THE PILGRIM SHIP.

By CUTCLIFFE HYNE.

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I.

Even before he left Jeddah, Captain Kettle was quite aware that by shipping pilgrims on the iron decks of the Saigon for transit across the Red sea, he was transgressing the laws of several nations, especially those of Great Britain and her dependencies. But what else could the poor man do? Situated as he was, with such a tempting opportunity ready to his hand, he would have been less than human if he had neglected to take the bargain which was offered. And though the list of things that has been said against Captain Owen Kettle is both black and long, I am not aware that anyone has yet alleged that the little sailor was anything more or less than human in all his many frailties.

Cortolvin came to the chart house and put this matter of illegality to him in plain words when the engines chose to break down two days out of Jeddah, and the Saigon lolled helpless in the blazing Red sea heat.

Cortolvin up to that time had not made himself remarked. He had marched on board from the new Jeddah quay, where the railway is, and posed as an Arab of the Sahara, who was glorying in the newly acquired green turban of a hadji. He was nicked on the mate's tally as a "nigger," along with some 340 other dark-skinned followers of the prophet, and he had spent those two days upon an orthodox square of ragged carpet spread on the rusted iron plating of the lower foredeck. When the pilgrims were mustered for victualing, he had flied in with the rest and held out a brass lotah for his ration of water and a tattered square of canvas for his dole of steamed rice. You could count his tribe twenty yards away, but he'd the look of a healthy man, and when on mornings he helped to throw overboard those of his fellow-pilgrims who had died during the night, it was plain to see that he was a fellow of more than ordinary muscular strength.

He came to Captain Kettle, in the chart house, to report that the pilgrims contemplated seizing the Saigon so soon as ever the engines were once more put in running order. "They've declared a jehad against you, if you know what that is," said Cortolvin.

"A holy war, or some such skittles, isn't it?" said Kettle.

"That's about the size of it," said the hadji. "You'll have to look out if you intend to remain master of this steamboat."

"I don't require any teaching my business from passengers," said Captain Kettle, stiffly.

"All right," said Cortolvin; "have it your own way. But I think you might be decently grateful. I've risked my life by coming to give you news of what was in the wind. And you can't pretend that the information is not useful. You've a coolie crew, who will be absolutely useless if trouble comes. These Lascars always are that way. You've just your two white engineers and two white mates to back you up, and the five of you wouldn't have a show. You've 340 fanatics to deal with, who are all fighting bred and fighting fit. They're all well armed, and they wouldn't a bit object to die scrimmaging in such a cause. You know it's part of their creed that if they dig out while fighting gaiours, they go slick to paradise by lightning express. That wily old camel driver of Mecca painted his heaven as just the sort of dandy place to suit this kind of cattle, and, as most of them have a beast of a time on this earth, they're anxious to move along upstairs whenever a decent opportunity offers to get there."

"They'll be an ugly crowd to tackle; I grant that."

"They are right, and don't you forget it. I might point out, captain, that personally speaking, I'd been a lot safer if I'd stayed down on the lower fore deck yonder, and held my tongue. They'd have got you to an absolute certainty if they ambushed you as was intended, and I could have kept out of the actual throat-cutting and preserved a sound skin. They've all got a profound respect for me; I'm a very holy man."

"And as it is?"

Hadji Cortolvin shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, I chip in with you."

"If you'll tell me why?"

"Cousinship of the skin, I suppose. You're white by birth, and I believe I should turn out to be white also if I kept out of the sun for awhile and had several Turkish baths. Of course, I've a snuff-colored hide on me now, and during the last two years I've been living with men of color, and following their ways, and thinking their thoughts. Funny, isn't it? I come across you; I don't know you from Adam; I can't say I particularly like what I've seen of you; and yet here am I, rounding on my former mates, and chipping in with you, on the clear knowledge that I shall probably get killed during the next few hours for my pains."

"May I ask your name?" said Kettle. "I believe, sir," he added, with a bow, "that you are a gentleman."

The hadji laughed. "So far as I recollect, I was that once, captain. Sorry I haven't a card on me, but my name's W. H. Cortolvin, and I lived near Richmond, in Yorkshire, before I was idiot enough to go wandering off the Cook's tourist routes into the middle of Arabia."

"I'm Welsh myself," said Kettle, "but I've known men from Yorkshire. Shake hands, sir, please. Will you have a whisky peg?"

"Pour it out, captain. I haven't tasted a Christian drink for thirty weary months. And you've got a chattie hung up in the draft of a port. Cool water, ye gods! Bismillah! But it is so good to be alive sometimes."

Captain Kettle looked with distaste at the hadji's attire. "Won't you sling that filthy nightgown thing of yours overboard," he asked, "and have a wash? I can rig you out with some pyjamas from the slopchest."

But Cortolvin would not change his dirt and squalor just then. He had worn it too long to be affected by it, "and," said he, "I don't want to advertise the fact that I'm an Englishman just at present. If my dear friends down yonder on the lower deck knew it they'd not wait for the engines to be repaired. They'd fizzle up just like gunpowder, there and then, and the whole lot of us white men would be pulled into tasselsbefore we'd time to think."

