The Skipper's Wooing

By W. W. JACOBS.

The schooner "Seamew" of London, Capt. Wilson, master and owner, had just finished loading at Northfleet with cement for Brittlesea. Every inch of space was packed. Cement exuded from the cracks, imparted to hairy faces of honest seamen a ghastly appearance sadly out of keeping with their characters, and even took its place, disguised as thickening, among the multiple ingredients of a tea-pie that was cooking for dinner.

It was not until the decks were washed and the Seamew once more presentable that the mate gave a thought to his own toilet. It was a fine warm morning in May, and some of the cargo had got into his hair and settled in streaks on his hot, good-humored face. The boy had brought aft a wooden bucket filled with water, and placed upon the hatch by its side a piece of yellow soap and a towel. Upon these preparations the mate smiled pleasantly. Throwing off his shirt and girding his loins with his braces, he bent over and with much zestful splashing began his ablutions.

Twice did the ministering angel, who was not of an age to be in any great concern about his own toilet, change the water before the mate was satisfied; after which the latter, his face and neck aglow with friction, descended to the cabin for a change of raiment.

He did not appear on deck again until after dinner, which, in the absence of the skipper, he ate alone. The men, who had also dined, were lounging forward, smoking, and the mate, having filled his own pipe, sat down by himself and smoked in silence.

"I'm keeping the skipper's dinner 'ot in a small sorsepan, sir," said the cook, thrusting his head out of the galley.

"All right," said the mate.

"It's a funny thing where the skipper gets to these times," said the cook, addressing nobody in particular, but regarding the mate out of the corner of his eye.

"Very rum," said the mate, who was affably inclined just then.

The cook came out of the galley and, wiping his wet hands on his dirty canvas trousers, drew near and gazed in a troubled fashion ashore.

"'E's the best cap'n I ever sailed under," he said, sharply. "Ain't it struck you, sir, he's been worried like, these 'ere last trips? I told 'im as 'e was going ashore as there was sea-pie for dinner, and 'e ses, 'All right, Joe,' 'e ses, just as if I'd said boiled beef and taters, or fine mornin', sir, or anythink like that."

The mate shook his head, blew out a cloud of smoke and watched it lazily as it disappeared.

"It strikes me as 'ow 'e's after a fresh cargo or something," said a stout old seaman who had joined the cook. "Look 'ow 'e's dressing nowadays! Why, the cap'n of a steamer ain't smarter!"

"Not so smart, Sam," said the remaining seaman, who, encouraged by the peaceful aspect of the mate, had also drawn near. "I don't think it's cargo he's after, though; cement pays allright."

"It ain't cargo," said a small but confident voice.

"You clear out!" said old Sam. "A boy o' your age shoving his spoke in when 'is elders is talking. What next, I wonder."

"Where am I to clear to? I'm in my own end of the ship, anyway," said the youth vindictively.

The men started to move, but it was too late. The mate's latent sense of discipline was roused and he started up in a fury.

"Well!" he said, "if there ain't the whole blasted ship's company aft—every man Jack of 'em! Come down in the cabin, gentlemen, come down and have a trop of Hollands and a cigar apiece. All the riff-raff o' the foc'sle sitting aft and prattling about the skipper like a parcel o' washerwomen. Why, it might be a barge for all the discipline that's kept. The boy's the only sailor among you."

He strode furiously up and down the deck, the cook disappeared into the galley and the two seamen began to bustle about forward. The small expert who had raised the storm, by no means desirous of being caught in the tail of it, put his pipe in his pocket and looked around for a job.

"Come here!" said the mate, sternly.

The boy came toward him.

"What was that you were saying about the skipper?" demanded the other.

"I said it wasn't cargo he was after," said Henry.

"Oh, a lot you know about it," said the mate.

Henry scratched his leg, but said nothing.

"A lot you know about it," repeated the mate, in rather a disappointed tone.

Henry scratched the other leg.

"Don't let me hear you talking about your superior officer's affairs again," said the mate, sharply. "Mind that."

"No, sir," said the boy, humbly. "It ain't my business, o' course."

"What isn't your business," said the mate, carelessly.

"His," said Henry.

