

GOULD NAT

THE SECOND
STRING

Nat Gould

The Second String

«Public Domain»

Gould N.

The Second String / N. Gould — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

CHAPTER FIRST	5
CHAPTER SECOND	9
CHAPTER THIRD	13
CHAPTER FOURTH	17
CHAPTER FIFTH	21
CHAPTER SIXTH	25
CHAPTER SEVENTH	30
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	33

Nat Gould

The Second String

CHAPTER FIRST

THE FAILURE

"There goes the failure of the family, yet I like him, there's real grit in him if it was brought out."

The speaker was Sir Lester Dyke, and the remark was made to his daughter, Winifred.

"The failure" did not seem unhappy, he walked across the field with a free and easy stride, whistling softly to himself, enjoying the beauties of nature, taking in everything at a glance, drinking deep of the many good things that mother earth provided for the entertainment of mankind. To look at him seemed to give a great denial to Sir Lester's remark. Failure was not written on his face, he was apparently an active, well bred, strong, able bodied young man, and yet Jack Redland was a failure, for he had done nothing to advance himself in life, and had tried his hand at many things without success. His brothers had done well in life, his two sisters had married rich men, and were more or less happy, according to the lot of such people. His father left him exactly two thousand pounds and he spent it in a year. How he had lived since that time no one knew, but he was always well dressed and never seemed in want of money.

As all the Redlands had done well in life, "the failure" stood out more conspicuously. Had his many friends been questioned they would have endorsed Sir Lester's remarks concerning him.

His family concern this story in no wise, it is with him we have to deal. It suffices to say that his father was an old friend of Sir Lester Dyke's, who had a small estate in Sussex and a house at Brighton.

Jack Redland was a frequent visitor at The Downs, where he was always made welcome, despite his failures. Perhaps it was Winifred's championship of him had much to do with her father's partiality. She was his only child and he adored her. Sir Lester had just given Jack a few words of advice, administered in somewhat strong doses, in the hope that it would act as a tonic and brace him up to contemplate some decisive line of action that would obliterate past failures. The recipient of the tonic did not seem to be troubled by it. During the five-and-twenty years of his life he had accepted a vast amount of advice, which could not have been of the right sort, as it failed to produce any effect. Advice is cheap, much cheaper than practical assistance, and, therefore, easier to part with. Some people consider themselves born advisers, they little know what bores they are. Jack was a difficult subject to bore, he was a patient listener, because he never showed in any way that his thoughts were elsewhere as his adviser rambled on in dreary discourse. Maiden ladies of a certain age with grievances, found him sympathetic; they thought it wonderful he possessed such a knowledge of the sex. Men with hobbies ran them hard at Jack's expense, but he did not mind it in the least. His temper was even, his outlook on life full of hope, and a blind belief in his lucky star, which advanced near to the borders of fatalism. He never doubted that he had been sent into the world to serve some useful purpose, but what it was he had been unable, up to now, to discover.

He did not consider himself a failure in the same light as others regarded him. Because he had tried several things and succeeded in none was not his fault, it was rather his misfortune, because he had not come across the right thing; when he did he felt sure of succeeding.

His education was of the ordinary kind. He went to a good private boarding school and when he left did not go to college, had he done so he would have been no better off. He played cricket well, was, in fact, much in request in the county team, he rode well, shot splendidly, played tennis, croquet, golf, or any other game that happened to be suggested, and Sir Lester said no fault could be found with anything he did in the way of sport. If he succeeded in these things why not in business? that

was the question that as yet remained unanswered. He had plenty of energy, rode hard in the hunting field, was a qualified gentleman jockey, and had won many races. This was one source of income which he did not despise. All this was very well in its way, but for a young man without means it did not afford a very good prospect in life.

The Downs was within easy distance of Brighton, and Jack Redland often walked from the famous seaside resort to Sir Lester's and back. He did so because he liked walking, for he was never short of the choice of a mount, any of his Brighton friends were only too willing to oblige him when they found he improved the manners of their horses.

It was a beautiful day, towards the end of May, and the country was resplendent in living green. Myriads of primroses clustered under the trees, and peeped out from nooks and corners in the banks. The birds sang joyously, heralding the coming of June, already teaching their young how to fly, in haste to be rid of them and rear more.

As he reached the bend round by the plantation, he turned and waved his hat to Sir Lester and Winifred, the former shook his stick at him, which caused him to smile, the latter kissed her hand to him, which made him look serious.

He was very fond of Winifred, and he admired her father, whose friendship he greatly valued. He had known Winifred since she was a little girl, now she was eighteen, and fast developing into a lovely woman. Once he did not see her for a year or more, that was when she was at school, in France, and when he met her he wondered at the change in her. It was then he learned she was no longer a child and could not be teased and have her hair pulled with impunity. She laughed at him when he spoke to her in such a different tone, and her bantering soon put him at his ease.

Out of sight of the house he sat down on a bank and idly pulled a buttonhole of primroses. His thoughts were with Sir Lester and Winifred, and he commenced to wonder whether the baronet was right when he told him it was entirely his own fault he did not get on in the world, and that it was high time he turned his mind and his hands to something useful. His numerous accomplishments had, so far, been of very little use to him. One of his sisters occasionally gave him a helping hand or he would have been in a very bad way indeed. At first he declined to accept money from her, but she overcame his reluctance by pointing out that she had no children, and had more money than she cared to spend upon herself.

"If you assure me it comes out of your private purse I will take it as a loan," he said, "but I will not accept a copper from Harry, he's a prig."

"He is my husband," she replied, quietly, "and you must not call him names. He is very good to me, very liberal, and I have nothing to grumble about. Please take the money, Jack, and when you are short again do not be afraid to ask for more; I know you will repay it some day, if ever I require it."

This was, however, a most unsatisfactory way of living, and he had no desire to trespass upon her bounty. What was he to do? The answer was difficult. He would be of no use in an office. As the manager of an estate he might find it a congenial employment, but he doubted his ability to succeed.

"Something is sure to turn up," he muttered, "but the right thing is a deuced long time in coming my way."

Hearing footsteps in the lane he looked up and saw a gypsy woman, with a basket on her arm, filled with bunches of primroses. She was young, and not ill looking. Many of her tribe wandered about the Sussex lanes, and he merely regarded her with ordinary interest. She saw him through the hedge, and stopped.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"Money, my child is ill," she said.

"Where is your husband?"

"I do not know, I do not care. He has left me, but I have the child. He is in Brighton, he will die if I cannot get money, I must have it."

"I am sorry for you," he said. "Money is scarce with me, but I can let you have a few shillings."

"God bless you, kind gentleman."

It occurred to him her story might be untrue, and he looked at her suspiciously. She saw his glance, and with the quickness of her race knew why he hesitated.

"I have told you the truth, my child is very ill, he is all I have in the world."

He pushed his way through the hedge, and stood before her. She looked into his face with sad, black eyes, in which there was no boldness.

"Here is five shillings for you, I am as badly off as yourself for money."

She curtsied as she accepted it, and said:

"You do not look like a poor man."

"I am; I am a failure," he said, smiling.

She shook her head.

"Your turn will come. May I look at your hand?"

He laughed again as he said:

"I have no faith in fortune telling."

"I do not wish to tell your fortune, I can read your hand if you will let me."

He held out his hand, and for some minutes she regarded it silently. They made a picturesque group under the budding trees, with the birds peeping down and twittering in surprise, and the primroses glistening all around.

"There are riches in store for you, there are dangers to be met with in a far off land. You will live long but there are years of strife before you. It is a good hand, the lines are true, it is not the hand of a man who will fail when the time comes."

He was interested, although he did not believe her story.

"Then there is no luck in store for me in England?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"None until you return," she replied.

"And where must I go? To what land must I journey to gain these riches?"

"That I cannot tell, you must trust to fate."

"I am not likely to leave England."

"You will, and before long."

"You speak positively."

"I am sure of what I say."

"You are going to Brighton, it is a long walk. Go to Hassocks, that will be nearer; here is another half-crown, you can take the train from there."

He did not wait for her thanks, but struck out across country, he knew his way well.

The five or six miles to Brighton were nothing to him, and he arrived there in time for dinner.

He had modest apartments in the Old Steyne overlooking the gardens, in a very quiet house where there were no other lodgers, and his modest requirements were easily met.

He preferred to live at Brighton, probably because it was within easy distance of Sir Lester Dyke's residence, and he had many opportunities of seeing Winifred. He walked to Hove in the evening, and sat down in a quiet spot overlooking the sea. His meeting with the gypsy woman impressed him more than he imagined. It was curious she should be coming down the lane as he rested there, he did not remember having met any gypsies so near The Downs before. Sir Lester had a decided objection to them, called them poachers, and worse names, and would have none of them on his land, or in the lanes if he could help it. The woman seemed superior to the majority of her class, and he believed her story about the child.

The sound of the sea, the swish of the incoming tide influenced him and he wondered if the woman's words would come true and that he might possibly find riches in a foreign land. He cared very little for money for himself, but there were possibilities attaching to the possession of it that

he cared for very much indeed. Again he saw Sir Lester shaking his stick, and Winifred kissing her hand. The stick was to urge him on, the kiss to call him back.

