

THE MYSTERIOUS CRIME ON THE S.S. NEPTUNE

CHAPTER II.—Continued.

"I dare say the effect wouldn't endure long," said Ronald, lightly. "Religion, which appeals purely to the senses is never so strong, as that which comes straight to the mind."

"Of course, not," replied Pat, who knew nothing about what he was talking, and only spoke to irritate the old lady, "I'd back Presbyterianism against Catholicism any day for fanaticism; it's a fight between Calvin and Peter—two to one on the winner."

Mrs. Pellypop made no reply, being struck with horror at the light way in which the young man treated religion, and walked hastily away with Miss Lester so as to close the discussion.

"Hang it, Pat!" said Ronald, as they walked slowly behind, "why can't you leave the old girl alone?"

"Because she won't leave us alone," retorted Pat. "Why the deuce should she come with us to spoil sport?"

"Two young men and only one girl isn't sport."

"Oh, begad! we'd have tossed for her, and the loser could have made himself scarce."

They then went to the Capuchin Convent and saw the dried monks, looking grim and ghastly enough in the dim light of candles carried by their living brethren. Pat's comment on their appearance was original.

"They look like Bombay duck," he said, "alluding to the dried fish, usually eaten with curry. 'I don't think I'll touch any more of it.'"

Kate Lester laughed. "You are amusing," but irreligious," she said, turning away.

"Irreligious, certainly," observed Virtue, in the person of Mrs. Pellypop; "but amusing, no."

"I don't think the old thing's got much sense of humor," whispered Pat to Ronald as they went up again into the light of day.

"Well, if no one else laughs at your jokes, Pat, you always do yourself," retorted the Australian, consolingly, "But come along, we'll go to the Barraca and see the view."

They strolled slowly along, inhaling the fresh air, and going through the ruined Barraca, which was unroofed by one of the Grand Masters they stepped out on the terrace, and saw that wonderful panorama, which is one of the finest things in Valetta. A magnificent view of the open sea, the blue waters of the Quarantine Harbor, while immediately below are the Sultan's garden, the huge walls of Fort Lascaris, and the Fish Market. Away in the distance can be seen Fort St. Elmo protecting the entrance to the port, Fort St. Angelo, which is one of the oldest in Malta, and the angular lines of fortification standing sharp and clear against the vividly blue sky. It was a gorgeous panorama, and even Mrs. Pellypop was impressed.

"This place is impregnable," she said, surveying it through her glasses.

"I don't think so," said Pat, in a contradictory tone; "a few of our new guns would knock it to pieces in no time."

Mrs. Pellypop deigned no reply to this flippant remark, but walked off indignantly, wishing that the fate he

intended for Valetta would befall this intrusive young man.

Suddenly Ronald uttered an exclamation;

"By Jove, what pretty girls!" Valetta, its traditions, its views, its pleasures, all vanished to nothing as he saw before him feminine beauty. Mrs. Pellypop was disgusted, as she considered no man had a right to admire a woman when another was beside him. This, however, was merely the Pellypop code, and not generally adopted.

But the two ladies who had caused Ronald's exclamation, fully justified his remark. One was tall and slender, with a dark, oval face, and coils of jet black hair wreathed round her small head. Wonderfully dark eyes which had a sleepy look, a straight, delicately chiselled nose, and a full red mouth. She was dressed in a loose, white gown, with a crimson sash round her waist, and instead of the ugly hoods generally worn by the Maltese ladies, had a saucy sailor hat on her head, long Suede gloves, and a tall pompadour umbrella of red silk, completed her costume.

The other was somewhat similar in appearance, but evidently older, and had rather a repelling expression of countenance. She was dressed in black and did not show to such advantage as her companion, so after a careless glance at her, Ronald—who, like all fair men, admired dark women—turned his attention to the younger of the two. They appeared to have been quarrelling, and the younger girl was walking quickly a little in advance of her friend with an indignant expression on her face, while the other followed more slowly with a frown on her strongly marked features. Ronald turned to his companion with a sigh.

"Yes, awfully pretty."

"I confess," observed Mrs. Pellypop, slowly, "I do not think so."

Ronald was discreet, and surrendered.

"I dare say not," he observed hastily, "but you see one is so often deceived by a passing glance."