The mate turned away sulkily, and, hearing a chuckle from the galley, went over there and stared at the cook—a wretched being with no control at all over his feelings—for quite five minutes. In that short space of time he discovered that the galley was the dirtiest hole under the sun and the cook the uncleanest person that ever handled food. He imparted his discoveries to the cook, and after reducing him to a state of perspiring imbecility turned round and rated the men again. Having charged them with insolence when they replied, and with sulkiness when they kept silent, he went below, having secured a complete victory, and the incensed seamen, after making sure that he had no intention of returning, went toward Henry to find fault with him.

"If you was my boy," said Sam, breathing heavily, "I'd thrash you to within an inch of your life."

"If I was your boy I should drown myself," said Henry very positively.

Henry's father had frequently had occasion to remark that his son favored his mother, and his mother possessed a tongue which was famed throughout Wapping, and obtained honorable mention in distant Limehouse.

"You can't expect discipline aboard a ship where the skipper won't let you 'it the boy," said Dick moodily. "It's bad for 'im, too."

"Don't you worry about me, my lads," said Henry, with offensive patronage. "I can take care of myself all right. You ain't seen me come aboard so drunk that I've tried to get down the foc'sle without shoving the scuttle back. You never saw me buy a bundle of forged pawn-tickets. You never——"

"Listen to 'im," said Sam, growing purple. "I'll be 'ung for 'im yet."

"If you ain't I will," growled Dick, with whom the matter of the pawn-tickets was a sore subject.

"Boy!" yelled the mate, thrusting his head out at the companion.

"Coming, sir," said Henry. "Sorry I can't stop any longer," he said politely; "but me an' the mate's goin' to have a little chat."

"I'll have to get another ship," said Dick, watching the small, spindly figure as it backed down the companion ladder. "I never was on a ship afore where the boy could do as he liked."

Sam shook his head and s'ghed. "It's the best ship I was ever on, barrin' that," he said sternly.

"What'll 'e be like when he grows up?" demanded Dick, as he lost himself in the immensity of the conjecture. "It ain't right 't' the boy to let him go on like that. One good hiding a week would do 'im good and us too."

Meantime the object of their care had reached the cabin, and leaning against the fireplace, awaited the mate's pleasure.

"Where's the cap'n?" demanded the latter, plunging at once into the subject.

Henry turned and looked at the small clock.

"Walkin' up and down a street in Gravesend," he said, deliberately.

"Oh, you've got the second-sight, I s'pose?" said the mate, reddening. "And what's he doin' that for?"

"To see 'er come out," said the boy.

The mate restrained himself, but with difficulty.

"And what'll he do when she does come out?" he demanded.

"Nothin'," replied the seer with conviction. "What are you looking for?" he inquired, with a trace of anxiety in his voice, as the mate rose from the locker, and raising the lid, began groping for something in the depths.

"Bit 'o rope," was the reply.

"Well, what d'd yer ask me for?" said Henry, with hasty tearfulness. "It's the truth. 'E won't do nothing; 'e never does—only stares."

"D'you mean to say you ain't been gammoning me?" demanded the mate, seizing him by the collar.

"Come and see for yourself?" said Henry.

The mate released him and stood eyeing him with a puzzled expression as a thousand-and-one little eccentricities on the part of the skipper suddenly occurred to him.

"Go and make yourself tidy," he said, sharply; "and mind if I find out you've been doing me I'll flay you alive."

The boy needed no second bidding. He dashed up on deck, and, heedless of the gibes of the crew, began a toilet such as he had never before been known to make within the memory of man.

"What's up, kiddy?" inquired the cook, whose curiosity became unbearable.

"Wot d'you mean?" demanded Henry, with dignity.

"Washing, and all that," said the cook, who was a plain creature.

"Don't you ever wash yourself, you dirty pig?" said Henry, elegantly. "I s'pose you think doin' the cookin' keeps you clean, though."

The cook wrung his hands and, unconscious of plagiarism, told Sam he'd be 'ung for 'im.

"Me and the mate are goin' for a little stroll, Sam," observed the youth, as he struggled into his jersey. "Keep your eyes open, and don't get into mischief. You can give Slushy a 'and with the sorcepans if you've not nothing better to do. Don't stand about idle."

The appearance of the mate impeded Sam's utterance, and he stood silently by the others, watching the couple as they clambered ashore. It was noticed that Henry carried his head very erect, but whether this was due to the company he was keeping or the spick-and-span appearance he made, they were unable to determine.

