

THE AUDACIOUS
ADVENTURES OF
MILES McCONAUGHY



ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

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THE
AUDACIOUS ADVENTURES
OF
MILES McCONAUGHY

AN EPIC OF THE MERCHANT MARINE

BY
ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

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E. M. H.

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The Audacious Adventures of Miles McConaughy

CHAPTER I

THE BAD SAMARITAN

“I say, less noise out there!” called the Consul.

The shuffling of many feet in the soft dust of the road beneath the window was stilled, and he bent his attention again to deciphering the code aerogram on the desk before him.

“‘Pot-luck,’” he muttered to himself, one finger exploring along the line of p’s in the code-book. “‘Pot-luck?’ Ah, ‘inaccurate information.’ Don’t these navy fellows ever admit they’re to blame? Hullo!”

The rasp of deep-sea voices had died down with the suppression of shuffling feet. Now they boomed forth again, and as the Consul raised himself in his chair to look out the window the rasp became a roar.

“I don’t care what ye say!” bellowed a voice of man’s-size proportions. “Ar-re ye goin’ to let me in or—Get out o’ ma way!”

The door to the Consul’s inner office crashed open abruptly, revealing a momentary picture of a much-frightened coloured man, caroming across the anteroom, and there entered six feet of massive humanity, arrayed in the wreck of what had once been a pair of white trousers, a ruined pea-jacket and a dilapidated blue cap, bearing the insignia of a master in the merchant marine. Behind him followed two similar apparitions. One was short and wiry, not more than an inch over five feet, and for clothing he wore a suit of dungarees, the grease-stains upon which had been patterned over by a design in salt water. The other was half a head taller than the first man, raw-boned and saturnine of aspect. He, too, wore an officer’s cap, but the rest of his costume consisted of heavy seaboots and slops. The three stood in a row, the short one in the middle, just inside the door, and glowered.

“Who—” began the Consul weakly, after he had regained his breath.

“Ar-re ye the Consul?” cut in the first big man—he of the master’s cap.

Braithwaite—lord of the high justice, the middle and the low in all affairs of his Britannic Majesty’s merchant marine, which came within the sphere of his post on the isolated islet of St. Saviour’s—simply nodded his head.

“Ma name’s McConaughy—Miles McConaughy,” returned the least of the two giants. “I am—I should say I wer-re—master o’ the *William, an’ Mary* out o’ Belfast, as tight a cargo-steamer, Mister Consul, as ye ever saw in the Caribbean. Me an’ ma crew have come a matter o’ a hundred miles in the ship’s boats. We wer’rre—” again the peculiar accent, a compromise between Scots burr and Irish brogue—“turned loose by a—— Dutch pirate that over-r-hauled ma ship and sunk her. An’ I’ve come to find out what amends the English government can make for failure to protect a vessel that is after sailin’ with a guarantee o’ safety on the high seas. Eh? What will ye be doin’ about it?”

Braithwaite threw up his hands helplessly.

“The *Unser Fritz* again!” he exclaimed.

“’Twas her-r,” replied the giant menacingly. “An’ I ask ye is it not a foul shame to the English Navy that a single German cruiser should do as she pleases between Cape Verde an’ the Caribbean, destroyin’ an’ deemolishin’ at will? It makes me glad I’m not an Englishman.”

“Aren’t you a subject of the King of England?” questioned Braithwaite, seeking the first loop-hole of escape that the other’s tirade offered. But his question only made matters worse.

“What good would he do me? English? Me English?” The giant laughed harshly and turned to his companions. “Ay, but do ye hear the man? English? I tell ye the Lord’s truth—I wouldn’t ha’ an Englishman on ma ship. A more wor-rr-thless, onaccountable—But what’s the use? No, man, I’m not English, I thank the powers that be. An’ if I were bor-rr-n English I’d get maself naturalized to a decent nationaleety.”

“What are you then? Irish?”

The giant groaned, and even his hitherto silent companions chuckled appreciatively.

“If there’s one thing I’d rather be less than English, it’s Irish!” he roared, at last. “The dishonourable, Popish blackguarrds! No, sir, I’m an Ulsterman—an’ I wouldn’t ha’ an Irishman on ma ship, no more nor I would an Englishman. There’s many a good vessel been lost by masterrs that knew no better nor that.”

It dawned gradually upon Braithwaite that he had a character before him, and as the idea soaked into his brain the humour of the situation appealed to him.

“It’s an unusual proposition, Captain,” he answered cheerfully. “As I understand it, you are from Ireland, but not an Irishman, and while you have nothing to do with the King of England, you consider yourself a British subject. I’m afraid I was a little dense about it at the start, but I’m beginning to get the hang of your argument now.”

“Ye show an increasin’ amount o’ aprehension,” conceded Captain McConaughy suspiciously.

“Thanks. And you are appealing to his Britannic Majesty?”

“I’m appealin’ to the British Empire!”

“Ah, yes. Quite so, quite so! But as I was saying, you are appealing to the—er—British Empire because your ship—the *William and Mary*, did you say?—has been sunk by the *Unser Fritz*. Well, I’m sorry to have to admit it, Captain, but that’s getting to be an old story.”

“It’s gettin’ to be a sad story,” interjected McConaughy. “Put the English in high place and do they ever fail to make a mess o’ things? Why don’t they let Scotchmen or Ulsterrmen or Welshmen run the Navy, like they do the Arrr-my? Eh, now? Ye’d have a Navy then, and one poor will-o’-the-wisp of a German cruiser wouldn’t be makin’ a laughin’-shtock o’ all your fleet.”

“There’s undeniably something in what you say, Captain,” agreed Braithwaite. “I suppose these men with you belong to your crew. Are they—er, Ulstermen?”

“Mr. Grant, here,” said McConaughy, indicating his companion-giant, “is ma firrst officer. He’s Scotch, like the fo’c’s’le hands. Mr. Apgar’s Welsh—he’s chief engineer.”

“Are there more of you?”

“Several dozen, by an’ large,” returned McConaughy dryly. “The Germans spared the lives o’ all o’ us as bein’ so many walkin’ advertisements o’ the English Navy’s disgrace. They’re long-headed brutes—I’ll say that for ’em—though not much as marksmen. It took ten o’ their shells to send the poor old *William* to the bottom.”

“It fair maakes me shutter efery time I think o’ t’e engines a-splinterin’ up!” exclaimed Apgar, speaking for the first time.

He was a nervous bit of a man, with oily black hair, and eyes that looked as if they had just been weeping. His voice had the sing-song nasal rhythm of the camp-meeting preacher.

“’Ow, my! Poilers an’ furnaces, grates an’ flues an’ funnels, all pitchin’ this way an’ that! It was horrible—— An’ yet we were all spared by the fafour o’ Tifine Profitence.”

“Ah, Evan, mon, but the furrst shell the hell-hounds dinged into us explodit under the bridge,” Grant reminded him ponderously. “Before they went for the engines there wasna a trace left o’ the charrt-hoose.”

“Must have been a bad business,” commented the Consul sympathetically. “How did it happen?”

“I left New Orr-r-leans seven days ago,” answered McConaughy. “The Consul there told me he had worrd from New York the Atlantic was clear o’ German cruisers. But no more nor a hundred miles no’east o’ here this scoundrel fired on us. He had twice our speed. What could we do? When his boat’s-crews boarded us they ordered us all over-side with barely enough water and bread to make St. Saviour’s, and such clothes as they didn’t want and we could get on our backs. It’s an achievement, I say, the English Navy may well be proud o’.

“Anyhow, it meant three days in the open boats for us. Now, we’re here—forty-odd o’ us. What are ye goin’ to do about it? We’re half naked, starvin’. We’ve no money, no means o’ livelihood, no friends. The long an’ the short o’ it is, Mr. Consul, we’ve got left only a burrnin’ contempt for the English Navy an’ a disposection for revenge on they Germans.”

“We’re all with you in that last sentiment, Captain,” returned Braithwaite. “And we’re doing the best we can. I’ve just received a wireless——” he touched the paper on his desk——“from Captain Hardress of the *Elk*, a ‘third-rate’ especially sent to this station to run down the *Unser Fritz*. Hardress seems to have been led off south on a false clue, and the Germans seized this opportunity to make the raid that caught you.”

“That’s consolin’ information,” was the sarcastic rejoinder of the master of the defunct *William and Mary*. “If this English officer ye speak o’ hadn’t been a trustin’ Wully he’d ha’ been where he should have been, an’ ma ship would not ha’ been sunk.”

“It’s quite natural for you to feel this way over the loss of your ship, Captain,” said the Consul good-humouredly. “But I don’t want you to get the impression that Government is callous to the hardships imposed upon

you and hundreds of other seamen by the activities of this commerce-destroyer. We are bending every energy either to run him into some neutral port and force him to interne, or else bring him to action in the open sea. Sooner or later we must succeed.”

“It’ll be later, so far as I’m concerned,” retorted McConaughy dourly. “Now, what about ma men?”

“They shall be looked after until they get another chance to ship or an opportunity occurs to send them home—whichever they prefer. I’ll give you a line to Portuguese Joe, who runs the hotel down by the quay. You’ll put up there. If he doesn’t treat you right let me know. You and your officers, of course, will be free of my table whenever you care to come.”

“That’ll be most kind o’ you, Mr. Consul, an’ in the name o’ the *William’s* company I express our appreciation.” For the first time a note of cordiality crept into the seaman’s voice. “Ye’re lookin’ to me more the shape o’ a man than these Navy officers ye tell me about. An’ I would not ha’ ye take personal any o’ the harrd things I’ve said in ma misery about the English. They’re an oncommon rotten race in the aggregate, but I’ll be after admittin’ I’ve found indeividuals—only now an’ then, ye understan’; no very ggreat number—that were consortable.”

“I hope you find me an exception, Captain,” answered Braithwaite soberly. “Lend me some of your time. There’s very little to do in St. Saviour’s. But for God’s sake, keep your men out of mischief. It will take all your energy, I fancy.”

“Don’t be worryin’,” replied McConaughy. “Mr. Grant an’ maself are not without some triflin’ influence among ’em.”

“Not entirely,” said Grant, with a solemn nod.

The three filed out of the door, and presently Braithwaite heard a series of rasping commands, and the slip-slop of feet in the dust. From the window he watched the nondescript column defile along the main street of St. Saviour’s down the hill toward the quay on the edge of the harbour where Portuguese Joe maintained the only hotel on the island. Some of them were in jerseys, some in undershirts, a few had shoes, and all had at least the fragments of trousers.

As they caught their stride, voices began to chant a song. Braithwaite leaned a little farther from the window, hoping to pick up the refrain of some musichall ditty a trifle newer than those Cavendish, the agent, played on his phonograph nights when thoughts turned to home. But there was surprise on

his face as the Consul finally sought his desk. The crew of the *William and Mary* had been singing what sounded suspiciously like a hymn.

II

“What’s the matter with your men, Captain?” demanded Braithwaite two days later on the occasion of their meeting in the narrow main street of St. Saviour’s.

“The matter?” Captain McConaughy bridled like an indignant mother whose progeny have been assailed by an ignorant schoolmaster.

“Why, I haven’t had a complaint,” returned the Consul with a chuckle. “Can’t understand it. No drunks, no island ladies kissed, no fruit stolen. They haven’t even beaten up any of the Spiggoties. What’s the matter with ’em? They’re all well, aren’t they?”

“Ay,” said Captain McConaughy a trifle stiffly. “They’re all well. Did ye think, now, Mr. Consul, I was turrnin’ loose a flock o’ hyenas on ye? I have discipline in ma crew, sir.”

“But what do you do with them?”

Braithwaite’s eyes, roving toward the sun-smitten, bare façade of Portuguese Joe’s, could not find a trace of the company of the *William and Mary*.

“They’re up the hill yon,” answered their skipper nonchalantly. “Ye see, the Welsh in the ‘black gang’ are arguin’ with Mr. Grant’s Scotch on account o’ this doctrine o’ predestination we Presbyterians hold by. They’re a good lot o’ men, Mr. Apgar’s, good as ever I sailed with, but Methodists, ye understand, an’ what ye might call talkative—oh, very. ’Tis a continual source o’ dispute among ’em. There are fewer o’ the Welsh, but they ha’ more the gift o’ tongues—in especial, Mr. Apgar, a grand talker, sir. Come an’ hear him some time.”

“I will,” replied the Consul abstractedly. His attention had wandered to a dirty cargo-steamer, loaded under her Plimsoll marks, that was wallowing in between the towering headlands. The gaudy banner of Spain fluttered from her poop-rail, and a greasy trail of smoke hung over her wake.

“That’s odd,” he said. “We get very few craft of her stripe in here these days.”

“Ah?” said McConaughy. “Now, I mind havin’ seen that vessel at New Orleans before we sailed. But if it’s the same one, she was loadin’ coal, an’

she will be havin' no right to put in here."

The Spaniard heeled around as her anchor hit the harbour-bottom, and presented a full view of her rusty, salt-spattered hull and soiled white upperworks.

"'Tis she," affirmed McConaughy. "I'd remember her anywhere for the pig-dirrtytness she seems so proud o'. That would be the *Samaritan* o' Cadiz."

"With coal, you say?" answered the Consul idly. "Probably for some island depot, eh? With business as bad as it is, a tramp like that fellow would snap up any cargo that offered. But excuse me, Captain, you were asking me to hear Mr. Apgar. I'll be glad to. Don't forget you are coming to eat with me whenever you feel like it."

"We'll be droppin' in on ye maybe to-morrer," acknowledged McConaughy.

And with a nod he strolled on toward the water-front. McConaughy was a professional seaman, and he loved the sea and more especially ships, even filthy, pot-bellied Spanish cargo-boats, with all the vermin of all the ocean-seas roaming fo'c's'le, cabin and holds. In the mood which had overtaken him he was not inclined to be communicative. He wished to be alone and to ruminate over his woes.

That miserable-looking craft which had just come to anchor in the harbour below him was the first sizable vessel he had seen since the *William and Mary* rolled over for her final plunge, and inevitably there had arisen before his eyes the picture of the old *William*, threshing along at a good eleven knots, with the trades behind her and the wave-spray spuming up over the bridge-screens. It is not to his discredit that hard-fisted, harder-bitten Miles McConaughy gulped back something that rose in his throat.

Anxious to avoid any further intercourse, he turned out of the main street and followed a narrow alley to one of the side streets that zigzagged down the hill towards the harbour, on a line more or less parallel with the broad, partially-shaded thoroughfare which was the principal artery of the sleepy little island town.

This side street was almost as narrow as the alley, and the huge palms and banana trees met overhead in a roof that shut out all but the most elusive sunbeams. There were very few people abroad in St. Saviour's at that hour of the day, verging on noon, and in the prevailing silence voices carried far.

Captain McConaughy was not an eavesdropper, but the few words he heard as he approached the corner where the alley and the side street met were calculated to remove any compunction he might otherwise have felt over the part he played. His feet made no noise in the soft coral-dust of the road, and he stopped just short of the corner in the shadow of a wall and a monstrous tropical bush.

“I don’t like it,” protested an incisive voice McConaughy recognised as that of Mawson, an American agent, whom he had met at Portuguese Joe’s the day before. “Why don’t you do it yourself, Meyer? It’s your own dirty work, you know, and just because I’ve taken a hand for you this far doesn’t mean——”

“Ah, but my dear friendt,” remonstrated a Teutonic voice. “Haf I not toldt you it iss imbossible for me to risk everything by going on board myself? Yes, I know it iss much I ask of you, but my Government will not forget. There will be other commissions. And I can not do this myself. It iss easy to be seen. All you haf to do iss go on board at once, caution der cabtain not to bermit any intercourse with the shore and tell him to come to my house after dark. You haf also to guide him to my house this evening, because he iss a stranger and a Spaniard and vat you call a—— fool, eh? But that iss all, and it iss not much.”

“It’s easy enough for you to talk about,” replied the American. “But if the English bunch here ever got onto this, it would be good-by to my success as a trader. I don’t like it, I tell you, Meyer; but I suppose I must see you through so long as I have gone this far.”

“That iss the right sbirit,” exclaimed the German accent. “If you——”

They moved away and the next few words escaped McConaughy, but he stole up to the corner in time to see a large stout man turn in at the gate of a house with the German Consular shield over the doorway. The thin, spare figure of the American was hastening down the street in the direction of the quay. McConaughy followed him at a more moderate pace, fists clenched at his sides, his eyes blazing with satisfaction.

“After all, it’s something to be master o’ a prayin’ ship,” he muttered to himself with a grin of satisfaction, as he stood five minutes later at the quay edge and watched Mawson’s progress toward the *Samaritan*. “Into our hands the Lord has delivered ’em, into our hands an’ no others. Now, how to keep the Navy men out o’ this? They’ll be like jackals to the slaughter, but if I know wee Jock Grant an’ Evan Apgar, not to be mentionin’ one—Hecht,

it's what might fair be called the showerin' out o' all the silver linin's in the sky!"

There was nothing despondent about the manner of the *William and Mary's* skipper as he tramped along the quay-side to Portuguese Joe's, there to encounter his trusty subordinates and their charges still controverting among themselves with meticulous precision the exact measure of reliance to be imposed upon Divine mercy. Thanks to the cast-off wardrobes of the small English colony on St. Saviour's, they made a better appearance than they did when they arrived.

But there was still a certain piquant incongruity of apparel which served to make the company a distinctive one. Here a six-foot Scotchman thrust his limbs through the white-duck pants of a slender Cockney clerk; opposite him sat a diminutive Welsh oiler wearing proudly over his dungarees the mournful memory of what had once been a frock coat, distinguished in the diplomatic service.

"Go on with your talk, men," said the captain briskly in his best quarter-deck manner, as the disputants started to scramble to their feet. "Mr. Grant an' Mr. Apgar, please—a word with you."

"Ay, ay, sir."

They answered readily enough, but the "old man's" tone came as a distinct surprise. They had not heard such a ring in his voice since the grinning sailors of the *Unser Fritz* bundled them out of their own ship, and they were made involuntary spectators of the German Navy's target practice.

Captain McConaughy led them around the harbour to a quiet corner just beyond the town limits, whence there was an uninterrupted vista of the anchorage. Then he dropped on the grass and signalled them to do likewise.

"I just said to maself I was glad to be master o' a prayin' ship," he began. "An' the impression is becomin' more firr-rmly fixed in ma belief with every moment that passes. Listen to this now."

And he told them briefly the conversation he had overheard between Meyer, the German Consul, and Mawson, the American.

"An' yon's the——" questioned Grant with a wave of his arm toward the squalid hull of the *Samaritan*.

"She's the *Samaritan* o' Cadiz," replied the skipper. "Ye remember her coalin' at New Orrleans? Do ye need to be told any more, man?"

Grant shook his head.

“So that’s t’e totge!” exclaimed Apgar excitedly. The little man jumped to his feet and stared thoughtfully at the uncouth, lubberly collier set in the midst of the blissful serenity of that harbour which is called one of the world’s great natural wonders. “Now, I arsk ye, ain’t that clefer? That German hengineer, he must be a maan with a rare lofe for his machines, a-thinkin’ like that for to get ’em coal. An’ to-night, sir, what apout to-night?”

“I’d rather do it by maself, ye underrrstan’,” said McConaughy reluctantly. “But I must have witnesses to back up ma story to the Consul. It’s a sore thing to admit, but we’re powerrrless as babes without his help.”

“Right,” echoed Apgar. “Three heads is petter’n one in this kind o’ totge. We slip into Meyer’s shruppery after tark, lie low under his window an’ prig his whole lay soon’s he begins to talk. Where’s he at then, I shoult like to know?”

“You’ve got it, Evan,” answered McConaughy.

“I tak’ it, then, ye’ll be haein’ a plan ready, sir, for what comes after?” spoke up Grant.

“Just so. O’ course, ye’ll underrrstan’, this is no way what might be termed final or a har-red an’ fast deetermination. But if ’tis as we think, why, then——”

When Captain McConaughy had concluded, his hearers were silent for a full minute. It was Apgar who spoke first.

“I alwaays said ye had a head on ye’re shoulters, Skipper,” he remarked with more familiarity than he usually allowed himself. “Put this—this——” he cast up his hands in despair—“this is more’n ortinary prain work; this is inspiration. I’m sore tempted to peliefe it’s an acknowletgment o’ prayer. ‘Fengeance is mine,’ t’e Pook saays, put t’e Lord takes his fengeance in many waays. Huple instruements we may pe, put speakin’ for t’e engine-room, I’ll promise ye we’ll pe efficient.”

Big Jock Grant simply shook his head.

“Mon, mon,” he purred in his rumbling voice. “I never thocht to see the Phillistine deelivered hand an’ foot, an’ by his ane tools. But, sir, if ye can keep the English out o’ this——”

“Keep the English out!” roared McConaughy in a bellow that scared the gulls across the bay. “Do ye not give me credit for the possession o’ the common sense ma mother-r weaned me on? For what else am I plannin’? Let an Englishman but get his nose into this affair an’ we’ll have all his

blunderin' self-sufficiency handicappin' the wor-rrk o' men who can be relied on. No Englishmen for me! Braithwaite I must tell, but he shall not know until I ha' his promise to help us."

The three sat silent for a space, the eyes of all fastened upon the unseemly hulk of the *Samaritan*.

"Py the looks o' her, I should say her grates 'ud pe full o' clinkers," commented Apgar, at last. "Put I expect she'd to—wi' a little tinkerin', she might to."

"Did ye by any chance tak' note if this Meyer keepit a dog?" queried Grant with seeming irrelevance, as they rose to return to Portuguese Joe's.

"If he does, the dog'll get five inches o' cold steel in his throat," said Captain McConaughy.

"Aweel, there's no sense o' gaun tae extremes," rejoined Grant. "If ye hae no objections, Apgar an' I might speer 'round about the Dutchman's hoose. There's nae sense in jumpin' i' the dark."

"Ye're a man o' caution," approved the skipper. "Do so, Mr. Grant."

III

It was a pot-black night. Braithwaite could make out only a group of shadows by the door.

"Who's there?" he called from the window.

"'Tis McConaughy," answered one of the shadows cautiously. "Let us in, sir."

Five minutes later, having relighted the lamp in his office, the British Consul stared across his desk at the same three men who had interrupted his labours a couple of days before. Of the group he, himself, was the only one who showed any traces of perturbation.

"Well, Captain, what's wrong?" he asked. "Some of your men in trouble after all?"

"Man, man, ye will take' us for roysterrers!" exclaimed McConaughy gruffly. "'Tis no such thing brings me here at this hour. No, Mr. Consul, we ha' news o' the *Unser Fritz*."

Braithwaite leaped to his feet.

"The *Unser Fritz*? Where did you hear of her?"

“I’ll tell ye that in the proper place, sir. Now, bide a moment. Before we go farrther, some things are to be under-rrstood.”

“What are they?”

“Fir-r-rstly, I ha’ ma own plan. Will ye help me put it through?”

Braithwaite considered.

“If it seems reasonable,” he replied at length.

“That’s suffeicient. Secondly, will ye keep the Navy men from gowpin’ the job?”

“After their persistent efforts to hold me to blame for all their failures you can rely upon me to bilk them in any way that’s legitimate,” was the Consul’s hearty response. “Now, man, for Heaven’s sake, dig into your story.”

“Here ye are. Mr. Grant, Mr. Apgar an’ maself ha’ just come from a comfortable nook under-r the Gerrman Consul’s window. Do ye mind that smutty-lookin’ Spanish tramp that steamed in this morr-r-nin’?”

“The *Samaritan*?”

“Ay. She’s carryin’ the next month’s coal supply for the *Unser Fritz*.”

“But, Captain, she cleared for Cadiz,” remonstrated Braithwaite. “I saw her papers myself. I make a point of investigating the arrival of every steamer carrying contraband. Those are my orders. She——”

“Are ye a child, sir?” returned McConaughy somewhat contemptuously. “In times like these do ye think its deeficult to find masters who will swear falsely to their manifests? There’s many a cargo bein’ cleared for one port or another that never reaches ’em. Yon Spanisher cleared for Cadiz never expectin’ to get wi’in two thousand miles o’ his port.”

“Where’s the rendezvous? Did you hear?”

“Ay; twenty-six degrees north, thirty-two west.”

Braithwaite swung around to peer at the chart of the Atlantic ocean that hung behind his desk.

“Why—why——” he stammered.

“Exactly,” proceeded McConaughy calmly. “’Tis the Sargasso Sea, or thereabouts. An’ what better place for a rendeyvoo could ye ask? There’s not a vessel goes within two hundred miles o’ that point under any conditions.

An' no English Navy officer would ever think o' cruising off the traffic lanes. Oh, the Dutchmen are canty! But they overreached 'emselves this time. The *Samaritan* sailed from New Orleans under sealed orders to put in here, an' here she was to be given her final instructions. No risk o' a leak, ye see—or so 'twould seem. An' yet, in face o' such precautions, because o' 'em, ye might say, she falls into our hands."

"Into our hands? Humph, we haven't got her yet. Not by a jugful." A mantle of gloom overspread Braithwaite's face. "All I can do under the circumstances, I'm afraid, is to notify the Colonial government, have her interned and send a radio to Hardress of the *Elk* to make the rendezvous on the chance of the *Unser Fritz* not hearing of the *Samaritan's* seizure."

Jock Grant and Evan Apgar, sitting just behind their chief, shifted uneasily in their chairs. Mr. Apgar, especially, was inclined toward nervousness. As a man possessed of the "gift o' tongues," he was strongly of the opinion that he could have told the story much better than the skipper. McConaughy silenced them, however, by a single savage frown which he turned upon the Consul without abating any of its ferocity.

"Did ye not say, in the firrst place, ye would help me put through ma own plan?"

"Yes," assented Braithwaite weakly. "But——"

"There's no 'buts' to it, sir. Listen to me. The *Samaritan* sails at five o'clock to-morrer afternoon. She'll hug the island shore-line, steaming northeast until she reaches Cape Cormorant, when she swings to enter the Cayman Bight. That will not be until close onto one o'clock o' the next mornnin'. We've got until then. Now, where is the *Elk*? It goes contrar' to ma dispoesection to make use in any way o' an Englishman, but there are times when indiveedual prejudice is not becomin'."

Under the spell of the masterful personality opposite him, Braithwaite groped among his papers until he produced a wireless message.

"This came yesterday," he said. "Hardress asked for information and said he was expecting to lie off Port Maurice, to the north of Cape Cormorant, all of to-morrow to take on fresh vegetables."

McConaughy permitted himself a faint exclamation of satisfaction.

"It could not be better," he declared. "Now, sir, here's ma plan. An' before I tell ye, let me point out that its success would be hopeless if once ye let the Navy interfere with it. Let me do it ma own way, with ma own men, an' I can't fail."

A quarter of an hour later the master of the late *William and Mary* sat back in his chair and regarded the Consul questioningly.

“You are right, Captain,” admitted Braithwaite. “The Navy could never work this trick. And it has possibilities, fine possibilities. Personally, I think it’s worth trying. It’s a flat violation of international law, to be sure, but we could risk that. What Hardress would say to it I don’t know, and of course he would have to be consulted. I’ll see what I can do though. By the way, I suppose you are not after any notoriety in this?”

“What d’ye mean by that?” demanded McConaughy suspiciously.

“Oh, you wouldn’t mind letting Hardress take all the credit if it was successful; cable the Admiralty it was a trick he had planned and executed through private information he obtained? Something like that, you know. The beggar’d probably get flag-rank for it.”

“What do I care for such baubies?” McConaughy waxed indignant. “Man, tell the brass-buttoned donkey he can have all the credit he can lie himself into. I want none. Me an’ ma men are after-rr the one end—the destruction o’ that German hellcat.”

“That being so, you stand a great deal more chance of getting Hardress’s assent,” Braithwaite informed him cheerfully. “I’ll take care to point out to him the opportunities in your plan for himself, and if he’s handled right, and you are careful not to hurt his feelings, I shouldn’t be surprised if we win his co-operation.”

“I’m in yer hands, then,” said McConaughy. “What do we do firrst?”

“I’ll send Hardress a code radio, notifying him we will meet him at Port Maurice to-morrow morning. We’d better ship your men over on the early narrow-gauge train—we can say that a ship is expected to take them home from there. Some of the Yankee fruit-boats that never come in here stop at Port Maurice. I’ll attend to it.”

Outside in the tropic night the three conspirators of the *William and Mary’s* crew gripped hands silently.

“He’s not a bad little man—yon,” said the skipper, with a nod toward the Consulate where Braithwaite was hard at work over his code-book.

“Right-o!” assented Apgar. “He has all the look o’ a Tory, put proatmintet, I shoul’t saay. A little strong preachin’ an’ Lloyd George would turn him to righteousness.”

“I hae a sudden thocht!” remarked Jock Grant, as they strolled toward Portuguese Joe’s. “Would ye say, skipper, we should let the English Navy captain tak the credit for the dog I scragged i’ the Dutchman’s garden? He was one o’ they Dutch dogs, an’ measured by the yarrd he micht amount tae somethin’.”

The three chuckled softly.

IV

It was a perfect tropic night, despite the pitch blackness that had followed moonset, shutting from the helmsman’s vision even the towering mass of Cape Cormorant that reared out of the ocean some two miles to port. The wavelets slapped gently against the rusty prow of the *Samaritan*; and the lookout on the fo’c’s’le permitted his thoughts to wander to a certain café in Barcelona, where at this hour the guitars would be tinkling far more captivatingly than the anchor-chains under his feet.

On the bridge, the watch-officer leaned on the rail and hummed softly to himself. Huge, unlovely though she was, the *Samaritan* lifted along over the motionless sea without visible effort.

Then, with the suddenness of a storm that swoops without warning, from the banks of darkness over the port bow came a loud hail—

“Ship ahoy!”

The lookout scrambled to his feet, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes. The watch-officer was galvanised to action, peering fruitlessly into the void, one hand on the engine-room telegraph. Again came the hail, piercingly insistent.

“Ship ahoy!”

And there was added to it a strange jumble of words in which the startled listeners on the *Samaritan* caught distinctly several Spanish phrases of common usage on the Caribbean littoral, the inaptness of which to the present situation served all the more to stir their curiosity. The watch-officer pushed the speed-indicator around to “half-speed,” then, as the bells jangled far down in the ship’s bowels, thrust it all the way over to “stop.”

The tramp shuddered throughout her length as the engines caught themselves up in mid-stroke, and there was a general opening and shutting of doors as officers off watch rushed from their cabins to learn the cause of such an unusual proceeding. They were just in time to hear the *chug-*

chugging of a motor-engine in the darkness to port, and a request in English from under the quarter to drop a ladder.

Several seamen hastened to obey the request. Less than a minute afterward a wild-looking figure scaled the rail, cutlass in hand, and leveled a pistol at the Spaniards nearest to him.

“Ye’re ma prisoner-rrs!” he roared. “Stand ye’re ground or I’ll shoot ye!”

And as he stood there another figure, cutlass clasped between his teeth, piled over the side and stood beside him. And on the heels of that one came another, and still another, and then more, a steady stream of light-footed persons who held their arms ready for instant use and spread out in strategical formation around their scaling-point.

There were six of them on deck before a light broke upon the bewilderment of the *Samaritan’s* captain.

“*Madre de Dios!*” he wailed. “They are pirates! Help, help, help! Juan—” this to his steward—“where is my pistol? Son of an infamous he-goat, what have you done with my pistol? Yes, yes, yes, the mother-of-pearl-handled one the directors gave me. At once, I say. Bring me my pistol! How shall I, without arms in my hands, defeat these perfidious robbers who assault us from the sea?”

Juan took himself off, but not to find the pistol. He was too wise, was Juan. In the light of a lantern which burned on the forward well-deck he had caught a glimpse of the grim faces of the pirates and he knew they were not men to be thwarted. Therefore Juan betook himself to a point he deemed farthest from the danger which impended.

But as he ran along the darkened deck, on his way to the paint-room under the poop, he heard the hiss of a heavy object through the air, halted in his tracks, and then, eyes distended, mouth agape, saw a peculiar, hook-shaped object circle an awning-stanchion and draw taut. Immediately he sensed the patter of feet braced against the steamer’s iron skin, feet that ascended her side much as a fly ascends a mirror, and while Juan stood, anchored to the deck, the face of a pirate, hairy and ferocious, lifted over the railing and peered toward the shadows which concealed him.

With a cackle of fear, Juan fled forward. Better to die with his shipmates than alone.

In the meantime, under the bridge the leader of the first boarding party was shuffling order out of the confusion. Backed by a score of brawny-

armed desperadoes, he had pushed the steamer's crew, men and officers alike, into the triangle of the bows where they cowered, panic-wilted, shivering before the bright cutlasses brandished liberally in their faces. Once the ranks of their captors opened, and for an hysterical moment they dreamed of liberty, but alas, the gaps were left only to permit the passage of certain scourings of the decks driven along before the onrush of the boarders who had scaled the *Samaritan's* stern.

"Now, then!" shouted the leader, who, it is scarcely necessary to say, was the redoubtable McConaughy. "Mr. Apgar, will ye take a squad o' yer men an' clean up the engine-room? I misdoubt me there's some o' these vermin skulkin' down there still."

"Ay, ay, sir."

And Apgar led off a dozen oilers and stokers, stubby, powerful little men such as you see around the Welsh collieries.

"Is there one among ye speaks English?" demanded McConaughy next of his assembled prisoners—all confident the throat-cutting was about to begin.

Much whispering, side-stepping, denunciation *sotto voce*, remonstrance, the whole culminating in the expulsion from the close-joined, vibrant ranks of a young man who shakily admitted some scant acquaintance with the desired tongue.

"Ay?" returned McConaughy, after several painful rehearsals had convinced him of the prisoner's claim. "Well, man, I'll tell ye this—ye speak it none too well. I could wish—but no matter-rr. Hark to me! Tell yer fir-riends they are ma prrisonerrr. Have ye got that fast? Then listen to this. If ye all behave yerselves, if ye do what ye're told an' make no unpleasantness, ye'll be fed an' treated well. If ye don't—" McConaughy's voice boomed with threatening force—"overboard ye go, every man jack o' ye!"

Muttered ejaculations of fear and supplication from the prisoners, while the purport of this ultimatum was made clear to them.

"An' now who's yer captain?" demanded McConaughy.

Limp as a rag, his hair bristling with fright, the uniform into which he had tumbled from his bunk all creased and torn, the trembling captain of the *Samaritan* was belched forth from the ring of his crew, only too willing to sacrifice an erstwhile master in propitiation of the new. McConaughy

surveyed him with the contemptuous pity which a big, strong man feels for a little, nervous one.

“I’m fair sorry for ye, ma frrrr-riend,” he said not unkindly. “As one masther to another-rr, I can appreciate ye’re sensations an’ the discomfort I’m compelled to put ye to. Ye’ll be made no more uncomfortable than is necessary, an’ I hope to be able to return ye’re ship in good condection.”

The Spaniard realised the friendliness of the speaker’s voice and plucked up courage to return an answer through the interpreter.

“He say,” repeated that worthy. “He arsk you mos’ respectful ‘oo you are; what you wan’?”

“Never mind who I am!” thundered McConaughy. “Ye have the face to ask me that? An’ ye’re hold loaded up with contrraband! Down to the fo’c’s’le with the lot o’ ye. Chase ’em down, men. Here, gently, there. Don’t hit the poor babbies unless ye have to.”

Flying squads of the *William and Mary’s* men, who had been sent through the ship to round up any Spaniards in hiding, now began to put in an appearance, some with quarry, some empty-handed. A file of the “black gang” produced a handful of the *Samaritan’s* engineers and stokers, who were shooed down the steep ladder into the fo’c’s’le to join their shipmates.

Within fifteen minutes of McConaughy’s first advent upon the scene, the transformation was completed. The *Samaritan’s* proper crew were prisoners under guard, and the men of the *William and Mary* had taken their places.

“Ev’rythin’ all shipshape, sir,” reported Grant.

“Ha’ ye orrderred the boatswain to tow those boats asterrn? If they come to harr-rm that English Navy captain will be chargin’ us wi’ piracy an’ deemolition o’ his Majesty’s property. Take heed o’ that, Jock.”

“They’ll do,” returned Grant succinctly. “Boatswain rove out a long cable an’ they’re safe frae the kick o’ the screw in a sea light as yon. What now, sir?”

“Why, I’ll see Apgar, an’ we’ll try an’ get her under weigh. What d’ye think?”

“I’m all ready, if the engines’ll turn,” responded the first officer. “Shall I tak’ the bridge, sir?”

“Do so, Mr. Grant. What’s that?”

The skipper inclined an ear toward an amidships grating.

“That, sir? ’Tis they Welsh. They’re singin’ a hymn.”

“Ah! Well, I’m afraid ye’ll have to pass the word along for no noise. There’ll be sufficeent opportunity for thanksgivin’ in the future. I’ll tell Mr. Apgar, maself.”

McConaughy found his chief engineer on a grating, perched amongst ponderous boilers and motionless pistons and cylinders. Below him his men moved about like phantoms, oil-cans in hand, peering into odd cracks and crannies, testing valves, slamming fire-doors. And up from the pit of blackness, to the accompaniment of the escaping steam, their voices rose in the strains of “There is a Happy Land, Far, Far Away.”

“There ye are, sir!” exclaimed Apgar, sighting his captain. “Come in. She’s one maass o’ flaked rust, put I hafe hopes, wot wi’ a little oil an’ much elpow-grease—not to speak o’ prayin’ in reason—we may get somethin’ out o’ her yet.”

“Is the steam on?”

“Plenty.”

“Very good. Start yer engines then. An’ Mr. Apgar——”

“Sir?”

“Pass the worrd to the men there must be no more singin’. ’Tis a job that requires caution an’ secretiveness. There’ll be time for rejoicin’ an’ givin’ praise to the Lord in due course.”

On the bridge Captain McConaughy found his first officer awaiting him.

“Hecht, man! But the boarrds feel good underrfoot after dirrty land!” exclaimed the skipper as he bounded up the bridge-ladder, never touching the hand-rail.

“Ay, sir.”

“Give Mr. Apgar the worrd to go ahead. Are yer lookouts posted? We’ll bear off to the so’-east two or three points. Navy men—an’ more especially the English—Mr. Grant, are canty concernin’ their appointments. We’re due at Crawford Island by mid-afternoon. An’ there was never a man yet said Miles McConaughy kept him waitin’.”

V

If you search all the maps published by all the learned geographical societies of Europe and America you will not find Crawford Island. That is

not its name, and anyway, it is an unobtrusive spot of land on the edge of the Caribbean, quite uninhabited and only nominally in possession of the power which claims dominion over the nearest patch of volcanic rocks. Its one claim to distinction and favour—a claim known to few besides the British Navy and certain island pearlers—is a fine, deep-water harbour, landlocked and secure, which offers splendid opportunities for concealment.

Here, a few hours after her seizure at the hands of McConaughy's psalm-singing pícaroons, the Spanish tramp *Samaritan* plunged her anchor onto the coral bottom and lay to, within a half mile of a sombre craft, all funnels and bristling guns, H.M.S. *Elk*, third-rate, 23.5 knots an hour—which was a good knot an hour under what might be expected of the *Unser Fritz* in a stern chase.

From his bridge McConaughy had a clear view of the pompous discipline exacted by Captain Hardress, his more or less reluctant ally in this little excursion beyond the pales of international law. Marines strode up and down on sentry-go; there was a bustle of white uniforms here and there; a watch-officer paced the shining boards of the quarter-deck, telescope under arm, and on the high flying-bridge gold lace and epaulets glistened in the sunshine. The braying of a bugle was the last straw for McConaughy.

"Mr. Grant," he called to his second-in-command. "I'll trouble ye to take a crew an' return their boats to the English. Present ma compliments to the captain an' ask him does he not think it more in the manner o' common-sense to shut off buglin' an' drummin' an' such like nonsense? Does the dodderer contemplate firin' his batteries, I wonder? What next? A fool would know there are pearlers all about these waters."

"Ay, sir," replied Grant. The first officer hesitated a moment. "D'ye see yon?" he went on, pointing over the *Samaritan's* quarter. "He's lowerin' a boat himself, an' bein' as we're strangers i' the parish——"

McConaughy nodded.

"Very well, Mr. Grant. I hadn't noticed. We'll wait for him then. Lower a gangway."

The English lieutenant who climbed the accommodation-ladder was young, pink-faced and most obtrusively haughty.

"Well, my man, where's the captain?" he hailed the first of Grant's fo'c's'le hands.

The Scotsman stolidly pointed toward the bridge, and the lieutenant betook himself thither, with a peevish demand as to "why the blighter hadn't

known enough to receive a naval officer at the gangway?"

"Are you the captain?" the lieutenant challenged as he gained the bridge and found McConaughy facing him, arms folded across his barrel chest.

"Yes."

The pink-faced lieutenant started to say something in an irritable tone, looked again at McConaughy and at the bulk of Jock Grant poised carelessly against the side of the chart-house, and thought better of it.

"Captain Hardress wishes you to come aboard the *Elk* with me," he said as sharply as he dared. "Are our boats in good condition?"

"Tell the captain I'll be over presently," answered McConaughy with a grin. "Yer boats? Man, did ye think we'd shock 'em under the screw? They're aft there; take a look at 'em yerself."

The lieutenant stuttered.

"Are you coming back with me?" he asked as soon as he had his breath.

"It depends on how long ye can wait," said McConaughy pleasantly. "I'm not wantin' to delay ye if there's any haste. But when ye do get back I wish ye'd tell yer captain not to be rousin' all the echoes on Crawford just because he's got a warship with him. Vessels ha' been known to pass close inshore here."

"But—but—Captain Hardress wishes to see you at once." The lieutenant's self-possession had vanished. His pink face had become crimson. "He also wishes you to warp over alongside the *Elk*; you can use the motor-dory and we will send our launch to assist. It is impossible for us to begin shifting the equipment for you until you are properly berthed. He wishes the whole job completed before dark, so that he can get out through the reefs without using his searchlights."

"Oh, he does, does he? Well young man—" McConaughy's voice took on the booming quality that was known to his crew—"what d'ye take me for—a seaman or a landlubber? D'ye think I'd try to warp through a narrow harbour wi' another craft lyin' a collision-length away, an' no settled plan to go on? Tell yer captain he's lucky to ha' a sailor to deal wi'. As soon as ma ship is ready for the worrk I'll bring her over—an' not till then. Take yer boats with ye. I don't want 'em. I'll berth alongside ye wi' ma own steam, an' never scratch yer paint."

The lieutenant fled incontinently, and presently departed for his ship, towing behind him the boats McConaughy had borrowed from the *Elk* for

the boarding of the *Samaritan*.

McConaughy followed the navy man's retreat with undisguised contempt, then turned his attention to the problem before him, which was to bring the tramp close enough to the man-o'-war to shift certain heavy articles from one to the other. He measured the distances with an accurate eye and finally sent for Apgar, to whom he explained the situation.

“ ’Tis what might fairly be called a deeficult manoeuvre,” he summed up. “But with a little prayin’ an’ some fine calculatin’ I think we may give the English a set-back in their boastful pride.”

“Right-o,” assented Apgar cheerily. “I’ll pe on t’e lefers meself, sir. Put a hymn would help matters, sir, if I might suggest. T’e men are poilin’ wi’ energy an’ testaments.”

“Very good, Mr. Apgar. The men may sing one hymn while we are shiftn’ poseetion, but when we are berthed there must be silence. This job is to be done without delay. I’ll have no English Navy officer accusin’ me o’ delayin’ the Empire’s business.”

Thirty minutes later there was a scurry and bustle on the decks of the *Elk*, as the big, bluff-bowed tramp sidled down on the cruiser, apparently drifting with the tide, the merest feather of smoke coming from her stacks.

“Hi, there!” yelled the bluejackets on the third-rate’s fo’c’s’le-deck, dancing in their rage. “Wot d’ye think ye’re gahn to bump into, ye bloody lubbers? Port yer ’elm, port yer ’elm! Back yer engines! Hi, yer dirty sons o’ Satan——”

Officers on the bridge and quarter-deck shouted more dignified warnings. But the two big men who dominated the *Samaritan*—one from her bridge, and the other, and still bigger one, from the fo’c’s’le bitts—merely nodded reassuringly. Captain Hardress, who was hastily summoned from the seclusion of his cabin where he had been enjoying his tea, while listening to a diluted version of McConaughy’s message as delivered by his outraged subordinate, arrived in time to sense the real meaning of the affair.

“Quiet, there!” he ordered abruptly after one look at the approaching merchantman. “Pass the word forward for those men to stop making idiots of themselves. Can’t you see he has her under control? The man may be a dashed impertinent fellow, but he’s a seaman—I’ll say that for him.”

McConaughy, heedless of the confusion he was creating, now crossed to the end of his bridge and surveyed the rapidly dwindling space between the *Samaritan* and the cruiser. Seemingly, he was satisfied, for he shouted an

order to Grant on the fo'c's'le, and one of the anchors roared down into the harbour depths.

A barely appreciable pause, while the *Samaritan* rode up to the anchor-chain, and McConaughy turned and waved his arm to a group of men aft. They released a reserve anchor over the stern, and within forty-five seconds the tramp was moored, hard and fast, so close to the grey steel hull of the cruiser that an ordinarily active man could have jumped from one to the other.

Then, and not till then, the whilom skipper of the *William and Mary* crossed to a position whence he could communicate with the little group of officers on the *Elk's* quarter-deck, prominent among whom stood Captain Hardress. McConaughy saluted with the quiet dignity that becomes one master in addressing another.

"I bid ye good day, sir," he said. "I'm here as agreed, an' ready to begin trans-shipment at yer pleasure."

Hardress nodded and issued the necessary orders. Presently the cruiser's huge crane whined and swung out an inquisitive arm above an empty hatch, dipped down, selected a long, mysterious something cased in canvas, and hoisted it gently through space, and down, far down into the gaping hold of the *Samaritan*, where it paused only at a deck just above the water-level. A few more bulky objects followed the first, and then the job was completed.

It was not yet dusk when the *Elk* hoisted her anchor and steamed out to sea between the harbour's palm-crowned headlands; and before darkness had blotted out the riding-lights of the cruiser in the distance, McConaughy followed her.

If a pearler had chanced to pass that way he would certainly have wondered at the great, slab-sided ship, with the streaks of dried salt on her hull, and the thunderous solemn chorus of voices that echoed from her ports, chanting "Praise God from Whom all Blessings Flow." In their own way the crew of the *William and Mary* held high revelry that night—to the horror and utter despair of the Spaniards who fought with the cockroaches in the darkened fo'c's'le.

VI

"There's but one thing that worrits me," said Jock Grant.

Captain McConaughy leaned back from the mess-table and reached for a toothpick.

“What’s that?” he answered. Then irrelevantly: “D’ye suppose, Jock, cookie will ever get the taste o’ the garlic out o’ his stew-pots? But ye were speakin’.”

“Ay,” returned Mr. Grant with the slowness which was his inevitable habit. “I dinna like this sailin’ wi’ false colors, so to speak.”

“An’ what might ye mean by that, Jock?” his skipper encouraged him. “There’s such a thing as meelitary necesseety, ye know.”

“I’m no complainin’ o’ the dirrty rag we’re trailin’ astern, skipper,” declared the first officer. “But ’tis the name o’ the craft. ’Tis fair hypocritical ye’ll admit, an’ gaun straight against the worrd o’ Scripture.”

Even Apgar, fresh from his prolonged duties in the rickety engine-room, appeared in the doorway at this juncture and took his seat with a brief nod all around.

“Conteenue, Jock,” urged McConaughy. “Ye’ve a point in mind, I see, but it fair escapes me.”

“Ye’re no verra glig i’ the uptak’, skipper,” retorted Grant with a trace of asperity. “I’m seemply commentin’ on the un-Scriptural use o’ holy parable. The *Samaritan* brocht help an’ succor, the Book tells us. An’ here be us, callin’ ourselves *Samaritan* an’ carryin’ death and destruction. ’Tis un-Christian, contrar’ to the speerit o’ releegion. That’s ma point.”

“Well spoke, Jock,” agreed Apgar, looking up from his stew. “I hafe hat the saame itea, put wi’ that maass o’ junk pelow-tecks on me mind I nefer seemed to get t’e hang o’ t’e matter. He has put it right, Skipper. Got-fearin’ sailormen, wi’ a knowletge o’ Scripture, shoult not pe takein’ liperties wi’ Holy Writ.”

“Ma conviction is that the two o’ ye ha’ me gowped on the point,” admitted McConaughy. “But what way would ye go to make a change for the better-rr?”

“’Tis no problem i’ the higher theology,” answered Grant. “The *Samaritan* i’ the Book was a good *Samaritan*. Verra weel; this shall be the *Bad Samaritan*. I’m o’ the opeenion she’ll be unco harmfu’ to a cerrtain party we all ken suffeeciently.”

“Ye’ve said it, Jock,” announced McConaughy. “She’s the *Bad Samaritan* from this on. I’m for the bridge.”

And he disappeared up the companionway that led forward to the chart-house.

For three days the *Samaritan* had been plowing her no'-easterly course toward that vaguely-defined mass of weed-strewn water which constitutes the Sargasso Sea, and the sun still shone brilliantly and the sea spread out around her almost as level as a dancing-floor, entirely deserted. For this was an empty triangle of the middle Atlantic, a wide area of tossing waves, lying between several of the traffic lanes followed by the commerce of the continents. No ship came here if she could help it, because to come meant abandoning the short courses that spell economy in coal-consumption and operating expenses.

Therefore McConaughy from his bridge stared out over an ocean that contained no trace of man. So it had been for two days. Before that there had been occasional trails of smoke on the horizon. But gradually they had become less frequent. Now stray patches of weed told him he was nearing the great belt of marine vegetation drawn together by the action of the Trades and the conflicting ocean currents, and this meant that the next plume of smoke would herald the *Unser Fritz*.

McConaughy glanced at the compass as he passed the wheel and then swept his decks with the comprehensive eye of a man who overlooks no details. Forward, two stalwart Scots, with cutlasses drawn, were guarding the open fo'c's'le hatch, whence came the babble of the Spanish prisoners who alternately fought among themselves until their guards went down and separated them or wept over the awful fate which they were assured awaited them at the caprice of the big man with the terrible voice who bellowed occasionally from the bridge.

Aft, some of Apgar's "black gang," off watch, were airing themselves by the rail. They had earned a rest, for under the skilful hand of their chief and a liberal application of oil, the disjointed engines of the Spaniard were grinding out a good knot and a half more than they had ever done since their builder's trials.

Otherwise, the *Samaritan's*—or rather the *Bad Samaritan's*—decks were deserted. McConaughy reached for the binoculars in the rack under the chart-house windows and trained them on the horizon. From west to east he swung, steadily, inch by inch, scrutinising the waste of waters with infinite pains.

He had almost given up the search, precisely as he had given up other similar searches, undertaken at intervals of an hour for the last day and a half, when a speck glanced for an instant in the lenses and disappeared. With an exclamation he worked back along the horizon's rim until he picked up

the dot once more. Faint, scarcely distinguishable against the burnished reflector of the sky, it yet focussed in his vision as a smoke-smudge pouring from the funnels of some vessel which had not yet come over the intervening curve in the vast swelling breast of the ocean.

The glasses fell to McConaughy's side, and the fingers of his free hand were knit together in a savage grip.

"Hecht!" he exclaimed. "'Tis she! It *must* be she!" He took off his cap. "Oh, Lord," he said slowly and reverently, "I thank Thee for that Thou hast delivered up ma enemy—an' Thine. Amen." He returned the cap to his head. "Quartermaster?" he said briskly to the spare helmsman who was on duty. "Go below and tell Mr. Grant I wish to see him. An' on yer way stop an' tell the guards at the fo'c's'le hatch to make it fast an' see that there are no ports open in the prisoner-rrs quarters."

When Grant arrived on deck, with Apgar at his heels, he found an orderly bustle under way. Squads of men were overhauling the davit-tackle for lowering the steamer's life-boats; the doors of the engine-room companionway were crammed with grimy faces, brought up from the nether regions of the stoke-hold by the magic word which had flashed from end to end of the ship. McConaughy himself was standing by a hatch, issuing orders to a gang of men working several decks lower down.

"Ay, she's in sight," he said. "We'll be up wi' her in two hours or less. Mr. Apgar, crack on yer steam. Get yer men to work instead o' lowpin' like silly crannies. Look sharp, all ye men! There's worrk to be done."

In less than twenty minutes the remorseless driving energy of McConaughy had effected all the necessary preparations. The fo'c's'le hatch had been effectually barricaded by heaping against it many lengths of chain-cable. The engines were turning over at top speed. Below-decks all was ready, and the men had been instructed to keep out of sight as much as possible. In fact, when McConaughy met his two principal assistants upon the bridge to point out to them the smoke-smudge on the horizon, now perceptible to the naked eye, the decks of the *Bad Samaritan* were as trim as those of a liner, a state of affairs which drew forth a disparaging remark from Apgar.

"Ye're too neat whatefer!" he expostulated. "Why, skipper, the Tutchmen know they're goin' to meet a filthy Spanisher. Ye hafe had a mania for cleanin' ship these last two taays, an' now she looks out o' her part. Dress her town a little. Fly some wash in the riggin'. Muck up her tecks out o' the galley."

“Ye’re right, Evan,” acknowledged McConaughy. “We can’t afford to overlook trifles. Mr. Grant, take a squad o’ men, rig out all the dirty clothes ye can find an’ tell Cookie to empty his garbage an’ slush-tins on the deck. Ye might get up a can o’ ashes, too, an’ spread ’em ’round the ash-hoist.”

Within an hour the strange vessel was sufficiently close to make out her character. Long and fairly high out of the water, with rakish military masts and sullen turrets, she bespoke the man-o’-war, although she flew no flag. Smoke poured from her four funnels in a black cloud, and she carried an enormous bone in her teeth. She was fully two and a half times as fast as the lumbering collier.

“Quartermaster,” ordered McConaughy, after a final inspection and a glance of approval at decks that would have riled his seaman’s soul in a less hectic moment. “Break out the signal.”

A quartermaster picked up a string of international code flags, which he hauled to the fore-peak and broke out. They spelled: “We are the *Samaritan*, for Cadiz, with coal. Who are you?” According to the instructions given to the Spanish captain, this should be followed by the cruiser firing a gun to starboard, if she were the *Unser Fritz*.

There was an anxious minute or two while the multi-coloured signal-flags rippled out in the gentle breeze. Then a cloud of white smoke billowed up from the warship’s farther side and the “smack” of a six-pounder smote their ear-drums.

“Yon’s a sound I never believed would be welcome to me again,” remarked McConaughy to his first officer.

“Ay,” returned Grant imperturbably. “An’ now will it be me ye’ll hae below at the deil’s worrk or yerself?”

McConaughy hesitated. It was palpable he was torn between two desires.

“It had best be ye, Jock,” he said regretfully at last. “A mastherr’s place is on the bridge. But, man, I envy ye sore.”

The two vessels drew rapidly together. McConaughy and the men on the bridge with him—all dressed in the slovenly fashion affected by the *Samaritan*’s proper company—could descry the figures in neat white uniforms that swarmed on the cruiser’s decks.

As they came within hailing distance an officer on the bridge of the *Unser Fritz* raised a megaphone and bellowed a question. McConaughy inclined his head and pretended he could not hear, then raised his own

megaphone and shouted a string of gibberish which he intended to be unintelligible. He was slightly nonplussed, however, when the officer called back an answer in fluent Spanish.

“Hecht,” he muttered to himself. “The hell-cats! There’s no be-foolin’ ’em for long. We’d best be quick.” He again went through the pantomime of a man whose hearing is not of the best and pretended to be busily occupied in conning his ship in such dangerous close quarters. The German officer who had addressed him before shrugged his shoulders and turned away. McConaughy almost grinned.

They drew closer still, McConaughy waving his arm reassuringly to the Germans. The cruiser was barely one hundred feet away from the tramp now. Every detail of her equipment showed; he could see the bulge of the light side-armor where it began just above the water-line, forming a protective belt about the engine-room. It was time.

He leaned over the bridge-railing and made a gesture to a shabby seaman lounging by the combing of the forward-hatch. This man dropped nimbly through the grating and bellowed an order into the depths below.

McConaughy sauntered over to the side of the bridge closest to the cruiser, megaphone in hand, as if he contemplated another attempt to make himself understood. He heard the clang of a cargo-port opening, but he did not permit that to hurry his steps. He had a part to play; it was for him to keep the German’s eyes well up from his water-line. And he played it.

With the megaphone raised to his lips, he stood in the position of a man about to speak, when it seemed as if all the rage of the elements had been let loose alongside the *Samaritan*. With a prolonged, crashing roar, as if a submarine volcano had burst, the *Unser Fritz* lifted clean out of the water amidships, buckling in two as she settled down, while a fountain of shattered and fused steel-deck fittings, guns, shields, funnels, fragments of masts and human débris was spewed over the waters.

The *Samaritan* was struck in several places by falling objects before McConaughy could signal his engine room to back out of danger. And the rapid explosion of several magazines in the cruiser’s hull created another tornado of devastation that pursued the tramp into the safety zone. But to do him justice, after his first thrill of exultation, McConaughy had but the one thought. Even as he pushed the engine-room telegraph indicator, his bull-voice roared out over the crackling of small-arms ammunition and exploding shells——

“Stand by to lower the boats!”

The *Unser Fritz* was settling rapidly. Her back had been broken, and already her main deck was within a couple of feet of the water. Such of her crew as had not been injured were scrambling about for pieces of wreckage, and many had taken to the water in order to get as far away as possible from the immense suction which would be created by her sinking hull.

McConaughy approached as close as he dared, then stopped and lowered his boats, six of them, at the same time ordering all the life-preservers cast overboard. He turned from the task of directing this work to find the cheerfully grinning face of Jock Grant towering over his shoulder.

“Aweel, sir,” said Mr. Grant complacently. “I’m thinkin’ I’m nae sae puir a marrksman wi’ they torpeders.”

“Think shame o’ yerself, Jock Grant,” replied his captain sternly. “’Tis true we ha’ taken our lawful vengeance, but those poor men are dyin’ out there.”

“Ye might think,” commented Evan Apgar, who popped up under Grant’s mighty arm, “to hear Jock talk he’t tone t’e whole thing py himself. How apout t’e ‘plack gang’, Jock? Titn’t we put ye alongsite o’ her so close a laat wi’ a pop-gun couldn’t hafe missed her—let alone a forty-knot Whiteheaat torpeter.”

Grant shuffled his feet and looked shamefacedly from one to the other.

“Hoot,” he said. “I’m nae sae muckle a selfish loon as ye’d mak’ me oot. ’Tis nae mair nor the just pride a mon should tak’ in a job weel done. But _____”

With a last roar of bursting decks, the *Unser Fritz* rocketted and swayed, then plunged stern-foremost into the deeps.

“I’m nae the mon to stand by an’ see puir deils gaein’ to their dooms like yon,” remarked Grant matter-of-factly, as he wrenched off his sea-boats and slipped out of his coat and trousers. “Stand by wi’ a line to fling me, skipper.”

And the giant went over-side in a soaring dive that carried him far out from the *Samaritan*’s hull amongst the wreckage where wounded, drowning men were fighting for a hold on every match-box that drifted past.

“Ay,” said McConaughy to his chief engineer, watching Grant strike out and clutch a German who had gone down twice, “’tis not so bad bein’ masther-rr o’ a prayin’ ship.”

VII

Two months later in Belfast, McConaughy came upon the following item in the *London Times*:

Among the orders published to-day at the Admiralty is one conferring flag-rank upon Captain, the Hon. Richard Penworthy R. G. Hardress, of H.M.S. *Elk*, who trapped and sank the German commerce-destroyer *Unser Fritz*, after the latter had evaded for many months the vigilance of all our cruisers on the Atlantic station. Rear-Admiral Hardress will be gazetted to a fleet command at the earliest opportunity.

It is a pleasure to see that their Lordships at the Admiralty are beginning to appreciate the importance of recognising the merits of able young officers, regardless of the claims of their less vigorous seniors.

“Hecht!” said McConaughy, and his face split in a wide, soundless laugh. “Can ye beat the English?”

CHAPTER II

BOARDERS AWAY

“It’s no’ verra easy—shippin’ a whole crew,” said Jock Grant with dejection in his voice.

“I willna split up ma men,” returned McConaughy. “So long as they’re ready to stick by me, I’ll stick by them.”

“There’s alwaays t’e auxiliary serfice,” commented Apgar tentatively.

“Serrve under the English Navy? Arre ye mad, man?” roared McConaughy. “Ye know ma principles, and I’m takin’ it for granted ye hold by the same line o’ thought, yerself.”

“Ay, ay,” Apgar hastened to agree. “I’m py no means suggestin’ apantonment o’ principles, skipper. Principles is graand for t’e soul, fair meat o’ morality. Put we are hungry, an’ t’e men are hungrier still.”

McConaughy groaned.

“Here I am, a mastherr wi’ never a black mark against his ticket, wi’ a company starrvin’ for wantin’ to wait an’ ship wi’ me again. An’ I can’t get a berth. It seems like the luck that was mine went wi’ the old *William and Mary*. I’m aftherr walkin’ the soles of ma shoes off, trompin’ up and down the stairs o’ shippin’ offices. An’ because I lost ma ship, through no fault o’ ma own, they give me the cold shoulder, me, Miles McConaughy!”

In the stress of his feeling, McConaughy rose to his feet and commenced to pace up and down the narrow confines of the small room the three had taken near the Belfast water-front. To this had they been reduced in the course of several weeks of unsuccessful endeavour to find any ship-owner or charterer who was willing to take over an entire ship’s company, from bridge to coal-trimmers.