They wandered all over the city—went to the market and bought fruit, and were warned against eating it by an officious Maltese—saw the Armory in the Grand Master's Palace—strolled round St. George's Square, and viewed with patriotic pride the flattering inscription to British Power over the Main Guard-House—sat in the carriage of the last Grand Master, and then went and had a light afternoon meal at a well-known hotel. It was now getting late, so, with a farewell glance at the Strada Reale and its queer crowd, they went down to the water-gate, where they found their boat waiting. A crowd of passengers was there, full of excitement about bargains made and experiences gained, and some guilelessly thought they had got the better of the Maltese shopmen, a thing quite impossible in this enlightened age.

They rowed to the steamer through the dark waters, with the lights of the city gleaming like stars in the distance, and the tall forms of ships looming like phantoms in the gloom. At last, after an adventurous journey, they arrived on board, and the first thing Ronald saw was Ventin leaning

over the bulwarks watching fresh arrivals. As soon as Mrs. Pellypop and Kate, escorted by Pat, had gone below, Ronald went to Ventin.

"Have you been on board all day?" he asked.

Ventin shook his head.

"No; I changed my mind and went on shore shortly after you left."

"Did you see her?"

"I did."

"The devil—did she see you?"

"I think so."

"Oh, so she didn't speak to you?"

"No! I was afraid of a scene and came back to the ship at once."

"Well, she won't come on board now," said Ronald consolingly; "so you'll be all right."

Ventin sighed.

"Nothing is so certain as the unforeseen," he replied mournfully.

CHAPTER III.

The excitement of arrival at a new place is only equalled by the excitement of departure, and as the "Neptune" was to leave at nine o'clock no one thought of going to bed until the anchor was up.

The deck was crowded with passengers talking gaily about their adventures during the day, and here and there could be seen the strange faces of new arrivals on board. All round the steamer numerous boats, each bearing a light, were cruising about, and the water looked as if covered with restless fire-flies. Every now and then the whistle would sound in order to summon heedless passengers who had forgotten the hour of sailing. A lot of people had come to see new passengers off, and some were having a parting glass at the bar, while others were talking together in knots on deck. It was a very animated scene, and Ronald, standing by Ventin, felt amused at the chatter and bustle that was going on. Ventin, however, eyed the crowd in his usual gloomy manner, and Ronald could not help asking him the cause of his lowering looks.

"Nothing more than common," he answered, carelessly; "I've seen all this sort of thing so often, it has become dreary—I'm bored, and I detest being bored."

"Are you afraid of seeing your wife?"

"Well, I don't know," replied Ventin, pulling his mustache; "if she certainly will, but as I am under another name she will ask for me by my real one, and therefore, she will be told there's no such person on board."

"And then?" interrogatively.

"Oh, as she saw me in Valetta today she will think I'm stopping there, and hunt everywhere for me—I hope her patience will be rewarded—by the way, when do we start?"

"Nine o'clock," replied Ronald, looking at his watch, "it's now half-past eight."

"I'll go to bed, I think," observed Mr. Ventin, holding out his hand.

"Won't you wait till we start?"

"Too sleepy," yawned the other.

"Well, if your fellow-traveller enters later you will be awakened."

"I daresay," said Ventin; "but I've got a whole cabin to myself—queer you haven't seen it—I've some things you'd like to look at."

"What is the number?" asked Monteith, carelessly.

"Forty-three."

Some one pushed against Ronald at that moment and he did not hear Ventin's answer.

"What number did you say?"

"Forty-three," from Ventin, in a louder tone of voice, "look me up in the morning—at present, good-bye," and he shook the young man's hand cordially.

"Good night, you mean," said Ronald laughing.

"It's all the same thing," replied Ventin idly, "like Kathleen Mavourneen—it may be for years and it may be for ever—good night," and he moved away slowly down the saloon steps.

Ronald remained leaning over the bulwarks looking at the stream of people coming up, and presently he was joined by Pat Ryan, who made facetious remarks on the late arrivals.

"How much sham jewellery have ye got, Chester?" he asked of a fair young man who came lurching up, evidently having more on board than he could carry. Mr. Chester made some unintelligible reply, and Pat resumed, "Oh! it's sham-pagne ye took instead; it's a bad pun, but a heavenly truth. That you, Bentley? how many girls have you mashed today? Begad, if your success has only been equal to your knowledge of Maltese it's mighty small progress ye've made. Ah! Monteith, me boy, that's a pretty girl in black. I hope she's come on board to stop; keep your wicked eyes off her, ye villain, or I'll set Mrs. Pellypop on to you."