"Easy, go easy," panted the mate, mopping his red face with a handkerchief. "What are you in such a hurry for?"

"We shall be too late if we don't hurry," said Henry; "then you'll think I've been telling lies."

The mate made no further protest and at the same rapid pace they walked on until they reached a quiet road on the outskirts of Gravesend.

"There he is," said Henry triumphantly, as he stopped and pointed up the road at the figure of a man slowly pacing up and down. "She's at a little school up at the other end. A teacher or something. Here they come."

As he spoke a small damsel with a satchel and a roll of music issued from a house at the other end of the road, the advance guard of a small company which in twos and threes now swarmed out and went their various ways.

"Nice girls, some of 'em," said Henry, glancing approvingly at them as they passed. "Oh, here she comes. I can't say I see much in her myself."

The mate looked up and regarded the girl as she approached with considerable interest. He saw a pretty girl, with nice gray eyes and a flush, which might be due to the master of the Seamew—who was following at a respectful distance—trying to look unconcerned at this unexpected appearance.

"Halloa, Jack!" he said, carelessly.

"Halloa!" said the mate, with a great attempt at surprise. "Who'd ha' thought o' seeing you here!"

The skipper, disdaining to reply to this hypocrisy, stared at Henry until an intelligent and friendly grin faded slowly from the youth's face and left it expressionless. "I've just been having a quiet stroll," he said, slowly, turning to the mate.

"Well, so long," said the latter, anxious to escape.

The other nodded and turned to resume his quiet stroll at a pace which made the mate hot to look at him. "He'll have to look sharp if he's going to catch her now," he said, thoughtfully.

"He won't catch her," said Henry; "he never does—leastways, if he does he only passes and looks at her out of the corner of his eye. He writes letters to her of a night, but he never gives 'em to her."

"How do you know?" demanded the other.

"Cos I look at 'im over his shoulder while I'm putting things in the cupboard," said Henry.

The mate stopped and regarded his hopeful young friend fixedly.

"I s'pose you look over my shoulder, too, sometimes," he suggested.

"You never write to anybody except your wife," said Henry, carelessly, "or your mother. Leastways I've never known you to."

"You'll come to a bad end, my lad," said the mate, thickly; "that's what you'll do."

"What 'e does with 'em I can't think," continued Henry, disregarding his future. "'E don't give 'em to 'er. Ain't got the pluck, I s'pose. Phew! Ain't it 'ot."

They had got down to the river again, and he hesitated in front of a small beer-shop, whose half-open door and sanded floor offered a standing invitation to passers-by.

"Could you do a bottle o' ginger beer?" inquired the mate, attracted in his turn.

"No," said Henry shortly, "I couldn't. I don't mind having what you're going to have."

The mate grimed, and leading the way in, ordered refreshment for two, exchanging a pleasant wink with the proprietor, as that humorist drew the lad's half-pint in a quart pot.

"Ain't you goin' to blow the head off sir?" inquired the landlord as Henry, after glancing darkly into the depths and nodding to the mate, buried his small face in the pewter. "You'll get your mustache all mussed up if you don't."

The boy withdrew his face, and, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, regarded the offender closely. "So long as it don't turn red, I don't mind," he said patiently, "and I don't think as 'ow your swipes would hurt anything."

He went out, followed by the mate, leaving the landlord wiping down the counter with one hand while he mechanically stroked his mustache with the other. By the time a suitable retort occurred to him the couple were out of earshot.

II.

Capt. Wilson, hot with the combined effects of exercise and wrath, continued the pursuit, but the pause to say sweet nothings to the second in command was fatal to his success. He had often before had occasion to comment ruefully upon the pace of the quarry, and especially at such times when he felt that he had strung his courage almost up to speaking point. To-day he was just in time to see her vanish into the front garden of a small house, upon the door of which she knocked with expressive vigor. She disappeared into the house just as he reached the gate.

He walked on aimlessly at a slow pace until the houses ended and the road became a lane shaded with tall trees and flanked by hawthorne hedges. Along this he walked a little way, and then, nervously fingering a note in his jacket pocket, retraced his steps.

"I'll see her and speak to her anyway," he muttered. "Here goes."