England; what ties were there to hold him here? He had never contemplated the prospect of leaving his homeland until the gypsy woman had spoken; he saw in her words the hand of fate, in which he placed his trust.

The sea breeze fanned his face, the music of the waves fascinated him as they had never done before, they called to him and he felt inclined to place faith in their summons. The sun sank, the air grew chilly, but still he sat on watching the lights of the fishing smacks as they appeared, one by one, out at sea.

Surely it was time for him to bestir himself, do something to earn his living, instead of idling along in pleasurable ease, if not affluence.

He had read of men who had gone out to far distant countries and come back rich. They braved dangers and privations, why should not he, had he less courage? He thought not.

He walked along the parade, still wondering if the gypsy's words would come true. That depended upon himself, he could at any rate give them a chance by going abroad.

By the time he reached his lodgings he had made up his mind to try his luck elsewhere, but where?

He meant to consult Sir Lester Dyke and hear what he had to say, his advice would at any rate be worth listening to. Then there was Winifred, how would she take it, would it grieve her much to lose her old playmate?

He felt the wrench on his side would be severe. The girl was more to him than he imagined, the mere thought of leaving her had roused other sentiments; during his absence she might marry, and on his return home find her the mother of children. He had no right to expect anything else, not even to ask her to wait for him, because he had no prospects in life, no home to offer her, was not even certain of making one. Sir Lester liked him, but would resent, and properly so, any approach to his daughter on such a subject.

If he went abroad he must risk everything, even the chance of finding Winifred still at home with her father on his return. Of one thing he was certain, if he left England he would not come back a failure.

CHAPTER SECOND

JACK'S RESOLVE

"I think you were rather severe on Jack," said Winifred as "the failure" disappeared from view. "I am sure he has tried his best to find something to do, he told me so."

"And you implicitly believe all the young rascal tells you," replied her father smiling.

"He is truthful, at any rate, that is in his favour."

"I agree with you; I do not think Jack Redland would tell a lie – unless –"

She looked at him archly.

"Unless it was to shield a woman."

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "and under such circumstances it would be justifiable."

"Possibly; it depends on the circumstances. I do not think I was too severe upon him, Win; he requires a spur to drive him along. I wish to goodness he would do something."

"So do I."

"Are you very fond of him, little girl?"

She answered frankly that she was very fond of him indeed, and her father was glad to hear her speak in this strain, it showed him she had not lost her heart to him. He was anything but rich, but had his daughter's happiness been at stake he would not have hesitated in granting her desire.

The Downs was a comfortable old fashioned place, situated in one of the most picturesque parts of Sussex. The property was not large, but being so near to fashionable Brighton, the land was valuable, and more than one tempting offer had been made to Sir Lester to part with it for building purposes. The mere thought of The Downs estate being cut up by jerry builders irritated him. His affairs would be in a very bad way when he parted with the place for such a purpose. His house at Hove had turned out a profitable investment; he could obtain double what he gave for it some years ago, and if it came to parting with property that must go first.

Sir Lester Dyke had been hampered from the commencement. His father had spent every shilling he could manage to raise, and left his son a multitude of debts and his affairs in chaos.

"Make a clean sweep of the lot," the lawyer had said, but Sir Lester, who was young and sanguine, laughed the suggestion to scorn, and clung to his property with grim determination. Luckily, he married a wife who had a moderate fortune which she willingly handed over to him to assist him in freeing the estate. Unfortunately, she died when his affairs were commencing to assume something like order. This was a great blow to him, but he bore it bravely and Winifred became the idol of his life.

He was fond of racing; his father, to his sorrow, had been before him, but in a different way. His father gambled heavily; Sir Lester loved the sport alone, and seldom put much money on his horses. His string was trained at Lewes, on the famous Downs, and Jack Redland had ridden more than one winner in the familiar black jacket with orange sleeves.

His love of country life was a sufficient inducement for him to remain at The Downs for the greater part of the year, and Winifred was his constant companion in his rides and walks. She rode well, and like her father, preferred the Sussex hills and downs to the fascinations of London life.

Sir Lester's favourite meetings were Brighton and Lewes, where he was well known, and where the victories of his horses were always received with much enthusiasm.

Winifred was popular in the neighbourhood, and young as she was, proved a charming hostess, as soon as she left school. Her figure on horseback was familiar at Brighton, and on the downs at Lewes, where she often went with her father to see the horses at work.

Caleb Kenley, the trainer, was devoted to Sir Lester, and as for Winifred, he could not do enough to please her whenever she visited him at Newhaven Lodge. Although Sir Lester could not

afford to pay him a large salary, Caleb Kenley was contented, and a dozen horses were quite as many as he cared to handle.

"It's all very well to have forty or fifty horses in your stables," he said, "but no man can keep his eye on the lot, and I like to know what all mine are doing. Sir Lester's a gentleman, and it is a pleasure to train for a man of his stamp. He never grumbles when he loses, and when he wins it's a treat to see the smile on his face. I'll stick to him as long as he sticks to me, and the mere good luck he has the better I shall be pleased."

Jack Redland was also in the trainer's good books. He knew Jack was regarded as a failure, but in his opinion no man who could ride as he did came under that category. When Jack won the Southdown Open Welter Handicap on Topsy Turvy, Caleb declared no professional jockey could have done as much.

"Davis rode him at Brighton," said the trainer, "and he ran a perfect brute. With Mr. Redland up he behaved himself; he knew there was a rider on his back. Failure is he! Bosh! he's only to take to the profession to make a fortune."

Eager to impart his newly formed resolution to Sir Lester, Jack Redland went to The Downs the following day.

"Winifred says I was rather hard on you yesterday," said Sir Lester, "but as you have come again to-day I suppose you consider my remarks were quite in order and to the point."

"They generally are," said Jack laughing.

"Dad says what he means as a rule," said Winifred smiling.

"I had an adventure after I left you last night," he said. "It actually made me think."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Sir Lester.

"Fact, I assure you. It was a mild sort of adventure, but it seems likely to have serious consequences."

Winifred was interested, and eager to hear the news. Jack explained how he met the gypsy woman, and what she said to him.

"I walked down to Hove later on and sat listening to the waves. The sound seemed to affect me curiously, and I felt there might be some truth in the woman's tale. I have done no good in England, perhaps in a new country my luck may change, and I may find an occupation suited to my tastes and abilities. I came over to-day to ask your advice, Sir Lester. Do you think I ought to try my fortune abroad?"

Sir Lester glanced at his daughter. She was silent, and there was a troubled look in her face. "She does not care to lose her old playmate," he thought.

"They say the man who fails at home will fail anywhere," he replied.

Jack looked disappointed, but replied —

"I do not think that is correct. In a new country one naturally leads a new life, and it need not necessarily be a failure. What do you think, Winifred?"

"I do not think you have been a failure here. True, you have not yet succeeded in settling down to some useful occupation, but the time will come when that will happen. Do you feel inclined to go away, to leave England?"

"Something tells me it will be for the best," he replied.

"Where do you intend going to?" asked Sir Lester.

"That is what I want your advice about."

"I am afraid I can help you very little. I know several young fellows who have gone out to different parts of Australia, and who have done remarkably well there; but it is a long way off."

"I do not mind where it is, or how far so long as I succeed. I made up my mind last night that wherever I went I would not come back a failure."

"That's right, Jack; I admire your pluck. If you go out with that determination, depend upon it, you will succeed."

"When do you think of leaving?" asked Winifred in a low voice.

"This year; the sooner the better," he replied.

Sir Lester wondered where the funds would come from, he would help him if necessary; but he could not do very much.

They discussed the matter for some time, when Sir Lester left them to attend to business matters.

"Why have you come to such a sudden decision?" Winifred asked. "You ought not to take such a step without due consideration."

"The gypsy woman put it into my head; she was very confident about my succeeding."

Winifred laughed as she replied:

"I had no idea you were so superstitious. If that is your only reason I advise you to remain at home."

"It is not the only reason; there is a far stronger inducement. I wish to succeed, to make money. I have an object in view."

"Most people have an object in life."

"Mine is all important."

"Tell it me."

"No, I cannot at present. If I succeed, I will. Shall you miss me very much, Winifred?"

"Indeed, I shall. We have been so much together, I think it unkind of you to wish to leave me."

"I do not wish to leave you. I shall think a great deal about you when I am away."

He wished he could tell her it was for her sake he desired to make money, but he knew he ought not to bind her by a promise in any way, even if she were willing to give it.

"I do not believe you will go; you are only joking."

"I was never more in earnest in my life. The only question is where shall I go?"

"Somewhere where it will not be very difficult for you to get back. You will not want to remain long away from old England."

"You think I shall soon be homesick?" he asked smiling.

"Indeed, I do; for I know how you love the old place. I believe it is your love of the country that has prevented your success."

"You may be right, and in another land I may find an occupation that will suit me, and at the same time bring me in money. I rather fancy a roaming life for a few years."

"And do you think the roamers make fortunes?"

"In some cases."

"They are the exception. Steady, hard work we are always taught is the best."

"But it is such a slow process. I want something more rapid," he replied.

"What was the gypsy woman like?" she asked.