The girl in question was neither pretty, nor fascinating, but Pat's brogue, once started, never knew when to stop; and Ronald was just going to march him off to the bar as the only way of closing his mouth, when the last bell was rung, and the cry of "All aboard for the shore," was heard.

A rush took place to the side, and a black line of people streamed down the gangway; then the ladder was lifted up; the old and new passengers lined the bulwarks and sang out "good byes" to their friends in the darkness—the anchor was tripped—the whistle blew, and the throb of the engines announced that the "Neptune" was once more on her way to England.

"I wonder if anyone is left behind," said Ronald to Ryan, as they went to the smoking-room.

"They must be deaf if they are," retorted Pat; "that devil of a whistle would wake the dead—now, me boy what is it to be?"

"Whiskey and soda for me," said Monteith, when they were comfortably established in the smoking-room through the wide doorway of which they could see the lights of Valetta fading slowly away.

"I'll follow suit," said Pat, promptly lighting his pipe. "Two whiskeys and soda, steward, and not too much soda."

All the ladies, tired with their experiences of Valetta had gone to bed, and the smoking-room was filled with gentlemen whose tastings of the wines of the country had made them more exhilarated than usual. Being convivially disposed they ordered more liquor and prepared to make a night of it.

"Where's Ventin?" asked Pat.

"Gone to bed," replied Monteith, knocking the ashes from his pipe.

"The deuce he has," said Ryan with surprise, "that's unusual for him."

"Tired, I suppose," was the answer.

"It's a pity," observed Ryan, regretfully; "he is a deuced good fellow for a song."

"Give us one yourself, Pat," said Bentley, tapping his glass on the table.

"Mr. Ryan for a song, gentlemen."

"Yes, a song—a song"—from all.

"I'll sing ye 'Killaloe,'" said Pat, "it's got a touch of the brogue about it that will go beautifully with the whiskey."

So he accordingly sang "Killaloe" to a delighted audience, who joined in the chorus with bacchanalian vehemence, and who gave the "Whoop ye devils," at the end with a vigor worthy of Donnybrook Fair. Then Ronald sang, "Wrap me up in my old stable jacket"—that old song which is always such a favorite; and after sundry other selections had been given by gentlemen with good intentions, but husky voices, Pat was called on to sing his favorite nigger song, "I love a lubly gal." A pleasant voice had Pat, and he sang the plaintive little melody in a charmingly sympathetic manner.

"I love a lubly gal, I do.

And I have loved a gal or two;

And I know how a gal should be

Lub'd—you bet I do."

Ronald found himself humming it as he went to bed, and then fell to sleep, and dreamt the dark girl he had seen that day in Valetta, was the "lubly gal" he loved.

To be Continued.

ELLIPTICAL TRUTH.

A kind-hearted clergyman was lately compelled to dismiss a gardener who used to pilfer his fruit and vegetables. For the sake of his wife and family he gave him a letter of recommendation, and this is how he worded it: I hereby certify that A. B. has been my gardener for over two years, and that during that time he got more out of my garden than any man I ever employed.

A PLACE UNUSURPED.

Well, said Mrs. Sirius Barker, with characteristic cynicism, I'm glad they draw the line in this feminine determination to usurp the place of man in modern civilization.

What do you mean?

I note that there is no movement afoot to have the wives stay in town during the summer and earn money so as to send their husbands to the seashore.

SCORING A NEW POINT.

How did you like my recitation? asked the young man.

It was truly remarkable, answered Miss Cayenne. It has given me a new insight into Shakespeare. I never until this evening realized how much genuine comedy there is in Hamlet's soliloquy and Marc Antony's oration.

CHEERS FOR THE MONSOON

HOUSE OF COMMONS REJOICES OVER NEWS FROM INDIA.

Danger of Famine to England—Criticisms of the Indian Press—Complaint That the British Government Gives No Aid, But Exacts Unremitting Taxation.