"I don't know about that," said Kettle. "I've faced some of the ugliest crowds that have floated on the seas before this, and they thought they were going to have it all their own way, and they found when it came to shooting that I could keep my end up very handily."

He waved his guest to a deck chair, placed a box of cheroots hospitably open on the chart table, and then he went outside the chart house and leaned over the bridge deck-rail. The awning above him threw a clean-cut shade which swung to and fro as the Saigon rolled over the faint, oily swell; and outside its shelter the sun's rays fell like molten brass, and the metal work was hot enough to raise a blister. The air was motionless and stagnant and greasy with the smell of humanity. The whole fabric of the steamer shimmered in the dancing heat.

For the dense mass of pilgrims below the situation approached the intolerable. Left to itself, the rusted iron deck beneath their bare skins would have grown hot enough to char them. Nothing but a constant sluicing with water made it in any way to be endured. And as the water from alongside came up to them as warm as tea, it did but little to refresh. The African can withstand most temperatures which are thrown from above onto the face of this planet, but even the African can at times die from heat as glibly as his betters. Even as Kettle watched, one of the pilgrims, a grizzle-headed Hausa from the western Soudan, was contorted with heat apoplexy; breathed stentoriously for a minute or so, and then lay still, and immediately became a prey to flies innumerable. Two of his nearest comrades bestirred themselves to look at him; pronounced that life was extinct; stood up, and with an effort carried the body out of the press, and heaved it over the hot iron bulwark into the oily sea beneath. It is not good that the dead should remain with the quick even for minutes in circumstances such as those. And whilst the bearers carried him away, an old white-haired negro from a koto stood upon his feet, swaying to the roll of the ship, and faced the heat-blurred east with bowed head. Aloud he bore witness that God was great, and that Mahommet was the prophet of God; and that of mortals, each man's fate was writ upon his forehead. And then the rest of the pilgrims bent their foreheads to the torturing deck plates, and made profession of the faith, following his words.

Captain Kettle, from his stand against the rail of the bridge deck, pitied the heathen, and thought with a complacent sigh of a certain obscure chapel in South Shields, but at the same time he could not avoid being impressed by the heathens' constancy. They might die, but they forbore to curse God in doing it, and the omission gave him an insight into the workings of fatalism, which made him think more of what Cortolvin had said. Every man among the pilgrims had sword or spear or mace, or rifle within grip of his fist, and as a fighting force—with fatalism to back them—he began to realize that they could make a very ugly company to maneuver against. A regulation of the pilgrim trade requires that all weapons shall be taken from this class of passengers during the voyage, but Kettle had omitted to disarm them through sheer contempt for what they could do. If they chose to fight among themselves, that was their own concern; it never even occurred to him as they came off Jeddah quay, noisy and odorous, that they would dare to contend against his imperial will, but now he sincerely wished that the means of serious offense were not so handy to their fingers. I do not say that he was afraid, for, know-

"OH, YES, I'VE A WIFE."

ing him well, I honestly believe that the little ruffian has never yet feared man that was born of woman, but the safety of the Saigon was a matter just then very near to his heart, and he had forebodings as to what might happen to her.

He went back again inside the chart house, sat himself upon the sofa, and ran a finger round inside the collar of his white drill coat.

"Do you like cheroots, sir?" he said to his tattered guest.

"Nice cheroots," said Cortolvin. "Wonder how many I'll smoke. Those true believers are a pretty tough crowd aren't they? There's one Soudanese fellow in a Darfur suit of mail. Did you notice him? He's been a big war sheik in his day. He helped to smash up Hicks Pasha's army, and commanded a thousand men at the storming of Khartoum; but he got sick of Mahdiism about a year back, and set out to perform the Hadj. When it comes to fighting you'll see that man will shine."

"He shall have my first shot," said Kettle. "It surprises me," said Cortolvin, "that you ever went in for this pilgrim-carrying business at all. You must have been pretty hard pushed, captain?"