He walked slowly back to the house, and with his heart thumping and a choking sensation in his throat, walked up to the door and gave a little whisper of a knock upon it. It was so faint that, after waiting a considerable time, he concluded that it had not been heard and raised the knocker again. Then the door opened suddenly, and the knocker, half detained in his grasp, slipped with a crash that made him tremble at his hardihood. An elderly woman with white hair opened the door. She repressed a start and looked at him inquiringly.

"Cap'n Jackson in?" inquired the skipper, his nerves thoroughly upset by the knocker.

"Who?" said the other.

"Cap'n Jackson," repeated the other, reddening.

"There is no such man here," said the old woman. "Are you sure it is Capt. Jackson you want?" she added.

"I'm—I'm not sure," said Wilson, truthfully.

The old woman looked at him eagerly. "Will you come in?" she said, slowly, and without giving him time to refuse, led the way into the small front room. The skipper followed her with the conscience of a fox invited into a poultry yard, and, bringing up in the doorway, he gazed uncomfortably at the girl, who had risen at his entrance.

"This gentleman is inquiring for a Capt. Jackson," said the old woman, turning to the girl. "I thought he—he doesn's seem quite sure whether it is Capt. Jackson he wants—he may bring news," she concluded, incoherently.

"It's not likely, mother," said the girl, regarding the adventurous mariner by no means favorably. "There is no Capt. Jackson here, sir."

"Have you been looking for him long?" inquired the mother.

"Years and years," said the other, forgetting himself.

The old woman sighed sympathetically. "Won't you sit down?" she said.

"Thank you," said the skipper, and took the edge of the sofa.

"You're not quite certain of the name?" suggested the girl, coldly.

"It- it sounded like Jackson," murmured the intruder in a small modest voice. "It might have been Blackson, or Dackson, or even Snackson—I won't swear to it."

The old woman put her hand to her brow. "I thought perhaps you might have brought me some news of my poor husband," she said at length. "I lost him some years ago, and when you came here inquiring for a seafaring man I thought you might somehow have brought news."

"You must see, mother, that this gentleman is looking for somebody else," said the girl; "you are hindering him from finding Capt. Jackson."

"If he's been looking for him for years," said the old woman, bridling mildly, "a few minutes will not make much difference."

"Certainly not," said Wilson, in a voice which he tried in vain to make stronger. "When you say lost, ma'am, you mean missing?"

"Five years," said the old woman, shaking her head and folding her hands in her lap. "How long do you say you've been looking for Capt. Jackson?"

"Seven," said the skipper, with a calmness which surprised himself.

"And you haven't given up hope, I suppose?"

"Not while life lasts," said the other, studying the carpet.

"That's the way I feel," said the old woman energetically. "What a surprise it'll be when you meet him!"

"For both of them," said the girl.

"It's five years last May—the 20th of May," said the old woman, "since I last saw my poor husband. He——"

"It can't be of any interest to this gentleman, mother," interposed the girl.

"I'm very much interested, ma'am," said the skipper defiantly; "besides, when I'm looking for poor Jackson, who knows, I might run up against the other."

"Ah! who knows but what you might," said the old woman. "There's one gentleman looking for him now—Mr. Glover, my daughter's husband that is to be."

There was a long pause, then the skipper, by dint of combining his entire stock of Christianity and politeness, found speech. "I hope he finds him," he said slowly.

"All that a man can do he's doing," said the old lady. "He's a commercial traveler by trade, and he gets about a great deal in the way of business."

"Have you tried advertising?" inquired the skipper, striving manfully to keep his interest up to its former pitch.

The other shook her head and looked uneasily at her daughter.

"It wouldn't be any good," she said in a low voice—"it wouldn't be any good."

"Well, I don't want to pry into your business in any way," said Wilson, "but I go into a good many ports in the course of the year, and if you think it would be any good in looking about, I'll be pleased and proud to do so, if you'll give me some idea of who to look for."

The old lady fidgeted with all the manner of one desiring and half fearing to divulge a secret.

"You see, we lost him in rather peculiar circumstances," she said, glancing uneasily at her daughter again. "He——"

"I don't want to know anything about that, you know, ma'am," interposed the skipper, gently.

"It would be no good advertising for my father," said the girl, in her clear voice, "because he can neither read nor write. He is a very passionate, hasty man, and five years ago he struck a man down and thought he had killed him. We have seen nothing and heard nothing of him since."

"He must have been a strong man," commented the skipper.

"He had something in his hand," said the girl, bending low over her work. "But he didn't hurt him really. The man was at work two days after, and he bears him no ill-will at all."

