better accept?”

“Yes. I don’t see what else we can do.”

“Well, come along down, then, and we’ll finish the job.”

They went down and found Mr. Haggerstein engaged in a game of patience with the tiny pack of cards he always carried. He was seated at the table and as the two entered he looked up from his game and then discontinued it, gathering the little cards together in a pack.

“Well,” said he, “how have you come to think about it?”

“We agree,” replied Brown. “Twenty-five per cent for you and your friend, which means that we will have to depend on his valuation even though we help to superintend the weighing.”

“Well,” said Haggerstein, “the value is there in the price of gold published in the Sydney papers and also in the exchange bulletins of Thursday. I guess you can’t be wrong much in depending on them, and as for the weighing, you’ll find Ambrose is a straight runner. I knew him in Papua before I came to Thursday. He was buying heads.”

“Heads?”

“Yes, sir. Smoked ones for export to ethnological museums and such. One of his jobs in life is head-hunting, either in the Solomons or over this way.”

“Of course, you mean human heads,” said Harding.

“Yes, sir, either full grown or shrunk ones. You know, the savages have a dodge by which they can shrink a head to the size of a tangerine orange; how they do it I don’t know—take out the bones in some way and then smoke-dry it; anyhow, they do it and when it’s done the head’s worth twenty pounds to a chap like Ambrose.”

“But if that’s the sort of business he’s on, will he have money enough to buy the gold?” asked Brown.

“Lord save you, yes,” replied Haggerstein. “He’d have money enough to buy anything. He’s one of the guys who work with other men’s money and their own brains. People depend on him. When I say depend on him I mean it in a business sense. If he gives the word that a deal is all right and likely to be profitable they back him without asking more. He has only to cable for the money to buy your gold, that is to say if he hasn’t got the dollars in hand at the moment. Leaving everything else aside, he’s a respected resident of Thursday, and he has a house and fine grounds and keeps horses; you know, they are all cracked over horse-racing on Thursday.”

“Yes,” said Brown, “from what I have seen, they are. Well, we’d better go to him directly we arrive so as to get the business over and done with. Will you bring him to the ship or shall we go and see him?”

“I’d like it this way,” said Haggerstein. “I don’t want you chaps to think there’s any collusion between him and me. You see, it’s this way. He knows nothing of this expedition of yours nor anything about the gold, so I’d like you to tackle him off your own bat. Go and see him directly we arrive, take my name as an introduction, say you have some gold for sale and there you are. You needn’t give him full particulars; when you give him my name it will be all right.”

“Where does he live?” asked Brown.

“Oh, not far, near the other side of the island. You can take a horse and trap and you won’t be long.”

The consultation broke up and they came on deck.

Thursday Island lay clear ahead, but it was evident that Brown had miscalculated the speed of the ketch, for it was now getting towards noon and the island was still a long way off.

“It’s the current,” said Haggerstein, “it is setting against us, so we won’t be in before sundown, and we’d better fix for you to see Ambrose tomorrow. I guess the chap will keep that long.”

“All right,” said Brown. “My friend Harding here and I will go over and see him. How long will it take us?”

“Oh, getting there and back won’t be more than two or three hours,” replied Haggerstein, “but there’s a chance that he may be this side of the island and so save you a journey.”

Haggerstein was right, it was not till just on sunset that they drew into the anchorage at Thursday Island, the magic light reflected from the west upon the beach, the bungalows, the atrocious tin roofs of the godowns and storehouses and the pearling luggers riding at anchor.

No sooner had the anchor dropped than Haggerstein asked for the dinghy to take him ashore. He had a lot of business to do, besides, he wanted to get a change of clothes. He had rooms, or a room, at what was called the yellow bungalow, which was situated close to the hill rise just back of the pumping station, and reckoned he wouldn't be any the worse for a clean shirt.

Just as he was going overboard Brown gave voice to a thought that was troubling his mind.

"Look here," said he, "won't they be asking questions about that pearling lugger, the one you left here in?"

"Not they," replied Haggerstein. "That pearler was owned by two Japs, friends of mine but still Japs, and the authorities here don't keep counting the Japs every time to see there's none missing. Well, so long to you folk, see you tomorrow."

He got over into the dinghy and Jimbo rowed him ashore.

Just as he was leaving, a heavy man, who had been watching these proceedings from the deck of a pearling lugger near by, called to a man near him on deck to haul the lugger's boat alongside. It was streaming on a line and, having been brought up, the heavy man dropped into it and rowed over to the ketch.

"Hullo," cried he, as he came alongside. "Just come in, ain't you? I'm Cap Bartells of the *Nunsuch*, and that's her I've just left. May I come aboard you?"

"Yes, come along by all means," replied Brown. "Here, give us the painter and I'll fix it."

Captain Bartells came on board, big as a walrus but as graceful as a seal. He refused to go below, preferring the spacious firmament to a cabin

skylight; also he could smoke the stuff he was smoking in the open without poisoning his hosts.

“Up from the Gulf?” asked Captain Bartells, seating himself on an up-ended keg.

“Yes,” said Brown. “How do you know?”

“Well, I reckon Port Darwin is too far for your size—but what I’m getting at is where you picked up that chap that’s just gone ashore.”

“I don’t see what that has got to do with you,” answered Brown.

“Oh, well, maybe it’s got more to do with you,” replied the other.

“How do you mean?”

“I mean that I’ve come across that chap in Papua and that he double-crossed a friend of mine, that’s what I mean. I mean that I swore to cry him down wherever and whenever I met him again. I mean that if you have any dealin’s with that chap he’ll double-cross you too. I mean that I’m sayin’ all this, laying myself open to a libel action, but that I’m as safe as houses, for that chap daren’t prosecute me. That’s my full meanin’ and you can take it or leave it as you like.”

“Are you sure he’s the same man you met in Papua?” asked Harding.

“Sure as me eyes is me eyes. I never make a mistake.”

“Well, thank you all the same for what you have said,” put in Brown. “You’ve done it with a good intention, anyhow.”

“Well, I must be going,” said the Captain, rising to his feet. “I’ve accounts to be doing up, and you take my advice and go cautious with that skite in any dealin’s you may be havin’ with him.”

He got over into the dinghy and rowed himself off to the lugger without another word.

