

dense the smoke had rolled. He was astonished because the damage had been no greater. The wheel was not burned at all, and at the stern the bulwark looked fresh and bright in comparison to the amidships' ruin.

Forward of the great amidships gap, Parton, as he peered, could see the captain's big water tank still standing, but the after end was quite blown out, and as he looked at it he realized the significance of the lesser explosion which had followed the great detonation of the Humberite. It had been the noise of the bursting water tank that he heard. Heated until there was not room enough in it for both its water and the steam which the roaring heat had generated, it had exploded, and helped to put the fire amidships out by pouring its deluge of fresh water directly on its heart through the very hole which the explosion had torn for it, as if with the idea of offering means for undoing its own fell work.

Parton longed to run forward and below at once in order to find whether his diamonds were safe or not, but he curbed his impatience for many reasons and went with the captain down into the cabin of the ship.

Captain Sears gathered up some of the clothes which were still hanging against the bulkhead at the back of the captain's berth, and taking an armful of them carried them over to the cabin table and laid them down on it.

While he was taking the clothes from the berth Captain Sears noticed Captain Burgee's big silver watch hanging against the bulkhead.

"Well, if there ain't Captain Burgee's watch!" he said in great astonishment. Then he looked around. Hanging in its place was the ship's chronometer. "Well, you must a' be'n in a hurry," he exclaimed.

These valuables made his mind turn to the salvage he had given up and he sighed softly.

"We were," laughed Parton. Then, going to his own berth, Parton gathered out of it such of his own belongings as they found there. Among them was his watch.

But the strain of working here in the cabin at such unimportant matters was too much for Parton. He felt that it would be unwise to tell Captain Sears about the treasures in the hold, and he had resolved when he had come on board not to show his anxiety about it. He knew that his interest in the cargo of the ship below decks would be surprising to the villagers, and he had no desire to arouse their curiosity.

He hesitated for a moment. Then he said:

"While you are in here I will take a look below, so that I can report to the captain about the condition of the hold. He will be anxious to know what shape his cargo's in, and I—have a few little things down there I want to see about myself."

"I'll be with you in just a minute," Sears said. "I jest unscrew this here chronometer. Captain Burgee allus would have the best they was. This here one cost him pretty near \$500. He'll be right glad to see it ag'in."

It was easy to see that it hurt him to have thrust upon his mind the bits of salvage which might have come to him, but which he had renounced.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The Matter of Punishment.

Ain't God clever! That's one reason why I think the Methodists is all wrong in figgerin' out the details of eternal torment. They don't give God no credit for His originality an' brains. Th' Tophet that their preacher-men describe is only what a very ordinary man, not over bright, would cook up for th' people that he hated. God knows 10,000 ways of punishin' th' wicked that beats their hell all holier. An' as for rewardin' of the good, man gits heaven right here on earth when his wife is lovin', or a woman when her husband re'ly cherishes and is a good provider—Such things'll go a Methodist paradise at least a dozen better an' not try more'n half.—The Log Book of The Lyddy.

When they reached the hatch and examined it by lantern light, a detail attracted Parton's attention and worried him. He felt sure that the hatch had been battened down and clamped when he had left the ship. Now he observed that the clamps were gone and the box edges of the hatch were not fitted closely over the raised edges of the opening. The hatch had certainly been tampered with, either when the mate had returned to the ship while the fire was in progress, or by strangers after the Lydia had been abandoned by her crew. And Captain Sears declared that none had been below since he had found her. It sent Parton's

blood rushing to his feet and made his heart beat fast. What a sarcasm of fate it would be if it should turn out now after MacFarren's claim had been overcome and he had gone home like a whipped cur, after Parton had escaped all the perils of the eventful and disastrous voyage, and after the Lydia had been brought to the very port which was nearest to the place where he had been sent by fortune after his disaster, if the mate had succeeded after all and borne away the diamonds.

The fact that the mate's boat had never been reported made his mind turn quickly to this gloomy view. Both the other boats had been reported as having been encountered by passing vessels. Parton had charged this in his mind to the effects of the explosion. He had thought that the concession had shattered the Lydia completely and that the mate's boat, which had been close to the wreck as he knew at the very moment of the explosion, must have been overwhelmed and lost in burst of fire and crash of falling spars, but now the circumstances that the hatch had so certainly been tampered with after his own flight from the apparently doomed vessel came as a great shock to him and seemed to upset all his theories.

Then the thought came to him that if the mate had really gone below, secured the diamonds and escaped, he would scarcely have taken the time and trouble to replace the hatch before leaving the burning vessel, and he decided that it must be that the man had only made an effort—that he had returned to the ship with the intention of searching the hold, and had gone so far in his work as to achieve the removal of the clamps, but had been driven away by fear of the fire before he had accomplished anything more serious.