"Young, married, with a little child very ill. She was good looking; not at all bold, and I think she believed what she told me."

"They are such deceptive people. How do you know the story about the child was true?"

"I doubted her at first. She read my mind in an instant, and assured me her story was correct. I do not think you would have doubted her had you been there."

"Father has a great aversion to them."

"And it is not unreasonable, but they are not all bad, there must be some decent people amongst them."

Winifred shrugged her shoulders. She did not like to think a mere gypsy woman had influenced his life to such an extent by a silly trick of palmistry.

"I shall hate all gypsies if you take her advice and go away," she said.

"She gave me no advice. She merely read the lines in my hand, and told me what she saw there."

"And said you would succeed and be rewarded when you returned home?"

"That is so. I shall look forward to the reward," he said.

She glanced at his face, but he was looking across the garden, over the fields beyond, and seemed lost in thought. She knew she would miss him very much. Suppose he never returned; met with a dreadful death in some inhospitable land. The mere thought of such a thing frightened her. She put her hand on his arm, saying quickly, and with a little shudder —

"Do not go, Jack. Stay here; stay in England, where we all love you. Don't go away."

"Where we all love you."

The words caused his heart to beat with happiness. She had used the word collectively, but it included herself. Noticing her face and her startled look, he said —

"Are you afraid I shall come to grief on my travels?"

"We hear of terrible things in the papers, such horrible things; and, oh, Jack, we have been so much together, I could not bear to lose my old playmate."

There were tears in her eyes, and he felt a desperate inclination to kiss them away. He mastered his feelings and said —

"I am well able to take care of myself, and I will come back, I promise you that. I am very glad you are so anxious about my welfare. I know I have a firm friend in you, Winifred."

She was cross because she had shown too much feeling, and said irritably —

"I am very silly. Of course, you can take care of yourself."

"You are never silly," he said. "I think I understand you, and it will be my greatest regret on leaving here to leave you behind."

"You cannot very well take me with you," she answered smiling.

"I wish I could," he replied.

"Thanks, I prefer The Downs," she answered laughing.

CHAPTER THIRD

A SCHOOL CHUM

"Going abroad!" exclaimed Caleb Kenley, "what the deuce has put that into your head?"

"I have been a dire failure here; perhaps elsewhere I shall turn out a success."

"You have not been a failure; there are very few better riders in England than yourself. Do not be offended at my question. Are you short of money? Is that the reason?"

"The principal reason, and a very good one. I have always been short of money."

"Why not ride as a professional jockey? You would find plenty of employment and make a heap of money."

"I should not mind it at all for myself," he replied.

"And who else have you to consider?"

"Some one very dear to me; I cannot tell you who it is."

"I think I can guess," replied the trainer smiling. He had noticed how Jack and Winifred were attached to each other.

"Please do not try, but if you know, keep it to yourself. I must make money – do something – and there is no chance for me here."

"You will not be going for a month or two?" asked Caleb anxiously.

"No, not for two or three months."

"I am glad of that; you'll be able to ride Topsy Turvy again at Lewes, and win on him, I hope."

"Is Sir Lester going to run him again in the Southdown Welter?"

"Yes, and of course, you must ride."

"I shall be delighted," replied Jack. "It will probably be my last mount in the old country, for many a long year."

"What country are you bound for?" asked Caleb.

"I do not know at present."

"I have a brother in Sydney, in New South Wales. He has done well there; he trains horses at Randwich, and I am sure if you met him, that is, if you go to Australia, he would make you welcome. He might be able to give you a wrinkle, put you in the way of making a living. He was always a shrewd sharp fellow; I have not heard from him for some time, but I know he is still there," said Caleb.

"If I decide upon Australia, I shall be only too pleased to meet him."

"His name is Joel, and if you decide to go there, I will write to him about you."

"Thanks," replied Jack, "it is always nice to meet a friend in the midst of strangers."

Jack Redland was often at Lewes, and rode gallops on the downs for the trainer. After their conversation he had a spin on Topsy Turvy, who went remarkably well, and he wondered if he was to win another race on him before he left.

From Lewes he went up to London, and called at several shipping offices. As he came out of the Orient Line offices and walked along Fenchurch Street, he met an old schoolfellow named Harry Marton, whom he had lost sight of for some years.

Harry Marton had been his particular chum at school, and when he left he entered the stockbrokers' office of Marton and Shrew, his father being the senior partner. He tried to persuade Jack to join him there, but he declined, giving as his reason that he could not bear to be cooped up in the city. After this their ways lay far apart, and they seldom came across each other.

Jack saw his former comrade looked anything but prosperous; in fact, like himself, he was evidently down on his luck. A hearty greeting passed between them, and Harry said —

"You look as though you were doing well; I am sorry to say I have had a very rough time of it. No doubt you heard of the firm's failure. The poor old governor, it completely broke him up, and

he died penniless, and I firmly believe heartbroken. His partner swindled him right and left, and to make matters worse, involved the firm in some very shady transactions. I warned my father, but he had such confidence in Shrew that he took no notice of what I said. It would have been better for him had he done so. We might have saved something from the wreck when the crash came."

"I am awfully sorry to hear it," replied Jack; "but you are mistaken as to my state of prosperity. I assure you I have not a penny to bless myself with, but I have some very good friends."

"Which I am sorry to say I have not," replied Harry. "Curious we should meet here. I wonder if you have been on the same errand as myself?"

"I have been to the Orient office to see about a passage to Sydney."

"And I have been on a similar errand, but not to the same office. I have had the offer of a passage out to Western Australia, to Fremantle. It is not a crack steamer by any means, but I don't mind that. When I arrive there I am certain of employment. You'll laugh when I tell you what it is."

"How strange we should meet here," replied Jack.

"It is, very curious; it must be five or six years since I saw you last."

"Quite that; it is a coincidence we ought not to overlook. How would it do for us to go out together?"

"It would be splendid, but Fremantle is a long way from Sydney, I believe."

"We cannot talk here; let us go into Carter's and have a chat," said Harry.

They entered the quiet, modest dining-rooms, and secured a table in a corner, away from the busy throng of city men, who were hurriedly discussing their luncheons.

"It always amuses me to watch the city man in here," said Jack. "He has not a minute to spare, and his food disappears with lightning-like rapidity. I wonder if it does him any good, or if he has the faintest idea of what he is eating."

"He cannot get much enjoyment out of it; I have tried it myself, and know what it means."

"In your clerking days?" said Jack.

"Yes, we never had much time to spare; it's different now. There is too much time and too little money."

Jack saw his friend was hungry, and ordered a substantial meal, which he was glad he had cash enough to pay for.

"I have not had such a good feed for many a long day," said Harry Marton with a sigh of regret that luncheon was at last over.

"It has been as bad as that?" said Jack.

"Yes, and occasionally I have had to starve for twelve hours. There is no man I have more pity for than the clerk out of work. He has to look respectable, or there is no chance of obtaining a situation; and when he gets work, his pay is miserably small. I assure you, Jack, I have tramped the city until I am sick of the whole thing. Nothing but refusals, even from men I knew when in my father's office. I wonder why parents are so anxious to bring up their children to respectable starvation. I have seen scores of good fellows dining off a piece of bread and a cup of tea, when a square meal would have been a Godsend to them. I think it is false pride in many cases; there's too much of the 'gentlemanly occupation' in this world."

"You speak from experience, I know very little about it," replied Jack, "but I can quite believe all you say. Tell me how you came to think of going to the colonies."

"Four or five years ago a man who hailed from Western Australia walked into our office. His name was Barry Tuxford, and he had been on the goldfields in that colony and made what he called a pile. He was a jovial, free and easy fellow, and he took a fancy to me. I showed him round town, and we had some very good times indeed. He got our firm to do some business for him, which panned out very well. When he returned he told me before he sailed, that if ever I wished to go out to Western Australia, I was to write to him to an address he gave me at Fremantle. I promised to do so, but at that time I never thought there was any chance of making use of him. I lost the address, but I remembered

the man, and that the town was Fremantle, so I risked it and wrote to him there. A fortnight ago I received his reply. He wrote that it was lucky Barry Tuxford was well known, or he would never have received the letter. He was sorry to hear of my misfortunes, said he recollected our jaunts around town, and proposed I should join him out there. 'We can do with a few smart fellows like you,' he said, 'and if you have a mate you can bring him with you; so much the better.' He then went on to say if I decided to go to Fremantle, I must take his letter to the owners of the steamer 'Golden Land,' and they would give me a passage out."

"Very good of him," said Jack, "You will probably mend your fortunes in the company of such a man. What are you to do when you arrive there?"

"That is the funny part of the business. He wants me to go with his pearling schooner, and some other boats, to a place I think he calls Shark's Bay. I am to be a sort of supercargo and general hand, I suppose, but what the deuce can he expect me to know about pearls and pearl fishing?" said Harry Marton.

"A man like that will soon teach you your work, and it must be a jolly interesting occupation, although, of course, there will be plenty of roughing it," replied Jack. "I should not mind it in the least."

Harry Marton looked at his friend, noticed his spruce appearance, and smiled.

"I don't think it would suit you, Jack. It's different with me, a case of Hobson's choice. Where Shark's Bay is I have not the faintest idea."