"He might be anywhere," said the skipper, meditating.

"He would be sure to be where there are ships," said the old lady; "I'm certain of it. You see he was captain of a ship himself a good many years, and for one thing he couldn't live away from the water, and for another it's the only way he has of getting a living, poor man—unless he's gone to sea again, which isn't likely."

"Coasting trade, I suppose?" said the skipper, glancing at two or three small craft which were floating in oil round the walls.

The old lady nodded. "Those were his ships," she said, following his glance; "but the painters never could get the clouds to please him. I shouldn't think there was a man in all England harder to please with clouds than he was."

"What sort of looking man is he?" inquired Wilson.

"I'll get you a portrait," said the old lady, and she rose and left the room.

The girl from her seat in the window by the geraniums stitched on steadily. The skipper, anxious to appear at his ease, coughed gently three times, and was on the very verge of a remark—about the weather—when she turned her head and became absorbed in something outside. The skipper fell to regarding the clouds again with even more disfavor than the missing captain himself could have shown.

"That was taken just before he disappeared," said the old lady entering the room again and handing him a photograph. "You can keep that."

The skipper took it and gazed intently at the likeness of a sturdy, full-bearded man of about sixty. Then he placed it carefully in his breast-pocket and rose to his feet.

"And if I should happen to drop across him," he said slowly, "what might his name be?"

"Gething," said the old lady. "Capt. Gething. If you should see him, and would tell him that he has nothing to fear, and that his wife and his daughter Annis are dying to see him, you will have done what I can never, never properly thank you for."

"I'll do my best," said the other, warmly. "Good afternoon."

He shook hands with the old woman, and then, standing with his hands by his side, looked doubtfully at Annis.

"Good afternoon," she said, cheerfully.

Mrs. Gething showed him to the door.

"Any time you are at Gravesend, captain, we shall be pleased to see you and hear how you get on," she said as she let him out.

The captain thanked her, pausing at the gate to glance covertly at the window, but the girl was bending over her work again, and he walked away rapidly.

Until he had reached his ship and was sitting down to his belated dinner he had almost forgotten, in the joyful excitement of having something to do for Miss Gething, the fact that she was engaged to another man. As he remembered this he pushed his plate from him, and, leaning his head on his hand, gave way to a fit of deep melancholy. He took the photograph from his pocket and, gazing at it intently, tried to discover a likeness between the father and daughter. There was not sufficient to warrant him in bestowing a chaste salute upon it.

"What do you think o' that?" he inquired, handing it over to the mate, who had been watching him curiously.

"Any friend o' yours?" inquired the mate, cautiously.

"No," said the other.

"Well, I don't think much of him," said the mate. "Where d'you get it?"

"It was given to me," said the skipper. "He's missing, and I've got to find him if I can. You might as well keep your eyes open, too."

"Where are you going to look for him?" asked the mate.

"Everywhere," said the other. "I'm told that he's likely to be in a seaport town, and if you'll be on the lookout I'll take it as a favor."

"I'll do that, o' course," said the mate. "What's he been doing?"

"Nothing that I know of," said the skipper; "but he's been missing some five years, and I promised I'd do my best to find him."

"Friends are anxious, I s'pose?" said the mate.

"Yes," said the other.

"I always find," continued the mate, "that women are more anxious in these sort o' cases than men."

"More tender-hearted," said the skipper.

"It ain't a bad sort o' face, now I come to look at it," said the baffled mate, regarding it closely. "Seems to me I've seen somebody very much like it—a girl, I think—but I can't say where."

"Bearded lady at a fair, I should think," said the skipper, bluffly.

Conversation was interrupted by the appearance of Henry, who, seeing the photograph in the mate's hand, at once began putting the butter away. A glance told him that the mate was holding it upside down, and conscience told him that this was for his benefit. He therefore rigidly averted his gaze while clearing the table, and in a small mental ledger, which he kept with scrupulous care, for items such as these, made a debit entry in the mate's account.

"Boy," said the skipper suddenly.

"Sir," said Henry.

"You're a fairly sharp youngster, I think," said the skipper. "Take hold o' that photo there."

Henry's face suffused with a great joy. He looked derisively at the mate, and took the photograph from him, listening intently to much the same instructions as had been previously given to the mate. "And you can take it for'ard," concluded the skipper, "and let the men see it."