"Hard wasn't the word for it," said the shipmaster with a sigh. "I met misfortune, sir, in Chili. I disagreed with my employer, who was a lady, and went off cruising in a boat by myself. A tea steamer picked me up and put me in Colombo. I got from there to Bombay as second mate of a tramp, but I couldn't stand the old man's tongue, and went ashore without my wages. I guess, sir, I'm no good except in command; I can't take an order civilly. Well, in Bombay I'd a regular nipgut time of it. I bummed round the agents' offices till I almost blushed to look at their punkah coolies; but I'd no papers to show that would do me any good; and none of them would give me a ship the size of a rice mat. At last when I was getting desperate, and pretty near put to going to sea before the mast, a Cardiff man I once knew, came to the lodging house and gave me a tip. He'd been master of a country steamer; he'd been sacked (he didn't deny it) for drunkenness; he'd not drawn a sober breath for months, and didn't see any prospects of changing his habits; and there was the berth vacant, and I might have it for the asking. The pay wasn't much; only Rs 100 a month and percentage on profits; and the owner was a Parsee. I'd never been low enough down to sign on under a black man before, but I guess I was past being very nice in my tastes just then. The owner was fat and oldish and wore a thing on his head like a top had turned upside down, and I will say I did not give him much politeness. But he knew his place; he sahib'd me quite respectfully; and he said he'd be honored if I'd take his steamer under my charge. 'She was all he'd got,' he said, 'he loved her like his life and he'd not trust her to any one except a pukka sahib.' Of course he lied a good deal; all natives do that; and he fixed up our bargain so that I'd little to win and he'd a good deal; which is those Parsees' way. But I will say he was always most respectful, and in the matter of victualing he really surprised me. Why, he actually put bass' ale on board at four annas the bottle!

"We cleared from Bombay in corn, and cottons, and earthenware consigned to Jeddah, and the owner told me I'd have no trouble in getting a cargo of dates and coffee to bring back. But the Jeddah merchants seemed to think different. I cut down freights to near vanishing point, but they wouldn't look at them anyhow. I couldn't get a ton of cargo on board for any spot on the globe, no, not if I'd offered to carry it for nothing. The Saigon might have swung there at moorings till the bottom rotted out of her; and expenses were running up all the time. The climate was sickly, too. I lost my serang before I'd been there a week, and two more of the coolies died in the next ten days. So when this cargo of pilgrims offered, I tell you I just jumped at it. Of course this old wreck was not fitted for the trade. She's small; she's iron decks, she's only two boats, and she's not near enough water tanks. The'd be a big penalty if he was caught. But I shipped a second rice steamer and signed the charter party, smiling. It wasn't as if I'l got to go through the Ditch to one of the Morocco ports; the pilgrims had only to be taken across to Kossair; and squaring an Egyptian custom officer is only a case of how much backshish."

"You do know your trade," said Cortolvin.

"The under side of it," said Kettle with a sigh. "A man with luck like mine has to. He never gets on with the decent lines where everything is square and above board. He can only get the little and corner owners, who you've got to make dividends for somehow and no questions asked or else just up and take the dirty sack. I'm a man," he added, with a frown, "that can do the job well and they know it, and keep me to it. But I despise myself all the time. It isn't in my nature, Mr. Cortolvin. Put me ashore, give me a farm and let me bend yellow gaiters and a large pattern coat, and there wouldn't be a straighter, sweeter-natured man between here and heaven."

The hadji swept the perspiration from his forehead with the back of a grimy knuckle. "There's no accounting for taste, captain. I'm the owner of acres near Richmond, and if I choose I could ride about my park and see to the farms, and live the life of a country gentlemen just in the way you think you'd like. But I tired of it."

"Perhaps you have no wife," suggested the sailor.

His guest gave a short laugh. "O Lord, yes," he said, "I've a wife." He paused a minute and then threw his half-smoked cheroot savagely out into the sunshine. "You can take it from me that I have a wife, captain. But—well, you see I've always been an Arabic scholar, and I thought I'd come out to the Hedjaz to study dialects for a year or so. It would be a pleasant change after the milk and honey of a country life. I don't seem to have got killed, and I think I've liked it on the whole. It's been exciting, and I know more about bastard Arabic than any European living, now that poor Palmer's dead, if that's any satisfaction. If I chose to go home now I could pose as no end of a big boss. The only thing is, I can't quite make my mind up whether to risk it. By God, yes," he added with a stare out into the baking sunshine beyond the doorway, "O yes, I've a wife."

Captain Kettle did not quite follow all this, so he said politely and vaguely, "Well, of course you know your own affairs best, sir." Then he took a long and steady look at his guest. "You'll excuse me, sir, but your name seems familiar. I wonder if you'd got that beard and some of your hair off whether I should recognize you."

"I fancy not."

"Cortolvin," the little man mused. "I'm sure I've seen that name before somewhere."

The hadji laughed. "I'm afraid that neither I nor any of my people have been celebrated enough to have come into public notice, skipper. But we had a namesake some years back who was famous. A horse named Cortolvin won the Grand National in '67. That's what you'll have got on your mind."

Captain Kettle stiffined. "I beg your pardon, sir," he said with acid politeness, "but I don't see you've earned a right to insult me. When I am at sea I am what circumstances make me. When I am ashore in England, I would have you know I am a very different person. I am a regular attender at chapel, and a man who (outside business maters) tries to keep entirely straight. In England, sir, I take an interest in neither pocket picking, horse racing, nor sacrilege, and I have it on the word of a minister I sit under that there is very little to choose between the three."

Cortolvin faced the situation with ready tact. That this truculent little ruffian who could flirt with homicide without a second thought should so strongly resent the imputation of being interested in a horse race, didn't surprise him much. He had met others of the breed before. And he smoothed down Capt Kettle's ruffled feelings with the easy glibness of a man of the world. But the needs of the moment were again recurring to him with violence, and he broke off artistically to refer to them.

