

STORIES OF THE SEA

By EDWARD JENKINS, M.P.

Author of "Little Hodge," "Lord Bantam," "Ginx's Baby," &c.

CHAPTER III.

The ship had put into Lough Foyle, for Moville. The tender from Derry had brought up one or two passengers. The mails had been transhipped. And now the Kamschatkan, bracing herself to the task, was rapidly leaving Tory behind her, running directly into the teeth of a nor-wester. The night fell black and drizzly; the ship, without a stitch of canvas, and with her topmasts lowered, hurred on by the enormous pressure of the uttering screw, pitched her bow gallantly at the vast advancing waves, ran up their sliding bosoms until she nearly reached the crest, quivered a moment up there on that dizzy height, and then plunging like a sea-mew or a porpoise through the tons of boiling surf that capped these leviathan rollers of the deep, and shaking them off her shoulders in a hissing fall of foam, she darted down with dizzy vehemence to the bottom of the vast abyss which the rising mass had left behind it. Everything had been made tight; the fore hatches had been battened down; the dead-lights had been screwed down on the engine-room and saloon skylights and the deck-cabin windows; the fiddles were on the table in the saloon, and everything was in the usual trim for dirty weather. Bad as the weather was, the watch were busily engaged in securing more firmly the trapaulins and tacklings of the boats, and in making everything as taut as possible. Scarcely a passenger was to be seen. One or two brave fellows stuck to the smoking-room, and tried to be jolly over their pipes and whisky. In the steerage only one man seemed to be able to withstand the general demoralisation. It was the man in the wide-awake. He was sitting near the top of the companion on the main deck, in the coil of a huge cable talking to the seerage steward. After comparing some notes about his fellow-passengers at the end, he turned the conversation to the saloon.

"You've a rare lot of first-class passengers aboard, haven't you?"
"Yes," said the steward. "Most on 'em wants to get home for Christmas, you see. It's not a favourite time for crossing, but this is a new ship, and captain's a favourite, and so a good many on 'em have been waiting. I never saw so many afore, at this time of year."

"Hah! Anybody particular aboard?"
"Well, there's a live lord among the rest. A young fellow, I believe, name of Lord Pendlebury, but I haven't seen him. Then there's old Sir Benjamin Peakman and his wife and daughter. He's as rich as Cresces. The usual lot, I suppose, commercial travellers, agents, and small tradespeople."

"You say Sir Benjamin Peakman is rich? Has he got a valet with him?"
"Not on board this time. He generally has one when he crosses.—There's a fellow, by the way, in the captain's cabin, Mr. Fex—rum name, ain't it?—he has a gentleman to wait on him."

"Do you think Sir B. wants a valet? That's my business, you know."
"Oh! I didn't know," replied the other. "Well I can find out for you."

"Do. I know sometimes these Canadian swells look out for servants on board your ships."
"Do you? Have you ever crossed before, then?"

"Not with you," said the other, evasively. "Try a drop of my brandy," handing a flask. "You'll find it extra good," he added, winking. "It came out of the cellar of my last governor."

Mr. Crog, the seerage steward, highly appreciated the brandy and the joke. They untied his tongue a little. "I say he said, lowering his voice, though in the infernal din that was filling the air from the fearful storm without and the rattling and racket and groaning and shrieking within, there was little chance of their being overheard, "the captain's in a precious stew. Just as we were moving off from Greenestie, after the tender had left us, a little boat ran up from the telegraph station there. A man in the stern held up a telegram."

"What is it?" shouted the captain.
"Telegram to stop the ship."
"Stop the ship? What for?"
"You've got Kane, the murderer, on board."

"Nonsense!" shouted the captain.
"I tell you, Captain Windlass, you have. Here's the telegram describing him."

"All right," says the captain. Quartermaster, there!"
"Ay, ay, sir."
"Heave out a few coils of the log line there into that boat."

"Heave it is, sir."
"When it was done, 'Now,' says he to the telegraph clerk, 'tie on the paper and run your boat close alongside.'"

"In another moment the telegram was aboard."
"Have you got it?" shouts the captain.
"Ay, ay, sir."

"Ring went the bell, 'Full speed.' Round went the screw. The boat was precious nearly upset, and we could hear them scolding as we bore away.—Halloo, I say! Look out; you'll go down the hatchway!"