"The men?" said Henry, in astonishment.

"Yes, the men; don't I speak plain?" retorted the skipper.

"Very plain, sir," said the boy; "but they'll only make a muddle of it, sir. Fancy fat Sam, and the cook, and Dick!"

"Do as you're told," said the other, irascibly.

"O' course, sir," said Henry; "but they'll only worry me with a lot of questions as to who 'e is an' wot you want 'im for."

"You take it for'ard," said the skipper, "and tell 'em there's a couple of sovereigns for the first man that finds him."

The youth took the photograph, and after another careful scrutiny, with the object of getting a start in the race for wealth, took it forward. Fat Sam, it seemed, had seen the very man only two days before at Poplar; the cook knew his features as well as he knew those of his own mother, while Dick had known him for years as an old and respected inhabitant of Plymouth. Henry went back to the skipper, and, having furnished him with this information, meekly suggested that they should drag Gravesend first.

It was midnight when they got the anchor up and dropped silently down the river. Gravesend was silent, and the dotted lines of street lamps shone over a sleeping town as the "Seamew" crept softly by. A big steamer in front whistled warningly for the pilot's boat, and slowing up as the small craft shot out from the shore to meet it, caused a timely diversion of the skipper's melancholy by lying across his own bows. By the time he had fully recovered from the outrage and drank a cup of coffee, which had been prepared in the galley, Gravesend had disappeared round the bend, and his voluntary search had commenced.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE HINDOO AND THE SHARK.

An Exciting Combat at the Mouth of the Hugli.

"Talk about your shark hunters in the South Pacific island," remarked the old traveler, "but I remember seeing an encounter with one of those long-toothed gentry that for cool nerve beat anything I ever read about.

"I was loafing around Calcutta one day late in the autumn, waiting for the evening train up to the city of Hugli, when I heard a tremendous shouting coming from the direction of the River Hugli, which is practically one of the mouths of the Ganges. Trotting over to the shore as fast as a white man ever traveled in India, I saw a huge commotion. Natives were hurrying away from the bank, as if in terror, and then running back as if their curiosity had overcome their greatest fears. The river was full of boats. The occupants of the larger ones were screaming with excitement, while those in the small ones were shrieking and jabbering with a considerable amount of fear.

"I soon discovered that the fuss had been created by a huge shark, which had come up with the tide and had ventured a little further than it was customary for sharks to do. His dorsal fin was cutting the water here and there, and when occasionally he turned on his back and sent his nose and grinning teeth above the water, groans and screams of horror went up in all directions. His sharkship was evidently out for supper, and was casting longing glances at the succulent Hindoo babies, of whom a considerable number were in sight.

"In the midst of all the hubbub a tall, lank Hindoo stepped out upon the roof of a kind of houseboat, and, in a short speech, announced that he would catch the shark. "Instantly a dead hush fell upon the multitude. The Hindoo stood erect. He was perfectly naked, save for a little garment at the loins, which our Texas cowboys call a 'gee-string.' He was armed only with a long rope like a lariat, which he held behind his back with his left hand.

"Presently Mr. Shark came to the surface about eight yards from the boat and immediately the Hindoo plunged overboard.

"A chorus of groans and exclamations went up, in the midst of which the Hindoo reappeared, swimming with his right hand. Man and shark faced each other, and I fancied that I saw a pleased expression in the monster's eyes, as much as to say: 'Well, this is civil, to say the least.'

"The shark evidently thought he had a cinch of the situation, for he swam leisurely toward the Hindoo, turned slowly upon his back, and opened his mouth. The mouth closed with a snap, and the people screamed, but the Hindoo had dived, and presently he appeared again on the offside of the shark, smiling and still carrying his rope.

"The big fish looked surprised, and then made another gentle dab at the Hindoo. The result was the same, and Mr. Hindoo came up fresh for the third round.

"Then the shark began to grow angry, and made a vicious run at the Hindoo, and again he missed. The people on the shore and in the boats began to feel confidence in the human champion, and their groans were changed to applause. Every time the man made a point against the fish those heathens would send up a rousing cheer.