“Hoot, skipper, I wouldna put it quite so bad against yerself,” interjected Grant, with kindly intent. “There’s never a ship-owner in Belfast holds it against ye for losin’ the *William and Mary*. They know ye were in the same fix wi’ many another master. It’s na a question o’ personal prejudice, I ken, but o’ a temporary peculiarity in the situation, complicated maybe, by the fact that it’s not every owner ye meet who is in the poseetion to ship an entire company at once.”

“All o’ us or none,” snapped McConaughy. “I ha’ told them that from the start, an’ so long——”

“I’m wi’ ye,” exclaimed Apgar. “Put speakin’ for me men in t’e Plack Gang, it’s gettin’ pious haart, this hafein’ to stant clear o’ the lofely fightin’ wot is goin’ on all around us.”

Huge Jock Grant wet his lips longingly.

“If we were in some bonny big patrol-boat, now,” he murmured. “A trawler, maybe, or some wee creature wi’ the engines for Evan to nurse, out in the North Sea blither.”

McConaughy turned upon them in anguish. “Would ye all deserrt me?” he bellowed. “Tak’ serrvice underr the English? I could go to Liverrpool to-morrer, foreby, an’ pick ma ship wi’ a line I know, an’ a gilt-edged Board o’ Directors settin’ up in Lunnon town. But would I do it? Would I? Ye know me, Evan Apgar, Jock Grant. Would I do it? I’d starrve on the Docks firrst. I’d beg ma way through Popish Galway.”

He bubbled and frothed, and even Jock Grant huddled his big knees together and tried to look small.

“I wouldna ha’ an Englishman on ma ships. If the English Navy men had been up to their jobs we’d ha’ the old *William* this day. D’ye mind how that English Navy captain on the *Elk* was so ready an’ anxious to pluck for himself the credit for our sinkin’ the *Unser Fritz*? Ay? An’ ye ha’ the face, either o’ ye, to suggest for a minit takin’ serrvice in the English Navy! Bah!”

“It’s t’e fightin’,” protested Apgar.

“The bonny fechtin’,” echoed Grant.

“As fine a lot o’ men as we pe,” continued Apgar; “an’ py t’e waay it looks, no more chance to take another rap at t’e Tutchmen.”

McConaughy glared at them.

“It’s no morre easy for me than for you,” he growled. “But I ha’——”

There was a knock on the door.

Apgar looked at Grant and Grant looked from the chief engineer to his captain.

“To ye think it might pe t’e laantlaty?” whispered the Welshman gruffly.

“If ’tis she, she’ll get her pay an’ we’ll seek otherr lodgings,” returned McConaughy grimly. “I’ll no’ be owein’ money—even to an Episcopalian.”

But instead of the dour face of Mrs. Judith Rawson, High-Church enthusiast, who looked with shocked disfavour upon her dissenting lodgers, McConaughy beheld the bluff, ruddy visage of an elderly, stockily built man, whose whole bearing proclaimed “sea-dog,” as he opened the door.

“How are ye?” boomed the visitor in a quarter-deck voice. “Captain McConaughy, aren’t ye? Yes. I lay beside ye in Sydney harbour five—no, maybe ’twas six or seven year ago. Ye had the *William an’ Mary*, then. Nay, don’t look so glum, man. I’ve heard o’ your misfortune.”

“Ye’ll be Craven o’ the Red Funnel Line—McNish’s Red Funnel Line,” returned McConaughy, firmly interrupting the other’s flow of conversation. “I mind ye now. Ye skippered the *Caerlaverock Castle*.”

He shut the door.

“Take a seat,” he added. “No, yon’s a chair. I’ll have the bed. This is Mr. Grant, ma firrst officer, an’ Mr. Apgar, ma chief.”

Craven shook hands fussily with the two, but neglected the invitation to sit down.

“Glad to meet ye, gentlemen, heard about ye—ay, heard a good deal about ye,” he said with a chuckle. Then, turning to McConaughy again: “Ye have a good memory, captain. But I gave up the *Caerlaverock Castle* two years gone by, now. I’m port superintendent of the line.”

“Then congratulations are your due,” returned McConaughy. “It’s not every mastherr that reaches your age, if I may say so, falls into an easy berth like that.”

“Ye say well, Captain McConaughy,” answered Craven complacently. “They’re good people, the Red Funnel Line. Old McNish, himself, was a shipmate o’ mine, long afore ye were born, I dare swear. But they’re kindly to all alike, seamen, ’prentices, dockmen, clerks and pensioners. It’s a good line to work for.”

Throughout this dialogue in which they were not included, Apgar looked at Grant and Grant looked at Apgar. It was patent to both of them that so important a personage as Captain Craven, port superintendent of the Red Funnel Line—McNish’s Red Funnel Line, you understand—had not come to visit McConaughy for the mere pleasure of rehearsing past meetings and his own fair treatment at the hands of Fortune.

McConaughy had the same idea, but no trace of it was revealed in his face. He had seated himself on the edge of one of three narrow cots that

occupied half the scant space in the room.

“I have heard McNish well-spoken of,” he said calmly.

There was no need for him to say anything more, so with that he became silent.

Captain Craven was not at a loss, however. He surveyed the three men before him with a large benevolence.

“The fact o’ the matter is,” he said, “I did not come here to gab about my own success, but to ask ye to step over to the offices with me, if ye have an hour to spare. The matter’s by way o’ bein’ urgent, so I am my own messenger.”

“I’ll be verry glad to step over with ye,” replied McConaughy. “But perrhaps ye do not know the terms upon which I will ship.”

Captain Craven put on his cap and bustled to the door.

“Your whole crew to go with ye?” he cried with the breeziness of a partially tamed hurricane. “Ay, an’ if ye’ll permit me to say so, captain, I honour your sentiments. They become ye, sir. No, set your fears at rest. The point ye mention will be no stumblin’-block in what we have to discuss. So come your ways along with me.”

He opened the door and swung about with a bow and a flourish.

“Your sarvent, gentlemen!” he exclaimed to Grant and Apgar. “Captain McConaughy, I await ye.”

McConaughy followed him dumbly, scarce trusting his ears.

“There’s no sense o’ delay in business,” Craven confided to him briskly as they descended the stairs. “That was old McNish’s motto, and it’s the motto o’ the firm to-day. When we decide to do business, we do it. It’s the American idea, they say. I know it pays.”

“I believe ye,” said McConaughy, with what—for him—was a confession of bewilderment. “But I never thought o’ goin’ to the Red Funnel Line. Ye have the reputation o’ preferrin’ to train yer own skippers.”

“So we have, so we have,” acceded Captain Craven. “This is an unusual step we are takin’—although, to be frank, I should warn ye not to regarrd the transaction as signed and sealed. The objection ye have mentioned will not hold, but the Managin’ Director has ideas o’ her own.”

McConaughy started.

“*Her* own?” he repeated.

“Ay, it’s Miss Tabitha we’re speakin’ of.”

“Miss—Miss—Tabitha!” McConaughy stopped in his tracks, gulping hard. “What arre ye takin’ me to?” he demanded suddenly with fierce finality.

Craven surveyed him in astonishment.

“Do ye not know, man?” cried the burly port superintendent.

“Know what?” snapped McConaughy.

“About Miss Tabitha.”

“How should I?”

Craven shrugged his shoulders in despair.

“If ye don’t, I can say no more—except to advise ye not to make any hasty conclusions,” he commented dryly. “The gist o’ it is that McNish, himself, died last year—as I thought every Belfast man knew—and his daughter succeeded him as Managin’ Director o’ the Line.”

“A woman, a bit lassie, Managin’ Director o’ the Red Funnel Line!” exclaimed McConaughy. His brows darkened. “If ye’re havin’ fun wi’ me, Captain Craven——”

Craven throttled a snort of merriment with some effort.

“I’ll say no more, McConaughy, or I’ll be sayin’ too much, belike,” he answered. “My orders were to bring ye to the Managin’ Director—an’ I may say for your future benefit that we find it worth while to obey orders in our office.”

Nothing more was said during the brief walk across town, and five minutes later McConaughy was staring up at the stately portico of the building which carried, across its front, in tall gilt-and-red lettering the words, “McNish’s Red Funnel Line,” twined about a rakish red funnel, and underneath “Regular sailings to Scandinavian and Baltic ports—Monthly steamers to Australia, China and the Indies.”

Of all the vast enterprises which Belfast boasts, none has brought it more world-wide fame than McNish’s Red Funnel Line, the dream of a poor boy who rose from the fo’c’s’le of a tea-clipper to become owner of one of the biggest steam-fleets in the Empire. McConaughy, self-reliant Presbyterian egotist and despiser of authority though he was, suddenly yielded to an

impulse to remove his cap as he entered the busy offices and saw fronting him the life-size, phenomenally stiff portrait in oils of the square-jawed old Scotch-Irish shipmaster himself.

Craven escorted the skipper of the defunct *William and Mary* between shining brass rails to a sanctum behind a plate-glass door, which presented a vista of deep leather armchairs.

“Wait,” he directed shortly. “I’ll tell Miss Tabitha you’re here.”

McConaughy was conscious of an inclination toward chaos at the pit of his stomach, but he resolutely mastered it and by unheard-of exertions contrived to present an iron countenance as Craven left him.

The port superintendent’s back had no sooner been turned, however, than the redoubtable McConaughy sank into the deepest of all the leathern armchairs, utterly crushed and quaking as a schoolboy quakes while waiting on the threshold of punishment.

“A woman,” he kept muttering between his teeth. “A wee-bit lassie! Managin’ Director—an’ me, Miles McConaughy, me! Hecht! Maybe the adverrsitee is goin’ to ma head.”

II

Some minutes—they seemed hours to McConaughy—later, Captain Craven reappeared through the farthest mahogany doorway, crooking his finger.

“She’ll see you now,” he vouchsafed.

McConaughy struggled to his feet, too close to panic for comfort.

“But—but—ye’ll ha’ given me no worrd o’ what the leddy may wish from me,” he expostulated. “Could ye not——”

But Craven was merciless, despite a twinkle of humour in his eye.

“I have no authority to speak o’ such matters, captain,” he answered. “She’ll be tellin’ ye, herself. Follow me.”

Dumbly, wrathfully, torn between contending emotions, McConaughy obeyed, a strong man who felt he had made a misstep but saw no way of retrieving it. He would have given anything at that moment for the ability to withdraw with dignity. Therefore he emerged from the dark corridor into a large, sun-bathed room, hung with pictures of ships and maps and port-scenes, perspiring profusely and quite reckless of his actions.

He was only dimly aware of the desk that barred his further progress and the figure that rose behind it.

“Captain McConaughy?”

Although a minute before he had decided that he hated Craven, McConaughy turned a desperate glance in search of the man who had lured him to this predicament. But the soft closing of a door was Craven’s farewell. He, Miles McConaughy, was left by himself to talk business with a woman, a bit lassie, a——

Suddenly, he looked up and permitted his eyes to sweep obliquely—he was not yet nerved to risk a straightforward gaze—the face of the Managing Director of the Red Funnel Line. He was surprised, pleasantly surprised. Here was no pink-and-white prettiness. Instead, he found himself surveyed by a pair of cool grey eyes set in a rather square frame over a jaw that jutted slightly forward, in striking contrast to the fluffy brown hair that topped the picture. Manlike it was not, but McConaughy had never seen a woman of this type in his life; his path had been far from the paths that the leaders of Feminism have marked out for the world to tread.

“You are Captain McConaughy?” she said again.

“I—Yes, ma’am.”

He shifted uncomfortably.

“Sit down, captain.”

She pointed to a chair by which he stood, just across the desk from her. McConaughy hesitated a moment, then stumbled into it.

Once more the grey eyes swept him steadily, summarising, analysing, probing swiftly beneath the surface. A strange woman, indeed! Under the stimulus of her investigation McConaughy began to be himself again. The self-reliant Presbyterianism of the man, always sufficient unto itself and assured of its own righteousness, came to his rescue.

He raised his eyes to hers. She met his glance as a man would have met it, frankly and easily. He saw now that she was not as old as he had first taken her to be, surely not yet thirty. But the character written broad on her face gave the casual observer an impression of age which was deceptive. Another thing that puzzled him was the absence of hardness he had thought he marked in her features. Her face was square in its lines, but never masculine.

She observed his scrutiny and smiled under it, smiled without any trace of coquetry.

“You seem surprised, Captain McConaughy.”

“I am,” he assented dryly. “In the firrst place, ma’am, I was not led to expect a leddy in this place. For the rest, I’m not a leddy’s man—an’ ye are by no means the kind o’ leddy I’d have expected to see here. So perhaps ye’ll excuse ma lack o’ mannerrs.”

She waved away the apology.

“Your surprise is natural. For the rest, I got you here to talk business, and it’s only natural you should wish to look at me. Anyway, I’m used to being looked at.”

She paused an instant, as if to give him a chance to take up the conversation, but he set his lips firmly together and sat back in the chair. It was never his way to talk when it was not necessary, and, he told himself, he did not intend to break his rule for a lady managing director.

“You’ll be wondering why I sent for you?” she continued at last. “Well, the answer to that is that I’ve been hearing of you. First, I heard that there was a Captain McConaughy here in Belfast who had lost his ship to the enemy and was unwilling to ship again unless he could take his whole crew with him. Then I heard what this Captain McConaughy had done—how he had trapped a German cruiser and sunk it in retaliation for his loss. That interested me. So I called in Captain Craven, who said he knew you, and between us, I don’t mind saying, we have conducted a thorough investigation of your record.”

“I’m honoured, ma’am,” returned McConaughy briefly, seeing that some manner of reply was necessary.

“So, as I know you, captain, after a manner of speaking, it is only fair that you should know me. My father left me this business—or, at least, the controlling interest in it. He always wanted a son, and he brought me up as much like one as he could, though he did not hold by the Cause, I’m sorry to say. So, when he died, I succeeded him. It’s a great responsibility, especially in times like these. My father took great pride in the record of his line. He never lost a ship. He had breakdowns and fires, and once the *St. Hilda* piled on the sands off the American coast, but in every case the vessels were salvaged. You can imagine my feelings, then, when I tell you I have lost two ships in the last two months.”

For the first time, McConaughy looked interested.

“Did ye now?” he interjected. “That’s harrd luck, ma’am. ’Tis maself knows how it feels to lose yer own—I had some interest in the *William an’ Mary*.”

“So I’ve heard,” she said, with a smile. “Now, as ship-owner to ship-owner, Captain McConaughy—” McConaughy was no longer a ship-owner and his share in the old *William* had been a beggarly sixteenth; but he swelled visibly under the compliment—“I put it to you: is not the condition of the seas a crime and a menace to all law-abiding subjects of the Crown?”

“Ma’am, it is,” roared McConaughy, with sudden vehemence. “Ye’ve said truth. There’ll be no two ways about it. Criminal, it is! And the insufferable self-suffeiciency o’ they English navy-officers! Will ye believe it, the only way I could get permission to attack that Dutch cruiser I sunk was by agreein’ that the captain o’ the nearest English warship should have the credit for it! If it’s the English are to fight this war, ma’am, there’ll be but the one end to it an’ we might as well make peace, now, as later. It’ll be the Ulstermen an’ the Scotch an’ Welsh that are needed if matthers are to run straight.”

“You’ve left out the Irish,” said Miss McNish, with a smile.

McConaughy glared at her.

“The Irish!” he rasped. “Popish blackguarrds! They’re o’ the same piece wi’ the English—exceptin’ only a bit few now an’ then, not enough to mention as a generalitee, however.”

Miss McNish stretched a large, firm hand across the desk to him.

“We’re of one mind on some points,” she said crisply. “That I can see already. First and foremost, Captain McConaughy, I’m an Ulsterman—or Ulsterwoman, if you’ll have it that way. The last thing I did before war broke out was to run a shipment of fifty thousand rifles, machine-guns, artillery and ammunition into the Lough here for the Ulster Volunteers. Down with Home Rule!”

“Ye’ve said it!” apostrophised McConaughy fiercely. “Hecht, lassie, ye may wearr skirrts, but ye’re more o’ a man than many I might name.”

Miss McNish displayed what looked to be dangerously like a dimple in one corner of her square jaw.

“I’m sure from you that’s a great compliment, captain,” she acknowledged. “But if you don’t mind, we’ve gotten off the track of our business talk.”

“Ye’re right, ma’am,” he agreed. “But I warn ye, yon’s a subject I can not be startred on wi’ any hope o’ peace an’ harrmony. Ye were speakin’ about the ships ye lost. Two, I think?”

“Yes, two. Submarines!”

His brow clouded at the laconic explanation.

“I’ve been hearin’ about this low-down savagery o’ they Dutchmen,” he growled. “For maself, I had no complaint. They caught me on the high seas, an’ they put ma crew over-side an’ blew ma vessel to pieces wi’out unnecessary brutality. But this sinkin’ unarmed craft wi’out warnin’—I just can’t understand it.”

“Nor can any of us, Captain McConaughy. My two steamers were sunk precisely as you have said, without any warning. In one case, three men were drowned. It was only by the mercy of Providence that the rest got away. But what has particularly galled me was the fact that the second vessel we lost was the old *Brompton Chine*, my father’s first ship and the keystone of the Red Funnel fleet. I could have put up with anything except that.”

Her eyes flashed as she spoke, but there was nothing weak about her anger. It blazed with determination like a man’s.

“An’ what would ye do about it?” he asked.

“Do? I’m going to take matters into my own hands. I’ve complained to the Admiralty, as has every ship-owner in Belfast, an’ nothing yet has happened. So now I’ll act for myself.”

“The proper spirit!”

McConaughy nodded approvingly.

“This is where you come into my plans,” she went on. “It has reached my ears that you are a fearless man, with a fearless crew. If you measure up to my requirements and are willing to do the work, I’ll place every facility in your way, and as for money—you can have what you want, in reason. What I’m after is a chance to show these English naval officers that they don’t know their own business.”

McConaughy considered.

“The idea sounds attractive, I’ll not deny, an’ I think I can answer for ma men,” he responded cautiously. “But ye spoke o’ requirements?”

“Yes, and such as they are, I adhere rigidly to them.”

He nodded and waited.

“In the first place, are your men proper Christians? I ship no Papists.”

“Ulster and Scotch Presbyterians on deck; Welsh Methodists in the Black Gang,” he returned with a grin. And more soberly: “I’ll have only God-fearin’ men underr ma command, ma’am. Psalm-singin’ an’ a bit o’ prayin’ are better for discipline than gamin’ an’ rum.”

“They are,” she assented, with obvious respect. “But how do you do it? I’d like to have you teach all my captains.”

“It’s a matther o’ belief,” he said indifferently. “I’ll ha’ no men but conform to ma ways. Is that the only requirement?”

“There is one other. Are you for the Cause?”

He drew his brows together.

“The Cause? What Cause would ye be meanin’——”

“The Cause of Woman’s Rights, to be sure,” she answered, with a trace of impatience. “Haven’t you——”

McConaughy settled back into his chair.

“This is new to me,” he interrupted judicially. “Woman’s Rights? What might they mean, ma’am? I never knew a woman that went after her rights an’ didn’t get them.”

Miss Tabitha McNish drew herself up with a show of dignity.

“I am referring to the women’s campaign for the vote,” she replied. “I was the first woman in Belfast to go to jail for the Great Principle—but, of course, that was before my father died. My present position does not permit me to sacrifice myself as I should like to, even if we had not suspended Militancy during the war.”

“Ye’re gettin’ me in deeper an’ deeper,” protested McConaughy, with a puzzled frown. “Votes for women? Hecht! I never voted maself, come to think o’ it. What would ye do wi’ ’em, if ye got ’em?”

“What would you do?” she retorted. “We’ll get what we want. Do you realise that the only people who can’t vote are women, criminals and idiots? Do you think that a woman who heads one of the greatest shipping companies in the Empire—ay, and who earned as big a dividend as was ever passed before in the one year of her management—do you think that she should be classed with the sweepings of the jails and asylums?”

McConaughy watched her with awed astonishment as she approached her peroration and her clinched fist fell upon the desk between them.

“No, indeed, ma’am; no, indeed, I don’t,” he hastened to placate her. “’Tis a subject I never happened to give thought to, me bein’ a poor sailorman, as ye know, an’ ma ways bein’ far from the ways o’ politics an’ the worrld’s affairs. But I hold fast to a theory that may answer your question: if women want a thing they should have it—for the peace o’ the worrld, if for no other reason.”

Miss McNish looked at him suspiciously.

“You’re in favor of the Cause, then?” she pressed.

“Heart an’ soul, ma’am,” McConaughy reassured her, now perceiving clearly the way to satisfy his amazing interrogator.

“That’s well,” she declared, instantly appeased. “I’m glad to meet a sensible man, Captain McConaughy. And indeed, I don’t employ any but sensible men. If a man can’t be a Christian and a Friend of Woman, then, I say, he should be cast into outer darkness. Certainly he isn’t an Ulsterman.”

“Certainly not, ma’am,” assented McConaughy heartily.

III

“An’ ye tell me the Red Funnel Line is—is a leddy!” gasped Jock Grant, as McConaughy concluded.

“Even so.”

Apgar knocked the ashes out of his pipe into the communal slop-jar and cocked an eye at his comrades across the back of the chair he straddled.

“I’m not so sure apout this Woman’s Rights pusiness, skipper,” he protested. “I hafe it in me mind Scripture tont uphold it.”

“Show me chapter and verse,” returned McConaughy calmly.

“Ay, Evan mon,” urged Grant. “An’ would ye fly i’ the face o’ yer own bread an’ butter for a lamshammle question o’ Scriptural theologee? Mon, give thocht tae the bonny fechtin’ we’ll be haein’ wi’ they Dutch loons—foreby the fact we’ll all can stick our fingers tae our noses at the English.”

“Materially speakin’, I can not teny t’e logic o’ yer argyment, Jock,” responded Apgar belligerently. “Put in a matter o’ t’e Spirit—which I content this is—as a Got-fearin’ Methodist an’ a maan who strifes humply to follow in t’e footsteps o’ John Wesley, I can not just reconcile meself to t’e

establishment o' political equality for women. Look through yer Bible, look through history, for that matter. Where will ye find women preachers, woman reformers, woman administrators? Fotes for women! Yaah! Papes for women, I saay!"

McConaughy rose carelessly from his seat by the door.

"Evan, man," he said quietly, "I'm not denyin' ye're a grand Methodist, but there are times when ye try ma patience. Ye prate o' woman's rights no' bein' i' the Bible! Look to yer Bible an' find me reference to the power o' steam! But do ye deny the efficacy an' righteousness in the Lord's sight o' reeciprocatin' engines by reason o' the negligence o' some Hebrew historians? Ye do not, Evan Apgar, else ye'd not be the best chief engineer sailin' from Belfast.

"In ma way, I'm as good a Presbyterian as ye be Methodist—ay, an' so's Jock yonder. But ye don't hear us slatherin' like chapel preachers over a question o' indeividual preference. If the bit lassie wants to vote, let her vote. Let 'em all vote. If Heaven doesna approve, Heaven will take care o' that, don't ye fear. In the meantime, Evan, ye're standin' in the way o' good jobs for other men besides yerself."

"It may pe ye're right, skipper," acceded Apgar meekly. "I hafe only testifiet accordin' to me lights, such as they are, an' I hope there's no lack o' Christian charity in Efan Apgar. I'm alwaays willin'—ay, glaatan' willin'—to stant asite an' sink me own wishes for t'e goot o' others."

"Spoke like a man, Evan," said Captain McConaughy gravely.

He picked up his cap.

"An' now we've got worrk ahead o' us; real worrk to stir a sailorman's heartt. Miss McNish has offered me the pick o' the Red Funnel fleet. It's for us to say which we prefer. She suggested we look at the *Joan o' Arc*; that's the best o' the lot, not a year out o' Harland & Wolff's."

"The *Joan o' Arc*, did ye say?" inquired Grant, wrinkling up his nose as they emerged into the street and headed for the water-front. "Isna that the name o' some Papist saint?"

"Maybe so," McConaughy agreed dryly. "But ye'll find the other names as outlandish, I'm thinkin', Jock. She's gone an' named the whole fleet after women, many o' them hussies, I should say, by the memory o' what I studied in school. She was tellin' me when she took over the Line she renamed every ship after what she called the great women o' history, exceptin' only an old craft that was her father's firrst command, the

Brompton Chine—her what was torpedoed the other day. 'Twas the loss of the *Brompton Chine* put this idea in her head."

"The lassie must hae good in her gin she gies that much thocht tae the mem'ry o' her faither," commented Jock Grant, the big-hearted.

"She's no a bad sorr't," answered McConaughy briefly.

There was a pause as they strode along.

"I assume from yer worts t'e laaty is still plessed wi' youth," said Apgar.

McConaughy deliberated conscientiously.

"Well," he said at last, "she's no very old, Evan man, but I'd harrdly call her youthfu'."

"She's perrsonable, I tak' it," suggested Grant.

McConaughy stopped dead in his tracks.

"Would ye now?" he roared. "D'ye think ye can pump me like a pair o' old maids dodderin' i' the back-garden over their tea? Pull away, the two o' ye. Hecht! I wasna born yesterda'. Ye'll see the leddy in a few minutes, an' ye can then form ye're own estimates o' her female beauty."

And during the rest of the walk to the Red Funnel Line docks McConaughy pointedly refrained from conversation, although his two officers, with several sly winks, took pains that there should be plenty of opportunities for him.

At the dock gates they met Captain Craven, who escorted them to a comfortable office inside where the mistress of the Line awaited them. She rose when the party entered and shook hands cordially with Grant and Apgar, as McConaughy introduced them.

"And this is Mr. Grant who fired the torpedo that sunk the *Unser Fritz*?" she exclaimed as her hand was buried in the huge paw of the First Officer of the departed *William and Mary*. "We're going to give you plenty of chances at the Germans, in the near future, Mr. Grant. Oh, and Mr. Apgar! I've heard about your engine-room records, Mr. Apgar. If you do all that is attributed to you, I shall be having you start a school of instruction for the other chiefs of the Line."

Grant and Apgar murmured bashful deprecations and retired to the background. Talking was not their long suit in the circumstances.

“A braw fine lassie,” rumbled Jock in a hoarse whisper, when he deemed himself out of range, Miss McNish having led Captain McConaughy to a window whence he might survey the serried files of Red-Funnel steamers drawn up in the slip below.

“Ay, laat,” assented Apgar. “Peyont t’e foolish age, too. She puts me in mint o’ t’e paastor’s wife at Plyddhwyd-Fydder; she—it’s t’e paastor’s wife I’m tellin’ ye o’—was well-fafoured, put she hat a waay wi’ her.”

In the meantime over by the window, Miss McNish had drawn McConaughy’s admiring attention to a splendid hull lying directly beneath them.

“There’s the *Joan*,” she said. “Here, next to the *Emma Willard*. How would she do? You’ll find no better craft in Belfast, Captain McConaughy. She’s all but brand-new—one Suez voyage and a run to Chile. If your chief is as good as you say, he can get sixteen knots out of her engines.”

But McConaughy shook his head.

“No, ma’am,” he said slowly. “It goes against ma inclination as a skipper wi’ a love for fine ships, but I wouldna ha’ the heart to take that beauty out on such a mission. She’s worth all o’ a hun’erd thousand’ pounds as she lies there. ’Twould be sinfu’, riskin’ the likes o’ her. Mind ye, if the plan I foller is the one I’m turnin’ over in ma mind, ’twill not be the fast ship or the big ship I’ll need, but some ordinary, dumpy, fat-bowed little tramp. An’ there’s ma choice now.”

He leveled his finger at a salt-rusted, hump-backed, dingy, three-hundred-foot cargo-carrier that lay on the opposite side of the slip.

“What?” exclaimed the Managing Director of the Red Funnel Line. “The *Emmalline Pankhurst*? Why, she’s the oldest thing we’ve got. I don’t believe you could force her boilers beyond eight knots with a following wind.”

“And what more would we ask?” responded McConaughy cheerfully. “I must be sure the slowest submarine can run circles round me. He’ll be the less likely to blow me out o’ the water wi’out givin’ me chance to accomplish ma plan.”

“And what might your plan be, Captain McConaughy?” asked Miss McNish, with no little curiosity.

“If ye don’t mind, ma’am, I’d rather wait for that until afther we’ve been over the—what d’ye call her?—the *Emmaline Pankhurst*. There’s some things—— But we have yer permission to go?”

“Yes, indeed, and I’ll come with you.”

As good as her word, she escorted them around the pier-head and up the gangplank that led to the *Emmaline Pankhurst’s* forward deck, at present cluttered up with spare ropes, disjointed machinery and lumber of many unpleasant sorts. McConaughy and his assistants were none too pleased at the idea of having a lady accompany them on the painstaking tour of inspection they had promised themselves; but their distaste soon wore away.

Miss McNish was able to go anywhere that they went; she made nothing of dirt and grease, wiping her hands nonchalantly on the same ball of waste that served for them; and when they wanted information it tripped pat from the end of her tongue.

Down companionways and ill-lit, slippery, iron-runged ladders into the nethermost stoke-holds she guided them, and it was she who suggested personal investigation of the screw-shaft, a journey which led them into the ultimate bowels of the ship, where the months’ old bilge-water stunk with a peculiar stink that rivalled the stale smell of half-baked, wholly-degenerate lubricants which abounded in the surrounding regions.

It was long after twilight when they reached the deck again, and at McConaughy’s suggestion, ascended the ladder to the bridge for a look at the chart-house and a general survey of the lay of the deck-space and superstructure. Miss McNish’s oilers were filthy, a wisp of dank hair lay across one cheek and a huge smudge of grease was daubed over half the other and her nose as well. But she was wholly unconscious of it, and so easy was her manner that the three men with her talked as unrestrainedly as if she had been one of themselves in fact.

“I’ll have my dockyard people look over the engines, Mr. Apgar,” she said. “I think you’re right; that starboard cylinder-packing needs attention. And some of those fire-grates are rusted. To tell the truth, the *Emmaline* is pigged-up worse than I thought. She’s a cranky ship—went aground once, and cost almost as much as she was worth to pull off. We haven’t used her much. I’ll have the fo’c’s’le painted, too, Mr. Grant, and of course, the officers’ quarters. Now, what about the steering-gear, Captain McConaughy?”

“I have but the one bit of advice to give to ye,” he cautioned. “Do not spendin’ more money than necessary on her. Leave the steerin’-gear as it is, wi’ such improvements as will let us follow a course. That’s enough. No fancy things.”

“You’re right,” she assented. “But so long as you and your men are going into danger, I want you to be comfortable and well-provided for. You spoke of a plan. Do you care to——”

“Yes, ma’am. Will ye step out here?”

He led the way from the chart-house to one corner of the bridge. Apgar watched them a moment with bated breath, then turned to Grant, who was twisting the wheel-spokes, in an attempt to find out what was wrong with the port rudder-chains.

“Jock,” he said earnestly. “I want to take pack wot I said apout fotes for women. If I haat any sort o’ fote I’t gife it to that laty. Why, Jock, she’s not a laty. She’s a man, Jock; she’s just as much o’ a man as pants an’ whiskers coult make her.”

IV

McConaughy vetoed the idea of turning over the *Emmaline Pankhurst* to the dockyard gangs. What repair work was necessary could be done easily by his own men, he told Miss McNish. And the morning after their tour of inspection the famous psalm-singing, divinity-erudite crew of the late *William and Mary* poured up from the various water-front hostels where they had sought shelter and took bodily possession of their new craft.

To the whining notes of a Methodist camp-meeting hymn, Evan Apgar led his diminutive Welsh oilers, machinists and stokers into the engine-room, whence there soon issued a clanking of hammers and clashing of spanners that well-nigh drowned the nasal voices of the singers.

’Tween-decks Jock Grant set his deck-crew to cleaning ship. Useless lumber was rooted out, dirt was hunted down with ruthless energy, paint was imported in copious quantities, and in twenty-four hours the down-at-heels *Emmaline* looked a different vessel. Her hull and upper works, which were water-tight, they left untouched. It was no part of McConaughy’s strategy to take out a smart-looking craft. But her inwards they made at least livable, and the cockroaches scuttled overboard in dismay. Next day the coal-lighters came alongside, and while the more technically expert of Apgar’s men still toiled with him over his decrepit engines, the stokers filled the bunkers.

In commercial circles it was given out that the *Emmaline* was scheduled for a rush trip to New York. This explained the haste in making her ready. McConaughy drove his men night and day. As they worked, the stores were brought aboard and stowed whenever opportunity arose. Everything was open and above-board.

His plans McConaughy confided to nobody save his employer. Not even Apgar and Grant were taken into his confidence. All the crew knew was that they had a ship once more and that there was a vague understanding they were to have a chance in the near future to “strike for the Lord and Gideon,” as Apgar put it. They had no more idea than did the drivers of the motor-trucks who brought them to the dock what was contained in the three big packing-cases that were deposited at the gangway the night before the *Emmaline* was due to sail. The only people who did know were McConaughy and the Managing Director.

Miss McNish, herself, came aboard as the crew were standing by the hawsers ready to cast off.

“Here comes your tug, captain,” she announced cheerfully, as she shook hands with McConaughy and nodded brightly to Grant, who, very stiff and solemn in a new uniform and cap, with the house-flag of the Red Funnel Line emblazoned on the peak, stood on the bridge, waiting to con the ship out of the slip.

While she was speaking, the tug steamed up to the bow of the *Emmaline*, and with an exultant toot, received the hawser by which she was to pull the larger vessel around into the fairway.

“Yes, ma’am,” answered McConaughy. “And we’re all ready for her. There’s not a thing to wait for.”

“Except me,” she answered, laughing. “Ah, how I wish I was going with you.”

“Ye’ll be just as well, I’m thinkin’, here on dry land,” returned McConaughy grimly. Then, seeing the look of anxiety that flitted across her face, he added quickly: “Not that I’ve any doubts as to what’s goin’ to happen. I know ma men, ma’am, an’ I think I can do wi’ the ship—for all she’s not much to look at.”

“The—packages—came all right last night?”

“All right, and they’re stowed in the officers’ quarters under the chart-house. We can get at them in a moment, whenever we need them.”

She glanced up at the bare pole-masts.

“I almost wish you had wireless, captain.”

“I don’t,” he retorted decidedly. “Knowin’ that we can’t signal for help, the Dutchmen will be all the more likely to give us time.”

Miss McNish nodded thoughtfully.

“Captain,” she said abruptly, “I want you to promise me something. If the danger should appear to be very great—greater, perhaps, than you have anticipated—do not try to put your plan into execution. You can always take to the boats and trust to being picked up.”

“Never you fear for us, ma’am,” he answered. “We’re used to lookin’ after ourselves—and we’ll be goin’ into this wi’ our eyes open. If other ships were manned the same way things would be different. I’m thinkin’ that anyhow ye’ll see an end to this submarine bugaboo before long. Even the English will perreive the needs o’ the occasion some day.”

“I hope so. And now remember. The submarine you are to look out for patrols a regular beat off the Mull of Oa on Islay. She runs down channel quite a ways and sometimes cruises well to the north and westward to watch for steamers from the States for Glasgow, by the northern trans-Atlantic route. She was the one that sank the *Brompton Chine*—and she’s the one I want you to get, if possible.”

“Very good, ma’am,” replied McConaughy, who had had his instructions by heart two days before.

The Managing Director gathered her skirts together and paused irresolutely by the gangplank, which a squad of stevedores were waiting to haul in. The important little tug lay alongside, with the hawser rove to her towing-bitts; Jock Grant stood on the bridge, ready to give the word, and the slip was empty of small traffic.

Miss McNish started to say something, thought better of it, and put her hand on the gangplank railing to descend. Suddenly she turned and thrust out her hand.

“The plain truth of the matter is, Captain McConaughy,” she said, with a break in her voice, “I’m a woman, as well as a Managing Director with a desire for vengeance, and it goes against the grain for me to see brave men going out to risk death at my bidding.”

A kindly light flickered in McConaughy’s eyes as he gave her slim hand a squeeze in his thick, horny fingers.

“Do not be fashin’ yerself about this bit matther, ma’am,” he adjured. “In three days, maybe less, ye’ll be seein’ us back in Belfast—an’ think o’ the pleasure we’ll all be havin’ wi’ the discomfiture o’ they stuckup English Navy officers.”

“I’ll try to think of that. But remember—no recklessness.”

With a final nod, she was gone. The stevedores hauled away with a “Ya-ha-ho-hay-pull!” and the gangplank swung in to the pier.

McConaughy looked up to the bridge.

“Very well, Mr. Grant; ye may take her out, now,” he said.

Mr. Grant rang the engine-room telegraph and then roared an order to the tugboat. Simultaneously the bow and sternlines were cast off and the *Emmaline* began to execute a clumsy circle toward the slip-mouth. With a casual glance around to assure himself that everything was going right, McConaughy betook himself to the engine-room hatchway, where he had spied the towsled black head of his Chief Engineer.

Mr. Apgar’s mind was not occupied with the immediate present, however, it appeared. He had no eye for his skipper. Rather, his gaze was fastened upon a diminishing figure on the pier.

“Arre ye gone daft, Evan?” demanded McConaughy indignantly.

Mr. Apgar gave his attention with a start.

“Ay, sir,” he said. “I coultn’t take me eyes off her.” He sighed sentimentally. “Think o’ her takein’ that much interest in us. I nefer saw any other owner to that, inteet. Fotes for Women, I saay—if we can get any more like her.”

McConaughy snorted.

“Suppose, then, you give the leddy some o’ your valuable time, Mr. Apgar. She’s payin’ ye for it.”

“I’m here, sir,” returned Mr. Apgar reproachfully, as he wrenched his eyes from the pier.

“Ay, so I see. Now, can yer first-assistant carry on for a few minutes?”

“Right-o, sir. I’ll just tip him t’e wink.”

The chief disappeared for an instant, shouted something down the hatch and climbed up again.

“Come to my cabin,” ordered McConaughy briefly.

In the Skipper’s sanctum under the bridge, McConaughy drew two chairs to a desk and pointed to a drawing which lay thereon.

“D’ye see this, Evan man?”

“Ay? What is it? A trap-toor?”

“Ye’re not far wrong. ’Tis the horizontal section o’ the cover o’ a submarine’s hatchway. In case ye don’t know it, Evan, we’re afther submarines this voyage. Now, what I want ye to do is to rig up for me a heavy balk o’ timber, wi’ screw-jacks set in each end, that I can clap across the open top o’ a submarine’s hatch-combing an’ clamp into place, so that the cover canna be fastened.”

“It can pe done, skipper. I can turn it out for ye in an hour,” acceded Apgar wonderingly. “Put why——”

“Can not ye see? Wi’ a conthrivance such as I outline to ye, ’twill be impossible for the men in the submarine to shut the hatch-cover, an’ wi’ the cover open they dare not submerge, for if they did the wather would pour in on them and they’d sink.”

Apgar brought his fist down upon the desk with a thundering smash.

“True! Trust ye to hit on t’e right totge. Put how in time are ye goin’ to get apoard a supmarine to work it?”

McConaughy waved to the packing-cases piled in the officers’ mess outside.

“There’s an ample supply of automatics, ammuniton and hangers. If seamen can’t use them nowadays, then they’re unworthy sons o’ their ancesthors.”

“Put, Skipper!” Apgar was aghast. “Woult ye attack a supmarine wi’ pistols an’ hangers? An’ wot woult they pe toin’ wi’ their torpeters?”

“Strategy, Evan, strategy,” answered McConaughy with the nearest approach he could muster to a smile. “Ye’ll see. Now do what I bid ye, for there’s no knowin’ how soon we’ll be wantin’ it. I must be off to give Jock Grant some instructions.”

Captain McConaughy climbed the bridge to find the tug casting off, and the *Emmaline* with way already on her. Mr. Grant, standing by the quartermaster at the wheel, was conning her slowly into the ruffle of traffic on the placid waters of the Lough. McConaughy cast an unconscious eye around to make sure all was as it should be, then summoned a junior officer to take Grant’s place, and pushed the big Scotchman into a far corner of the bridge.

“D’ye suspect what we’re afther, Jock?” he asked.

“Na,” said Grant calmly. “Save that it maun be a game worth the candle if ye an’ that bit lassie back yon hae thocht it oot.”

“Submarines, Jock! We’re afther submarines—I might better say, *a* submarine—or any submarine, at all—for the matther o’ that. Ye may notice we carry but two boats on the davits. I want ye to see to it they’re both ready to drop in the wather at a moment’s notice.”

Unlike Apgar, Jock Grant did not ask any questions. If McConaughy had planned a thing, that was enough. He was prepared to proceed and do his share of it, without any details other than the Skipper cared to impart.

The *Emmaline* took a naval pilot aboard for the passage through the mine-fields, but dropped him outside. There was a slight head-wind blowing and a lumpy sea running. The sky was dull grey and smothery, and the old *Emmaline* promptly proceeded to demonstrate her true qualities by digging her nose down deep and wallowing along like an over-fed hippopotamus. McConaughy held to the bridge-railing and watched her performance with fascination.

“Hecht!” he murmured. “They didna give her a wrong reputation.”

With it all, however, she revealed a plugging persistence that earned grudging admiration in view of her manifest unseaworthiness. Every sea she could take aboard, though, landed with generous wetness on the fo’c’s’le and splashed aft to the engine-room ventilators. Finally, they put up the bridge-screens to protect the watch at the wheel as much as possible.

It was well into the afternoon, and the Irish hills were still abeam, when a saucy little destroyer ran up alongside, tossing the short waves apart before her knife-bow like a spoon dashed through gravy.

“——!” muttered McConaughy between his teeth. “Can the English never leave us alone?”

“What ship is that?” hailed an officer on the destroyer’s bridge through a megaphone.

“*Emmaline Pankhurst*—Belfast—for New York—in ballast,” McConaughy bellowed back.

“Show your private signals,” ordered the officer.

McConaughy drew out the secret orders, with which he had been provided by the naval authorities of the port before leaving, and ordered a quartermaster to hoist a string of code signals.

“All correct,” shouted the officer. “Just wanted to make sure you deserved help. There are some alleged neutrals perambulating ’round the Irish Sea that we’d like to steer into the mines. Now, for your own good—Submarines are reported by wireless to be operating off Islay. All shipping is warned to make for nearby ports. Follow us, and we’ll escort you in to Portrush.”

McConaughy swore with a fluency that surprised even Jock Grant and drew looks of deep respect from the man at the wheel. Although a praying seaman and a disputatious Presbyterian, McConaughy conceived that oaths had their predestined place in the mundane universe, and he used them at need with the thoroughness upon which he prided himself in everything.

“I do not want yer escortt,” he roared back.

“What? What’s that?” The destroyer slipped up nearer. There came an audible chuckle from her decks. “I say, friend, what speed have you got?”

“Maybe six knots in this wind,” acknowledged McConaughy.

“And the U-boats do sixteen, wind or no wind. You ought to be on your knees sayin’ prayers for the Admiralty that sent us to look out for you. But there’s no satisfyin’ you Irish.”

McConaughy waxed purple in the face.

“Irish!” he spat with a shiver. “Irish!”

There was a pause. The destroyer forged slightly ahead at reduced speed.

“Well, do we follow him?” questioned Mr. Grant nervously.

“Follow him!” McConaughy choked. “What else can we do? Like as not the scoundrel ’ud suspect something and arrest us if we refused. Can ye beat the English? For wrong-headedness, self-sufficiency an’—— But what’s the use?” He broke off. “What’s that? He’s settin’ signals for us. I suppose that officer man wore his voice out talkin’ so much.”

With a sardonic laugh, McConaughy picked up his glasses and began to read the international code flags.

“Shall—burn—single—red—light—stern—after—dark.—You—will—
not—show—any—light.”

“An’ at that, we’ve got him, the silly fool!” grated the *Emmaline’s* commander. “We’ll never be near a port on this coast until long after darrk, an’ if I don’t give him the slip in the meantime, I’m an Englishman!” He rang the engine-room telegraph for reduced speed. “Mr. Grant,” he

resumed pleasantly, "the sea's breakin' choppi'er an' we're havin' engine-trouble if our offeecious friend should inquire."

The dark came rapidly on that grey day. There was no sunset, only a blurring of half-seen objects, the dimming of the wave-froth. The destroyer tossed a quarter of a mile ahead of them, like a huge playful whale, sometimes half-observed by a wave larger than ordinary. Presently, a red lamp was lowered over her stern, and she swung in closer toward the Irish coast. In half an hour the red lamp was the only mark of her presence, and thanks to the skilful way in which Apgar was throttling down his engines, the destroyer was gaining distance, hand-over-fist, on the clumsy *Emmaline*. At half-past eight o'clock McConaughy drew a breath of relief.

"Now!" he exclaimed.

And the helm was put hard over, so that the *Emmaline* careered wildly across the bouncing head-seas that broke in a whitish-grey tangle of foam high above the bows. The red light on the destroyer's stern dwindled and finally faded altogether. The *Emmaline* was alone.

McConaughy was not an imaginative man, but there was something singularly impressive about that wave-swept, wind-ravished darkness. Somewhere, five or six miles to the northwest, the destroyer laboured her powerful engines. Ahead lurked the hidden menace of the submarines. Astern lay Belfast, safe behind its mine-fields, forts and guard-boats, living a conventional life even in wartime.

For the submarines he had no fear, but there came to him suddenly the omnipresent dread that is at the heart of every master who sails blind—and he shuddered, involuntarily giving voice to the grisly thought.

"I do not like this pit-mirrk," he growled to Mr. Grant. "There's always the chance we might run into some Glasga' boat or a dreadnaught on a picnic."

"Ay," responded the Scotchman phlegmatically, "but steamin' wi-oot lights is nae mair risky nor navigatin' in a fog."

V

Morning found the *Emmaline* ploughing a placid sea. The wind had blown itself out; the waves had moderated.

"A splendid day for submarine-work, Mr. Apgar," exclaimed Captain McConaughy upon meeting his Chief Engineer at early breakfast.

“Ye to seem to take a professional interest in their success, Skipper,” rejoined Mr. Apgar glumly.

“An’ so will ye, Evan man, so will ye,” retorted McConaughy.

After breakfast, the packing-cases in the officers’ mess were broken out, and an automatic, with ammunition, and a hanger were furnished to each member of the crew. The contrivance which Apgar had arranged overnight for wedging up a submarine’s hatch was carefully explained to big Jock Grant and then secreted in the bottom of one of the two life-boats which hung outboard, suspended from the davits, all ready to drop into the water. Acting under additional orders, Apgar also secured all the fire-hose on the ship, coupled it together and attached it to the steam-pump.

In the meantime, McConaughy posted extra lookouts as they cleared the Mull of Oa and bore up for the outer Hebrides, with the Irish coast far astern. The seas were deserted, sure proof that the watchful couriers of the Admiralty had scoured off all the helpless prey that they could reach to warn of the submarine danger. There was no land in sight. Except for a few gulls and porpoises the *Emmaline* had seen nothing living since she parted company with the diligent destroyer the night before.

So hour after hour slipped by, until it was almost noon, and McConaughy began to be worried. He strode from end to end of the bridge, a restless eye on the compass and the surrounding waters.

“Unless we flush something pretty soon, we’ll have to be turrnin’ back, Mr. Grant,” he remarked at last, with obvious dissatisfaction.

On the heels of his words came an excited hail from the fo’c’s’le head.

“Where? Where away?” answered McConaughy, himself, straining over the bridge-screens.

“On the starboard beam, sir,” shouted the man.

McConaughy followed the sailor’s pointing finger, and sure enough, there, fully a mile to the right of the course they were pursuing and about parallel with the *Emmaline* at the moment, a long sheeny bulk was rising out of the crisp wavelets, lifting itself from the depths with the ponderous ease of a sinister antediluvian sea-monster. Amidships of its dripping length rode a pair of long antennae, which were periscopes, the eyes it saw through, and just back of them was a cylindrical projection which was the conning-tower.

While McConaughy watched through his glasses, the top of the conning-tower opened and several men climbed out upon the wet deck of the

submarine, clutching to life-lines which were strung along either side on light stanchions. These men made their way forward to the end of the narrow deck-space, where one of them stooped and seemed to be busied with something at his feet. Evidently he released some powerful spring, for a portion of the deck slid away, and automatically a long, slender barrelled three-inch gun rose up in the exposed place.

Other sailors had swarmed out of the conning-tower, carrying ammunition, and within five minutes of the look-out's hail a dull boom echoed across the water and a shell burst just ahead of the *Emmaline*.

"That'll mean 'heave-to,'" commented McConaughy, with a sardonic grin, as he pushed the speed-indicator on the engine-room-telegraph over to "Stop."

The *Emmaline* had been making barely six knots before this, and she came to a full stop without any hesitation. The submarine, however, had put on speed, apparently not being willing to take any chances, and dashed up at a great pace.

"All o' sixteen knots," muttered Evan Apgar, who had come on deck to watch the spectacle. "There's good engines in 'er."

"You'll be havin' a look at 'em before long, Evan," said McConaughy.

"I hope so, sir."

"Ye might be goin' to a funeral, man, instead o' a parr-rtty. Stand by wi' yer hose. Have no fearr; we'll fool the Dutchmen."

McConaughy turned to the First Officer.

"Mr. Grant, pass the word among the men to be careful not to show their arms. The hangers should be concealed in trousers-legs; the pistols kept in their pockets. Tell off the crews to go in the boats with us. I'll take the second boat, ye'll take the firrst."

As casually as if he were walking over to speak to a friendly shipmaster, McConaughy strolled to the starboard wing of the bridge and awaited the summons of the submarine's commander, as the hostile craft slowed up abeam of the *Emmaline*, her disappearing-gun trained full on the steamer's vitals. The German captain was dressed exactly like his men, in greasy dungarees, but McConaughy distinguished him instantly by his cap and the medals pinned on his filthy jacket, conspicuous among them the Iron Cross.

"Hullo, mein friendt, vat ship vas you?" called the German pleasantly.

McConaughy told him.

“So?” The German showed his teeth in a perfectly friendly smile that contained a hint of derision. “Vell, we save you a long voyage, eh? You get out your boats, unt go to the nearest port. Your ship we blow up.”

McConaughy simulated intense distress.

“Blow up the old *Emmaline*!” he exclaimed, almost in tears. “Sure, ye can let us go. She’s such an old ship. She——”

The smile left the German’s face.

“Sir, this is war,” he said sternly. “Vat I am about to do, you would do if you were in my place.” He cast a look about the vacant horizon. “Because there is no other shipping in sight, I gif you half an hour to get your men over-side. At the end of that time I begin to fire. You had best hurry.”

McConaughy choked—but not with the kind of emotion the submarine commander suspected.

“Very good, sir,” he said submissively.

Mr. Grant had told off the men to go in the two boats. McConaughy’s, which was on the port side, was lowered first so that he would have time to pull around before Grant’s boat was in the water.

“Have your guns ready,” McConaughy hissed to his men, as they cleared the *Emmaline*’s stern and made for the submarine. “Shoot for the gun-crew. Remember, they mustn’t have a chance to fire.”

The two crews rowed leisurely toward the submarine.

“I can’t take you on board,” called the German captain as they drew nearer. “I’m sorry. You haf to shift for yourselves.”

“But, see here,” answered McConaughy. “We’ve only got these two boats. What about the rest of my men? Can they have time to build a raft or something?”

“Impossible!” The German straightened up. “I told you half an hour, unt half an hour you shall haf. No more.”

“But—but we’ll be terribly crowded in two boats.”

“I can not help that. It is the fault of your owners; they should know better.”

During this conversation, McConaughy had manoeuvred his boats steadily closer to the submarine.

“Well, at least, can’t you give us some brandy or spirits?” he temporized. “I don’t carry any on ma ship, and we’ll need some if we’ve got to set out for land in our overcrowded condition at this time of year.”

“That I’ll be glad to do,” said the submarine commander. “Come over, unt I vill hand you vat you need.”

He turned to the conning-tower and shouted something down the hatch.

“Our chance!” murmured McConaughy in a strident whisper. “Fire!”

Crack! Crack! Crack! The automatics bit the silence. The three Germans clustered about the gun-breech tumbled over, riddled with bullets; the submarine commander sank beside the conning-tower, with a bullet through his thigh; McConaughy, himself, carefully shot away the periscopes.

“Give way, all!” he roared. “Now, Jock, the hatch, man! Quick! Before they close it!”

In answer to his appeal, huge Jock Grant took a flying leap from his seat in the stern of the first life-boat and landed on all fours on the submarine’s slippery deck, just as the German captain, dripping blood from his injured leg, had struggled to his feet and was desperately trying to close the hatch. Grant swept the German backward with a single blow, and jammed the heavy balk of timber Apgar had prepared across the opening in time to prevent several frenzied hands from closing it from inside.

In a trice the giant Scotchman had screwed the jacks fast at either end, and it was impossible to make that particular submarine water-tight.

Another group of Germans, aft of the conning-tower, likewise had shown a disposition to fight, but they were quickly cowed into submission by the hangers and pistol-butts of the *Emmaline’s* men. Once he had gained the submarine’s deck, McConaughy shouted to the bridge of his own ship to start the engines and swing around to the other side of the submarine, lest some of the Germans below should try to torpedo her in revenge. But the under-sea boat’s crew were far too frightened by this utterly unlooked-for turn of affairs to have any thought of such desperate measures. With the smashing of the periscopes, moreover, their only means of vision had been taken from them. They could not be sure where the *Emmaline* lay.

After stationing a strong guard around the conning-tower, with orders to shoot at the first threat of a sortie, McConaughy directed the clearing-up of

the limited deck-space of his prize. The wounded captain and his unhurt prisoners, five in number, he put aboard one of his life-boats and sent back to the steamer.

“Three dead, six captured,” he observed. “That’s nine out of the way. There can’t be more nor twenty below yet. Well, we’ll have to argue it out wi’ ’em.”

He hailed the *Emmaline*.

“Come up closer,” he ordered. “Lower the fire-hose overr-side, an’ tell Mr. Apgar to put on full pressure. We’ve got to bring these fellows to terr-rms. They’ll be thryin’ to run away wi’ us, if we don’t.”

The fire-hose was duly lowered to the submarine’s deck, and McConaughy, himself, trained the nozzle through the open hatch.

“Is there one o’ ye below can speak English?” he shouted.

Followed an intense commotion, and at last a feeble answer in the affirmative.

“Then here are ma terms for ye. Surrender, an’ yer lives will be spared. Resist me—an’ I’ll fill ye so full o’ water ye’ll sink in five minutes.”

This ultimatum inspired a frenzied discussion, loud argument, evident physical combat, and finally an announcement that the majority had overpowered the few who sided with their officers in advocating death to the humility of surrender to a merchantman’s crew.

“Humph!” grunted McConaughy, when he had extracted from the timorous interpreter below the reasons why certain of the Germans preferred death to yielding. “Ye can tell yer stubborn friends—an’ I admire men o’ their breed, I’ll say that for ’em—that we’re in no sense askin’ to be classed wi’ the English Navy. We hold by ourselves, to speak the soberr truth, young man. We have much the same opeenion o’ them ye may enjoy yerselves. Now, if ye’re ready for surrenderin’, come up, one at a time. We’ll take care o’ the rest.”

VI

“What hae ye got there, sir?” inquired Jock Grant, as McConaughy descended the Jacob’s-ladder which hung from the *Emmaline*’s rail to the deck of the submarine.

McConaughy shook out the folds of bunting by way of reply.

“We’ll be all above-board,” he said. “I’ve had ma lesson o’ the manners o’ the English Navy. The credit for this is ours, and ours it shall remain. I’ll be havin’ no snip o’ a young officerr thryin’ to gain promotion on our work. We’ll put our brand on it, eh? The Red Hand o’ Ulster.”

The bunting he exposed to the delighted gaze of that portion of his crew assembled on the submarine around him or lining the rail above was the banner of the Ulster Covenant, the Red Hand on a white field that had waved above the serried thousands of the Volunteers who swore their violent opposition to Home Rule. A ragged cheer went up at sight of the flag that had not been seen in Belfast since the war began.

Grant, for all his Scots blood, grinned ready appreciation.

“But we should be haein’ the Dutch flag underneath the bonnie banner,” he suggested. “That’s the proper fashion.”

“So it is,” McConaughy agreed. “Drop down the hatch, Jock, man, an’ see what ye can find in the fellow’s signal-locker, if he has such a thing.”

Cautiously, as became his bulk, Jock lowered his gigantic body down the scanty hatchway, and presently, with a snort of triumph, he was back again, an Imperial German Navy ensign trailing behind him.

“’Tis a strange place below, Skipper,” he observed, “but on a sma’ scale, d’ye ken, they hae most o’ the necessitees.”

“That’s fine, Jock,” exclaimed McConaughy, overjoyed. “We’ll hoist ’em right away.”

He led the way aft to where a metal jack-staff projected over the downward-slanting stern of the whale-like craft, and to the peak he slowly hoisted the two flags, first the banner of the Ulster Covenant, with its Red Hand spread sinisterwise, and then the dark-striped German flag, seeming to cower and slink its folds under that persistent threat. McConaughy stood back, hands upon his hips, to admire his job.

“It looks well,” he remarked with satisfaction. “I’m pleased wi’ that, Jock, mighty well pleased. An’ now we’ll be gettin’ under way. Anybody we meet won’t be in doubt how matthers stand, will they?”

“Sma’ chance, sir,” assented Mr. Grant.

McConaughy moved toward the Jacob’s-ladder, taking a last look around him as he walked.

“An’ how many men d’ye think ye’ll need?” he asked suddenly.

Mr. Grant looked as startled as he felt.

“What for do I want men?”

“Well, ye’d scarce like to handle the prize by yerself, Jock,” returned his captain.

“Who? Me? Skipper, are ye daft? Would ye put me i’ the bowels o’ this hell-craft?”

McConaughy paused with one hand on the ladder.

“Well, ye said they had most o’ the necessitees below.”

“Ay, but on a sma’ scale, I said, sir. On a sma’ scale, ye ken, an’ I’m an unco’ larrge mon, Skipper. Why, if I’m gaun through thae bit passages below, I maun move sideways, an’ at that, the back o’ ma pants is a’ grease.”

“Hecht, Jock!” returned McConaughy, with a frown. “Would ye be makin’ all this fuss before the crew? We can not tow the thing, handless. She’ll be dead-weight enough, wi’ a man at the wheel, an’ somebody to stand by in case o’ danger.”

“But I dinna ken her machines,” pleaded Grant frantically. “If ye’d been below, sir, ye’d apreeciate what I’m sayin’. She naethin’ but machinery, frae bow tae stern—all manner o’ whirligigs, an’ spinnin’ wheels, an’ they motor-things, an’ stop-cocks, an’ rods a-blingin’ in an’ oot. ’Tis nae job for me. Evan micht hae more o’ a gift for it than me; he kens machines.”

McConaughy nodded his head slowly.

“Maybe there’s somethin’ in what ye say, Jock. I’ll send Evan down.”

But it required almost as much persuading to induce Mr. Apgar to assume charge of the prize.

“Wot? Me ride in that tin intake falfe?” he protested. “I’m too goot a man for ye to lose, Skipper. Ye’ll hafe call for me serfices sometime again.”

“That’ll do, Mr. Apgar,” replied McConaughy in his quarter-deck manner that his officers seldom saw. “Somebody’s got to do it, an’ as Mr. Grant pointed out, that somebody must know machines. Ye’ll have five men, an’ I’ll throw in the boatswain besides to look after the navigatin’ for ye. Now, be quick. I’m anxious to get away from here. We’ll have slow worrk, towin’ the prize from here to Belfast.”

To tell the truth, Apgar recovered from his dismay as soon as he saw the inside of the submarine. He was too much of a natural-born mechanic not to

exult over the chance for exploration and study of new things.

Long before the towing-cable had been made fast and the submarine dropped astern of the *Emmaline*, he was immersed in her vitals, oil-can in one hand, portable, wire-bracketed electric lamp in the other, prying here and there among the intricate maze of motors and special machinery.

Late in the afternoon he climbed up the narrow companionway to the tiny bridge, where the helmsman stood, endeavouring to keep the submarine's nose true on the course the *Emmaline* was following.

"She's doin' four knots, no more," he appraised the thrust of his own formerly beloved engines.

Then, without another word, he plunged below. Followed much clanking and purring of machinery, and without warning the man at the wheel felt a quiver running through the frail hull beneath him. The submarine was moving ahead, propelled by her own engines! To his amazement he found himself creeping up on the *Emmaline*, and he was obliged to steer to one side to avoid a collision. His frenzied shouts brought McConaughy leaping toward the steamer's stern, just as Mr. Apgar's face, sweaty and oil-streaked, emerged from the conning-tower hatch.

"What mad tricks arre ye up to, now, Mr. Apgar?" shouted the irate skipper.

"I'm safein' yer time, sir," responded Apgar cheerfully. "I fount I coul't get the wrinkle o' these oil engines wot propel her on the surface, so I thought we might as well mofe along at normal speet, insteat o' loafin' t'e waay we peen toin'."

McConaughy's expression changed.

"That's good worrk, Evan," he approved. "What can ye get out o' them?"

"Three times wot yer can out o' that old tup," retorted the Chief Engineer, with callous disrespect for the engines he had adopted for his own—engineers are fickle souls, always willing to fall in love with any new fabric, whose mysteries and capacities excel what they have known. "Put for comfort's sake an' to afoid accitent, we'd better make it a uniform speed o' six knots—an' we'll keep the length o' the tow-rope pe'ind."

For the rest of the afternoon they made good speed, and the pace did not decrease after dark. McConaughy used the trick the destroyer had taught him the night before, and swung a single lamp over his stern taffrail,

otherwise steaming with all lights doused and an extra lookout posted to guard against collision. The night passed without incident. The wind still continued moderate, with very little sea, and nothing happened to interrupt the progress of the *Emmaline* and her tow.