“Well, that was straight,” said Brown.

“Doesn’t alter our position, though,” said Harding. “We knew the chap to be a scamp, and it only confirms our knowledge.”

They stayed talking awhile and watching the shore lights, the lights of the bungalows on the hillside, the lights of the cinema “palace” and the lights of the bars. They would have liked to go ashore and have a drink at one of those same bars and a talk with the interesting people sure to be

found there, but they refrained. Their business was too important to risk the chance of any mix-up.

The gold, like a troublesome child, had to be looked after. They were beginning to appreciate the worries of wealth in the raw, in bulk and not gained by legitimate trading.

So they hung, held off from enjoyment and a stretch on shore, rewarded only by the lights of the houses of entertainment and the glimmer from the skylight of the lugger where Cap Bartells was no doubt doing up his accounts.

Next morning Haggerstein turned up. He had been rowed ashore the night before by Jimbo, this morning he came paddled off in a canoe by a Malay.

“When I’ve done my business here,” said he as he came on board, “I’m going to take a prahu out. I’ve hired her for three months to prospect for trochus shell; there she is lying by that schooner, a good sea boat, and two men can handle her.”

By a ratty old schooner a couple of cable lengths to port Brown could see the prahu, one of those mosquitoes of the sea, all wings, so to speak, and no body. The wings were folded now, in other words the great lateen sail was lowered, but one could judge of its spread by the height of the mast.

“That chap who has just rowed me off owns her,” explained Haggerstein. “Name’s Nakardyke. He and me is going to run her out and go half-shares in the takings. There’s more than trochus shell in the venture, there’s pearl shell, and that’s not all; well, maybe a shut head is best and we’ll leave it at that.”

By which Brown understood him to mean opium or dope-running of some sort.

They went down to breakfast whilst the Malay took the canoe back to the prahu with instructions to be back in an hour.

“I’ll go ashore with you,” said Haggerstein, “and, while you are off seeing Ambrose, I’ll finish my business with the ship’s chandlers and people; you wouldn’t think much provisions were wanted for two men and a prahu; well, it’s just the small storage space that makes the difficulty and takes the time. Then, when you’ve made arrangements and brought Ambrose over, we can come on board here to weigh the stuff up and conclude the deal. You had better arm that man of yours if the ketch is to be left without any of us on board. One never knows with gold; people seem to smell it.”

“Fishuck will have my automatic,” said Brown, “and Jimbo will be with him.”

When the meal was over they put ashore, Haggerstein in the canoe which he had signalled for and the other two in the boat rowed by Mr.

Fishuck. On the beach they watched whilst Mr. Fishuck put back, and then, having seen him safely on board, they turned their steps with Haggerstein up the shingle past the great godown that fronts the sea and to the place where a horse and trap could be hired.

The place was an hotel. That is to say, a rickety verandah painted green and fronting a tin-roofed building, half house, half bungalow. The whole thing labelled: "Hotel."

The proprietor came out of his bar on to the verandah at the summons of Haggerstein. He was a man with a hatchet-shaped face, a black patch over his left eye and what seemed a tumour affecting his right cheek, which was, however, gum. He chewed as he looked at the two strangers whom Haggerstein introduced as, "The gentlemen I spoke about last night, Jake, who want to be taken over to Mr. Ambrose."

"Well, I'm ready," said Jake, "if they are. I've only to put the old mare in the shafts. Hold a bit till I call Tinker."

They sat on the verandah edge as he called Tinker, a black, who came running from a fowl-house near by, where he had evidently been plucking chickens to judge by the feathers flying from him.

Then came a short season of waiting filled with the sounds of Tinker and Jake evidently struggling with trap and harness, and the sounds of the mare's hoofs evidently resisting blandishments and adjurations. Then a sound like the sound of a kick in the belly, an indignant squeal, and round the corner came the "trap".

Ye Gods!

A victoria from the time of Victoria, with Jake on the box-seat belabouring the raw-boned Waler in the shafts, Tinker running beside it with words of encouragement and advice.

"She'll be all right when she gets warmed up," said Jake. "Hop in whiles she's going, for if she stops she'll most like lay down."

They scrambled in.

"See you when you get back," cried Haggerstein, "and don't over-drive the mare."

"That chap will have his joke," said Jake, speaking without turning his head. "And what's his joke with you, may I ask?"

“I don’t think he has any joke with us,” replied Brown, “and our business is our own affair.”

The driver took this snub without replying except by a short laugh that sounded like a cough, nor did it interfere with his equanimity, for he began to point out objects of interest by the way, such as the racecourse and Captain Smith’s bungalow and the tree where Danny Driscoll was shot. He’d climbed it after a big robbery of pearls, but someone spotted him in the branches and he was shot down like a raccoon. “Fell out of that top branch,” said Jake, “and saved himself, catching a holt of the one under; there he hinged till they shot him again and he dropped to the next one, where he caught holt again till he couldn’t hole on any longer. It was like a chap tumbling downstairs catchin’ at the banisters. I could have died laughin’ when he come the last lump and fetched the ground.”

“Was he killed?” asked Harding.

“Well, his neck was broke, if that’s your meanin’, and he’s buried over yander by that blue gum. Yes, I reckon he was killed all right, though they say his sperrit walks still.”

They passed several bungalows with gardens around them. Thursday Island is in some ways a residential district, in other words, well-to-do people live there, people having to do with the administrative or the fisheries, and their homes are well founded and well furnished, and when at last the old victoria and the Waler drew up at the gate of Ambrose’s garden the house of Ambrose proved to be of the Thursday Island better type.

“How long will you be wantin’ me to wait?” asked Jake.

“Not long,” said Brown. “Maybe half an hour.”

He turned to the gate and opened it and, followed by Harding, came up the path leading to the frontage of a whitewashed bungalow. A Java boy met them on the verandah.

Yes, Mr. Ambrose was at home, and would they sit down in the verandah till he told his master of their wish to see him?

They sat down in cane chairs, and in a few minutes out came a little old man with a face yellow as ivory, a gold front tooth and a smile with something hard in it—maybe it was the effect of the tooth.

“Mr. Ambrose?” said Brown.

“Yes,” said the little old man, “that is my name.” He seemed recovering from the surprise of the other’s tattooed face.