"Well, by this time the thing was getting exciting. I never saw such swimming before, and I never will again. The man was a regular water snake. He dodged, twisted, dived and jumped like an eel. The fish made charge after charge. Once his fin grazed the Hindoo's arm, and the water was colored with blood. The man's stock went down a point, but it soon rose again, when the crowd began to see that the fish simply wasn't in it. The man was beating him at his own game. You see, the fish could only go in one direction—straight ahead like an arrow—while the man turned and doubled like a fox.

"Well, by and by the exertion and excitement told on the monster. He got rattled, churned the river into foam, and then became quiet again. It was the last round.

"The shark charged languidly. The man waited, lying in the water until the great mouth was open to seize him. Then, with a convulsive backward leap, he straightened his body and sank foot downward like a plummet of lead.

"The shark settled down over him, lashing the water into a lather of foam. They seemed to be grappling with each other. The crowd groaned and screamed, and then became silent.

"For the space of what seemed many minutes the people watched the surface of the water until even the bubbles had disappeared, and all was quiet.

"'Lost, lost!' screamed a priest, and the mob re-echoed the cry and began to beat their breasts like a lot of madmen. Then suddenly in the middle of it all the Hindoo reappeared, thirty yards up the stream. Both hands were above his head, and he was screaming: 'Tan, tan, tan!' He had slipped the noose of his lariat around the shark's tail, and drawn it taut; and he held the free end in his hadn.

"In an instant it was ashore, and a score of Hindoos were drawing at it. It took them half an hour to get Mr. Shark ashore, for he pulled like a locomotive, but they finally managed it.

"He proved to be nine feet long, and sold for a sum which enabled his captor to live in comfort for nearly half a year."—Philadelphia Telegraph.

THE FRIAR.

There with the cowl about his face,
And the beads within his hands,
A lonely man in a lonely place,
The silent friar stands.
The sandals on his feet are placed,
The cord is girded round his waist,
The stones are worn where he hath paced,
Kyrie Eleison! Christe Eleison!

He hath pattered his Aves three times o'er,
And for every bead hath a prayer told,
The rules of his order demand no more,
And the light is o'er and the chapel cold.
Yet stays he and kneels where the stone was pressed,
By the knees of an abbot of memory blessed;
Bows his head and beats his breast—
Mea culpa! Mea culpa! Mea maxima culpa!

And the cowl thrown back to view reveals
Deep-set eyes of the hue of night,
And a brow where Remorse forever seals
The restless sign of its deadly blight.
What hath the crime of thy youth-tide been,
Man of God, or man of sin?
To have brought thee here; it was dark, I ween.
Mea culpa! Mea culpa! Mea maxima culpa!

The latent light of those midnight eyes,
A trusting woman might have blessed.
Is it the monk or the wind that sighs,
Christe Eleison! Thy will is best!
The hollow wind may sigh and moan
Over the grave where no grass hath grown.
Be it sin or sorrow—'tis all his own.
Mea culpa! Mea culpa! Mea maxima culpa!

The morning came and they sought him there,
Cold and still—he had found his rest.
And a laughing face with golden hair,
And soft blue eyes was on his breast.
The sandals on his feet were placed,
The cord was girded round his waist,
The stones were worn where he had paced
Kyrie Eleison! Christe Eleison!

LEWIS V. BOGY.

ORATOR WHO DIDN'T ORATE.

The committee on arrangements at Red Hoss Bend had secured a Fourth of July orator from Raymondville, and on the night of the 3c, he arrived at the mining camp. We had chipped in a dollar apiece to get a new barrel of whisky, an American flag, a lot of fireworks and an orator, and the boys were a little anxious to know if the latter was all right. Therefore, as soon as he had eaten supper, he was waited upon by a small crowd, with Jim Barney as spokesman, and when they had been regularly introduced Jim led off with:

"Look-a-yere, Jedge, we ar' a-lookin' fur sunthin' red-hot from you tomorrer. Kin you give us some specimens from that orashun?"

"Why, yes, of course," was the reply. "It begins, like all other Fourth of July orations, with the band of Pilgrims who sailed from England in search of Liberty. They landed at Plymouth Rock, you know."

"What sorter people was them pilgrims?"

"Very respectable and religious."

"None of the whoop-er-up sort among 'em, eh?"

"No."

"Then you'd better skip 'em, Jedge, fur our crowd will be lookin' fur a different sort. What cums next?"

"Well, after awhile England laid a tax on tea, and the people of Boston got so mad they turned out and threw a whole cargo overboard."