By morning, however, they were in the main traffic lane close to the northern entrance to the Irish Sea, and it was not long before a heavy bank of smoke on the horizon developed into a lean black hull that raced up like a greyhound unleashed, a destroyer on patrol. As she ranged alongside the *Emmaline*, her crew lining the rail in open-mouthed astonishment, McConaughy noted with a chuckle that the officer on the bridge was the same confident person who had ordered him to follow into Portrush.

“What ship is that?” hailed the officer.

“*Emmaline Pankhurst*—Belfast for New York—in ballast,” returned McConaughy in the same laconic words he had used before.

“The——” A stream of profanity echoed across the water. “Are you the sow-bellied, rust-eaten, vermin-crustud tub that gave us the slip in the dark night before last?”

McConaughy leaned from his bridge and his eyes flashed fire.

“Keep a civil tongue in yer head, laddie,” he roared. “I was a grown man before ye knew the kiss o’ salt water. An’ remember this—I can look after maself better than you or any other fool in King George’s Navy. We’ve got the devil-fish that had ye scared, towin’ harmlessly astern there—an’ it cost not a life to take her.”

“I see you’re towing a submarine,” retorted the officer. “And I’ve got a torpedo trained on her and one on you, too, in case you’re up to some Prussian trick, so look sharp, my man. Heave to, now, or I’ll fire into you.”

“Fire, an’ be damned to ye!” shouted McConaughy, shaking his fist. “D’ye see that flag up there?” He pointed to his masthead. “That’s the flag o’ the British Empire—not the English Navy. Fire on it, if ye dare.”

The destroyer’s commander was plainly nonplussed. He tried a new tack.

“I don’t want to make trouble for you,” he said. “But I have my duty to do, and this is a most unusual situation. I must ask you to let me come aboard.”

McConaughy rang the engine-room telegraph to slow down.

“If ye’d asked decently, like a man, in the first place, I’d have stopped for ye before. Come aboard, if ye want to.”

The destroyer sidled closer to the *Emmaline*, and the officer, an agile young fellow, reached out and caught the rope ladder that was flung down. A minute later, monkey-fashion, he scrambled over the rail.

“Sorry for our misunderstandin’, captain——”

“McConaughy is ma name, Miles McConaughy.”

The navy man did not try to conceal his surprise.

“McConaughy!” he repeated. “Are you—I say, I heard a story not long ago about you. Are you the fellow who sunk the *Unser Fritz*?”

McConaughy assented.

“And Hardress of the *Elk* took the credit! The story’s just gettin’ into the wardrooms. I say, I was a snotty once—a middy, you know—under Hardress. I—— By Jove, old chap, I know how you feel. Will you shake hands?”

Rather reluctantly, McConaughy offered his hand.

“What’s your name?” he asked.

“Chivers-Grahame—Commander Chivers-Grahame, destroyer *Eremité*.”

“Ah,” said McConaughy, “that explains it. Ye’re not English.”

“Not more’n half, anyhow. Why?”

“I knew ye couldn’t be. Ye cursed too well, in the first place, an’ after that, I took ye for a man—not an Englishman.”

“Humph,” grunted the *Eremité*’s commander. “You do not seem to think much of the English.”

“I do not,” responded McConaughy concisely. “Now, what can I do for ye?”

He broke off suddenly to jump on the rail.

“Below there!” he bellowed to the destroyer’s deck. “What are ye up to? Lay off from that submarine, or by the powers, I’ll have her torpedo ye!”

Chivers-Grahame ran over beside him.

“What’s biting you, now?” he demanded. “We’re only sending a boat’s-crew to take over the prize. Don’t worry about your reward; I’ll promise you

my assistance. And I give you my word of honour, I'm generally considered an honest man."

"Did I say anything about a reward?" snapped McConaughy. "The plain fact o' the matter is, I took that submarine, an' I'm goin' to bring her into Belfast—or sink her. I was sent to get her—an' I'll bring her in."

"You were sent to get her?" The navy man collapsed feebly against the rail. "Look here, by any chance, are you an Admiralty secret agent?"

"No," snorted McConaughy in bitter contempt. "I'm in the employ o' the Red Funnel Line, which fitted me out to rid the Channel o' that hell-hound. An' the Red Funnel Line an' ma crew will get the credit for it, an' we'll tow her into Belfast for an object-lesson o' what can be done to submarines."

Chivers-Grahame collected himself together, with a weak grin.

"You're an uncommon determined sort of nut," he commented. "However——"

He shouted down to his men to swing in the small boat they were lowering.

"Have your own way," he went on, turning to McConaughy. "I'm—— if I'll quarrel with your kind. You're too unusual. But you can't get rid of me, you know. The Navy's been hopin' to get a chance to look at the vitals of one of these new U-boats for months, an' I wouldn't run the risk of your losing her. I'll have to keep you company the rest of your voyage."

"Do what ye please, so long as ye do not molest me," answered McConaughy indifferently. "I pretend to no control over others."

"All right. No hard feelin's, eh?"

Chivers-Grahame swung one leg over the rail to descend to the destroyer, thumping against the buffers between herself and the *Emmaline's* steel side. But suddenly his eye caught the medley of colour that trailed from the submarine's jack-staff.

"What flag have you got there?" he asked with interest.

"Our own flag," said McConaughy.

"I beg your pardon." The officer was plainly puzzled. Just then a puff of wind snatched at the folds and blew them out. "I say, what are you? A bloody hand! Do you esteem yourself some kind of a modern buccaneer?"

“An’ if I did, what then?” retorted McConaughy. “But no, sir. That’s the flag o’ Ulster, the Banner o’ the Covenant.”

Chivers-Grahame cast a long, lingering look over the skipper of the *Emmaline Pankhurst*, then swiftly ducked beneath the railing, his face convulsed with mirth.

“Oh, my sainted cat!” he apostrophised the unhearing hull of the *Emmaline*. “The Red Hand of Ulster—at sea! An Ulster buccaneer—in the Irish Channel. Ye gods and little fishes!”

He tumbled onto his own deck, weak from laughter, and confided the tale in choice installments to his amazed juniors. Then, under reduced power, he steamed slowly along within sight of the two strange vessels that owned the rule of Miles McConaughy and the Red Hand of Ulster.

Late that afternoon, the *Emmaline Pankhurst*, her prize and the attendant destroyer *Eremita*, were piloted through the mine-fields, duly escorted into the guarded waters of Belfast Lough and brought to rest under the admiring eyes of the city. Word of their coming preceded them up the estuary.

The unusual sight of a merchantman towing one of the dreaded U-boats was enough to excite the most ardent attention. The news reached the office of the Red Funnel Line before the Managing Director had closed her desk for the day; and accompanied by Captain Craven, she lost no time in setting out for the docks.

“Keep off,” hailed a seaman at the *Emmaline’s* gangway, as their tug tried to run alongside in the gloom. “Nobody allowed on board until morning.”

“But this is Miss McNish,” returned the Managing Director with a palpitating heart.

“Who? Miss McNish?” McConaughy’s bull-voice boomed through the air. “Come aboard, ma’am. We ha’ grand news for ye.”

As she stumbled up the accommodation-ladder hastily lowered for her, McConaughy reached down and gave her a helping hand. She could not see very well in the failing light, and she brought her eyes close to his face as she asked breathlessly—

“Are your men—all safe?”

“Every one, ma’am,” he answered cheerfully. “Not a scratch—an’ the old *Emmaline’s* just as good, too.”

“How—how did you do it?”

He escorted her into the officers’ mess, summoned Jock Grant and Evan Apgar, who had now been allowed to leave his cramped quarters, the boatswain’s presence being deemed sufficient to protect the prize against any perfidious attempt by the navy to seize her out of hand. And between them they told her the story.

Long before it was finished, Miss McNish gave ample proof that she was a true woman, for all her Managing Directorship. She laughed when McConaughy recounted how they had given the destroyer the slip, and she cried when she heard of the fate of some of the submarine’s men, and she laughed again at the recital of Jock Grant’s fears of the U-boat’s cramped quarters and how they refused to surrender their quarry to the destroyer on the *Eremit*e’s second appearance.

“It was splendid, Captain McConaughy—and you gentlemen,” she exclaimed, with enthusiasm, her plain face lighted up, her eyes shining like stars. “I am proud to have you all with the Red Funnel Line. And you shall stay as long as you wish—forever, I hope. I have plenty of work for men like you, work you will love, I know.”

“We’ll be just glad to serrve ye, ma’am,” returned McConaughy, with what was real humility for him.

“Ay,” assented Jock Grant and Evan Apgar.

It was late when Miss McNish had been satisfied and consented to go aboard her tug again. As they emerged on deck, their ears were smitten by a weird sound that rose from the fo’c’s’le.

“What’s that?” she asked sharply.

McConaughy inclined his ear; then turned to his subordinates for advice.

“‘In Heafen’s Lap We’ll Lay Our Heaarts, an’ They’ll pe White Like Snow,’ ” said Apgar, after an instant’s listening.

“Nay, nay,” Jock Grant contradicted him. “’Tis ‘We Maun Reap, Brithers A’, i’ the Garrden o’ the Laird.’ ”

“What do they mean?” Miss McNish besought of McConaughy in increased bewilderment.

“A bit prayer-meetin’ like,” he answered awkwardly. “We ha’ been in the Valley o’ the Shadow, as ye might say, an’ the men are givin’ their

thanksgivin'—as is only proper. We ha' been bountifully protected out o' the grace o' Providence."

He bowed his head as he spoke, and Miss McNish noted, with a catch in her breath, that Apgar and Grant had done likewise. As she went over the side, they were still standing there, with their heads uncovered.

CHAPTER III

HEROES ALL

“It’s not the kind of work I like to give you, Captain McConaughy,” said the Managing Director of the Red Funnel Line, with a perplexed frown.

“What will it be, might I ask, ma’am?” returned McConaughy. “When I signed on wi’ the Red Funnel Line, I signed wi’out reservations.”

“I’m sure you did, Captain. But—this is a job to try a seaman’s soul. The Government have requisitioned us to supply a transport for the Dardanelles.”

“Throopin’! Eh!” The disgust in McConaughy’s voice was eloquent. “I’ve never been in the passenger trade, Miss McNish, so I’ve no observations of a perrsonal nature; but from all I’ve heard, carryin’ soldiers is worrse nor carryin’ tourists—an’ tourists is verrmin.”

“You are right,” the Managing Director agreed. “But here is the situation. All my experienced skippers, except you, are at sea. To meet the Government’s requirements, I must give them the *Joan of Arc*, the newest and most valuable ship in the fleet. I don’t like to send her out under Johnson or Harrod. Who is there but you?”

“There’s nothin’ else for it,” McConaughy assented. “Then I’m to turn ma men out o’ the *Emmaline Pankhurst*?”

“Yes. The sooner the better. The Government people are in haste. As it is, the *Joan* will have to go to the dockyard workers at Cork for refit. She is to carry an entire battalion, I believe, one thousand officers and men.”

“Umph!” McConaughy threw oceans of contempt into the grunt. “Isn’t that like the English? Always they do be makin’ their minds up in a hurry and thryin’ to do a thing afther the other man has the lead on ’em. An’ so I’m worrkin’ for the Crown?”

He chuckled silently.

“Yes, Captain,” said Miss McNish swiftly, “and please manage to hold your feelings in check. I’m not more fond of this pig-headed Ministry than you are, but the war is the war, and each of us has to do his bit.”

It would be impossible to say that a twinkle glinted in McConaughy’s eye. But some hint of a contraction twitched his optic muscles as he

answered his employer.

“For the English, as ye know, ma’am, I ha’ no use at all. They’re an unhandy, self-suffeicient, exasperatin’, contemptuous, overbearin’ lot o’ incompetents—wi’ a rare exception now an’ then, I must admit. But as I said before, I signed wi’ the Red Funnel Line wi’out any reserrvations, an’ a word from you is an orrder to me—and to ma men.”

“That’s noble of you, Captain,” answered the Managing Director, with a relieved smile. “You are to have *carte blanche* as to stores, and if you want any extra men——”

“I thank ye, ma’am,” interposed McConaughy hastily. “But ma own crew will do. I’d rather ha’ them I can rely on than the scourin’ o’ the docks which is all the Navy has left over.”

“Suit yourself, Captain, suit yourself,” Miss McNish reassured him with secret amusement. “I know men like yours can’t be picked up offhand.”

“Ye say well, ma’am,” assented McConaughy. “It’s an honor ye pay us. And now if ye ha’ no more——”

“Yes, that’s all, Captain. Clear the *Joan* as early as possible. You’ll have escort down Channel to Cork.”

“Escorrt!” rumbled McConaughy as he closed the door from the Managing Director’s private office. “Escorrt! That’ll be meanin’ more o’ these childish English Navy men thryin’ to teach Miles McConaughy the ways o’ the Lorrds’ oceans. Hecht! An’ I’m a serrvant o’ the Crown!”

In the main office he encountered Captain Craven, Port Superintendent of the Line.

“Did she break it to ye, McConaughy?” asked Craven with a grin on his plethoric crimson face, just such a face as a Port Superintendent should have.

“Ay, she did,” returned McConaughy briefly.

Craven’s grin exploded into a volcanic chuckle.

“And is there anything by way of stores ye’d like to ’ave put into the *Joan*?” he inquired.

“None that I know of yet. But Apgar’s sure to find throuble wi’ the provisions made for his engine-room. Ye’ll hear from us shorrtly.”

“Ye’ll get whatever ye want, then.”

McConaughy tarried.

“Ha’ ye heard by any chance where we take on our carrgo—if ye can call such fools as English soldiers carrgo?” he said.

Once more mirth enlivened the corrugated architecture of Captain Craven’s face.

“I can’t say for sure, McConaughy, but there’s a transport fleet concentrating at Cork. The rumor is they are to take on troops from the Curragh of Kildare.”

“What? Irishers?”

McConaughy’s dismay was apparent, but it gave way immediately to indignation.

“Papish Irishers, eh!” he grumbled thunderously. “D’ye see me, now, Craven—I ask ye, man, d’ye see me—me, Miles McConaughy—pilotin’ a shipload o’ Irish Papists? I—I’d wreck ’em all in Biscay firrst!”

“It may not be so bad, McConaughy,” said Craven soothingly. “All we know definitely is that ye go to Cork for refit. After that it may be Southampton—or Glasgow, even, and some o’ your Presbyterian Scotch cousins.”

“A good job, too,” growled McConaughy. “If we have to muck up the *Joan wi’* soldiermen at all, best they be Ulsterrmen or Scots.”

He strode through the streets to the water-front with a black look on his face. Ardent Presbyterian and Ulster Unionist that he was, Miles McConaughy viewed an English Episcopalian as a milk-and-water Papist and an unconscionably helpless egotist. But the South Irish, whose blood coursed in his own veins, were to him as the spawn of Belial, children of the sulphury pit, itself, minions of that hated creed which he referred to in the time-honoured phrase of the Cameronian hill-preachers as the Scarlet Woman. In his estimation they were ultimate evil.

The first man he met as he strode up the gangway and over the side of the ancient *Emmaline Pankhurst* was Jock Grant.

“Guid mornnin’, Sir,” Grant hailed him. “Ye didna get the worrd, then?”

“Ay, we ha’ the worrd, Mr. Grant,” responded McConaughy with gloomy formality—sure sign he was out of sorts. “Where’s Mr. Apgar?”

“Here, Sir,” whined the nasal voice of Evan Apgar, and the little Welshman emerged from the engine-room hatchway, wiping his fingers on a

ball of waste.

“Come up to the charrt-house,” ordered McConaughy shortly.

In this sanctum he explained briefly his conversations with Miss McNish and Craven.

“We be mortal sinful men, Sir,” exclaimed Apgar, casting his eyes aloft when McConaughy had finished; “but we hafen’t done nothin’ in the sight o’ Proffidence, whateffer, to pring town on us such an affliction o’ scorpion’s and sharp-lashet whips.”

“Papists!” commented Jock Grant slowly, as the full purport of the awful word seeped through his heavy understanding. “Ay, Papists! I canna believe it, Sir! This English Gov’ment are clabber-headit loonies, but they’ll ne’er be sendin’ Irishers to ficht for ’em against the Turrks, noo. Why, ’twould be plain invitin’ one set o’ idolaters tae mak’ friends wi’ another!”

“We’d best be prepared for the worrst,” said McConaughy. “The young leddy yon is a fine brave young leddy, as ye know——”

There was a rumble of assent.

“An’ I propose to stand by her. She’s a friend to us. We’ll be friends to her. We’re in the hands o’ the Lorr. I say it wi’ out blasphemy.”

II

The *Joan of Arc* came out of the hands of the dockyard refitters, shorn of her feminine personality and name. Gone was her conspicuous red funnel, badge of the Red Funnel Line. Gone the black, white and buff painted upperworks. In place of these she showed a hull streaked in wavy, mirky, grayish-green, dirty-white daubs of neutral colouring, designed to melt into a sea background and hide her from the merciless submarine.

Even her funnel was a sickly gray-green hue that changed its tint with every line of rivets. Her identity was disguised under the combination “H-532.” She was no longer a liner of sorts, but a mere numbered and tallied unit in a vast scheme of affairs.

McConaughy looked upon her rapid metamorphosis with foreboding. He was a merchant-skipper, and the ways of the Transport Officers he was thrown in contact with were as strange as they were repugnant to him. The *Joan* was a new command, but even so, she was the crack boat of his owners, and in his regard she held that peculiar place of fetish-reverence which the master-mariner secretly nurses for whatever superior fabric

happens to be nearest to him. The *Joan* was more than the *Joan* to McConaughy. She was the most up-to-date product of Harland & Wolff's yards, the pride of Belfast, flagship of the Red Funnel fleet, the last word in marine architecture of her style. She was his immediate idea of perfection.

Therefore he loved her with the jealousy a devoted suitor has for any superlative mistress. He dreaded to witness the desecration of her decks by lubberly soldiers. Every time he visited the 'tween-decks and saw her spacious holds made over into berths for the accommodation of the troops, with long lines of double-tiered bunks, he shuddered and turned resolutely away to seek what solace he could find on the bridge.

He was fresh from just such a visit the day after the *Joan*—or the “H-532,” as she was now known—had anchored in the roadstead, when Jock Grant hurried up to him with a pink telegraph slip.

“Frae the Transport Officer,” explained Grant.

McConaughy ripped it open without a word. He read:

H-532 will take on board immediately upon receipt of this Fifth Battalion, Royal West Galway Fusiliers, with regimental transport and stores. Officers' chargers will go by Fleet Staff-Transport H-539. The master of H-532 will bear in mind that he is in full charge of his vessel's navigation and the discipline of his crew, but is under no circumstances to have authority over the troops he carries.

Orders as to the movements of H-532 will be communicated by message, wireless or flag signals, as necessity dictates, from the flagship of the Officer Commanding Escort Squadron, and will be obeyed without question. The master of H-532 is recommended to consult with Col. Sarsfield O'Mallagh, the Officer Commanding, Fifth Battalion, Royal West Galway Fusiliers, in all matters wherein the conduct or discipline of the troops on board has relation to the navigation of his vessel. Masters of transports are recommended to bear in mind Transport Officers' Serial Order Z-8574, *in re* necessity for tact in handling such problems as may arise.

This order will take effect upon its receipt.

“It's no guid news ye hae got, skipper?” said Jock uneasily, as the shadow spread across McConaughy's face.

“ ’Tis not,” snapped McConaughy. “But here; read it for yoursel’. We’re in the hands o’ the Philistines, already.”

Jock laboured through the communication and handed it back.

“I’ll be off to tell Evan,” was his only comment.

“Ay,” said McConaughy, “an’ ye may tell him from me——”

“Ahoy! Thransporrt, ahoy!” came a hail from a small boat ranging up to the *Joan’s* counter. “What thransporrt is that?”

“H-532,” bellowed Jock Grant. “An’ be—— to ye, ye yelpin’ clabberjaws!” he added in slightly lower tones.

“Ha, ’tis safe we are then, God be praised!” rang out a cheery voice in a West Irish brogue a knife could never have sliced through. “We’re comin’ aboardd ye, H-532—if it so happens ye’ve anythin’ in the nature av a small flight av stairs.”

“Have ye offeecial business?” demanded McConaughy, himself, leaning over the rail.

“As offeecial as military business may be, me dear man.”

McConaughy’s fists gripped the rail hard.

“Row around to the starboardd gangway, if ye’ve a right to come aboardd,” he directed thickly. “If ye ha’ not, don’t be wastin’ ma time.”

He walked down the deck toward the gangway, a very fair idea of what was to come shaping itself in his mind, and waited while the two passengers in the small-boat stumbled up the slippery stairs.

“Is the Captain aboard?” asked the first man, who wore the insignia of a colonel on his military greatcoat.

“I’m Captain McConaughy.”

By this time the second man had come over-side, and McConaughy saw that he wore a garb that was a mixture of an officer’s uniform and the habit of a Catholic priest. The Ulsterman gave no sign of his feelings, other than the lack of hospitality in his manner.

The first stranger cast a quick glance around him.

“She’s not a Cunarder, Father,” he said, “but she looks a tidy sort of craft, eh?”

The priest nodded.

“Faith, an’ I hope she’s more steady nor the atom ye persisted in takin’ me out here in. Me stomach is still clappin’ the bottom av me lungs.”

The other officer laughed.

“You’ll have to grow sea-legs, Father, and the rest of the men, too, I fancy.”

He turned to McConaughy, who had stood by throughout this brief dialogue with murder struggling to break loose in his heart. “Not a Cunarder, indeed! The lily-livered Papistical children o’ original sin! Wasna the pride o’ the Red Funnel fleet suffeicient for their likes?”

All this was on the tip of McConaughy’s tongue to say, but he strangled it by a mighty effort.

“Oh, by the way, Captain,” said the officer, “I’m Colonel O’Mallagh, of the West Galway Fusiliers. My people are going with you, I suppose you know. This is Father Cashin, our chaplain.”

“’Tis glad I am to meet ye, me son,” said Father Cashin cordially, reaching out a hand which McConaughy failed to notice.

A far-away rumble, like the precedent warning of an earthquake was his sole response to the greeting.

“You might take us around,” suggested Colonel O’Mallagh. “The men will be off by noon.”

“Ye may come wi’ me,” answered McConaughy rigidly. “She’s not a Cunarder—as ye said a minute yon; but she’s considered a comforrtable vessel by them that knows the sea. It may be ye won’t be satisfied wi’ her. If so, I’d suggest ye report to the Thransport Officer before it’s too late.”

Colonel O’Mallagh looked at him curiously.

“I haven’t a doubt the ship’s all right, Captain,” he said quietly. “Lead on.”

“Ye’re an Irishman, Captain McConaughy?” panted Father Cashin, as he descended the new companionway the dockyard men had rigged down the forehatch.

“I’m an Ulsterrman.”

Father Cashin missed a step and dropped down on Colonel O’Mallagh’s neck with a mutter of apologies.

“Ah!” was all he said, but there was a twinkle in his eyes that persisted for several minutes afterward.

Speechless, save when conversation was absolutely necessary, McConaughy guided his two passengers from one end of the ship to the other. Everything was spotlessly clean and orderly. In case of bad weather, the absence of portholes had been remedied by the erection of auxiliary ventilators running up on deck.

“Very well arranged,” was Colonel O’Mallagh’s verdict, when they concluded their inspection in his own cabin aft. “Very well, indeed. I used every bit of influence I possessed at Whitehall to get a P. & O. boat or an Atlantic liner; but in the present rush I daresay we’re lucky to have secured nothing worse.”

McConaughy, in the doorway, choked; shut off the blasphemous words that rose to his lips; experienced a fresh burst of hatred and flared into full eruption.

But as usual when aroused to anger, his voice was level and cold as a chilled-steel blade.

“Through the misconceptions of a dubious Providence or maybe the blunderin’ o’ fools below,” he began, “we are to be shut up on this ship together for some weeks. Ye have a manner, I tell ye plainly, that has no attraction for me; but I’m wishful to do ma duty by the Line which employs me. Ye’re at liberty to do and say what ye please so far as concerns the men under ye, but ma instructions place the navigation an’ handlin’ o’ ma ship in ma own hands. From that I’ll thank ye to stand aside. And inasmuch as I ha’ nothin’ to say about your soldiers, maybe ye’ll be so kind as to ha’ nothin’ to say to me about ma ship. If ye ha’ just cause for complaint, come to me an’ I’ll meet your wishes. That’s ma orrders. But I canna be havin’ any self-suffeccient landlubber who wears a Colonel’s uniform tellin’ me my ship will do because it is no worrse nor it is.”

Throughout this harangue Colonel O’Mallagh stood motionless, eyeing McConaughy at first with an amusement which gave way to anger at the last scorching words.

“But this is insubordination!” he exclaimed coolly. “Would you insult me, man? I’m not the kind to take such words calmly. You have two minutes by my watch to apologise, and if not——”

McConaughy drew from his pocket the telegram he had received immediately before Colonel O’Mallagh came aboard. A contemptuous grin

twisted his features.

“Here’s my instructions,” he said. “‘The master of H-532 will bear in mind that he is in full charge of his vessel’s navigation and the discipline of his crew.’ Is that expleecit enough for ye? I’d be very glad to take the subject o’ the remarkks ye made just now to an officer o’ higher rank nor yourself. An’ d’ye think your superiors would be pleased to have throuble sprung on ’em at this moment, wi’ the throops on the embarkin’ stages, an’ sailin’ orders issued?”

“It is not my intention to dispute your authority over your own vessel,” replied Colonel O’Mallagh. “But you owe a certain respect to the uniform I wear, and I tell you I’ll not permit any dirty, rebellious Ulster talk from you or any other man.”

The Colonel’s eye flashed as he spoke, and his fists clinched involuntarily as McConaughy’s eyes flamed back their challenge. But Father Cashin decided that this was the time to interfere.

He caught Colonel O’Mallagh by the sleeve and drew him back into the cabin, out of earshot of McConaughy.

“Are ye mad, sorr?” he pleaded quickly. “’Twould make throuble for all of us if ye mixed it up wid this beetle-browed son av the Pit. The bhoys would be wild; they’d wreck the ship. We’d all be court-martialed, an’ insthead av active service an’ glory galore, we’d be phack-drillin’ in some prison camp. Besides—take this in the right spirit now—the man has ground to stand on. Ye were not kindly in the way ye spoke av his ship.”

The anger peeled off O’Mallagh’s face as a shower disappears across Killarney Lakes.

“You are right, Father,” he admitted. “His ship would mean as much to him, I suppose, as the regiment does to me.”

“Ye’ve said it, me son. Now say it to him. Ye need not give in, but—ye undherstand me.”

Colonel O’Mallagh nodded and turned to the dour bulk of McConaughy, standing in the cabin doorway.

“Although your own manner has not been wanting offensiveness,” he said, “I want to say that I had no intention of belittling your ship, Captain, or the fine-hearted work you’ve done in making her ready for my men. I appreciate it.”

McConaughy grunted scornfully. He was not to be smoothed over by any half-hearted apology, as he styled the Colonel's words. So his only answer was a gruff:

"I want none o' your appreciation or thanks. I'll do ma duty, an' 'tend to ma own business. Do ye do the like, an' we'll ha' no throuble."

O'Mallagh shrugged his shoulders. He had recovered his own temper, and McConaughy's continued disagreeableness was become a source of amusement to him.

"Have it your own way, Captain," he replied. "Life's too short for quarreling with friends when we have all Germany to pick from—eh, Father?"

"Ye shpeak truth," agreed the priest. "An' if I might make so bowld, sorr," he continued, addressing McConaughy, "I'd like to say to ye——"

"I want no advice from your cloth, an' ye might as well know that now," rasped McConaughy.

There was a silence.

"Is there anything ye wish?" he demanded. "I ha' worrk——"

"No, nothing," said Colonel O'Mallagh coldly. "Father Cashin and I will remain on board."

III

When the *Joan of Arc* steamed from Cork on the first leg of her voyage, the Fusiliers lined her rails, swarmed in her rigging, massed on every conspicuous spot they could reach, and cheered and sang. First, they sang to the crowds on the shore; then they sang to the passing craft they met in the fairway; and when distance had isolated them they continued to sing to the mocking bluejackets on the attendant destroyers, who knew to the fraction of a sea-mile how long this mood would last.

All went well until the *Joan* rounded a certain headland, where shipping begin to catch the vicious, choppy roll of the Channel, with the ponderous thrust of the whole Atlantic Ocean behind it. McConaughy was on the bridge, and as he saw the succession of rollers heading for them, he turned to the quartermaster at the wheel, with a grim chuckle, and said:

"Ease her off a bit. Ay, so. Let her take it on the counterr."

Those harmless-looking rollers spattered themselves in spewing foam over the *Joan's* fo'c's'le, and there was a howl from the drenched soldiers who had been enjoying themselves in fancied safety. But worse was to come. The shower of foam was followed by a peculiar crossways, retching dip, glide and rebound as the ship came up to meet the rollers, slid off, came up again and bored through. In five minutes her decks were covered with uneasy men, and the songs and shouting were replaced by the groans of sufferers sore sick with a sickness they had never known before.

The commander of the nearest destroyer ran up a trifle closer at the first sign of the *Joan's* unorthodox performances; but a near view of the state of affairs left him and his men also prostrate wrecks.

“Heaven send we don't flush a submarine just now!” he exclaimed to his second in command between gales of laughter. “But there's a man over there with a sense of humour. Rudimentary, perhaps, but—I say, did you see those Paddies collapse?”

From the bridge McConaughy viewed the results of his strategy with a face that never altered. Indeed, after a quarter of an hour of trick-work it was unnecessary for him to assist nature. The *Joan* by then was feeling the full influence of the heaving green water, and the Fusiliers had gained such a fair start that they were some laps ahead of the game, as it were. He turned over the bridge to Jock Grant with a feeling of profound satisfaction.

“'Twas a masterfu' stroke, Skipper!” said Jock, who had enjoyed the incident with more than his ordinary appreciation of humour.

“Eh, Jock? What would ye say?”

“Oh, nought,” answered Jock, with what he meant for a sly wink.

At the engine-room hatchway McConaughy encountered Evan Apgar.

“Ye may hafe callet it a joke,” grumbled the Chief Engineer, “but I wish ye could see t'e floor o' t'e fireroom. T'e coal-passers wasn't ready for such monkey-shines, whateffer.”

McConaughy laid one finger alongside of his nose.

“Hecht, Evan man, come wi' me.”

He led him gently to the hatchway entrance, whence could be gained an unobstructed view of the deck under the sullen grey evening sky. Apgar took one look and slid down upon his haunches shaking all over.

“I'll say no more, Skipper,” he grunted at last.

Luck played into McConaughy's hands. The second day out they ran into a gale that blew up from the breeding-place of the great storms somewhere near the Line. The flagship of the Escort Squadron made signal "Rendezvous at Gib"; the transport fleet parted company; the destroyers scuttled for shelter.

It was a case of making sea-room for all. Several score odd vessels, big and little, feel uncomfortable when herded in together under the lash of the mighty winds. As a gale, of course, it was not much to McConaughy. There was one spell of thirty-six hours he spent on the bridge, peering under dripping sou-wester at the stunning seas that breached the bow; but he did this as a matter of principle and habit, rather than because he thought there was any special need for it.

After the wind had moderated he delighted to scare the wits out of the few Irishmen who had earned their sea-legs by taking an occasional breaker over the counter. A day of this hair-raising experience reduced them to a state little better than that of their more unfortunate brethren. Colonel O'Mallagh and his officers were all in the same case. The one man of the Fusiliers who bore up under all McConaughy's devilment was Father Cashin.

Sick as a man well could be at the start of the expedition, the little priest had pulled himself to his feet as soon as he realised the suffering of his "bhoys," as he called them, and from the time the storm broke he was the busiest person on board. He suffered as the others did, but not so much, simply because he kept moving and occupied. He had come up on deck for a much-needed breath of fresh air—the berth-decks were vile from their necessarily shut-in condition—and he was sharp enough to note, landsman though he was, the dexterous manœuvring of the helmsman that brought about the impressive deluges of salt water.

The hot Irish soul in him flared up in righteous indignation against the perpetrator of such a joke, although he refused to dignify it by this name; and he made his way unsteadily to the bridge where McConaughy stood, sardonically enjoying the rout of the Fusiliers' forlorn hope.

"D'ye call yourself a man, Captain McConaughy?" he demanded at once.

"I do not call maself a Papist," retorted McConaughy.

The priest disregarded this counter-attack, but the hostility in McConaughy's eyes fanned his indignation into ripe anger of a wholesome

intensity.

McConaughy started back involuntarily as the little man crowded toward him, hanging on by one hand to the bridge-screens.

“Ye’re a broth av a foine, large, upsthandin’ man,” said Father Cashin, his brogue thickening in his excitement, “and I’m afther supposin’—though ye do not give me warrant for it—that ye must have some repetashun wid your employers to be havin’ command av a vessel the like av this. But I say this to ye, freely, Sorr: Ye demonstrated just now the sinsibility av a schoolboy an’ the callousness av a heathen. Ye have gone out av your way to call me out av me religion, an’ I’m glad to be afther havin’ this to say to ye, in addition: I’m more than pleased that I’ve nothin’ in common wid the likes av you. Ye are sent out at expinse av Gov’ment to do imporrtant worrk, an’ how do ye do it? Like an irresponsible bhoy, no less. Blanhanderin’ an’ blatherskitin’ an’——”

McConaughy had been too startled by this outburst to take up the challenge, but now he interrupted with a bull roar of wrath.

“Would ye insult me on ma own bridge?” he shouted. “Get off before I do ye a mischief!”

Father Cashin leveled a single glance at him.

“I’m havin’ no fear ye would sthrike me,” said the priest dryly. “I’ve handled men more dhrunk than yourself before now, an’ divil a marrk have I to show for it.”

“Dhrunk?” roared McConaughy, brandishing a mighty fist. “Dhrunk? Man, are ye daft? Would ye tell Miles McConaughy he’s drunk on his own bridge. Me, that have never——”

“Even so,” interrupted Father Cashin, composedly; as composedly, that is, as a man may who is swinging to the motions of a storm-tossed ship. “What it is ye’re dhrunk on I do not claim to know. But no man who was not dhrunk out av his throe sinses by some unholy passion would act as ye have acted.”

McConaughy laughed, a sneering, vaunting laugh.

“Ho, ho! D’ye think because ye’re accepted by your Papist flock that ye can speak in parables to me? Ye mean nothin’ to me, ma man—nothin’ save a matter to be avoided. So now get off ma bridge before I ha’ ye put off. I ha’ worrk before me—the care o’ your immorrtal soul, no less!”

And McConaughy laughed again. But he did not laugh long.

Father Cashin came up close to him, so close that his wagging forefinger agitated directly under McConaughy's chin—Father Cashin was too short to reach his nose; and the eyes of the quartermaster, who was used to cursing in reason, even from his psalm-singing skipper, rolled in terror at the flood of vitriol that the priest poured on McConaughy's head.

“There wasna a blasphemy in all that he said,” McConaughy confessed afterwards in recounting what had happened to Jock Grant. “But the man had the language o’ the Bible an’ the Prophets a’ twisted around the tip o’ his tongue. I’m a ready-thinkin’ man, Jock, as ye ken; but he had me fashed. I’ll admit it. On ma own bridge, too. Ye’ll credit ma amaze. I stood there an’ listened like a loon.”

So he did, and when Father Cashin had finished to his own satisfaction, all McConaughy could think of was to draw out his written instructions for the voyage.

“I ha’ listened to all ye’ve said,” he replied as calmly as he could. “Now I ha’ this to say. I am in command o’ this ship. I am responsible for her navigation. Wi’ your perrsonal beliefs an’ prejudices, I ha’ nothin’ to do. Ye are obsthructin’ ma worrk, so I ask ye to leave me be.”

But this was merely stimulating Father Cashin's temper. Once more he stepped on to McConaughy's toes, and wagged his menacing finger into the Ulsterman's grizzled chin.

“Will ye undherstand, me man, once an’ for all,” challenged the priest, “I will not be lettin’ the likes av you tell me me dhuty? I know what ye’ve been up to, addin’ to the sufferin’s av me poor bhoys, an’ if I have a chance some day ye shall sweat for all that ye’ve caused——”

In desperation McConaughy turned to the helmsman and dropped a suggestive eye towards a mountain of water that was piling up on the starboard counter. A deft flirt of the wheel, and an instant later Father Cashin's new diatribe simmered out beneath a flood that swept him into the port scuppers. Here McConaughy found him and jerked him to his feet.

“Ye limb av Satan—ye—ye——”

“There, now, little man,” urged the Ulsterman soothingly. “’Tis no weather for a landsman. Get below.”

“Ye did that as ye did before. It was purposed. I saw it.”

“Saw what?” asked McConaughy in pained surprise.

“I saw the signal ye were afther makin,’ an’ if ye think—— Take your hand off me arm.”

“Here ye are,” said McConaughy cheerfully, heedless of the command, as he guided his drenched victim to the companionway. “Mind, now; hang to the hand-rail.”

“I’ll not go below while ye are up to your thricks!”

“D’ye perrist in defyin’ me?” said McConaughy sternly. “Who is in command here? Would ye not obey the orrders o’ your Colonel?”

“That’s neither here nor there. Unloose me. Would ye be layin’ your hands on a priest?”

The two confronted each other at the head of the ladder to the deck, and McConaughy was conscious of a grudging admiration for the little man who had outfaced him.

“The priest parrt o’ ye means nothin’ to me,” he growled. “The fact that ye are a man means more. But for the present ye are in the way, an’ I ha’ not the time to argue wi’ you.”

Father Cashin perceived the weakening in this attitude and pressed his advantage.

“Very well, then. Will ye give me your word there shall be no more av this wicked playwork to make sick men sicker?” he pressed.

McConaughy hesitated. To tell the truth he was tired of the whole business. He was not, strictly speaking, a humourist, but he was able to see that if his little trick was suspected it had lost its point.

“Had ye any experience wi’ the sea,” he said gruffly, “ye’d appreciate the deeficulties o’ the poseetion. But ’twould be expectin’ too much from your cloth to ask that—let alone ye ha’ lacked opportunities to realise what ye ha’ escaped. But I think we are through wi’ bad weather for the time.”

“I’ll hold ye to that last,” warned Father Cashin, as he descended the ladder to the deck.

McConaughy watched his difficult progress to the nearest hatchway with interest.

“Hecht!” muttered the *Joan’s* skipper to himself. “Yon’s a fearless bit man. Arrogant wi’ papacy, no doubt—’tis a malignant race. But we’ll break ’em yet.”

IV

Somehow—nothing is ever kept private for long on shipboard—the story of Father Cashin’s interview with McConaughy got abroad, and the feeling between the Fusiliers and the *Joan’s* crew, never cordial, became a thing to worry about. Not that the responsible heads on either side gave it a moment’s consideration; this is seldom done.

It is natural that soldiers and sailors should disagree. Moreover, McConaughy, for one, took secret delight in the widening of the breach between his men and Colonel O’Mallagh’s, when he heard that a brawny Scotch quartermaster had knocked out the Athlone Giant, reputed to be the second strongest heavyweight in the Irish Division.

So there was more or less of an armed truce during the remainder of the *Joan’s* run to a certain destination in the Sporades, where the expedition was mobilising for the last dash at the point of attack. Fights were of too common occurrence to deserve particular notice.

McConaughy and his officers were on scant speaking-terms with Colonel O’Mallagh and his officers. Indeed, when the transport arrived at the base, a rock-bound, submarine-proof harbour in a musical-comedy island, within striking distance of the Dardanelles, and Colonel O’Mallagh went ashore to pay his respects at Headquarters to the Officer Commanding-in-Chief, that functionary regarded him keenly and said:

“What’s the matter with your people? My aides report the men look rather fagged.”

“We haven’t had a very comfortable voyage,” answered Colonel O’Mallagh miserably. “And the ship’s master and his crew are a set of demons from some Ulster inferno. It’s been all we could do to keep them from fighting the Regiment.”

“Oh, that’s all, eh?” said the General with obvious relief. “Well, don’t let it worry you, Colonel. I was afraid we might have to quarantine you or something. We can’t spare men for that. If your fellows are longing for a fight, they’ll get it.”

“Thank you, sir. That’s the very word they are waiting for,” returned O’Mallagh eagerly. “May I tell them?”

“I’ve no objections.”

An hour later the Fusiliers woke the echoes of the hills that overhung the harbour with their far flung whoops of joy. McConaughy and his men

viewed them somewhat derisively.

“Cannon-food, puir loons,” commented Jock Grant.

“Ay,” agreed Evan. “Steepit in t’e pitch o’ sin, t’e misguitet idiots! What chance hafe they got? T’e talons o’ Satan is fixed in their fitals this minute.”

The Fusiliers stopped cheering and began to sing. No, it wasn’t “Tipperary,” which had outlived its brief fame by this time. Nor was it “Is This Misther Clancey that Kapes the Hotel?” for this, be it remembered, was an Irish regiment. The corps which evinced an interest in the identity of Mr. Clancey were mainly of Cockney extraction.

The song which was bringing the troops on other transports to the rails, to listen in mingled amusement and enthusiasm, was “The Wearing of the Green”; and the Fusiliers sang it as the Irish Brigade at Fontenoy might have sung “The Young Chevalier,” with the blood of “Butcher” Cumberland’s redcoats still on their bayonets.

“The—— traitorrs!” grunted Jock.

“Repels, that’s what I call ’em, inteet!” barked Apgar.

“There’s nae doot the English are fuils tae be sendin’ such-like for fechtin’ wi’ the Turrks,” continued Jock. “They’ll but wait the chance, an’ then turn against us.”

Apgar nodded gloomily and they both looked at McConaughy, who so far had said nothing. There was a frown on his face.

“I’m none so sure ye ha’ the right o’ it,” he said at last. “As for rebels, Evan, why ’tis a name I’ve been proud to bear in ma time—an’ so ha’ you.”

“Would ye speak up for t’e Paapists?” gasped Apgar.

“I would not. But if there’s to be fightin’ I’m o’ the opeenion ye may hearr o’ them. D’ye see, now? They’re white men, are they not?”

“Ay,” chorussed Jock and Evan.

“And do ye be meanin’ to tell me white men, Papists or no Papists, are not a match for greasy Asiatics? Hecht! I’m lookin’ to see a fight worrth while—more especially, d’ye obsarrve, if yon bit priest man gets in.”

“Ye talk like a converrt,” objected Jock Grant in disgust.

“Say converrt to me, an’ I’ll bash the head o’ ye in, big as ye are!” flashed McConaughy in sudden wrath. “I’m speakin’ by the light o’ ma obsarrvations, an’ wi’out prejudice.”

“They’re Irish, ye’ll atmit?” demanded Apgar.

“Aye, Evan. ’Tis manifest at this moment if ye but listen to their treasonable song.”

“An’ Paapists to poot! An’ ye hafe scrappet your own argyment, Skipper, when ye callet their song ‘treasonaple’—which it is!”

“Maybe so,” admitted McConaughy uneasily. “But there’s——”

“An’ ye know they’re plunget unrepentent in efil, wallowin’ in t’e mire o’ t’e pit, scornful o’ salfation an’——”

“Thru, Evan man, but——”

“Touchin’ their state o’ sin there can be nae doot, sir,” interjected Jock Grant. “If ye gie them the chance o’ prredestination, an’ say they hae no choice but tae go i’ the de’il’s path they were born in, then ye hae gied them a’ Prrovidence wad allow. Ye’ll admit that?”

“Hecht!” roared McConaughy. “I’ll admit nothin’. I’m forrgettin’ by times I ha’ a crew o’ theeologians instead o’ sailormen. The arrgyement is wi’out benefit to either side. I’m right an’ you’re wrong. An’ ye’re right an’ I’m wrong. But ye ha’ the worrds o’ me. I’ll say that much.”

“Put Jock’s claim o’ pretestination,” interposed Apgar. “I couldn’t atmit that, whateffer. Nor you neither, Skipper. That’s arrant Prespyterianism, that is.”

Jock Grant emitted a bellow of wrath.

“Evan mon, wad ye tempt me tae wring yer neck?” he demanded fiercely.

McConaughy shoved his compact figure between the two.

“D’ye think to dignify your religion by maulin’ yersel’s before they Papishers?” he inquired. “No more now.”

His voice took on the icy ring it acquired in times when he meant to be obeyed. Grant and Apgar promptly wilted.

“We’ll ha’ no more o’ this arrgyement,” he cut off their stumbling explanations. “An’ don’t be givin’ me cause to rremind ye again. Get to your engines, Evan. Jock, I’ll see ye in the charrt-house.”

In a way, McConaughy was secretly ashamed for the stand he had taken against his First Officer and Chief; and yet, at the same time, he found himself advancing reasons for the belief that the Fusiliers, and particularly

Father Cashin, were not so black as he had first painted them to himself. Why this was so, he could not understand. For a Papist to McConaughy always had been the most spiteful of creatures, surpassed in evil possibilities only by an Irish Papist. He had been brought up to believe that the physical connection of Ulster with the three southern provinces was the result of some handiwork of the devil, designed as a sore temptation and scourge of the faithful.

Now, he found himself trying to advance excuses for an Irish Papist, and a priest at that. But outwardly, his attitude toward Father Cashin was as disdainful as ever, and as for Colonel O'Mallagh and his officers—why, McConaughy did not look at them, if he could help it.

During the week that the *Joan* lay at the base, many other ships joined the transport fleet, some coming from Alexandria, some from Marseilles—loaded with war-worn veterans of the Flanders trenches, these; and some from home. Stout old individualist and hater of official authority—as expressed in terms of British officialdom—though he was, McConaughy was impressed by this tremendous assemblage of craft, far and away the greatest he had ever seen. But what most impressed him and his lieutenants was the enormous cost of it all.

“Man, man,” McConaughy confided one day to Jock Grant, after they had finished checking over the indents of several hundred tons of new stores. “D’ye appreciate the awful recklessness of it all? Money! Why, it means nought to these English officer men. They willna bother themsel’s to read a paper if it accounts for less nor a thousand pounds. ’Tis dreadful! Fair wickedly wasteful!”

“I wadna waste porritch as they Commissary loons waste fresh beef,” agreed Jock. “My requisition ca’ed for but ten hunderdweight, but rather nor carve a carrcass they gied me fifty pun’ addeetional, an’ laughed when I asked a ccredit for other stores.”

“Evan is the man that enjoys it all,” said McConaughy, with a grin. “He’s stocked up wi’ engine-room supplies till his lockers ha’ flowed over, an’ but this mornnin’ he came to me, askin’ could he ha’ room in the fore-peak for a fresh case o’ lubricants.”

“For the English it may be a’ richt,” said Jock, as he moved toward the door. “They’ll be dyin’ soon or late, wi’ their bloody fechtin’ hither an’ yon. An’ a mon may live well whiles he has the opportunity. I’ll nae begrudge it tae ’em. I’m wishfu’ we had the same chance before us.”

“What? Dyin’?” asked McConaughy grimly.

“Nae, ye dinna catch ma drrift, Skipper. I’m nae mair overanxious for dyin’ than yersel’. But I could pleasure masel’ in the fechtin’ when it comes.”

“That ye could, Jock. An’ so could the rest o’ us.”

Something in McConaughy’s tone attracted Mr. Grant’s attention.

“Hae ye a meanin’ hid beneath they worrds, Sir?” he asked.

“I said what I said, Jock,” returned McConaughy. “But——”

He hesitated.

“I’d enjoy the fightin’ as much as yersel’.”

“Ye hae a plan, then?” pressed Jock.

“I ha’ hopes, Jock, ye might say. An’ I ha’ a deep confidence the Lorr’d is indulgent to them that mingle hopes wi’ prayers.”

“If prayers will do it, there’s nae doot at a’,” said Jock relievedly. “I’ll mak’ every gowk i’ the fo’c’s’le pray till his shinbones ache.”

Three o’clock of a raw Spring morning found the *Joan* pitching restlessly on the Ægean swell, one of a mob of ships herded vigilantly by swift destroyers, all steaming at eight knots towards the shores of Gallipoli—cruisers, transports, mine-sweepers, trawlers, tugboats towing strings of lighters. There was no sleep on any craft. Sailors and soldiers all crowded the railings, straining into the thick gloom ahead, as yet unbroken by the sunrise flare.

In and out along the busy deck Father Cashin pushed his way, attending to a hundred and one details that were beyond the ken of any Line officer. He saw to it that the youngsters had their kits packed right; suggested the proper proportion of “the rale stuff” to mingle with water in the canteen; cautioned the lazy to tallow their feet thoroughly; and paused now and then to write a letter for a man who was glad to avail himself of the priest’s fluent fountain pen.

“Don’t be shparin’ yourself a mite av botheration, Timmie,” he would say. “It’s yourself will be glad for the pains ye’ve took this time to-morrer—if ye have the luck to be alive. But I needn’t be so encouragin’! An’ have ye confessed?”

In the excitement aboard the *Joan* the differences of the past were forgotten or laid aside. Colonel O'Mallagh stood beside McConaughy on the bridge, by formal arrangement prepared to lend any assistance he could in the difficult task that confronted them. They were united by a bond of common interest.

"How far is it now?" asked O'Mallagh for the second time in two hours.

"About ten miles I make it," returned McConaughy, glancing at the special Expeditionary chart pegged on a small shelf by the binnacle—the only light showing above the water-line, except for a tail-lamp over the stern. "But wi' all this rabble 'tis——"

He was interrupted by a hail from close aboard, and crossing to the starboard wing of the bridge, he looked down on the narrow black hull of a destroyer that had ranged alongside.

"Ahoy, H-532," came the hail again. "This is the *Flitterwing*, destroyer."

"Ay," said McConaughy.

"Our orders are to take you in. We'll pilot you to your anchorage and stand by to cover your landing operations. Have your boats swung out and ready for emergency. Don't lose us."

"Ay," repeated McConaughy indifferently.

What a pother and fuss about a perfectly simple operation! he growled to himself. But that was the way of the English Navy.

The destroyer slipped ahead; the quartermaster at the transport's wheel put the helm over a trifle, and she followed in the wake of the smaller craft.

McConaughy returned to his position by the binnacle.

"There's the sun at last," said O'Mallagh.

He pointed to a streak of light that shot up into the eastern sky. But before the words were well out of his mouth, a far-off, muffled boom reached them.

"No, by Jove!" he exclaimed. "It's the Turks!"

The boom became a full, deep-throated roar, and the eastern horizon was lambent with the flashes of the mouthing guns. The cannonade grew and swelled in majestic dissonances, until it seemed to split the portals of the night.

Then, all in a moment, the sun leaped up over the low hills of the land ahead of them, and day dawned gloriously, with the many-hued splendour of an Ægean sunrise. It was as if a curtain had been snatched from some mighty proscenium.

One minute all had been indistinct; the next the watchers on the *Joan's* bridge saw the great panorama stretching away before them, heaving waters, and dark warships, and a rugged, woody shore, broken by small promontories and bays, rimmed by a narrow beach.

Other transports were in closer than the *Joan*, and from some of them men were already swarming into the tenders and small boats. And now the fire of the Turks tripled in volume. To the roar of the big guns was joined the rattle of rifle fire and the staccato clatter of machine-guns, drumming, drumming, dr-rr-rrumming.

The water around the tenders close in shore was lashed into foam by the projectiles. A tug crammed to the guards with Highlanders caught a 4.7-inch shell in her boiler, and went down in a horrid smother of smoke and steam, leaving the sea dotted with bobbing heads. Tenders and small boats were in trouble on every hand, but those uninjured kept on, and every man in the water who could swim aimed for the beach, rather than for the transports.

Despite himself, McConaughy was impressed again. He preserved his characteristic phlegm with some effort, but beneath the surface he was deeply stirred. This was bigger than anything he had ever imagined. It was different. It was enormous. The ruthlessness of the idea of throwing all these men into such terrible danger appealed to his own love of power. He itched to have a share in it, to be in control of it. Surveying the field, he was telling himself already that if it had been his plan he would have done thus-and-so.

“Wasteful! Just like the English,” he grunted. “Why do they no preten’ they do be plannin’ something else? ’Tis batterin’ out the brains o’ they chaps to fling ’em all against the one cove.”

“Quite right, I daresay, Captain,” agreed Colonel O’Mallagh, peering through his binoculars at the first files of men struggling ashore. “But our fellows have made it already, you see.”

“They’re so much nearer slaughterr, then,” returned McConaughy. “Ah, d’ye see that?”

The thin line of men that reached across the beach shivered and flew to pieces under some invisible strain. They never reached the bushes and cover. The same fate awaited the second line, and a third, fourth, and fifth. The

British straggled out of the surf, weary and panting, only to face the fire of an enemy they could not see, lying protected in masked rifle-pits. Every step they took they stumbled on barbed wire, ingeniously woven through the sand, and even running down into the sea, so that in many cases their boats could not venture close in.

“Here comes the *Flitterwing*,” said McConaughy, as the destroyer turned and made back to them.

She steamed close and an officer hailed:

“Slow down, H-532. The admiral has wirelessly to hold you.”

“Is the attack abandoned?” called O’Mallagh.

“Don’t know. We’re going in to support, though.”

While the destroyer was turning her nose to the shore her bluejackets were loading the four-inch guns she carried fore and aft, and before she was under way once more they had opened fire, their shells kicking up the sand in the bushes that lined the beach just above the heaps of bodies that marked the limit reached by the landing parties.

McConaughy shrugged his shoulders.

“Firrst, d’ye obsarrve, we were goin’ to ha’ a land battle,” he remarked. “Now, ’tis to be a sea battle. Marrk the consistency o’ the English. They’re a ggrand race, and consistency is one o’ their ggrandist ttraits.”

The Irishman snapped his binoculars back into their case.

“True, perhaps,” he said. “But it is easy enough for you to talk. You are here in safety, Captain. In all probability, you will never be in danger. But do you suppose those poor devils over there on the beach found fault with their superiors? Not they.”

A brick-red flush crept up McConaughy’s neck.

“D’ye—d’ye—mean I’m—I’m afraid?” he gasped.

“I’m not seeking a quarrel with you,” replied Colonel O’Mallagh quietly. “I’m merely telling you that it is not becoming in a man like yourself, who is not called upon to run any risk, to criticise the men who are not afraid to risk all.”

“Ye mean I’m afraid, just the same,” roared McConaughy. “Ay, I know ye! Hecht! Let me tell ye, no man yet told Miles McConaughy he feared aught but the Lorr! An’ if ye’d seek to tell me now, ye’ll be the last!”

“I’d advise against making a scene, Captain,” said O’Mallagh coolly. “I think you’d find yourself in a serious position if you tried to start any trouble _____”

“Who said aught o’ trouble?” demanded McConaughy. “I’m tellin’ ye this alone: Where ye go, I’ll go—ay, an’ farrther, too, if there’s land to walk on, or sea to swim in!”

“All right, I’ll be glad to have you.”

“Ye will, before ye’re through,” responded McConaughy grimly. “Now, d’ye still want to get ashore?”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m askin’ ye a question. D’ye still want to get ashore?”

“Yes, but the *Flitterwing*——”

“De’il take the *Flitterwing*!” bellowed McConaughy. “Why should I heed her?”

A glance showed him the destroyer had proceeded to the southward on a reconnoitring tour, dropping shells into the hills at intervals to draw the fire of the Turks. The transport fleet lay just behind them, but there were no warships in the immediate vicinity; and ashore the fire had died down as the British retreated.

“Tell me this?” resumed McConaughy to the bewildered O’Mallagh. “In the circumstances ye’re in command here—are ye not?”

“I suppose so.”

“An’ ye can ordherr me to do what ye will?”

“Yes.”

They were interrupted by the simultaneous arrival from opposite directions of Father Cashin and Jock Grant. Jock said nothing, merely placing himself behind his captain. Father Cashin was more bellicose.

“Are ye fightin’ again, McConaughy?” he asked with scant courtesy.

“Not yet, little man,” grinned McConaughy. “But ye’ll get your bellyful soon if I ha’ ma way.”

He confronted O’Mallagh again.

“Now, then, will ye guarantee ma owners against loss if I put ma ship at your disposal?”

“I don’t follow you, Captain,” answered O’Mallagh, with a puzzled shake of the head. “What’s all this——”

“No, no,” McConaughy broke in impatiently. “I’m offerin’ to put ye ashore—d’ye ken ma meanin? Firrst ashore o’ your whole Army! Now, will ye sign a paper that the Gov’ment will indemnify ma ownerrs if aught happens to the ship?”

“You are very careful before you make this great attempt,” thrust O’Mallagh.

A light flamed up in McConaughy’s eyes. But Father Cashin intervened with a quick nod of appreciation.

“The man’s right, Colonel, Sorr,” he said. “He has his dhuty to his ownerrs. The ship must be costly, an’ he has no call to be riskin’ her widout authority.”

“Very well,” said O’Mallagh. “I’ll sign an order assuming responsibility for the ship. What’s your proposition?”

“By your leave—firrst,” McConaughy interrupted, producing a notebook. “Ha’ ye a fountain pen, little man?”

“I have that, me big bucko,” returned Father Cashin.

“It might be as well to write out the orrdher now,” continued McConaughy. “We’ll take no chances. It’ll mean the offside o’ a hun’erd an’ twenty-five thousand pounds for ma ownerrs.”

Colonel O’Mallagh cursed in aggravation at the Ulsterman’s cool deliberation, but a warning poke from the priest held him to a peaceful course. He scratched a hurried order pressing the *Joan* into emergency service, and guaranteeing her owners compensation for any damage which might result to her.

“Are you satisfied, my long-winded friend?” he asked as he handed it over. “From your talk I thought you’d have us landed by this time?”

“We’ll be there soon enough to please ye,” rejoined McConaughy placidly, tucking the precious paper away in a waterproof wallet.

“An’ what will ye be doin,’ Captain?” inquired Father Cashin.

“Run ye ashore.”

“What?” exclaimed O’Mallagh.

“Ay, run ye ashore—so ye can just tumble from the lower-deck carrgo-porrts into the surrf. An’ afther that the rest o’ the Army can come in behind us, takin’ our wake. Hecht, man, we’ll show the English a lesson, if ye ha’ the guts to stand the gaff!”

VI

McConaughy could not have picked out a better or more psychological moment for the execution of the exploit which was to make his name a household word in the Levant. The British transports had drawn out of range of the shore-batteries, which were still engaged with the heavier ordnance of the warships, and the Turkish infantry in the breach-trenches had relaxed their vigilance. Being McConaughy, he sized up the situation at a glance.

“Ye’d best get your men below,” he said to O’Mallagh. “There’ll be the less chance for hurrt. Keep undherr coverr, all o’ ye. Rremember, we’re wantin’ to take yon Turrks by surrprise.”

O’Mallagh, with Father Cashin at his elbow to prompt him, accepted McConaughy’s orders with unwonted meekness. The wondering and protesting rank and file of the Fusiliers were sent below, and cooped up in the hold. The *Joan* appeared again as an innocent cargo-boat, luridly painted but otherwise guiltless of indications of her military character. Having seen to this, McConaughy paid a visit to the engine-room, where he found Evan Apgar sweating industriously over a smoking bearing.

“Dhrop that foolery, Evan man,” he directed. “We’ve serious matthers undher foot.”

“What?” demanded Evan rather surlily—the *Joan* was a kittle ship, and he had few chances at the tinkery that was meat and drink to his artist’s soul.

“We’re goin’ to run ashore. An’ I want every ounce o’ steam ye can cram into her.”

“Name o’ John Wesley!” shouted Apgar. “Are ye maad, whateffer?”

“Did ye ever know Miles McConaughy mad, Evan? No, I’m angry. Whist, it may be I’m foolish to risk our mortal bodies this way—I’m no worryin’ about the souls o’ any o’ ye; though I’m thinkin’ the Irish’ll be in a bad corner o’ Hell, if anything goes wrong—but ’tis a grand thing for the ownerrs.”

“For t’e owners?”

Blank bewilderment showed in Apgar’s face.

“Ay, Evan. The English assume full responsibility for our loss. Hecht, d’ye see the point? In the hands o’ the English I knew we’d lose the *Joan* sooner or later, so I’ve fixed it that we get back her value at the startt-out.”

“But ye’d run her ashore under t’e guns?”

“Ye’re not afraid, are ye?”

“Afraid? Me? Ah, Skipper, ye know well Evan Apgar ain’t afraid whateffer.”

“Good. Here’s what I want.”

McConaughy sketched briefly the situation, and Apgar was convinced, heart and soul.

“If it’s speed ye want, ye shall hafe it, sir,” he cried. “We’ll show t’e Paapists if we’re afraid.”

He leaned over the brass rail that walled off the narrow grating on which he sat amongst his gauges and levers, and shrieked aspirated instructions in mingled Welsh and English to the stokers who toiled in the fireroom.

On the bridge McConaughy found Colonel O’Mallagh, Father Cashin, and Jock Grant, erecting a rough barricade around the chart-house. It was not exactly bullet-proof, but it provided some shelter.

“Full speed ahead,” was McConaughy’s greeting. “Jock, give Evan the signal. Quarrterr-mastherr, set your course by yon sunken lighter, an’ make for the centre o’ the bit o’ bight ye see sthraidt ahead o’ ye.”

He turned to O’Mallagh.

“Ha’ ye machine-guns? Well, ye might bring ’em up on deck, wi’ some good gunners. We’ll need some cover against the fire they Turrks will be puttin’ on us.”

O’Mallagh hastened to carry out the suggestion. By this time he did not require a nudge or a word of whispered expostulation from the priest. He was hypnotised by the cold, ferocious energy of the Ulsterman.

“Ye’ll be makin’ for the centre av the little harbour?” asked Father Cashin.