“Mine’s Brown,” said that individual, “and my companion is Mr. Harding, and we have come to you with an introduction from Mr. Haggerstein.”

“From Mr. who?”

“Haggerstein.”

“Haggerstein?”

“Yes.”

“Please describe him, that I may be sure.”

Brown drew a verbal picture of the discussed one, and the old gentleman named Ambrose, who had taken his seat in a cane chair, sat with finger-tips pressed together and tightening lips as the drawing went on.

It was evident that his temper was rising.

“Well!” said he when the recital was finished. “Let me hear some more. This person told you to come to me—for what reason?”

“He told us you might be disposed to interest yourself in a gold proposition.”

“A gold proposition!”

“Yes; he said you might be disposed to interest yourself in the purchase of gold.”

“Me!”

“Yes.”

“But I am not a gold-buyer, nor have I any interest in business except in the business of saving souls. I am the chief director of the Santa Monica Mission, which has its head office in Santa Monica in California. I am here directing this branch, which includes in its activities work in Papua and the western islands of the Pacific.”

“Gosh!” said Harding. “A missionary!”

“But why,” asked Brown, “did he give us your name as a possible purchaser?”

“I cannot answer that,” replied Mr. Ambrose, “or only on the assumption that it was a jest on his part, designed not only against me but against you. I thwarted the scoundrel some time ago; it was on the matter of exploiting native girls by selling them to the slave markets of our civilization; yes, I

repeat that, the slave markets of our civilization.” Mr. Ambrose rose up and began to pace the verandah. “Of our so-called civilization, a civilization that admits into its circle of being the rum-runner, the dope-runner and men like this villain Haggerstein. Yes, undoubtedly he designed this thing as a jest against you and me, but there may be more in it. In dealing with a man like Haggerstein it is always well to remember that there may be something more in his dealings than is offered in the ordinary light of day. Tell me. You said something about gold. I do not want to pry into your affairs, but it may be important for you to give me more details on this matter.”

“It’s just this,” said Brown. “We have a boat here with some gold on board, gold we got quite honestly by digging—we wanted to sell it, and this man Haggerstein advised us to come to you.”

“The gold is on board your boat?”

“Yes.”

“And when did you see Haggerstein last?”

“This morning, just a little while ago.”

“Why did he not come with you himself?”

“He said he didn’t want us to think there was any collusion between you and him, and that he preferred us just to come to you on our own.”

Mr. Ambrose’s nose was working.

“Collusion between me and him—the scoundrel! But don’t you see?”

“What?”

“Why he sent you here on a wild-goose chase.”

“No.”

“Good heavens—he wanted to get you away!”

“To get us away?”

“Yes, so that he may steal your gold.”

“That is impossible,” said Brown.

“Why?”

“Because the gold is on board our ketch, and we have left two trusty men guarding it; one of them, by name Fishuck, has an automatic pistol that I gave him; the other, a negro, is entirely devoted to me and can give a good account of himself in a fight.”

Mr. Ambrose laughed in a dreary sort of way.

“Maybe,” said he; “but I don’t think this rascal would try any means likely to end in a fight. He is more subtle than that; but while we’re talking time is going; you must get back at once if it is not too late, and I will go with you.”

Brown and Harding sprang to their feet. Ambrose, having got his hat, led the way, and next moment they were in the victoria, Ambrose on the little front seat opposite the other two. But the vehicle did not start; instead, Jake got down from the driving-seat and contemplated the ensemble.

“I can’t take three,” said he. “Three passengers with me makes four, and I can’t overload the mare.”

“Overload your grandmother!” cried Harding. “She pulls like a steam-engine when she wants to; there’s nothing wrong with her but temper.”

“Well, you get out and tell her that,” said Jake. “Anyhow, one of you get out, for I’m not goin’ to drive the three of you; she ain’t no dromedary, and this ain’t no circus.”

A remark evidently directed at Brown’s face.

“Wait a moment, my man,” said Ambrose. “Why did you drive these gentlemen to my house?”

“Because they axed me.”

“Yes, but have you anything to do with a man named Haggerstein?—no, don’t bother to answer me and tell lies—you know who I am. I’m James Ambrose of the mission, a pretty hard nut to crack. Now, up on your box with you and drive us, and lay into that old mare of yours, for we’re in a hurry, see. Come, up with you.”

And up he went; such is the power of mind over matter. Also he drove.

Shouting over his shoulder, “I’ll lay into her if it’s only to drive you to the police, you lot of bloody pirates!” he drove.

The old victoria bumped and swayed, left the track, found it again, the noise of the springs, couplings and half-loose bolts making a jazz-band accompaniment to the shouts of the driver, from whose pocket, incidentally, protruded the neck of a bottle, both suggesting and confirming the suspicion that during his wait at the house of Ambrose he had been liquoring up.

“Drive! I’ll drive you to the police, you bloody pirates!” was the burden of his chant, punctuated by whacks on the rump of the Waler, going now at a

canter and flinging her fiddle-head from side to side, till, coming up to one of the ubiquitous goats of Thursday Island, it decided evidently that a race was on, and that, having no victoria behind it to pull, it might win if it joined in.

The mare differed in opinion on this matter and, gingered up by the spirits of rivalry and optimism, accepted the offer. Next moment they were all in a ditch, except Jake, who had been shot into the middle of the road and was lying on his back, seeming dead.

“Only stunned or drunk,” said Brown. “Pull him into the ditch and let him lie. We’ve got to get to the beach on foot; it’s not more than a mile from here. Come!”

He had unharnessed the mare. They left her stamping and sniffing at the odoriferous body of her master and started for the beach, running.

When Brown and Harding started on their wild-goose chase in the old victoria, Haggerstein got busy. Going to a marine-store dealer, where he purchased four lengths of whipcord, he then turned and came along to the shop of Ah Chung, the Chinese who specialized in confectionery and sweets.

Chung, with a face round and as expressionless as a moon-fiddle, was starting on his morning batch of cakes, mostly made of rice and scraped coconut. On one side of the shop, away from the cake counter, were jars filled with all sorts of sweets, including a jar of the famous Chinese "stick-jaw", a sort of toffee made chiefly from molasses.