"Don't you think," he said, "my fellow pilgrims will bear a little attention now, skipper?"

"I will be off and make up a bit of a prize packet for them," said Kettle. "Excuse me, for two minutes whilst I go and give instructions to my chief."—And he swung on his pith helmet and left the chart house.

II.

The sun climbed higher into the fleckless sky, and lulled above the Saigon in insolent cruelty. The Red sea heat grew, if anything yet more dreadful. The men's veins stood out in ropes upon their steaming bodies, and it scorched them to draw in a breath. Drink, too, was scarce. The Hedaz is a region almost waterless; the desert at the back drains up all the moisture, and the Saigon had left Jeddah with her tanks only half filled. She had to depend upon her condenser, and this was small. And in the tropics condenser water must be dealt out in a sparing ration or a dozen hours may see a whole ship's company down with raging dysentery.

The Saigon carried a spar deck amidships, and the pilgrims were gouped in two bodies fore and aft of this on the iron plating of the fore and main decks.

The spar deck was officially reached from these lower levels by a couple of slender iron ladders, but it was not unscalable to a fairly active climber. There was an alleyway passing beneath the spar deck, but this could easily be closed by the iron doors in the two bulkheads, which fastened inside by heavy clamping screws.

The chief engineer came into the chart house and hitched up his grimy pyjamas and mopped his face with a wad of cotton waste. He looked meaningly at the whisky bottle, but Kettle ignored his glance.

"Well, Mr. McTodd?" he said.

"I'm a' ready for the pagans, sir, when ye're willing to gi' the worrd."

"What are your engines like now?"

"A wee bittie less fit for the scrapheap than they were a dozen hours back, but no very much to boast of," Mr. McTodd spat out into the sunshine. "They're the rottenist engines ever I fingered," said he, "and that's what I think of them. A man ought to have double my pay to be near them. They're just heart-breaking."

"You knew she wasn't the P. & O. when you signed on."

"We're neither of us here, Captain Kettle, because we were offered fatter berths."

Kettle frowned. "I'll trouble you, Mr. McTodd, to attend to the matter in hand. You have those steam pipes ranged?"

"Both forrard and aft."

"Commanding both ladders?"

"Just like that."

"And you've plenty of steam?"

"Ye can hear it burring through the escape this minute if ye'll use your ears. It's been vara exhausting work toiling down yonder in that a'ful heat."

"Well, Mr. Cortolvin here assures me that the niggers will begin to play up the minute we get under weigh, so you see we know where we are, and must be ready for them. I shall want you and the second engineer on deck, of course, so you must arrange for one of your crew to run the engines till we've got the business settled."

"I've a greaser down yonder who can open the throttle," said McTodd gloomily, "but he's got no notion of nursing sick engines like these, and as like as not he'll drive them off their bedplates in a score of revolutions. You'd better let me keep the engine mysel', captain. I'm a sick man, and I'm no fit for fighting with my throat as dry as it is now."

Captain Kettle poured out a liberal two fingers of whisky and handed it across. "Now Mac," said he, "wet your neck, and let's have no more of this nonsense. You'll have to fight for your life inside of ten minutes, and you'll do it better sober."

The engineer eyed the whisky and poured it slowly down its appointed path. "Mon," he said, "ye've an a'ful poor opinion o' my capacity. I'll just be off and give yon coolie greaser instructions, and get my side arms, and be with you again in forty clock ticks."

"I pity the nigger that comes to hand grips with McTodd," said Kettle, when the grimy man in the gray pajamas had left the chart house. He's an ugly beggar to handle when he's sober as he is now. We'll get ready now, sir, if you please. You go to the after end of the bridge deck with McTodd and the second mate, and I'll look after the forrard end with the old mate and the second engineer. When they try to rush the ladder McTodd will give them the steam and they will never be able to face it. All you and the second mate have to do is to see they don't climb up over the rail."

"I wish it could be avoided," said Cortolvin sadly. "That high-pressure steam will scald some of them horribly."

"It will do more than that," said Kettle. "It will strip the meat clean off their bones."

"I have lived amongst those men or their sort for two solid years, and many of them have shown me kindnesses."

"You should have thought of that, sir, before you came to me here in the chart house."

"I did think of it; but I couldn't be a renegade to my color; and so I came. But, captain, will you let me speak to them? Will you let me tell them that their scheme is known and prepared for? Will you let me explain to them what they will have to face if they start an outbreak?"

Capt Kettle frowned. "You will understand that I am not frightened of the beasts," he said.

"I quite know that," said Cortolvin, "and I am sorry to spoil a fight. But it is their lives I am begging for."

"Very well," said Kettle, "you can fire away. I don't speak their bat, and it is as well they should know from some one what they have to look forward to. Here's a life preserver which you may find useful. It's the only weapon I have to offer you. My pistol is the only gun we have in the ship."