At last, through their combined and powerful efforts, the hatch was slid further to one side. But as the dark hole yawned in front of them, Captain Sears, with an exclamation of disgust, recoiled before the foul air that poured out of the opening. "Rats!" said Captain Sears. "They say they allus leave a sinkin' ship; but I reckon from the smell that they didn't calculate that the Lyddy was a-goin' to sink. I guess they ain't got no special ability to tell when the vessel that they're sailin' on is goin' to ketch fire. Phew!"

It was evident that to descend into the hold would be impossible for some time, and during the period of waiting, Parton gave much thought to the matter of Captain Sears' relinquishment of all salvage claims. Finally, just as they were starting toward the hatchway again to see if the air had sufficiently cleared so that they might go down into the hold, he spoke to Captain Sears.

"I ought to tell you that I hope that there is certain property of mine there in the hold, which I value very highly, Captain Sears," he said. "I realize that I shall owe its recovery to you if I find it safe, and despite the fact that you have resigned your salvage, I shall be certain to make some suitable arrangement for paying you for what you have done for me."

"Don't you worry about me," said Captain Sears, still buoyed up by the grandiloquence of his recent speech, and anxious to maintain his position of exalted generosity. "I guess you and me won't quarrel. I ain't one to take advantage of no man's misfortunes. People done a lot o' talkin' about my askin' for some pay for towin' in Cap Briscoe's body, but I ain't so mean as some would try to make me out."

"All right," said Parton. "If you are willing to leave it all to me, I think that we shall be able to arrange it so that we shall both be satisfied."

"I'm willin'," said Captain Sears, "and if you've re'ly got anythin' down there, I guess th' air's clean enough so's you can go down now and look for it."

Then they went below. The unbearable odor had to a very large extent departed from the hold when they entered it. There was in the bottom of the passageway between the piled mahogany about three feet of water, and they stepped into it cautiously.

There were few evidences that the explosion had had any definite effect in this part of the ship. As is the case with many high explosives, its effect had been mostly upward. The Lydia had been built with strong transverse bulkheads of sturdy oak, and Parton could see that that one which formed the after wall of the hold into which they had entered had been wrenched and strained, for thin glimpses of moonlight which poured through the ragged hole in the deck beyond gleamed faintly, but the forward bulkhead did not seem even to have been strained. Indeed, had it not been for the presence of the water underfoot, and that penetrating, dreadful odor, Parton might have imagined

that he was again in the hold during that eventful voyage which had led to so many strange occurrences—occurrences of which this midnight exploration was not the least unusual.

While Captain Sears went forward to see how badly things were damaged there, Parton turned into the narrow alley which offered access to the log wherein he had concealed his treasure. He made the count which located it, more by feeling than by sight, and when he had found it, flashed his lantern on it so that he might, by finding the impression of the key which he had hammered into it, be sure that he had made no mistake. He found this without difficulty, but he drew his breath in quickly when he saw that the earth which he remembered to have rubbed over the log's end was quite gone. It showed as clean of it as if it had been intentionally scoured.

Instantly the thought came to him that this meant that the mate had been there, and in working at the cavity had rubbed it off. He could feel that his face had paled with this suggestion, but an instant later, when he thrust his finger in, he could feel the plug which the captain had whittled for him, tight in its place, and he was reassured. It was only after at least five minutes of work with the augur that he succeeded in dislodging this.

In the meantime Captain Sears was examining the hold forward, and from time to time shouting comments on its condition back to Parton, who replied, although not always, with great intelligence.

It would be difficult to describe the emotions which thrilled through him as each one of the little wads of crumpled paper fell into his scooped palm at the hole's mouth. He almost laughed audibly as his fingers pressed the paper wads and felt the hard irregularly shaped core in each of them. At last the cavity was empty, and he had his fortune in his pockets once again.

This accomplished, he shouted to Captain Sears.

"Find what ye wanted?" asked that seaman in a low, bass rumble from the darkness forward.

"Yes," said Parton. "Well, let's git out o' this, then," said the captain. "Th' air down here is staler than a last year's newspaper, and it smells a darn sight wuss!"

The two men met just beneath the open hatch. They were then standing in a good three feet of water, which swung with the gentle motion of the ship as she felt the slow heaving of the long swell from the Atlantic. Just as he was about to put his foot upon the ladder to climb to the open air above, Captain Sears noticed something which the lantern light showed white lying beneath the water close behind the ladder. He stooped over to look at it and swung his lantern so that he could see. He gave another glance at the thing which had attracted his attention, and then he gasped and stepped back, so that he collided sharply with Parton, who was behind him.