The British House of Commons the other day was so far roused from its habitual apathy when Indian affairs were under discussion as to receive the information with a succession of hearty cheers that the monsoon had broken on the parched soil of the famine district. Lord George Hamilton, the Secretary of State for India, is described as having given the welcome news in a voice of tremulous uncertainty, and when the House seized the importance of the event it gave full expression to the sense of relief which overcame it. If the reports of persons quite recently returned from India are to be credited, a successful monsoon may go a long way to avert serious trouble in that country. A man associated with one of the missionary societies, who left India a few weeks ago, has expressed the opinion that the maintenance of English rule out there depends now on an expenditure of money or blood. He gave as his reason for putting the case so strongly the fact that, even if the rains are all that are hoped for, the loss of ploughing cattle has been so unprecedented that the impoverished and enfeebled peasants, will have no means of cultivating the land. The cattle have died literally by hundreds of thousands and cannot be replaced, according to the lowest estimate, under \$5,000,000. Then the wretched people will need food and shelter until the crops, supposing they succeed in getting the seed into the ground, come to maturity. A correspondent of the Times of India depicts their condition in the following sentences:

"These poor people; before they left their village homes for the far-off famine works, had to sell everything to satisfy the gnawing cravings of hunger; even the flimsy materials of their huts were disposed of either for fuel or for grain. They are now quite worn out by constant and unfamiliar work, sustained only by a scanty diet. Their clothes, if any, are threadbare and hardly sufficient to ensure decency much less to cover their bodies. In this condition, if they are exposed to the inclemency of the rains when they return to their villages, they will simply die by thousands. All the endeavors of the Government are directed only toward keeping them alive. Clothing for them is urgently required."

A large money grant by the British Government in order to start the Indian peasant in the famine area once more in life is, in the opinion of the man referred to, imperatively called for. If for want of such assistance the unfavorable season passes away without a crop being got into the ground, and the people have again to face famine with its attendant consequences of plague and pestilence because the British Government refused the needed help, then he thinks it will have to make its hold of India good by the expenditure of blood.

Already Indian papers are contrasting the action of the Government of the Czar during the last great famine in Russia with the inaction of the British Government in this supreme crisis in India, with nearly sixty millions of people in the grip of hunger, plague and cholera. The Russian Government spent close on \$120,000,000 of its spare resources to relieve the distress of its moujiks, while the scanty relief which the British Indian Government gives its starving ryots is taken out of their own taxation or from borrowings which they will have to make good out of their future earnings, the land revenue being the main source of the Indian Government's income.

The Indian press, growing bolder as the crisis increases in gravity, further points out that while the British Government gives no active aid to its Indian subjects in their extremity, it makes no remittances of taxes, as was customary under the native rulers in times of distress, but vigorously exacts the last fraction of taxation due by the impoverished ryots. It likewise continues the drain of revenue to England to pay what are called the "home charges" among them such a charge as \$23,750,000, exacted annually to pay the cost of maintenance in England of the depots of regiments serving in India. It is estimated that the total drain from India to England this year will amount to not less than \$80,000,000, for which no commercial return or equivalent in any shape whatever will be made; the total similarly abstracted during the last twenty years being put at the stupendous figure of \$2,500,000,000. It is such stories as these that give point to the complaints and protests—for they are nothing more as yet—of the Indian press and Indian public speakers on Indian affairs.

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ECZEMA ON THE HEAD.

Mrs. Joseph Querin, Ethel, Huron Co., Ont., writes:—"I was troubled with eczema on the head and face for about 9 years. My head was a mass of scabs, and though I tried the doctors I was all the time getting worse. I finally began to use Dr. Chase's Ointment, and to my surprise obtained relief from the first application. Three boxes have cured me, and I would not begrudge \$200 for the benefit I have derived from this great remedy. Dr. Chase's Ointment is of almost daily use in the home, and I would advise everybody to keep some on hand."

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Mrs. J. M. Bradley, 100 Jane street, Ottawa, states:—"For several years I have been gradually running down in health; I was very nervous and weak, and worried greatly over my future."

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Mr. David McLeish, 279 Slater St., Ottawa, Ont., states:—"I was troubled with kidney disease and backache for four or five years and have used very many remedies without obtaining permanent benefits. Some time ago I began using Dr. Chase's Kidney-Liver Pills, and found them to be the best medicine I ever used. Their use took away that kidney backache, and made me feel better in every way, gave me refreshing sleep, and made my digestion good."

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