Haggerstein, having conversed for a while with Ah Chung, bought some cakes and also a bag of sweets. Then he went to a billiard-room near by and borrowed, by annexing, a piece of chalk. This being done, he lit a cigar and came down to the beach, where he found Nakardyke waiting for him. They put off in the canoe, bound for the ketch.

When they came alongside they found Jimbo fishing with a line over the counter and Mr. Fishuck below. Mr. Fishuck had been doing some cooking, preparing in advance the dinner; he was now knitting and watching a pot, which was on the stove and preparing evidently to come to a boil.

"They told me to come off and wait for them," said Haggerstein; "they've gone over to the other side to see a man—Mr. Ambrose. What have you got in that pot?"

"Taters," replied Mr. Fishuck.

"You've put them on pretty early if they're for dinner."

The housewife and cook sniffed at this.

"Maybe," he said; "but there's somethin' else but taters in that pot—didn't you never hear of a stoo?"

"You mean an Irish stew?"

"I mean no such thing. I mean a stoo as it ought to be made, not a scrag of mutton and a few taters."

"Well, how ought it to be made?"

“First,” said Mr. Fishuck, “you’ve got to have your stock; it’s like makin’ soup—you can’t make soup by bundlin’ your bones and what-not into water and boilin’ them, they’ve got to be rendered; and you can’t make a stoo by stickin’ carrots and taters and such into a pot and bringin’ them to a boil.”

“I see,” said Haggerstein.

He was eating one of the cakes he had brought on board and the parcel of candy was lying on the table near by.

“What’s that you’re eatin’?” asked Mr. Fishuck, breaking off from his theme for a moment.

“Schnuzzles,” replied the other—“that’s what the boys call them there; they’re made by a Chink, a chap called Ah Chung; try one.”

Mr. Fishuck put his knitting away.

“But if you want to taste it proper,” said the other, “take a bit of this candy first.”

He held out a bar of toffee.

“Bite a piece right off,” recommended he; “bite hard.”

Mr. Fishuck, with his jaws so stuck together that he couldn’t shout, put up a good defence, but it lasted only some five seconds, then he was on the floor, his jaws still stuck together and overlaid with a handkerchief. Then his hands and ankles were tied with the length of whipcord, and Mr. Haggerstein, with a last glance at his work, came on deck.

Jimbo had just hooked a big flat-fish; his hair was still done up in little wisps. He turned as Haggerstein came on deck. Haggerstein looked at him and he looked at Haggerstein.

Despite the witch-protective hair-dressing which he had adopted, it was evident that Jimbo had no confidence in himself or in things around him. His face was as expressionless as the face of the flat-fish he had just pulled from the sea.

Haggerstein, his eyes fixed upon him, said no word; he advanced a step and, bending, made a chalked line on the deck, then advancing step by step, with his eyes fixed on the eyes of the other, he caused whatever was in the mind of Jimbo to pull a string of some sort; anyhow, the lower lip of the fascinated one began to droop and the whole face to assume an expression of vague wonder; not wonder allied to alarm, but a pleasant wonder, as

though inspired by some land of infinite fried chicken, water melons and patent-leather boots. Now, as though leading the subject towards the frontiers of this delectable land, Haggerstein, after a few passes with his hand, brought him forward and, with a hand on his head, compressed him like a concertina, till, completely closed up, he was crouched with his nose to the line of chalk.

Then, leaving him, he went to the side where Nakardyke was waiting in the canoe, brought him on board and down below. The two parcels of gold, the sack and the bag of dust, were all ready for lifting and deportation. Brown had placed them in the cabin where a prospective buyer could examine them and sample them, and where, so he fancied, they would be safe under the watchful eye and ready automatic of Mr. Fishuck.

The latter individual, lying bound and gagged on the cabin floor, had to watch while the Yankee and Malay tackled the sack, lifting it between them and carrying it on deck, to be dumped in the canoe. Then they came back for the bag; having put it in the canoe, they pushed off for the prahu.

No one in that anchorage took any notice of the two men leaving the ketch with what looked like a sack of potatoes. The nearest vessel was Captain Bartell's ketch, and the Captain that morning was a bit late up.

Having finished his accounts the night before, he had lit his pipe and opened a bottle of rum and gone in for enjoying himself in a mild and retrospective way—voyaging old voyages and fighting old battles over again. So that it was near three o'clock before he turned in. He awoke late, and having dressed and breakfasted he came on deck and took a look around him. He saw the prahu and two men in a canoe approaching her, but this sight told him nothing.

However, a moment later, when after another look round the prahu came into his purview again, he saw that the canoe was alongside her and the men were hoisting something on deck. This interested him, and taking the glass from its sling by the mast he levelled it at them and saw that one of them was Haggerstein.

“Now, I wonder what that skunk is after,” said Captain Bartells as he put the glass back in its sling.

As he did so his attention was drawn to the deck of the *Catch Me Up*.

On coming up he had noticed a crouching figure on the deck, and had put it down to one of the crew engaged in caulking or deck-scrubbing, or something like that. On looking again, however, he noticed that the figure

had not moved. It was still crouched motionless and in exactly the same position as when he had observed it first.

“Hoi!” cried the Captain.

The call rang across the water, but produced no result.

“Why, the chap must be dead,” cried he. “Hoi, you blighter, what are you playin’ at, anyhow? Get your legs under you and stand up!”

This invitation having no result, the gallant Captain got into the dinghy which was alongside and rowed off to the yawl.

On deck he found Jimbo—Jimbo crouched on all fours, his nose down to the chalked line on the deck, in the attitude of an animal that has crouched to drink from a stream.

“Hi, you!” cried the Captain, and on the words turned the crouched one over with his foot.

Jimbo rolled on his back, opened his eyes, stared at the sky, and was about to speak, when Captain Bartells, attracted by sounds from below, left him and went down to the cabin, where he found Mr. Fishuck on the floor, tied up and gagged.

The sounds coming from the misused one can be reproduced if you care to shut your jaws tight and then attempt to shout.

In a moment he was untied, but it took several minutes and a good deal of manipulation before the jaws became unstuck.

Then came revelations.