"We'll hunt it up on the map."

"They haven't such a thing as an atlas at Carter's."

"There is no harm in asking," said Jack, and called the waiter.

"Hatlas, sir? No, sir, the gents as come here has no time to look at a hatlas. The only part of the earth they care about lies within a radius of a mile round Carter's. They may have seen a hatlas at school, sir, but, bless you, it would be so much waste paper here."

They laughed, and Harry Marton said —

"I thought as much; anyway, it matters little where Shark's Bay is. I have no doubt I shall eventually be landed, or stranded, there."

"I thought pearl fishing was about worked out in Australia," said Jack.

"It cannot be, or Barry Tuxford would not have a hand in it. He's far too cute to tackle anything that is worked out, or likely to be, while he is in it."

"He asked you to take a friend. Suppose I join you?"

"You!" exclaimed Harry, delighted. "You don't mean it, that would be too much of a good thing. The 'Golden Land' is not the sort of steamer you would care to travel in; there's none of the luxuries of a liner on her. She's a cargo boat."

"We were at the same school and that was good enough for us. Why should the same steamer not be equally suitable? I am looking forward to roughing it, and may as well commence with the 'Golden Land.' At any rate, it is worth risking in order to have your company."

"Of course, if you really mean it, I shall be very pleased, and the passage can easily be fixed up."

"When does she sail?" asked Jack.

"At the end of the month if she has a full cargo, which she is almost sure to have."

Jack thought of Lewes Races and his mount on Topsy Turvy. If the "Golden Land" did not sail until then he would not miss the chance of winning again.

"I am going to ride in a race at Lewes, one of Sir Lester Dyke's horses, and you must come down and see it. There may be a chance of winning a few pounds to help us on our way."

"I have seen your name in the paper," said Harry, "and often envied you. I wish I could ride well. It will be very useful to you in the colonies. I am afraid my funds will not allow of my travelling to Lewes."

"I'll see to that. If we go out to seek our fortunes together we will have one common purse."

Harry Marton shook his head as he replied —

"That will not be fair, for I have very little to put into it."

"Our combined capital will not be burdensome, but such as it is we ought to share it," replied Jack laughing.

"Well, I will leave it to you, only mind, I insist upon a correct account being kept so that I can repay you if I overdraw."

"Agreed," said Jack, smiling. "We will be as accurate as a bank."

"If you have really made up your mind we may as well walk round to the shipping office, and see whether we can go by the 'Golden Land.'"

The Captain of the "Golden Land" chanced to be in the office when they entered, and the manager introduced them. Captain Seagrave was a bluff hearty sailor of the old school, not given to oily words or polished language, but an able skipper, and his employers knew it would be hard to find a better man for their work.

He had made many voyages to Australia and other countries, and risked his life in ships that were anything but seaworthy. He eyed the two young men curiously, and a humorous smile spread over his face. He hardly thought them the class of passenger for a rough and tumble trip to Fremantle in the "Golden Land." At the same time, he saw a prospect, in their company, of the monotony of the voyage being broken. In reply to the manager he said —

"There's d – d little room on board for human beings; the accommodation is limited, and the bunks are not equal to the best shake-downs in a decent hotel. There's a tarnation lot of company in the ship sometimes, which we get rid of in the best way we can. The dining saloon, gents, is not on a par with an Atlantic liner's, but there's ample room for feeding, providing the sea's calm. When she's in motion, the 'Golden Land' lets you know it. If the firm's willing, I'll take you both, and I daresay we shall pass the time pleasantly enough. We shall know each other inside out before we reach Fremantle, I guess."

CHAPTER FOURTH

AN OLD TIME SKIPPER

Jack Redland decided to take a trip to Fremantle in the "Golden Land," and arranged for his passage before leaving the office; he was surprised at the low amount charged.

The manager watched them as they left with Captain Seagrave, and thought:

"You little know what you are in for. I would not make a trip to Australia in the 'Golden Land' for a hundred pounds, how the deuce Seagrave manages to get the old tub out there safely beats me. She'll go down for certain before long. I hope it will not be this trip."

Captain Seagrave was in a jovial frame of mind, and he liked his company. He admired pluck and knew his companions had plenty of it, or they would not have ventured on such a trip without asking a few more questions.

"What sort of a steamer is the 'Golden Land'?" asked Jack.

Job Seagrave smiled as he replied:

"She's not what you'd call a floating palace; every time I sail in her I fancy it will be her last voyage, but she holds well together, and I know how to handle her, although she has as many humours as a thoroughbred."

Jack laughed as he said —

"I judge from that remark you are fond of racing."

"Yes, my lad, I am, and not above winning a trifle, or losing it."

"I ride in races sometimes."

The skipper turned an admiring glance on him.

"You don't look much like a jockey," he replied.

"I am a gentleman rider. If you care to go down to Lewes the week before we sail you will see me win a race, I hope."

"Lewes!" exclaimed Seagrave, "that's funny, bless my soul, it's funny. I was born there, in that glorious town I first saw daylight, or gas-light."

"Well, this beats all," said Harry Marton, "it is a day of surprises."

"A fellow must be born somewhere," said the skipper, in an apologetic tone, at which they both laughed.

"Have you been there lately?" asked Jack.

"Not this trip. I was there about twelve months ago, at the races, and had a look round the old place, but very few people know me now. I remember I backed a horse called Topsy Turvy, because he belonged to Sir Lester Dyke. I knew his father, they are a grand old family."

"I rode the horse," said Jack, quietly.

"Belay, there," shouted Seagrave, as he came to a dead standstill and stared at him, much to the amusement of the passers by. "You rode him, well, of all the — curious things this beats cock fighting."

"And I am going to ride him again at the next meeting," said Jack.

"The shekels of Job Seagrave go on to that horse," said the skipper, "and listen to me, young man, if he wins we'll lay in a nice little stock of dainties for the voyage. The 'Golden Land' is not over well provisioned, my inside feels like a salt mine sometimes before we touch land."

"I am going to Brighton to-night," said Jack. "Will you come with me?"

"You mean it, my son?"

"I do, heartily welcome you will be, and you too, Harry."

Harry Marton declined, he had no intention of draining his friend's slender purse, and, moreover, he had a little affair of his own with a bright eyed girl he wished to attend to.

They parted at London Bridge, Jack and Captain Seagrave going by the Brighton train.

"Glorious country this," said the captain, when they had passed Gatwick and got into the open.

"I am proud of being a Sussex man. I have had some rare fun at Brighton and Shoreham in my young days. It was there I got my first taste of the sea, and I liked it so much I stuck to it, but I've done no good at it. You see I hadn't the chances some of these swell skippers had, but I made the most of what little I knew. I have been through the mill, I can tell you, right through the whole boiling lot, from cabin boy to skipper."

"All the more credit to you," replied Jack.

"That's as it may be, and as how folks think. It's not much to blow about being captain of a dodgasted old coffin like the 'Golden Land,' but it's a living and I like it. On land I feel lost, on board I am as right as a trivet. It strikes me as curious a smart young fellow like you wants to leave this country and go to such a hole as Freemantle. You'll soon be sick of it, take my advice and throw it up."

Jack Redland laughed, he liked his bluff, hearty companion, and told him the reason he was going away.

"That's it, is it?" said Captain Seagrave. "You want to make money and come back and give it your best girl. Mind you, I don't say that is not a laudable desire, but are you sure of the party in petticoats? I have never had much to do with 'em myself, except in a casual way, but what little I know about 'em makes me steer clear of such craft. They're dangerous and you never can tell when they 'bout ship and sail clear away from you. Mind you have her safely in dock before you go, and don't let her come out until you return."

Jack laughed heartily as he replied —

"If she does not wait for my return I must find someone else to share my fortune, if I make one."

The train pulled up with a jerk that threw Captain Seagrave forward.

"Bad steering," he said. "I wish I had the engine driver in my stoke hole, he'd learn better manners down there."

"Tickets, please," said the porter.

"Tell the driver of this train he —"

The porter banged the door to, and left the skipper fuming.

Arriving at Brighton they walked to Jack Redland's lodgings, and after tea sat on the balcony.

"You are well fixed up here," said Seagrave, "nice and comfortable I call it. Rum old place this, I often wonder what sort of a time those old dandies had in the Pavilion a century or more ago."

"Judging from what I have read, they must have been gay and festive," replied Jack. "They drank hard, and made love desperately then; we go about such things in a more decorous manner now."

"That's true, but is it a change for the better? Is secret debauchery an improvement on open profligacy?"

He was rather surprised to hear his companion talk in this strain, and said —

"You do not think the morals of the present generation are any better than they were in those days?"

"Not a bit, you've only to look at the papers to find that out. There is some fairly sultry reading in the Divorce Court cases."

"Granted," replied Jack, "but still I think on the whole we have become better mannered, and more circumspect, since the time of the Georges."

"Maybe, but with all the learning to be had at other people's expense, I don't think we have much to boast about. In my young days we had to learn to work almost before we learned to spell."

"It does not seem to have done you much harm."

"None at all, but I'd have been a tarnation sight more presentable if somebody had taken me in hand and licked me into shape."