The Jewish-looking man, who had been sitting comfortably enough on the huge coil of rope, was suddenly pitched over head and heels backwards into the water-way, and with another roll described a graceful parabolic curve, which landed him only a foot or two short of the hatchway, with his shoulder jam against the combing, where he came to an anchor. The steward ran forward and secured him. He seemed to be much shaken and alarmed.

"There get down again into your crib, and hold on tight with both hands. Why, you've knocked your weather eye, and look like death. Here, take a swig of your own reviver," said the other.
"Oh, it's nothing," said the other, "Where's my hat?"

In handing him the big wide-awake, the steward took a good look at him. "That's not the man!" he muttered to himself. "But he's a precious sharp-looking un, now, one gets a sight of him."

Any observer would have agreed with Mr. Crog. The removal of the wide-awake had revealed a most striking head and physiognomy. A head with an immense shock of carrot hair, which was in a state of great disorder. A forehead, square, receding from great ugly brows. Black, keen, flashing eyes, gathered inward, and completely covered by those brows. A long pale face, every lineament telling of strength and resolution, and passion, and cunning. A nose sharp and thin, with a Jewish outline; a small mouth; a long narrow chin; half whiskers at the side of the face, of a peculiar sandy-red colour, which oddly contrasted with the darkness of his skin and eyes. The lower part of the face shaved smooth as a child's. For an instant the man's eyes looked up boldly and peremptorily into those of the steward, as if to penetrate his inmost thoughts. But Mr. Crog had no sooner seen his man than every trace of suspicion vanished. The stranger covered himself again with his hat. One eye was swelling desperately with a blow from one of the iron stanchions at the side of the vessel. He made no effort to relieve it.

"I'm all right, now," he said, laughing. "What were you saying? Try a little more of this. I can fill it again."
"Oh, I thought perhaps you could help me in fishing out this fellow. There's a tremendous reward offered—five hundred pounds."

"Whew!" said the other, jumping up briskly, but, warned by the increasingly savage motion of the vessel tumbling into his nest again and holding on firmly. "Have you got a description?"

His face was turned away from the steward, and his tone was one of indifference, but if Mr. Crog could have peered under the dark sombrero, he would have seen on those singular features a mixture of irrepressible pain and anxiety.

"Yes," said Mr. Crog.—"Take care! Don't you go squirming about so, or you'll be off again. I've got it here. The capen gave me a copy of it. Every officer and steward has a copy. It's short, you see, being by telegraph. We was to have waited till the detective arrived by special boat from Derry, with the full description, and no one was to be allowed to go to shore. (Reads.)

"A man of about forty-five or fifty years of age, with thick black hair, supposed to be dyed to cover gray, parted down the middle. Large black whiskers, worn a la Dundreary, with heavy moustache. High forehead, big eyebrows, black shining eyes. An imperial on chin, prominent nose, dresses handsomely in frock-coat, or, when traveling, in a tweed shooting suit. Large diamond ring on left little finger. Very powerful build, seems about five feet or ten inches in height. Good address, and very gentlemanly in his manners. Probably has a wound or bruise on his left eye. Talks German, French, and English."

"Well, you've got the bruise, any way," said Mr. Crog, laughing. "It's fortunate I was by, to see how you got it. They're all so keen after that brute you'd have been in quod in twenty-four hours."

"By Jove!" said the other, laughing loud and long. "Take a man up for murder because he has a black eye! You'll be able to seize a dozen of these fellows downstairs on that score before two days are over. There's a gang of gamblers on board."

"No. Is there?"
"Yes. I found 'em out last night. I've not been a gentleman's servant, and all over Europe, from St. Petersburg to Biarritz, not to speak of Homburg and Monaco, for nothing."

Mr. Crog looked respectfully at his Jewish friend. This was the very man to help him to dig out the criminal from the mine of humanity below there.

"Well," replied Mr. Crog, "there's a hundred pounds for you if you pick him out, dead or alive."

"A hundred pounds, sir," cried the other, in a contemptuous tone. "Do you suppose I'm going to share with you at any less than half the money? I'll see you hanged first. Wait until I've talked it over with some of the officers."

Mr. Crog was quick enough to see that the astute stranger had caught him, and being a man of sense, he agreed with the fellow quickly, while he was in the way with him, seeing that now it would be that or nothing. They shook hands over the bargain, and then the stranger tried to rise to his birth. He could scarcely move.

"Well," he said, "I am stiff! I shall have to lie up, I can see. Well, don't you be in a hurry about that fellow. I shall stay quietly in my berth for a day or two, and listen to what goes on, especially if this infernal weather lasts."