“Ay,” said McConaughy. “They’ll be firin’ at us from both sides, an’ half the time they’ll be shootin’ each other.”

“Man, man, but ye’re a devil,” said the priest admiringly.

“I thank ye,” was McConaughy’s dry acknowledgment.

The *Joan* had gathered way on her, and now she was steaming along through the quiet sea at a smashing clip. Her throbbing engines were driving her as she had never been driven before, as Apgar would never have dared to drive any save a doomed vessel. What mattered it if the bed-plates did rock against their courses, if piston-rods tore back and forth with a violence that threatened disjointment of their connections?

She had separated from the body of the transport fleet before anybody noticed her conduct. The warships were all preoccupied in their methodical searching out of the Turkish land batteries. And the Turks were too busy dodging the warships’ shells to pay any attention to the lone steamer that came tearing inshore toward the spot where so many brave men had drowned a few minutes before. She had covered half the distance when the nearest warship perceived her and sent a string of signal flags fluttering up to a yard-arm—McConaughy had taken the wireless man from his post, and Jock Grant privily had heaved a fire-ax into the heart of the dynamos.

McConaughy viewed the signal through his binoculars.

“Wait for proper support,” he read aloud. “Attack suspended.”

“We ought to answer that somehow,” said Colonel O’Mallagh nervously.

“An’ they’d ha’ ye up for disobedience o’ orrdhers, like as not—though ye won ’em the battle,” returned McConaughy disparagingly. “Not if ye’ll take my advice, ye won’t.”

“I’m thinkin’ Captain McConaughy is in the right,” said Father Cashin hastily.

O’Mallagh nodded dumbly, and the signals went unheeded.

The *Joan* steamed on; the miniature capes that bounded the small bay already reached out wooded arms to embrace her. They were within easy rifle-range when the first shell pitched over, and a blast of magazine fire swept the beach.

“Shall we answer that?” called O’Mallagh.

McConaughy shook his head. His face was set in grim lines; he stood, with legs apart, hands jammed into his pockets, by the quartermaster at the wheel, peering through slitted eyes at the perilous course. The Turks were firing wildly, with traces of demoralisation. Most of their shots went wide of the target. But presently bullets began to *plunk-plunk-phut* into the ironwork, and an occasional shell sprinkled shrapnel on the decks.

“Shouldn’t we begin firing now?” appealed Colonel, Mallagh again, as a bullet flicked into the planking at his feet.

“Not yet,” said McConaughy sternly. “Now, then, quartermastherr, lash your wheel. So. Lie down all o’ ye. When we take the ground ’twill be enough to knock the legs from undher ye. Pass the worrd along.”

Prone on the deck they lay, McConaughy and huge Jock Grant—a silent witness of all that had happened—and O’Mallagh, the priest and the quartermaster.

“I’m fearful many av your men will be comin’ to harm, Captain,” Father Cashin found time to whisper. “They’ve no place to go, but this God-forsaken ship, an’ she’ll be a sieve in no time.”

“We’ll ha’ the same chance as you,” replied McConaughy. “D’ye think we’ll sit idle whilst the heathen shoot at us?”

Before Father Cashin could answer, the *Joan* struck. It was cataclysmic, that moment. She drove into the shore like a nervous race-horse bent on smashing its brains out against the stable-wall. Her bow bit deep into the sand, heaved upward in a slather of dirty foam, and crashed down again half her length up the beach, with a wrench that tore the plates asunder from garboard strake to water-line. She landed right side up, shuddering, her whole length on the bottom and less than a man’s height of water around her bow.

McConaughy leaped to his feet as she strained motionless.

“Now,” he yelled. “Shoot for all ye’re worth, Irishers!”

The answering cheer of the Fusiliers was drowned in their own firing. The cargo-ports forward on either side dropped away, and men began to tumble into the water. But McConaughy did not wait for this. He and Jock Grant jumped down to the deck, rounded up the crew and lowered away every life-boat on the davits. Everything that could float they put over-side, crates, hatch-covers, spars and lumber, the machine-guns operated from the shelter of the bulwarks giving some protection to the work, although men began to drop here and there on the decks.

In the pressure of events, however, McConaughy forgot Colonel O’Mallagh, an oversight he was made aware of only by the indignant appearance of that officer just as the last life-boat struck the water, and promptly swarmed with waiting Fusiliers.

“This is a fine business!” stormed O’Mallagh. “Here are the Galway Fusiliers going into action for the first time in history”—as his rage increased, he lapsed into brogue—“widout their commandin’ officer. Would ye be puttin’ a dishgrace upon me, Sorr?”

“I would not,” said McConaughy, chuckling. “Lend a hand here, an’ we’ll compose the deefficulty.”

He led the way amidships to where a life-raft reposed on the well-deck.

“ ’Tis an onwielderly craft,” he continued, “but I’m thinkin’ we can put her in the wather. Anyhow, ’tis your last chance, unless ye can swim.”

O’Mallagh, Father Cashin and a few of the *Joan’s* crew bent their backs to the task of hauling the raft on rollers across the deck. The bullets snicked all around them; one of Apgar’s Welshmen coughed and died just as they had her poised over the water. But they made it, and Jock Grant leaped down first, with a couple of oars, to steady the clumsy thing. Then they lowered a Jacob’s-ladder, and McConaughy motioned to O’Mallagh to descend. He climbed down gingerly. Father Cashin stood back when his turn was called next, and the few remaining members of the crew, headed by Apgar, descended.

“Go on, little man,” said McConaughy at last.

“An’ lave ye here longer nor any wan av us to be a marck for the bullets ye’re riskin’ by reason av our taunts? What d’ye think I am?”

“A brave bit Jesuit,” returned McConaughy. “But down ye go. ’Tis the law o’ the sea: a mather must leave his ship the last.”

“Ye’d blander me again, I’m thinkin’,” began Father Cashin sturdily.

“I’d do nothin’ o’ the sorr,” snapped McConaughy, ducking involuntarily as a three-inch shell tore the corner off a deck-house, and sent the splinters hurtling about where they stood. “D’ye think I’m sthandin’ here for the fun of it? Go on, I tell ye, unless ye wish to ha’ my death on to your soul.”

Father Cashin descended the ladder as meekly as had Colonel O’Mallagh.

Despite his pretended nervousness, McConaughy was not in any haste to leave. A single look assured him that the party on the raft were safe for the time being, for the Fusiliers already had cleared the bushes of the enemy on that side of the bay and were making good their grip on the Turks’ second-line trenches along the crest of a slender line of hills beyond. The firing was

coming mainly from the opposite side of the bay, still held in force by the enemy.

What interested him particularly, however, was the visible effect produced in the invading army by the *Joan's* exploit. The transports, escorted by the warships, were all steaming in towards the landing-place, the warships endeavouring to keep down the fire of the Turks as much as possible by dint of impetuous use of their own batteries against the shore positions. While he watched, several of the larger transports, including a giant Cunarder, which carried a whole brigade in her capacious hull, dropped anchors and began discharging men into their attendant trawlers.

“Just like the English!” he muttered to himself. “Two ways to do it, an’ being English they took the wrong way. Hecht, but they’re a stubborn race!”

He was aroused from his observations by a firm grasp on his arm, and looked down at Father Cashin.

“Ye mad man!” rasped the little priest. “The lives av the rest av us may not matther, but can ye not see there is a rig’mint, more or less, av Turrks on the shore over forninst ye, all thryin’ which shall have the honor av shplittin’ your thick skull? Think shame av yourself, man, an’ treasure the immortal life the Lorrdd has suffered ye to retain.”

And this time it was McConaughy who meekly led the way down the Jacob’s-ladder, thereby violating the inexorable law of the sea for the first and only time in his venturesome career.

They found the left wing of the Fusiliers, their Major dead, and some scores of men out of action, digging into shelter on the rim of the beach. This section of the regiment had been severely punished in getting ashore, because they had been the last to leave the ship and the Turks had had an opportunity to recover from the first shock of surprise. The men were inclined to be a trifle dazed, like all new troops when called upon to sustain severe punishment and denied a chance to retaliate.

Colonel O’Mallagh won them back their nerve by gravely stalking up and down, pistol in hand, and taking occasional pot-shots at the bushes whence flashed the Turkish volleys. But it was McConaughy and Father Cashin who led them to victory.

McConaughy, in the first place, collected all of his own men who were still alive, armed them with guns taken from wounded Fusiliers, and marched them into the battle-line. Wherever he went, Father Cashin was not

far away. And in ten minutes they had bedeviled beshamed and bedamned the half-beaten Fusiliers into the belief that they could lick everything under a fez between themselves and Constantinople.

“Is it ready ye are to scalp the omadhouns, bhoys?” shouted Father Cashin, as he bounded to his feet, his only weapon the gold crucifix he held up before their eyes.

“Only thry us, Father dear!” they answered.

“An’ will ye let the Papists lead ye?” bellowed McConaughy to his company.

A hoarse roar was the reply, and Evan Apgar’s Welshmen raised the nasal strains of a hymn.

McConaughy sprang forward.

“Afther the heathen, men!” he called.

The *Joan’s* crew rallied to the appeal. Father Cashin got the Fusiliers from their shallow pits in the sand. Colonel O’Mallagh puffed into a run and shouldered his way to the front. That is the whole story. The Fusiliers and the *Joan’s* men swept over the sand-dunes, stormed into the bushes, leaped down on the startled Turks who scrambled up to meet them and then went on with bloodied bayonets.

When the van of the reinforcements waded through the surf they found a thin, ragged line of Irish Catholics and Ulster-Scotch-Welsh Protestants holding the shore and raving and singing together. On a scrubby hill, which was covered knee-deep with what had been Turkish askares, a small group of ill-assorted men were holding a solemn council-of-war to determine whether they should march on to Constantinople. It was with difficulty that the first general officer to come ashore—a rather nervous brigadier, with three months of general staff training—restrained them from carrying out this ambition.

“A most magnificent piece of work, gentlemen,” he said a score or two of times. “Most magnificent. Gad—magnificent! Splendid for the morale, y’ know. Tonic effect. But not war. No, by gad, not war!”

As they came away from the audience, McConaughy put his arm around Father Cashin’s shoulders.

“Little man,” he said, “do ye be really tellin’ me ye are a priest o’ Rome?”

“Me big bucko,” retorted Father Cashin solemnly, “are ye really one av these bla’guard Ulster rebels?”

“Hecht!” McConaughy chuckled. “Ye’re a man, priest or no priest. An’ for the rest, I’m no sayin’ the Irish canna fight—when they’re well led, d’ye see, an’ they’re supported prpperly.”

The priest caught him by the elbow.

“McConaughy,” he exclaimed, “ye’re a man, yourself! But the heart av ye’s hard an’ narrow. Look at that hill where we fought. D’ye see it?”

“Ay.”

“There’s good men’s blood soakin’ that ground. Blood av Catholic Galway, an’ blood av Protestant Ulster an’ Scotland an’ Wales. An’ d’ye mean to tell me, McConaughy, there was any difference in the way those men died?”

“All men die one way,” said McConaughy slowly.

“Ay, just so. ‘All *men* die one way.’ Ye’ve said it for me. They died together, those men on the hill, an’ one died as readily as the other.”

“That’s thue,” McConaughy conceded.

“Then, I ask ye what is religion between men?”

And Miles McConaughy, Ulster Presbyterian—with leanings toward predestination—crushed the priest’s hand in his hard paw.

“ ’Tis just nothin’, little man,” he said simply. “Just nothin’.”

CHAPTER IV

THE HEELS OF CHANCE

McConaughy cursed with choice profusion and elaborate attention to personal detail whilst the whole landing-beach dropped work and listened awestruck. But the little dark man, with the hooped gold earrings, simply bobbed politely and smiled, as he patted the neck of the nearest mule.

“Ye dwarfed child o’ impotence, ha’ ye no more than the animation o’ your face for sign o’ human intelligence?” demanded McConaughy at last.

“I don’t think the blighter savvies yer lingo, Guv’nor,” suggested a Tommie, with a snicker.

“Oh, don’t ye?” retorted McConaughy sarcastically. “Ye’re a man o’ penetration, that’s apparent. English, by your looks. I thought so. Did ye ever know an Englishman to miss the chance to mak’ a fool out o’ himself?”

This to the crowd in general, which remained discreetly silent.

Somewhat encouraged by the tame reception of his insult, McConaughy resumed haranguing the man with the mules.

“Ammuneetion—d’ye see?” he roared. “Amm-mun-ee-shun! Put—on—mule! Want—it—in—the—trenches! D’ye see? Ye leathery-hided, evil-eyed _____”

“Easy there! Are ye fightin’ again, McConaughy? Make way, bhoys, make way. Can’t ye see I’m needed at the front?”

And Father Cashin bustled into the ring. McConaughy’s grimace of rage faded into a cheerful grin.

“Ho, little man, ’tis glad I am to see ye!” he exclaimed. “I’m afther thryin’ to get ammuneeetion for your regiment and ma own men. But not a word can I push through the skull o’ this bit o’ corruption here—and ’tis his mules we’re wantin’ for carrtin’ the ammuneeetion up to the front.”

“He’ll be cheerful, at the least,” said Father Cashin, with a brief glance at the bone of contention, who still smiled and bobbed his head politely, stroking the neck of the mule he leaned against. “That’s something to be goin’ on. Now, what would ye call him?”

“Wi’out desire o’ offendin’ ye, little man, a misbegotten loon o’ your own denomination—an’ maybe one-half naygur.”

The priest pursed up his lips contemplatively.

“Ye do be nowhere at the guessin’ game, McConaughy,” he pronounced. “He’s a Greek—in the which case he’s none av me flock—or he’s Eyetalian?”

The man’s eyes glinted at this last word, and he exclaimed excitedly:

“*Si, Si!* Maltese!”

“Eh?” said Father Cashin. “Maltese, is it?”

He emitted a voluble string of fluid syllables, and in a trice the muleteer was vying with him, hands and face wriggling frantically. Father Cashin turned to McConaughy in triumph.

“Sure, the man’s Maltese, an’ as good a British subject as yourself.”

“But how did ye talk to him?” pressed McConaughy in admiration.

“In what but the tongue in which he habitually convarrises? D’ye think it was for nothing, McConaughy, I shtudied siven years av me life under the Pope av Rome in the midst av all the Eyetalians?”

“Did ye, now?”

“I did. So ye see there’s some good come out av Rome. An’ what did ye want wid the spalpeen?”

“His mules—no less. What I ha’ been tellin’ him this twenty minutes past.”

“’Tis soon done if ye go about it the right way. Show him the boxes ye’ll be wantin’ him to take.”

McConaughy indicated the pile of small-arm and machine-gun ammunition cases, and the Maltese lifted them deftly onto the rude pack-saddles with which his string of diminutive mules were equipped.

The group of idle soldiers that had gathered about them broke up and drifted away. It was late afternoon and the sun was setting in a sullen, grey sky. The waves washed the beach with a rattling swish of gravel, and from up and down the tenuous length of Gallipoli Peninsula came the sporadic echoes of firing.

A big gun down near Sed ul Bahr was dropping projectiles in the bay close to where they stood, evidently searching for the landing-place by azimuth fire. But nobody noticed this, except to comment on an unusually high geyser of shell-tossed water. It was two days since the landing-beach had been carried, and in that time the greenest troops had become calloused to danger and suffering by the monotonous grind of ceaseless fighting.

McConaughy and Father Cashin discussed this phase of the situation as they picked their way through the sand-dunes at the head of the string of mules.

“ ’Tis to-night or never, me big bucko,” said the little priest.

“I agree wi’ your logic—strange as that may seem. We should ha’ thrust out yon Turrks at the beginnin’ o’ things, an’ if all this blunderrin’ army had fought wi’ the cirrcumspeckshun and impulse o’ ma own company an’ your regiment—why, then, little man, we’d be by the worrst o’ our troubles.”

Father Cashin nodded.

“There’ll be no doubt av that. But an empty dhudeen is an empty dhudeen. Sorra a speck more av ’baccy ye have for currsin’ the pouch wid a hole in it. An’ now for yourself. Ye’ve stood well by the regiment, an’ by me—an’ I take it kindly av ye. But there’s no call for riskin’ the lives av yourself and your men in this Donneybrook shcrap we’ll be havin’ to-night. I’m thinkin’ there’ll be more bloody pates than honor at the hind end av it. Ye know, widout me tellin’ ye, ye have no real right at the front where ye’ve been afther blanchandherin’ your way, an’ a worrd wid the Shtaff would get ye back where ye belong—an’ that’s on the blue sea beyond.”

McConaughy halted at the opening of a nullah in the last line of sand-dunes, and placed a heavy hand on the priest’s shoulder.

“Any man but yourself that spoke to me this wise would be stretchin’ himself on that prickle-grass.”

“Would ye be threatenin’ me, McConaughy?” demanded Father Cashin, with a twinkle in his eye.

“Nay. I know better. Ye ha’ me cowed, little man, for a’ your black Papistical coverin’ an’ priestly huggle-muggle—an’ I’ll say again I mean no disrespect to yourself by the language that is ma only speech on certtain subjects. Let be on that. We ken each other.”

“We do.”

Father Cashin slapped him on the back with a vigour that made McConaughy grunt with surprise.

“Ye ha’ more guts in that fat body o’ yours’ than I gied ye crredit for. Now, touchin’ what ye said a while back. I wrrecked the *Joan o’ Arc* to get the Fusiliers ashore. Ma ownerrs are safe from loss on her. I ha’ no worry to me on that score. There’s thirrtty-odd o’ the *Joan’s* crew left wi’ me—not a married man among ’em. I’d as soon sail wi’ Englishmen as married men. An’ if ye think, in the cirrcumstances, I’ll deny maself an’ ma men the chance o’ the finest bit o’ fightin’ we’ve had this mony weeks, ye ha’ worrked a ways off your thru course. I’d be shamed to call maself Ulsterrborn, if I drew out o’ this, now.”

“I knew ye’d say so, McConaughy,” said the priest, as he turned into the nullah.

“Besides,” added McConaughy, a glint in his eye, “what would your Papistical Irishers do wi’out ma Pprotestant die-harrds to gie ’em courage this night. Eh?”

“Do?” retorted Father Cashin. “Why they’d just do not as well as they’ll be afther doin’ wid you to egg ’em on.”

They turned an angle of the nullah and ducked instinctively as a bullet zipped by into the sand.

“I’ll be shpeakin’ to Colonel O’Mallagh about that east wall. It should be raised,” commented Father Cashin. “Hi,” he called to the muleteer, with a warning gesture at the low sand-bank on the side toward the enemy.

“*Si, si, padre,*” responded the little man grinning his continual pleasant smile.

“Does he know nothin’ but ‘See, see?’” grumbled McConaughy. “For the wall, Cashin, ye need not be worryin’. If we do as we ought to-night, there’ll be no enemy in miles o’ this.”

“If we do,” sighed the priest, looking back despondently at the vista of the bay a short distance below, dimly mysterious in the Spring twilight, a few lanterns twinkling already on the landing-beach where the crumpled hull of the *Joan*, which had served as the army’s landing-stage, was already turning rusty under the sweep of salt-breakers.

“If!” he said again. “There’s a deal av mismanagement here, McConaughy. I’m wid ye in all that ye say av the English by reason av the brave bhoys I’ve seen die needlessly here these past eight-and-forty hours.

My God! To think av the mothers an' the wives an' shweetheartts will be weepin' their eyes out this many a weary, weary month—an' all for this!"

McConaughy looked sidewise with surprise. This was a new angle to Father Cashin for his consideration, although the hundreds of blustering raw Irishmen who confessed to the West Galway's corpulent little priest knew the inner heart of him that was tender as any woman's.

"Ha' done," said the Ulsterman hastily. "Ye'll be turrnin' ma bowels to wather by that kind o' talk. Let be, until we've done the work the Lorr'd has appointed for us. It may not be safe worrk, but 'tis the humblin' o' the heathen, an' Papist or Christian, I tak' it that's no a very bad cause to die in."

"Ye do be havin' the right av me, McConaughy. I think shame av meself for weakness. But—well, God's blessing on us, an' we're here once more wid me bhoys."

The base camp of the Fusiliers behind the line of trenches was spread out before them, a network of hollows, partly artificial, partly natural, all linked together by shallow passageways and cloaked by sombre scrub-trees that clung to the inhospitable sandy soil, blasted and tossed by the great winds that blew from the Mediterranean. A rumble of greeting met McConaughy and Father Cashin as they passed group after group of men off duty, and made their way toward the regimental headquarters, a tent heaped over with tree-boughs and dirt, as some protection against shrapnel.

Colonel O'Mallagh came out to meet them.

"Gad, it's a relief to see men again at the end of an hour or two," he cried. "Life seems devilish short here. What have you there, Captain McConaughy?"

"Ammuneetion. Wi' the help o' ma little friend here, I commandeered this mule-thrain an' the Maltese Eyetalian that 'tends it."

"Good, we'll need every round we can get to-night. Our people are to have the right of the line. We lead the advance."

"In that case, I'd best be lookin' to ma own company," said McConaughy. "I'm no good to ye where the Maltese is concern'd. Ye must convarrse wi' him through the friend o' the Pope. He shpeaks nought but Eyetalian—though, if we get the time, I'll thry him on Jock Grant an' Evan Apgar. It may be he kens the Gaelic or Welsh."

“ ’Tis an awfu’ darrk nicht,” remarked Jock Grant, as he sidled along the communication trench with due precaution against jostling the dynamite bombs strapped on either hip.

“Iff ye mus’ talk, doan’t ye maak so greaat noise,” hissed Evan Apgar behind him. “We haf Turrks to t’e front, not shatows.”

Jock turned to retort and stumbled over a tree-root that projected across the footway. He landed against the trench wall with a rattle of equipment and the file halted in expectant horror. But no explosion came.

McConaughy shouldered his way to the front, exasperation evident in his haste.

“Ye blunderrin’ loon,” he rasped to Grant. “Would ye sacrifice the lives o’ the company for the sake o’ a bit o’ convarrse on the weather? This is not play. Get for’ard now, an’ not a worrd, or I’ll send ye back to the camp-guarrd.”

He put himself in the lead and his lieutenants followed, Evan snickering to himself until Jock turned and drove a skilful elbow into a place calculated to connect with the Welshman’s source of breath. A choke, and Evan was still. McConaughy, in his painstaking study of the winding course of the trench, did not notice this violation of his orders, a good thing for both Grant and Apgar.

The sap zigzagged back and forth through several clumps of dwarf trees and coarse bushes until finally it emerged upon the crest of a low rise, where it straightened out to right and left and wound along the brow of the miniature eminence. A Fusilier sentry, stationed here, challenged in a whisper, and McConaughy gave the word for the night—

“Churchill.”

“Who are ye?” muttered the man.

“The bombing party o’ the Fusiliers,” answered McConaughy. “Captain McConaughy an’ the crew o’ the *Joan o’ Arc*.”

“Good luck go wid ye, sor. The colonel an’ Father Cashin are waitin’ for ye over beyant the next traverrse.”

“Thank ye, ma man. I must firrst check off ma parrty before I join them.”

He stepped out of the narrow way against the front wall of the firing-trench and counted man after man as his crew filed past him, each one

equipped with at least two bombs in addition to rifle, bayonet and ammunition.

“Thirrtty-two, thirrtty-three, thirrtty-four,” counted McConaughy, “thirrtty-five, thirrtty——”

He stopped in amazement as his fingers touched a long, velvety ear that twitched from his grip.

“An’ who might ye be?” he demanded. “By the power o’ the Presbyt’ry, ’tis a donkey!”

“*Si, si, signor,*” murmured a gentle voice at his elbow.

McConaughy reached out a brawny arm and grasped a handful of shirt upon which he flashed the brief glare of a match.

“Ma Maltese Eytalian!” he exclaimed. “May I die a Papist! How come ye here, ye imp o’ Satan?”

The muleteer shrugged his shoulders with tragic earnestness, and volleyed a string of Latin explanations.

McConaughy seized him by the throat.

“Speak soft or I’ll brain ye!”

The muleteer cowered and mumbled something about the “padre,” which he repeated over and over again. In the mean time, his donkey stood quietly, with an occasional flick of its tail, and the Irish sentry walked back from his post to learn what was delaying the commander of the bombing party.

“He’ll be afther talkin’ av the Father, sorr, Father Cashin,” opined the sentry.

“Is he, indeed?” commented McConaughy. “Then to Cashin he’ll go an’ explain what he do be doin’ here at this time o’ the night.”

He released his hold on the miserable Italian’s throat, hesitated, and then snapped:

“Get for’ard now, ye lubber—and no noise, d’ye hear me, no noise!”

“*Si, si, signor,*” gasped the little muleteer, and he scurried after McConaughy’s men, his donkey pattering along beside him.

A hundred yards farther on, where the line of trenches was masked entirely by a considerable clump of pine-trees, the *Joan’s* crew and the

Fusiliers were grouped on a narrow front. A squat figure which advanced to meet him McConaughy recognised as Father Cashin.

“We’ve been waitin’ for ye, McConaughy,” said the priest. “What do ye be afther—an’ for the love av Peter, what have ye brought wid ye?”

“No less nor your own particular friend, the Maltese Eyetalian,” said McConaughy drily.

“What’s he want here?”

“Ask him.”

“Troth, an’ I’ll do that same. The man must be daft.”

A few sputtered sentences, and Father Cashin threw up his hands and chuckled vigorously.

“Save us, ’tis a warrior, a Turrk-eater,” he remarked.

“What does he say?” asked McConaughy.

“Why, he has a betther idea av dhuty than some men I’ve met. He considered it his obligation to bring resarrve ammuniton to the firing-line.”

“Well, now he’s brought it, he can go back,” suggested McConaughy.

Father Cashin nodded. But his next words brought a flood of passionate objection from the muleteer.

“A warrior, did I say?” observed the priest. “He’s a hero, no less. Sure, he demands to proceed an’ bathe wid the rest av us in the blood av Turrks.”

“He’s no place here,” said McConaughy impatiently. “Send him back. We’ve no time to waste wi’ him, Cashin.”

“Maybe so.”

But Father Cashin’s commands drew forth more oratory and gesticulatory speech so vivid that even McConaughy gained some comprehension of the man’s meaning.

“Divil a bit av arrgyment can I think av to answer him,” confessed Father Cashin at last. “He says he’s a British subject, same as us.”

“But he’s no right here,” insisted McConaughy.

“An’ neither has yourself, if ye come to that,” said the priest.

“But ’tis diff’rent entirely. Now, listen——”

“Harrk to me, McConaughy.” The little priest spoke gravely. “I’ve a fellow feeling for the man. Mind ye, he comes from Malta, one av them islands the English do be afther seizin’ to themselves from time to time, since time began. I misdoubt the poor spalpeens are kep’ down the same as Erin’s folk——”

“I hold wi’ none o’ your Fenianism, Cashin,” interrupted McConaughy, hotly. “In Ulster——”

“Maybe so, maybe so. An’ ’tis not criticisin’ your cause I’d be, McConaughy, as ye well know. But what I do say is that the English would be nowhere if ’twas not for the Irish, North an’ South, Ulstermen an’ Galwaymen, Belfas’ men an’ Dublin men. An’ what recognition do they be givin’ us, eh? I ask ye, now, man? What? Ulster or Galway, ’tis all the same. We get the lean bit av the shinbone, afther the dogs have picked it bare. We may fight betwixt ourselves, but we both despise the English.”

“Ay, ye ha’ the right o’ that, Cashin,” McConaughy conceded. “But I do not see——”

“But ye will see! Man alive, this bhoy here comes from an island the like av ours, conquered and misruled, I doubt not, by the English for their own ends. An’ they degrade him that would be a soldier by makin’ a muleteer out av him! By the Staff av St. Pathrick, we’ll put the English in their place an’ make him a soldier!”

McConaughy dropped his hand in a bear’s clutch on the muleteer’s shoulder.

“A ggrand thought, Cashin!” he cried. “Ye ha’ a head on your neck, little man. As for your Maltese friend—— An’ by the way, how will he call himself?”

Father Cashin and the muleteer consulted a moment, the Italian’s eyes glinting with joy as he heard the decision which had been reached, and then the priest announced:

“Nicolo Zapolo. An’ he says he has a knife that thirsts for the blood av Turks—divil a less!”

“He’s a man for ma own measure—Nicolo,” declared McConaughy. “He shall march wi’ us an’ ha’ all the fightin’ his belly can hold. Come your ways after me, the two o’ ye.”

It was well past midnight, and the cannonade, which had been steady throughout the earlier hours of the night, had all but ceased. Now and then

the sentries exchanged a shot but the artillery was quiet. It was damp and clammy, with a mist from the Ægean.

“A fery long time we’fe peen here, inteet,” grumbled Evan Apgar.

“You’ll get the worrd soon enough,” McConaughy assured him cheerfully. “’Twill be all the cannon on the fleet an’ ashore, an’ ye’ll be by-ordinar’ fortunate if ye do not lose an ear-drrum.”

As he spoke, a green rocket shot up from the centre of the position and its million falling stars were answered by a red rocket from the fleet.

“Harrk till she hoots,” remarked Jock. “Wull the lassies yon greet wi’ the _____”

He was checked by a single thunderous roar of big guns that grew and waxed without cessation, that belted the peninsula from end to end and that embraced their immediate position in a fiery arc from shore to shore.

“Out o’ your trenches, men!” shouted McConaughy.

And the crew of the *Joan of Arc* scrambled after him.

The officers of the Fusiliers held their men in leash for five minutes, according to orders, so that McConaughy’s detachment might have a chance to launch their bombs and break down the Turkish defence. But Father Cashin and his protégé the muleteer were loath to see McConaughy get ahead and they endeavoured to follow him. This was all very well for the priest and Nicolo, but Nicolo’s donkey got half-way up the dirt wall only to slide down upon a cursing private, who refused to see why his comrades laughed at him.

It remained for a squad to boost the donkey and its load of ammunition boxes up out of the trench by sheer man power, by which time McConaughy’s party had gained a hopeless head start, and the general advance was begun.

The Turks were firing high, aiming at the ridge which marked the British position, and consequently, by crouching close to the ground, McConaughy and his men reached the hostile trenches without any loss. They snipped through the entanglements with their wire-cutters, crawled forward on hands and knees, and at fair heaving distance discharged their bombs. Then they went in with bayonets and butts, thirty-odd mad sailormen, who did not know fear, who chanted psalms as they fought, and alternately cursed and prayed. At their heels stormed the Fusiliers.

The first trench was carried with a rush. The second gave under increasing pressure.

Reinforcements were brought up; bombs were thrown at arm's length, caught and hurled back before they could explode; over a front of ten miles men were joined in the old-fashioned warfare, knee to knee, stock to stock.

The *Joan's* crew fought in a loose wedge formation, with giant Jock Grant at the apex, and McConaughy and Evan Apgar flanking him. That wedge was never motionless; it pushed onward with the remorselessness of a steam-roller. Several companies of the Fusiliers saw what was going on and they joined the formation, giving it mass and extra impact. So the second-line trenches were taken and the Turks began to flee.

McConaughy seized advantage of the breathing-spell afforded to glance around him.

"Ye wicked limb av the Ould Nick!" bellowed an unmistakable voice. "Would ye now? A-a-aa-h-h! Take that! Bate the spalpeen, Nick. So! 'Tis only in your name ye resemble the Evil One, me son."

McConaughy ran forward around an intervening rock-sangar, and almost stumbled over Father Cashin, Nicolo and the donkey, valiantly defending the precious beast against two big Turks. The donkey was playing a noble rôle, for evidently having discerned who were his true friends in the mêlée, he was lashing out with his heels at the Moslems and discomfited their every attack. Fortunately, their rifles were empty, and Father Cashin's clumsy passes with a gun he had picked up deterred them from filling their magazines whilst Nicolo, knife in hand, glided about them, watching for an opening.

"This way, men o' the *Joan!*" roared McConaughy. "Rescue here! Rescue!"

But no more help was required. The Turks, seeing that the odds were against them, turned and ran.

"There's no holdin' ye back, little man," cried McConaughy. "Ye're too venturesome by far."

"I go where me bhoys go—or where ye go, yourself."

"Ay, ye're a contentious bit Jesuit, as I know to ma sorrer. An' now what?"

"Nicolo and meself will be afther searchin' for another foeman or two."

“Come wi’ me. There’s few Turks ye’ve left between this and the straits, but we’ll see.”

Here on the far right of the line the fight seemed to be as good as over, but a few hundred yards on their left one wing of the Fusiliers were still battering the enemy’s second-line trenches; and judging by the racket from the rest of the front, the Turks were giving a good account of themselves.

“ ’Tis a pity there are not more o’ us,” observed McConaughy, as he led on in the track of their successful charge.

“What’s wrong wid ye?” asked Father Cashin.

“We’re goin’ a shade too far to suit me. ’Twould be all right, if the rest o’ the line had gone on, but—see for yourself.”

“Why not go back?” suggested the priest.

“I’ll do that same,” agreed McConaughy grimly. “But firrst, we must get together the men that ha’ gone on this way.”

The darkness had lifted somewhat, and they were able to follow the trail of the advance by the wounded and stragglers. It led across the summit of the inner range of hills and down a considerable valley, which was intersected by a small stream. At the wreck of what had been a farmhouse on its bank they caught up with Jock Grant.

“A grand fecht, skipper!” he panted. “ ’Tis ma candid opeenion we hae loppit off a mony score o’ these deil’s spawn. I canna deny the fechtin’ on the land gies a mon a pleasure he’ll ne’er encounterr on the watter.”

“Where are your men?” demanded McConaughy angrily. “Ha’ ye left them, ye zany?”

“Nae, nae,” denied Jock with an injured expression. “They’re but up yon glen assailin’ a handfu’ o’ Turks that fled into a shielin’ ye’ll come tae at the hinder end. Evan’s wi’ ’em.”

“An’ ye should be wi’ ’em, yourself. Get on, Mr. Grant. We ha’ no minutes to spare. We are cut off here.”

Jock’s mouth gaped open, as he boggled this alarming statement. Then he disappeared at a run up the valley.

“Is it as bad as that?” queried Father Cashin.

McConaughy shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

“Look over yon. The rest o’ the Fusiliers are fallin’ back. The English, as ye might expect, ha’ bitten off more nor they could chew. Where will we be, if we stay here, a half-hour from now?”

A burst of firing came from the direction Jock Grant had taken. Father Cashin’s forehead was knitted in a puzzled frown.

“What ye’ve said will be the truth, I’m thinkin’,” he asserted. “But as well try to drag a weasel from his hole as put Grant to pryin’ loose those bhoys from a nest av Turrks. ’Tis for you an’ me to do, McConaughy, if ’tis to be done at all.”

McConaughy looked across the hill they had last passed at the receding fighting lines.

“Ye’re right,” he agreed shortly.

He turned to the dozen or so of stragglers who had collected about them.

“If you men know the side o’ your bread that’s buthered, ye’ll mak’ tracks the way ye came,” he advised. “It’s more nor doubtfu’ I can get the rest o’ these loons out o’ here. Ye’d best go back wi’ Father Cashin.”

The priest snorted indignantly.

“Is it back ye’d have me go? McConaughy, ye have a—— uncivil tongue in your head by turns. I’ll stay here.”

“Sure, an’ we’re wid ye, Father dear,” spoke up a shock-headed corporal. “This’ll be no time to show our backs to the Turks.”

“’Tis none o’ ma responsibeelity, then,” said McConaughy gruffly. “Come afther me—an’ do not be dhraggin’ your heels.”

As they ran up the valley, the firing ahead of them increased in volume, raged furiously, and dropped in diminuendo to a silence that was broken by a medley of Irish yells and Protestant hymns of exultation. McConaughy burst on the scene to find several hundred Fusiliers and sailors prancing about the one street of the village in which they had trapped the last remnant of the Turks.

“Is it mad ye all are?” he demanded, after he had succeeded in drawing them within sound of his voice.

A rather shamefaced captain and three subalterns denied the accusation for their men, and Evan Apgar was at pains to slink well in the rear of the crowd.

“Look behind ye,” adjured McConaughy.

They looked and saw a wall of fire that reached once more from sea to sea. The Turkish reinforcements, surging forward in echelon, had flowed back over the area the Fusiliers had cleared temporarily. And already the dawn was whitening the eastern sky.

“Ye’ve been thinkin’ yourselves heroes,” continued McConaughy. “Oh, I know ye! Ye went on wi’ never a thought o’ discipline or ordhers, just hot passion to be tearin’ the Turrks’ throats. An’ now—hecht! It looks to me that the Turrks will be tearin’ the throats o’ ye—unless ye surrenderr.”

“Isn’t there anything to be done?” asked the captain nervously.

“Look about ye,” returned McConaughy.

“Can’t we fight our way back?” demanded a subaltern. “There wouldn’t many of us get through, but that’s better——”

“Ye speak like a man, ma young friend, but ye speak the truth,” commented McConaughy. “There’d be too —— few to get through at the finish.”

Dejection was plain in every face. The men who had been elated with victory a few minutes before were now subdued by the idea of defeat.

“There’s but three things to do,” resumed McConaughy. “We can turn and fight our way back—in the which case, if ye ask me, we’ll all perrish; we can surrenderr; or we can bide where we stand an’ mak’ such a fight as we may, in the hope the English will send aid to us—an’ that’s puttin’ a trust in the English I canna feel justified.”

Father Cashin pushed his way to the front.

“There’s a fourrth courrse we could be takin’—if ye’re all men enough,” he said. “Don’t frown, McConaughy. Me friend Nicolo is a janius, no less. The idea is his.”

“Are ye triflin’?”

“Troth, an’ I’m not. Me liberty is as dear to me as is yours to you. Harrk to me, now. Nicolo here is an adopted son av the counthry. He’s worrked hereabouts, an’ he knows the roads an’ the lingo. He says why do we not kape on the way we’re goin’? The Turrks are not lookin’ for an enemy in their rear.”

“But we’d be sure to meet more soldiers.”

“Maybe so. An’ we’ll tell ’em we’re Germans. There do be Germans in most av the Turrk forrts hereabouts, Nicolo says. Bid the bhoys throw away their caps, an’ take fezes wherever they may. A fez will make a good German out av a poor Englishman any day.”

“An’ afther that?”

“Afther that, we’ll discuss what’s to come next. For the moment, ’tis pressin’ we get somewheres away from here.”

McConaughy drew a deep breath.

“The thought’s a mad one, but I’m for it,” he announced. “ ’Tis the best I ha’ hearrd yet.”

There was a general murmur of assent among the officers.

“ ’Tis just chance, no more,” remarked Father Cashin. “But what Irishman, Ulsterman or Galwayman, would be refusin’ to kiss the heels av Chance? Discarrhd your caps, me bhoys. Become Turks. A fatigue parrry into these houses to forage headgear!”

III

Fezes were not difficult to come by. Many of the men already had collected them from fallen foes as souvenirs, and there were enough defunct Turks in the vicinity to supply the rest.

When they were mustered again in the village street, the dirty, soiled Fusiliers, in their red caps, looked for all the world like a column of Anatolian infantry. Niccolo had been equipped with an officer’s uniform and was perched upon his mule, the ammunition boxes having been emptied to refill the depleted pouches of the company. McConaughy stood beside him, awkward in a sword-belt and dangling sabre.

“Hassan Futeh is the place we are to head for,” announced Father Cashin after a prolonged discourse with the ex-muleteer. “ ’Tis a mite av a fishin’ village on the Ægean coast, an’ there’s a chance—if we get there—we could be findin’ a vessel of some kind laid up by the blockade. But to get there will be a long journey from all I can make out.”

“How far will it be?” demanded McConaughy impatiently.

Father Cashin and Nicolo consulted again.

“Well, from all I can hear, the matter will be this wise,” said the priest. “Nicolo says we must cross to the road on the straits side av the peninsula.

From here by that road 'tis fifty miles to Sharkoi, an' from Sharkoi 'tis thirrtty miles across the hills to Hassan Futeh."

"A two days' march," commented one of the Fusiliers' officers.

"Yes," said Father Cashin, "two days av uncommon harrd marrchin', although me friend tells me we will not be havin' to go the whole distance to Sharkoi. Now, do ye remember this, all av ye: Nicolo is the one av us that speaks Turrkish. 'Tis he will do the talkin' when we meet our Allies on the road. 'Tis meself will give the orrdhers in German. I once spent a month in a convent at Cologne. Leave it to me. I'll be roarin' the like av a hauptmeister."

"Hecht!" said McConaughy. "Ye'd best gie us a worrdd beforehand so that we'll know your wants."

"Divil a fear, McConaughy. Ye'll do me proud. But 'tis not likely the need will arise. The Turrks from this to Constantinople are far too worried wid the progress av events to make trouble for 'emselves about a few wanderin' German soldiers. If any av them turrrn inquisitive—why, lave them to Nicolo an' me."

It was just dawn as the weary column marched out of the bloody street of the little village, and up the valley toward the Dardanelles. Behind them still sounded the clamour of the fighting, for the Turks were now launching vigorous counter-attacks against certain advanced positions retained by the British troops. But in the section of country traversed by the Fusiliers not an enemy was encountered.

They were descending a side track to the main road, which wound the length of the peninsula, behind the central crest of hills, when they met their first Turks, a dusty battalion of infantry, hastening to brace the fighting-line.

Several of the Turkish officers hurled questions at Nicolo, who answered them briefly, and as the Fusiliers toiled by, terribly conscious of the hundreds of eyes peering at their sweat-masked faces from under turbaned brows, they heard again and again, the muttered words:

"Franks! Ger-man Franks!"

But none of these glances displayed suspicion, and the Fusiliers passed triumphantly through their first ordeal. Father Cashin clapped Nicolo on the back, as soon as they had rounded a turn in the road, and the plodding Turks were out of sight.

“Isn’t he the broth av a fine little man, me Maltese friend?” he exclaimed to McConaughy. “Harrk now to what he was afther telling the gullible officers we just left. He says to them that we were German artillery from the lower forrts, goin’ up on special duty, an’ that we were afther stoppin’ off on our way to join in the scrap beyond. An’ more than that, the spalpeen closed our trail by tellin’ ’em we had wiped out a few av the English that got inside the lines at that village.”

Tired as they were the Fusiliers and the *Joan’s* men kept on the march until nearly noon.

“There’s no time to be lost,” said McConaughy in reply to pleas for an earlier rest. “Any minute we may be meetin’ wi’ some staff officer or general who’ll know too much to believe our story. I’m no marrcher nor are ma men here, but we’ll keep up wi’ ye, happen what may, if ye do but set the pace.”

And grumbling, the Fusiliers kept on.

They had a brief rest in the early afternoon, sheltered by a grove of olive-trees beside a spring on a hillside some distance off the road. Here they ate the emergency rations they had carried into action with them, and lay down, sleeping or listening to the persistent roar of the battle off to their left. At four o’clock the remorseless McConaughy had them up again.

For hours and hours they plodded on, past endless streams of transport vehicles, carrying munitions to the troops at the front, past sullen-looking, downcast battalions of reserves, pushing along through the dust, with heads bowed down. For the most part these aliens paid no attention to the little column of Europeans. Whenever an officer did address an inquiry he was answered by Nicolo, who, duly primed by Father Cashin, talked mysteriously of some great coup which was planned for his command at the base of the peninsula. And the Turks, already taught to look upon the Germans as demi-gods and miracle workers, watched their “allies” file by with wonder on their simple faces.

At nightfall it was Nicolo and Father Cashin who held up a passing transport train and by display of arrogant authority and an overbearing manner, compelled the surrender of some sorely needed food. With this spoil, the Fusiliers again left the road and sought shelter in a gully which sloped down towards the straits. They had covered nearly forty miles, and even McConaughy admitted they had earned a rest. But with the daylight he roused them again.

“There’s three times the danger there was yesterday,” he said. “Yesterday all we met were more interested in the fightin’ than aught else. To-day ’twill be different. I’m none so confident as I was.”

For several miles nothing happened. The road was not so thronged as it had been the day before, nor was the roll of firing so loud and unceasing. Nicolo had halted on a little rise to point out Sharkoi in the distance, saying that they could turn off at the next crossroads and strike across the hills by less frequented paths, when McConaughy’s keen sight singled out a group of horsemen approaching them.

“Take a look at yon parrrty, Cashin,” he said.

Father Cashin pursed up his lips.

“A staff,” he said.

“How many do you make it?”

“Three—four—five—is there another? No. Yes, five.”

“It might be worrse,” commented McConaughy. “But we must ha’ sharrp worrk. If ye do not object I’ll use ma own men. They’re smarrter at this manner o’ warfare.”

“What would be your meanin’?” demanded the priest.

McConaughy explained at length.

“Troth, you’re as mad as the rest av us,” returned Father Cashin at last. “But madness has carried us this far. I’m agreeable.”

He looked at the other officers of the Fusiliers, who nodded their assent.

McConaughy went down the column and singled out ten men to whom he whispered instructions. Then he gave certain orders to their comrades, and the Fusiliers resumed the march.

A mile farther on they met the approaching horsemen, all handsomely mounted and equipped. The leader had a blond moustache, but the others manifestly were Turks, of the snappy, Young Turk type. They drew rein as the column advanced, and the Fusiliers parted right and left and flowed around the group of horsemen, halting only at an order snapped in Turkish which was translated by Nicolo to Father Cashin.

Nicolo, of course, started his usual explanation in fairly fluent Turkish, but was interrupted almost immediately by the officer with the blond moustache.

“Strange,” said he. “I had not been advised of this movement.”

Nicolo looked uncomfortable, but shrugged his shoulders.

“It is possible the Effendi does not——”

“Don’t you know who I am?”

“I have seen the face of the Effendi, but——”

“You fool, I’m Scharnholz Pasha.”

Nicolo bowed to his mule’s neck. Scharnholz Pasha was the chief of staff of the German commander-in-chief in those parts, actually in command of the operations on Gallipoli.

“Do you speak German?” continued the Teuton commander.

“I—yes—no—that is——”

Nicolo floundered hopelessly, this being a contingency which had not been foreseen.

“How do you talk with the Germans you are guiding, then?” pressed Scharnholz, giving him no time to rally his wits.

“I—we speak in Italian,” stammered the Maltese.

“So? You are a fine interpreter!”

Scharnholz turned to the nearest officer of the column, who happened to be McConaughy, and propounded a question in German to him. McConaughy blinked, then sensed that the psychological moment for action had risen. He whistled shrilly and grasped Scharnholz Pasha by one bootleg; a sailor took hold of the other, and before the German officer realised what had happened he was sprawling in the dust and his arms were strapped in his own sword-belt. At the same moment a pair of the *Joan’s* men unhorsed each of the Turkish officers and bound them. They were frightened and bewildered, but not so Scharnholz Pasha. He bellowed and he writhed and he champed his teeth.

“What’s he afther sayin’?” asked McConaughy curiously.

“He says ye are English pigs,” began Father Cashin.

“What,” bellowed McConaughy, leaping forward and thrusting his fist in the German’s face. “Tell him if he says that again, I’ll unstrap his hands an’ give him the lickin’ he desarrves. English! I’ll teach him to dishonour an honest man!”

But Scharnholz Pasha was not so easily quieted. It required a gag and the personal administrations of Jock Grant to silence him. Jock and a Fusilier almost as big led him along between them with great solicitude, endeavouring to obtain lessons in the goose-step.

Father Cashin, Nicolo, and the Fusiliers' officers were mounted on the captured horses—McConaughy flatly declined to have anything to do with such an untrustworthy means of locomotion. Thanks to the summary fashion in which their prisoners had been taken, the incident on the roadway passed unnoticed, although the minaret of Sharkoi mosque gleamed in the near distance across a clump of cypress-trees.

Within five minutes, the column was on the march once more, the prisoners swallowed up in their midst, and in a quarter of an hour they had turned into the crossroad this side of Sharkoi, which led them through a sparsely settled country of hills and rough valleys that grew wilder and more desolate as they advanced toward the Ægean coast.

Here they met occasional patrols of Turkish cavalry and pack-trains carrying provisions to the troops and batteries scattered along the littoral of the peninsula, but there were no troop movements on a large scale. It was plain that they were entering a tract of country which the Turks did not deem in imminent danger of invasion.

“Will ye look at it all?” demanded McConaughy, sweeping his arm about the barren sky-line. “’Twould ha’ been ours for the takin’, but did the English think o’ that? Not they! They were afther pickin’ out the best fortified poseetion the Turrks had established.”

Nobody gainsaid him.

Once a Turkish patrol hailed them for news, but otherwise they were not stopped. The peasant population took to earth at the sight of armed men of any complexion, as is customary in the East.

When they halted at sunset on a ridge, whence they caught a far-off glint of silvery waters, Nicolo told them they were within ten miles of Hassan Futeh. And throat-parched, hungry, foot-blistered, but undaunted, the men who afterward became famous in camp-fire narrative as McConaughy's Disloyal Marine Light Infantry raised a joyous cheer.

It was thought inexpedient to light fires, but there was a chance to rest and the leaders held a brief council.

“Do we push on or wait?” propounded McConaughy.

The Fusilier officers were all for quick work. Push on, they advised, now that they were so close, and not risk any interposition of fresh Turkish forces.

“’Tis thru we’re in ignorance av the stren’th the Turks may have at Hassan Futeh,” admitted Father Cashin.

“Ask the Maltese Napoleon does he know would it be likely the Turrks would ha’ a garrison there?” suggested McConaughy.

“Betther yet, why not ask our prisoners?” returned the priest.

“’Tis worth thryin’,” agreed McConaughy.

The prisoners were dragged up, the Turks limp and fearful, Scharnholz making a pitiful attempt to carry his exhaustion with a swagger.

“We’ll begin wi’ this son o’ the Honezollens,” instructed McConaughy. “Cashin, tell Nicolo to ask him if there are Turrks at Hassan Futeh.”

“Hassan Futeh!” exclaimed von Scharnholz in perfectly good English. “What do you want at Hassan Futeh?”

“So, ma man, ye ha’ concealed from us your fameeliarity wi’ English?” said McConaughy.

“Faugh, you never asked me,” retorted the German. “I speak it better than yourself.”

“A Gerrman wi’ knowledge o’ the English! He’ll be an extraordinar’ grand de’il!” asserted Jock Grant from his post beside the prisoner.

“Sure, we’ll admit, ’tis the conjointure in one body av the two extremes av evil,” said Father Cashin dryly. “But what interests me more is the prisoner’s knowledge av the situation in the front av us. An’ now that we convarrse face to face, I’ll thank ye, Mистер Scharnholz——”

“Colonel *von* Scharnholz!” snapped the prisoner with choleric emphasis.

“Ye’re not at Potsdam, me dear man,” returned the priest calmly. “Be thankful we’re not afther callin’ ye the thru names we kape for your like in moments of outrageous passion. Answer me question, please!”

Von Scharnholz gnawed his lips and appeared to be deep in thought. It was two minutes before he answered.

“But why on earth would you go to Hassan Futeh?” he inquired. “It’s not a place of any value.”

“Well,” said McConaughy judiciously, after a glance from Father Cashin, “there’ll be no reason for hidin’ our principal anxiety. We ha’ just fought our way through the Turrkish Army, an’ we’re lookin’ for a likely seaport wi’ means for reachin’ our friends again.”

Scharnholz seemed to be labouring under some excitement.

“But why go to Hassan Futeh, then?” he reiterated. “It is a mud-hole in the swamps, fever-ridden, with low water on the river-bar, and there are no boats.”

“Do ye tell me so?” replied McConaughy curiously. “I’m surprised. ’Twas another story had been told to me before.”

“You have been led astray, sir,” insisted the German. “Any other place on the coast would serve your purposes better.”

“What?”

“Kiskapan, for one. It’s farther from here, but you’d have a chance of getting away.”

There was a pause. McConaughy appeared to ponder, and von Scharnholz wet his lips feverishly.

“I’ll guide you there,” he volunteered.

McConaughy transfixed him with an eye that had met unflinching the wrathful might of the “Roaring Forties” and the ice-winds that blow through Magellan Straits.

“Ye ha’ a strange, sudden interest in our fortunes,” he remarked softly.

“I—I—I’m thinking of my own health,” asserted the German. “You can’t escape fever at Hassan Futeh—and there’s no way out.”

“Humph! Is it garrisoned?”

“Garrisoned?”

“Yes, that’s what I said, man. Can ye not hear?”

“Why—why—no, it’s not——”

“Not worrth garrisonin’, ye would say?”

“Yes—that’s it.”

McConaughy regarded him steadily for a minute.

“Tak’ him away,” he said to Jock Grant. “That’s all.”

Grant was leading the prisoner off, when McConaughy stayed him.

“How many Germans are at Hassan Futeh?” he roared.

“Wh—wh——”

The German’s jaw dropped feebly, and for a fraction of a second he hovered on the verge of an answer. Then he pulled himself together and became again the smart, insolent officer he had been before the interview began.

“There is no need to ask me that question,” he replied quietly.

“Hecht!” growled McConaughy, surveying his foeman’s departing back. “I’m thinkin’ there’s every reason for askin’ ye—an’ suspectin’ the two-faced, cunning deceit o’ ye, in the bargain.”

“I’ll agree wid ye, McConaughy,” said Father Cashin. “The divil was lyin’ or I’ll go back to the seminary. An’ what now, gentlemen?”

“Hassan Futeh, by all means,” said the senior Fusilier officer. “But we had better prepare for possible opposition, don’t you think?”

“Opposeetion?” said McConaughy. “I hope so. I ha’ never fancied returnin’ from a voyage wi’out profits to show for it.”

“I’m not a man av arrms,” said Father Cashin, “but if ye’ll harrk to my advice, me friends, ye’ll delay the attack until the fore-end av the dawn. Then ye’ll catch any enemies in their beds, an’ our bhoys will have been refreshed by a scrap av sleep afther the day’s long marrch.”

“Will ye notice,” McConaughy appealed to the others, “the bit Jesuit calls himself no man o’ arrms? By the power o’ the Presbyt’ry, he’s the masher o’ the English generals we ha’ seen to this time!”

IV

Hazy in the swimming river mists, Hassan Futeh lay beneath them. From the shelter of the coarse grass of the river embankment, McConaughy and Father Cashin stared down-stream at the huddle of fisher’s huts dim in the grey light.

“Yes, there’s shipping in the channel,” said the Ulsterman; “but I canna make out what it is.”

“And that large building at the far end av the village—what would ye call it?” asked the priest.

He pointed at a structure roughly built of logs and timber, which stood apart from the stone fisher huts and was noticeable by reason of its greater size.

“’Twill bear lookin’ into,” said McConaughy. “Here, Cashin, how will this be for a plan? Wi’ half o’ the men, includin’ ma own crew, I’ll seize the shipping; wi’ the other half ye’ll be cleanin’ up the village. Isna that a fair diveesion o’ labour?”

“All I’d be askin’,” assented Father Cashin. “An’ as you’ll be havin’ the more distance to cover, I’ll await your fire before I go in.”

McConaughy nodded, and, scrambling down the embankment, they told off their men, McConaughy being at pains to see to it that in the way of officers he drew only the youngest of the Fusiliers’ subalterns. In the work before him he aimed to rely on his hard-headed marine executives.

The men were freshened by a long rest, which had preceded the final ten-mile tramp to their goal, and they struck out behind him at a swinging pace, as he led the way around the outskirts of the village to a position which would give them prompt access to the little clump of masts and indistinct hulls by the muddy strand.

The prisoners, securely bound, were left under a small guard.

They were close to the outlying houses before they obtained a clear view of the vessels in the river—as a matter of fact, it was little more than what in America would have been called a creek.

“There’s a two-pole felucca,” said McConaughy. “She’s a tidy-sized craft.”

“That will be an unco sonsy quay for a Turrk fishin’ village,” commented Jock Grant.

“Ay,” exclaimed Evan Apgar excitedly, “an’ whateffer will ye caall t’e craft at t’e end o’ her? She’s a motor poat or I nefer touch haand to engine again! An’ a big ’un, skipper! ’Tis queer pusiness, inteet!”

McConaughy’s fingers dug into Jock Grant’s arm with a vigour that made even the brawny Scotchman wriggle.

“Jock man,” he whispered, “do ma eyes deceive me or—hecht! What will be the shape lyin’ t’other side the quay?”

Apgar saw it at the same moment.

“Naame o’ John Wesley!” he muttered piously. “A submarine!”

“Or the beginnin’s o’ one,” amended Grant “Look carefu’, an’ ye wull note her deckin’ is no complete.”

McConaughy chuckled silently to himself.

“Sma’ wonder our brass-bound prisoner would ha’ turned us from the road to Hassan Futeh. Well, ma men, Providence ha’ sprinkled bountifu’ rewards upon us. Be worrthy o’ your forrtune. *Joan’s* men, step for’ard! Ye’ll attend to the shipping. Mr. Grant, ye’ll seize the felucca; Mr. Apgar will seize the motor-boat; I’ll take care o’ the submarine. The Fusiliers will cover us an’ lend whatever supportt may be needfu’. We’ll attack.”

A Moslem fisherman stepped to his doorway to eye the day’s weather as McConaughy’s column swept by. He squealed and retired precipitately. Lest the man give the alarm, McConaughy fired a shot in the air to warn Father Cashin to launch his attack; and as the *Joan’s* crew swarmed down to the river bank a rattle of rifle-fire told them the priest’s force was meeting with opposition. But their own task proved childishly easy.

Two Teuton faces, heavy with sleep, rose from the unfinished hull of a small submarine by the well-built stone quay—evidently a job done by the Germans, for Turks would never have wasted Allah’s time on such labour—but they cowered down at sight of the rifle-muzzles thrust against them. A lone sentry in the motor-boat across the quay was caught in his bunk.

On the felucca Jock Grant found nobody at all. Ten or a dozen small undecked fishing boats were equally deserted, while in the village not a face was visible at door or window. The Turkish peasant, with characteristic phlegm, awaited whatever end fate might have in store for him. In the meantime, he did not tempt that fate by appearing in its way.

As soon as McConaughy had made certain of his spoils, he led all the Fusiliers under his command to assist in the attack upon the large building, which was evidently the barracks of the German sailors who had been building the submarine. He found Father Cashin’s detachment lying in a circle around the house, firing at doors and windows and sustaining a fairly heavy fire in reply.

“Many a poor bhoy’s life would pay if we were afther rushin’ the place,” said the priest. “ ’Tis not worrth it.”

“Ye’re right,” McConaughy admitted. “Ha’ ye summoned ’em to surrender?”

“Divil a chance have I had till now, what wid the mad rush av things. Is all well below?”

“Yes. Where’s Nicolo?”

The Maltese, at sound of his name, bobbed up from behind a clump of bushes, whence he was firing a rifle with great industry and negligible effect.

“Bid the Eytalian call out in Turrkish that ’tis hopeless for them to resist, an’ if they give in they shall ha’ quarrther!”

Nicolo did so in an intermission of the firing, but without result.

“Do you the same in German—if ye can,” said McConaughy next.

“If I can!” snorted Father Cashin.

Nevertheless he stumbled through an involved sentence in German, between intermittent blasts of firing. And still there was no answer.

“No use,” said McConaughy. “’Tis a harrd choice. Daylight is here, an’ we should not linger, yet I would not ha’ men killed at the end o’ the venture.”

“If we had only a bit av a bomb, like them ye——”

“Ye ha’ the proper conception,” McConaughy cut him short. “’Tis that or nothin’. Bide here an’ do not let any young fools come to their finish.”

He disappeared in the scrub, and after he had placed several houses between himself and the German position, he started for the quay at a run. Here he dived into the half-finished shell of the submarine, seeking like a setter on a warm trail from end to end, until he found what he wanted. This he carefully examined, then tucked it under his coat and set out on his return to Father Cashin on the firing-line.

“What have ye there?” demanded the priest.

“Hecht!” returned McConaughy jovially. “What but a bit giftie for they Germans!”

He held it up for inspection, then proceeded to fasten it upon the barrel of his rifle.

“By the looks av it, ’tis a wickid conthrivance,” said Father Cashin dubiously.

“Ye speak truth, Cashin. ’Tis a German time-bomb. One o’ the things they hell-hounds ha’ devised for the persecution o’ poor, unoffendin’ merrchant skipperrs like maself. If they willna give in, they shall ha’ a taste o’ their own medicine. Tell ’em so.”

“I’m none so sure me vocabulary will go that far,” returned the priest, “but I’ll do me best.”

While he was in the middle of his exhortation, McConaughy elevated the bomb on the end of his rifle. Perhaps it was Father Cashin’s eloquent portrayal of the possibilities involved in the discharge of the missile down the gentle slope towards the barracks that turned the trick. But it is more likely that McConaughy’s ocular proof of what was impending satisfied the imaginations of men who were fully acquainted with the action of the chemicals composing that particular bomb. At any rate, there was an abrupt cessation of firing, and an officer waving a white handkerchief appeared to demand terms.

“Uncondeotional surrender,” answered McConaughy firmly.

Five minutes later the terms were accepted, and twenty-eight Germans, three of them wounded, gave themselves up.

These prisoners, together with those previously taken, were placed on board the felucca in the river, with an adequate guard, and the remainder of the invaders turned their attention to making a thorough job of wrecking what would otherwise have been a busy nest of commerce destruction.

Additional time-bombs sufficed for the demolition of the workrooms and barracks and the submarine herself. Then the bulk of the Fusiliers were put on board the felucca with the prisoners, and McConaughy and his officers in the motor-boat took the sailing craft in tow. The powerful low-speed gasoline engine, built for just such a purpose, made no work of pulling the felucca down with the tide, and when they had passed between the flat river banks and out over the bar, the felucca raised her lateen sails and added several knots to their hourly progress. By nightfall they were well out in the Ægean and keeping a sharp watch for British picket-boats.