"What sort of a place is Fremantle?" asked Jack, changing the subject.

"It's not much like Brighton," replied Captain Seagrave, laughing. "You'll find a vast difference, but there's worse places than Fremantle on the face of the globe. It's an old convict settlement, at

the mouth of the Swan river, about a dozen miles from Perth. It's not one of the best of harbours, but I have never met with any mishap there. It has been improved a lot of late years. It will seem a very dull place to you, I am afraid. May I ask what you are going to do when you arrive there. It's not a good place to be stranded in."

"My friend, Harry Marton, is going out at the request of Barry Tuxford – " commenced Jack.

"Barry! well, I'm blest. Barry Tuxford, you'll be all right with him. There's no cleverer man than Barry in Western Australia, he can make money out of anything he touches. What do you think his latest move is?"

"Something out of the common," ventured Jack.

"Rather! He's revived the pearl fishing again, and what's more, he's had his usual luck.

"That is what he wants us for; I say us because he told Harry to take a friend out with him. We are going pearl fishing."

Captain Seagrave laughed.

"Barry will get the pearls and you will do the hard graft, but he will treat you fairly, he's a square man is Barry Tuxford. I reckon you'll go up to Shark's Bay and round that quarter, it is an outlandish place. I fancy life on a station would suit you best; anyway, I'd give it a chance if the pearling does not agree with you. They'll be glad to have a 'jackaroo' like you, who can ride, on any sheep station."

"What is a jackaroo?" said Jack.

"A new chum who wants to learn sheep farming; some of them pay a premium, but there is no occasion for that. You can work for nothing and learn a lot in a very short time. It's a rum life, but I have met many men who would not leave it for anything else. I suppose the great open country is to them like the sea to me, they feel lost without it."

"I shall make my way to Sydney if I cannot do anything in Western Australia. Caleb Kenley, who trains for Sir Lester Dyke, has a brother there, who is doing very well in the same line, and he says he will be very glad to see me."

"I'm sure he will, you are one of the right sort, Mr. Redland, and if you'll take an old salt's tip you'll quit pearl shelling and stick to horses."

Jack laughed as he replied —

"The one occupation is almost as risky as the other."

"But you are more likely to go under at pearling than at racing."

"There is no harm in trying the former. I can easily leave it if I wish."

"When we reach Fremantle I'll just put in a word for you both with Barry Tuxford. He's got a finger in a good many things, and I should not wonder if he dabbles in racing, there's a lot more of it than there used to be in Western Australia."

They went on to the parade and Captain Seagrave pointed out the many alterations that had been made at Brighton since he was a boy. "All these fine houses at Hove have been put up since my time, and the sea had a lot more of its own way than it has now," he said. They went on to the old pier and listened to the band, and Captain Seagrave found his companion so much to his liking that he forgot all about the time. It suddenly occurred to him that he must make a move if he wished to be back in London that night.

Jack had not much difficulty in persuading him to stop, and when they returned to his room they sat up until the early hours of the morning talking over the forthcoming voyage.

When Captain Seagrave left Brighton, Jack set out for The Downs.

Sir Lester and Winifred were much amused at his description of Captain Seagrave, and his conversation.

"He knew your father," said Jack. "Strange, is it not, and also my chance meeting with Harry Marton? I am commencing to think all these happenings mean something in my favour."

"I am very glad you do not sail until after the Lewes meeting," said Sir Lester. "I want you to ride Topsy Turvy in the Welter. He's top weight, and there ought to be a fair price about him. I

mean to put you a hundred on, just for luck, and if he wins it will be a small amount of capital for you to take out with you."

"I cannot accept it, indeed I cannot," said Jack.

"You must, my boy, just to please me. Remember you have ridden for me several times, and won races, and have always refused anything I offered you. Tell him, Win, he must allow me to have my own way on this occasion, he will take more notice of you."

"Of course you must, Jack, it will be very unkind of you if you do not. Besides, you have not won the race yet, although Caleb says it is a good thing for Topsy Turvy if you ride. Promise me you will do as my father wishes."

Jack had to give way before this combined attack, and acknowledged the money would be very useful, if he happened to win.

A change had come over Winifred since Jack Redland's decision to leave England. Her father noticed it and was troubled, after all she might be fonder of him than she cared to confess. What a pity it was Jack had to leave the country, but it was all for the best, and no doubt in time Winifred would grow accustomed to his absence. Had he been to blame for leaving them so much alone together? He thought not, for he liked Jack Redland, and knew he was an honourable, upright man, even if he had failed so far in life.

Jack remained at The Downs; there was always a room for him, and he was treated as one of the household. The place had been almost a home to him since his father died, and he felt he would regret leaving Sir Lester and Winifred more than anything else, the parting with them would be the most severe ordeal he would have to face.

Youth, however, is the time of hope and resolve, and he was sanguine of success. So far everything had turned out strangely in his favour, and there was no reason why it should not continue until his return.

CHAPTER FIFTH

TOPSY TURVY

Having completed the arrangements for his voyage, Jack Redland went to Lewes to ride Topsy Turvy in his final gallop. The horse went well, and he became exceedingly fond of his chance, so much so that he wrote to Harry Marton and advised him to put a little money on as he thought it was a pretty good thing.

"I am not, as a rule, over confident," he wrote, "but Topsy Turvy has done such splendid work that I really think, bar accident, there is not much risk, and I know I can ride as well as any of the other fellows."

Captain Seagrave had not many friends in London, but he imparted to his chief officer and engineer that Topsy Turvy was about the best thing he had ever heard of for the Southdown Welter.

"I don't mind telling you, Sam, we are in for a decent trip this time. We're going to have company, two smart young fellows, and one of 'em is going to ride the horse at Lewes. What do you think of that?"

"I'll back him, just for luck," replied Sam Slack, chief officer of the "Golden Land," "but if he doesn't win our passenger will hear of it during the voyage. We have none too much money to spare, as you are aware."

"Granted, Sam, but that is all the more reason why we ought to get a bit when we can."

Rufus Macdonald, chief engineer, was a canny Scot, but he had the bump of speculation strongly developed, and when the skipper gave him the tip he quietly said he'd think it over.

"The Sussex fortnight" is always pleasant, Lewes following after Brighton meeting.

At Brighton, on the breezy downs, Sir Lester won a couple of races, and as Topsy Turvy had no difficulty in beating these horses on the training track they were all sanguine of success.

Captain Seagrave came to Lewes, and Jack introduced him to Caleb Kenley.

"I have heard of you," said the trainer, "and am glad to meet you. The Lewes folk were very proud of you when you stood by the 'Northern Star' and rescued all her crew, at the risk of losing your ship and everyone in it. You see we did not forget you were born here, and I assure you we thought a lot of your bravery."

"I should have been a coward to leave them in the lurch; it was risky, but it's no more than one seaman ought to do for another," replied Seagrave.

"Men do not always act as you did, and I maintain you deserved a lot more credit than you received for that job."

"Seamen often risk their lives to save others, and no one hears anything about it. We consider it part of our ordinary work," replied the captain.

The trainer afterwards gave Jack Redland a full account of Captain Seagrave's action, and it enhanced his respect for the man, whom he already liked.

Lewes is a popular meeting, and there are several races for gentlemen riders. Jack, however, determined to accept no mounts, except on Topsy Turvy, although he had several offers. He intended to keep himself fresh for that event as so much depended upon it.

In the paddock he introduced Captain Seagrave to Sir Lester and Winifred, and the skipper at once divined this was the young lady Jack Redland had in view. He admired his choice, and Winifred's affable manner towards him increased his respect for Jack's judgment. Sir Lester was amused at the captain and thought that after all Jack was not far wrong in selecting the "Golden Land" to voyage in to Fremantle.

Topsy Turvy looked as fit as hands could make him, but he had top weight, and there were half a dozen good horses in the race. Speculation on the Welter, as a rule, was not extensive, but

on this occasion the bookmakers fielded liberally, and the odds against Sir Lester's horse were five to one. At this remunerative figure he secured five hundred to a hundred on Jack's account, while Captain Seagrave plunged to the extent of a ten pound note, a reckless proceeding he had never been guilty of before.

He handled the note tenderly, and sighed as he gave it to the layer of odds, who plunged it with indifference into his capacious bag.

"He thinks no more of it than of a bit of waste-paper," thought the captain. "I wonder if the day will come when I can bundle ten pound notes into my pocket like that. If Topsy Turvy wins I shall have fifty to the good, and shall know what it is to be rich."

Bibury was favourite at even money, and as he had recently won a big race, the majority of backers fancied the race was good for him. Marco and The Duke were also well backed, as were all the others, seven runners appearing on the board.

The owner of Bibury, a clever amateur, was riding his horse, and he advised Sir Lester to back it.

"Topsy Turvy is a good horse," he said, "but I do not think he has much chance of giving the weight away to my fellow. I hear Jack Redland is going out to Australia. I'm sorry, he is a real good fellow."

"This will be his last mount in England for some years, I expect," replied Sir Lester, "but I hope to see him carry my colours again when he returns. You seem confident about Bibury; I may tell you my horse was never so well as he is at present, and he will give you a good race."