The pair of them went outside the chart-house and walked to the head of the forward ladder. A steam pipe lay on the deck planks, and the second engineer stood beside it with thumbs in his waist strap. On the deck below the pilgrims no longer squatted together on their carpets, but stood in knots, and talked excitedly. Cortolvin clapped his hands and the sea of savage faces turned toward him.

There were representatives in that mob from half the Mohammedan peoples of northern Africa. There were lean Arab camel breeders of the desert, jet black farmers from the Great lakes and the upper Nile, Haussas from the western Soudan, limp fellaheen from lower Egypt, an Egba who had served in the British police force at Lagos, merchants from the back of the Barbary states, workers in metal from Sokoto, and weavers from Timbukhtu. They were not all the holders of the title of hadji, though by the Mohammedan law every male must make the mecca pilgrimage at least once in a lifetime, unless debarred by poverty or lameness, it may be done by deputy. And these deputies, fierce, truculent ruffians, who had lived their lives amongst incessant wars and travel, were perhaps the most dangerous of all the lot.

They listened to their late associate with a momentary hush of surprise. He spoke to them in fluent Arabic. He did not appeal to their better feelings; he knew his audience. He said it was written that if they tried this thing, if they attempted to capture the steamer, they should surely fail; that all things were prepared to give them battle, and that a horrible death awaited those who persisted in their design. And then he tried to point out the nature of the Saigon's defenses, but there he failed. It is ill work to explain the properties of high-pressure steam to savages. A murmur rose among them which grew. They roared defiance. And then the great black mass of them rushed for the iron ladder.

Captain Kettle clapped a whistle to his lips and blew it shrilly. "Now, then, Mr. Cortolvin," he cried, "away with you aft to help McTodd. These cattle here want something more than talk, and I'm going to give it to them."

In answer to his whistle, steam had been turned on from below. The second engineer unhitched his thumbs from his waist belt, took a lump of waste in each grimy hand, and lifted the iron pipe. It was well jointed and moved easily, and he turned the nozzle of it to sweep the ladder. In that baking air the steam did not condense readily; it traveled three yards from the nozzle of the pipe before it became even thinly visible, and it infringed upon the black, naked bodies and burned horribly without being seen.

At first they did not flinch. With a dreadful valor they faced the torment and fought with each other to be first upon the rungs, and then when those in front would have held back the mob behind pressed them irresistibly onwards. In a moment or so the first rank began to go down before that withering blast, and then others trod on them and fell also, till the hill of writhing black humanity grew to half the height of the iron ladder. And in the meantime others of the pilgrims were trying to storm the bridge deck at other points, but on the port side, the gray-headed old mate fighting barehark with an ax, and to starboard Captain Kettle with pistol and knuckle duster, battled like wild cats to keep the sacred planking inviolate.

What was going on at the after end of the Saigon they could not tell. From behind them came the roar of the fighting Hausa, and the savage war cries of the desert just as they rose up from before their faces. But in its first flush the fight was too close for any man's thoughts to wander from his own immediate adversaries.

It seemed, however, that the battle was over first in the after part of the steamer, and whether this was because the attack there was less heartful or because Mr. McTodd's artillery was the more terrible cannot now be known. The question was debated much afterward without coming to a decision. But, anyway, by the time Captain Kettle's adversaries had ceased to rage against him, Cortolvin was free to come and stand by his side as interpreter. The wounded lay sprawling and writhing about the iron decks below them; the survivors—and scarcely one of these was without his scald—huddled against the forecastle; and the grimy second engineer held the steam pipe upward so that a gray pall hung between the Saigon and the sun.

"VERY WELL," SAID KITTY," "YOU CAN FIRE AWAY."

"Now, sir," said Kettle, "kindly translate for me. Tell those animals to chuck all their hardware over the side or I'll cook the whole lot of them like so many sausages."

Cortolvin lifted up his voice in sonorous Arabic. "It was written," he crid, "that the gaiour should prevail. It is written also that those among you having wit shall cast your weapons into the sea. It is written, moreover, that those of you who do not on this instant disarm shall taste again of the scorching breath of Elbis."

A stream of weapons leaped up through the air and fell into the swells alongside with tinkling splashes.

"It would be a weariness to guard you," Cortolvin went on. "Swear by the beard of the prophet to make no further attempt against this ship or we shall gaol you fast in death."

A forest of trembling black hands shot up before him.

"We swear!" they cried.

"Then it is written that you keep your vow," said Cortolvin. "God is great! See now to your sick." He turned to Kettle and touched his tagged turban, after the manner of an officer reporting. "The mutiny is ended, sir," he said.

Captain Kettle swung himself lightly on to the upper bridge and telegraphed "full speed ahead" to the engine room. The propeller splashed in the oily swells and the Saigon gathered weigh. Sullen and trembling the pilgrims began to tend their hurts, and presently McTodd, with a large copper kettle in his hand, descended among them and distributed oil and surgical advice.

"There were none actually killed at my end," said Cortolvin.