Ambrose and his companions, leaving the *Victoria* in the ditch and starting to run for the beach, had their work cut out for them, for the temperature of Thursday Island, especially at that season, is not ideal as a condition for physical exertion. However, the whip that drove them was pretty efficient, consisting of the feeling that Haggerstein had in some way played some game of his own, and that the only possible players left against him—to wit, Mr. Fishuck and Jimbo—were not his match, even if Mr. Fishuck had an automatic to assist him.

Arrived on the beach, they saw with a momentary relief that the ketch was still at her place in the anchorage.

They were not long in getting a boat to push off in, and as the boatman, a Japanese, put his back into the business they noticed as they drew closer to the ketch that not only was her boat streaming on a line just as Mr. Fishuck had left it when returning from putting them ashore, but that there was also another boat (Captain Bartells') fastened alongside.

At the same moment, and before the Jap could lay them alongside, there suddenly erupted from the cabin of the ketch and on to the deck the figures of Captain Bartells, Fishuck and Jimbo, who had gone below at Bartells' call to assist in the resuscitation of Mr. Fishuck.

What brought them all on deck in such a hurry was the revelation made by the recently gagged one directly his jaws were freed.

"Robbed!" he shouted. "Tied up and robbed——!"

"Say," cried Bartells, suddenly seeing light, "was the chap's name Haggerstein?"

"That's him."

"Then he's off with the stuff," replied the other. "I seen him goin' aboard a prahu with a sack. Quick, let's get after him; kim on deck!"

They rushed up to find the boat with Ambrose, Brown and Harding drawing near. It was now that Captain Bartells made a slip by stopping to talk with the newcomers instead of starting in instant pursuit of the prahu, whose sail was now going up to catch the gentle sou'-west breeze.

“You’ve been robbed!” cried he. “I knew somethin’ would happen; told you both right about that skrimshanker Haggerstein. He’s boned your stuff and there he is on his blasted prahu making off. There he is!” cried the Captain, pointing to the craft with sails now fully set and beginning to forge through the water. “There he is!” he cried again, as the others scrambled on deck, having flung the Japanese boatman a dollar. “Let your boat go adrift—it will come to no harm—and get mine on board. There he is, and we’ve got to be after him or it will be too late; histe the mains’l; kim on and lend a hand with the winch. Up she goes——!” The canvas rose, slatting in the wind clapping to the sound of the winch pawls as the little anchor came up.

The fact that Captain Bartells was leaving his lugger to her lonesome did not seem to occur to him at all, or, if so, it was disregarded.

The sporting instinct that demands for its satisfaction the pursuit of some animal was fortified in its urge by the fact that the animal they were chasing was Haggerstein.

Haggerstein, whatever else he might be, was certainly an individual with the skunk-like property of raising men against him; first Ambrose, then Bartells, and many others, no doubt; but Ambrose and Bartells were enough for him now, coupled with the others—if only they could overhaul him.

The prahu was moving; she did not seem to be moving swiftly, yet she was getting into a zone where the wind was stronger owing to the absence of protection by the land.

At this moment it was evident that the *Catch Me Up* was overhauling her, but not in a spectacular manner; at the present rate of sailing, Bartells, who had an eye for speed, reckoned that it would be hours before they came level with her.

Still, time did not matter much so long as the chase succeeded. He said this, and even as he said it the prahu, which had now fully entered the wind zone, began to show an increased speed. Her great lateen sail seemed to welcome all the wind it could get, and after the lapse of five minutes or so it was evident that, as things were, she had the heels of the ketch.

“Wait a moment,” said Bartells; “we’ll be gettin’ more wind in a minute, and then we’ll see.”

They did.

With the increase in the wind the *Catch Me Up* improved her speed, but even so it was evident, after the lapse of ten minutes, that she was no more than holding her own.

Then the anger of Captain Bartells began to appear; anger not against Haggerstein but against the prahu and her lateen rig.

It was race hatred expressed in ship terms. To think that an old umbrella like that should get the better of him!

His anger even turned against the ketch.

“I don’t know your sailin’ qualities,” he said to Brown. “Your boat looks fit, and she ain’t an unhandy rig, but she sails as if she was barnacled or towing a drogue.”

“Rats,” said Mr. Fishuck, as though to himself.

Bartells blew up.

“I’d thank you to have more respect for my remarks——” he burst out, but Harding interposed.

“It wasn’t your remark he was referring to,” said he; “he’s got it in his head that this boat is unlucky, because there are no rats on board her. Isn’t that so, Fishuck?”

“That’s my meanin’,” said the rat-fancier, “and you can take it or you can leave it.”

“Well, rats or not, she’s lost the wind,” said Brown, who was gazing ahead.

He was right.

The wind had died—for the prahu.

Anyone who knows the sea south of Thursday Island, and especially at certain seasons, will know the sometimes maddening uncertainty of the winds in that region.

The prahu, from queening it on a ruffled sea, suddenly found herself upon a mirror, but the ketch had not caught the calm yet, and held on bravely, hoping for the best.

The wind held.

Held, then began to waver, and finally died out, leaving the two vessels a couple of cable lengths apart, bowing one to the other on the gentle swell.

“Now we’ve got them,” cried Bartells—“the boat!”

The boat of the ketch had been dropped in the anchorage off Thursday Island, and Bartells’ boat hastily brought on board.

They started now to get it afloat.

Haggerstein and the Malay might put up a fight, but they were four against two, and the freeboard of the prahu was low.

“Leave the pistol,” said Brown to Fishuck. “We don’t want any shooting. Now all of you over with her.”

The boat smacked the sea, and in tumbled Harding, only to scramble on board next moment.

Jets from three separate leaks were spouting through the bottom boards.

As a matter of fact it was Bartells’ fault; he had not examined the boat carefully for cobra worms. She had seemed all right for a long time past, but the destroyers had been at work; the rough handling of getting her on board in a hurry had done the business, and there they were, looking pretty silly—six men, including Jimbo, against one white man and a Malay, and nothing to be done.

A voice came over the water. It was the voice of Haggerstein, and it seemed jeering.

“Don’t mind him,” said Bartells to Ambrose, noticing the swelling of the other’s neck. “No manner of use mindin’ a chap like that. Let’s think what’s to be done. I’ve took notice that there’s always somethin’ to be done when all seems up. Pity we cut your boat adrift, but how was we to have known _____”

“Lord,” cried Brown, “what fools we are—we’ve forgotten the motor!”