“ ’Twould be a dour end tae a pleasant parrty for the English to sink us for Gerrmans noo,” suggested Jock Grant, as he nursed the motor-boat’s wheel and peered ahead into the fathomless darkness.

“Thaat can not be, Jock,” said Evan, as he wiped his hands slowly on a piece of waste—it was the first he had fisted in many a day and the greasy feel of the cotton was good to him. “T’e Maltese prought luck to us. While we hafe him we are saafe, whateffer.”

“Wad ye call that a Christian theory?” demanded Jock indignantly.

“I pe as Christian as t’yself,” retorted Evan. “Mark t’e words——”

A hail, raucous and foreign, split the night to starboard.

McConaughy, who had been listening idly to the dispute, waked Father Cashin, who sat asleep beside him, and Father Cashin dragged Nicolo from his comfortable berth close to the engine. Again came the hail—Heaven only knows why it had not been preceded by a shot or a torpedo. In those seas at night a boat on picket generally fired first and hailed afterwards. But the commander of that destroyer may have glimpsed through his night-glasses something odd about the pounding little motor-boat and the rakish felucca that rolled along behind her.

The polyglot muleteer promptly answered the second hail, and presently a lean, ferocious shape, silent as death, slid up beside them and the blinding white glare of a searchlight beat upon their faces.

“The French destroyer *Artemis*,” said Father Cashin hurriedly. “I hope _____”

The interpreter with which every ship of the Allied fleets was provided, now appeared on the destroyer’s bridge.

“Ahoy, there!” he called. “Who are you people?”

“Numbers Two and Four companies, Royal West Galway Fusiliers, an’ the masther and crew o’ the Red Funnel Liner *Joan o’ Arc*—transport H-532,” McConaughy thundered back. “Wi’ thirrtty-odd Gerrman prisoners— an’ some Turrks,” he added as an afterthought. “Most o’ us are on the felucca, an’ she’s none too comforrrtable. Will ye stand by us?”

“We will,” came the answer.

The searchlight danced off across the waters in a precautionary hunt for submarines. The men on the motor-boat caught a brief vision of a torpedo tube swinging away from them.

“Now, will ye caall me unchristian?” grinned Evan to Jock Grant. “If t’e Maaltese Eyetalian haad not t’e gift o’ tongues, where would we be, whateffer?”

Jock shook his head.

CHAPTER V

PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY

“Of course, the question is for you to decide, personally, Captain McConaughy,” said the Intelligence Officer. “You are not under our orders any longer. The service is quite optional with you.”

“I ha’ been out from home an unconscionable length o’ time,” returned Miles McConaughy, without removing his eyes from the vista of Alexandria’s shipping seen through the office window. “There’s ma owners _____”

“I wired the Red Funnel Line yesterday,” the Intelligence Officer interrupted. “Here’s their cable.”

He tossed the slip across the desk. McConaughy smoothed it out with painstaking thoroughness, knitted his heavy brows and pored over the contents earnestly. At the conclusion he emitted a dry chuckle. The Intelligence Officer grinned slightly.

“You find it amusing?”

“Aye.”

“T. McNish seems to think you’ve run into as much danger as you ought to,” commented the Intelligence Officer. “You stand well with your owners.”

“Moderrately,” conceded McConaughy. “She’s a braw bit leddie, the Managin’ Dirrector.”

“A lady?”

“Aye.”

“Who? T. McNish?”

“Just so.”

The Intelligence Officer laughed.

“Who would have supposed the Managing Director of the Red Funnel Line to be a woman? Well, that explains what I didn’t understand about the cable, captain. Only a woman could have written it.”

McConaughy regarded him with suspicion.

"I trust ye ha' no intention o' disrespect in your remarks," he said. "Miss McNish is an extraordinary good friend to me. I'd be——"

"No, no," asserted the Intelligence Officer hastily. "You quite mistake me, captain. I was referring merely to the unmistakable feminine attitude assumed by the writer of the cable."

"Feminine is it?"

McConaughy's voice still showed traces of resentment.

"Read it for yourself."

"Aye? 'Tis no great composition. 'Have no objections further employment O.H.M.'s service Captain McConaughy and crew, but wish the choice to be put up to Captain McConaughy. Urgently advise him not to risk lives of himself and his men in any further dangerous enterprises. T. McNish.' What would ye call feminine in that?"

"Why, man, who but a woman would have shifted from under the burden of making the decision in that way? And who but a woman would have left the decision to you and in the same breath advised your judgment on it?"

"H'm." McConaughy pondered the matter a full minute. "Ye ha' a sharp comprehension," he admitted finally. "I'll say that for ye. Ye'll not be English?"

"My name's McDonald," returned the officer amusedly.

"That explains it." McConaughy nodded his head solemnly. "Yes, ye'll be too perceptible by far for an Englishman. If ye're in persistent contact wi' the breed it must be a sore trial to ye."

"Now and then, captain, now and then. But we must get back to this matter of your decision."

McConaughy studied the cablegram again.

"If it's no *verry* dangerous I can go," he said. "She'll ha' no objection to such, I tak' it."

"Well, it's not a lightening job in Belfast Lough," replied the Intelligence Officer. "But neither is it a case of charging the whole Turkish Army. For a man of your record, I should call it rather a holiday task."

"Gun-rrunnin' is an old story," observed McConaughy contemptuously. "But gun-rrunnin' for the English Government—Hecht! There's a spice to the idea, I'll no deny!"

“Here’s the whole proposition briefly,” continued the Intelligence Officer. “This man who calls himself Dikran Kalekian, and who has credentials as agent of the Hunchakis——”

“What’s that?”

“It’s an Armenian secret society—political. This man Kalekian brings information that there are some thousands of his countrymen driven into the higher valleys of the Taurus range along the coast of the Gulf of Adalia, who are anxious to make trouble for the Turks, but lack the arms and ammunition. He claims that if he had the weapons he could seize the whole coast from Adalia to Smyrna. Now, we have plenty of arms and not as many men as we should like. The chances look good to us. By loading a shipload of rifles and cartridges we may be able to stir up so much trouble in the Mediterranean vilayets that it will divert troops from the Dardanelles and perhaps even make it worth while for us to land another expedition at Smyrna.”

“First, I’m thinkin’, ye’d better mak’ due prrovision for the poor loons ye ha’ left at Gallipoli,” remarked McConaughy.

The Intelligence Officer looked uncomfortable.

“Of course, my military position forbids my discussing——” he began.

“Ye show ggreat wisdom in that attitude,” McConaughy admonished him grimly. “Say as little as ye can—for there’ll be—— little to say when we come to the long end o’ it.”

“But you see the advantage of this Armenian plan?” asked the Intelligence Officer after an uncomfortable silence.

“Humph! I see where it might prrofit the English. I’m none so sure o’ the Arrmenians—whoever they may be.”

“Oh, they’re a sort of primitive Christians,” replied the Intelligence Officer carelessly. “Been livin’ in that part of the world ever since Adam and Eve sinned. They were pretty near the first Christians, judging from what Kalekian says. He’ll talk you blind on the subject.”

“Primitive Christians, ye say?” There was new interest in McConaughy’s tones. “They still do be Christians?”

“Oh, yes. That’s their trouble. Whenever the Turks haven’t any other iniquity on their hands, they have a massacre of Armenians. The Turks have been gettin’ back at us in that way for some weeks past. They’ve cleaned out the Armenians in some districts, and in others the Armenians have fled to

the mountains. Our warships pick 'em up occasionally in small parties, cut and shot to pieces, generally, and starvin'."

"Hecht!" growled McConaughy. "That's harrd hearrin' for Christian ears."

"It's not pleasant."

"And they're still arrdent in the faith?"

"Well, I'm not a theologian, so I can't give you expert testimony," rejoined the Intelligence Officer with frank amusement. "But from all I hear—yes. They claim that they are the only true, original Christians, and their creed is different from ours."

"They're no Papists?" asked McConaughy in sudden alarm.

"Oh, no. They have nothing to do with the Roman Catholics."

"That's well," said McConaughy. "Ye'll meet consorrtable Papists once or twice a voyage—there's a friend o' mine by the name o' Cashin, a man he is as well as a priest—but they're no my idea o' satisfactory Christians."

The Intelligence Officer uncrossed his legs, lit a cigarette and shuffled his papers.

"We seem to be wandering from the original subject again," he remarked. "How about it, captain? Will you take charge of this little legal gun-running expedition? There'll be good fat pay for all hands, and no danger that I can see. You land your cargo at a certain point in the Gulf of Adalia—Kalekian attends to that. You get a receipt for the goods, and that's all. Well?"

McConaughy considered.

"I'll ha' convarrse firrst wi' this Armenian ye speak of. Is he here?"

"In the next room, I believe. Half a sec'."

The officer vanished, to return a moment later with a tall dignified man, intellectual in visage, lighter than a Spaniard in colour, and clothed with conventional correctness in a frock coat and striped trousers.

"This is Dikran Kalekian," said the Intelligence Officer. "Mr. Kalekian, Captain McConaughy, whom we hope to persuade to take care of your business for you."

The Armenian bowed profoundly, with a flash of white teeth through his curly black beard.

“It is a pleasure to make the acquaintance of a man so brave and so well known as Captain McConaughy,” he said with a very slight accent tingeing his well-chosen English. “I am sure there is nobody who could do better for us what we wish.”

McConaughy stared uncomfortably. The Intelligence Officer choked an unborn chuckle and said:

“I’ll leave you two together to talk this over. Let me know if you want anything.”

As he left, McConaughy had the feeling of a man whose inner self is being probed by an alien intelligence.

“Ye—ye’ll be a Christian, I hear,” he stumbled at last.

“Christian? Oh, yes.” The Armenian smiled—he seemed continually smiling; when his smile was accentuated it was simply broader. “My people always have been Christian. You will forgive me if I say it, but when your people were painted savages in their northern woods, my people were worshippers of the True Religion. We had reared stately churches in our great cities, and we were many and prosperous under our princes and kings.”

“Humph,” said McConaughy. “I don’t hold wi’ princes an’ kings—nor pprecisely wi’ grrreat churrches, either. I’m o’ the belief a wood chapel does as well for the drawin’ o’ the spirrit into interrcourse wi’ Divinity.”

“So it is with us, now,” agreed the Armenian. “For many centuries we have been forced to worship in stables and caves, fortunate beyond words when we had a hut we might call a church.”

“Do ye tell me so? That’s cruel harrd.”

“For our faith to our creed we have paid yearly taxes in blood,” continued Dikran Kalekian. “We have never known when the hand of the oppressor would descend upon us. And because we have always been shut off from intercourse with the great free Christian nations, we have never had arms, and so our only protection has been flight. But through all this we have kept the faith.” He drew himself up proudly, and a light, half-proud, half-satirical, gleamed in his eyes. “We are the primitive Christians, the holders of the Belief as it was first transmitted.”

McConaughy was awestruck, breathing fast.

“It’s ma conviction ye ha’ a just grrievance against they Turrk hell-hounds,” he rasped. “An’ ye do not hold wi’ the Papists, they tell me?”

“With Rome?” The Armenian snarled with rage. “We detest her. Aye, even as do you Protestants, although you have taken your creed from hands many times removed from the source.”

“Touchin’ that point I ha’ a dispoasetion to arrgue wi’ ye at some convenient time,” returned McConaughy firmly. “But o’ the injustice that has been done ye I ha’ no doubts. I’m a Christian man, an’ I thank God I ha’ a Christian crew. I wouldna carry any other. For Christians in distress I ha’ the feelin’ o’ kindred the Good Book enjoins upon us a’—aye, though it might choke me in the gizzarrd, I’d save the Pope o’ Rome, himself, from Turrks. So there’s ma hand on it. Ye shall ha’ your arms if Miles McConaughy’s skill means anything.”

A sinister light flared in the brilliant eyes of the Armenian as he gripped the Ulsterman’s hand, but it was drowned instantly in the suave smile which curled his red lips.

“Sir, you have a magnificent Christian heart,” he said impressively. “You have a heart, if I may say so, like the hearts of the first Apostles, who transmitted Primitive Christianity to us, who have transmitted its light through the ages. I shall look forward, Captain McConaughy, to many pleasant discourses with you.”

“Do so,” replied McConaughy heartily. “An’ ye’ll find pleasant fellows for discourse o’ religion in Jock Grant, ma Firrst Officer, an’ Evan Apgar—he’s ma Chief Engineer. Jock’s a Scotch Presbyterian, the same as me, wi’ some thriflin’ modifications touchin’ on predestination an’ one or two bit points we ha’ never cleared up. Evan’s Welsh, an’, man, he’s ggrand when he has the inspired fit come on him for to testify!”

II

“She’s no a verra sonsy craft,” observed Jock Grant, as their launch threaded its way through Alexandria’s port traffic toward the tarnished hull of the one-time Turkish coasting-steamer *Chambyses*.

Neither McConaughy nor Apgar answered him, but both silently registered entire affirmation. They had passed a number of slatternly vessels in their progress from the quay, but none was so down-at-heel, battered and dilapidated as the *Chambyses*, riding to a rusty length of cable some two hundred yards on their port quarter. She was a small boat—about 1,000 tons, according to the Intelligence Officer, who advanced the information cheerfully—with one funnel that looked to be about to tumble down; two bare pole-masts; a hull that was slowly scaling away, and upperworks that

had not known a paint-brush since they left the Greek shipyard where she was built.

“Not exactly an attractive craft, I’ll admit,” agreed the Intelligence Officer, “but she’s just what is needed for your purposes. Inconspicuous _____”

“Man,” said McConaughy, “would ye call a leper inconspicuous?”

“Well, no, perhaps—But, seriously, Captain McConaughy, she may look bad from here, but we’ve cleaned her up thoroughly inside. She’s been fumigated for rats, and the Health Officer told me they burned several tons of cockroaches.”

“She’d need all o’ that,” replied McConaughy. “What was she in the days o’ her shame?”

“She was on a run out of Smyrna up and down the coast—pilgrims, European cabin-passengers, native deck-passengers, livestock, dates, wine and vermin. We picked her up off Smyrna some months ago, and she’s been lying here ever since. We don’t care what you do to her.”

“Hecht,” said McConaughy. “There’s suspeeion in ma mind if the English grow generous. I tak’ it she’s not what would be called seaworrthy.”

“I’m no seaman,” the Intelligence Officer hastened to affirm.

They slid alongside the dingy flank of the *Chambyses* before McConaughy could make answer, and he and Jock Grant followed the Intelligence Officer up the ladder which the Egyptian caretaker had lowered for them. Even Apgar, who had maintained silence throughout the trip from shore, followed last, with a look of settled gloom on his face. The others turned at once to the bridge, but Apgar dove down a flight of steep ladders under a grated hatchway that led to the engine-room.

Mr. Apgar’s motto in life was “know your engines.” When he went aboard a new craft, he always sought out first the engine-room and endeavoured to work up some form of admiration for that which was to be under his care. Invariably, he regarded his new charges with loathing, which shifted gradually to some form or other of respect, according to the efficiency they manifested. But it was impossible for him to withhold for long his affection for any piece of machinery, no matter how cranky and troublesome it might be.

McConaughy and Grant were not surprised, therefore, when Evan appeared to them on the bridge a quarter of an hour later and announced

calmly—

“It caan’t pe tit.”

The Intelligence Officer looked at him in amazement, but McConaughy simply said—

“Are they very bad, Evan?”

“Fery paat is mild langwidge,” retorted Apgar. “T’ere is not a piston-rot t’at is not so cofered wi’ shale, I wonter can it run true. Eferyt’ing is rust. Whoefer cleaned ship, he paintet t’e walls, he paintet t’e decks, an’ he spat on t’e engines.”

“What speed would ye give her?” asked McConaughy.

“If ye put on t’e steam now, she gifes six, sefen refolutions a minit—an’ she ploughs herself to——!”

Evan was by way of being an Evangelist, but he believed in faithful delineation of the truth.

McConaughy looked speculatively out to sea.

“The carrgo is all stowed?” he remarked to the Intelligence Officer, who stood anxiously by.

“Yes, I’ll show you——”

“Never mind that.” McConaughy swung around to Apgar. “Ye’ve got three days to clean up in, Evan,” he said curtly. “Bring the men out this afternoon and turrn to. Ye’ve handled worrse nor this rat-trap in your time.”

“Aye,” said Evan obediently. “’Twill taak’ a wealth o’ paint an’ oils.”

McConaughy slapped him on the shoulder.

“Ye’re in Gov’ment employ, man,” he admonished. “Think o’ the joys ahead o’ ye. All ye need do is the signin’ o’ the indents.”

Apgar scuttled out of sight with a grin of pleased anticipation on his face. In his philosophy the next best think to a beautifully, spotlessly clean set of engines was a set of engines that required his utmost skilful exertions to make them workable. Success, in such a contingency, naturally was a tribute to his personal ability. So in the next two days he built up a wonderful love for the *Chambyses*’ decrepit old engines. He and his assistants debated ardently what emergency measures should be taken with the boiler-tubes, which apparently suffered from some metallic form of tuberculosis.

“We caan to nought put keep a low heaat o’ steam an’ pray,” said Evan at last.

It was marvellous what a low head of steam and praying did accomplish—all of six knots an hour.

But no such perfunctory makeshifts were practicable in the case of the tail-shaft, which well-nigh broke Evan’s heart. He raved and he cursed and he swore, and ended up by withdrawing to his cabin for an hour’s meditation and prayer. When he reappeared he was still pessimistic, but grimly determined to achieve some improvement.

“Craacket?” he replied to McConaughy’s inquiries. “Why t’ e screw does not faal into t’ e waater, I caan not unterstant, whateffer.”

He went ashore and purchased sundry requisites at heedless prices—in his abstraction even foregoing the pleasure of bargaining with his kind,—and upon his return took two of his more trusted subordinates and descended to the nethermost, stinking inwards of the *Chambyses*, where they laboured the rest of that day and most of the ensuing night, crouched and huddled in bilge and floods of oil, welding a ring about the most reprehensible section of the tail-shaft.

“Py efery right, she shoulth be trawn,” asserted Evan, after he had crawled forth, filthy but happy, and imbibed cups of tea amid the congratulations of the entire crew; “put she will holt wi’ aplenty lupricants. Naame o’ John Wesley, what a wreck o’ gootly iron she to pe!”

In the meantime, McConaughy and Jock Grant had been busied with the other preparations for the expedition, involving the substantial overhauling of the navigating gear, shipping of supplies and certain internal arrangements. The three days McConaughy had stipulated were up by the time they had done what was absolutely necessary.

“Are you satisfied she’ll keep afloat?” asked the Intelligence Officer when he came aboard the next morning, in company with Dikran Kalekian and another Armenian, to see them off.

“’Twill be no fault o’ ours if she decays on our hands,” returned McConaughy grimly. “An’ ye had the face to tell me ’twas easy money we’d be earnin’ by the voyage! Hecht, ye’ll go far wi’ the English!”

“Hope so,” returned the Intelligence Officer, with a grin. “It’s hard enough for a poor Scotsman, eh, Mr. Grant?”

“Ye say truth,” Jock corroborated soberly. “I mind——”

“Never mind what ye mind,” interrupted McConaughy brusquely. “What for ha’ we got two o’ these primitive Christians wi’ us? That wasna ma underrstandin’.”

“Oh, the other bird? He’s a servant or something like that to Dikran. Our friend is quite a person in his own country, Captain McConaughy.”

“An’ am I supposed to be takin’ ma orrderrs from him?”

There was belligerency in McConaughy’s tones.

“Not at all, not at all. Your relations with him must necessarily be delicate, captain, and I am instructed to advise you to employ great tact. He is with you in an advisory capacity, as guide and mentor. He knows intimately the coast you will visit; he has made the plans for the landing of the arms. You had best consult with him in everything affecting the object of the expedition. But on the ship, of course, you are master. Here are your official papers. They will identify you with any of our patrols you may encounter.”

“Humph.” McConaughy stowed the documents in an inside pocket, after a cursory survey of them. “Ha’ ye orrderrs for me?”

“Only these: you are to sail at once, making your course for Morphou Bay on the northeast coast of Cyprus. What speed can you get out of this junk-heap?”

“Six knots, accordin’ to ma chief.”

“Well, it’s three hundred miles from here to Morphou Bay—a good two days’ run. Say you get there day after to-morrow in the evening. You’ll lie off whilst Dikran or his servant goes ashore for information. Your next move will be governed by what they learn. If everything is all right you will proceed at once for a point on the Gulf of Adalia, about midway of a barren stretch of one hundred miles between Adalia, at the head of the Gulf, and Alaya on its eastern coast. That’s where the arms are to be landed.”

“An’ what sorr’t o’ a coast might this be?”

“Rocky, I understand. Pretty bad. But you needn’t worry. Dikran’s servant knows it all, and he will pilot you.”

McConaughy cast a glance of ill-favour toward the two Armenians who waited in the opposite gangway.

“Ye’re puttin’ me fair into the hands o’ they loons,” he growled. “An’ Christians or no Christians, they do be natives. I’m none so engaged wi’ the

prroject.”

“Nonsense, man,” returned the Intelligence Officer. “Remember, there’s more in it for them than there is for you. They have every incentive to get you safe to port. Good luck. I’ll see you this day next week if all goes well.”

McConaughy shook hands without enthusiasm, and turned to his passengers.

“We’re ready if ye are,” he said.

“But certainly,” responded Kalekian. “At once, Captain McConaughy. This is my servant and friend, George Kostikian. He belongs to the ancient guild of the mariners, as yourself. Upon him you may rely to guide you safely through unknown waters.”

George Kostikian was a dark, sour-looking, bearded man with evil, slant eyes, and none of the urbanity of manner that characterised his master. He grumbled a greeting to McConaughy in some strange tongue and then resumed his study of the surroundings.

“George speaks only the speech of the Haiasdan,” continued Kalekian. “I will interpret if you wish to ask him anything.”

“What is Haiasdan?” asked McConaughy curiously.

“That is what we Armenians call ourselves. Armenia is a name invented by the old Greeks. It is not in our speech. We call our land Haik, and we are the Haiasdan.”

“Ye’re a strange race,” rumbled McConaughy.

“We are,” assented the Armenian, with an odd, fleeting look that McConaughy missed.

“And now,” McConaughy went on, “if ye would see your cabin——”

“Gladly.”

“Yon steward will attend ye. I must get the ship under way. Ma frriently advice to ye is that ye prrocur life-presarrvers before ye do aught else.”

Alarm appeared in Kalekian’s face.

“The ship, she is not safe? But what a foolishness to sail——”

“Oh, I’m not altogether in earnest,” answered McConaughy contemptuously. “She’s a rotten old tub, but we’ll get along if it doesna blow up a storm. Mak’ yourrsel easy.”

But the Armenian was not satisfied, and when he reappeared on deck five minutes later, the crew of the *Chambyses* noted with soundless mirth that he brought a life-belt, which he carefully deposited behind the door of the miniature saloon that was perched midway of the old coaster's deck.

The anchor was already hoisted inboard, and Apgar's reinforced screw-shaft was turning gingerly, the flaking rust from the propeller-blades dyeing the foam of the wake, as they forged slowly out to sea. Below, the engines groaned and clanked, whilst Evan and his stunted Welsh oilers and stokers doggedly fought the speed upward, first to four knots, then to five, and with a burst of triumph to a precarious six. As they passed the last sandy headland, the first swell of the Mediterranean broke over the bows and staggered the *Chambyses*; but she rose buoyantly to it after a moment's hesitation, and refused to be cowed by still heavier seas.

"She'll ha' a heart in her," McConaughy admitted to Jock Grant, who stood by him on the bridge.

"Aye," said Grant. "The lassie kens a knowin' touch. It maun please her tae hae real sailorsmen admeenisterin' her wants."

"Ye're a poet, man," cried McConaughy. "Go below wi' Chips an' sound the well. I'd know if she's makin' wather."

Grant reported all dry and shipshape below, and McConaughy patted the bridge-rail in mute admiration.

"I'll tak' back some o' the harrd worrds I ha' said," he declared. "Let a ship ha' appreciation, Jock, an' she'll do the rest if ye give her the chance."

Jock nodded.

Evening found them crashing through a rising sea, well out of sight of land. Dikran Kalekian lay in his bunk, too limp to move, but the man he called his servant stood under the bridge, easily swinging with the motion of the ship and crooning a weird monotonic plaint as the salt-spray hissed against his face.

III

The *Chambyses* dropped anchor in Morphou Bay late in the afternoon of the second day after leaving Alexandria. Fisher-boats, with wide-winged lateen sails, circled about them, and on the beach several groups of white houses showed against the green masses of the olive-trees. In the distance towered the blue peaks of the Olympus Mountains. Everything was peaceful

and soft and quiet. They might have been a thousand miles, instead of less than one hundred, off the main trade routes.

“Well, I ha’ done ma porrtion o’ the worrk,” said McConaughy to Dikran Kalekian, when the Armenian staggered on deck, white from the prolonged bout with the Mediterranean rollers. “Here ye are in Morphou Bay.”

“It is well,” Kalekian answered, with some return of confidence as he noted the comparative stability of the deck. “One more favour, brave captain. Permit me a boat’s-crew to take ashore my servant. George should procure the news we require from our friends here.”

McConaughy nodded and ordered Jock Grant to have a life-boat lowered. Presently, it was pulling toward the beach, Kalekian’s servant squatting in the bows like a figurehead of ill omen. Then two hours slipped by. It was dusk when the boat pushed off from the shore. As it broached to beneath the davit-falls, Kalekian called down a single question to his servant. The answer, hoarse, guttural and singularly brief, sent a flood of colour into his face.

“You may go on,” he said to McConaughy with a touch of arrogance. “Everything is satisfactory. Our friends are waiting us. The secret is still secure.”

“An’ that’s good hearrin’,” returned McConaughy, unimpressed. “What’s the course?”

Kalekian hesitated and shot an interrogation at his servant.

“The course should be set for Cape Tchesme, at the mouth of the river El-Ashat,” he answered, after George had talked to him for several minutes in the rough tongue they used. “It is about one hundred and twenty-five miles from here at the head of the Gulf of Adalia.”

“ ’Tis not information the most definite,” said McConaughy, “and when we draw into the land, I’ll be wishfu’ ye should lend me your serrvant to con the ship.”

“You shall have him.”

The *Chambyses* slammed ahead all that night and the next day. Shortly after noon she raised a high, mountainous coast, and the Armenians were called to the bridge. At George’s advice the course was shifted to northeast by east and they steered through a sullen ground-swell parallel with the coastline. The shore was rugged and bare of any evidence of human

habitation. Aloft, dense forests clothed a few of the peaks and ridges, but for the most part the scene was absolutely desolate.

“What do ye call yon hills?” asked McConaughy.

“They are the Jeb-el-Aksar, a branch of the Taurus range,” replied Kalekian.

“They’re no very thickly populated, I’d swear.”

Kalekian smiled sadly.

“Ah, sir, my poor people! They have been killed, so many of them. Once they were numerous. Now, these mountains that you see shelter the few poor remnants.”

“An’ that is the worrk o’ they Turrks?”

“Yes.”

“The infernal butcherrs!” McConaughy ground his teeth. “To think o’ Christians left to the heathen to be despoiled an’ white men fightin’ among themselves!”

If McConaughy had chanced to look sideways at that moment he might have caught the tiger-light that flared in George Kostikian’s eyes. But he was intently peering at the coast, and his mind was occupied with the visions of bloodshed and massacre which had just been conjured up before him. Nobody saw the light in George’s eyes or heeded the faint curl of Kalekian’s lip as he responded—

“There shall be due vengeance exacted, brave captain.”

It was four o’clock in the afternoon when a bold headland loomed ahead, and George raised his arm, with the one word—

“Tchesme!”

They rounded the cape and entered the delta of a small river which flowed through a valley in the mountains, dropping anchor some three-quarters of a mile off shore. In the foreground a shabby fishing village huddled by the river bank. But what caught McConaughy’s first glance was a white mass of buildings that crowned the landward extremity of the cape, where it soared upward in a flat pinnacle of rock, commanding the narrow valley and the course of the river El-Ashat.

“Is yon a forrtress ye ha’ brrought us against?” he demanded suspiciously.

Kalekian laughed.

“Long years ago, my friend—yes. But now it is a ruin, used, it is true, by our friends as a hiding-place, because the ignorant of the mountains believe it to be haunted by great djinns and Afrits. We purpose with your kind help to remove the guns there.”

“Do ye? I’m none so attracted by the looks o’ it.”

Kalekian looked nonplussed.

“Why,” he protested, “what better——”

“I’ll ha’ ye rememberr,” pursued McConaughy, “I’m rresponsible to the English at Alexandrria for ma carrgo. I’ll not commit they arrms to any place where they may fall to the Turrks. Ye told me the coast was deserrted an’ ye bring me to a forrtress.”

“A forrtress, brave captain? Not so,” protested Kalekian. “A ruin, a haunt of outlaws.”

“Outlaws, is it?” responded McConaughy. “Then I’ll tak’ a look at that same.”

Kalekian shrugged his shoulders and held rapid converse with his servant.

“Have your own way, sir,” he said, after George had spat out a couple of venomous sentences. “You will like the place better after you have inspected it, perhaps. But do not blame me to the English for the delay.”

“I’ll assume all rresponsibeelity,” rejoined the Ulsterman. “Miles McConaughy never yet shifted his burrden to any otherr’s neck. Do ye mak’ ready to go ashore. I’ll be wi’ ye dirrectly.”

McConaughy stepped into the chart-house to give some parting instructions to the officer of the watch. He was in the midst of them, when the door was darkened by two figures.

“Well, Mr. Grant, Mr. Apgar?” he inquired sharply.

“Ye’re gangin’ ashore?” suggested Jock.

“Aye.”

“Ye’ll not go alone, then,” said Evan.

“What d’ye tell me?” demanded McConaughy.

“Ye’ll not go alone, whateffer,” said Evan stubbornly. “We go in t’rees.”

“Would ye defy me to ma face?”

“Harrk to the sense o’ it, skipper,” replied Jock imperturbably. “Ye wad gang shore wi’ twa natives ye ha’ no knowledge o’. ’Tis no judeecious. Think on it, an’ ye’ll admit the logic o’ ma poseetion.”

“Hecht,” said McConaughy, “I see ye ha’ the right o’ me—an’ the numberrrs. Ha’ done, then. We’ll go together.”

Jock and Evan beamed.

“Is the boat ready?”

“Aye,” said Jock, “an’ the big deil and the little deil are burrnin’ the thwarrts.”

“Who’s the big deil, Jock?” asked McConaughy curiously. “D’ye mean Kalekian?”

“No, no. I’d gie ma oath the evil i’ him isna the measure o’ her i’ the serrvant. That laddie has an ee I wadna care to meet on a blustery nicht i’ the moors.”

“Ye talk the like o’ a preacher,” declared McConaughy. “Evan, himself, wi’ the flame in him, wouldna outdo ye. But we ha’ no time for the like o’ this nonsense. Come your ways wi’ me.”

They found the Armenians waiting for them with scarcely concealed impatience, but no comment was made and the party rowed ashore in silence. The fishing village was almost deserted. A few women and children regarded them apathetically, and a group of savage-looking, wild-haired men paid scant attention to the Europeans, but bowed low before the Armenians, with whom they engaged in earnest conversation—directing their remarks especially to George Kostikian, whose menial position did not appear to count in their estimation. It was he who dismissed the villagers with an offhand gesture.

Kalekian turned to McConaughy.

“Our friends will bring donkeys to carry us up to the old place.” He motioned toward the white mass of buildings which dominated the river and its valley. “They have sent word to our people all through the mountains, and to-night we shall decide what is to be done about the rifles.”

A less egotistical person than McConaughy might have noticed the underlying threat in the last phrase, the insolence of tone and expression. But it never entered the Ulsterman’s head to suspect an Armenian, who had

been seasick, of flouting him. McConaughy simply nodded and sat down on the ground to await the next move.

The donkeys, however, turned out to be excessively small beasts, and McConaughy and Jock Grant refused to trail their long legs on the ground, electing instead to walk. Evan, whose legs were short, and who loathed any form of exercise other than the climbing of greasy ladders, readily mounted one, and they set off in single file up the valley.

The shadows were lengthening as they began the ascent, and by the time they had turned into a side gully evening had set in. But their guides climbed steadily, never amiss for the trail, and McConaughy and Grant, deck-wallopers that they were, soon began to pant under the unaccustomed toil.

“Hecht,” grunted McConaughy, “this minds me o’ the time I was a bit ’prentice in the old Orange packet, wi’ the thirrd officer timein’ us over the cross-trees an’——”

Just how it happened none of the three could ever say. They had halted for breath, McConaughy and Grant some distance behind Apgar, when without warning they were set upon from all sides. Men in dirty white clothes dropped from the rocks around them, joining forces with their escort.

McConaughy and Apgar struggled without avail. Big Jock Grant managed to throw off the three foes who had fastened upon him, and to reach for the automatic in his belt; but before he could draw it he was down, and an instant later his hands had been jerked behind his back and made fast. In less than two minutes the fight was over, and the three white men were on their feet again, battered, dusty, cursing, but helpless.

“Ye swine o’ the pit!” roared McConaughy, as he strained at his fastenings when Dikran Kalekian approached him with a broad grin of triumph. “Ye may tak’ liberrties wi’ the English Gov’ment, but Miles McConaughy——”

“If you do not be quiet I will order one of these men to cut out your tongue,” said Kalekian softly, and somehow McConaughy believed that he meant it.

“D’ye call this Christian?” exclaimed the Ulsterman in milder tones. “We may not be the same colour, but——”

Kalekian smiled a terrible, tight-lipped smile.

“You fool!” he snarled. “And you believed all that you were told—just as your foolish officers in Alexandria believed it!”

McConaughy’s jaw dropped.

“Are ye not Christians?”

“Christians!” Kalekian spat like an angry cat. “We are of the Senussieh! We are the bitter foes of all things Christian!”

“But——”

“Silence! You shall hear your fate when you go before the Sheikh of El Senussi, himself.”

The next hour was a nightmare. The three prisoners were pushed and pulled, flogged and dragged, up the steep ascent to the tableland of rock crowned by the old castle. On close approach it became evident that this structure was largely in ruins, but its general outlines were still complete, and it was manifestly a place of some strength.

At first they were flung into a narrow chamber beside the gateway, and here they were left for an hour under guard, forbidden to talk or communicate with each other. They were glad of the rest, though, for all were cut and bruised and sore. Then they were led out across a courtyard, strewn with huge blocks of fallen walls, into a great hall lit by numerous torches and crammed with men in dirty white robes and turbans, all armed with bright, new Mauser rifles.

Dikran Kalekian and George Kostikian sat at the far end of the room by themselves, but the “servant” sat above the “master.” There was nothing servile about his appearance now. His robes were spotless, his turban was the green of the Hadji, his manner and bearing were those of a lord and a conqueror. And his eyes glinted cruelly as they roved over the three men in bonds before him.

“Bow down, you Christian dogs,” ordered Kalekian.

“Not to a cur,” retorted McConaughy with more vehemence than originality.

Kalekian made a sign, and three guards shoved the prisoners down upon their faces.

“So Christians must approach the Sheikh of El Senussi,” announced Kalekian, and at the naming of the title the men in the hall pounded their gun-butts on the stones.

After their involuntary obeisance the prisoners were permitted to stand up.

“You are brought here for judgment,” said Kalekian.

“Judgment for what?” rasped McConaughy, blinking the sweat and blood out of his eyes, his stubborn intelligence reaching out already to grasp the situation.

“As to how you shall die, brave captain. If you write for us a letter to your ship, telling the officer in charge that you are detained in the mountains and wish him to give up to us the arms, you and those with you shall die swiftly. If you do not—we of the Senussi have torments which will yet wring compliance from you. And believe me, even then your death will not be an easy one—though we have mercy on you and blow out your brains, as you will request.”

“D’ye think ye’re dealin’ wi’ children?” replied McConaughy contemptuously.

“No, with pliant human flesh.”

“Who are ye?”

“The servant of this prince here.”

He indicated Kostikian.

“And who is he?”

“He is the Sheikh of El Senussi—” again the thundering rattle of the gun-butts on the stones—“in this land, Vicar of the Vicar of Allah, who from his secret city in the deserts of Tripoli rules all Islam from Fez to Muscat and beyond to Delhi and Calcutta. To him bow all the Senussieh. His will is all powerful.”

“Who are the Senussieh?”

“They are the followers of El Senussi—” yet again the battering salute—“the True Believers of Islam, Inheritors of all the World.”

“Then ye are nought but Turrks,” said McConaughy, craftily seeking to prolong the conversation, with an eye to reaping as much information as he could whilst the opportunity presented itself.

“You lie, Christian. The Turks are our servants. We use them for our purpose.”

“But yourself—are ye not Armenian?”

“I was born Armenian. But the Senussieh are of all races, and the influence of El Senussi—” once more the thudding of the gun-butts—“reaches everywhere.”

McConaughy drew a deep breath. This was no trivial plot.

“Ye ha’ answerred all ma questions,” he continued. “Answerr me one more. Ye ha’ guns. Why do ye want ma carrgo?”

“We can never have enough guns,” replied Kalekian. “Those guns which you have brought are to go to our brethren in Egypt, who wait the signal to rise and join us in driving the English into the sea. Soon we shall give the word, and the Germans and the Turks will break the canal, and the Senussieh in their might will pour out of the deserts of Tripoli, the Sudan and the wastes of El-Arish. Then the English rule will die.”

“It can’t die soon enough to suit me,” said McConaughy cheerfully.

“What do you say?” exclaimed Kalekian.

“I’m no more English than yourself, man. Nor are ma officers. I ha’ no affection for the English, a dodderin’, self-satisfied race—to let the like o’ this hatch under the noses o’ them!”

“Would you recant?”

“Recant what?”

“Recant Christianity—accept the doctrine of Islam. You would not be the first.”

McConaughy laughed silently.

“I’m thinkin’ I’m one o’ they primitive Christians ye were tellin’ me about so eloquent. I canna change ma faith so easy, Mr. Senussi.”

“Beware how you use that name,” cried Kalekian. “It means death without mercy.”

“An’ that is all ye ha’ promised me since I came here.”

“It is what awaits you, fool. Its manner of coming is your only choice.”

McConaughy shrugged his shoulders.

“Ye fair rival the English in your generosity, man,” he said.

The green-turbaned Sheikh snapped something out of the side of his mouth, and Kalekian stooped hastily to confer with him.

“It is our Lord’s decision that you shall be held in bonds for the night,” he announced finally. “In the morning you will have an opportunity to write the letter of which I have spoken. It matters not greatly whether you do or not; the arms are as good as ours. But we will pay you with easy death for the lives of the men we might lose in an attack on the steamer. Think well in the hours which lie ahead of you, for our torments are not lightly endured. We will tear the flesh from your limbs slowly, strip by strip, until you yield. Better a quick death.”

“We thank ye for the choice,” said McConaughy dryly.

Their guards whirled them around and marched them from the hall.

IV

“A fine pusiness, inteet!” complained Apgar.

Their guards had thrown them into a stone-walled room and shut the massive door behind them. For the first time they were alone and unwatched.

“Ye’re no verra cheerfu’, Evan,” said Jock Grant, wriggling his pinioned arms thoughtfully.

McConaughy said nothing. He was walking about the dim chamber, lighted only by the moonbeams which streamed through a couple of gaping embrasures in the rugged walls high overhead, surveying the compass of their prison.

“And wot for should I be cheerful?” snapped Evan. “Haf ye knowledge o’ these Senussis? No? Well, for t’e comfort o’ your soul, Jock, let me tell ’ee they are t’e cruelest heathens in t’e world. No maan knows t’e whole truth apout ’em. Efen t’e Turks fear ’em.”

McConaughy joined them, humming a psalm-tune under his breath.

“’Tis not yet time to say your last prayerrs, Evan,” he said. “Tak’ hearrt, man. Ye’re in the right, though, about they Senussis. From what little I ha’ heard o’ them along the Riff coast they do be fearsome devils. Prrotestants like they are, by all accounts, against the old-time Mohammedans.”

“Hoot, ’tis little allowance they mak’ for us that are Prrotestants, too,” remarked Jock. “Wad ye not think, now, they’d appreciate we are no Papishers, an’ claim some bit kinship?”

“Don’t fash yourrsel, Jock man,” returned McConaughy. “We’re Christians. That’s enough for them. Besides, we’ll be kennin’ their secret.

D'ye see? There's the reason we'll ha' to get out to-night, if we get out at all."

"Get out?" repeated Evan. "D'ye mean escaap'?"

"Why not?"

"T'e circulation is gone from ma haands, this hour back—an' if we had our haands wot could we do against stone walls?"

"Much, Evan. But firrst, 'tis true, we must free our hands."

He knitted his brows in deep thought.

"Gie your fingerr's a chance wi' ma lashin's, skipper," suggested Jock. "I ha' loosed 'em a wee bit. It wad be a sair pity if sailormen couldna unravel the knots o' they heathen."

The hands of all three were lashed behind them, and the first problem was how to enable a man to work on the bonds of a comrade. It was finally solved by having McConaughy and Grant squat down back to back. Thus placed it was practicable for McConaughy to pluck with his fingers at the knots of the fastenings around Grant's wrists. When McConaughy's muscular fingers tired—and this was soon, for the cramped position of their arms deprived them of all but a tithe of their normal strength—Evan Apgar took a turn at the work.

It was not easy. On the contrary, it was painfully slow. Their nails were worn to the quick. Utter exhaustion benumbed their aching fingers. But hour after hour they stuck to it, and in the end sailor cunning triumphed and the ropes fell from Jock's arms.

A few minutes' rubbing and pounding served to restore the blood to his paralysed hands, and then he rapidly undid the fastenings of McConaughy and Apgar. Their plight was somewhat worse, for their hands were terribly sore from the constant picking at the rough knots.

But they wasted no time in commiserating themselves. McConaughy led the three straight to one of the embrasures, ten feet above the floor.

"There," he said, "Jock, do ye tak' Evan on your shoulderr's, an' give him a look outside."

The wiry little Welshman readily scaled Jock's giant frame and slipped into the embrasure as nimbly as a cat. The wall was all of six feet thick, and Evan was swallowed up in the cavity. But presently he reappeared, stretched flat on his belly.

“T’ e waall trops straight town,” he whispered. “Put ’tis fery ruddy. A maan might maak’ it.”

“What will be at the bottom?” asked McConaughy.

“T’ e mountain-site, wi’ plenty bushes.”

Jock turned to the skipper.

“Let me put ye up, sir,” he said.

McConaughy being up beside Evan, the two of them had little trouble in helping Jock scramble up the wall, for the huge Scotchman was agile, despite his weight. Then the three lay down in the embrasure and studied the descent before them.

For any men except sailors or acrobats it would have been sheer madness to attempt. The wall flared out slightly toward its base, which was fifty feet below. What made the descent at all possible was this flare and the added fact that the stones were laid in irregular courses, which the stress of bygone sieges and earthquakes had jarred still further from their set pattern, so that at intervals a man who was sure-footed and sure-handed might find minute toe and finger grips.

All this McConaughy grasped in a single sweeping glance.

“Tak’ off your shoes,” he said briefly. “ ’Tis a case for naked toes and quiet. I ha’ a notion we’ ll fool they Senussis yet.”

They took off their shoes and stowed them in their pockets. Then, one by one, they lowered themselves from the embrasure, caught the first insecure toe-hold and began their precarious descent.

They scarcely breathed. The rattle of a dislodged chunk of mortar sent their hearts throatward; and once, when Jock’s bulk tore loose a crumbling block and he saved himself from falling only by a spread-eagled clawing of every vantage-point he slid past for a distance of ten feet, they expected to be shot at from the battlements overhead. But nothing happened, and five minutes later the three adventurers were safe in the shelter of a clump of bushes and drawing on shoes again over their blistered feet.

Jock chuckled from time to time as he wrestled with his laces, but McConaughy’s face was very serious.

“Ma men,” he said, as he stood up, “we owe thanks to the Powerr o’ Faith to-night. I’ ll ask ye to pray wi’ me in thanksgivin’—an’ that we may ha’ as successfu’ an issue to what lies before us.”

“Amen, amen,” quoth Jock and Evan earnestly.

“God,” said McConaughy, “ye ha’ been uncommon kind an’ forbearin’ to us, your faithful, humble serrvants, an’ we ask ye to help us out a little more in the harrd time that lays ahead o’ us. We ha’ been deleeved out o’ the hands o’ infidels an’ idolaters, who sought our apostasy, and if we had the courage to resist ’em we do not seek to arrogate that to themselves. No, God, we——”

And so on, for ten minutes longer, for McConaughy was a powerful prayer when he was fairly started. In fact, he was interrupted, while he was still forging strong, by Jock Grant, who began to fear that they were overdoing it.

“Skipper,” he whispered delicately, “skipper, gin ye maun pray another spell, bide ’till we are gaun awa frae these deils i’ the castle.”

“Mr. Grant, I’ll thank ye not to interrupt ship’s prayerrs,” said McConaughy sternly.

But nevertheless he desisted at the end of his next clause, and after droning a long “Amen,” which was dutifully echoed by Jock and Evan, led the way into the beechwood that clothed the mountain-flank on which they found themselves. The contents of their pockets, including compasses, had been taken from them. But McConaughy picked his course by the stars, and struck off in a direction which he thought would take them to the seacoast, although at some distance from the village below the castle.

It was now about three o’clock in the morning, and the stars were shining less brightly. Far off they heard the howl of a wolf; behind them loomed the white fairy mass of the castle, the “old place,” as Kalekian the renegade had called it. For the rest, the Jeb-el-Aksar appeared deserted. But the fugitives were duly cautious and walked as lightly as they could.

They had gained the foot of the tableland, where the shadows lay thicker, when McConaughy heard what sounded like a stick cracking under pressure immediately in front of them. He motioned to his comrades to halt, and they waited breathless; but the noise was not repeated.

“Some peast o’ t’e forest, maype,” hissed Evan.

McConaughy nodded.

“We’ll go on,” he answered shortly. “If ’tis anything else there’s no use in standin’ still.”

They stepped out into a little clearing and were instantly surrounded by a group of men in gaudily embroidered sheepskin jackets, some of whom carried antique rifles, other scythe-blades bound to sticks and still others vicious curved knives and heavy clubs.

“Do we fight?” asked Jock, doubling his fists.

“Bide,” ordered McConaughy, puzzled as the newcomers made no overt act against them. “Watch ’em. If they——”

There was a rustle among the sheepskins and a man stood forth of the group.

“What the——!” observed the stranger. “Say, are yer Americans?”

There was a pause, and the sheepskins moved closer.

“Americans!” repeated McConaughy. “No, ma man, we’re Brrritish.”

“Oh!” This in a palpable tone of disgust. “I thought yer might be from the little old U. S. A. One grand berg, bo, buhlieve muh! And say, if I can ever beat up the carfare to get by the censor, it’s me back to the old job, shufferin’ a street-car in Pittsburg.”

“Is the mon frae the States?” exclaimed Jock Grant in amazement.

“Sure,” said Sheepskin.

“Whateffer would ye be toin’ here?” demanded Evan Apgar.

“Search me, feller! If I’d a known when I was well off, I’d a stayed in Pittsburg. But, gee! I had to play the Smart Aleck. Get me? Wanted to come home and show the old folks all the sport clothes suits I’d bought wid me fifteen plunks a week. And look at me, now!”

He revolved as he spoke.

“I gets here just before this little scrap is pulled off. And what happens? I _____”

“Are ye Arrmenian?” asked McConaughy.

“Well, I’ve taken out me first-papers back home, but that doesn’t mean anything to the Turks. Sure, I s’pose yer’d call me Armenian. Anyway, I was born here, but I jumped the old lot when I was a kid, just after one of the massacres that they said would never happen again. Gee! And wasn’t it just my luck to happen back in time for the biggest Mr. Mohammed has pulled off yet! Yeh! A regular double-header!”

“Where will ye ha’ got that talk?”

There was suspicion in McConaughy’s voice.

“Oh, I talk real United States. Yes, sirree. I went to night school—took a course in a correspondence school, too. I was studyin’ to be a lawyer.”

“Ye talk like one,” commented McConaughy. “Who might your friends be, young man?”

“They? Oh, they’re same as me. But they’re natives—never been off the home lot.”

“What were ye doin’ here?”

“Waitin’ for yer, I guess, Mister. Say, s’pose yer give us a line on yourselves. We’re the majority vote here. Yer don’t talk like Turks, but them Senussis are a tony crowd. Yer can’t never tell what they’ll be up to.”

“So ye know about the Senussis?”

“Know about—why, Mister, that gang have been raisin’ the devil all through our villages. They’ve raided and burned and killed everything Armenian they could reach in these mountains.”

McConaughy heaved a sigh of genuine relief. But a sudden thought checked him.

“Are ye Primitive Christians?” he inquired.

“What’s that? Prim—what d’ye call it?”

“ ’Tis o’ no matter o’ consequence,” McConaughy hastened to answer. “As for ma partry, we ha’ but just escaped from they Senussis ye speak of. I’m thinkin’ the farther we get from ’em the safer will it be for all concerned. So——”

“Oh, they can’t do anything without me knowin’ it,” returned Sheepskin coolly. “We’ve got ’em well watched. If we had the arms we’d beat ’em up in great shape. I’ve got one fine young army back here in the woods, Mister Englishman.”

“Brr-ghurr-zz——” cursed McConaughy. “Don’t ye mis-call me again, young man! D’ye think because ye ha’ friends more numerous nor I that _____”

“What’s bitin’ yer?”

“I’m no English. I wouldna be English. If I were born English I would drown maself. I——”

“All right, all right, old man. No offense. Pour ice-water on your head. Gee, what a bunch o’ pep! Yer never mentioned your name. How was I to know?”

“I’m Captain Miles McConaughy o’ Belfast. These——”

And McConaughy solemnly introduced his officers, the while the Armenians pressed about and watched with open eyes.

“Pleased to meet yer all,” said Sheepskin. “I ain’t stuck on meself, Mister—I mean, Captain—got it right that time, didn’t I? But it was a darned lucky thing for yer that yer blew into me and not into some party o’ ginks that wouldn’t a savvied your lingo. How’d yer get here?”

As briefly as possible McConaughy recited their adventures up to that time. Sheepskin became visibly excited.

“And the Senussis haven’t got your ship yet?” he cried.

“No.”

The Armenian-American turned and jabbered frantically to his brother-sheepskins. They did not seem to comprehend him at first. Then all of a sudden they broke into yet more excited jabbers and several darted away into the forest on various errands. Sheepskin lent McConaughy his attention again.

“Look here,” he said, “would yer like to get back at them crooks up on the hill?”

“The Senussis?”

“Sure. Would yer like to give it to ’em good and proper?”

McConaughy considered.

“Ye ha’ not made clear your meanin’,” he responded cautiously.

“Put it this way, then. I’ve got most of our people that are alive collected in a safe place back in the woods by the coast. I’ve got 5,000 men there like these boys.” He swept an arm around the circle of fierce, bearded faces that topped the sheepskin tabards. “We’da been at the Senussis before this only we ain’t got enough arms to go round. Now and then we cut off a little party, but most o’ us have got nothin’ but sticks and knives. Give us guns and we’d wipe ’em out, though.”

The young man's eyes blazed as he spoke and his face glowed with emotional excitement. It was plain why he was leader.

"Say, Mister, it's a great chance for yer," he urged. "Wasn't yer sent here to arm the Armenians? Well, here we are, waitin' to be armed. What more do you want? Help us and we'll wipe out that nest o' rats up there—and there won't be no revolution in Egypt—nor no attack on the Canal, neither."

A low growl of assent arose from the other Armenians. They did not know the exact meaning of the words, but they could tell the drift of their leader's argument.

McConaughy looked at Grant and Apgar and they stared back at him. It was a big idea, beyond question, a big idea. But——

"There would be Turrkish throops in these hills?" suggested McConaughy. "Ha' ye orrganisation? Can ye keep together?"

"Watch us! Just watch us! As for Turkish troops—no, there aren't any just now. They've all been withdrawn to Smyrna and the Dardanelles. They went away soon after the massacres. The Turks thought our people would be quiet, then. Organisation? Well, Mister Captain, I swiped me plan from the way Boss Carney carried the election in the Twenty-third Ward the last election I was home. Let's see, that was '13. Yes, '13. Gee, it seems a long way back."

"'Tis ma belief ye ha' the gist o' a plan," said McConaughy slowly. "But 'tis no a thing to be decided in the blinkin' o' an eye. We'd best be movin' from here. Then do ye an' some o' your friends guide us to where we can get aboarrd the ship and we'll talk it over wi' deeliberation."

Sheepskin looked disappointed. He was of the school of strategy which relies upon inspiration and charges with the precipitate haste of a Murat. But his face cleared as he reflected the real meaning of McConaughy's proposition.

"There's no time like the present, as we say back home," he replied. "But you're the doctor. Come along." He shot an eye toward the sky, which was whitening in the east. "It's gettin' late for to-night, anyhow," he conceded. "Well, we'll have to see about puttin' it over to-morrer, eh?"

He detailed several men to remain on picket-duty and watch the castle from that side, and then the entire party marched off through the forest, aiming for the coast.

“Don’t yer worry,” advised Sheepskin, as they started. “We won’t have no trouble gettin’ on board your boat. I know where there’s a fishin’-felucca hid up a creek, and yer’ll be safe widout the Senussis knowin’ where yer are. Leave it to George, Mister, leave it to George.”

After they were fairly on their way, McConaughy dropped back to a position beside Jock Grant.

“Well, Jock,” he said, “now will ye admit the effeecacy o’ perristant prrayerr?”

“Ay, skipper,” returned Jock meekly, “but ppredestination is a concertrd worrkin’ o’ Divine Will. Ye wadna——”

“Hecht! Predestination! Will ye never learn to drop that red rag whiles ye talk wi’ honest God-fearrin’ Ulster Prrotostants? I’ll leave ye to Evan.”

“Pretestination, intee!” spoke up Evan. “Ye shallna maak’ me waste ma time efaangelisin’ t’e Scots.”

V

The small saloon of H.M. gun-runner *Chambyses*—as she is now called in the few wardrooms that know this story—stank with the acrid stink of half-cured sheepskins. Round the one narrow table sat Miles McConaughy, Jock Grant, Evan Apgar and their new Armenian friends.

The *Chambyses* rocked gently in the swell off the bar of the river El-Ashat. On deck her crew lay behind the bulwarks with rifles handy, watching the white mass of the “old place,” blazing in the morning sun on the southern headland, where lurked the sinister band that owned the rule of El Senussi, that almost fabulous figure of the Orient whose name is always whispered with a backward glance for eavesdroppers, whose hand stretches to every crack and corner of the world of Islam, who, from his unknown abiding-place afar in the burning sands of the Tripolitan desert, pulls the strings that cause jihads, revolutions and uprisings, beyond the control even of the Padishah, himself.

Now and then as they talked, the Armenians in the saloon looked out through the portholes at the riven pile of the castle. It was as if they could never shake off the dreadful menace it contained for themselves and for all Christians on the barren Adalian coast, to which the fanatical rule of El Senussi had penetrated.

“How long ha’ they been here, Sheepskin?” asked McConaughy with a scarce necessary gesture.

“Since the massacre began, last Winter. Nobody knows where they come from. First thing we knew they were here. They killed a heap more’n the Turks, so at last the Turks were afraid of ’em. They seemed to have spies everywhere. They’re bad people, Mister. Yer wanter get that straight.”

“Ye won’t need to be tellin’ me,” responded McConaughy grimly.

“Aw, yer got off easy. They can do things wid ramrods an’ pine-splinters—we’re wise to ’em.”

“D’ye ken a man named Kalekian—Dikran Kalekian?”

“Do I? Say!” Sheepskin cursed with an unchecked brilliance that brought admiration from McConaughy, who could appreciate the efforts of a brother artist.

“Ye’ll ha’ learned that in the States?” commented the Ulsterman.

“What? Oh, yes. But look here, Mister Captain, this Kalekian’s got my goat. He was one of our big men, rich, had a carpet factory in Smyrna, and travelled a lot. He helped organise the Hunchakis—that’s our secret society—like the Masons, d’ye see?—only wid a political twist—and when we found he was a spy—well, we went all to pieces. The Turks caught most of the leaders in the coast vilayets, and then he brought in this gang o’ Senussis and they done the rest.”

McConaughy chuckled silently.

“I’ll tell that to the English in Alexandria,” he said. “’Twas Kalekian perrsuaded ’em to send me wi’ arms an’ ammuneetion for the sufferin’ Armenians.”

“Well, we’re here,” responded the Armenian. “We’re the sufferin’ Armenians, all right.”

“Ay, but this isna a matther to be proceeded in wi’out due caution,” answered McConaughy. “I’m rresponsible to the English for ma carrgo.”

“Aw, what d’yer want? We can’t buy the guns off yer. But give us a chance and we’ll smash the Senussis. Ain’t that enough? How yer goin’ to protect us if we don’t get arms?”

Jock Grant leaned his ponderous bulk across the table toward his skipper.

“Wadna the judeecious course be tae draw up a contract, douce an’ properr?” he suggested. “A bit paper for tae pprevent——”

“Sure, that’s the dope!” assented Sheepskin enthusiastically. “Better make it a contract. You deliver the goods to us, and we’ll deliver to you for value received. That’s the stuff.”

“Hecht,” said McConaughy, “I’m no lawyerr man to be scribblin’ o’ terms an’ agreements.”

“Leave it to me, bo, leave it to me,” advised Sheepskin airily. “Was it for nothin’ I took the correspondence school course in law? Let’s have paper.”

Evan Apgar tore a sheet out of an old log-book he took from a drawer and pushed it across the table, together with an indelible pencil.

“Will ye waant aught else?” he asked.

But the Armenian, already driving his pencil doggedly across the paper, did not hear him. The others watched the birth of the great idea in silence—compulsory, on the part of Sheepskin’s followers, for they could not speak English.

“How’s this?” demanded Sheepskin finally. “Contract agreed between me, Tony Papastikian, for the Armenians of the Jeb-el-Aksar, and you, Miles McConaughy, representing the English——”

“Eh? What will ye be puttin’ there?” interrupted McConaughy.

“Don’t yer represent the English Gov’-ment?”

“I do not, young man,” roared McConaughy. “Will ye never tak’ it in through your thick head that I willna ha’ anything to do wi’ the English?”

“Well, who do yer stand for, then?”

Followed a hasty conclave between McConaughy and his lieutenants.

“Ye’d best put ‘the British Gov’ment’,” he amended, somewhat mollified. “Me representin’ the English! Underrstan’, Sheepskin, I ha’ no obligations to the English. They ha’ pushed me into every tight hole I ha’ ever escaped from.”

“If yer not English, what in—— are yer?”

There was irritation in the tones of Tony Papastikian.

“I’m an Ulsterrman.” McConaughy rolled out the word impressively. “An’ a subject o’ the British Empire—though I do not hold wi’ kings an’ emp’rrohrs.”

Sheepskin grunted impatiently.

“Are yer through talkin’?” he demanded. “Cause if yer are, we can get on to business.”

“Get on—but rrememberr I’m no English.”

Papastikian grunted again, laboriously crossed out the word “English” and added “British Government.” Then he paused, with his head on one side, and considered the document.

“That you will give us free all the guns and ammunishun we need,” he continued at last. “That we will attack the Senussis after that. That we will agree to wipe out all the—— skunks.”

“What will be skunks?” asked McConaughy suspiciously.

“It’s a mean animal wid a bad smell.”

“Man, but ye ha’ the gift o’ worrds! Let it stand. It couldna be more prrecise.”

Tony Papastikian beamed with the pride of authorship.

“Have I put enough in it?” he inquired diffidently.

McConaughy now studied the paper.

“Ye’d best add to it, ‘and give all possible aid and help to the Brritish Gov’ment in fightin’ the Turrks and Gerrmans,’ ” he advised. “I misdoubt ye talk betther than ye spell, but that’s a small matther. Now, we’ll sign.”

Slowly and with infinite care, McConaughy and Papastikian traced their signatures, and then McConaughy carried it to his own cabin and locked it up in the ship’s safe.

“Now, what’s to do?” he said upon his return.

“My idea, before yer pull off a stunt, is to caucus on it,” remarked the Armenian. “Get me? Sit and chew the rag until the vision comes home to little Willy.”

“A most extrraordinar’ mannerr o’ speech,” whispered Jock Grant hoarsely into Evan Apgar’s ear.

“Ay,” said Evan a little moodily—he had not had much chance at the conversation. “An’ the tonkey lofes his pray!”

McConaughy did not heed these disgruntled comments—if he heard them. His mind was leaping forward over the campaign ahead of him.

“Firrst, to get the guns landed,” he remarked abstractedly. “But before that we must ha’ a plan. What will it be, Sheepskin?”

“For gettin’ the guns ashore yer must pull outter this hole,” replied the Armenian. “It’s too close to the devils. I know a place twenty miles southward on the coast, where yer could lie safe.”

“Can your people meet us there?”

“Sure. Yer wouldn’t wanter get there until dark—yer can loaf around outter sight o’ land until sundown, then run in. We’ll be ready.”

“An’ ye ha’ five thousand men?”

“Five thousand, Mister. We’ve got maybe seven or eight hundred guns, most of ’em old.”

“An’ what will yourself do?”

“I’ll stay to shuffer yer in. The rest o’ my bunch can go ashore and spread the news—see?”

“An’ afther we ha’ prrovided ye wi’ arms?”

“We’ll go as far as yer like. But for plans let’s wait ’till we hear from our spies watchin’ the Senussis.”

Ten minutes later, the eagle-eyed sentries on the battlements of the old place saw a fishing-boat leave the side of the *Chambyses* and slant off down the coast. Five minutes afterward the rusty tramp heaved her anchor and pointed her nose straight out to sea, disappearing presently in a cloud of her own smoke, hull down upon the brazen horizon.