"I dropped four," said Kettle. "I had to, it was either me or them. And my old mate axed half a dozen before they let him be. We'd a tight time here whilst it lasted."

"It will require a good lump of bachshish to explain it all satisfactorily at Kosseir."

"O, I can't go near there now after this. No custom house for me, sir. I shall just run in shore a dozen miles short of it, and put the beggars on the beach in my boats, and let them get into Kossier as best they can. I suppose you'll come back with me?"

"I suppose so. Anyway, I can't go with them."

"I can imagine," said Kettle drily, "they'd give you a lively time, if they had you to themselves for five minutes. The sons of the prophet don't admire having Europeans messing about the Kaaba. But I owe you something, sir, and I shall be happy to go out of my way to serve you. I will drop you at Suakim, or at Aden, or at Perim, where I am going to coal, whichever you please."

"But what about yourself?"

"O, I shall be all right. I am seldom in need of a nursery maid, sir."

"But if this affair gets into the newspapers, inquiries will be made, and you'll very possibly find yourself in an ugly hole."

"It won't get in the papers," said Kettle, thoughtfully. "The pilgrims can't tell, my officers daren't for their own sakes, and you leave me to see my coolies don't. Newspapers," he repeated, dreamily, "queer the hint should have come like that."

"What hint? What are you talking about?"

"I remembered then where I'd seen your name, sir. It was in the Times of India, general news column."

"What was said?"

"Well, sir, I suppose you'd better be told. But you must hold up for a hardish knock. Will you come into the charthouse for a minute and have a peg?"

"No, get along, man; get along."

"I think it was about your wife, sir. Does she hunt?"

"All the season."

"Then it will be her. I remember now it said Richmond in Yorkshire, and the name was Mrs. W. H. Cortolvin. She's broken her neck, sir."

Cortolvin clutched at the white rail of the bridge. "My God," he cried, "Dead! Julia dead! is that all, captain?"

"It was only a two-line paragraph. You'll please understand how sorry I am to carry such sad news, Mr. Cortolvin."

"Thanks, skipper, thanks." He turned away and walked to the end of the bridge and stayed there for a while, leaning against an awning stanchion, a staring at the baking levels of the Red sea, which were slipping past the Saigon's rusty flanks. And then he came back again and stood at Kettle's side, looking down at the pilgrims anointing their scalds below. "I have learned to be something of a fatalist, captain," he said, "when I was amongst those people. This is how I sum the situation. 'It was written that my wife should die whilst I was away. It was written also that I should live. God ordered it all. God is great.'

Captain Kettle gripped his hand in sympathy. "I'm sorry for you, sir; believe me, I am truly sorry. If you think a bit of poetry about the occasion would help you at all, just you say, and I'll do it. I'm in the mood for poetry now. All things put together, we've been through a pretty heavy time during these last few hours."

"Thanks skipper, thanks," said Cortolvin. "I know you mean well. And now, if you don't mind, I'll leave you. I think I'd like to be alone for a bit."

"You do, sir. Go and lie down on my bunk. I'll have you a beautiful elegy written by the time you're back on deck again. It will comfort you."

A TEARFUL BRIDE.

The Part a Celestial Must Play—A Bit of China in America.

A native daughter of San Francisco is the central figure of a queer little drama just now being enacted in Chinatown, relates the San Francisco Chronicle. The young woman is Chinese and the customs of her foremothers have claimed her as their own.

She is the bride-elect, this little Miss Gon Moy. Her father has been in the undertaking business here for forty years, and the family is one of wealth and position. One of the sons, Roon Gay, is secretary of the Chinese parlor of Native Sons, and all the brothers have been educated in English schools.

Not so little Miss Gon Moy. That would not do for a girl of good family. She has lived a secluded life ever since she was a wee little girl, and now that she sits weeping and wailing that she is to be a maid no more, she may be wondering, too, whether in those free days of her childhood she ever saw Chong Sun, the young man who is going to be, who practically is already, her husband. She has never seen the bridegroom, this defrauded little bride, so far as she knows.

She has seen many men in her day, though, perhaps peeping out at them, as her bridesmaids are doing now, in violation of Chinese etiquette. And who knows but she may have seen this very particular young man? Might it not have been he who smiled up at her so prettily that day when she was herself an honored attendant at the wedding of her friend, or that other day when she first wore her hair after the fashion of marriageable girls?

Though she may ponder all these things in her heart, the bride mustn't stop weeping and wailing.

Mourning for the dead is cheerfulness itself by comparison with the part a Chinese bride has to play, and this one must long to enjoy the freedom and comfort of her father's undertaking shop home once more.

She was taken away from there about two weeks ago, after her parents and the parents of Chong Sun had arranged the marriage, including all the details about settlements and presents.

A good-sized store room at Jackson and Stockton streets had been prepared for the ceremonies. The brother of the bride conducted me to the place this morning and entertained me after the fashion of the cultured upper class Chinese people in extending hospitality to white devils.