They had clean forgotten the petrol-engine below.

Darting down, Harding took the canvas cover off whilst Mr. Fishuck helped in the starting.

It was a delicate job they proposed to do, for if there was too much way on the ketch when she came up to the prahu she might run the latter down or capsizes her, and then good-bye to the gold.

However, the great thing was to start her first. If you have ever had anything to do with yacht engines you will agree that the great thing to do is to start them first, and after that keep them going.

However, this engine gave no trouble in the starting. It went excellently for fifty or more revolutions and then stuttered and stopped.

“Below there, what’s wrong with the engine?” came the voice of Brown from on deck.

“I don’t know,” cried Harding. “Come and see, you’re an expert on the job.”

The expert came below.

Then out came a tool-case from a locker and he sat down to the job. It took five minutes to strew the floor with parts and another two to replace them in position; then, wiping his hands with a piece of cotton waste, Brown, rising from his knees, said, “She’s all right now. Start her.”

Nothing followed the command in the way of revolutions.

Then suddenly, and just as Mr. Fishuck was beginning to say something about rats, Harding examined the petrol gauge. They had run out of petrol; there was evidently a leak of some sort that had been going on since the engine was last used. But there were two spare tins, or ought to have been.

“Fishuck!” cried Brown. “Fetch out the spare petrol.”

There was none. Mr. Fishuck had forgotten to get it on board at Thursday, though expressly ordered to do so by Brown.

He admitted the fact, and there was no use in saying anything. He had no excuse; rats failed him for the moment.

They all came on deck.

On board the prahu Haggerstein could be seen contemplating them. The situation, one might fancy, would have appealed to his undoubted sense of humour, even though he could not gauge the full extent of it owing to the petrol position.

Or maybe he had some inkling of that, for presently, having surveyed them long enough, they saw him getting the canoe overboard, assisted by his companion.

Then they saw him getting into it and pushing off alone, leaving Nakardyke to keep ship.

“Well, of all the impudence!” said Harding.

“Oh, that’s nothing,” said Ambrose. “Or rather that’s him. If I could tell you the trick he played me over the two China girls and the opium jar, and which happened at Macao, you wouldn’t be surprised at anything he’d do; and the worst of it is he always gets the laugh on his side.”

“Well, he’s certainly got it now,” said Brown, as the canoe approached.

Within hailing distance Haggerstein hailed them.

“Hallo, folk!” cried he. “How are you gettin’ along?”

The “folk” remaining dumb, he paused in his paddling for a moment, reminding them of a predatory animal cautiously returning to the scene of its crime.

Then he resumed paddling, and drawing closer seemed interested in the remains of the boat lying half-submerged alongside the ketch.

There was something else interested in the boat—a shark.

The sea was infested with sharks, but only this one put in a spectacular appearance; it seemed nuzzling the wreck of the boat, attracted maybe by the smell of an old beef-tub that Bartells had left on her and which was now washing about with the bottom boards and loose plankings.

Mr. Haggerstein, having observed the shark at close quarters, turned his attention to the dumb ones on board the ketch.

He had nothing to gain by this impudent approach, or only the something he may possibly have gained from the humour of the position, and the satisfaction of parading his wickedness—like Topsy—before this audience.

Yet, beside all that, maybe he had some plan, born of the fact that these pursuers, though the ketch might not be able to overtake the prahu when the wind came, might yet be able to make it warm for him somewhen and somehow, for, close up now, he spoke again.

“How about a deal?” said he. “You’re pretty much no good without your boat, but I’ll forget all that. I’m willin’ to trade on equal terms.”

He came close up now, so that they could talk without unduly raising their voices.

“Oh, you are, are you?” said Brown.

“I call that generous.”

“Are you sure you wouldn’t like three-quarters?” said Harding. “It would make us unhappy if we thought we had robbed you.”

“Take that!” cried Mr. Fishuck, seizing a demijohn full of water standing on the deck and dashing it into the frail canoe, which spouted like a geyser, dipped and all but overturned.

“Hell!” cried Haggerstein. Next moment he was scrambling on board from the wreckage of the canoe and the attentions of the attentive shark.

“And now you’ve done it,” said he; and they certainly had as far as his return to the prahu was concerned.

“Done it?” cried the outraged Fishuck. “When *you* done for me—you—blighter! . . . Let me at him!” cried Mr. Fishuck, held back by Harding and Ambrose. “Let me at him and I’ll show him what’s what.”

“Shut up,” said Brown, “and wait till you get ashore for the business—Look!—the prahu has got the wind.”

And sure enough the great sail showed, taking a breeze that first sprang up from south of east, and which was coming like a violet fan spreading open towards the ketch.

Haggerstein, forgetting everything else, sprang to the wheel.

“Can’t you see?” cried he. “That blasted Malay is steering her; she’s going close-hauled, making to get away from us. Pile on everything you’ve got—here’s the breeze.”

It came, full and warm, and the ketch took it with a ruffling of her canvas, and to the creaky tune of block and rope.

Five minutes passed and it became evident that the ketch was only just holding her own—if that. Close-hauled was not her best point in sailing. It evidently was for the prahu.

Haggerstein, who had temporarily taken the helm, handed it to Brown.

“There’s no knowing,” said Haggerstein. “This wind may last or go flat calm again; there’s no knowing, this season of the year.”

“Oh, shut up,” said Brown. “I don’t know what stops me from having you flung overboard. You played us a dirty trick and got that Malay to join you, and now where are you? You might have had your share of the stuff, and now it’s a hundred to one none of us will have anything: we can’t keep up this chase for ever . . . Gosh!”

The prahu, gallantly sailing and most capably steered by her one-man crew, seemed suddenly in trouble. Her great sail, which had been held close-hauled, swung flattened like a broken wing and then vanished as the mast went with a crash.

“She’s struck a reef!” cried Haggerstein. “If she sticks on it we may save the stuff; if she don’t it’s lost.”

Brown said nothing.

There was nothing to say. Nothing to do but steer straight and trust that they might be in time.

It was still possible, if she did not slide off the reef before they reached her, to save the gold.

Just possible.

On the day the ketch started with the gold expedition on board Mary Summers returned home to find that her mother had developed a chill.