"What is it, captain?" Parton asked. He could see that Sears' face had paled, and his agitation was further evidenced when he dropped his lantern, which fell into the water and went out.

"Down there!" said Sears, pointing. "I almost stepped on it!"

As he still pressed backwards, Parton made way for him, and himself advanced, holding his lantern close to the surface of the water and looking eagerly to see what it was which had so disturbed the captain.

Shining in the flickering rays of the yellow light Parton saw a pale, distorted face gleam up at him. He stooped a little lower over it and recognized it. It was that of Brown, the mate. He must have returned, then, and, ignorant of the explosive, imagined that the fire would give him time to find the diamonds. He may have been dazed by the shock on the very instant when he had reached the hold, and been drowned in the water which poured down from the bursted tank. Perhaps he had time to make a fruitless search for the hidden stones and was just returning to the ladder when the concussion came which laid him unconscious at its foot, where the encroaching water ran in on him and smothered him as he lay senseless. At any rate, he lay there dead.

Parton was very well satisfied to let Captain Sears take upon himself the telling of the gruesome tale, and hurried to the captain's group. Before he had crossed that shaky planking of the dock, Norah had her hands clasped upon his arm. The captain gazed eagerly at his face, which seemed to bob uncertainly about in the flickering of the lantern light. Norah was a bit paler even than the moonlight warranted. It was Mrs. Burgee who spoke first in an anxious whisper.

"Did ye git 'em?" she asked huskily. Parton nodded. He could see that neither she nor Norah had heard, or, at least, paid heed to what Captain Sears had been saying. All their eyes were for him, all their ears were for what he might say to them.

When they reached the captain the old man smiled eagerly, but was evidently not enlightened by what he saw in Parton's face. He leaned forward, with almost tremulous eagerness.

"He got 'em!" Lyddy said, almost in a whisper.

The captain's lips opened tremulously. They closed again. Finally they formed the words:

"Well, by John Quincy Adams! Shake!" Parton reached over and took the old man's almost helpless paw in his with a hearty clasp.

Afterward.

It may be interesting to those who have been good enough to read what has gone before to hear a hint of what came after.

Examination of the Lydia's hull by experts developed that the captain's judgment had been right about the effects of the Humberite in case of an explosion. It was much less damaged than at first it had appeared to be. The concussion had spent most of its force in the center of the ship and its impulse had been upward. The Lydia's bottom planking had not been so much as started. It was when the examination of its condition had been completed and this cheerful announcement had been made that a plan was born in Norah's mind, which afterward bore much pleasurable fruit.

"We are rich now, aren't we, Henry?" she asked one day while she and her husband were walking toward the house after an inspection of the ship.

"Yes, dear," said Parton. "Rich enough to let us do nearly what we please for the balance of our days and still have something over for the captain and for Lyddy."

"I am glad you spoke of that," she said. "I had thought of it, and I am glad you spoke of it."

A moment later she questioned him again.

"Could the Lydia be rebuilt so that it would be seaworthy?" was her query.

"It might be. Its upper works are gone, but its hull is quite as staunch as ever. Why?" asked Parton.

"I have a plan," she said. "The old ship is the dearest thing in all the world to our old friends, except, perhaps, ourselves. We owe them much."

"We do, indeed," said Parton, heartily.

"Then, if we are rich enough, why not pay a part of our debt by having it repaired?"

"Norah," said Parton, as he pressed her arm with satisfaction, "you are wonderful. We will do it."

And they did.

The refitting changed the Lydia into something between merchantman and yacht. Its first voyage was notable, principally because of the nature of its passenger list. They were selected by the two women, and the choice was made, not because of social importance, but because of real and carefully investigated worth—and need of long vacations. Its cruise, with the captain in command, partially disabled, but still proudly capable of standing watch in daylight, will long live in the memory of all those who were on board of it.

(The End.)

Pointed Paragraphs

Even the prediction of the weather man who waits come out.

Eternal vigilance is the price of retaining a borrowed umbrella.

A thorn in the hand is more trouble than a dozen in the bush.

Girls who are pretty as pictures are seldom as pretty as their own.

We give a man credit for being level-headed if he isn't above our level.

It's surprising how sweet a homely girl's voice sounds through a telephone.

Nothing makes a quarrelsome man so mad as the refusal of his wife to talk back.

If the average man had his life to live over again he would probably make more mistakes than over.

Don't despise small things, young man. A 19-cent box of candy goes a long distance with some girls.

George Washington's reputation for truthfulness may have been due to the fact that he never traded horses.

Before marrying a title the American heiress should make sure that she has sufficient coin to lift the mortgage and live happily ever after.—Chicago News.