About the door a motley crowd of coolies, hoodlums, children and the curious generally elbowed vigorously in the attempt to get a peep beyond the often opened door. A row of heads was strung along at the top of the red draperies which concealed the lower half of the high windows, and save that the heads were evidently very much alive and had bright, bead-like eyes that sparkled down at the crowd out on the sidewalk one might have supposed them to be hanging from the ceiling by their queus, arranged by some modern Chinese Bluebeard.

My guide indicated by a graceful gesture that the people were to give me "gangway," and the crowd of Celestials rolled back with an uncanny quickness that reminded me of the waters of the Red sea obeying Aaron's rod.

Two fine, large American flags draped the entrance and half partitioned the room. In quiet contrast Japanese screens completed the divisions, and the room was so arranged that its air of being one big room and yet full of the unseen, the mysterious, the suggestive, sent the shivers up and down my spine.

The bride's father is master of ceremonies up there, and my guide presented me with courtly graciousness. A dozen comfortable women smiled at me over their tea cups, and children in fresh, gay costumes gave friendly greeting.

I began to feel very much at home, and I quickly asked to see the bride. Instantly the temperature fell several degrees. The smiles were turned to frowns, my gracious guide found urgent business, elsewhere, his brothers and his father suddenly became absolutely unable to understand or speak a word of English.

The room was full of pretty things, and I thought I would be patient a little and look at the presents.

There were plenty of them. A row of express wagons stood outside loaded with furniture, trunks full of silk, bric-a-brac, all presents to the bride.

The mystery of the row of heads was explained from within. Chinese maidens came and went from among the screens, shed their slippers dexterously and stepped upon the matting of what was once a show window. They peeped over the draperies and down at the men in the street, and they gazed with an intensity and an evident pleasurable excitement hard to explain to the ordinary inhabitant of a world pretty well filled up with ordinary men. The bride did not appear. She wailed softly, but not as one without hope.

She couldn't see the presents, but she knew they were there. She hadn't seen the bridegroom, either, but she knew that on Wednesday he will come for her, and that she will be driven about the streets in a carriage, a brass band before and all the express wagons loaded with presents following on behind.

But nobody offered me as much as a cup of tea in all that hall of feasting and revelry.

It was a little bit lonesome, too, among all those busy people in gala attire and unable to speak save in the gutteral language of a land the odors of which stuck in my throat and dulled my wits into an inability to comprehend the suavely elusive people who surrounded me.

Before the spell of "them spicy eastern smells" had bound me quite, I escaped into San Francisco and the present.

And the sound of a Fourth of July celebration in miniature followed close on the heels of my departure.

The representatives of the oldest civilization under the sun were taking pains to protect a native daughter of San Francisco from the contaminating influences set in motion by the too near approach of a white devil.

TELEGRAPHING "ON 'CHANGE"

Wonderful System of Recording Stock Quotations in Many Cities.

APPARATUS CONTROLLED BY ELECTRICITY

Telegraph Operators Guarded Like Prison Inmates to Prevent Bribery—Exact Science of News Distribution.

The remarkable system by means of which the New York exchanges deliver stock quotations simultaneously in various parts of the country has been well illustrated by recent heavy wheat markets. The public probably does not know that there are mechanical arrangements for transmitting stock news from city to city, so that this news will be posted on dials in New York, Chicago and other cities at the same moment; that the New York exchange employs several operators who are so much sought by dishonest brokers that a bodyguard is placed over them during the hours of "change;" that these men have been offered thousands of dollars by arbitrage brokers to delay certain messages for half a minute; and that the whole system of quotation delivery has been reduced to a science so exact as to make even the experienced broker marvel over the details of the system.

As a matter of fact, there is probably no kind of telegraphic communication that moves with such lightning-like speed, that requires such a nice balance of mechanical perfection and human skill, and that at the same time so carefully guards against leakage en route, as the one which transmits information from the great exchanges. In the New York Stock exchange alone there may be 10,000 separate quotations sent out in the course of a day and the record of each of these transactions must pass through human hands and brains, as well as through recording and transmitting instruments and miles of wire and tape; yet so rapid is the system that each sale or offer is reported in 2,000 New York offices within an average of a quarter of a minute from the time it takes place on the floor of the exchange. In the New York Stock exchange, which will serve as a type of all, the line of communication begins with the "reporter" on the floor. There are fourteen of these reporters and they are the employes of the exchange itself. To each one is assigned a certain number of stocks and he is supposed to obtain a record of all sales in his particular group. All the business on the floor of the exchange is done by verbal agreement, and is carried on amid a babel of noise, but it is very seldom that a sale escapes him. He jots down each transaction on a little slip which is rushed across the floor to one of the telegraphic booths and is put on the wire within 10 seconds of the time it is made.

SHORTEST LINE IN THE WORLD.