It was one of those bad days when all sorts of bad things seem trying to crowd themselves into the twelve hours between dawn and dark.

The going-off of Harding had been followed by the returning home to find her mother ill; on top of that the afternoon post brought an overdue bill for coal; on top of that she broke a china ornament belonging to the sitting-room chimney-piece.

Some women when worried relieve themselves by a fit of dusting. The china shepherd victim of the fit was mended, but remained as a reminder of the bad day, followed by others indifferently good.

It seemed to Mary that their luck had gone off with Harding on this expedition to discover the fate of her father, and to recover, if possible, some of his gold.

They lost the seafaring lodger and got in place of him a young clerk, who had to be got rid of because of his coming home late and sometimes drunk. Then came a girl typist, who shied at paying her bills and even tried to borrow money.

After that came a season of tribulation with a musician engaged by the Palace Theatre of Varieties, and who imagined himself a Mozart.

He paid his way all right, but he paved it with irritations—complaints about the boiling of eggs, the noise of the dog next door, and, worst of all, the noise of the piano two doors off.

Himself a violinist, he did not apologize for the screeching noises with which he filled the house at odd times.

With every regard for himself and none for other people, he was, in short—Temperamental! One day, after several months of this sort of thing, he went off secretly, taking his luggage with him and leaving behind him his bill unpaid.

It was a blessing in one way, but also a blow, for money was an object. The financial position of the house of Summers was, in fact, in an exceedingly shaky condition. Though Mrs. Summers had recovered from

her illness, the after-effects remained, making it necessary to employ a servant to help in running things, and though the servant was small, her wages were big and had to be paid weekly.

On the day the violinist left—at least, on the day when he vanished, leaving his unreceipted bill—things seemed to have approached a limit. There was less than ten pounds in the Summerses' exchequer, and there were bills to be met, to say nothing of the small servant's wages on the following Saturday. It was four o'clock in the afternoon, and Mary had just made herself a cup of tea when a knock came at the door, and going to open it she found herself face to face with Harding.

And she had gone to the door dreading that it might be some creditor with a bill to be paid!

Ten minutes later, as they were sitting at tea—Mrs. Summers was still keeping to her room—and he was starting to tell of his misadventures, Mary interrupted him.

“I know,” she said. “You haven’t been successful, but that doesn’t bother me. I never really quite believed anything would come of it, but at least you are back. Don’t talk about failure, but tell me all that occurred. Tell me everything right from the beginning.”

He started.

The recital took nearly an hour before he came to the incident of the prahu striking the reef.

“If she had stuck on the reef,” said he, “we might have recovered the gold, but when we got there she was gone—nothing but a few planks washing about and the great sail floating on the water.

“The gold is sunk in a hundred fathoms—we took the soundings—and it is there for anyone to fish for.”

“And the Malay man?”

“Gone. The water there is full of sharks.”

Mary sighed.

This wretched gold that had taken away her father seemed fateful for everyone connected with it.

“Did the rest of you get back safe?” she asked.

“Yes,” he said. “We dropped Haggerstein and Ambrose at Thursday Island and sailed the old ketch back. We got in only yesterday. I’d have come to see you then only I had to go home with Brown to see about things.”

“Never mind as long as you are back,” said she.

Then, suddenly:

“Oh, but I forgot.”

“What?”

Instead of replying she ran from the room and returned with a visiting-card. He took it and read:

Messrs. Danks, Elders & Danks,
Cannon Street,
Sydney.

“Danks, Elders and Danks?” said he. “Who are they?”

“I don’t know,” said Mary. “Only the gentleman who called said it would be to your advantage to communicate with them. I said you were away, but I would let you know when you came back.”

Harding pondered.

He could not imagine anyone with interest enough to inquire after him, and this was evidently a business firm. Then came a worrying thought: could this have anything, possibly, to do with the death of Cheke?

He had nothing to fear even if the whole of that story were made public; still, he did not want it made public, either for his own sake or the sake of Brown.

The fear of Haggerstein making mischief had been dissipated by the fact that Haggerstein’s acts would prevent people from listening to him. Haggerstein, besides, was definitely out of the picture; when they had got back to Thursday Island he went off to Papua, urged by prudence and the threats of Mr. Ambrose to expose him. No, Haggerstein was not to be feared. Then why did Harding feel nervous and almost depressed at this card of invitation from the firm of Danks, Elders and Danks to come and see them and receive a piece of good news—news, anyhow, that would be to his advantage?

“I’ll go tomorrow,” said he at last. “What was the man like who called?”

“Oh, just a young man,” said Mary; “he seemed a clerk—at least, I should think he was a clerk. He said Mr. Danks did not advertise for you as he has your address both here and at Mossvale.”

“Well, I’m blessed!” said Harding. “How on earth did he get that?”

“I don’t know,” said Mary. “But you had better go and see; somehow or another,” she finished, “I think it will be worth your while.”

“I’ll go tomorrow, first thing,” he said, “and I’ll come here directly I’ve seen them and tell you all about it.”

Then they fell to talking about their present position.

It was not a very cheerful subject.

Danks, Elders and Danks hold and practise in Cannon Street, Sydney, and it was outside their door that Harding met Uncle Charles on the day when the latter had just left the Aquarium luncheon party disgusted and disgruntled.

The house is a grim building of three storeys, inhabited mainly by lawyers.

Danks and Co. inhabited a suite of rooms on the first floor, an outer office, clerks' room and, opening off that, the room of Mr. Danks.

He was all that was left of the firm, Elders and the other Danks being dead, but he was a very efficient left-over, and he looked it as he sat before his desk this morning. A massive man of forty or so with a face expressionless as a stone wall and little eyes as direct as gimlets. Harding, before parting with Mary the night before, had asked her to give him the personal papers that he had left with her in the suit-case.

It was just as well to be able to prove his identity in case of any trouble about Cheke; but Mr. Danks, as he finished the letter he was writing and asked his visitor to be seated, and having put the letter in the wire rack for post, had nothing to say about Cheke. Instead:

“You are Mr. Harding, I presume?”

“Yes,” said the other.

“Nephew of a client of ours now defunct.”

“How do you mean?” asked the other.

“I mean,” said Mr. Danks, “that your uncle died a fortnight ago.”

“I'm sorry to hear that.”