Winifred was talking to Jack as he prepared to mount. She was very anxious for him to win, as she knew the five hundred pounds would be very useful to him.

"You must win, Jack," she said. "It will be the last time I shall see you carry the old colours."

"I hope not," he replied cheerfully. "I do not mean to remain away for ever."

"But we cannot tell what may happen in the meantime," she said, rather sadly.

He got into the saddle, and bending down to her, said —

"You need have no fear of anything untoward happening. I shall always think of you wherever I am, and come back to you as soon as I can."

She watched him ride away, and said to herself —

"Poor Jack, I wish he would remain here. How I shall miss him."

Topsy Turvy dashed down the course, pulling double, and there was no mistaking the resolute style in which he galloped.

"He's a beauty," muttered Captain Seagrave, "they are a well matched pair, how well he rides; bound to win I should say. I have another fiver, I may as well go the whole hog and risk it. Job Seagrave, you are a fool."

This time he had to be contented with four to one, and he grumbled at the price.

The bookmaker informed him the odds were good, and that if he did not like four's he could go without.

It was a pretty race, and the horses were all well together for the first mile, The Duke leading the field.

Jack knew the course well, the run in has a curious dip, not far from the winning post, and as Topsy Turvy possessed any amount of stamina it was here he would show to advantage. They had half a mile to go and the rider of the favourite went up level with The Duke, Jack keeping close behind on Sir Lester's horse.

Captain Seagrave enjoyed racing, but he was not a good judge of horses in running, and he fancied Topsy Turvy ought to be nearer the leaders. He had fifteen pounds on the race, and all he had left in his pocket was an odd sovereign and a few silver coins. He commenced to lecture himself on the follies of speculating and said he would have been much better off had he locked himself in his cabin, and did the same with his money in his locker.

"It will teach me a lesson," he said. "I'll never make another wager. I wish I had not come near the blessed course. It's not his fault, he thought the horse would win right enough, but –"

He stopped short as he caught sight of the black jacket and orange sleeves coming with a rush on the outside. His tone changed at once.

"He's going to win, by all that's wonderful he's winning. I wish I had more money on. Let me see. Fifty and twenty, that's seventy, not a bad little haul."

Bibury was still in the lead, and again the gallant skipper quaked in his shoes. He was far more excited than when he rescued the crew of the "Northern Star" in the midst of a raging sea. He was used to the howling of the winds and the roar and lashing of the waves, but the turmoil of the racecourse was new to him.

Winifred watched the finish eagerly, she wondered if Topsy Turvy would get up and beat the favourite. The dip was reached, and the stiff pinch began. Gradually Topsy Turvy drew nearer to Bibury and despite his weight held his own.

The excitement was intense. Captain Seagrave shouted, and the sound almost deafened the man standing next to him; he moved away, calling the skipper anything but polite names. This had no effect upon Job, who waved his arms frantically and cleared the space near him.

Nearer and nearer Topsy Turvy stole up to Bibury, until they were neck and neck, then came the supreme moment, when, for a second or two, the result hung in the balance.

It was all over – the black and orange went to the front, and Sir Lester's horse had won for the second time.

Jack Redland was glad it was over, he had seldom ridden a better, or harder race, for it had taken him all his time to beat Bibury. Thanks to Sir Lester he had won five hundred pounds, and in his present position it seemed like a fortune. He rode into the weighing enclosure and dismounted, Sir Lester and Winifred congratulating him on the result.

"It was a close shave," he said, as he came out of the weighing-room, with the saddle on his arm, "closer than anyone imagines. I had to ride my hardest to beat Bibury, he is a good horse. It was the dip at the finish did it, Topsy Turvy has more stamina than the other one."

"At any rate you won, and rode a capital race. Will you take that jacket out with you, it may come in useful, bring you good luck," said Sir Lester.

"It will be a delightful souvenir," said Jack.

"And I will work a forget-me-not on it if you wish," said Winifred.

"Do, please," answered Jack, "that will serve to remind me of many things in the dear old land."

Captain Seagrave was beside himself with delight. He drew his money, counting it over and over again to make sure it was right. Then he sought out Jack Redland and shook his arm with tremendous force.

"Seventy pounds. That's what I have won. Only think of it. My lad, we'll live in clover this trip, I tell you. Where's the horse, let me have a look at him."

"There he is," replied Jack, highly amused. "Mind he does not shiver your timbers with his heels, he has a nasty habit of lashing out."

Captain Seagrave patted the horse, and gazed at him admiringly, he thought Topsy Turvy the most beautiful creature he had ever seen; had he lost probably his interest in the animal would have diminished considerably.

Harry Marton, in London, anxiously awaited the result of the race. He had put a couple of pounds on, more than he could well spare, and if he won he meant to obtain some necessary additions to his outfit.

He bought an evening paper, but it was too early, "all the winners" were not in yet. Later on he bought another, and put it in his pocket. He wanted to look at it where no one would observe him. He went down a side street off the Strand and turned into one of the gardens on the Embankment, where he sat down.

Slowly he drew the paper out of his pocket, and opened it. He read the result of the first race, then went down the list. "Ah, here it is!" he exclaimed. "Sir Lester Dyke's Topsy Turvy (Jack Redland)!" He waved the paper aloft, to the astonishment of two sedate old gentlemen near by. He had won ten pounds, and that meant much to him. He blessed the name of Topsy Turvy and wondered how Jack Redland had got on, and the skipper. Anyway, it was a downright good commencement, no doubt they would encounter many reverses in time to come, but they had started with a success and that meant a good deal.

There was nothing of the gambler about him. He had merely risked the money, on Jack's advice, and he had won. He had no inclination to try and make it into more by similar means. The "little bit on" had done him no harm, and the excitement had done him good.

Harry Marton knew what gambling meant in stocks and shares, and that this form of speculation was far more baneful than a small investment on a race. His father's downfall could be traced to the former, there was no danger of the son allowing himself to be snared in the same net. He would not have been much worse off had he lost his two pounds, he was far better off now he had won ten. It was with a light heart he went home that night and slept soundly, until the din of the traffic awoke him in the morning.

Captain Seagrave returned from Lewes, and went down to the "Golden Land," lying in the docks. He felt like a man who had conferred a benefit upon his fellows. There was a glow of satisfaction on his face as he stepped up the gangway on to the deck. It was ten o'clock, and everything seemed very quiet on board. He saw no one about and shouted in his familiar gruff tones. The cabin boy came along grinning.

"Where's the chief officer?" asked Captain Seagrave.

"Ashore, sir."

"Where's the chief engineer?"

"Ashore, sir."

"Where's the whole blessed crew, anyway?"

"Ashore, sir."

"Who the h – ll's left on the ship?"

"Me, sir."

Captain Seagrave seemed inclined to burst with wrath, he changed his mind and roared with laughter.

"So you are in charge, Billy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Any report to make?"

"Yes, sir."

"Out with it."

"Mr. Slack said he was very much obliged to you and that the whole blessed ship was topsy turvy."

"Oh, he said that did he, anything more?"

"Yes, sir."

"Full steam ahead."

"Mr. Macdonald said all his men had followed the advice he gave them, and you need not expect to see any of 'em for four and twenty hours."

"Go on, any further news," said Captain Seagrave.

"Please, sir, Mr. Macdonald said that if I kept to the craft, and looked out for you, he was sure you'd make it right with me when you came on board."

"The devil he did. I'm very much obliged to Mac, but he was quite right, here's a dollar for you."

The astonished lad gazed in awe at the skipper, the gift was so unexpected, so unusual, he could not understand it. As he walked aft he muttered – "I'm blest if he ain't topsy turvy, too."

CHAPTER SIXTH

TAPPING

When Captain Seagrave appeared on deck next morning the first person he encountered was the chief officer.

Sam Slack looked decidedly seedy; there was an up-all-night and commenced-afresh-in-the-morning appearance about him. He lurched forward and saluted the skipper. "That was a fine tip, captain, a grand tip; I backed it, so did most of the men."

"When I came aboard last night I found the cabin boy in charge. Do you consider that the proper way in which to leave a ship?"

"The circumstances were exceptional; we made a night of it."

"Where's Mac?"

Sam Slack smiled as he replied —

"When I left him last night he was taking in sufficient Scotch to last him for a voyage; he'll turn up all right to-day, and we can do without him. I hope you had a good win."

Captain Seagrave was in a good humour. The seventy pounds he had won was safely locked up in his chest.

"I did all right, Sam. By Jove, young Redland can ride; it was a clinking race. I was in a deuce of a funk at one time, thought my money was gone, but he pulled through all right at the finish. I'll tell you what, Sam, we'll get in a few delicacies for the voyage. You'll go your share, I am sure."

"Certainly, but I only had five pounds on, and won twenty."

"A whole fiver! Where did it come from?"

"The office. I bled them; got a bit on account. It was like drawing a back tooth, but I managed it."

The skipper looked at him admiringly. He knew Sharp and Co. were not given to ostentatious displays of liberality.

"You are cleverer than I thought you were. How did you manage it?"

"Gave them your tip."

"You told Sharp I was backing Topsy Turvy?"