"By the way," said Mr. Crog, "what's your name?"
"Stillwater," replied the other. "James Stillwater. I've given up my ticket to the purser's steward, so you need not bother me about that I'll look after myself."

He crawled slowly down the hatch-

way, and limped along to the men's quarters, where he had selected the most retired, the darkest, and most disagreeable berth in the ship.

CHAPTER IV.

Sir Benjamin Peakman, K.C.M.G., was a new knight, but not a new light in the colonial world. His name had been associated with the business and politics of our transatlantic possessions for now very nearly a third of a century. Hard and astute, he knew how to conceal his shrewdness and sternness under an air of good humor and of deference, which, if it reminded one too much of the sleek affectation of a cat, bent on a hunting excursion in a bird-frequented garden, was at all events generally agreeable. He was not a handsome man, but he had large teeth, and he showed them with adroitness. He was always smiling. He smiled to himself when he was by himself, and when you would have thought, he fancied no one was looking. The truth was he always saw everybody and everything. He forgot nothing. His manners were invariably gentle and conciliatory, especially so, some people said, when he meant mischief. He purred, whichever way you stroked him, which proves that the feline analogy is not quite perfect. He had been like this from the time when he first emerged from obscurity into visible and noticeable life. People in Quebec could remember him—when Quebec was the greatest commercial place in Canada—an errand boy for the shipping house of Macwhappy and Salt. It was said that he had come to that post from the Eastern Townships, where many a time he had driven the team that dragged his father's plough. If mentioned at all, that ought to be put down to his credit, for never did plough-boy his credit, for never did plough-boy carry into town a gentler man or a more natural deference than Benjamin Peakman, when he deserted agriculture for commerce. He was a big boy too, and a sharp one. His mother was descended from a family of U. K. loyalists, who had selected a home in the colony of Quebec when, with a sturdy love of Monarchy and Toryism, they were obliged either to flee the new republic, or to fight to establish it. It was by her impulsion that young Benjy, who had received a tolerable education at a village school, conducted by an honest Presbyterian Scotchman, was led to leave the tending of his father's flocks, and try his luck at fleecing in a larger arena. The result did honour, in some sense, to the maternal instinct. Master Benjamin had been brought up in a hard school. He had rarely handled money. When he did see it he appreciated it. His small eyes danced in his large face whenever he held it in his hand. The propensity of trade, of winning wealth, of keeping it, and making it grow, absorbed his soul. There are such boys with faculties otherwise noble and worthy. Had I such a boy I should pray that this devil might be cast out of him, for I know none worse. I could cherish some hope for a profligate, prodigal, debauched, or drunken character; but the steady establishment in any human being, by a gradual process from early youth to manhood, of the trading soul and spirit, with all that follows it of selfishness, hardness, want of scruple, low subtlety of intelligence, bloodless heart, impenetrable conscience, consuming hunger and thirst after wealth and indomitable determination to possess it at all hazards—present and future—is the most dismal and hopeless perversion of a God-made nature that it is possible to conceive. Rather than that, be happy to see your son making ducks and drakes of give him one, and are fool enough to give him one, and with some scraps of honour, of good feeling, of generosity, of conscience, still glowing amid the embers of his disordered being.

However, this may seem to be rather hard upon Sir Benjamin Peakman, besides appearing to forestall or pre-empt the reader's opinion of him. Wherefore it is to be accepted distinctly as in no way referring to him, but as an interlocutory and abstracted remark, for the relevance and propriety whereof there is ample precedent in numerous works, ancient and modern, admitted by all the critics to be perfect both in matter and form.

Young Peakman's policy from the first was like that of the British Government when it means mischief; it was a policy of conciliation. No one could put him out of temper. His mates could never bully him into a fight or tempt him to a harsh word; his employers, when they swore at him, saw him accept their oaths as if they were blessings; he disarmed the most ill-tempered debtors to the firm or its most impracticable customers, by the gentleness with which he parried their rude remarks, and the quiet steadiness and the crafty devotion with which he insisted on carrying out his employer's commands. He was one day hit on the head by a jackboot thrown at him by a captain of one of his employers' ships who was in bed at an hotel. He picked it up, and respectfully returned it to the owner, saying, "What message shall I give, sir, to Messrs Macwhappy and Staff?"