“Well, some time before his death he made his will. He called upon us one day in a great state of—shall I say—temper. He was angry, as far as I could make out, about an Aquarium that was being planned and to which he had intended contributing a large sum of money. Indeed, I understood him to say that if a man wished to leave his mark behind in this world it was better to leave one big mark and not a number of little ones. I must say I agreed

with him there, and I saw nothing to make me urge him against leaving the bulk of his fortune in the way he contemplated.

“The thing was to be a Super Marine Biological Institute, greater than anything of the sort that we possess.

“Then, unfortunately, he attended a luncheon party given by the projectors and he left it in high temper. The thing was, of course, mentioned in the Press, and quotations given from what I fear was a rather ill-advised speech.

“He called here that afternoon and drafted a will. It did not take him five minutes. It was as though he were afraid of dying and leaving his money to be disputed over or to go in any way to the Public Benefit. In short,” said Mr. Danks, “he has left his estate to you, sir, as his nearest of kin; but don’t mistake me—that expression was not used in the will, so you have no fear of some relative or claimant turning up to dispute the fact.

“The estate was just simply left to you, and that’s all about it.”

Harding could scarcely believe what he had heard.

“How much is it?” he asked at last.

“It totals a little over one hundred thousand pounds, net personalty about eighty thousand. Quite a nice little fortune.”

“Yes.” Harding was still half stunned by the good news.

A nice little fortune. The words struck him strangely, for he had at that moment only some thirty shillings in his pocket.

Brown had said, “You can stay on and help me as before at the same salary—till you can get something better.”

Meaning clearly that he was keeping him in the job just out of friendship.

Brown would always be his friend, considering what they had been through together, but it was impossible to impose on this friendship, and that morning Harding had seen clearly the future before him, a future of small jobs interspersed with intervals of small-job-hunting.

That morning he had seen himself for a moment as what he was—a man, no longer young, who had failed in life, from a business point of view, for want of continuity of endeavour.

He could do great things in spurts—witness the gold-seeking business—but he was not constructed for foot-slogging.

Continuity of endeavour is what enables a man to climb a rope or a mountain, to reach on foot a distant city.

He was not work-shy, only shy of the monotony of repeated mornings of dullness and of jobs that did not appeal to him.

Now at a stroke he found himself in the delectable city without moving a foot towards it, at the top of the mountain without taking a step.

“And now,” said Mr. Danks, “about the matter of credentials. Your likeness to your uncle and the fact that you have been staying both at Mossvale and the Summerses’ (a fact of which he told me) are enough for me, but not for the courts. You have, no doubt, papers?”

“Yes,” said Harding, “I have. I left all my documents in charge of Miss Summers. Here they are. Birth certificate (I had to have that, coming to a new country in search of work), letters from my mother about my uncle—here’s everything, and here’s my solicitor’s address in London. You can write to him.”

Danks took about twenty minutes examining everything. Then he said:

“This is all right. You ought to thank Miss Summers for looking after these documents so carefully.”

“I am going to marry her, if she will have me,” replied the other. “She is my best friend——”

“And that is the best recommendation a wife can have,” said Danks.

“You were my uncle’s solicitor?” said Harding.

“Of course.”

“Well, may I ask you to take charge of these documents and of my affairs?”

“With pleasure; and now, may I ask, are you in need of any monetary advance for present purposes?”

“If you can advance me a hundred pounds I shall be glad,” replied Harding.

Ten minutes later he found himself in the street, where he hailed a taxi, and, driving to the Bank of Australia, cashed Banks’ cheque.

With the money in his pocket he stood for a moment enjoying the bright morning and gazing at the busy crowds.

Never had Sydney, that city of youth, seemed more youthful or more delectable. Then he got into the taxi again and ten minutes later he was telling the good news to Mary Summers. When he had done that business, with the accompaniments you may imagine, he started to tell his good-luck tale to the two people he reckoned his true friends after Mary—Mr. Fishuck and Brown; but Fishuck first, as he was the nearest.

He took himself off to the little cove, where he found the redoubtable Mr. Fishuck seated on an old boat, keel up, by the shack and engaged in caulking it.

“Not my job,” said the caulker. “Nets and lines is my job, but a man has to be doin’ something for a livin’, and here we are all back, as you may say, scrapin’ the barnacles off us and no more money than when we started, and all because of that — of a Haggerstein, blister his soul, and may it bust like a sausage in the devil’s frying-pan—and Murphy said to me only yesterday, ‘Well,’ said he, ‘and what are you grouching at—haven’t you brought the old boat back? Them that go after gold,’ says he, ‘in my experience, is lucky if they get back with their skins, and here you are, back with the boat and all. And I hope to turn an honest penny out of her when she comes to be sold again to some double-ended ass that will maybe be wantin’ to take her out after gold again, or maybe di’monds.’ And ‘Dam’ you and your di’monds,’ says I to him, ‘and what about rats?’—I’d let out at him about them rats—and ‘What do you take me for?’ says he. ‘How was I to know, if I have to go rat-huntin’ in every hooker I have a hand in sellin’? I’ll give you the job,’ says he, ‘for nix,’ says he. Well,” finished Mr. Fishuck, “here we are again, just as on the first day I saw you and you huntin’ for a job.”

“I’m not going to hunt for any more jobs,” said Harding.

Mr. Fishuck heaved a sigh.

“So you’re sayin’,” said he. “Well, anyhow, if you’re ever on your uppers you’ll know where to come for a crust of bread and a lay down, and that’s here.”

“Thanks,” said the other. “You’re a good chap, but I hope I won’t have to come. You see, I’ve just been left a hundred thousand pounds.”

“Oh, get out,” said Mr. Fishuck.

Harding, married to Mary, is now living in a pleasant little house on the borders of Sydney Harbour. Brown often visits them, and they have a small ten-ton yacht, supplied by Mr. Murphy and manned by Mr. Fishuck; there are no rats on it, but that doesn't matter, as it is only a pleasure craft.

Mrs. Summers died last spring, and only yesterday I saw the report that a Yankee named Haggerstein has been speared by Papuans for selling them dud rifles and non-explosive cartridges.

Was he our Haggerstein—or may we hope so?

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *Due East of Friday*, by H. de Vere Stacpoole]