"I did. Moreover, I said you had persuaded Mac to follow your lead, and Sharp said if Mac thought it was worth a bit, he'd have a trifle on himself; and he did."

"Then Sharp ought to send us a couple of cases of whisky aboard. I'll ask him about it," said the skipper.

Later on in the day the chief engineer put in an appearance, and staggered into Captain Seagrave's cabin.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Mac?"

"Yes, it's me — what's left of me. You'll ruin the ship, Captain. It's not fair to the men; it's demoralising. I hope next time you get a tip you'll keep it to yourself."

"That's ungrateful. How much did you win?"

"Only a tenner. I had not sufficient faith in you to put on more than a couple of sovs."

Job Seagrave laughed. He got on very well with his officers and crew. They really liked the "old man" because he invariably stood by them, no matter what trouble they got into, or whether they were right or wrong.

A clerk from the shipping office came to the door of the cabin, and handed the captain a note. It advised him that the "Golden Land" must sail as soon as possible after the remainder of the cargo, which was to be delivered that day, was got on board.

"All serene," said Job. "But what about my passengers? They don't expect her to get away before next week."

"Then you'll have to hurry them up."

"How the deuce am I to find them?"

"That's not my business; you have your orders," said the clerk impudently. The office hands did not like the skipper; he was one too many for them.

"Are you running the ship, or am I?" roared Job.

"You have the honour to command the old tub, I believe."

"Then you clear out of it as soon as possible, or you'll travel down the gangway faster than you came. You shrivelled up young leek, how dare you cheek me!"

The clerk disappeared. He had experienced what the captain's temper was like before, and did not relish a repetition.

"The atmosphere feels cleaner now he's gone," growled Mac.

"We'll sail when we think proper, Mr. Macdonald, and I'm d – d if I am going without my passengers, Sharp or no Sharp."

Mar chuckled. He gloried in defying "the powers that be" ashore.

"Tell him we are short of coal. Inform Mr. Sharp that there is not sufficient grease on board to make a slide on the cabin floor, let alone to oil the engines. That ought to settle him."

"Mac," said the skipper, "we are going to have a decent trip. I am about to provision this ship in a lordly style. Will you stand in, it will be worth it?"

The chief engineer looked dubious.

"I had a very small win," he said. "But I'll lay in some of my special, and you're welcome to a share."

"Where's the crew?" asked Job, as he went on deck.

"Half in and half out. They keep turning up in small quantities; the bosun's just arrived in a hansom," laughed Slack.

"He's a credit to the ship. When the bosun can drive about in a hansom, there's no reason why the skipper should not have a carriage and pair."

"None at all; I'd like to see you in it, you'd fill it well," replied the chief officer with a smile.

"Stow your chaff; I'm going to board Sharp in the office. Mind you, I have forgiven you lubbers for deserting the ship last night, but don't let it occur again, or there'll be a concert on board."

"And very little harmony."

"That is so, Sam; you have a keen intelligence," replied Job.

He drove to the office of Sharp and Co. in a hansom, and entered the premises with a defiant air. The clerk who presented the letter on board, saw him, and fled to the rear of the building.

Abe Sharp was in his office, and as the skipper entered he asked him to be seated.

"Haven't time," said Job. "We're under sailing orders. Steam up, and we move out in two hours. Are the papers ready?"

Sharp knew his man. "You received my letter?" he asked.

"I did. That's the reason the funnel is already belching forth smoke. We're quick on the 'Golden Land,' a darned sight smarter than you are in this office."

"I am afraid your temper is ruffled," said Sharp.

"And so would yours be if a tadpole addressed you with the authority of a whale."

"Who is the tadpole?"

Job Seagrave named the offending clerk.

"He shall be reprimanded," said Sharp.

"Much good that will do him. Sack him."

"He's useful."

"Then I'm sorry for you. We have no use for things like that on the 'Golden Land.' Are the papers ready?"

"No, of course not."

"Then what the – is the use of dragging me up here in a hurry."

"You are too sudden, captain. I hope you don't drive the 'Golden Land' at this rate."

Job Seagrave smiled as he replied —

"I'll tell you something in confidence, Mr. Sharp. I have made my will, and left a written confession behind me in safe hands. If the 'Golden Land' is submerged this trip you'll hear about it."

"She is perfectly seaworthy, and although an old boat, is by no means a bad one."

"Have you ever travelled in her?" asked the skipper.

"No, oh dear no!"

"Then try a voyage in her this time. There'll be room in the firm for another partner in a few weeks."

Abe Sharp laughed as he replied —

"You are in a joking humour this morning. I suppose it is the result of your good luck yesterday?"

"And what may you be pleased to call my good luck?"

"Sam Slack called here, and said you had gone to Lewes to back a horse."

"Did he now? That's kind of him, giving me away like that," said Job.

"It's no concern of mine, of course," said Sharp, "but I advise you to stick to your ship and leave horses alone."

"What are you going to put aboard out of your winnings?" asked Job.

"My winnings, what do you mean?" asked the astonished Sharp.

"You backed my tip, and it came off. I think we deserve a few odds and ends in the way of luxuries after that. As a rule, mind you, I say as a rule – this voyage may prove an exception – the 'Golden Land' is not exactly a floating Hotel Cecil. Perhaps you'll assist us in the cookery department, and I may say that the wine cellar is disgracefully under-stocked."

Abe Sharp laughed again. He, too, was in a good humour.

"I confess I had a trifle on that horse Slack named. Only a trifle, mind you. I'll see what can be done for you; but if steam is up, and you sail in two hours, I fear it will be impossible for me to accede to your request."

"Steam can be let off," said Job.

"What do you require on board?" asked Sharp.

"Most things; you can't go wrong whatever you send aboard, unless it be salt," said Job.

"You have never complained before about the provisions."

"Your memory is failing. I made one complaint five years ago, and said I'd let it stand good so that I need not be at the trouble of repeating myself."

"I understand; and let me tell you, Captain Seagrave, we are perfectly satisfied with you. Our firm never forgets the men who serve us well."

"I have been in your employ about twenty years," replied Job, "and if you have not forgotten me, I cannot say you have remembered me."

"You have had your salary raised," said Sharp.

"That has not hurt me. The rise was imperceptible."

"Really, I think you deserve some consideration. I'll mention the matter to the Board."

"We shall be half way to Australia then."

Abe Sharp was amused. He knew very well Captain Seagrave was underpaid; but he could do very little for him on his own initiative.

"You must sail as soon as possible. When can you leave?" he asked.

"When I get my two passengers on board. I have to find them first."

"That's awkward; but have you no idea where they are?"

"The young fellow who rode Topsy Turvy yesterday I can lay hands on pretty quick, and no doubt he'll find his chum."

Sharp was interested.

"Is Jack Redland going out with you?"

"Yes; I thought you knew."

"I was not in the office when he came with Marton. His father was a well known man in the city."

"Was he? Then the son does not take after him. He's a gentleman," said Job, who hated the city and the men in it.

Abe Sharp winced. He said sharply —

"I am busy now, Captain Seagrave; but I'll see about sending down to the ship."

"And when must we sail?"

"I'll have the papers ready for you to-morrow."

"Very well, I may not see you again. I always feel like that when I leave London in the 'Golden Land,'" said Job, with which parting shot he stalked out of the office.

He sent a telegram to Jack Redland to Brighton, and received a reply to the effect that he would be on board the next day.

"That's business," said Job as he read it.

He did not leave the ship again, and the following morning the chief officer put his head in at the door of his cabin and said —

"It's come, sir."

"What's come?" asked Job.

"The consignment from the office."

"Good lord, you don't say so. What is it?"

"Cases. Tinned stuff and bottled stuff."

Captain Seagrave went out to inspect.

Piled up on the deck were over a dozen cases, and his practised eye saw at a glance they were of the right sort.

"Any message with them?"

"None, except that they were sent with Mr. Sharp's compliments to Captain Seagrave. How did you work it?" asked Slack.

"I gave him a pretty lively half hour. I reckon he'll not be sorry when we are at sea. I told him I had made my will, and left a written statement behind as to the state of the 'Golden Land.'"

Sam Slack laughed heartily.

"How did he take it?" he asked.

"Solemnly, he didn't care for the medicine."

"And I got a fiver out of him. Skipper, something's going to happen. Sharp's been converted."

"Perhaps he has; but he'll be no credit to the sect he patronises. They'll have to lock up the collection boxes pretty quick."

The chief engineer walked solemnly round the cases as he saw them on deck.

"Where are these from?"

"The office."

"Is it rat poison?"

"No, it's a present from Sharp to the skipper."

Mac sat down; the blow was too much for him.

"A present from the office?" he said slowly. "You're certain it's not explosives?"

"She'll go down soon enough without any assistance of that kind," said the chief officer.

"Does he know about it?" and he pointed towards the captain's cabin.

"Oh, yes; he worked the oracle yesterday."

"He actually pumped some of the milk of human kindness into Sharp's wretched body?"

"That is so."

"Then I'll go and shake hands with him," said Mac, and went to the cabin. He stood looking at the skipper solemnly, and Job said —

"What is it, Mac?"

"I want to shake hands with you, captain. I'll consider it an honour."

The skipper held out his hand, wondering what it was all about.