The wire over which the operations of the exchange are sent is probably the shortest independent telegraph line in the world. It extends only from the exchange floor to the attic, where it splits and terminates in two little box-like rooms, side by side. These are the operating rooms of the New York Stock Quotation company, which sends reports to the offices of members of the exchange within the district known to the outside world as "Wall street," but here simply as "the street," and to the telegraph company's patrons scattered throughout the city. The quiet of these two little rooms, broken only by the steady click-click of the instruments, contrasts strangely with the roar and clatter of the exchange floor, and the dozen operators who are the only occupants of the place seem far removed from the maelstrom of rising and falling fortunes that is raging below, though in reality they are much nearer to it than the persons who watch the tumult on the floor from the galleries.

"Most of the men employed here," said the superintendent, "have been for years engaged in this kind of work. An ordinary operator, who has been engaged in sending word messages, no matter how rapid he might be, would be of no use to us here for the first few months, until he got into the swing of the work. You see, nearly everything we send out here is in the form of quotations, which consist of figures or special characters, which require a special training to master.

"The men are all naturally fast operators, and are selected with special care from among the best in the Western Union service. The skill which some of them acquire at this work is really remarkable. The average record of the operators, as I have figured it out, is about twenty-five quotation per minute. Each quotation runs something like this: 'W. U. 89¾,' never shorter than that, so that this means about 200 impressions per minute, or a total of 7,500 quotations for the time the exchange is in operation—from 10 in the morning to 3 in the afternoon."

When the business of the exchange is running an ordinary course, the transmitting operator takes each quotation by ear as it comes over the short Morse wire leading from the floor of the exchange, and sends it out as it comes, without waiting for it to be recorded, so that the printing of the quotation on the tape in every ticker in the system is practically instantaneous with the touch of the transmitting operator on the exchange floor. When there is a rush of business, however, there are two receiving operators to each transmitter, one seated on each side of him. They take down the messages as they come, and the transmitter sends them out alternately, being able to work twice as fast as the receivers.

GUARDED LIKE PRISONERS.

During their hours of duty the operators are, to all intents and purposes, prisoners. They are a flight above the highest floor to which the elevators run, and are guarded by a stalwart stock exchange janitor, who will not permit any person to go near them. The effectiveness with which this individual does his work is proved recently by the superintendent of the telegraph company, who was turned back by the zealous guard, and was not allowed to enter the operating room of his own company until he had brought the secretary of the exchange to vouch for him. There are instances in the history of the institution where the operators were offered some thousands of dollars to delay one message, merely to the extent of sending another ahead of it. So far as is known, however, there is no instance in which such an offer was accepted. The only way a man could affect the sending of messages now would be to give all his telegrams to one operator, and have a secret understanding by which the operator would rush these messages ahead of all others. But such an imposition would be quickly found out, with consequences disastrous to both parties.

The whole history of the rise and fall of the arbitrage or scalping business is a story of the perfection of telegraphic communication. It was regularly and profitably operated between New York and Boston and New York and Philadelphia. The arbitrage broker required only a private wire between New York and Boston, let us say, with terminals as near as possible to the exchanges in the two cities. The margin of his profit was represented by the difference in time made over his private wire and that of the public service. An active stock, such as Chicago Gas, perhaps opened in New York at 103. The opening bids in Boston might be the same. A bull movement might develop in Chicago Gas in New York, and the next sale was 104. The broker knowing that as soon as Boston heard of this the Boston price would rise to 104, rushes a message over his private wire to his Boston agents to "Buy Chicago Gas." If this message beat the official announcement of the rise in the stock, the broker's agent was able to buy Chicago Gas at 103¾ in Boston, while the broker himself would be selling the stock at 104 in New York, thereby "scalping" ¼ and making a handsome profit at no risk.

It is possible now to send an order from the New York stock exchange, have it delivered at the exchange in Boston or Chicago and obtain an answer announcing that the order has been filled, in the space of two or three minutes, and in some instances it has been done in less time. The only arbitrage business now carried on in New York is between that city and London, and here it is simply a case of getting the cable first. M. F. Harding, the Western Union superintendent, says that it is not unusual to send a business message to London and to receive an answer inside of five minutes.

The record for quick cabling was established in the recent whist tournament between the house of representatives and the English House of Commons, when a message traveled from Washington to Westminster hall and back in thirteen and one-fourth seconds.

THE TWO RESPONSIVE DIALS.

Much more rapid than this is the official exchange of prices between the two exchanges. Formerly the slips recording the sale prices of wheat had to be carried from the wheat pit across the floor of the exchange to a telegraphic booth by a messnger, as is done in the stock exchange, but some time ago the superintendent of the Western Union suggested that the service could be improved by placing an operator directly in the wheat pit. This saves a trip of perhaps twenty feet, but in slicing the edges off telegraphic records it is necessary to cut exceedingly fine, and even inches may count.

At one side of the wheat pit in the New York produce exchange there is a high pulpit-like desk in which two men sit side by side. In front of one is a telegraphic instrument, the wire from which terminates a few feet from the Chicago wheat pit. The second man operates a number of keys which control the dial on the big "New York"