All this was very amiable, and to many persons seemed to be very praiseworthy. And so it would have been, had it been the natural ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. But it was not. It was simply cunning of the meanest order. Twenty years later, when Benjamin Gumbo was a veteran, and Benjamin Peakman had become a ruling partner in the firm of Macwhappy, Salt, and Peakman, the old man was turned off at the first chance like a mangy dog; and when he went to Peakman and pleaded his long service and his six children, and besought that he might not be sent into hopeless poverty, Mr. Peakman, in his blindest manner and with the smile of an angel, said, "Captain Gumbo, I am sorry I cannot hold out the least prospect of our requiring you again. You have perhaps forgotten a little incident which occurred so many years ago, when I was a boy in this office and you were the senior captain? I wish you good-morning, sir."

The captain told this story all over

Quebec. Everybody commiserated him but everybody respected Benjamin Peakman the more. They saw that he was not to be trifled with. Sir Benjamin Peakman was known, then, to be an able man, a steady, resolute, even a dogged man; a man who hid from other people equally his aims and his manner of working them out. A trustworthy friend, if it were worth his while; but a man whom if you crossed, he would have his revenge out of you in some way, and, by general opinion, would not be nice about the means. But always so oily, so acute, so studious of the people he dealt with, so wide awake to their weaknesses and so subservient to their wishes, that all the world, with a few exceptions, regarded him as the "ablest," the "nicest," the "altogether most attractive" man.

Hence when Mr. Peakman, then a wealthy colonist and a member of the Upper House and a colonial cabinet minister, was sent over to London to make certain financial and political negotiations with the Home Government, he at once made his way. His deference suited the courtly ministers; his ability took those who were men of business. The whole Colonial Office, from the doorkeeper to the Secretary of State, regarded him as the pink of colonial statesmanship. When he had gone away they found he had got a great deal more out of them than they could well defend in Parliament.

To be Continued.

POST OFFICES IN SPAIN.

Curious Methods of Handling the Mail—Poor Place to Send Letters.

A foreigner in Spain sees many irregularities, especially in the post-offices. In Potes, a village of twelve hundred inhabitants, in northern Spain, the postmaster was an old man who was usually found asleep, and resented being stirred up to deliver a letter. In the larger post-offices the height of confusion is reached, because letters are put into pigeon holes, alphabetically arranged, according to the fancy of the postmaster.

"Mr. John Smith," says Doctor Gadow in his 'Northern Spain,' "will on enquiry, probably be told there is nothing for him, because the letter is safely lodged under J., the postmaster having mistaken Smith for an additional surname; but John Smith, Esq., will as likely be relegated to E, and, unless the postmaster is amicably inclined, your letter has a good chance of remaining there until the quarterly or annual clearance, when it may be returned through the dead letter office. I say 'may,' because such letters are considered troublesome, and have a knack of disappearing."

Doctor Gadow, having obtained an introduction to the postmaster of Potes and exchanged compliments with him, was invited to look through his shelves and take his choice. He came across a letter addressed to a gentleman in Cabezon, a town at some distance from Potes. On asking why it had not been sent on, he received this startling answer: "That man is a foreigner—is he not? Well, numbers of strangers come to Potes, and he is as likely to turn up here as at Cabezon!"

At San Sebastian, Doctor Gadow called at the post-office twice for a registered letter containing a remittance from his lawyer, and was assured that nothing had arrived. On procuring a note from the English Consul the letter was forthcoming, with the excuse that the post had just come in. He pointed out that the local postmark was five days old; then the postmaster answered that as Gadow ended with "w" a letter represented in Spanish by double "o" or double "u" the name was a difficult one to pigeon hole.

FRENCH LAW.

Owing to a low and declining birth rate, which has reached a point where it means an actual loss of some 20,000 of population a year, France has resolved to take care of what babies she has. A law has therefore been passed forbidding anyone to give solid food of any kind to infants under one year without the written authority of a qualified physician. Also the use of long rubber tubes to feeding bottles is prohibited, because of the difficulty of keeping them sterilized. Since 1891 the deaths in France have exceeded the births, and as there is no hope of increasing the proportion of births, which is now 22 to each 1,000 of the population, the only hope is in preserving the lives of as many children as possible. The health authorities exercise the most arbitrary power in the supervision of contagious diseases, and the Magistrates are severe on those who violate the sanitary regulations. The system of milk inspection, on which the welfare of thousands of children depends in Paris, is thorough and effective.

LUCKY FOR TOMMY, PERHAPS.

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