"I congratulate you," said Mac. "I did not think any man breathing could have done it."

"Done what?" asked Job.

"Tapped Sharp," said Mac, as he walked quietly away, and Job Seagrave roared with laughter.

CHAPTER SEVENTH

WEATHERING THE STORM

The "Golden Land" started on her voyage to Fremantle with Jack Redland and Harry Marton installed on board in the most comfortable cabin in the ship.

"I'd have given you mine with pleasure," said Job, "but although it's pleasant and airy, it's difficult to manage. You want to know it thoroughly or you come to grief. In a rough sea you stand a good chance of being washed out if the door is left open, and you might forget to shut it."

Jack Redland said they were quite satisfied with their present quarters, and had no desire to turn the skipper or anyone else out.

He had bid a hurried farewell to Sir Lester and Winnie, and the parting was keener than he anticipated.

Left alone with the girl he was sorely tempted to ask her to be his wife, but he knew it would not be fair to bind her in any way. He saw by her face that she was deeply moved, and his heart beat high with hope. She might wait for him. She might be true to the unspoken love they both felt. If he made a fortune in a few years all might be well, but he knew he must hurry and leave no stone unturned if he meant to win her.

"Take this, Jack," she said, handing him a small miniature of herself, which her father had had painted not long before. "It will remind you of me in the distant land, and I hope, make you feel you have a friend whose thoughts are with you at all times."

"It is the greatest treasure I have," he said, and then, unable to control himself longer, he took her in his arms and kissed her. In another moment he was gone, hurrying from the house, almost afraid of what he had done; but as he turned round to wave farewell, he saw her standing there, both arms outstretched, as though she would call him back at the last moment. He knew he would never forget that picture or the kiss he had given her. Winnie was sorrowful, and yet happy. Jack had betrayed himself, and she knew he loved her.

"Poor Jack," she murmured, "I will wait for him until he returns, no matter how many years it may be."

She told her father, and he smiled. Jack was out of the way, and she might forget. He could afford to be generous; at the same time he sympathised with them, and had financial matters been other than they were, nothing would have pleased him better than to have the young man for his son-in-law.

"I gave him my miniature, I hope you do not mind," she said. "I wished him to have some remembrance of me."

"You did quite right; nothing could have pleased him more, and you can have another painted," he replied.

So the "Golden Land" steamed on her way, parting the lovers as the ocean has parted thousands for ages past.

Although an old boat, she acted fairly well, and was not quite so coffin-like as her skipper described her.

They coaled at Port Said, where Jack and his friend went ashore, to find the usual cosmopolitan crowd, as dirty and unclean as ever. They were not sorry to be on board again, and when they left the Red Sea behind and steamed out into the wide ocean, the refreshing breezes invigorated and put new life into them. The sea air seemed to tell of hope and fortune, and Harry Marton especially was not at all sorry he had left London far behind.

"We'll have a night ashore at Colombo, young men," said the skipper the day before they arrived at Ceylon. "There's plenty to see, and it will be a change for you; and it's our last port of call."

They were nothing loath, and when the ship entered the harbour she was quickly surrounded with all manner of small boats, of various shapes and sizes, manned by noisy shouting natives, clamouring for custom.

Job Seagrave was not long in putting things in order, and leaving the chief officer in charge, they were pulled ashore by a couple of villainous looking dark-skinned natives.

"A nice couple of niggers to row respectable white men," said Job.

One of the men grinned. He evidently had some idea of the nature of the remark.

"You look uglier than ever now," said Job. "Take my advice, and keep your smile for dark nights; it's far too powerful for daylight."

They walked through the bazaars and the skipper showed them most of the sights that were interesting. Everything was new to them: the bright coloured garments, the waving tropical trees, with their huge leaves, the almost naked natives and rickshaw runners. It was difficult to tell the women from the men. Outside the town swarms of dark-eyed naked children surrounded them, clamouring for coins, no matter how small, and showering blessings upon their path, in quaint broken English, as they walked along.

They strolled about for the greater part of the night, and in the early morning returned to the ship.

"They turn night into day here," said Jack, "and no wonder, for it must be unpleasantly hot in the burning sun."

"You are right, it is," replied Job, "but you'll find it a lot hotter where you are going to, and if you tackle Barry Tuxford's pearling business you'll be as near to a certain place as it is possible to get in this world."

"A nice look-out, anyway," replied Jack, "but we shall not back down."

After leaving Colombo a couple of days there were signs of a storm, and Captain Seagrave knew what that meant in this latitude. Once he had given up all hope of saving the "Golden Land," but she pulled through, although it was a narrow squeak. He had no desire for another such experience. Anxiously he scanned the sky, and saw great black masses rolling and chasing each other like angry billows. There was a peculiar moaning sound in the air like spirits in torment; he had heard it before, and dreaded it. The heat was oppressive, and Jack thought the ship was as hot as an oven. He, too, watched the sky, but was not aware of the danger. He saw the skipper on the bridge and went towards it.

"There's something brewing up there," said Job shouting down to him.

"Rough weather, eh?"

"Yes, we're in for it."

"We have had no occasion to grumble so far," replied Jack, "and we can hardly expect to get through without some kind of a rough and tumble."

Blacker and blacker grew the clouds, and the roaring sound increased in volume.

"Better get below," roared Job, "or hold hard on to something."

Jack caught hold of the rail near him, and steadied himself. He had no intention of going below and was curiously anxious to see a storm at sea. As he looked up at Captain Seagrave, and saw his face, he felt there was a man who could be trusted, who would never lose his courage, and he commenced to understand why the "old tub" had weathered so many storms. The skipper might be a rough man, unpolished, but his heart was in the right place, his nerves true as steel, and the desire to do his duty strong within him. Such men as these, Jack thought, have made England the nation she is, and raised her merchant vessels and ocean steamers to the highest pitch. Ashore Captain Seagrave might cause smiles to cross the faces of men who were as mere pigmies compared to him now.

Suddenly the coming storm struck the ship. She staggered, quivered, groaned, swerved, then righted herself and plunged forward into the boiling, seething mass of water again.

Jack held on tight, for the wind howled and shrieked around him, and every timber seemed to creak and groan. Far ahead he saw Sam Slack gesticulating furiously at some of the crew; he wondered how he kept his legs with such a heaving, shivering mass beneath him. Sam, in his way, was quite as good a man as the skipper, although he was not born to control and lead like Job Seagrave. He obeyed any orders given him, no matter the danger involved in carrying them out, but he would have been afraid to give them on his own responsibility.

Jack watched him curiously, and then looked up at the bridge. Captain Seagrave was shouting through a trumpet to Slack, who heard him amidst all the din, and came towards him. Then there was a roar of words which were unintelligible to him, but which the chief officer understood, and hurried "forrard" again. It seemed easy for him to walk the deck; Jack tried the experiment, but as he let go his hold the ship lurched; he fell heavily, and a huge wave washed him into the centre of the vessel. He was unhurt, and laughed at his experience, but had no desire to try it again. All through the night the wind howled, and the seas swirled round the "Golden Land," in huge angry masses. When Jack staggered on deck again next morning he saw Captain Seagrave at his post on the bridge, braving the still furious elements, fighting them until they were beaten.

"He's been there all night," said Sam Slack, as he shouted into Jack's ear; "you never catch our old man leaving the bridge in a gale like this. I'll be glad when we're out of it. So long as he sticks at it we stick at it for shame's sake. Mac's been down in the engine-room all night, and he's there yet. If strong language can keep his boilers going it'll be done. Mac's powerful in a storm, it kind of works him up, and he knows the engines are none too good, and want watching like babies. Where's your mate?"

"Down below. He's very bad; wishes he was ashore, I think," said Jack laughing.

Towards the afternoon the storm slackened, and Job Seagrave left the bridge. Jack followed him into his cabin.

"You have had a rough night's work," he said. "I can quite understand now why the 'Golden Land' has made so many safe passages."

Job smiled as he pulled off his oilskins.

"It was pretty rough, I acknowledge; but we have been in many worse things in our time. As for me being on the bridge, I would not leave the old tub in any other hands; they'd smash her for a certainty – don't know her as well as I do. We understand each other, and when I give my orders, she obeys. Sam's all right, a real good sort, but she'd not do for him what she will for me."

Mac came in, grimy, and mopping his face with a greasy rag.

"I told 'em to let me know when you'd come off the bridge," he said. "You'll be the death of me some day. It's hell down below, and every minute I'm afraid there'll be a burst up."

"Not with you in charge, Mac. I have been telling Mr. Redland the ship understands me better than any man on board, and it's the same with you and the engines."

"Yours is a cooler job than mine," growled Mac.

"I know you are always nice and warm," replied Job, "but think what an advantage it is in cold weather."

"We never run into cold weather," replied Mac with a grunt. "Why don't you take a trip to the Arctic regions to give us a chance of getting even with you?"

"I'll think it over," replied Job. "Meanwhile try this, it will do you good," and he poured out a stiff nip of whisky.

Mac drained it at a gulp, and his eyes glistened.

"One more will just about recompense me for a beastly night in the black hole," he said.

Job laughed and gave him another.

"Is this some of Sharp's stuff?" he asked.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.