VI

In the twilight haze the *Chambyses* crawled back toward the land. The goal of Tony Papastikian was a small natural haven, sheltered by a rocky islet off the mouth of a creek. Of rivers that coast is guiltless, save now and then a stream of the proportions of El-Ashat—which is the reason for its barrenness—and in fair weather no better port could have been desired for the landing of the cargo.

McConaughy, however, had developed no inconsiderable affection for the pot-bellied old tramp, and he insisted upon sending off a life-boat with a leadsman to pilot them into the anchorage. So it was all of eight o’clock before the *Chambyses* swung to her riding cable.

On the shore blazed hundreds of campfires, and the hum of an excited multitude came off to them on the wings of the gentle breeze. Torches waved back and forth over the water as a fleet of jimcrack craft swarmed about the *Chambyses*' iron sides, yelling questions and greetings to which Sheepskin replied as best he could in the confusion.

"Say, Mister," he hailed McConaughy, "do yer want any o' these guys to help unload?"

"Bid them keep off if they wouldna be scalded by the fire-hose," roared McConaughy. "Where would we get wi' a mob the like o' that? Ma own men will land the arms at the beach and there ye will see to the disthribution and reporrt to me."

Another life-boat was dropped from the davits and pulled alongside the forward hatch. Evan coupled up the donkey-engine, a sorely decrepit contrivance, which had a hacking cough and the wheeze of an insomniac—the deck-hands stripped the hatch-cover, and the first box of Martinis, with the king's Broad Arrow stamped on the boards, was jerked over-side.

As soon as a boat was full it put off and rowed ashore to a point where Jock Grant was stationed and Papastikian marshalled his countrymen in orderly lines that stretched away into the fire-lit gloom. When two stacks of cases, one containing rifles and one cartridges, had been accumulated, Sheepskin commenced serving them out as the lines passed him, and Jock marked down the numbers on a mammoth indent-sheet.

It was close on to dawn when the procession of small boats ceased and Jock rowed back aboard to report wearily:

"Fower thousand fower hun'ert an' twa, Sir, wi' twa score loons nae satisfied wi' their old guns an' clamorin' for new. But gin their breech-blocks wad worrk I'd na gie them new ones."

"Rrrright, Jock man. An' now we'll tak' a snooze. Hecht, we ha' earned it. Ma bones ache."

In fact, all on board the *Chambyses* were so tired they were ready to drop. With never a thought of what lay ahead of them, they sank down wherever they chanced to be. McConaughy slept on the bunk in the chart-house. Jock and Evan and a stray quartermaster or two lay on loose canvas in the open on the bridge. The crew were scattered from end to end of the decks, and few expended the energy to seek their quarters.

Judge, then, of McConaughy's surprise, when, upon awakening shortly after noon, he chanced to glance over-side and saw what appeared to be the

columns of an army marching and counter-marching on the shore.

“Are we betrayed?” he gasped to himself, snatched binoculars from a rock and levelled them on a martial figure which crowned a small elevation of rock in the midst of the mobilisation. “By the powerr o’ the Presbytery, ’tis Sheepskin! What does he here? Jock, Evan!”

Jock and Evan responded by yawning and rolling over on the deck. McConaughy promptly kicked them mercilessly.

“Owch,” yelled Evan, who was the tenderer of the two. “Hafe ye no feelin’s whateffer for t’e saanctity o’ rest? T’e curse o’ Whytisffyrde on ye!”

“Ha’ done your currsin’ an’ look at Sheepskin’s army,” replied McConaughy.

Grumblingly, Evan lurched to his knees, seized the binoculars and levelled them on the bridge-rail.

“St. Taavit!” he muttered involuntarily.

Jock, aroused by this, propped his big frame on an elbow and peered through the weather-screens. His keen eyes gripped the spectacle at a glance, for Jock made up by his sharpness of visual perception for his mental sluggishness.

“A bonny wee army!” he said admiringly.

“Wee army, is it?” returned McConaughy with some indignation. “I’d go from here to Smyrna wi’ it, if the looks o’ it do not lie.”

“Aweel, skipper, there be but five thousand o’ them,” said Jock cautiously. “An’ Arrmenians are no the like o’ Aberdeen men i’ the thraw o’ a fecht.”

“Aperteen men, inteet!” Evan chuckled. “Whaat for use are Aperteen men pesite the men o’ Harlech?”

“Whisht, whisht!” ordered McConaughy. “We’ll go ashore. Jock, call me up a boat’s-crew. Evan man, sift through your fireroom and pick me out the handiest men o’ their hands to tak’ wi’ us. We must leave some wi’ the ship.”

While his subordinates executed his instructions, McConaughy went below with the carpenter, who soon reappeared on deck with several heavy coils of rope and a collection of light timbers, all of which were lowered into one of the life-boats.

“What for ha’ ye brought that tackle?” inquired Jock, as he came up.

“For a very important purpose, Jock. ’Tis a well-known fact that a bird which can fly out can fly in.”

“Hoot, ye’re speirin’ me,” said Jock gruffly.

But Evan, who had overheard the conversation, nodded sagely.

“A laatter, skipper?” he observed. “ ’Tis a goot defice.”

“Ye posturin’ bit mon,” growled Jock. “Wad ya seem tae be——”

“I would use ma wits, Jock,” grinned Evan, as he slipped down a davit-fall.

Jock looked about to make sure no member of the crew might be within eyesight to observe such a grievous breach of ward-room discipline, and then leaped on the same falls, coming down behind the Welshman with a rush that threatened the safety of his fingers.

“Ye misbegot clabberjaws!” exclaimed McConaughy, leaning over the bulwarks, whence he had witnessed this incident. “Are ye schoolboys or men? Ha’ done wi’ this or I’ll orrdher the two o’ ye back aboard to guard ship. We ha’ worrk before us.”

Jock and Evan merely grinned up at him.

“ ’Tis the fechtin’,” admitted Jock. “The fechtin’ always goes tae ma head.”

“Well, see it goes no farrther. I’ll meet ye on the beach—an’ use care for that tackle I ha’ trusted ye wi’.”

When McConaughy came ashore at the head of twenty picked men of the crew, whom he had selected to be his personal guard on the expedition, he found his First Officer and Chief Engineer squatted in the sand and splicing foot-long strips of timber at eighteen-inch intervals between two sixty-foot ropes, to the accompaniment of a running fire of gibes from Evan, aimed at Jock for having failed to understand what the rope ladder was for.

After turning over to them the men of the crew for direction and guidance, McConaughy strolled up the beach to where Sheepskin and a group of the bearded elders of the Armenians stood, supervising the drilling of the refugees.

At this close range he could appreciate even better than on shipboard the regularity of ranks, the method and system of organisation. The men drilled

in proper units, by platoons, companies, battalions and regiments. They had the proper officers and non-commissioned officers. Moreover, although they were undeniably clumsy, yet they had a distinct perception of the rudiments of military drill and tactics. If they were slovenly in sloping from column of squads into company or battalion front, nevertheless, they instinctively knew the meaning of the different formations. Here was no green, untaught mass of men. That aggressive zest for instruction and leadership which distinguished Tony Papastikian evidently had been turned to good account.

“This isna new to them?” remarked McConaughy.

“Don’t yer believe it! Say, I wanter tell yer I’ve sweated some blood to beat this business into a bunch o’ backwood guys like these.”

“Where did ye get the knowledge yourself?”

“In the militia—back in the States. Sure, I done me time. Riot duty, too.”

“Ye are a man o’ penetration, I see,” commented McConaughy. “ ’Twas in ma thoughts we’d ha’ to delay operations whilst ye taught these men not to shoot themselves. But they could marrch the morrow’s dawn, I should say.”

“Before that,” answered Sheepskin. “To-night’s the time. Have yer got a minit? Well, come on over here wit me an’ listen to the reports I got this mornin’ from me scouts.”

He led the way to where a rough shelter of timber and rocks had been thrown together. In the background—in fact, all around the area occupied by the armed men—McConaughy noticed crowds of women and children. If there were five thousand men, he computed hastily, there must be at least twenty thousand non-combatants.

“The Senussis are up in the air, buffalood,” began Papastikian, as they sat down. “Get me? Yer see, when you fellers disappeared yer left ’em guessin’. They never believed men could get down that wall widout breakin’ their necks——”

“Ay?” interjected McConaughy. “Well, they’ll learn whiles that men can get up it—wi’out brreakin’ their necks.”

“An’ it was hours afterward they caught on to it that yer musta bumped into some o’ our people,” continued the Armenian. “Fact is, they didn’t get wise ’til they saw the boat we took yer off in comin’ ashore. They were hot—specially when yer went away, an’ they knew they’d lost the guns. Gee! I hear what happened to that guy Kalekian was a caution!”

“How would that be?” inquired McConaughy with genuine interest.

“Why the chief o’ the Senussis blamed it all on him. First they beat him wid ramrods. Then they beat him wid raw-hide whips. Then they poured vinegar on to his back. What they done after that I don’t know. Buhlieve me—he got his!”

“An’ where do ye learn this confidential informmation?”

“I got a spy in the village down by the mouth o’ the river. He slips it to me scoutin’ parties. See?”

“Ay. Now, why d’ye advise attackin’ to-night?”

Sheepskin hunched forward, his eyes blazing with excitement, nervous fist punctuating his remarks.

“They’ve got a big powwow on to-night. A couple o’ Turk generals an’ a German officer have come to talk wid ’em about this drive at the Canal an’ the revolt in Egypt. Then I sent ’em word askin’ terms for the Armenians that hadn’t turned coat an’ come in. They sent back word that all who turned Moslem could go back to their villages. The fellers I sent were pretty poor-lookin’ sights an’ they got the Senussis to believe it was all up wid us. They’ll never look for anything like we can spring to-night. I tell yer, Mister, this is the time.”

“An’ how would ye attack?” questioned McConaughy.

“Attack? We’ll come up on ’em widout their knowin’ a thing—we can cut off the outpost they have in front o’ the gate o’ the castle. Then we’ll just pile through the gate.”

“Ay, but ’twill cost ye a heap o’ men.”

Sheepskin waved his hand impatiently.

“Maybe. I guess yer right,” he admitted coolly. “But what o’ that? We got the men.”

“Will they ha’ machine-guns?”

“Sure. They got two, I heard.”

McConaughy shook his head.

“Ma friend, ye ha’ the speerit, but ye are unaccountably rash,” he pronounced. “’Tis conceivable ye might win through as ye ha’ planned wi’ bombs. ’Twould be likely, an’ ’twas just like the English to fit out a modern army wi’ never a thought o’ heavy orrdnance. But I wouldna ha’ great

hopes, an' for one I decline to risk ma life in a fool adventure the like o' that."

"Are yer goin' to quit?" demanded the Armenian indignantly.

"Quit? The thought was never in ma mind. Hark to me, young man. Ma counsel, now——"

For the next five minutes Sheepskin's part in the conversation was merely to nod his head at frequent intervals, but before long the frown which had gathered on his face was replaced by a beaming smile and as McConaughy concluded he jumped to his feet with unsuppressed enthusiasm.

"That's the stuff!" he cried. "Say, Mister, can I be a general in your army. This is your party. You're the boss."

"Ye can that," returned McConaughy heartily. "We'll show the heathen a trick or two, eh?"

VII

Silent as ghosts the Armenian columns poured through the ravines of the Jeb-el-Aksar in the early moonless hours of the night. No sound was made by the thousands of feet shod in bulls'-hide sandals; the browned metal of sights and slings refracted no light from the dim star-shine; and miles ahead crept a veil of scouts to prevent detection of the movement.

They marched by three different routes, so that there might be no delay in the concentration of their entire strength, and the rocky ground, which would have tried troops bred to the plains, proved no obstacle to their steady three miles an hour.

McConaughy and his men were with the centre column, which was commanded by Papastikian in person; and as it was impossible for them to keep up with the swift, remorseless pace of the mountaineers, they were mounted on hardy little ponies that trotted along, no matter how rugged the way. It was just over twenty miles to the stronghold of the Senussieh, and the three columns met at an appointed spot in the mountains, some two miles distant from the old place, shortly after midnight. Here the scouts reported their observations.

There had been much going and coming all day in the castle, they said; but in reply to McConaughy's questions, translated by Sheepskin, they admitted that an outpost was still stationed at the end of the tongue of land, upon which the castle stood, where it joined with the escarpment of the

mountains above the river. The members of this outpost, camped among the rocks, were constantly on the alert.

“Ye’ll concede ma point was well-taken,” said McConaughy to Sheepskin, when he brought this out. “By the plan ye proposed ye would ha’ butchered the outpost, and then swept across the neck o’ rocks up to the castle gate, wi’ machine-guns drummin’ the life out o’ ye. Few o’ ye would ha’ come through at the end o’ all, an’ they few might betther ha’ died.”

“Yer got the goods on me, old timer,” Sheepskin cheerfully acquiesced. “There ain’t no doubt o’ that, though I do think we coulda wiped ’em out my way, before they got us all.”

More questions deduced the fact that a mounted party of Turkish and German officers had arrived during the afternoon.

“Did they ha’ escortt?” demanded McConaughy.

“No, they came alone,” the scouts agreed.

“Hecht,” said McConaughy, “I misdoubt that we ha’ complications here. The Turrks wouldna dare ride alone through this counthry. Well, five thousand men is more nor we need for the matther in hand. Sheepskin, do ye pick out a judeecial, cirrcumspeckshus man, give him a thousand rifles, an’ we’ll depute to him the coverrin’ o’ our rear an’ the line o’ rretreat, so to speak—though rretreatin’ is the last thing I ha’ in ma thoughts.”

The Armenians were already divided into five regiments, each one thousand strong, and one of these regiments promptly was told off, assigned a position to occupy, and filed away into the night. McConaughy was gratified to notice that the men obeyed the orders with alacrity, even though many of them must have supposed that they were being deprived of the opportunity they had long hankered for to come to hand-grips with the ruffians who had burned their villages and slain their families.

“Now,” said McConaughy, “ ’tis time to concertr measures. Sheepskin, I’ll ask ye for one hundrred men for ma own purrposes—young, lusty lads.”

Papastikian vanished, to reappear fifteen minutes later with the pick of his four remaining regiments.

“They’ll do,” said McConaughy after a careful inspection. “For the rest, do ye advance wi’in range o’ the outpost an’ wait there for the noise o’ ma attack. Aftther that—drive through ’til we shake hands.”

“I got yer.” Sheepskin saluted smartly. “Say, we won’t do a thing to that gang.”

The two parties divided. Papastikian, at the head of a solid column of nearly four thousand men, tramped up a gully that would lead him to a position whence he could look down unseen upon the castle and its approach, biding the signal to link his efforts with those of the smaller party, under McConaughy, who had branched off to the left, aiming to strike through the forest which had sheltered the *Chambyses*' officers the night of their escape, and so gain the foot of the castle walls.

An hour's march took McConaughy to the forest edge within view of the soaring bulk of the "old place." A wan moon was trying to shine through the sea-mist, and its filmy light made the white walls look all the more substantial and massive. Outwardly, they seemed deserted.

But why should a watch be kept upon this side of the fortress? Surely, the Senussieh might believe that no men could scale these precipitous walls, even if three mad Franks, by some magic unknown, had contrived to slip down them without leaving their mangled bodies at the base.

"Dod, skipper, she looks a guid bit more deeficult fra' the bottom than she did fra' the top," whispered Jock Grant. "Gin I had seen it firrst fra' this end I wad ne'er ha' tried it wi' ye."

Evan shivered.

"It maak's me 'maazet-like at me temerity," he gasped. "Got must hafe peen fery kint to us."

"Well," said McConaughy grimly, "'tis as I said—if a birrd can fly out he can fly in."

"Ye'd ne'er attempt tae go up that wall?" exclaimed Jock. "Man skipper, ye're daft—just daft! It canna be did."

"It will be did," retorted McConaughy.

"Oh, sir, think petter o' it," appealed Evan. "Haat I t'e true itea o' t'e plaae I would nefer hafe encouraget ye in it."

"Would ye mutiny?" asked McConaughy brusquely. "Ha' done, ye silly gowks. Ye talk the like o' women. 'Tis a matther to be attended to, an' forasmuch as 'tis a dangerous matther I'll attend to it maself. But by the same token, 'tis comparatively simple."

"But ye'll peril——" began Jock.

"Bide," ordered McConaughy firmly. "Ha' ye e'er turned me from ma path by worrds? Now, do what I say."

“Ay,” said Jock and Evan meekly.

“There will nought happen to me. But if there should, then, Evan, do ye thry the wall. An’ if ought happens to ye, then Jock shall thry it. If ye canna mak’ it, then go to Sheepskin, tell him so and thry to carry the place by storm. That’s a’.”

Then, to their surprise, McConaughy commenced to undress. Evan nudged Jock and Jock nudged Evan. Finally, Jock cleared his throat and inquired huskily:

“Wull—wull ye be—ah, that is—d’ye feel a’ richt i’ ye’re head, sir?”

McConaughy ceased operations—he was down to greyish-white underflannels, and was drawing on a pair of heavy white wool socks over the pair he had worn—and regarded them calmly in the moonlight.

“Jock,” he said, “if ye or Evan—ay, Evan man, I see ye squintin’ there—ever again thry to insinuate that I’m loony, I’ll tak’ over a cloth-packet for the privilege o’ mast-headin’ the two o’ ye for the fool ’pprentices ye are.”

Having delivered himself of which statement, McConaughy stood up, serene in his all-but-nakedness, and fastened a light rope around his waist. Next, from a pocket he produced a long, flat steel chisel and tied it loosely to his wrist by a bo’sun’s lanyard.

“I’m ready,” he announced. “Evan, ye’ll stay here wi’ the Arrmenians!” He communicated this intention by vigorous signs to the natives who had watched his conduct with sibilant wonder. “Jock, ye an’ the *Chambyses*’ men will come wi’ me. Bring that ladder an’ the spar I gave ye.”

This last was directed to several of the crew who carried the bulky coils of the rope ladder Jock and Evan had made, together with a substantial spar some seven feet long. “An’ the firrst man up afther me will bring ma clothes an’ arms,” added McConaughy. “Do not be forrgettin’ that. Quiet, now, through the underrbrush.”

They picked their way among the low bushes that covered the gentle upward slope that formed the foundation for the castle walls. McConaughy carefully had selected the section of the wall down which he and his lieutenants had climbed, reasoning that the knowledge he had then gained of its cracks and crannies would now serve him in good stead, whilst the room they had occupied would form a safe place for his little band to congregate against the time they should be ready to make their rush.

At the base of the wall, Jock gave his chief a single handclasp, and McConaughy turned to the white cliff before him. He took the chisel that was tied to his wrist, slipped it into a crack, and, with this leverage to assist him, found a slight projecting ledge for his foot, and commenced the upward climb.

The first few steps were easy, and almost before the men crouching in the bushes had a chance to draw their breaths he was above their heads, blending tonelessly into the background. But then came a time when he poised spiderlike against the sloping flatness of the wall, feeling here and there within range for a cavity or projection in which to put one foot. Splay wise, in their loose heavy socks, McConaughy's toes—prehensile as only a sailor's can be—explored the gritty surface. A hole an inch or two deep in a decayed course of mortar was enough for them. Sometimes when footholds failed, he reached arm's-length above him, jammed his chisel into a crack and hauled himself upward by sheer muscle to a more profitable level. Once even this failed, and for a space those who watched below waited expectant, looking to see his body swing loose from its slight support and crash to the ground.

But McConaughy clinched his teeth, and, sprawling sideways by one arm, caught hold of a narrow ledge and dropped easily to new footing. There he rested for several minutes, panting exultantly.

"Hecht!" he muttered to himself. "There was a while ye looked the Recorrdin' Angel i' the face, Miles McConaughy."

And he waited, after he had regained his wind, to offer a fervent prayer.

Refreshed, he started upward again, taking care to zigzag back and forth across the face of the wall, so that always he had the window of his former cell directly above him. This was what he aimed for. Had he chosen to follow the whimsicalities of the masonry he might have won to another opening, or even to the upper battlements, in less time than it required to gain the one he sought. As it was, his singleness of purpose came near to causing disaster almost at the moment of victory.

Inch by inch, McConaughy had scaled thirty feet, more than half his distance. He had struck a comparatively easy stage, following the course of a jagged crack, the result of some earthquake in centuries past, and he forgot to remember that the shattered blocks presented a menace of their own, as well as an assistance. He was mounting blithely, the chisel clinched between his teeth, relying entirely on toe and finger grips, when suddenly a ledge

under foot gave way and one hundred pounds of masonry clattered down the wall.

For a moment, then, he hung by the tips of his fingers, arms jerked well-nigh out of their sockets by the sickening plunge. He could feel the flesh give as his fingers sawed the uneven edges of the stones. Yet more terrifying still was the murmur of harsh voices overheard and the patter of unshod feet on the battlements.

There was one thing to do, and one thing only. Desperately he fought for a safer hand grip, drove his toes into such holes as opportunity offered, and pressed his body close against the wall. He praised God at that moment that the chisel was in his mouth, cutting cruelly into the corners of his lips where it had been driven by the shock of that first downward plunge, but safe where its steel blade could not glint up at inquiring eyes.

Again the watchers below held their breaths in anticipation of disaster. But the two sentinels who came to the battlements merely glanced downward casually, their eyes sweeping over the white excrescence upon the white wall with never a thought of suspicion, and turned away again. The djinns and afrits—in whom the Senussieh, fierce modern regenerators of Islam, do not believe—might try to scale that monstrous height; but no man born of woman, least of all the fear-driven Armenians who were the only foes to be expected, would risk his neck so uselessly.

McConaughy, of course, never saw their eyes pass by him. He clung to the stones, motionless as a lizard, until a brief hiss from below told him he was free to climb again. He was more careful, now, choosing his holds with meticulous precision, testing out every ridge and cranny to make sure it would sustain his weight.

He was up so high that he dared not look down. Whenever he removed his attention momentarily from the stones in front of him, he glanced aloft to make sure he was trending toward his objective.

At the last, he did not dare even to look upward; a trembling began to develop in his limbs; his hands shook; his body quivered. Iron man that he was, McConaughy was near his limit. It was with a thrill of hysterical surprise that he saw the window beside him, a bare arm's-length away.

The sight gave him renewed strength and confidence, and he worked sideways slowly, to a position whence he could step onto the sill and grasp a projecting corner of the lintel for balance. But at this last moment, too, failure all but tripped him, for he forgot the rope trailing from his waist, and,

as he released his hand-hold and started to shift his other foot to the window-sill, the line caught about his ankle. He tottered, reached out for support, and by blind luck grasped a friendly ridge in the masonry. Then he sank down on his knees and crawled shakenly into the deep recess in the hollow of the wall, glad to lie at full length and fight down the sobs of terrible exhaustion that owned him.

From this faintness he was aroused by a strange noise that smote through his weariness like a trumpet-blast of alarm. Huddling to his knees, he listened for a repetition of it, holding the chisel before him as a weapon to resist attack. Once, twice and three times, McConaughy breathed softly, and the gloom was soundless. Then the noise was repeated, a persistent groaning that broke into an ineffective, protesting babble of formless words and phrases.

Forgetting his bloody lips and fingers, his sore toes and joints, McConaughy crept forward along the embrasure, until, sprawled out on his stomach, he could look down into the stone-walled room that had been his own prison. The recurrence of the groan guided his eyes to a formless heap in one corner.

“Whateverr it is, ’twill be no hindrance to us,” murmured McConaughy to himself. “Whiles I ha’ finished here, I’ll look to the poor man. He’ll be some wreck o’ the hatred o’ these Senussi scoundhrels, like enough.”

Crawling back through the embrasure, he twigged the rope pendant from his waist. Immediately it tautened under a heavy weight, and very slowly and with all due caution against bumping and knocking down more stones, he hauled up the spar. Placing this beside him he dropped the rope again, and presently, in response to a tug at the lower end of the line, began hauling up the rope ladder, which he made fast to the spar, dexterously splicing the upper rung to the timber in such a way that it would support safely an immense burden.

When this had been accomplished to his satisfaction, he pushed the spar back through the embrasure, and swung it around inside the chamber so that it reached across the window from side to side and formed an effective anchorage for the ladder.

Then he crawled to the outer end of the embrasure and waved his hand as a signal for the ascent to begin. Simultaneously, he descried a thin line of figures creeping from the edge of the forest and knew them for Evan and his Armenians, who must have been watching with hawks’ eyes in the darkness.

The ladder was already creaking with the load of two men climbing it, and as the first man was about to clamber on the window-ledge, it swayed to one side under an abrupt accession of weight, and he reached out wildly for support, with a muttered ejaculation.

“Ye onhandy scrapple o’ the pit!” snarled McConaughy. “Would ye give us, ready bound, to the Senussis?”

“Nae, skipper,” returned Jock mournfully, as he crawled up beside him. “But I ha’ just drappit ye’re clothes.”

“Dropped ma clothes!” repeated McConaughy. “Oh, ye——”

He choked with the emotion of it.

“Look at me!” he commanded. “Misther Grant, d’ye considherr ye are showin’ the due respect and considerration for your superiorr officerr he has a right to expect, when ye compel him to go about in the garrb o’ a Lascarr?”

“I ha’ brought ye’re arrms, sir,” pleaded Jock.

“He’ll ha’ brought ma arrms!” McConaughy apostrophised the stone walls about them in a tragic whisper. “Tell the loon that comes afther ye to pass the word——”

But the far-off “durr-durrr-durrrr” of rifle fire that swelled rapidly into one sonorous, smashing roll of thunder, reverberated out of the surrounding mountains and tore the words from McConaughy’s mouth.

Overhead and about them they could hear the “old place” waking into life. Orders were shouted; bare feet, swished over the stone pavements. Yet there was no confusion. The Senussieh went about their tasks, sought their positions, with the promptness of disciplined men.

“’Twill be Sheepskin,” said Jock, not unready to shift the attention of his wrathful skipper to another’s blame. “The canty gomeril! He wouldna bide ’till ye——”

“Hold your clamourr!” interrupted McConaughy scornfully. “Can ye not tell the firin’ is more nor two miles yon? Ay, ’tis beyond that. Sheepskin hasna fired a gun. But I miss ma rreckonin’ if he isna forrced to repel an attack from the castle here. Hecht! A good plan gone wrong! We’re i’ the hands o’ Prrovidence this night, Jock, an’ it’s ma opeenion Providence will expect us to shift for oursel’s.”

In the meantime three other men had scrambled into the embrasure, which was becoming overcrowded. McConaughy cocked an attentive ear to the turmoil without, then hitched himself forward to the inner edge.

“Well, we’ll be about our own share o’ the business,” he said. “There’ll be no time to be lost. Let me down, Jock—an’ if ye jarr me, man, but I’ll trim the hide o’ ye wi’ ma chisel here. So.”

Swung from Jock’s brawny arms, McConaughy dropped easily to the floor of the chamber, caught the rifle that was pitched after him and stole toward the door, forgetful of the prone figure in the far corner, which had now ceased to groan. One by one, the *Chambyses’* men followed him, and the Armenians had begun to arrive, when a wild shriek resounded between the stone walls and broke into frantic gibberish:

“Oah, yes! It is ghosts! Verily ghosts! Djinns and afrits come to haunt me! Oah, holy saints! Oah, Allah, all-merciful, compassionate! Oah, devils of all religions——”

VIII

McConaughy dropped his chisel, with which he had been prying at the lock of the door.

Staring at him from the heap of rags in the corner was the ghastly figure of what had once been a man. Crusted blood was smeared over the remnants of its face and in its hair; its nose was slit and one ear was gone; its scabbed fingers twisted and clutched and twined; the naked shoulders that rose from its filthy coverings were seared and criss-crossed with a network of terrible welts and open, bleeding cuts.

“A mon!” murmured Jock Grant.

“Got saafe us!” whispered Evan. “It *was* a maan.”

Fascinated by the loathsome horror of the thing, McConaughy approached closer to it, and in terror the spectre withdrew into its rags.

“You would not hurt me,” it gabbled aimlessly. “No, the brave captain would not hurt me. The brave captain is now a brave ghost, is he not? Hee, hee, hee! A brave ghost. We are all brave ghosts. Gentlemen, don’t you want to buy some beautiful rugs? I have a consignment just arrived from Persia. Yes, gentlemen, they are not machine-made factory impostures from Aleppo, but the genuine article. All the way from Persia and beyond. Real Baluch stuff—a prayer rug from Kalatka—and there is a rose and gold gem sent me by a mandarin in Peking. Rugs, rugs, rugs for—but won’t anybody

buy? Won't anybody buy of poor Kalekian? Oah, no, no, no! Do not beat me! Oah—the knife—not the knife—not again——”

The gabble died away in a scream of racked torment.

There was not a man in the room but shivered.

“It's—it's Kalekian!” gasped McConaughy.

A pair of fever-lighted eyes gleamed up at him from the cowering creature.

“Oah, yes,” it mumbled. “Kalekian—Dikran Kalekian. He was a rich merchant of Smyrna. All know Kalekian. Hee, hee, hee!”

Several men made a mad break for the door. It was too much for them. McConaughy, himself, felt his stomach turn.

“Heaven forgive me that I ever wished vengeance on the man,” he said hoarsely.

“Ay,” agreed Jock. “But, skipper, what wad ye do wi'—it?”

McConaughy shook his head.

“Do? What can we do?”

Nevertheless he put down his rifle and bent closer over Kalekian. But the sight of McConaughy's blood-smeared face threw the tortured man into a paroxysm of terror.

“No, no, don't do it again!” it pleaded. “Don't cut me again!”

McConaughy drew back, almost as if he feared the clawlike hands that waved at him.

“Hecht!” he said, “I do not like to leave——”

The stammering chatter of machine-guns close at hand made the thick stone walls tremble.

“Quick!” yelled McConaughy, forgetting all about the thing that had been Kalekian in the sudden emergency of the moment. “There'll be no time to waste, men. Sheepskin will ha' had to attack. We must get out o' this before they slaughter him.”

Half a dozen men threw themselves against the huge door, but it barely quivered beneath the shock.

“Stand aside,” McConaughy ordered. “Fire into the lock. All together, now! Aim carefully! Fire!”

Twenty steel-jacketed bullets tore through the great timbers and the metal work about the fastenings.

“Again,” demanded McConaughy. “That will be enough. Jock, give her they shoulders o’ yours.”

Jock flung himself into the door like a human battering-ram, and it gave perceptibly.

“Half a dozen o’ ye again,” urged McConaughy.

The half a dozen hit the door in a mass, 900 pounds of hard bone and sinew, and it ripped outward, letting them through in a tumbled heap into the vaulted corridor beyond.

At the far end of the passage a smoky torch was stuck into a ring on the wall. From the distance echoed the clamour of voices, and dominating all, the rolling staccato clatter of rifle fire, punctuated at intervals by the sinister note of the machine-guns. Warily, McConaughy led his party, now more than fifty strong, along this corridor in the direction of the fighting. Behind them trailed a string of late comers, hastening to catch up with the advance-guard.

Nobody appeared to challenge them, and after threading a succession of murky passages they emerged into the great hall, where McConaughy, Jock, and Evan had been interrogated before the Sheikh. As they pressed toward the entrance, several of the Senussieh, in their white robes, ran out of a side door, checked in astonishment at sight of the intruders, and then turned to flee. One of them McConaughy shot dead, the other staggered under the impact of a bullet in the shoulder, but contrived to get through the door, and could be heard screaming a warning to his friends.

“Aftherr the scoundhrrels, men,” shouted McConaughy. “Keep together—and make for the machine-guns!”

With a savage cheer, in which the Armenians shrilly joined, the *Chambyses* men—who had been the *Joan of o’ Arc’s* men and before that the men of the *Emmaline Pankhurst* and the *William and Mary*—closed up behind him. There was a hurry-scurry in the half-light of the dawn, a clash with a little knot of silent men, whose eyes glowed fanatically in their dark, bearded faces; and the invaders found themselves in a courtyard, fighting their way to the gate, where the Senussieh were standing off Sheepskin’s hordes from behind piles of shattered stones.

Up to the present, McConaughy perceived, Sheepskin had satisfied himself with developing a strong feint attack, but had not ventured to push

assaulting lines across the neck of land swept by the machine-guns. His rifles buried the gateway in a hail of lead, and he had been waiting for the arrival of McConaughy in the foe's rear—a fact of which he was duly apprised by the flurry of shots in the interior of the Castle. Now his men began to come out in the open, taking advantage of an attempt by the Senussieh to shift one of their machine-guns, so that it could be trained to the rear.

McConaughy saw this move, too, and started to intervene, but a German officer, who had been directing his gunners, leaped at him, sword in hand, and behind this man poured a torrent of the white-robed warriors of El Senussi, voiceless as wolves taking their prey.

“Aim from the hip!” McConaughy bellowed hasty warning to his slender band. “Don't raise your guns to fire!”

He fired once as he had directed, but then the German was upon him and he had to lift his rifle to block a slash at his head. This was new work to McConaughy, but evidently an old story to his assailant, who wove a ring of flickering steel about his torso.

“Hecht!” muttered McConaughy, as he leaped three feet backward to avoid a cut at his arm. “I ha' carved maself wi' ma chisel. Now will I let this brash tinsmith despoil me? By the powerr o' the Prresbyterry, I——”

And dodging a vicious thrust, he drove his butt into the astonished German's mouth.

“That willna be the proper way to fence, I misdoubt,” he told himself, with some satisfaction. “But 'twill ha' merrits.”

The Senussieh had charged with empty rifles, relying on their bayonets. But McConaughy's order to shoot from the hip had given time for three fair volleys, which sent the Moslems reeling backwards behind heaps of dead and wounded.

“The machine-guns!” shouted somebody.

But the firing had cluttered the trailpieces of the mounts with bodies, and it was no easy thing to disentangle them. One gun still bore on the approach to the gateway and was belting lead into a mob of Armenians that would not be cowed by death. The other McConaughy reached in the nick of time to prevent its being used to sweep his party to eternity. He dealt the breech-mechanism a blow with his rifle that jammed the cartridge-belt, and then set himself to resisting the frantic efforts of the enemy to recapture the gun before it was too late.

Back and forth in the gateway the conflict swayed. McConaughy and his men, shoulder to shoulder, stood in a swirling eddy of several hundred of the Senussieh. They were crowded too close to be able to shoot. It was a case of butt and muzzle—crash to the skull with the butt and dart straight for the eye with the muzzle, relying on the peep-sight to flick up into the brain.

While it lasted it was warm work—warm and fast. Men went down on all sides. McConaughy and Jock took Evan in between them and guarded his small body as best they could, but Evan more than earned his protection by lightning dashes to the front, which always served to lessen the pressure and account for a man or two.

The end came when Sheepskin forced his assaulting column up past the one working machine-gun and filled the gateway with thousands of crazy Armenians, who cut loose right and left, crumpling the last dauntless opposition of the Senussieh in five minutes of merciless hand-to-hand fighting.

McConaughy was profiting by this diversion to wipe the blood from his eyes, when Jock seized him by the arm.

“Yon, skipper! D’ye see? The tall mon wi’s robe half off—him wi’ the green turban—he’ll be George, him that ca’ed himsel’ Kalekian’s serrvant.”

McConaughy readily glimpsed the man Jock indicated. He had worked out of the fighting zone and was running toward the great hall and the warren of passages that lay beyond it.

“He’ll be thryin’ to escape,” exclaimed McConaughy. “We must ha’ the rascal.”

Others saw the fugitive and joined in the chase, realising that a man who wore the badge of a Hadji must be worth capturing. One or two shots were fired without effect, and the hunted man glanced back over his shoulder. He redoubled his pace at sight of the pack on his heels, and reached the entrance of the great hall with a safe margin to spare.

Here McConaughy expected the quarry to disappear, but when the Ulsterman burst through the doorway he found the men who had been ahead of him shrinking backwards from the grewsome spectacle that was being enacted in that chamber of tragedy. All thought of pursuit was abandoned. Most of them seemed to prefer the outer air.

“What’s wrong wi’ ye?” cried McConaughy as he shouldered his way forward. “If the man stands, get aftherr him. What for——”

Then he saw what was happening, and his jaw fell, too.

In the centre of that enormous room, where a few nights before the gun-butts of his followers had thundered salute to the shadowy presence of which he was the embodiment, stood the Sheikh of El Senussi, Vicar of the Vicar of Allah, mouthing and slaving, his features convulsed with a frantic fear that was not of this world. Round him in an ever-narrowing circle crawled the remnants of Dikran Kalekian, in its torn clawlike fingers clutching the chisel with which McConaughy had scaled the castle wall.

As it crouched nearer, this red ghost of Kalekian whimpered like a dog nosing after a rat, and the tall man in the green turban seemed to shrink and shrivel and grow small, whilst he moaned and mumbled inarticulately, in a way that sent the cold shivers down the spines of the men in the doorway, who had just seen eight hundred die by steel and bullet.

Suddenly, Kalekian flitted close to his victim and slashed the chisel down his face.

“So!” he babbled, with high-pitched childish laughter. “How does that feel, Lord Sheikh? Your mouth is gone. But a good workman finishes his work.” Again the swift dart of the keen flat blade, and a whine of animal pain. “And now your nose. Behold! We are as babes of the same birth, we two. It irks me to spoil your beauty so. Yet it must be done, Lord Sheikh. Once there was a man named Dikran Kalekian—do you remember him?”

Kalekian had resumed his crouching circuit, so close now that he could reach out and touch the Sheikh at will.

“Yes, Dikran Kalekian, that was his name,” he rambled on. “He was a very rich man. He sold carpets—good carpets. All the Franks bought from him. He was known and respected—Dikran Kalekian. He——” the spectre paused abruptly. “But Kalekian had only one ear and you have two. That will never do. Hee, hee, hee! Never do, never do!”

The chisel flashed, and the shivering, hypnotised hulk of the Sheikh screamed in agony.

“God!” swore McConaughy. “I canna stand it! Are ye ready, men? Shoot them down. They are neitherr human.”

The rifles cracked and the two figures of horror in the centre of the great hall swayed and sank in a single heap.

McConaughy and Sheepskin clasped hands in the courtyard, as the last of the prisoners—there were not many of the Senussieh who suffered themselves to be taken alive—were marched away.

“A clean sweep, mister!” exulted Tony Papastikian, brigadier of sorts and sometime Pittsburg motorman. “Some job for a bunch o’ amachours, eh?”

“It might ha’ been worrse,” McConaughy admitted. “But what for did ye spoil ma programme?”

“By jumpin’ me attack? Sure, that wasn’t me; that was you. D’yer remember yer told me to send out a thousand men in case there was another bunch in the ring? Well, an hour or so after yer left me they began to raise the devil. The Senussis in the castle here got worried an’ started out to investigate, bumped into me first line—an’ zip! There yer were! I had to kill the noseys to save me own crowd.”

McConaughy was all interest.

“Ha’ ye hearrd from the coverrin’ forrce?” he asked.

“Yep. Just got a message. They ran into a camp of Turk cavalry, the escort o’ that German officer you beaned. An’ believe me, them guys took a lot o’ beatin’ up. But we nabbed the whole bunch. There ain’t a Turk wit’in a hundred miles o’ us. It’s a clean sweep, I tell yer. An’ we got this country, now, so they’ll never get it away from us again.”

“So farr, so good,” said McConaughy. “But ye must orrganise, ma young friiend, if ye would preserrve your gains.”

“Organise? You bet. We’ll form the Republic of Armenia right here. And say——” the conception of a great idea flamed in Sheepskin’s face, “we’ll make yer the first President! How ’bout that, eh? Ain’t that a peach o’ a scheme? You for President, and me—well, I’ll be yer Secretary o’ State or Minister o’ War, or maybe the Vice-President or something like that,” concluded Sheepskin modestly.

“Beforre we begin to discuss affairrs o’ state, I’ll prefer to be rrightly clothed,” replied McConaughy dryly. “For the present, I——”

He coughed apologetically, with a glance at his figure. Miles McConaughy was a self-respecting man and he was acutely conscious that there were several serious, not to say dangerous, breaches in the suit of heavy woollen under-flannels in which he had climbed the castle wall and then fought through a hand-to-hand action.

Papastikian chuckled.

“Yer do look kind o’ queer,” he agreed. “Little bit wore out, eh? Well, we’ll talk about it after yer get dressed.”

When somebody finally brought McConaughy the clothes that Jock Grant had dropped from the rope ladder, he took a wash, had Evan, who was a skilful man with his hands, bind up the innumerable cuts and sores he had sustained from head to toe, and then turned in for what he called a good “on-shore” sleep. It was well into the afternoon when he woke up, and Jock brought him a cup of tea and a dish of lamb stew from the Armenian mess.

“Evan an’ me ha’ been guarrdin’ ye like Sir Ed’arrd Carrson i’ Dublin,” announced Jock. “Dod, skipper, but they Arrmenians are daft-like! They willna let ye be.”

“Why? What’s up?” asked McConaughy, quaffing his tea in deep gulps.

“Aweell, I’m not richt i’ ma mind what they are afterr,” admitted Jock. “But they ha’ been holdin’ clavers o’ one kind or anither a’ the day while ye slept, wi’ niddle-naddle this an’ argie-bargie that. Evan nor me canna mak’ head nor tail out it a’. Whiles Sheepskin comes an’ asks us if ye are waked, an’ if ye are not will we wake ye. An’ at the long last, I just plain told him he could gang awa’ or I’d gie him the fore-end o’ ma boot.”

McConaughy grinned.

“Hecht, Jock, that will be no way to speak to the Prresident of Arrmenia.”

“The Prresident o’—are ye daft, too?”

“Jock, ye’re too given o’ late to suspectin’ folk o’ daftness,” reproved his captain, drawing on a much-worn pair of trousers with the studied luxury of a Sybarite. “An’ by the way, Jock, ha’ ye ever considherred the throe benefit o’ pants to a man? Tak’ ma word for it, ye can ha’ no appreeciation o’ what they mean ’till ye ha’ gone a day wi’out them.”

Jock withdrew into himself with a manifest air of injured dignity.

“Gin ye ha’ feenished ye’re tea, I’ll be lookin’ to the men,” he said coldly, and departed.

Mr. Grant’s footfalls had not ceased to stir the echoes of the stone-walled halls, when Sheepskin appeared timidly around the corner of an adjacent corridor.

“They wouldn’t let me get to yer,” he said sulkily. “Say, there’s been great doin’s.”

“What will that be?”

“Well, yer elected.”

McConaughy seemed to be surprised.

“Elected what?”

“President—President o’ Armenia.”

“Am I so? Hecht! That will be grand honourr, I confess, though I’m by no means considherrin’ maself worrthy o’ it, Sheepskin. An’ who elected me?”

“The manhood suffrage o’ the free Armenians here assembled,” declared Sheepskin pompously—it sounded as if he was reciting something from memory. “But say,” he added eagerly, “I pulled yer stuff in the caucus. There never was nobody else in their minds. I saw to that—though one or two old guys tried to say you wasn’t eligible ’cause you wasn’t a native. I tied a can to that bunk. Hope yer’ll remember that, Mister President.”

There might have been a twinkle in McConaughy’s eye, but Sheepskin did not see it.

“This is a very deeficult mattherr,” he said. “I’m a citizen o’ Ulster an’ the British Empire, d’ye see? An’ I’m a mastherr marriner, wi’ obligations to ma ownerrs. ’Twould in no ways coincide wi’ ma duties to accept the honourr ye do me. Also, I ha’ in ma mind that there’s a man would be an excellent Prrsident nearer to hand.”

“Who’s that?” demanded Sheepskin with some disappointment—almost suspicion.

“Well,” answered McConaughy deliberately, “if a man’s to be Prrsident o’ a people he should talk their lingo. Isna that right?”

“Sure.”

“He should be one o’ them. I ha’ seen enough o’ the cursed habits o’ the English, always rready to tak’ over an’ govern some alien race, to know that a people should be ruled by themselves. For ma authorrity, I’ll referr ye to history.”

“But look here, Mister, there ain’t one o’ these Armenian guys that knows enough to come in out o’ the rain,” interrupted Sheepskin. “That is,

exceptin' me," he amended quickly.

McConaughy clapped him on the shoulder.

"Ay, just so. An' ye'll be the man I mean. Ye'll mak' a firrstrate Prresident, wi' a little experrience, Sheepskin; an' on cerrtain conditions—" he paused weightily—"I'll lend ye ma supportt an' countenance."

"What are they?"

There was no mistaking the candidate's attitude.

"In the firrst place, ye'll hold your powerr from the British Crown. I'm not very parrtial to crowns, Sheepskin, but wi' us the crown isna harrmfu'—'tis nought but a easy way to avoid concentrhation o' authorrity. An' anyways that's the law o' it. Ye'll ha' the standin' o' a prrotectorrate."

Sheepskin calculated swiftly.

"Sure, that's all right," he decided. "A protectorate means that the big feller fights all the little feller's battles, pays his debts an' builds up his trade. I learned that in America. Any more?"

"Secondly, ye'll grant prpreferential privileges to Brritish commerrce in your porrts—ye ha' none, but that's a matther o' detail."

"As long as I ain't got any ports, I guess I'll stand for that," said Sheepskin cheerfully.

"Thirrdly," McConaughy went on, "ye'll hold your powerr as Prresident o' the Republic o' Arrmenia, an' your successorrs in the office will hold theirs, subject to a superrvisory Boardd o' Conthrol to consist o' me, Miles McConaughy, the Managin' Dirrektor o' the Red Funnel Line, Sir Edwardd Carrson, the Rev. Dr. Ferrgus McLash o' the Sammis Street Presbyterrian Churrch in Belfast, David Lloyd George an'—I hate to put this in, Sheepskin, but we'll need something like it just to diddle the English—the Arrchbishop o' Canterburry."

Papistikian considered for several minutes.

"Are all those guys located in your home-burg?" he asked at last.

"They rreside in the Brritish Isles—if that's what ye'll mean."

"Well, I'll take a chance on that condition, too. What's the next?"

"Fourrthly," continued McConaughy, "ye'll enter into an alliance wi' the Brritish Government an' its Allies in the present war."

“I guess there ain’t nothin’ else for me to do,” said Sheepskin. “But say, in return for that do I get fixed up with ammunisthun an’ things?”

“I’ll use ma best endeavourrs for ye in Alexandrria.”

“All right, then. It’s a deal. We’d better go out an’ tell me friends about it all.”

Of the political scene which followed it is only necessary to say that McConaughy spoke for exactly seven minutes, and that Tony Papistikian translated the speech of “his great and good friend”—he was careful to break into English now and then to enable McConaughy to be reminded of the touching friendship between them—for an hour and a half, at the end of which oration he was elected unanimously as the first President of Armenia.

X

“Abstract from the log of H.M.S. *Hetare*, destroyer.

“Nov. 21, 1915; off the coast of Asia Minor; Lat. 36 degrees fifty minutes N., Long. 31 degrees 35 minutes E. About ten A. M. to-day, whilst steaming past Cape Tchesme in the Gulf of Adalia, we were hailed by a ketch which came off to us from the mouth of a small river. Lay to, and covered him with the forward twelve-pounder, suspecting a trick to torpedo us.

“He came alongside, and a man boarded us who called himself Papistikian. He asserted that he was President of a Republic of Armenians established in that vicinity and that his people not only were independent of H.I.M. the Sultan of Turkey, but were under the protection of and in alliance with H.B.M.’s government. This person, a most peculiar individual who talked English with an obvious American accent, requested us to send word to the proper authorities at Alexandria to ship him a quantity of arms and ammunition, claiming that we were obligated to do so in return for treaty rights granted by him to us.

“He also gave us a paper which he asked to have sent to Captain Miles McConaughy, in care of the Red Funnel Line, Belfast. This latter message, which was unsealed, read as follows:

“DEER CAPTAIN: This is to tel you that the Republic is geting on fine. I have got 10,000 fiting men now but not near enuff guns for them. Will you tel the rite peple to send me some more guns and some ammunisthun.

“I could do with 10,000 more rifles as more men are coming in every day. We have got 100,000 people in the Republic now and they are building new villages in the hills on the coast, where the Turks can't get at them. We had 1 scrap with the Turks after you left us, but we went out and fought them without waiting for them to come to us. They got all they wanted and since then we have not heard from them. That is all, except that we have not got any flag and we want 1.

“Will it be all right to have a flag with red all round the edges and in the middle of it a white spot with a red star. Please put this up to the Board of Control, and let me know P. D. Q. All are well and send regards, hoping you are the same and wishing we might have another fine scrap again some time,

respectfully,

TONY PAPASTIKIAN.

“P. S.—I notice we ain't heard anything from the Senussis. Have you. I guess we did 1 pretty big favour for the British Government, eh? They ought not to be stingy with a little ammunition and guns.’ ”

Endorsed by the Chief of Staff to the Admiral Commanding-in-Chief on the Eastern Mediterranean Station, and referred to the British Diplomatic Agent at Cairo.

Endorsed by the British Diplomatic Agent at Cairo and referred to the Sirdar.

Endorsed by the Military Secretary to the Sirdar and referred to the Principal Intelligence Officer, Alexandria.

Endorsed by the Principal Intelligence Officer, Alexandria, “Approved and respectfully referred back.”

Extract from the *London Times*:

OUR NEW ALLIES IN ASIA MINOR

(Special dispatch to the *Times*.)

Alexandria, Jan. 5, 1916 (delayed by Censor.)—A large shipment of arms and ammunition has been landed by our naval forces on the coast of the Gulf of Adalia for the use of Armenian communities in that vicinity who are successfully resisting Turkish oppression. It is said that the efforts of these people have been of material assistance in the defense of the Canal.

CHAPTER VI

FAIR SALVAGE

McConaughy emerged from the dingy smoking-room companionway and spat disgustedly over side.

“Hecht!” he muttered. “Isna there a corner o’ the dirrty ship wi’out a stink?”

He glanced up and down the slatternly decks of the *Giorgi Papastopoulos* and the disgust on his face deepened. “Filth, dirrt an’ bugs, above an’ below. Now, if I were a man o’ sporrin’ procleevities, I’d lay a small wager ye’d find some manner o’ contameenation in the trucks.”

The gigantic figure of Jock Grant rounded the deck-house from for’ard.

“Ha’ ye seen to the men, Jock?” asked McConaughy.

“Ay, Skipper, they’re weel enough, but crawlin’ wi’ verrmin an’ a’ ready tae mutiny.”

“I’ll not blame them,” answered McConaughy. “I could mutiny maself. But what else could we do? Man Jock, this tub o’ muck was the only craft out o’ Alexandrria in the comin’ forrtnight—an’ back to Belfast we must go. It’s long enough we ha’ been away. We’re no source o’ profit to the owners, ye’ll perceive, travelin’ passengers.”

Jock nodded.

“Richt, sir. But ye’d best drop a worrd tae the men. They’ll ken ye’re reasons if they hear them. But they thirrd-class quarters—I’m nae put out by a bit roach or rat, but——”

He shook his head gloomily.

“Ha’ ye seen Evan?” inquired McConaughy after a pause.

“Whiles back. He was hangin’ about the engine room hatch, wi’ a passion o’ longin’ i’ the e’e o’ him. I doot——”

Apgar hauled himself up the forecastle companionway in time to hear the last words.

“Ye pig Scots natural!” he shrilled. “Waad ye taak’ worts on me pe’ind me pack?”

“Whist, Evan mon,” placated Jock. “I was but tellin’ the skipper——”

“Ha’ done, the two o’ ye,” ordered McConaughy. “Men o’ your age an’ poseetion fightin’ like ’prentices! Where ha’ ye been, Evan? Jock was just sayin’ he saw ye by the engine room hatch. ’Twas I asked him.”

The belligerency faded from Evan’s dark earnest face, but his wiry body still quivered with half-suppressed emotion.

“Oh, Skipper,” he wailed, “if ye could put see t’e engine room! Harlaant & Wolff puilt ’er!”

“What?” exclaimed McConaughy. “She’s Belfast-built?”

“Ay. T’e shaame o’ it! I ha’ peen just now in t’e engine room. Put ’tis no engine room; ’tis a heap o’ rust an’ flaaake-iron, shiftlessness an’ corruption. Nefer tit I see the like o’ it whatefer. An’ t’e tefil what apides town t’ere, ’e jappered at me in his heathen speech an’ his men come arfter me wi’ shofels—me, whaat had come town for to paas t’e time an’ consult on t’e mysteries o’ steam.”

“Aweell, Evan, the loon didna ken your lingo,” suggested Jock. “Ye wadna bide the comin’ o’ dagoes ye couldna underrstan’ i’ ye’re own——”

“They’re no corrdial on this ship,” interrupted McConaughy. “I’ll stand by Evan to that extent. Ye may say what ye like, Jock, I ha’ never met seamen o’ any race the like o’ these. I’d sooner sail wi’ Gerrmans. Ay, indeed. A Gerrman Dutchman will ha’ appreciation for the fine points o’ discoorse o’ seamanship. But I ha’ spoke the masther o’ this cesspool an all he’ll do by way o’ answer is touch his cap an’ mutter what sounds more the like o’ currsin’ than friendly speech. Evan holds good grounds o’ arrgyment, Jock.”

“’Tis not to pe arrgyet,” protested Evan. “Why, t’e peak o’ ma desire was for a piece o’ waaste between ma fingers an’t t’e smell o’ t’e grease. Put he woultna let me—t’e curre o’ Penhallock on him!”

“A Welsh curre will ha’ small results on a Catholic,” observed McConaughy.

“I’d ma doots there was somewhat wrong wi’ this ship,” said Jock wisely. “That wull explain a’.”

“What explains all?” demanded McConaughy.

“They’ll be Catholics, ye say.”

“A sorr t o’ Catholics, Jock. Not the kind we know, d’ye see, but a kind o’ Catholic Catholics. Ye might say the Catholics are Pprotestants to these ones.”

“Is thaat so, inteeet?” Evan had forgotten his troubles. “Put ’tis surpriset I am, Skipper, for ye to give t’e naame o’ Pprotestants to aany set o’ Paapists.”

“Ye ha’ the wrong grasp o’ ma remarrks, Evan,” returned McConaughy. “I ha’ no such meanin’ in ma mind. Besides, ye’ll concede we ha’ met some few Catholics ye might be proud to ha’ Pprotestants.”

“Ay, maype so. Put——”

“Skipper,” interrupted Jock excitedly. “Starrboardd, there! Twa, three points off the quarrter! D’ye see yon darrk bit thing? Ay!”

“A submarine!”

“One o’ ours?” ventured Evan.

McConaughy snorted.

“An English submarine wouldna steal up the like o’ that. She’s comin’ toward us, what’s more. Now, isna this a commentary on the seamanship o’ the crew we ha’ to trust in? They’ll not yet ha’ sighted the Dutchman.”

But at that very moment an hysterical babble of voices rose from the bridge. Bells clanged in the engine room; orders were shouted and countermanded. Fearful passengers swarmed out of the cabins to watch the lean, shining hull of the submarine rise slowly to the surface, sloughing off the green waves of the Mediterranean as it slid rapidly toward them. Presently, a man appeared on the top of the conning-tower, which had been all that was visible when Jock first sighted the strange craft.

“They’ll ha’ their gun worrkin’, or a torpedo, perrhaps,” commented McConaughy. “Ay, there they go.”

The man on the conning-tower was joined by several others and they scrambled over the slippery deck, clinging to a light hand-rail, to reach the mechanism of the lid that shut down on the three-inch gun the submarine carried forward.

“She’ll pe on us in fife minutes,” said Evan. “Whateffer——”

Again the bells jangled in the engine room of the *Giorgi Papastopoulos*, and the rhythmic jar of the engines slowed and then ceased entirely.

“Is the loon daft?” gasped Jock.

“No, he’ll be feared,” said McConaughy grimly.

The little knot of figures on the fore-deck of the submarine scattered apart and a faint report drifted over the water. A shell dropped just ahead of the steamer’s bow. The *Giorgi Papastopoulos* responded with an insistent mournful tooting of her whistle.

“Well, ma men, ’tis a Gerrman prison-camp for ye, or——”

McConaughy paused significantly.

“We’re wi’ ye, Skipper,” Jock promptly assured him. “Gie us the worrld.”

Evan silently started in the direction of the engine room hatch.

“I hafe ma refofles, put a spanner’ll to just as well,” he flung over his shoulder. “Jock, send me ma men.”

“There’ll be no need,” McConaughy reassured him. “Leave it to me.”

He and Jock headed for the bridge ladder.

The submarine had not fired again, but was still approaching.

“ ’Tis a close business,” panted McConaughy as he ran. “But we’ll mak’ it, Jock, or I’ll know the reason why.”

“Ay, Skipper,” was all Jock said.

They burst up the ladder upon a scene of pitiful confusion. The master of the *Giorgi Papastopoulos* was running back and forth with tears streaming from his eyes. The first officer and the watch-officer were huddled under the binnacle, or as nearly under it as their bulk would permit; one quartermaster was sheltering behind the wheel-house and another was donning a life-belt, apparently preparatory to a hasty plunge over side.

McConaughy wasted no time in words.

“Tak’ the wheel, Jock,” he ordered.

His own first move was to switch the indicator of the engine room telegraph to “Full speed.” His next was to grasp the weeping captain by the shoulder and jerk him around.

“D’ye speak any English?” he rasped.

“Ver’ leetle,” answered the Greek amazedly.

“Was it your intention, man, to surrender all the innocent people aboard your ship to the mercies o’ Gerrman pirates? Wad ye see the women an’ childern thrust into sma’ boats in the open sea? D’ye know what would

happen to ye if ye ever came into Alexandrria or any other English portt again?”

“N-n-n-n-no,” sputtered the captain, waving his hands desperately.

“Proceed wi’ your ship, then.”

“But he—dat submarine—he shoot my sheep!”

“He’ll shoot it if you don’t go ahead.”

“But thees ees Greek sheep!”

“Ye zany! D’ye think that makes any difference wi’ a German submarine? Answer me this: Ye ha’ English goods aboardd, ha’ ye not? Ay! An’ French goods? An’ d’ye think they’ll let ye go? They’ll put a torrpedo or a bomb into ye the minute they come up! What will your ownerrs say to that, ma man? Ownerrs are the same—Greek or British.”

McConaughy glanced over-side as he spoke. The *Giorgi Papastopoulos* was beginning to move slowly through the water. Below-decks he could feel the engines resuming their normal pulse. From every quarter of the ship rose a tumult of yelling, screaming, praying and commands. The Levantine passengers of the cabins and the third-class and steerage were frantic with fright, and the vessel’s crew, if anything, were worse. But apparently the submarine had not suspected as yet that her warning-shot was being disregarded.

“Keep to your course, Jock,” McConaughy admonished his first officer at the wheel. “We’ll ha’ maybe an even chance—no more, an’ not much less, I hope.”

He administered a hearty kick to the nearest quartermaster and jerked the man to his feet.

“Where d’ye keep your signal flags?” he demanded of the captain.

The Greek dumbly indicated the signal locker.

“Orderr this man to set the International signal: ‘Not under control. Helm does not answer.’ That may give us a few yards.”

The signal was duly set, as the steamer picked up her speed and began to move ahead at a faster rate.

“That’s betther,” remarked McConaughy. “It’s touch an’ go, but——”

The submarine fired again, and this time the shell fell uncomfortably close, splashing spray over the bridge-screens.

“He will ha’ smelled our thrick.”

The Greek captain, now somewhat recovered from his fright, pushed forward with open hostility.

“W’at you do on thees bridge? Eet is onlawful you come ’ere. Remove!”

McConaughy glanced down at him contemptuously.

“Rremove, is it? I will that, ma man, if ye’ll promise me ye’ll not deelverrick us up to the pirates.”

“My sheep—I sail ’er,” protested the captain. “You ’ave no right!”

“An’ that’s indisputable,” McConaughy conceded more equably. “Ye must ha’ some good in ye afther all. Jock, the man will ha’ the right o’ us. Give up the wheel.”

With manifest reluctance, Jock turned over the wheel to one of the quartermasters and stepped aside.

The submarine fired a third shell, which went wide.

“If there’s anything I can do,” suggested McConaughy. “Maself or ma men——”

“Zere is nosink,” replied the Greek coolly, and he glanced suggestively at the bridge-ladder.

“Ye’re no’ very grateful to a man who may ha’ saved your ship,” commented McConaughy. “But I’ll expect ye to stick to it, now.”

With which parting admonition he followed Jock down the ladder, heedless of the scowls of all the Greeks and the open curses that were addressed to him as soon as his back was turned.

“Now, Jock,” he said, when they had regained the upper deck, “we must clear the people out o’ the stern. ’Tis there the shells are most like to hit, an’ these dago loons willna think o’ it. Get your men an’ drive all ye find aft—passengerrr and crew.”

Jock’s task proved easier than he had expected. By vigorous gestures toward the pursuing submarine, the Scotchman and his helpers succeeded in conveying the reasons for their commands to the frightened passengers, but as for the crew, they searched high and low, and could find not a single man, until at last Jock noticed the heel of a sea-boot projecting from one of the life-boats slung on the port davits.

McConaughy betook himself to the engine room. Here he found Evan Apgar huddled at the head of the ladder leading down into the maze of boilers and machinery, a heap of loose nuts of divers sizes and threads before him. As McConaughy stooped to enter the companionway, Evan snatched up a nut and hurled it at a shadowy figure that stole from behind a boiler some twenty feet below. A yell, and the figure vanished.

“Ye ha’ the right idea, Evan,” McConaughy said approvingly. “Don’t be lettin’ the scoundhrels soldier at the job.”

“No fear!” rejoined Evan. “T’ e nuts is petter nor spanners. I ha’ maate ’em understaan’ we must ha’ steam—an’ more steam!”

“What will she do, d’ye figure?”

“Fifteen, maype sixteen knots. She’s a mail-poat.”

“A mail-boat! This hull o’ stinks! I’d never ha’ believed it, Evan.”

“T’ e engines is t’ e pest paarrt o’ ’er.” Apgar glanced lovingly at the giant cylinders and pistons that thrust back and forth. “She was a great poat in ’er tay, sir.”

“Can ye keep her going at top speed?”

“Ay,” said Evan briefly, a nut poised ready in his hand.

“If ye want help, let me know. Ye’ll get it. If we’re caught now these Greeks will lay the blame for running on us, an’—ye know!”

Evan nodded.

“She’ll no’ to whaat she could if I hat ma own men town t’ere, put t’ e Taagoes will to t’eir pest.”

“Remember, it’s two hourrs to dark,” McConaughy reminded him, pausing with one hand on the door. “Give us but two hourrs, an’ we’ll dodge the Dutch.”

Without answering, Evan leaned forward slightly and sent a reverse-thread clinch-bolt singing down the engine room at a man who had crouched momentarily on a pile of waste and oil-cans by the stoke-hold entrance. Simultaneously, he reached for a second bolt and bellowed a raucous curse at a fat little man in a uniform-cap who ventured out from the control-platform, a few feet distant. The fat little man emitted a fat little squeak and dropped down the short ladder to the post he had quitted.

“T’e chief,” explained Evan perfunctorily. “T’e maan has no ’eart for his engines, put I ha’ feared him.”

McConaughy smiled and retired to the deck. All was going well so far. He noticed with satisfaction that the passengers had been driven forward, while Jock Grant and a capable party of their own men were enjoying themselves jerking the Greek sailors from the life-boats into which they had scrambled at the first hint of trouble. Ahead, the sun was setting slowly and from the port quarter wafted the hot wind that blows off the sands of Northern Africa. McConaughy noted these facts instinctively. His eyes were trained on the distant submarine, sliding through the water at a speed little less than that of the liner.

“We ha’ gained on her,” he muttered to himself. “She’ll mak’ heavy weather o’ seas that will na give us throuble.”

The gun on the under-sea boat barked and a shell burst just aft of the steamer’s taffrail, a few shrapnel pellets clinking against the stern plates.

“Ay, shoot,” McConaughy admonished the Germans, as the twilight deepened. “’Tis little enough good ’twill do ye!”

As if in answer to this taunt, the gun opened a furious bombardment, hurling shell after shell toward the fleeing liner. But barring a few stanchions and some deck-litter, no harm of consequence was done.

II

Night shut down dark and starless. The warm wind from Africa struck a colder air-strata that was tinged by a breath from the far-off Alps, and a silvery mist spread over the waters.

The *Giorgi Papastopoulos* drove on at headlong speed, panic nipping the souls of her crew. Her engines, once the noblest work of Scots craftsmen, now rusted hulks of groaning metal, laboured with stubborn faithfulness, bearing up under a burden they should never have been asked to stand. Her crew cowered in protected corners, ever with an eye astern for the menace of the submarine they were not yet confident of having escaped.

Nobody thought of watching the course ahead. That way beckoned safety; behind lay danger. And the mist and the darkness wrapped the vessel closer and closer as she sped her path of destiny.

McConaughy remained on watch until he was confident the submarine had been eluded. An hour after the mist fell to reinforce the veil of darkness, he was convinced that there was no chance of the Germans finding them. A

choppy sea had sprung up that slowed the steamer's progress and must have far more effect on the rolling hull of a slender U-boat. With a sigh of relief and an inward prayer of gratitude, he told Jock and Evan to abandon their guard-duty on the several divisions of the Greek crew and see to it that their own men had some rest. Himself, he retired to the cabin which he shared with his officers in the first-class quarters, if anything could be called first-class on the *Giorgi Papastopoulos*. Later Jock and Evan joined him, and after a vigorous denunciation of their surroundings, a regular preliminary to slumber since the voyage began, they rolled into their bunks.

In the dim hours that come between midnight and the dawn, McConaughy awoke with the sudden alertness that is a characteristic of men of action in all professions. His ear caught at once the steady throbbing of the engines, the beat of the twin-screws, the strain and murmur and unrest of the hull. All was as it should be, his seaman's sense reassured him. Yet he was vaguely uneasy.

He looked through the cabin's porthole into a blank wall of misty darkness. Water lapped the sides; the bow rose and fell crunchingly over the short rollers. And suddenly, with the abruptness of a lightning-bolt, there came a grinding shock that tossed him clear across the cabin into Jock's berth.

Glass broke, crockery crashed, furniture, fittings and cargo surged through compartments and holds. A thud on the upper decks told of the collapse of the topmasts and wireless gear. Wild yells and howls outdid the uproar of the afternoon before. The quiver of the shock had not died away when doors began to slam and racing feet jarred the decks and gangways.

McConaughy was knocked breathless by the force of his impact upon Jock's bony knees, and Jock was too startled by his skipper's onslaught and his own sudden awakening to grasp the situation immediately. But Evan swarmed lithely down from his upper bunk and slipped into trousers and shirt in the twinkling of an eye.

"She'll haf' took grount," he averred as he dressed rapidly.

"L-like enough," gasped McConaughy. "Man, Jock, but ye're harrd in your bones!"

"Whut for ha' we a' this clamour?" rejoined Jock with the grumpiness of any large man awakened from a sound sleep. "Dinna ye——"

McConaughy hit him a sounding thump on the shoulder.

“We’ll be aground, ye big, ill-favored loon,” he admonished. “Up wi’ ye! There’s work to be did.”

Evan found them their clothes and they dressed in silence. By this time, indeed, they could not have heard themselves speak had they shouted. The screams on deck were deafening, and on top of this the steamer’s whistle was blaring a melancholy lament like the vocal misery of a dying calliope. The door was jammed, and it took them a minute to force it by dint of Jock’s immense shoulder. Then they sped through the corridors to the third-class quarters where their men were housed.

On every side groups of frantic passengers and sailors were fighting for possession of the life-boats. McConaughy gritted his teeth as he ran.

“God knows where we’ll be!” he grunted to Evan at his elbow. “But there’s few o’ these poor souls will get anywhere unless we tak’ hold.”

McConaughy’s men were ready and awaiting his commands. A small party of them had sallied forth and seized two of the nearest life-boats and were standing by when he arrived on the scene.

“Good work, ma men!” he approved. “Now, get ye for’ard, a brace o’ ye, an’ round up some o’ they women and childern that will be jumpin’ in the wather in a minute hence.”

In five minutes the two life-boats, loaded to capacity with women and children and four Greek sailors apiece, who had been pried dexterously from a tearing mob that clustered about another overcrowded boat, were lowered from the davits, the first to reach the water.

“I’m thinkin’ we’d best be lookin’ to the general state o’ affairs,” remarked McConaughy, when this had been done. “What’s our plight, Evan? Can ye see?”

“Noought, put we’re aground, haarrt an’ faast. ’Tis saant, not rock, py mercy o’ Providence.”

Jock appeared and touched his cap.

“There’s a bit fecht aft, sir. Knives oot.”

“Murrdher them, if ye need,” replied McConaughy tersely. “None o’ that. We’ll tak’ a hand, men.”

Jock knocked one knife-fighter insensible, then heaved him into the bottom of a boat. The other was cowed into immediate peacefulness by a brandished fist. Foot by foot, McConaughy drove through the crowded

decks, sifting passengers from the crew, sending away the women and children first. Just aft of the bridge he met the Greek captain, beard bristling, hands gesticulating, voice shrill with fright.

“Where are we?” demanded McConaughy.

“W’ere? I should know—how? Affreeka, zat ees all.”

“What were ye doin’?”

“I sleep in my cabeen.”

“What? Ye slept in your cabin a night like this, when ye knew there was danger behind, and your ship going full speed through a fog?”

The captain shrugged his shoulders.

“I mus’ ’ave rest,” he suggested. “I am man, not machine.”

McConaughy surveyed him with large contempt, started to say something, thought better of it, and regained control.

“Ha’ ye done anything to find out where ye are? How do we lie?” he asked.

“W’at ees zat?”

“Ha’ ye sent out one of the boats to look for land? Ha’ ye lowered the lead? Ha’ ye done ought a seaman should do to protect his ship?”

“W’y should I do zat? I protec’ ze life of my crew an’ my passenjairs. I see zat zey get off—zat ees all. W’at more? Zat ees enough.”

“Enough! Man, ye——”

The Greek scowled at him.

“Plees’ you stan’ aside. My boat ees rready.”

McConaughy looked at the man in astonishment.

“Your—your—— Say that again!”

“My boat ees rready,” repeated the Greek impatiently. “I go een heem. Plees’ you stan’ aside.”

“Ye’d leave the ship—*your* ship—*now*?”

The Greek nodded and started to walk around McConaughy toward a boat that was preparing to drop from the davits.

The Ulsterman burst into a roar of bull-throated rage.

“Ye—ye fat-bellied little swine! Ye misfit, bunglin’ scrapple o’ the pit! An’ ye call yourself a seaman! God save us! Even the English would reject such as ye. I—I——”

The Greek yelled in terror and tried to dodge, but McConaughy was too quick. He caught the master of the *Giorgi Papastopoulos* by the collar of his uniform jacket and the scruff of his uniform pants and pitched him bodily over the side.

“An’ all I wish is that he’d not be picked up,” remarked McConaughy, after relieving his anger somewhat by this physical upheaval. “But there’s no chance o’ that. He’ll be lorrdin’ it over some miserable women an’ childern yet—unless I happen to be wi’in hail.”

All the boats had now been lowered except two, and the crews of these were waiting at the falls to let them drop. The decks were clear. But McConaughy was not satisfied.

“There may be sick or little ones below,” he decided. “Do all o’ ye split up by yourselves an’ go through her from end to end. Leave not a hole wi’out investigation.”

The Greeks at the davit-falls were ordered to stand by, and McConaughy led one detachment of his own men aft, while Jock and Evans took the others to the forecabin. The idea was that they should work together toward the middle of the ship, combing her holds and cabins thoroughly.

This was a job that required some time, but the wind was dropping with the approach of dawn. The seas had moderated, and for all McConaughy could see, the position of the *Giorgi Papastopoulos* was absolutely safe. She rested easily, at a slight incline, on what seemed to be a sloping sand-bar just a few feet under water, her bow several feet higher than her stern.

“Belfast-built,” he said to Evan, as they parted.

“ ’Tis cruel harrrd to see her go.”

“A mercy o’ t’e Lord, she’ll think,” replied Evan. “She’ll be well-rit o’ t’e wreckers.”

McConaughy worked forward slowly, unwilling to skimp any corner of a ship with which he was not familiar. He sent his men into the darkest holds, and it was half an hour before he reached the starboard gangway running from the second-class quarters to the first-class cabins. Here, as he peered into state-rooms, always with an eye for some unfortunate baby, forgotten or

discarded in the panic, he was disturbed by a hail from the deck and a pistol-shot. He took the main saloon stairs at a bound.

Jock Grant was standing by the rail, pistol trained into the fog, and as McConaughy appeared he fired a second time.

“Are ye mad, Jock?” cried McConaughy. “What are ye doin’?”

“Dod, I missed the hound,” returned Jock composedly. “The Greeks wull hae left us, sir.”

“Left?”

“Ay, whiles back I came on deck an’ the twa o’ they boats ye gaed orrderrrs tae stand by were i’ the water, the men i’ baith o’ ’em pullin’ tae the oars. I shouted an’——”

“What’s yon?” interrupted McConaughy.

A grey shape crept toward the starboard quarter through the lightening veil of the mist.

“O-o-ah, you Engleesh peegs,” wailed a voice mockingly. “For zat you ’ave insult’ me on my sheep I leave you. Take ze sheep. Be careful of heem. I ’ope ze Moors get you.”

A taunting laugh, and the shape vanished before Jock could shoot again.

“Deil’s worrk, I see,” observed McConaughy. “Well, Jock, go on.”

“That wull hae been the Greek captain mon that spoke ye,” said Jock. “’Twas he, as I was sayin’, gared shout tae the men ye put i’ the boats an’ bade ’em leave ye. He called oot tae me when I hailed ’em. That wull be a’.”

“An’ enough,” answered McConaughy thoughtfully. “The scoundhrel’s gone, beyond question. What was that last he said?”

“Aboot the Muirs?”

“Ay, ’twas that. I’d like fine to know what was his meanin’. I’m free to say, Jock, I ha’ but the wildest idea o’ our poseetion. They were never over friendly on the bridge, an’ I could not get latitude an’ longitude as I would ha’ liked.”

McConaughy scowled.

“An’ he mis-ca’ed me English a minute back, too. I’ll give him cause to eat they worrds.”

Evan strode up, a hunk of waste clutched lovingly in one hand, a daub of grease decorating his face.

“We will pe tesertet, I ’ear,” he said.

McConaughy nodded abstractedly.

“Any wather in her for’arrd?” he asked.

“A goot pit in t’e fore-peak, an’ I shoul’t saay some plaates are startet well aft, put she’s py no means in whaat I woul’t caall taanger.”

McConaughy nodded again and turned away, tapping the teak railing with his revolver-butt. Jock and Evan exchanged looks. They perceived that an idea was incubating in their skipper’s brain.

“We hae much tae be thankfu’ for,” remarked Jock softly.

Evan, with his quicker wit, chipped in:

“T’e poat is ’onest puilt.”

“Ay, that’s ma thought,” responded McConaughy quickly. “More, Evan, she’s Belfast-built—built well, too. Look at yon teak rail; look at her cabin fittings; look at her engines; look at the mould o’ her. She’s too good a boat to leave on the sands o’ Africa.”

“If we could pull her off, she’d bring a pot o’ money!” exclaimed Jock. “Canna ye see the way a salvage court wad jump at the chance tae draw the siller frae they Greeks?”

“’Twould be plain sailin’, in a manner o’ speakin’, once we got her free o’ this,” agreed McConaughy. “I’m even thinkin’ the assessors would allow us a bit exthra by reason o’ the bare-faced desertion o’ her own company. But we ha’ yet to get her off.”

“An’ t’ere is people yon woul’d prefent ye,” interjected Evan, pointing through the rising mist.

McConaughy stepped forward in time to see a shadow flit by the stranded hulk of the liner, a shadow which he instantly identified as a good-sized felucca, probably crammed with men.

“Hecht, ye’re right, Evan,” he said. “I ha’ no knowledge o’ this coast, but ’tis safe assumin’ ’tis a bad one—more especially at this time, what wi’ fightin’ all over Europe an’ gov’ments too busy to watch the heathern. How are the boilers? Ha’ ye steam?”

“Fair pressure.”

“Set your men to it. Build up the fires. Give her all that will be safe.”

“Ay, sir,” and Evan disappeared.

“Jock, take your men an’ rig the fire-hose for connection wi’ the boiler.”

A broad smile overspread Mr. Grant’s face.

“Ay, sir,” he responded.

III

Eastward the sun creased a sombre trail through the clinging mist. Seaward stretched boundless waters, broken at frequent intervals by oily patches proclaiming shoals. McConaughy from the bridge surveyed his surroundings with an expert eye. Only by the favour of fortune, he apprehended, could the *Giorgi Papastopoulos* have navigated blindly her way past so many sand-bars. But the very multitude of the obstructions was a source of safety, for the vessel lay behind what amounted to a series of breakwaters.

“So farr, so good,” he muttered to himself.

He turned his face shoreward, where the increasing radiance of the sun was tearing to shreds the veil that shut the vessel in.

“A-a-ah!” he exclaimed, as the first rift opened.

A mile or so away a sandy beach, backed by sand-dunes, filled the perspective. It boiled with white-robed figures, clustered about several feluccas and smaller craft drawn up at the water’s edge.

“Mr. Grant! Mr. Apgar!” called McConaughy.

The word was passed along, and they scrambled up the bridge-ladder.

“Ha’ ye got steam up?” he addressed Apgar.

“She’s comin’ nicely,” responded the Chief, now gloriously sweaty and filthy in professional dungarees.

“Jock, d’ye see yon?”

Jock nodded.

“Call all hands for’arrd. I ha’ somewhat to say to ’em.”

McConaughy’s men, so lately transferred from the status of passengers to their normal life as working mariners, gathered eagerly in front of the

bridge. The fog was breaking up rapidly and they could see the menace on the beach as well as their officers.

“Ma men,” said McConaughy, “we ha’ been in many a narrow hole togetherr, but I ne’er failed to push ye out, did I?”

“No, sir.”

There was confidence in that booming reply.

“I tak’ pleasure in your answeerr,” McConaughy continued. “More by rreason because we’ll soon be in another tight hole, if ma eyes are good as they used to be. I want ye to do as ye’re told; keep undherr coverr, and thrust in me again. The few arrms we ha’ will be no use against yon devils. We’ll give ’em steam.

“But firstt, we’ll ha’ a bit prayerr, for it’s more than likely we’ll ha’ need o’ all the aid Providence can spare us these next few hours.”

McConaughy uncovered himself, and all his crew did likewise. Then he stood forward in the centre of the bridge, and his deep, bull voice growled an octave lower:

“Lorrd, we are thy serrvants, humble sea-farrin’ men, wi’ no mannerr o’ thraffic wi’ idolatorrs. We ha’ deserrved little enough from ye, but we ask protection from the dangers ’round about us, especially, Lorrd, from the heathen over yon that threaten us wi’ sharrp knives an’ rifles—an’ we hope, Lorrd, their ammunection is defective, an’ may the gun-runners that brought it in be cursed. We will ha’ a big fight for it, Lorrd, so we pray ye make the steam hot an’ their arrms unsteady.

“An’ Lorrd, if it is not presumin’ beyond measure, we ask that some manner o’ vengeance be brought down on that Greek masther o’ this ship that left us here, hopin’ we might perrish. We want no harm to come to his passengers and the poor innocent loons o’ his crew; but we pray that he be made to suffer all the evil that ought to come to a masther that deserrts his ship.”

McConaughy paused and turned matter-of-factly to Evan.

“Will that be all?” he asked. “Ha’ I covered the ground, Evan?”

“Prafely, sir,” responded Evan with enthusiasm.

McConaughy resumed:

“An’ because o’ all this we ask help from ye, Lorrd. If we didna deserrve it, we wouldna ask it. Amen.”

“Amen,” growled the chorus in answer.

There was a rustle as heads were covered.

“We’ll ha’ breakfast, now,” announced McConaughy calmly.

Evan stepped up to him, his black eyes glowing through a mask of grease and soot.

“It would pe well to sing a hymn,” he suggested. “T’ere’s no haarm, whateffer.”

“A good thought,” McConaughy assented.

This time he stepped back, and Evan took his place, the wild passion of some old bardic strain gripping the Welshman’s spirit as it always did when the fervour of religion swept over him. It was a simple hymn they sang, trite, cloying, childish; but the roar of their voices carried clear across the water to the beach where the white-robed figures ceased their restless movements to listen to this war-song of the mad Kaffirs, whom Allah had delivered into their hands.

“There is a happy land, far, far away;
Where saints in glory stand, bright, bright as day.”

Breakfast over, McConaughy made a hasty tour of inspection to see that no lower-deck ports were open, no ropes or other means of escalate left trailing from the vessel’s iron sides. Fore and aft, on either beam, the fire-hose lines were stretched, nozzles ready with patent holders adjusted, so that men could handle them after the switching coils were filled to bursting with deadly steam. A twist with a spanner, and the boilers could be turned into them.

The sun was now beating down mercilessly. As far as the eye could see there was nothing save wastes of water and wastes of sand, rolling waves and rolling dunes. Inland a few scattering palm-trees broke the monotony at intervals. Several of the boats drawn up on the shore were run out through the low surf to an accompaniment of yells and tom-toms. McConaughy, serene on his bridge, observed the preparations of the Moors with a calculating eye. But he ducked for cover when the leading boat abruptly let off a fusillade that rattled all about him, ripping the bridge-screens to tatters.

“Hecht!” he muttered, as he crawled down the offside ladder. “They’ll no be very carefu’ o’ their ammunection. High-powerr guns, too, or I’m an Irisherr.”

As if in corroboration of his judgment, the Moors fired another volley, which whistled along the decks of the *Giorgi Papastopoulos* and broke a few porthole deadlights. The Children of the Desert had been supplied recently with an assortment of Mannlichers from the Trieste arsenal, accompanied by more ammunition than the oldest sheikh had seen in his whole life; and they were as delighted as children with an opportunity to turn their new toys to practical use.

“Are these men enemies?” had asked the more cautious greybeards, when the *Giorgi Papastopoulos* was discovered.

“Enemies?” replied a young sheikh. “Did not the Kaffir that brought us these guns from the sea say that all who came on the surface of the waters would be foes?”

There was a nodding of turbans in front of the camel’s-hair tents pitched behind the dunes.

“Ay, these men be of those Kaffirs who can not fight or work miracles, as the Kaffir told us,” said another. “For, look, they come on the surface of the waters, even as we do, while the Kaffir who brought the guns, he came underneath, where naught but fishes or djinns may live.”

“There be much booty in a great ship such as this,” asserted another, licking his lips.

“Our tribe shall be rich for generations,” declared a third.

So they attacked.

Boat after boat put off from the shore. The Kaffirs who came under the sea had been most generous with their rifles. Even the striplings of fifteen and sixteen had been equipped. And the boats were crowded.

McConaughy took note of all this from behind a pair of curtains at one of the portholes in the main saloon. He had cleared the decks of his men, and the hose-nozzles were trained from strategic shelters in companionways and odd corners, barricaded hastily with whatever furniture or impedimenta could be rooted up for the purpose.

“Ye’ll no do yourselves any good if ye’re killed,” McConaughy gave parting warning. “Look to it. Not a head do ye show till I give the worr’d.”

The Moors lay to a few cables-length from the steamer and bombarded her vociferously. Every time a porthole flew to pieces they screamed with delight. Once, when a shot nipped the whistle and it emitted a throaty murmur, they turned tail and all but fled.

At last they ceased firing and the boats drew together in a cluster. It was plain that the Children of the Desert did not altogether like the dead silence and lifelessness of this strange vessel.

But the leaders orated vigorously, and when confidence had been restored their flotilla broke up in two sections, one making for the port quarter aft and the other for the starboard quarter forward. As they drew near, the attackers opened fire again, the tom-toms clamoured and every lusty voice was raised in the most blood-curdling screams of approved desert warfare.

McConaughy's only answer—that is, Apgar's—was a raucous blast on the whistle which brought them up standing. Another check, and once more the leaders harangued, whilst mullahs described the glories of paradise, the exquisite tortures to which the Kaffirs could be subjected and the vast treasures awaiting bold spirits.

Greed and lust triumphed over superstition. Chattering and howling, the Moors closed in. The mast of each boat crawled with men; the shrouds were thick with them; crude ladders were poised ready on the halfdecks of the larger feluccas. There was an end of firing, for the Moors could see nothing to shoot at and the breaking of deadlights had ceased to divert them. They were after blood.

Knives clinched between their teeth, the leading ruffians swarmed up the sides and over the rail onto the deserted decks. McConaughy, from his curtained porthole, let them come on.

“The more o’ ye, the betther, so farr as I’m concerned,” he growled. “Ay, ye dirty thieves. Ye’ll be clean, some o’ ye, before ye’re through wi’ the bath I’ll give ye.”

The Moors on deck were too busy helping up the files behind them to pay any attention to their surroundings. They took it for granted that they had only to seek out the hiding-places of their enemies and enjoy the sport of killing in thoroughly artistic desert fashion.

Man after man they came, until McConaughy rubbed his eyes in amazement. He had forgotten that prehensile bare toes can easily climb the iron hull of a steamer, provided a rope is at hand to brace one’s self against.

But he did not move until the decks were full and the first confident scouts of the boarding parties started out in search of loot. Then he raised to his lips the boatswain’s whistle he had borrowed and blew a single shrill blast.

Ss-ss-ss-ssss-sss-sssss!

The boldest of the attackers hesitated at this strange sound which was like the threatening hiss of a giant serpent. Imagine their surprise, when from blind doorways projected long, viciously gleaming heads that jerked and trembled and suddenly emitted scalding jets of white vapour that burned and shrivelled all flesh with which it came in contact.

The war-cries and jests gave way to howls and yelps of pain. A few of the leaders attempted a rush, but it was impossible to see to aim through the steam-clouds, and the onslaught of this mysterious enemy was merciless and certain.

Crazed and desperate, those sufferers who were able to move ran to the sides and leaped overboard. Such as had escaped followed suit. Nobody thought of the ropes that had been hung or the ladders or the raking masts of the feluccas. The one ambition of all concerned was to escape as quickly as possible from the dreadful menace of the white death. The huddled bodies that lay silent about the decks were urge enough, let alone the continued streams from the nozzles.

But McConaughy was not content with this punishment. He wanted to be at peace so long as the *Giorgi Papastopoulos* clung to the sands, and he ordered his hosemen out to the rail, whence they could direct their jets down upon the crowded waists of the enemy craft.

Few of the Moors thought to fire their rifles, and the few that did never attempted to aim. Every man who could stagger on his feet strove to do the one thing—to escape from the inhuman enemies who had given his friends and brethren an end far more terrible than the brains of the desert could devise.

McConaughy parboiled them as long as they were within reach of his nozzles, then ordered his men back under cover, and when the weary Moors lay to after their first desperate push back for the shore, all that they saw was the same perspective of lifeless decks, only this time dotted with white-garbed heaps and little curlicues of vapour, under the glare of the sun. Not a man moved within the range of their vision. The *Giorgi Papastopoulos* looked a ship of the dead.

“He lied, the Kaffir who came from the sea, he lied!” moaned the sufferers. “These Kaffirs have a magic stronger than any he knew. They kill without revealing themselves. Allah! Take pity on Thy slaves.”

McConaughy surveyed the scene with a competent eye.

“That will be suffeicient for ’em,” he announced. “Lay off, you hosemen. Jock, send a messengerr to Evann wi’ orrdherr he may turnn off his steam.”

“Rricht, sir,” assented Jock. “Puir de’ils,” he added, with an eye at the figures that cluttered the decks.

“They would ha’ puir-de’iled ye wi’ half a chance,” returned McConaughy. “Ye innerrcent, would ye fondle wildcats?”

“Nae, nae, skipperr, but——”

“Now, I wondherr are their ammuneetion-pouches full?” continued McConaughy abstractedly. “ ’Twas uncommon ceevil o’ the scoundhrrels to bring their rifles wi’ ’em. Even wi’ the steam, I’ll feel more comforrtable armed.”

“They’ll nae come their ways here again,” said Jock, returning from a personal tour of inspection through the saloon windows. “There wull be nigh thurrtly lyin’ ootside.”

But McConaughy already had forgotten the fight. Past history was past history to him. He wrestled with the present, and when the present gave him an opportunity he speculated on the future.

“Jock,” he said abruptly, “ha’ ye ever salvaged a ship?”

Jock shook his head.

“Forbye ye ca’ a bit tow i’ the high seas a salvage,” he amended.

“Ye’ll ha’ experience aplenty, before the week’s out,” rejoined McConaughy. “Wi’ the mornn we’ll fa’ to. They Greek loons ha’ put money in our pockets, Jock.”

IV

McConaughy’s policy of frightfulness met with the results he had anticipated. The *Giorgi Papastopoulos* remained an object of awed wonder to the Moors. From their sandhills, the Children of the Desert viewed the bustle on her decks without any desire to sample again at close-range the efficacious magic of the Kaffirs who held such huge serpents in leash. At night they sometimes mustered up enough courage to fire an occasional shot in her general direction, but you could not have hired the entire tribe to approach her.

Still, McConaughy took no chances, and several members of the crew, armed with captured rifles, stood guard when he mustered his men early on the morning after the repulse of the attack.

“I ha’ somewhat addeetional o’ importtance to say to ye, ma men,” he advised them. “We ha’ prayed, ye’ll ken, an’ so far as we know, our prayerrs ha’ been answerred. I ha’ suffeicient confidence in Providence to believe they Greek loons will receive the rretribution the Lorrdd will ha’ awarrded to ’em. But we ha’ it in our powerr to tak’ a vengeance a damn sight more satisfactory to ye than a’ the heavenly vengeance a Christian can call down. We can hit they Greeks in the pocket. D’ye see? Here we ha’ a fine, well-built, heavily-laden express ship—a liner. I ha’ been over her wi’ ma officerrrs an’ I do not hesitate to tell ye, she will assess in the Admiralty Courts for six hun’erd thousand pounds.”

There was a restless stir among the crew as the figures sank home.

“Here she is,” McConaughy continued. “She’s deserrted—criminally deserrted. We were payin’ passengers, entitled to all due considerration, an’ instead o’ that her mastherr an’ his men deserrt her an’ leave us on boardd. Now, ma men, ye know what a British Admiralty Courtt will say to that. It’s one o’ the few good things we can say o’ the English that they’ll never miss a chance to man-handle another nation’s merrchant marine. The Greeks are no popular in this war. If we get her off—an’ I’d think little enough o’ the lot o’ ye, an’ maself included, if we could not—we stand to tak’ in all o’ three hun’erd thousand pounds. It may be more. I’m not pretendin’ to be a sea-lawyer, but we ha’ protected this ship in the firrst place, an’ if we save her our claims against her can be as high as we choose. D’ye follow me?”

A murmur of assent answered him.

“’Twill be harrrd worrk,” McConaughy warned them. “An’ we can ha’ no slackness. We must get off before rough weatherr springs up or before they Moors stir up their courage again. Are ye for it? It may mean thousands o’ pounds to every one o’ ye.”

This time there was a deep-throated, rumbling cheer.

“Good!” exclaimed McConaughy. “Now we will be fallin’ to worrk. Mr. Apgar an’ his arrtificerrrs will pay special attention to the plates that ha’ been startred for’arrd; the balance o’ the ‘black gang’ will put the engines in shape. Mr. Grant will tak’ charrge o’ the deck worrk and the shiftin’ o’ the carrgo. There’s worrk for all. Remember, she’s Belfast-built. She was a good

ship before they hell-hounds got hold o' her—an' we'll make her as sweet a craft as she was the day she dropped down the Lough. Smarttly, ma men!"

And smartly they responded to him. Evan and his skilled mechanics found welding tools, rivets and spare plates, descended into the fore-peak, and in water up to their waists laboured mightily with the leaks which had been started by the force of the impact with the sand-bar.

In the meantime, Jock and his husky deck gang were shifting the cargo as far aft as possible so as to lessen the weight with which she clung to the bar. This was a tedious job, a job which required days, for McConaughy had his own ideas on the subject, and he wished the cargo to be distributed so that it would do the most good when he came to put into effect the plan that he was debating in his brain.

Of course, it was impossible for Evan to make good all the damage wrought by a collision with a continent; the ship needed dry-docking for that. But at least he was able to repair the more serious breaks and to brace the weakened deck-beams and structure of the stem. By actual trial with the pumps it was determined that the water could be kept down to a safe level in the fore-peak, and that was as much as could be asked in the circumstances.

"It will not be what I call a grant job," he reported to McConaughy, "but I have seen worse work in harpour."

"Is she good for Gib?"

"Ye can tak' her 'ome, if ye want to," retorted Evan. "All she needs is gentle hantling."

"We'll see," was all McConaughy answered.

He walked back to the after holds, where Jock was sorting and rearranging cargo. An appreciable difference had been caused in the way the vessel lay. She was no longer down so deeply by the head. Instead, her stem rode fairly high on the sand bank, whilst her stern had sunk deeper in the water.

Jock tossed away a fountain of sweat from his brow with a single dash of his hand.

"We're no verra speedy wi' the work i' hand, sir," he apologised.

"Ye ha' made progress, Jock."

"Oh, ay. Progress, nae doot. But 'tis slow work."

"Ye sing a song the like o' Evan's," remarked McConaughy dryly.

“We canna mak’ a ship out o’ a derelict in seven day, man. ’Twould be a fair sacrilige.” He glanced around him. “Can ye mak’ me a raft?”

“A what?”

“A raft, Jock.”

“Ay. How big wad ye hae it be, skipperr?”

“A good big raft, Jock, big enough to support an anchorr.”

Jock pondered.

“It can be done,” he said at last. “We hae nae materials tae hand, but that is a matterr will be clearred up, one way or anotheerr.”

“That’s the spirrit, Jock,” approved McConaughy. “Tak’ what ye need—anything, to the cabin fittings. We must ha’ the raft.”

It was not necessary for Jock to strip the cabin fittings, but he took practically every other bit of timber and every empty hogshead on the *Giorgi Papastopoulos* for his purpose. He assembled these ingredients in the shallow water by the bow, and here, with the help of Evan, he constructed a ponderous, loosely built raft which yet was capable of supporting an enormous weight. To it, by means of the for’ard donkey-engine and winch, was lowered the huge port anchor.

Then the raft was towed around to the stern of the stranded liner, a steel-wire cable was moved outboard to the anchor, and the raft dropped astern with its burden to deposit it in deep water several hundred yards away in the channel. Followed a repetition of this performance, and presently a second anchor, likewise rove to a wire hawser, was dropped beside the first.

This was two weeks after the fight with the Moors and McConaughy decreed a rest for his weary crew. They lolled about the decks, panting and tired, but quite happy. Their work was progressing, and they were men who took great pride in their work. The *Giorgi Papastopoulos* shone with new paint. The rust-scale had been flaked off her engines and furnaces, which glistened with oil. The cargo had been shifted far aft, so that now her hull teetered on the brink of the sand-bar at high tide, poised as if ready to slide off. The steel hawsers connected with the anchors outboard over the stern were hitched to the aft donkey-engine. All was ready for McConaughy’s plan.

“To-morrer,” he was saying to Evan, “we’ll thry out the powerr o’ your engines an’——”

“Hoot, skipper,” came a hail from Jock Grant. “Smoke i’ the norr’west!”

McConaughy snatched up his glasses. Even with the naked eye he could see the low-lying smudge against the horizon-line that had caught Jock’s attention. The binoculars showed, in addition, a lean dark hull that was racing along at tremendous speed.

“Hecht!” he growled. “A desthroyerr! Evan, this is no’ a bit o’ luck for us, if she’s some meddlesome, interrferrin’ Englishman, wi’ smarrt Aleck officers wishfu’ to pull us off an’ stow some coin in their own pockets.”

Evan cursed with a vigour and picturesqueness hardly compatible with his religious views. Jock, who joined them at once, was inclined to be gloomy.

“’Twas too much to expect,” he said. “Forbye, I could feel the siller i’ ma pocket.”

They stood and watched as the destroyer approached. Several miles offshore, she lay to and dropped a small motor-boat which easily navigated the shallows, as it was high tide. McConaughy trained his glasses on this craft and started in surprise.

“They’ll ne’er be English,” he cried.

“Who, then?” asked Jock.

“Here, look for yourself.”

Jock’s eagle eyes studied the motor-boat carefully, then lifted to the distant hull of the destroyer.

“She’s nae English,” he pronounced. “Eye-talian, maybe——”

“She’s Greek,” asserted Evan.

McConaughy snatched the glasses again and levelled them.

“I think ye ha’ the right o’ it, Evan,” he said finally. “They’re no English an’—ah!”

As if in answer to their uncertainty, the destroyer broke from her stern the Greek naval ensign.

“That wull be worrse nor everr,” commented Jock heavily. “Greek! Much guid we did wi’ our prayerrs!”

“T’e cowarts from this ship must ha’ peen picked up,” said Evan.

“Ye bethray remarrkable intelligence, Evan,” said McConaughy scornfully. “If——”

The motor-boat ranged alongside and an officer stood up in her stern, surprise written broad on his face. He addressed them in Greek, and when McConaughy answered in English his surprise became greater.

“Wat you do on thees sheep?” he demanded.

“We’re passengerrs abandoned on her by her mastherr,” returned McConaughy.

“But—but there is nobody on thees sheep—he have say there is nobody on thees sheep!”

“He said what was a lie, then. He abandoned us on her.”

“Who are you?”

“We are British subjects.”

“Oh!”

The officer turned and jabbered to a junior who sat beside him.

“Are there of Moors a presence in this vicinity?” he next asked elaborately.

“Lots o’ ’em,” answered McConaughy. “They shoot at us all the time.”

The officer ducked quickly and cast a wary eye toward the shore.

“But they have not take thees sheep?” he said wonderingly.

“So ’twould seem.”

The officer considered.

“It ees all w’at you call strange,” he declared. “But now we pull you off, eh? That is right?”

“I suppose so.”

McConaughy’s heart was heavy.

“Firrst,” continued the Greek, “we mus’ breeng our sheep in close to you. There ees channel?”

An idea of dazzling boldness and simplicity flashed into McConaughy’s brain. Instinctively, his eye swept the intervening flats and shoals, now decently covered by the flowing tide.

“Good channel,” he replied. “Ye come straight in from where ye are now. There’s a short turn to the west—” he pointed to an oily patch of water that indicated a mudbank any landlubber might have spotted—“and after that ye come rright on, bearrin’ a thrifle east o’ south.”

The officer nodded.

“I go do heem,” he promised. “You make ready zee cables.”

McConaughy watched the little boat sputter away, then turned to his officers with a look of hope in his eyes.

“It’s no what I’d call good morrality, in the general sense,” he said. “But when ye remember that they scoundhrrels got safe away from here afherr leavin’ us to be butcherred by the Moors, I’m no friendly to Greeks o’ any sorr.”

Jock was observing the destroyer with a calculating eye.

“Barrow-on-Furrness,” he observed. “She’s new, two hun’erd thousand pun, skipper, or I ne’er kenned a 32-knot turrbine.”

Only Evan shivered and looked at them askance.

“Why, what’s wrong wi’ ye, man?” asked McConaughy.

“T’e engines o’ her,” said Evan sorrowfully. “Fair worrks o’ aarrt—high-powerr turripines! Oh, sir, think o’ t’e hafoc ’twill mak’ wi’ all t’e peauty o’ her insites!”

“I’m thinkin’ o’ the siller in ma pocket,” said Jock, complacently.

McConaughy frowned.

“Say no more, Evan, say no more,” he ordered. “Isna there a dhry-dock left for her to go to? Ye shall tow her there, yourself.”

Evan said nothing, only watched the destroyer as she reshipped the motor-boat and picked up headway, coming on rapidly, with a bone in her teeth.

“Not efen an Englishman woult steam like that, wi’ an unknown coast in the front o’ him,” he said at last.

She turned the first shoal, straightened her course and again increased her speed.

“Seventeen knots, or I’m a Dutchman!” McConaughy exclaimed. “ ’Tis showin’ off, no less!”

At that moment the raking hull of the destroyer heaved up into the air, wrenched sideways and came down in a smother of muddy foam. One of her big funnels toppled over and smoke belched across her decks.

Evan sank down and refused to look at what followed.

“T’ere will not pe a fane left in her turripines,” he moaned. “Oh, I caan see t’e wreck o’ her! What a shaame!”

McConaughy was examining the wreck critically through his glasses.

“Her bow will be pretty well smashed up,” he said. “Evan man, be sensible. Can they get her off?”

“Get her off! Wi’out powerr? She’s helpless.”

McConaughy winked at his First Officer.

“Jock,” he said, “was it two hun’erd thousand ye put her at?”

“Ay, sir.”

“We’ll ha’ to add a few figures to that check, then. Cheer up, Evan. Ye ha’ more worrk to do, now, than any o’ us. Hecht, we still ha’ our luck wi’ us, aftherr all!”

V

“Losh, but the mon’s greetin’!” exclaimed Jock in disgust.

It was true. The captain of his Hellenic Majesty’s destroyer *Archimedes* was ascending the precarious ladder lowered over the side of the *Giorgi Papastopoulos* for his reception, with tears coursing down his cheeks.

“The fool!” rasped McConaughy. “Is he a woman?”

“He’ll hae bonnie whiskerrs,” volunteered Jock seriously.

“T’e man weeps for his ship,” spoke up Evan. “Think shaame o’ yourselves, t’e pair o’ ye, that ye maake a mock o’ him. How woult ye feel in his plaace?”

“Ay, Evan,” said McConaughy soothingly. “I ken how ye feel, an’ I’ll lend ye to the Greeks for repairrin’ the damage.”

Evan muttered and turned away. It still seemed criminal to him to have wrecked the destroyer’s turbines. It was not a question of conflicting interests with him; he paid no heed to the motives back of McConaughy’s actions. He was thinking solely of those beautiful engines, with their thousands of intricate vanes whirring in nicely planned orbits, each where it

belonged, suddenly torn to pieces and hurled into utter chaos. It shocked his engineer's heart. To him it was mechanical blasphemy.

The commander of the destroyer, followed by the officer who spoke English, came over the side and approached McConaughy, wringing his hands.

"I can underrstan' naught o' what he says," McConaughy interrupted, after a flood of aspirated Greek had been poured into his ears, addressing himself to the English-speaking officer. "Do ye tell me what he wants."

"He say it was mos' unfortunate you tell heem to make hees sheep go zat way," explained the bi-lingual gentleman.

McConaughy shrugged his shoulders.

"It was most unforrtunate—for him."

"Thees is mos' difficult coast," continued the Greek.

"Ye say well. It is. Here are two o' us piled up on its sands."

This idea appeared to strike the Greeks as remarkable and they jabbered over it for several minutes.

"He say what you goin' do now?" stated the interpreter next.

"I'm meaning to pull off ma ship," returned McConaughy.

"He say he theenk he send wireless message for help."

McConaughy instantly galvanised into action. This would interfere materially with his plans.

"If he does it will bring the Austhrian submarrines down around us like flies," he objected. "They'd jump at the chance o' sinkin' a Greek warship—an' then afterwarrd tell your King that they thought ye was English."

The Greek shuddered. Plainly, the thought was not at all to his liking.

"But what ees there else to do?" he asked. "My captain he say hees engines are all gone—w'at you say? Oh, smash, bust! Hees bow is broke in."

"I could pull ye off," said McConaughy tentatively.

The Greeks threw up their hands in amazement.

"But you are stuck on ze bottom yourself," objected the interpreter.

"Yes, but I'll be off in a day or two."

“How ees zat?”

McConaughy conducted them aft, and explained his plan in simple words. They were in ecstasies over his genius.

“My captain, he say w’at a marvellous seamansheep,” cried the interpreter. “It ees mos’ wonderful! Sare, we bow before you!”

McConaughy relented somewhat at this hero-worship, which he also accepted as an indication that his victims were not entirely devoid of knowledge and appreciation of their profession.

“I might send over ma chief engineerr,” he suggested. “He’s a man o’ parrts. It’s possible he could fix up your bow for ye.”

“Zat would be mos’ kind. Sare, we accep’ wiz pleasure.”

Here Jock interrupted.

“It wad nae be harrmfu’ tae draw up a line or twa o’ agreement,” he suggested quietly. “If it comes tae the coorts, there’s naught more highly considered than a contract.”

“Ye’re right,” McConaughy agreed.

He turned to the Greeks.

“Ye’ll ha’ no objection to present a request for assistance to me, all formal an’ prroperr? ’Twill mak’ mattherrs more regularr.”

This was considered by the officers and finally accepted. So the party adjourned to the chart-house, where the document was drawn up in what Jock deemed regular form.

“The worrds are nae verra legal i’ their twists,” he said modestly, after their guests had departed, with much hand-shaking and protestation of obligation; “but she’ll hold i’ any coort i’ the worrld where they mak’ pretence o’ justice.”

“Ye ha’ not done much, then,” returned McConaughy. “Are ye that innercent, Jock, ye do not ken there’s no such courrt anywhere?”

Jock looked aggrieved, and being aggrieved retired precipitately.

“At the lang last, it’s bien common sense, juist that an’ nae more,” was his parting shot. “I’m makin’ no grand claims. Only wait ’till the lawyers hae their say. Ye’ll ken ma wisdom.”

“Doubtless, Jock, doubtless.”

And McConaughy forgot about it in the exigencies of the double task that now confronted him.

Evan, with several skilled mechanics, was sent over to the destroyer to patch up her bow—the engines were hopeless, he saw at a glance. It had been precisely as he had feared. Hundreds of vanes were torn from their places. It would require weeks, if not months, of expert dockyard work to put the turbines in running order again.

The moving of the *Giorgi Papastopoulos* went on in the meantime. It was something that could not be done hastily. At the full of the tide the engines were reversed, the screws biting deep in the water, and the donkey-engine started hauling on the steel cables made fast to the anchors.

Slowly, a foot at a time, the liner slid back toward her element. It was a fight by inches, really, for McConaughy feared to put too much pressure on his donkey-engine, lest the cables part or the anchors give. Only by nicely adjusting the relative strain on the propelling machinery and the kedging apparatus was it possible to achieve success.

Three-quarters of an hour's work satisfied him the first day. Then he knocked off to inspect the cables, the position of the anchors and the ground gained. It was fairly satisfactory. The anchors had dragged a little at first, but this had served to bury them deeper in the mud-bottom of the channel. The cables were whole and sound. An examination of the bow showed that the vessel had been pulled about ten feet off the sand-bank.

The next day an on-shore wind piled the seas against the beach and rendered futile any effort to kedge successfully. So passed the third day. On the fourth, however, the wind had died down, and McConaughy renewed operations. This time, he was resolved to put his scheme to the touch, once and for all: to haul off within the twenty-four hours.

The fight lasted for nearly three hours. Sometimes by a whole foot, sometimes by an inch or two, the steamer threshed off the sand-bar that had fastened on her. Progress was mortally slow, but absolutely sure. And after a certain period had been passed the rate of gain increased materially.

At eleven o'clock in the morning, there was a sucking pull on the bow, a violent jar throughout the hull, and in a trice she had come off, floating free and unencumbered. Very carefully, then, they backed her out into the channel and moored her by the cables attached to the sunken anchors.

The salvaging of the destroyer was a simple matter compared to what had gone before. A steel cable rove to her forecandle, a strong steady pull by

the liner's rejuvenated engines, and the warship was released. Her bow was crumpled worse than the *Giorgi Papastopoulos*, and she made water badly, but luckily her fore collision bulkhead was able to stand the strain.

"She's all right for six or seven knots," was McConaughy's judgment after a painstaking survey. "But we'll ne'er mak' Gib. 'Twill be Malta this voyage."

VI

It was several days later that the picket-boats off Valetta sighted the peculiar procession coming in—first, the battered liner; next the still more battered destroyer, her bow a mess of timbers and emergency tarpaulin screens.

"Wot the blazes do yer call yerself?" hailed a warrant officer.

"Derelict towing a salvaged Greek destroyer," replied McConaughy.

"Where yer from?"

"No porrt."

"Wot?"

Much profanity accompanied this ejaculation, together with an emphatic statement that "blankety-blank-blank seaswipes o' the merchant service would get their blankety-blank-blank-blank heads blowed off if they tried to get funny with the Royal Navy, yer blankety-blank-blank, etc., ad lib."

McConaughy leaned over his bridge-railing, with a quiet smile.

"Man, man," he expostulated, "I'd fearr to ha' the certainty o' the pit starin' me in the face, if I were in yourr boots! Ha' ye no comprehension o' the sinfu'ness o' futile cursin'?"

"I asked ye a civil question," rejoined the picket-boat.

"An' I'll give ye a civil answeerr, ma man. We ha' been plucked by the mercy o' Providence from the manifold dangerrrs o' the sea."

The picket-boat sheered off.

"Blankety-blank-blank-blank-blank-blank," she apostrophised the air about her. "Wot do yer think yer are? A bloomin' Sunday-school excursion?"

As if in answer to this aimless taunt, the sea-breeze brought to the picket-boat's crew the bass roar of a hymn:

“There is a happy land, far, far away;
Where saints in glory stand, bright, bright as day.
There we shall happy be
When from sin and sorrow free,
Lord, we shall live with thee
Blest, blest, for aye!”

“Blow me bloody deadlights out!” gasped the picket-boat. “A bloody chapel-boat, that’s wot she is!”

In fact, Valetta was frankly puzzled by the *Giorgi Papastopoulos* and her company. The English naval officers were quick to appreciate the feat McConaughy had accomplished, but he received their advances with frigid dislike. The Greek consul wept in despair at the plight of his nationals and their property. The officers of the *Archimedes*, after their vessel was safe in harbour, joined forces with him in a frantic effort to escape legal obligation for the aid they had accepted.

The English port authorities were rebuffed by McConaughy, but secretly glad to see the Greeks embarrassed. As for McConaughy, he cabled Miss McNish to send him the best solicitor in Admiralty law that money could hire.

For McConaughy, he was prodigal of words in that cable:

Vessels involved should appraise 800,000 pounds. Suggest it is stake well worth Line’s efforts.

Miss McNish cabled back:

Sending Britney, of McIntyre, Heathcote, Dunton and Britney, of Liverpool. He will advise. Nonsense to speak of Line’s interest in matter. Will lend all aid, but reward will go to you and crew.

“Verra decent o’ the lassie,” observed Jock, when McConaughy showed him this reply. “She wad hae no ground for claim in any case, though. We didna use her property.”

“Ye close-fisted Scotsman,” roared McConaughy. “What o’ that? Isna she a friend to us? I’d give her all ma share an’ welcome, if she’d tak’ it.”

“Nae doot, nae doot,” said Jock cautiously. “But there’s nae ca’ tae be reckless wi’ siller.”

“T’e money is not in our pockets yet,” remarked Evan caustically. “It’s petter ye should not talk so large.”

Indeed, eventually they all came around to Evan’s way of thinking. Mr. Britney arrived in Malta, went through the usual legal preliminaries of libelling the salvaged vessels, expressed the utmost confidence in the case, and returned to England with McConaughy and his crew, where they gave testimony before Lord Gurney, Justice of the Court of King’s Bench, sitting as a Judge in Admiralty, at London.

But long months elapsed after this. The *Archimedes* was repaired and released under an agreement with the Greek Government; the *Giorgi Papastopoulos* likewise was in service again, her owners having furnished bond.

Jock had begun to be much worried about their case and was prone to pessimistic discourses on their folly in having ever let the *Giorgi Papastopoulos* out of their hands.

“Wi’ the desthroyerr it may be we wadna hae been entituled tae retain her,” he was saying to Evan one day, “but the——”

He was interrupted by the arrival of McConaughy with an open letter in his hand.

“Well, men, we ha’ won,” said McConaughy calmly.

Evan said nothing, but Jock leaped up.

“How much wull it be?” he demanded.

McConaughy held out the letter to him.

“Three hun’errd an’ ten thousand pounds.”

“Dod,” said Jock tremblingly.

“Saant Taavit!” breathed Evan.

After a time Jock mustered up courage to read the letter, a long document, replete with legal phrases that meant nothing to them, including quotations from Lord Gurney’s opinion.

“Ha’ done, ha’ done,” adjured McConaughy impatiently. “’Tis mattherr that I cannot undherrstand an’ doubt ye can, either. Is there nought wi’ sense to it?”

Jock emitted a sudden volcanic chuckle.

“Ay there is that,” he said. “Skipperr, d’ye mind the time ye twitted me for ma law worrds i’ the contract we drew up wi’ the Greek orf’cer? Harrk to this, now:

“Touching the claim for salvage from the owners of the *Giorgi Papastopoulos*, there can be no question in law or in fact. The evidence is most clear upon this point. The vessel was a total loss, abandoned upon an unknown, hostile coast, where her looting and eventual destruction was a certain eventuality if she was not protected. Moreover, the claimants were abandoned upon this vessel by her master under conditions of most distressing and revolting cruelty. Notwithstanding this, they guarded her from attack, repaired her damages and through the exercise of commendable ingenuity and determination were able to float her by their own unaided efforts.

“In such a case, legal custom has established the assessment of salvage to the maximum amount. The vessel was in the way to becoming a total loss to her owners. They were fortunate to save anything from the disaster. In the circumstances it does not seem unreasonable to place salvage at an amount one-half the total estimated value of the ship, her mails and cargo, or three hundred thousand pounds.

“The claim against his Hellenic Majesty’s destroyer *Archimedes* would not rest upon equally indisputable grounds if it were not for one saving fact. It must be remembered that the officers of the destroyer have presented evidence to show that when their vessel came ashore the *Giorgi Papastopoulos* was still in a similar plight, the coast was occupied by hostile Moors, and while the claimants had succeeded in repelling one attack by their own efforts, it is not certain that they could have been equally successful in meeting a second attack.

“The officers of the *Archimedes* point out that their guns covered the *Giorgi Papastopoulos* and furnished what they claim to have been essential protection for her in her efforts to get off the sand-bar. This service, they contend, should more than balance any claims the claimants have presented on account of having hauled the *Archimedes* off the sands and towed her to port.

“But, as has been said, there is one flaw in their argument. Counsel for the claimants were able to produce in evidence a

written request for aid, implying acceptance of obligations, and signed by the commander of the *Archimedes*. While not a strictly legal document, this served to fix, beyond cavil, the justice of the claim entered against the *Archimedes*. By arrangement with the Greek Government, the salvage on the *Archimedes* has been fixed at ten thousand pounds.”

“There, Skipper!” exclaimed Jock, “will ye speir at ma law-worrds anitherr time?”

“I will not, Jock, ye big, overrgrown sea-lawyerr,” boomed McConaughy. “Norr will I comment on the overrbearrin’ conceit o’ ye, for I’m too happy at this moment to find fault wi’ the most lackin’ man in the whole o’ Belfast.”

CHAPTER VII

CONTRABAND MATRIMONY

McConaughy entered the offices of the Red Funnel Line with the soul-warming satisfaction of the man who has sixty thousand pounds banked to his credit. The clerks in the counting-room whispered behind their ledgers as he passed, for he was a great man now. No other skipper stood so high with the Managing Director and the Board, and it was even rumoured that he was to be permitted to purchase an interest in the Line.

To McConaughy the stir he created meant nothing. He nodded casually to a few underlings he knew and brushed through the swinging baize-covered door that led to the private offices. Here he found himself in a lobby. The door in front of him was labeled "Managing Director"; the door to his left "Board Room"; and the door to his right "Captains' Room." As he hesitated a moment, a high tenor laugh echoed from behind the Managing Director's door.

"Haw-haw-haw! I say, you know—Haw-haw-haw! Rather neat—what? Take your bally motor to the Esplanade—what? And I said to him——"

A deep bass voice rumbled indistinctly, and again there came a feeble "Haw-haw-haw!"

McConaughy compressed his lips at the obvious English accent of that laboured laughter, and turned into the door marked "Captains' Room."

"What ho, McConaughy? Back again, eh? Where from this time?"

The speaker was Craven, Port Superintendent. Several other Captains of the Line, who were waiting, looked up and nodded or spoke.

"Well, ye'll be a man o' wealth this day, McConaughy," said one.

McConaughy agreed shortly.

"We made a good haul in the salvage."

He turned to Craven.

"I'm from the States. Ma ship is docked. There was worrd the young leddy wished to see me."

"That's right. She sent a message you were to come straight up." Craven leaned closer to him. "Who do you suppose is in there with her now?"

McConaughy shook his head.

“Claragh.”

“Who?”

“Lord Claragh.”

“The Claragh Line?”

“Ye guessed it.”

“And what for would he be there?”

Craven raised his eye-brows and winked mysteriously at his fellow-mariners. They responded with broad chuckles.

“I think little o’ his mannerr, judgin’ by the seelly foolishness o’ his laughterr,” growled McConaughy.

“That was not Claragh,” said Craven, with another wink that seemed inexpressibly comical to his friends. “’Twas his son, man—the Hon. Herbert Tibbotts.”

“Whoever he may be, he’s a fool—just that,” rejoined McConaughy. “I could all but smell he was English.”

This seemed to strike the assembled skippers as uproariously funny. McConaughy looked from one to the other with pronounced disfavour.

“Ha’ ye some jest between yourrselves?” he demanded.

“In a fashion, yes,” admitted Craven, wiping away the tears which had run down his face. “To put the case in a nutshell, McConaughy, Claragh’s anxious to marry his son to Miss McNish.”

“What? That brrayin’ donkey from the London mews?”

“Yes.”

“Hecht! An’ ye do not rresent it, any o’ ye?”

“Why should we?” spoke up an old captain. “Lord Claragh was a shipmate of Miss McNish’s father. He was the only Englishman McNish ever cared for. This marriage was something the two of them talked over years ago, when the children were small. It was the constant wish of McNish, himself. Ye’ll bear me out in that, Craven?” he appealed to the Port Superintendent.

“Yes,” said Craven. “Besides, do you see, McConaughy, the old chaps were plain cracked on the subject o’ joinin’ the two Lines. You’ll imagine

what that would mean! The Claragh Line and the Red Funnel together! Where would be the Cunard or the Hamburg-American?"

"But do ye not think o' the lassie?" cried McConaughy.

"Certainly. But 'tis time she was finding a husband."

"Ay, but must it be a husband wit' a brray like a mule?"

"You're not fair to the young man, McConaughy."

"Fair enough, belike."

"Besides, she'd be just what he needs to balance him. They'll make a grand couple."

"Lady Claragh she'd be, wi' her own coronet, an' the Queen's friend," said the old skipper who had spoken before.

McConaughy snorted.

"Ye're gone daft, the lot o' ye! All ye think o' is the Line! An' what use or mannerr o' ornament would be a coronet for Miss McNish? She's well-enough wi'out such gewgaws. Friend o' the Queen! She's a young leddy highly respected in Belfast by old an' young, wi' an abeelity for commerce beyond her yearrs, an' a disposeetion unsourred by clabberrin' old lunatics like yourrselves! What more could ye ask?"

"Well, well," said Craven peaceably, trying to smooth down the situation. "'Tis plain to see where ye stand, McConaughy. But my advice is that ye wait until ye have seen the young man and his father. He's a great man, Claragh."

"Maybe so, Craven. I'm no disputin' your right to an opeenion o' your own, but I ha' no use for the mindin' o' other people's business."

"Have ye talked wi' Miss McNish?" demanded one of the captains.

"I ha' just landed in Belfast."

"Ye'll not find her altogetherr opposed to the idea," remarked Craven. "'Tis a matter o' importance beyond the comfort o' a single person. Man, McConaughy, think o' the union o' the Red Funnel Line and the Claragh! Think o' the fleet we'd have and the connections."

"Ye're thinkin' more o' the Fleet an' the increased powerrs o' the Porrt Superintendent than o' the young leddy's comfort, I'll venture," observed McConaughy dryly.

There was some indignation at this charge and Captain Craven's ruddy face flamed with resentment. But the tinkling of a bell beside his desk cut off his hot rejoinder, and he disappeared in the direction of the Managing Director's office. The other Captains remained silent, awed, if the truth were known, by McConaughy's biting tongue.

In a minute Craven was back, still glowering.

"She'll see ye, now," he announced curtly.

A grin creased McConaughy's wind-battered face.

"Hecht, Craven, ye'll no be put out wi' me for expressin' ma opeenions?" He thrust out a hand that closed like a hawser-bight on the Port Superintendent's. "Ye're too good a friend, man, for me to quarrel wi' ovrer some English pup."

Somewhat mollified, Captain Craven returned the grip. The door shut to behind McConaughy and the other Captains leaned forward in their chairs to listen.

They heard his bull-voice roar out a greeting to the Managing Director that might have been launched from the bridge with the intention of reaching the look-out's cage.

"Miss McNish! It does ma hearrt good to see ye again! An' all the men o' ma crrew send greetin's, wi' many rrecollections o' the kindnesses ye ha' done them. Ay, ma'am, we had a ggrand voyage to the States. But tame worrk we found——"

Here Miss McNish managed to stem the tide, and the lower tones of her voice intervened. Then the listeners in the Captains' Room heard McConaughy burst forth:

"How do ye do, Sir. I'm glad to know ye. Ye ha' been a mastherr, I'm told. In steam? That's well. Ay, an' yourr son. Young man, I like fine to meet yourr fatherr's son. But I canna say ye favourr him."

"Dod!" grunted an old Scotch skipper. "The besom willna hae callet the Laird 'his Lairdship' once in the meetin'!"

II

McConaughy had eyes only for Miss McNish when he entered the Managing Director's office. His keen glance noted the fine-drawn wrinkles new-come to her brow, the tensity of mouth, the indefinable shadow that masked her square-chinned, honest face. He knew there was nothing in the

affairs of the Line that could worry her to that extent, and instantly his anger seethed within him at the thought of the gossip of his fellow-skippers and what it meant.

“Poorr lassie!” he told himself.

And he indignantly ignored the other two persons who occupied chairs by her desk. Notice them? Not he! The persecutors! The English meddlers! But his quick perception caught the note of appeal in her voice when she interrupted his greeting, and he heeded her because there was one person in the world, and only one, Miles McConaughy was willing to check his feelings for—and that was Miss Tabitha McNish.

She had stood by him in the past. She had stood by his men, better still. She had been square and loyal, as few ship-owners are in these degenerate days. He worshipped her, just as did every other man in the employ of the Line, but in his case the worship was a little more disinterested, a little more unswerving, because she was the only woman for whom he had the slightest use at all.

So if Miss McNish indicated that she wanted him, Miles McConaughy, to treat Lord Claragh and the Hon. Herbert Tibbotts with friendliness that was all that was to be said on the subject. Miss McNish rewarded his hearty response to her unspoken appeal with a look of warm appreciation. Lord Claragh observed McConaughy with unconcealed interest. The Hon. Herbert Tibbotts, after one yawning glance, turned away and swung his gangling legs listlessly, whilst he surveyed the various studies in oils of the steamers of the Line that decorated the wall.

It would be idle to say that McConaughy was not impressed by Lord Claragh. There was not a sea-captain in the world ignorant of the story of the rise of this Liverpool lad from the bridge of a tramp-steamer to the ownership of one of the greatest lines in the Empire. Plain William Tibbotts, he had been, Bill Tibbotts to Miss McNish’s father and the shipmates of his youth. Now, he was a Viscount and Baron, a Peer of the Realm, a Privy Councillor, friend and confidante of Kings, builder of Empire, hero of countless stories—mostly untrue—participant in the financing of nations, dictator of the fate of ports wealthy beyond the wildest dreams of Carthage and Tyre, demigod of the humble, symbol of attainment to mariners wherever his house-flag was known.

He was an old man, but a man still possessed of boundless vitality, whose grey eyes smoldered under heavily-thatched white eye-brows, whose rumpled, frosty hair grew thick all over his massive head, whose huge, big-

boned figure was held erect by the indomitable will that refused to submit to three-score and ten. He was known for a hard man. He never forgave a mistake. He was irritable, dictatorial, pig-headed, passionately wedded to his own way, a born egotist. But he loved a man for being a man.

“Ha,” he growled in a rasping, deep-sea voice that had proved itself against the hurricane. “So you’re Captain McConaughy! I’ve heard of you, Captain. You’re a man after my own heart.”

“And I ha’ hearrd o’ ye, Sir,” answered McConaughy seriously.

Lord Claragh chuckled.

“Doubtless,” he agreed. “You’re just in from sea, I hear. Have you salvaged any derelicts or confounded the King’s enemies?”

“There are none such in the Norrth Atlantic lanes.”

“That speaks well for the Navy.”

“Why wouldna the Navy pen in half their strength or less?” flashed McConaughy. “Hecht, it’s taken the English long enough to learn the way. I lost ma own ship, the *William an’ Mary*, out o’ their dodderin’ self-suffeiciency that wouldna admit a Gerrman Dutchman could outwit them.”

“Captain McConaughy has strong views on this subject,” interposed Miss McNish hastily. “He had an unfortunate experience early in the war. You may have heard.”

Lord Claragh chuckled again.

“The *Bad Samaritan* story, eh?” he said. “I heard. Also, how a certain Navy captain got his flag. Well, Captain, a man with your record is entitled to his own opinion on naval matters. I’ll not try to gainsay you. But what would you say if you were told the Navy wanted your help?”

“Say!” snorted McConaughy. “Well, sir, ’twould depend on who said it, but I’d be sore tempted to laugh in his face!”

“I say it.”

McConaughy hesitated and glanced at Miss McNish.

The Hon. Herbert Tibbotts, who had surveyed every picture on the walls, with ever-increasing boredom, grew weary of his lot at this point and rose languidly from his chair. He was a tall, excessively thin young man, with a carefully-cultivated stoop, a long, narrow face and ash-colored hair. He wore a morning-coat and a monocle and a very lackadaisical air.

“Oh, I say, Governor,” he protested in an extreme Oxford drawl. “You’re takin’ rather long to get to the point, aren’t you? Why not put it to the Johnny straight, what? Perfectly simple matter. Ask him, and be done with it. Aw, don’t you agree with me, Miss McNish?”

“Sit down, Herbert,” said his father impassively.

The Hon. Herbert sat down.

“The fact is as I have stated, Captain,” resumed Lord Claragh. “The Navy want your help. I have asked permission of Miss McNish to put the proposition before you. She has said it is for you to decide whether to accept it or not.”

“That is quite true, Captain McConaughy,” supplemented Miss McNish. “I think you’ll be interested in what Lord Claragh has to say.”

McConaughy sat down.

“I’ll hearr ye,” he said briefly.

A smile flitted across Lord Claragh’s face. Here was no ordinary man, he knew, but a fearless, uncompromising soul that discarded all unessentials and held to the facts alone. Instinctively, he abandoned the arguments he had marshalled in advance, and told his story in plain, forthright terms.

“You know the North Sea?”

“Fairrly well. As a lad I was in trawlerrrs off an’ on.”

“Then you know the North German coast up by the Danish frontier? The North Frisian Islands?”

“Ay.”

“Good. It’s a desolate coast—no need to tell you that. Sand-banks and shoal water for miles out to sea. Our war-craft have steered a wide berth of it, for fear of mines and because there were no advantages to be gained close inshore. There are no towns worth the bombarding, a fishing village, now and then, that’s all. Now, for reasons I can’t disclose, the Admiralty want more definite information of the seas between the Jutland Bank and Rom, the northernmost of the North Frisians. The task is not as easy as it sounds. Rom must be visited, the coast searched for information of patrols and military posts. It will also be necessary to enter Danish waters. The Admiralty wish to know for certain if the Germans have established themselves in any way on the Island of Fano, if they have planted mines in any of the Danish territorial waterways, where submarine bases could be

located and where there are depths of water close inshore in which submarines might operate.

“For many reasons this work can’t be done by a regular naval craft. Also, it requires a man of unusual ability and initiative, rather above the standard of the destroyer cub. It’s dangerous, of course. Much more dangerous than periscope-potting off the Dogger Bank. But the men who go will be commissioned as volunteer officers of the Royal Navy and their crew will have regular status, as well. If possible, however, the work is to be done secretly and at night. For full success, it is desirable that the enterprise should never become known to the enemy or to the Danes.

“I have just given the Navy for this purpose my new speed-yacht *Saucy Mona*. She can do thirty-two knots or better, and the builders sent her over from the States under her own power. I designed her myself for fast going in rough weather. She’ll stand up to anything that a destroyer can live through and more, and a dozen men can handle her. Will you take command?”

“Umph!” grunted McConaughy.

“As to your crews, you can make your own arrangements,” Lord Claragh went on. “There is just one request I should like to make—as a personal favour. I want my son to go along as a volunteer. I can’t let him go into khaki. It would not be right for my son, the man who will succeed to the Claragh Line, to fight through this war on land. Would it now, I ask you, as a sailor, Captain McConaughy?”

The frown which had been deepening on McConaughy’s face lifted somewhat.

“If the sea’s in a man’s blood ’twill worrk its will,” he pronounced judicially.

Lord Claragh hesitated.

“My son is—er—a fairly good sailor, I think I may say. I have had decided ideas about his career, Captain McConaughy. He has been two voyages to Australia as apprentice, and if it had not been for the war would have made a number more. I believe a ship-owner should know his own problems.”

The Hon. Herbert Tibbotts, who had been twining and untwining his legs throughout his father’s lengthy speech, interrupted here.

“I say, Governor, you haven’t twigged it at all, you know. You’ve forgotten the one bally thing that makes me jolly well worth while. Haw-

haw-haw! I say, you know, Miss McNish, that's rather good, what? If I do say it myself, rather good. The fact of the matter is Captain—Captain, oh, yes, Captain McHoneybee—I've been out in these submarine-catchers, and the Governor fixed it so I could take a course in the Machine-gunners School at Bisley. They tell me I'm a cracking fine shot with a Lewis gun."

Miss McNish had been tapping on the desk with a pencil during this oration. But she hastened to add:

"It's quite true, Captain McConaughy. Mr. Tibbotts is a first-rate gunner. Lord Claragh thought you might take him along as Machine-gun Officer, as the *Saucy Mona* has two guns—I think you said?"

She appealed to Lord Claragh.

"Quite so," he said. "But I haven't used what I think is my strongest argument of persuasion, Captain. I particularly want you to accept this task, because I should like to have my son see active service of this character under your tutelage."

McConaughy shook his head.

"You'll do me the justice to believe I wouldna accept o' an underrtakin' as imporrant as this out o' vanity," he said. "For the rrest, ye must leave me to talk it overr wi' Miss McNish."

"Then you won't give me an answer now?"

Lord Claragh's bristling eye-brows drew down in a gesture of savage impatience.

"No," stated McConaughy calmly.

Lord Claragh started to say something, then shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"You're in the right of it, Captain McConaughy," he admitted, "although it is not to my taste to await an answer. When may I hear from you?"

"Before evening."

"Very good." Lord Claragh turned to Miss McNish. "My dear Tabitha, you should go a little easy on yourself. The Red Funnel Line must be earning dividends every bit as large as the Claragh Line, so you have nothing of that kind to fret yourself unduly over. You're carrying too heavy a load, my dear, too heavy a load. As your dear father's friend, I can't stand by and see it, without a word of advice."

“And yet you are taking my best captain away from me?” she objected with sudden bitterness.

Lord Claragh looked uneasy.

“Only temporarily, my dear, and you agreed it is what we call ‘doing our bit’.”

“Doing Captain McConaughy’s bit, you mean. Ah, well, don’t mind me.”

“And shall you be in Liverpool next week?” pressed Lord Claragh, as he picked up his stick and gloves. “Then you’ll dine with us, of course. Herbert is looking forward to it, aren’t you, lad?”

The Hon. Herbert ceased munching the handle of his stick, stifled a yawn and agreed:

“Quite right, Governor, quite right.”

Lord Claragh gave McConaughy a hearty handshake in passing towards the door.

“You’re a man after my own heart, Captain,” he repeated. “I’d like to hear the story of that salvage coup some time. It reminds me of my young days. Good day.”

The Hon. Herbert likewise ventured a handclasp, but winced at McConaughy’s bear-grip.

“Aw—aw—charmed to have met you, Captain—Captain—aw—McHoneybee. I shall look forward to this—aw—voyage with you. Rather different from a chug-chug up the Mersey, what? Good, that. Haw-haw-haw! If I do say it myself, rather good, eh, Miss McNish?”

McConaughy stared after him in dumb amazement. The idea of going to sea with such a person simply appalled the Ulsterman. He seriously doubted the young man’s sanity. In fact, so worried had he been over this point that he had passed over without resentment the mistake in his name and the irritating drawl and ladylike punctiliousness of accent.

“Well?” said Miss McNish, breaking in on his silence.

McConaughy came to himself with a start.

“Hecht,” he said, “I was wonderrin’ was the young man mad!”

She repressed a smile.

“I’m afraid he is not, Captain.”

Something in the way she spoke drew his attention.

“Ye’ll ha’ worries on your mind, as the Lord said,” he exclaimed.

“Nothing worth mentioning. But tell me. Shall you accept Lord Claragh’s proposition?”

A look of positive horror dawned on McConaughy’s face.

“What? Go to sea wi’ that loon?”

“Oh, he’s not so bad. Besides, you must remember that it would be an undertaking after your own heart. A chance for fine seamanship, and perhaps a fight before you got back.”

“Humph,” grunted McConaughy uncompromisingly.

Miss McNish drew intricate patterns on her deskpad.

“Lord Claragh did not tell you his real reason for the enterprise,” she said suddenly. “He is deathly afraid his son will have to join the Army. Anything would be better than that, and he looks upon this enterprise as a sop to the authorities. If they will only permit him to lend his son for occasional sea-forays of this kind he will be satisfied.”

“The more ye say, the less prejudiced I am for the mattherr,” barked McConaughy.

“You mustn’t consider me in making up your mind,” she continued. “If you can be of any use to the Navy, I feel that I have no right to withhold your services. At the same time, I shouldn’t care to undertake the responsibility of ordering you and any of your men into danger.”

“They’ll be uncommon strrange to danger, ma men,” commented McConaughy with unusual wit.

“Well, will you go?”

“For why should I inconvenience maself for the self-suffeccient English Navy an’ a man wi’ no claim upon me, but soft worrds an’ a sickly son?” countered McConaughy. “Is there aught bindin’ the Red Funnel an’ the Claragh?”

Miss McNish shielded her face with her hand, and continued to draw geometric patterns over the blotter.

“No,” she said finally. “There is no tie between the Red Funnel and the Claragh.”

She paused.

“Not yet,” she added after a moment.

McConaughy gasped.

“Then there’ll be truth in the yarns I ha’ hearrd?” he challenged.

“Well,” said Miss McNish, smiling nervously, “if you’d only tell me the kind of yarns, Captain McConaughy.”

“About your marrysin’ that—that——” he jerked inarticulately toward the door.

She nodded.

“But—but—are ye daft?”

For the first time she looked up at him squarely.

“Captain McConaughy,” she said, “I don’t suppose you have the faintest idea of the pressure that can be brought to bear upon a woman in my position in a case like this. In the first place my father and Lord Claragh talked about the—the—marriage——” she rapped out the word with a venom that impressed even McConaughy—“when we were children. It was the wish of my father’s heart. One of the last things he said to me. Lord Claragh thinks that I would have a good effect on Herbert, steady him down. And he wants to see the Lines brought together. Everybody who knows us has the same desire—even my own employés. Do you know you are the first person who has indicated any opposition to the idea?”

McConaughy opened his mouth, then felt there was nothing for him to say.

“There is a stunning effect in concerted pressure by many wills upon a single individual,” she went on. “You cannot imagine how it affects one. I am conscious continually of all these people wishing a certain thing. It baffles me. It wears me down. I am not emotional, Captain, but I begin to feel as though it would be easier to give in.”

A crooked smile twisted her face.

“Besides, you know, I’m getting on. I’m not so young as I was—the women all tell me that. And sometimes it seems as though it would be good to have a man to lean on.”

“Ay, but not to supportt,” protested McConaughy. “If ye would ha’ a man, lassie, tak’ one will not expect ye to think for him. Ye’re an extraorrdinarr’ likely crreaturre, if ye will not mind ma sayin’ so, an’ ’tis plain ridiculous to suppose ye are required to bind yourself wi’ a monkey in a paper-collarr.”

“Why, you talk as if you meant it, Captain,” she cried almost shyly.

“I do mean it, ma’am.”

“I wish I had some more friends like you. But no. What is the use?” She shook her head sadly. “You’ll be sailing off again presently and then—then _____”

McConaughy brought his fist down with a crash upon the desk.

“I have it,” he shouted in a voice that carried out to the counting-room.

“You have what?”

“A—the—the—well, what ye might——”

He scratched his head uncomfortably.

“I’m just a bit excited, ma’am,” he apologised at last. “But don’t ye worry longerr. I ha’ thoughts in ma mind. Ye shall not do what ye willna.”

“I’m sure I don’t know what you mean. Have you——”

But he was at the door before she could stop him.

“Oh, Captain,” she called, as he slipped into the hall. “What are we going to tell Lord Claragh? We had both better have the same story, so in case——”

“I’ll be goin’,” he answered briefly.

“You’ll accept?”

“Ay. If ye meant what ye said about givin’ me leave.”

“Oh, yes, to be sure,” she replied vaguely. “But—but——”

“’Twill tak’ only a few days, wi’ luck,” he assured her.

“But why—— You know Mr. Tibbotts is to go along?”

A Satanic grin wreathed McConaughy’s face.

“Ay,” he said soulfully.

“She’ll be unco’ weel-favoured, I’ll say that for her,” approved Jock Grant, as he cast an appraising eye along the *Saucy Mona*’s hull. “But man Skipperr, she fair shrieks o’ the sinfu’ness o’ rriches.”

“I never knew ye to disclaim the advantages o’ wealth, Jock,” remarked McConaughy drily.

“Aweel, I’ll no deny I hae a properr appreciation o’ the value o’ siller, but I wouldna spend it on a toy like this.”

“I believe ye.”

They were joined on the dock by Apgar, just come from the engine-room, his face still flushed with enthusiasm. One hand crumpled a filthy handkerchief, the only substitute for his pet ball of waste that he had been able to find.

“She’ll pe t’e graantest pit craaft I efer tit see, whateffer!” he exploded. “Engines like a waatch’s works! An’ clean! Why, I have peen efery where pelow an’ t’ere is no tirt on me. So smaall an’ so powerrful! T’irrtty-two knots an’ our! Think o’ it, Jock! Think o’ it! T’irrtty-two knots an’ our! When we got fourteen out o’ t’e old *Joan* we thought we were doin’ things.”

“She’s a good boat o’ her kind,” agreed McConaughy.

“She’ll hae machine-guns fore an’ aft, I see,” commented Jock.

“Ay. Young See-the-worrlid is theirr keeperr.”

Jock swung around with a wrinkle between his eyes.

“Ye’ll mean the lad no harm?” he asked. “I’m not meanin’ tae impute ought tae ye, Skipperr, but ’tis a——”

“Hecht!” said McConaughy impatiently. “He’ll be in uniform. I ha’ seen to that. His Majesty’s Royal Naval Rreserrve—no less. Ye know what that means.”

“But they Gerrmans——”

“Leave mattherrs to me, Jock. I ha’ thought all out. I ttreasurre no evil intentions against the lad. He’s a fool, but he can’t help that. He’ll come through, bettherr an’ wiserr for the experiences I ha’ in storre for him.”

Evan nodded wisely.

“Ye say truth, Skipper. A Gotless life he must hafe lifed, py whaat ye hafe tolt us. Atverrsity will be goot for him. There is nought prings religion

to a man quicker than to feel t'e scourge o' pain an' haartship. T'e young man is lucky."

"I hope he thinks so," remarked McConaughy grimly.

"An' wull there be fetchin'?" queried Jock wistfully.

"I canna say more than I ha', Jock. If the Gerrmans do not be plain fools an' incompetents—an' ma obserrvations so farr do not stamp 'em such—we must ha' some chance at 'em."

"Whaat apout t'e Nafy's reasons for this pusiness?" asked Evan.

McConaughy shrugged his shoulders.

"I will not worry about the Navy's thoughts," he answered. "They ha' suddenly discovered they know nothin' about something they should know all about. So they send us to discover it for 'em. That's the Navy's way, an' as it is exactly what I should expect 'em to do, I see no prroblem to be solved."

"Good," rumbled a deep voice behind them. "There's a man who isn't afraid to speak what he thinks."

McConaughy turned slowly to face Lord Claragh, who was accompanied by Miss McNish and his son.

"I ha' nevrer concealed ma opeenion yet, sir," he returned calmly. "If the Admirralty everr seek it, 'tis theirs for the askin'."

Lord Claragh chuckled.

"I'll wager. Who are these men with you?"

"Ma Firrst Officerr, Mr. Grant. Ma Chief, Mr. Apgar."

Lord Claragh shook hands with each.

"I've heard of you two. Like Skipper, like crew, eh? Wish I could be conscienceless enough to pry you away from the Red Funnel."

"Ye couldn't, sir," stated Jock simply.

"Eh?" Lord Claragh looked puzzled.

"He'll mean our serrvice wi' Miss McNish is not an affairr o' pounds an' shillin's," explained McConaughy.

The bushy eye-brows of the Lord of the Claragh Line, master of fleets and argosies, bent together in a straight line. Then he laughed shortly.

“How I envy you, Tabitha,” he said to Miss McNish. “There are no men in my Line I could say that of.”

Miss McNish looked almost beautiful at that moment.

“They mean it, too,” she said proudly.

“We do that,” endorsed McConaughy.

“The feminine influence goes for something, then,” remarked Claragh, with a touch of pleasant cynicism.

But McConaughy frowned.

“’Tis a mattherr between honest Christians, that’s all,” he said.

“Humph, I wish I could find some of the same sort of Christians. Any time you want—— But I’m not a recruiting sergeant. Tell me what you think of the *Mona*?”

“She’ll do,” said McConaughy.

“If she lacks anything, you have only to ask for it.”

“She’ll do,” McConaughy repeated. “Wi’ the engineer ye spoke o’ and the storres cited in the indents, we shall be all rright. I’ll tak’ twenty o’ ma own crew.”

The Hon. Herbert Tibbotts returned from a saunter up the dock in the interests of diversion.

“I say, Governor,” he volunteered, “don’t you think the old tub would do better if we had a Navy man or two along? No offence to you, Mr.—that is, Captain—Captain McHoneybee.”

McConaughy’s teeth showed for an instant between his tight-drawn lips, but otherwise he restrained the sudden murderous impulse that took possession of him.

“No, Herbert,” Lord Claragh answered firmly. “I see no reason for employing Navy officers. In fact, the Admiralty people are particularly anxious to give Captain McConaughy a free hand.”

“Quite so, quite so. But then, you know, Governor, it’s no child’s play, this drifting up to Germany’s front-door and rapping to see if Kaiser Bill is home. I say, Miss McNish, not a half-bad way to put it, what? I’ll try that out at the Club when I get back, eh?”

Miss McNish, with an appealing glance at McConaughy, put a resolute hand on the Hon. Herbert's arm.

"Come, and show me how the machine-guns work," she said.

"Oh, rather. But I didn't think you were interested. It's like the girl at the Variety who meets the old codger in the antiquary shop, you know, and he says: 'Why, bless me, my dear, I didn't know——'"

They disappeared towards the speed-boat's fo'c's'le, and McConaughy slowly regained control of himself. Evan was muttering openly.

"You said something, Mr. Apgar?" asked Lord Claragh.

"Nought," snapped Evan.

"Ah! And what do you think of the *Mona's* engines?"

"Goot enough, intect."

Lord Claragh turned to Jock.

"Did you notice the steering-gear?" he said. "They tell me she can all but turn on her tail."

"She'll be well-foundit," conceded Jock.

Lord Claragh looked somewhat humorously at McConaughy.

"I'm glad you all like her. And I do think she'll stand up for you. But it doesn't matter whether you bring her back or not—so long as you get the information you are after. I'd rather see you all safe than anything else, though."

"We ha' lived through worrse nor this is like to be," said McConaughy.

"How soon can you get away?"

"Any time ye say. To-morrow morning?"

"That will be excellent."

Lord Claragh looked around him nervously for a moment. Then, satisfied that no eavesdroppers were present, he continued:

"I think it only right to tell you, Captain McConaughy, that I am particularly anxious to keep my son incommunicado, as it were. He is, I may say, inclined to be susceptible—especially to young women. I have learned lately of an incipient affection which has sprung up between him and a person—a—a—to be frank, a theatrical person. It is not the first. I have—well, I have paid substantial prices once or twice before. This appears to be

more serious, however, and I regard this enterprise as a Godsend, if it suffices to keep him out of the way until she can be disposed of. I have plans for my son, which make it necessary that he should be protected against those who impose upon his good-nature."

"Do ye tell me so?" replied McConaughy gravely. "Hecht, SIRR!"

And while he affected to blow his nose he winked vigorously at Jock and Evan, who wandered off presently behind a dismantled landing-stage to give vent to their mirth.

"He's suscepteeble, mon," appealed Jock. "He's tae be keepit in—— What did the auld Lairrd ca' it?"

"I caannot saay," rejoined Evan. "Put we'll keep him so, Jock."

"Ay, he'll be well keepit care o', puir loon."

IV

The knife-bow of the *Saucy Mona* sliced through the first surge off White Head, then swung northwards on the course by the Maidens, the isolated clump of rocks crowned by a lighthouse off the Ulster coast, a scant hour's run from the mouth of Belfast Lough. Trawlers and destroyers of the submarine patrol, charged with keeping the North Channel free from the German commerce-raiders, were the only craft they met. So vigilant was the patrol that there was little danger from the elusive under-sea boat, but McConaughy judged precaution wise, and he travelled at twenty miles an hour, an easy clip for the *Mona*, with lookouts fore and aft and his machine-guns uncased and ready.

An hour and a half after passing the Maidens they sighted Rathlin Island. Off to starboard was the Mull of Kintyre, and as they dropped the rocky coast of Ireland abeam they struck the heavier swells that boomed in from the North Atlantic, checked only by the Hebrides. In a short time they were out of sight of land and to McConaughy's intense delight the Hon. Herbert became painfully ill. Abandoning the forward machine-gun, which he had insisted upon serving, the heir of the Claragh Line succumbed groaning in the scuppers. McConaughy saw to it that more than one wave-top licked over him, but he never stirred, except to gulp and groan.

"A bonnie laddie tae be ownerr o' kittle ships," said Jock Grant disgustedly. "Whad ye e'er drream he was the son o' his daddie? He'll hae nae mair o' the sailorr i' him than senseabeelity."

“He’ll ha’ been several voyages to Australia, the old man said,” answered McConaughy.

“Ay, an’ ye’ll ken fine what that meant,” returned Jock. “The ownerr’s son, an’ a’ hands fashin’ theirrselves tae mak’ siccar wi’ him, bowin’ an’ scrapin’ an’ bletherrin’. ‘Are ye sick, Mr. Tibbotts? Dinna fyke ye’re self wi’ duties ony lad i’ the crew may do juist as weell. Lie ye doon i’ ye’re cabin an’ rest.’ ”

“Hecht, there na talk the like o’ that on a vessel I command,” declared McConaughy. “Ma young Lorr’d will ha’ had rest enough by now.”

With which he abandoned the miniature bridge, raised little more than man-height above the deck, and strode down upon the luckless Tibbotts.

“Mistherr Tibbotts!” he called.

The Hon. Herbert made no answer.

“Mistherr Tibbotts!”

A groan was the only acknowledgement.

McConaughy stooped, seized one shoulder and yanked the limp figure to its feet.

“When the mastherr o’ a craft, whetherr Navy or Merrchant Marrine, calls to a memberr o’ his crew, officerr or seaman, he expects instant answeerr,” he said sternly. “Mind that, ma laddie. Your fatherr’s son should know bettherr.”

The Hon. Herbert dashed the salt water from his face and essayed weak anger.

“Wh-wh-what do you mean, my—my—good man?” he chattered, for he was really cold and miserable. “D-d-don’t y-you know m-my father is L-l-lord Claragh? You sh-sh-shouldn’t speak t-to me like th-that.”

McConaughy held him off at arms’ length and surveyed him steadily for as much as a minute. Then he delivered himself of a speech which was quite incomprehensible to the Hon. Herbert.

“Ye poor drowned rat o’ a misbegotten side-swipe o’ fantastical English conceit,” he said softly. “’Twas in ma mind maybe I cherrished too harrd feelin’s towardd ye, but from this minute I ha’ only pleasure in the contemplation o’ your fate. Thank yourself for it.”

“But you mustn’t talk to me like that,” almost sobbed the Hon. Herbert. “It isn’t right, you know. Why, it isn’t done. Really, I assure you, you have quite the wrong conception of your duties. Laying aside all question of class, and quite as man to man——”

“Bill Tibbotts’ son talkin’ o’ class an’ class!” muttered McConaughy, with a shake of his head. “Young man, ye ha’ much to learn—more than I ha’ time to teach ye at this time. Come wi’ me.”

Still with an efficient grip on the Hon. Herbert’s dripping shoulder, he led him toward the cabin-companionway, despite the protests and feeble physical opposition offered to their progress.

“Bide, bide,” urged McConaughy, when temper flared in childish resentment. “Ye’ll mak’ a spectacle o’ yourself beforre the men. Think o’ class an’ class, laddie. ’Twould never do, never, never. Gently, now.” They gained the foot of the stairs. “Here’s your cabin. Now, in ye go.” A dexterous push, and the Hon. Herbert landed in his berth. “Become a shadderr o’ a man, laddie. That’s ma counsel. Learn humeelity an’ seamanship. Ye ha’ farr to go.”

And McConaughy shut the door.

“D-damn you!” cried the Hon. Herbert, turning over in the bunk as the door slammed. “I don’t like you! I say you know, really, I despise you! You have annoyed me—fearfully!”

A chuckle was audible from outside.

“I shall tell my father, most certainly,” threatened the Hon. Herbert, tears welling into his pale eyes.

“In good time, ma lad, in good time,” the mocking voice returned. “An’ ’twill be verra good time, I’ll assure ye.”

On deck again, McConaughy drew a long breath of the clean salt air. Mr. Grant received him with an appreciative grin as he ascended the bridge-ladder.

“Guid work, Sirr,” said the First Officer. “Ye ha’ savit us a’ trouble by grapplin’ wi’ the gomeril at the starrrt-off o’ things. When he comes to, he’ll ken his poseetion i’ the worrld.”

“Ay,” said McConaughy, “he should ha’ a more properr appreciation o’ the evil o’ bein’ born English. But I’ll say frankly, Mr. Grant, I wouldna ha’ the handlin’ o’ him for any length o’ time for his fatherr’s interest in the Claragh Line.”

Early in the afternoon they sighted the now lanternless tower of Skerryvore, breaking the endless sea-line to port. To starboard the mass of Ben Hynish loomed up on the misty coast of Tiree, and they entered the great gulf which separates Skye and the lesser islands of the Scottish coast from the Outer Hebrides.

To Jock these dangerous waters were old-time memories of his youth, and he made nothing of piloting the *Saucy Mona* in darkness through the narrow gut of the Little Minch and on by starlight through the North Minch, dodging the shoals of Shiant Bank. They rounded Cape Wrath before dawn, and morning found them well to the North of Scotland. A submarine-chaser of the motor-patrol, a craft close akin to their own, raced up to demand identification, and then they bore on for the Orkneys. Late that afternoon the British guardships passed them through the Pentland Firth, where submarine nettings stretched in zigzag lines toward the lair of Britain's mighty battle-fleet.

Here McConaughy tarried no longer than he had to. He was afraid that he might be pestered by some new orders from the Admiralty, and he wished to make use of the dark hours ahead to slip through the North Sea, without being seen by any chance German patrols and gain the shoal waters in the neighbourhood of the dangerous Horn Reef or Great Jutland Bank, where he might feel reasonably safe from hostile curiosity and any force except the God of Storms. For this last reason, he was particularly careful to secure all the information possible from every ship they met on their way through the Firth as to the prevailing winds in the North Sea. All agreed that the past week had been particularly nasty and that it was reasonable to anticipate a few days of calmer weather.

"We maun juist trust i' Providence, that's a'," said Jock piously, when they had cleared on the last leg of their run to the enemy's coast.

"Ay, an' in such seamanship as we can boast," replied his captain. "If Providence sends a wrong wind whilst we're under the Bank—'twill tak' all the ennergies o' Providence to save us."

They ran all night, eighteen to twenty knots, no lights—for that is the custom of the North Sea in wartime—and double lookouts. At each of the machine-guns stood muffled crews, belts ready fixed in the breaches. The weather turned a trifle cold toward midnight, but the sky was frosted with a million stars. Clearer going they could not have asked for. And if they were visible in the star-shine to an enemy, no less would an enemy have been

visible to them. Not even a periscope could have escaped detection under the hard blue light.

But they sighted nothing, for they were out of the track of such scanty commerce as ventured in these narrow, mine-infested, submarine-ridden waters; and the war-craft of both fleets kept more to the southwards as a general thing. In fact, there was no reason for any vessel to follow the *Saucy Mona's* course, which led smack against the Horn Reef and the vast expanse of shoal water and sand-banks that stretched south from it along the northern strip of Germany's coast, forming a far better defence for its inhabitants than countless armoured fortresses and guns.

McConaughy snatched a brief nap in the tiny cabin behind the pilot-house, leaving orders that he be awakened at four. He came on the bridge ten minutes after that hour to greet the first level rays of the sun pushing over the horizon. The wind was blowing down from the north, biting and keen. The ordinarily tempestuous floor of the North Sea was comparatively smooth, and the engines of the *Saucy Mona* were thrusting her along at twenty-five knots, a speed which was nothing to their driving cylinders. After his first mechanical survey of sky and waters, McConaughy turned to the chart and figured out their position.

"There used to be a lightship eight miles south o' the Reef," he said to Grant. "Bid the lookouts watch for it. But she may not be there any more, so we'll not rely on it for a landfall. We've a good way to go yet, and I'll shoot the sun at noon. By then we'll know more than we do now."

That morning they hoisted the Imperial German Naval ensign, for as McConaughy said, there was slim chance of their encountering Allied warships and more than a little chance of their running into a stray German destroyer—in which latter case their only hope would be to elude conversation and get into shoal water, where the enemy could not follow, or else make the Danish coast.

At noon McConaughy verified their position. Their course was true, but as he had expected, the Horn Reef Lightship had been removed. They passed over her former anchorage and a few minutes later spied the oily rollers that marked the outer edge of the great sands. Here they turned east and bore off on a course toward Skallingen on the Danish coast. For precaution's sake McConaughy kept a man in the bow with the lead going, and found, as the charts were marked, a depth of ten fathoms close in the lee of the Reef.

Bearing in mind his instruction to look for mines, he spent the remainder of the afternoon switching back and forth over the waters south of the Reef, a heavy trawling-net over-side. Once or twice they raised the dingy sails of a Danish fishing-boat, but the Danes fled with ludicrous fear at first sight of the dreaded ensign flapping at the *Saucy Mona's* stern. It was evident that the German patrols did not encourage intimacy of neutral shipping.

Darkness fell without a single mine to their credit, and the seas about them tumbled open and grey. Warily, then, McConaughy steered a course to the southeast, giving the dangerous sands wide sea-room. Through the early hours of the night they pounded well down to the southwards, never an adventure to relieve the monotony of tireless watching, and at midnight turned northwards again. Just before dawn they raised the Nordly light on their port bow, and presently, straight ahead, the tower of Blaavands Huk shot its lacey beam athwart their path.

"It doesna look bad to see a lighted coast again," McConaughy remarked to Jock.

"Ay, it gie's a body a sonsy warrm feelin' i' the heartt o' him," Jock agreed. "I hae mair use for the Danes than e'er before."

The *Mona* stormed in close enough to get a brief look at Skallingen roadstead. A few fishing-craft and a brace of rusty little coasting-steamers were the only occupants.

"No submarines there," commented McConaughy, as they ran out to sea once more, ignoring with true German insolence the signals flown from the little Coast Guard station on the nearest headland.

"Aweel," said Jock. "An' what's tae be done noo?"

"We'll ha' a bit look at some o' they sma' islands to the south o' us. 'Twill tak' the balance o' the day, an' at night——"

He winked solemnly at Jock, and for some reason Jock found this amazingly funny.

"We wull hae seen nothing o' the laddie syne ye gied him his cabin-orderrs," he suggested suddenly. "Wad ye not——"

"Ay," assented McConaughy, "bring him out. He should ha' his sea-legs by now."

Hugely pleased, Jock descended upon this errand, and McConaughy sent a Quartermaster in search of Apgar. Evan appeared presently, buttoning his jacket and endeavouring to conceal the grease on his fingers.

“Hecht, Evan man, I ha’ scarrce seen ye since we came on board,” remarked his skipper. “I mind ye told me, too, there was no grease i’ the engine-room below. Where ha’ ye been?”

“T’e engineer below is an haartificer after me own heaart,” responded Evan shamefacedly. “We hafe been consultin’ o’ t’e mysteries o’ t’e profession.” He burst into fiery enthusiasm. “Maan Skipper, I hafe nefer seen such power as his wee peauties can defise. Wi’ nefer a rumple an’ no more noise nor a sewin’-machine, they trive us t’irry knots. ’Tis marfellous! I hafe been learnin’ t’e ways o’ them.”

“Well, there will be no harrm done, but from now, Evan, d’ye see, I must ha’ ye at ma orrdherrs. So ye’ll forego the engine-room an’ stand by me here.”

“Ay,” said Evan willingly enough. “An’ to we fight now?”

“I canna tell. Just bide your time, an’ ye’ll know as much as maself.”

Jock appeared at the bridge-ladder with a puzzled look on his face. He jerked one thumb over his shoulder.

“He wull be——”

But before the words were out of his mouth the Hon. Herbert stepped from the cabin-companionway. He was a vastly different figure from the woe-begone youth who had collapsed in the scuppers. Clad in uniform, clean-shaven, immaculate, he sauntered up to McConaughy with the same offhand manner.

“Ha, Captain McHoneybee—got the name straight, old top, what?—this is better than the last time we met. I was feelin’ rather off the other day, not a bit fit, ye know. Afraid I may have ragged you some, what? But don’t let it worry you. I’m that way sometimes when my temper’s up. Never mean a thing I say. *Mal de mer* and all that sort of thing, you know. Well, how is the old ark doin’? Did the Governor do you right?”

“By the Power o’ the Presbytery!” swore McConaughy with unaccustomed vehemence.

Then his face wrinkled in the suspicion of a smile.

“Tak’ no more thought o’ it, Mistherr Tibbotts,” he said smoothly. “’Tis a mattherr o’ no importance. I ttrust ye slept well the past day?”

Jock and Evan gaped. But the Hon. Herbert merely smiled with easy, condescending good-nature.

“Thanks, old chap,” he replied. “Yes, I had a deuced good nap last night, though the goin’ was rather poor yesterday. You seem to have picked out an easier track for the day’s run, what?” He laughed in his high-pitched tenor. “I say, rather good that, eh? Rather good, if I do say it, myself.”

And horror of horrors, he slapped McConaughy on the back. Jock and Evan gasped openly, expecting to see the rash youth hurled into the sea. But McConaughy only smiled again, a trifle constrainedly this time, it is true.

“Ye ha’ a ggrand conception o’ humourr, young man,” he said. “I canna mind I e’er hearrd a man crack so mony jokes as ye do in a day’s time. Ye must ha’ a noble intellect.”

The Hon. Herbert looked puzzled.

“Intellect? Intellect?” he repeated. “That’s a new one on me. I’ve been told a good many things, you know, but never—I say, I believe you are spoofing me! I do, really old top! Quite good, too, by gad! Quite good! Ha, ha, ha!”

He called upon Jock and Evan to join him.

“A great jokester, the old boy is, what? Ha, ha, ha! Never would have believed it of him. D’ye see the point? Intellect! Rummy good stuff.”

Evan saw the veins swelling on McConaughy’s forehead, sensed the need of relief and leaped into the breach.

“T’e aft machine-gun has tropped a polt,” he remarked. “Caan ye help me to fix it? We hafe been waitin’ for ye this hour past.”

“Right you are, Taffy,” assented the Hon. Herbert. “Be with you in a jiffy. I say,” he turned again to McConaughy—“where are we, Skipper?”

McConaughy choked a moment.

“I’ the Norrth Sea,” he announced thickly, after an effort.

“The North Sea? That’s definite, what? Well, I’ll take a squint at the chart by-an’-by. Come along, Taffy.”

As he left the bridge, McConaughy looked at Jock, and Jock looked at McConaughy.

“Puir Evan,” said Jock.

“Poorr Tibbotts, ye might bettherr say,” rejoined McConaughy with asperity. “But there’s no sympathy in ma hearrt for him this day.”

“Skipper,” said Jock seriously, “dinna ye see the unmistak’able worrkin’s o’ Prrovidence i’ the shapin’ o’ the laddie’s doom? He’s gey ripe to sufferr misforrtune an’ misery.”

“Well,” said McConaughy drily, “ye might as well call it Prrovidence as aught else, Jock. But I’ll say this, wi’out any intention o’ irreverrence: if ’twere not Prrovidence lookin’ out for the loon, I’d be sore tempted to interrvene maself.”

At which cryptic remark, Jock again found cause for laughter.

V

From Skallingen it is only some thirty miles into German waters. A number of small islands, little more than sand-spits dot the adjoining coasts of Jutland and Schleswig-Holstein. McConaughy found a good berth between two of these islets, well within the Danish sphere of influence and out of sight from the open sea, anchored the *Mona*, and then set out in a small motor-dory to explore the neighbouring archipelago.

Twice they met Danish fishermen in front of huts on shallow beaches, and one of these men, who spoke a little English, assured them that the German submarines had never come here—a fact McConaughy was already convinced of by reason of the shallow water. Indeed, the fishermen said they had never seen a warship of any kind in the vicinity. Often they heard the echoes of firing far out in the North Sea to the southwest, but otherwise the war meant nothing to them. They were as far away from it, as if they lived on the opposite side of the Atlantic.

By dusk McConaughy was back on board the *Saucy Mona*, and summoned a council of war. It was arranged that they should start upon the last lap of their adventure at midnight, make a quick run down to a point off the island of Rom, and then land a party in the dory and another small boat, in tow of the dory.

“We’ll mount a machine-gun i’ the dorry’s bow,” said McConaughy to the Hon. Herbert. “That will be your job, an’ ’twill keep ye busy the rest o’ the evenin’—thank the Lorr!” he added, under his breath.

But Evan accosted his skipper not long afterward, with a ruddy face and fiery eye.

“W’aat to ye mean, gifin’ that itiot-fool t’e right to wreck a goot machine?” he demanded. “To ye think t’e machine-gun woult pe any use

whatever if I let him tismantle it? For efery polt an' screw he has touchet I hafe hat to put on four to make goot t'e tamage. Caall him off."

"I ken well your trouble, Evan," said McConaughy soothingly, "an' I wouldna ha' let the young man wreck the gun. But I must give him something to do against the night's worrk. Bear wi' him. 'Twill not be for long."

Evan retired muttering Welsh profanities.

Midnight saw the *Mona* racing south, with a huge bone in her teeth, and every light hooded. Her crew stood in groups about the decks, each man equipped with a rifle, an automatic pistol and an electric flashlight. The Danish island of Fano slipped by to port, and they veered farther out to sea. At a point off Sonderho, the southernmost Danish port, where the water shoals rapidly, they altered the course still more. When they dropped anchor a few minutes before one o'clock, they were six miles off shore, with twenty feet of water under them.

Silently, one by one, fifteen men entered the dory—McConaughy, Jock, Evan, the Hon. Herbert and eleven of the crew. Lord Claragh's engineer was left in charge of the *Mona*, with orders to show a light, when the dory flashed a green lantern twice. This was to guide the landing party back to their ship.

The wind was blowing offshore, and for the first four miles McConaughy ran under power. Then he shut off the motor, and they took to the oars. It was two, when they sighted the white sands of the beach of Rom ahead of them. A grey mist was settling down upon the waters, ragged and irregular, sometimes torn to shreds as the wind arose, again falling in a light blanket that restricted vision to a radius of twenty or thirty yards.

Without a sound, save the easy crunching of the gravel under its keel, the dory ran up on the beach, and the landing party leaped into the shallow water. One man was delegated to stay by the boat, the rest followed McConaughy up through the sand-dunes that came close to the surf-line. When they were safe amongst the marsh-grass he halted them.

"Mr. Grant an' maself will go for'arrd," he said. "The rest o' ye will bide here until we give the word to advance. Mak' no noise."

"But, I say, Captain," interrupted the Hon. Herbert, "surely you are not goin' to do a chap out of his fun, are you? My Governor was most particularly anxious that I should be in this thing, you know. Really, I think _____"

“Ye’ll see all the life ye can digest before the night’s done,” McConaughy reassured him grimly. “Stay here wi’ the others.”

The Hon. Herbert shrank back into the group and said no more. There was an edge to McConaughy’s voice that—well, other men than the Hon. Herbert, with far more will-power, had bowed to it.

After a brief word with Evan, McConaughy and Jock stole off through a gully between the dunes in a southerly direction parallel with the coastline. As they climbed higher, they found the mist thinner. They walked for some twenty minutes before McConaughy found what he was after. On top of a sand-ridge to their left, well above the water-line, loomed a dark, irregular succession of quadrangular shapes, masked in marsh-grass, stunted trees and bushes. Away off to one side stood a heavy, squat tower of steel, with a quaint conical cap like a candle-extinguisher. McConaughy nudged Jock in the ribs.

“That will be a battherry,” he whispered.

“Sma’ guns, though,” amended Jock. “D’ye see the size o’ the pits, noo, Skipperr? Four-incherrs, maybe, or fives.”

“Ay. They wouldna ha’ big ones here, for big ships canna get in. We ken that.”

“There maun be sentries or pickets. Where wad——”

A clash of arms in the bushes above them cut the whisper from Jock’s lips. Looking closer they made out dimly the bulk of a black-and-white striped sentry-box, with a small clump of pine-trees growing between it and the sea. Jock held his breath, but the sentry only shifted his rifle, moved about restlessly and then apparently resumed the nap he had been disturbed in.

“Do we scrag him?” hissed Jock.

McConaughy pondered the suggestion.

“No,” he said at last. “I want a prisonerr to tak’ back wi’ me—parrt forr the information, parrt as recompense——” he grinned, but Jock could not see his face in the darkness—“for the losses we may sufferr. If we tak’ him now we may mak’ a noise an’ give the job away ahead o’ time. We’ll wait, an’ tak’ him when the others are up.”

They crawled off cautiously along the way they had come, and having put several dunes between themselves and the sentry, broke into a run. A

low challenge warned them they were approaching their friends, and McConaughy answered reassuringly.

“Come wi’ me,” he said, without giving the Hon. Herbert a chance to ask questions. “There’s no time to be lost. Be carefu’ how ye step, though. I’ll brain the man that stumbles.”

It required somewhat longer for the larger party to gain the foot of the dune whereon the sentry was perched. Here McConaughy left them again, and taking only Jock with him, circled the dune in order to come up on the other side. They crawled on their hands and knees through marsh-grass to the edge of the clump of trees. The sentry was standing in the entrance to the sentry-box, one hand holding his rifle, the other rubbing the sleep from his eyes. He was a thick-set, bearded Landsturm man, who probably found such lonesome work not at all to his fancy and was thinking more about the wife and *kinder* in some Frisian town than his present duties.

McConaughy and Jock popped up before him like two Jacks-in-the-box. McConaughy relieved him of his rifle with one hand, laying it dexterously on the grass, and with the other encircled his ankles in an iron grasp. Jock seized him around the shoulders and pressed a mammoth paw across his mouth, pending application of the gag that was ready in the Scotchman’s pocket. The two of them had the poor man trussed and helpless before his dazed wits comprehended the situation.

A hiss from McConaughy brought the rest of the party to their side. He told off two men to escort the prisoner back to the dory, then they pressed on, heading this time inland, toward the rear of the fortifications, where the barracks of the garrison might be expected to stand. As they advanced, the scrub growth grew heavier, but a well-defined path led through it and they followed this.

Fifteen minutes later the path debouched between two dunes upon a narrow valley in the sandhills. Shacks, houses and tents lined its bottom. Close to them was what McConaughy judged to be an ammunition-dump, boxes of shells cloaked in tarpaulins and covered loosely with boards. Lights gleamed in one building, which he took to be the guard-house. He summoned Jock and Evan to his side and discoursed briefly his plan.

“Remember, Evan,” he concluded, “ye will waste no time about your retreat. Jock an’ I will tak’ care o’ the raid worrk. Two men will be enough for ye; the rest will come wi’ us.”

They split up, Evan approaching the ammunition-dump, McConaughy, Jock and eight others advancing at a trot upon the guard-house, their feet soundless in the soft sand. Outside this building McConaughy halted, and looked in a window. Half a dozen soldiers sat or lay about a wood-stove; a sergeant scratched at a heap of papers on a desk. McConaughy turned to his party.

“Smarrtly, men,” he said briskly. “Rifles at the ready, shoot any man that raises a hand. Now!”

He threw open the door, and his men filed in after him. Their rifles covered the dazed Germans, some of whom were scarce awake.

“Ye are prisonerrrs,” said McConaughy calmly. “I ha’ taken the forrt.” He walked up to the sergeant. “Where is the commandherr?”

The sergeant stared at him blankly.

“The Commandherr,” repeated McConaughy impatiently. “Commandherr? Commandherr?”

The man pointed dumbly out of the door. A glance over his shoulder showed McConaughy that the sergeant indicated a building more pretentious than any of the others which stood nearly opposite.

“Guarrd these men,” he told Jock. “Tak’ what paperrrs ye find in yon desk.”

He ordered two of his crew to follow him and ran across the street. The door of the house opened readily, and he stepped into a dark hall, flashing his electric light about him. A door to one side looked inviting and McConaughy opened it. On a camp-bed was stretched a sleeping man. The dazzling light awakened him, and he sat up, rubbing his eyes, just like the yawning privates across the way.

“Wo ist das?” he asked.

McConaughy’s answer was to motion to his men to pinion the officer. The German gave one cry of surprise, then was throttled into submission and bound with his own bed-clothes.

“Tak’ him back to the dorry, ye two,” McConaughy ordered his men. “Stay, though. I wouldna send ma worrst enemy onto the sea a raw night like this i’ his bed-clothes. Here’s his uniform. He can ha’ it when ye get him on board. Be quick, men.”

As the German was escorted from the door, McConaughy forced the lock of a field-desk, stuffing papers and maps and plans into his pockets as fast as possible. A ticking watch on the desk said three o'clock, and he knew his time was scant. Drawer after drawer he smashed open with the butt of his automatic. When he was sure of all the documentary loot in sight, he rushed out.

The sound of a shot greeted him from the guard-house, and he fairly hurled himself across the street. He found a scene of hubbub and confusion, and in one corner the body of the old sergeant. Jock and his men were clubbing the Germans with the butts of their rifles.

"Peace!" roared McConaughy, and his personality worked its will even upon the sullen Germans. "What's this?"

He pointed to the old sergeant.

"The auld deil wadna be quiet," said Jock angrily. "Some o' the prisonerrrs began tae shuffle their feet an' I went amang them tae stop it, an' the next thing I kened he was lowpin' for the door. I shot him. There was nought else tae do."

"Where's Tibbotts?"

"Here," said a meek voice in the farthest corner. The Hon. Herbert looked downcast. "Don't you think you ought to be getting out of here, Captain McHoneybee?" he urged. "It's rather dangerous, you know. I'm sure my Governor——"

McConaughy cut him short.

"Look out for the—— fool," he said to Jock. "Get away, ma men. Mr. Apgar will be blowin' up the ammuneetion i'——"

A deafening roar cut him short. It was followed by an indescribable hurtling, crackling, whistling din, as tons of separate projectiles began to detonate. The shriek of shrapnel filled the air. A fragment of the casing of a five-inch shell smashed through one corner of the guard-house. Death rained all about them.

"Run!" screamed McConaughy. "Afherr me, men. Berr away from the path we came."

He led the way through the door, and his men streamed after him, Jock and the Hon. Herbert bringing up the rear. As they ran down the street of tents and barracks, German soldiers commenced to pour out. At first the little column was not noticed in the confusion. But then the prisoners of the

guard-house must have joined their comrades, for suddenly rifles began to crack through the hell-storm of the blazing ammunition-dump and bullets flicked around the heels of the *Mona's* men.

McConaughy dropped back to the rear, urging every man who passed him to make rapid progress for the landing-beach. Jock caught up with him at the first gully between the dunes. The First Officer was swearing vigorously, dragging along the limp form of the Hon. Herbert by one shoulder.

“Will the lad be shot?” asked McConaughy in some alarm.

“Shot? I could wish he was,” snorted Jock. “Nae, nae. He’ll be nae mair nor funkyd wi’ the fear o’ death.”

“Hecht,” grunted McConaughy contemptuously, pausing to raise his rifle and sprinkle a clip of cartridges over the leaders of their pursuers, dimly seen in the mist-shot darkness.

“Ha’ we gaed farr enough?”

“Ay. Drrop him. We’ll stand here.”

Jock dropped his burden and sank down beside McConaughy in the sand, cuddling his rifle to his cheek and making every shot tell in the crowd that swarmed between the dunes.

“Why-why d-don’t you g-go on?” chattered the Hon. Herbert miserably. “I d-don’t think my Governor would like this. Really, I don’t.”

“All right,” said McConaughy. “Jock, they’ll be checked. Come on.”

Jock motioned toward their companion.

“Nonsense,” said McConaughy. “He’ll be a grown man. He’d scorn your aid, Mitherr Grant. Come wi’ us, Mitherr Tibbotts.”

The Hon. Herbert trotted after them, but soon they lost sight of him in the gloom. A wail reached their ears.

“Wait, please wait! I’ve tripped over a root. Please wait!”

“Come yourr ways, laddie,” called Jock cheerfully.

“But wait for me!”

“Ay, just follow on,” McConaughy reassured him.

They heard another cry indistinctly, and then a party of Germans, who had worked around to flank them, opened fire, disclosing the intended trap,

and McConaughy and Jock flew for their lives. It was close, too close for comfort. They dodged out of a gulley and into another that a hasty glance at McConaughy's compass showed should lead to the sea, and as they ran they could hear the shouts of men in a gulley parallel to theirs.

"God send——" panted McConaughy.

"Oh, Captain! Captain McHoneybee!" The wail, was very faint. "They're all around——"

A chorus of Teutonic yelps cut off the rest.

"Nae shots," grunted Jock as he ran. "He'll be safe in body, but unco sorre i' mind. What were ye sayin', Skipper?"

"I'm no as—young as—I was," replied McConaughy, breathing hard. "I was—sayin'—I hope Evan will ha' the—machine-gun—ready. Ah! Here's the beach."

They burst out upon the open sands. The dory, shoved off, was lying in water deep enough to float her, all the party aboard.

"Turrrn loose on the dunes!" cried McConaughy. "We're spent."

As he and Jock staggered through the water and were helped inboard by eager hands, the machine-gun drummed a warning to the first Germans that swarmed across the seaward dunes, and every man who was not busy doing something else took up the tune with his rifle.

For the next few minutes Jock and Evan lay in the bottom of the dory and panted their lungs full of glorious, salt-laden air. The racket of the machine-gun and the tearing clatter of the rifles meant nothing to them. It was McConaughy who recovered first.

"Evan," he called.

The Chief Engineer abandoned the machine-gun to an assistant and crawled over the thwarts to him.

"Ha' ye lost any men?"

"No. Two wountit—not enough to count at all, whateffer. Put naame o' John Wesley, Skipperr, ye hafe ploot i' your coat!"

Evan stooped quickly and ran his fingers along McConaughy's shoulder. McConaughy shuddered involuntarily, and Evan stripped the coat open.

"Ay," said the Welshman. "Ye hafe a pullet through t'e shoulter."

“An’ I did not know it,” said McConaughy dazedly.

“Ye titn’t know it? Toes it hurt ye?”

“Ay, now. But I ha’ neverr felt it to this minute. ’Tis ma firrst wound, Evan.”

“Got pe praiset we hafe ye safe,” said Evan fiercely.

A chorus of amens echoed from the crew, who abandoned machine-gun and engine to cluster around their skipper.

“ ’Tis nought,” said McConaughy harshly, so he would not show feeling. “Back to worrk, all o’ ye.”

“Put firrst we shoult hafe a wee prayer,” objected Evan. “We hafe peen teliveret out o’ greaat taanger—an’ yourself not t’e least.”

“Ay,” agreed McConaughy. “I ha’ appreciation o’ Divine Merrcy. Well, pray, Evan.”

And with the German bullets at long range still plunking in the water around them, the motor thumping in their midst, Evan delivered himself of a prayer, after his own heart, aggressively humble as to themselves and trenchantly bitter towards their enemies.

But he had scarce gotten the last amen out of his lips when he whirled around upon McConaughy again.

“Saaint Taavit!” he cried. “T’e natural! Tit ye foist him on t’e GERMANS?”

McConaughy grinned with pleasureable recollection and winked at Jock.

“Ay, Evan. Poor lad! He covered the rearr o’ ye to the last. We did what we could to pprotect him. If I do say it, maself”—Jock chuckled at this—“we were heroes, between us. Obsarrve ma wound in proof. But he lingerred too long, Evan. An’ that’s the long an’ the shorrt o’ it. The GERMANS took him, an’ he’ll spend the next yearr or two o’ his promisin’ young life scratchin’ lice an’ learnin’ the virrtues o’ poverrrty. God be ppraised!”

“Amen, again,” said Evan.

“The young leddy——” Jock began.

McConaughy cut him short.

“The young leddy will nevr be mentioned in connection wi’ the incident,” he commanded. “Remember that, the two o’ ye. ’Twas the forrtune o’ war. I will na call it the misforrtune.”

“Tit ye——” Evan lowered his voice, at once discreetly and significantly.

“I did not, I’m thankfu’ to say. I was rready to trrip him at need or bind him an’ hand him overr to the Gerrmans; but mattherrs worrked out bettherr than I dared hope for. The laddie lost himself. Hecht, I thought from the startt all we would need do would be leave him by his lone i’ the darrk! I was right.”

Evan looked suspicious.

“Put your wount?”

“Just plain Heavenly luck, Evan man. If I was you I wouldna be jealous o’ the gifts o’ Prrovidence.”

Evan shook his head doubtfully.

“Ye’re a paat maan when crosset,” he said stubbornly, “put I woult not put it py ye, if ye wanted the effect——”

“Would ye imply self-desthrruction?” roared McConaughy.

“Well,” said Evan unabashed, “t’e wount is clean through t’e flesh an’ nigh painless. It coul’t not have been neater tone—coul’t it, Jock?”

Obviously startled, Jock started to reply, when McConaughy interrupted.

“Jock kens naught about it. Do ye, Jock?”

“Nae, nae. ’Twas——”

“Ye ken naught, Jock.”

“Ay, Skipperr.”

Evan spat over-side with an expressiveness beyond words.

VI

“And how is the shoulder?” asked Miss McNish.

“Fine, ma’am,” returned McConaughy. “An’ yourself?”

She smiled radiantly.

“I don’t know why it is, Captain McConaughy, but I feel better than I have in a long time. It—it seems strangely as though I had gotten some weight off my mind.”

McConaughy smiled shrewdly.

“Might it not be ye ha’ rid yourself o’ the burrden o’ contemplatin’ enforced matrimony?” he asked.

Miss McNish walked over to the window of her office without replying. McConaughy, after a sly glance at her back, began to flick the pages of the manifest of the *Elizabeth Barrett*.

“Captain McConaughy,” she said abruptly.

He looked up.

“I have a confession to make.”

“Ay?”

She hesitated.

“The plain truth,” she said desperately, “is that I’m not a bit sorry poor Herbert Tibbotts was captured. I’m glad. Yes, glad! I find myself hoping that the war will last for years.”

“About that last ye need not fash yourself, ma’am,” remarked McConaughy drily. “The ppresent state o’ mind o’ the English an’ the bunglin’ o’ their leaderrs is a sure guarantee ye will na be bothered by the young man this mony a yearr.”

“But I ought not to feel this way. It’s—it’s rotten!”

“I wouldna say so,” he replied judicially. “It’s ma soberr judgment ’twas for the best o’ a’ concerned.”

“How?”

“Well, ye wouldna dispute ma obserrvation so far as yourself is concerned?”

“No, indeed.”

“As for the young man, well, ma’am he was an uncommon worthless, spoiled pproduct o’ sodden riches. It may well be this experience will be the makin’ o’ him. At the long worrst, it couldna do him harm.”

“Perhaps,” she agreed doubtfully. “But his father? Poor old Lord Claragh feels it bitterly. By the way, here is a letter from him that partly concerns

you.”

She recrossed the room to the desk and tossed over to him several type-written sheets.

Without answering her last objection, McConaughy began to peruse them.

“Dear Tabitha,” he read: “As you can readily understand, the news which came almost simultaneously from you and the Admiralty has well-nigh prostrated me. People refuse to believe it, but I am growing old. Herbert was all I had, as you know, and now I must think of him as wasting some of the best years of his life _____”

McConaughy chuckled silently—

“in a German prison-camp. I at once took up with the Premier the question of securing a special exchange, but I am told there has been so much scandal about previous exchanges of this kind that the Ministry have put a stop to it. However, I was able to secure intelligence through the American Ambassador at Berlin that Herbert was well and none the worse for his heroic deeds.

“In fact, my dear Tabitha, the one consolation which I have is the thought of Herbert’s dauntless courage and self-sacrifice. Perhaps you have heard that he has been gazetted at the Admiralty for the War Cross. Some of my friends say that he should have had the Victoria Cross, and I daresay if I had subscribed as I was asked to the last Liberal fund it would have been arranged. But I take pleasure in thinking that, after all, Herbert won his decoration without family influence or pressure of any kind, simply by his own splendid devotion to duty. Captain McConaughy’s report of the way in which Herbert covered the landing-party’s retreat has been read by many of my friends, and I hear, is receiving some circulation in the daily press. It must afford you, too, my dear, satisfaction to know that your childhood playmate has raised himself to such high esteem.”

McConaughy stopped at the bottom of the first page.

“It proves ma point,” he said, tapping the paper. “The old Lorr’d is no less pleased wi’ mattherrs than yourself. If his son had come back he

wouldna ha' got the Cross an' been called a hero. Claragh would ha' been pleased, 'tis throe; but he wouldna ha' gained the satisfaction he knows to-day."

Miss McNish pondered this for a moment.

"Yes," she assented at last, "I fancy you are right. But go on. You haven't read the last page yet."

Silently, McConaughy complied.

"For Captain McConaughy's share in the enterprise I entertain the most profound gratitude, both to you and to him. I wonder if I might have your permission to approach him with a proposition which has been approved by our Directors. We have been feeling for some time the need of a technical seaman on the Board to assist myself in the executive control of the Line. I need scarcely say that the salary would be commensurate with the responsibility entailed, and while I do not desire to seem to reflect upon the Red Funnel Line, which your dear father built up so nobly, still, it is unquestioned that the Claragh Line is the larger of the two and Captain McConaughy would enjoy with us a correspondingly greater opportunity. Please let me know at your convenience if I may communicate with him on the subject."

McConaughy pushed the letter on one side and picked up the manifest of the *Elizabeth Barrett*.

"Well?" said Miss McNish.

"Well," replied McConaughy, "I'll be takin' out the *Elizabeth Barrett* next week Thursday."

"But, Captain McConaughy," she insisted eagerly, "I haven't the slightest objection to your going to the Claragh Line. I think you owe it to yourself in fact."

McConaughy put down the manifest again and looked at her severely.

"Ma'am," he said, "d'ye think that Miles McConaughy would e'er work for an Englishman, be he low or high, when there's good men o' Ulsterr will appreciate his worrth? I ha' no intention o' leavin' your employ—unless ye wish me to."

"Wish you to?" she cried. "Never! And for what you have said, if for nothing else, you shall have a seat on our Board just as soon as I can call a

meeting to arrange it. Oh, how I shall enjoy writing Lord Claragh that you would rather hold a half-size position with the Red Funnel Fleet than be a giant of shipping interests in the Claragh Line!”

“An’ while ye are about it,” counselled McConaughy, “ye might drop him a line that ye ha’ given overr thoughts o’ matrimony wi’ that—that long-sided, thick-headed, airy-faced, gingy-haired gomeril he ca’s his son!”

“Why, I never knew you felt that way about him,” exclaimed Miss McNish.

“He ca’ed me Captain McHoneybee,” said McConaughy simply.

“Well, he has had his deserts,” she laughed.

“Ay,” said McConaughy, and there was a twinkle in his eye.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *The Audacious Adventures of Miles McConaughy* by Arthur Douglas Howden Smith]