"Anybody killed in the scrimmage?"

"I think not."

"Jest throwed the tea over and went home and went to bed, eh?"

"That was the way of it, I guess."

"Then you'd better leave that out, Jedge, as it wouldn't interest us two minits. If they could do all that and no one git hurt it couldn't hev bin much of a row. What happened arter that?"

"The colonists began to think of independence," replied the judge. "It wasn't long before they were ready to resist England's unjust demands by force of arms. You have heard of Patrick Henry, of couse?"

"No, never have. What was his best holt?"

"Oratory. He was the one who said: 'Give me liberty, or give me death!'"

"And did he pick up his guns and sail in?"

"I—I think not."

"Then you'd better cut that out, Jedge, fur we don't cotton to a chap who is all talk and can't shoot. Anything more happen?"

"Well, the British army marched out of Boston to Lexington and the Americans killed a number of them."

"Kill a thousand and lick the rest outer their butes?"

"Oh, no. Only a few were killed or wounded, but it was beginning of the war for liberty, you know."

"It won't do, Jedge—it won't do," said Jim, with a shake of the head. "If the Americans didn't lick the British 'till they hollered it wouldn't interest this crowd fur shucks. You'll hev to cut that all out. What cums next?"

"Bunker Hill."

"Who got licked thar'?"

"The Americans retreated, but—but——"

"Stop right thar', Jedge!" exclaimed Jim, as he rose up to go. "What we want is a red-hot orashun, with the Americans on top and givin' everybody else hell Columbia, and as you hev'n't got it, and ar' not the critter we took you fur, you kin start fur home when you h'ar the first war-whoop in the mornin'!"

HOPEFUL WASN'T THERE.

As we reached the top of a long hill the driver looked back over the road and uttered a grunt, and as we turned our heads we saw a strange figure half a mile away on the back of a galloping mule. Three or four minutes later it was near enough to be recognized as a woman, who was mounted man-fashion on the animal. As she reached us she pulled the mule up with a "w-h-o-a, now!" and after getting her breath she asked of the driver:

"Say, now, hev you got a passenger aboard named Hopeful Davis?"

"No such man, ma'am," replied the driver.

"Man with reddish hair—bow-backed—squint to one eye—about forty years old," she continued as she carefully eyed the three passengers on top of the coach.

"Haven't seen no such critter, ma'am. I take it thet he was your husband?"

"You needn't take it that way exactly. He was along here about a month ago, and asked me to marry him. I said I would, and he was to show up three days ago. I guess it's a case of flunk."

"I'm sorry fur you, ma'am. When a woman was sot her mind on——"

"Who has sot her mind?" she interrupted.

"Excuse me, ma'am; but I thought you said he was——"

"I said he was comin', but he hasn't showed up. I ain't breakin' my heart, however. Mebbe I'd hev married him, and mebbe not. Don't you be quite so fur ahead with your feelin's fur me. Any of you men on top want a wife?"

"All married men, ma'am," said the driver as we hooked off over the prairie without a word in answer.

"I see. Wall, that's allright. Think you'd know the critter I spoke of it you saw him?"

"I think I would, ma'am."

"Man with reddish hair—bow-backed—squint to one eye—about forty years old. I remember, too, that he's got a squeak to his voice. If you see him tell him that I'm goin' to wait till Saturday fur him. And if he don't show up thar'll be at least fourteen men spoonin' around my dug-out on Sunday, and before Monday noon the Widder Hardman won't be a widder no more."

The New Telephone Dodge.

"What's the matter with you?" asked the head of the firm when he came in and found the junior partner pacing the floor like a caged lion.

"Understand that this is strictly between ourselves," came the answer in an irritated voice. "There are some things that a man wants to endure without any assistance or sympathy from others. I was sitting here an hour ago looking through the mail. A well-dressed man with pleasing manners came in and asked for you, stating that there was an important matter of business about which he must talk with you personally. We had a pleasant little chat, when he looked at his watch, said he seemed to have conflicting engagements, and asked if he might use the telephone. Of course I consented, and showed him through the next room into the booth.

"In about ten minutes he came out smiling, thanked me cordially, and said he would be back in half an hour to transact his business with you. He wasn't more than out of the building when the telephone jingled and the main office inquired when that message to St. Louis should be charged to.

"'What message?' I yelled, excitedly.

"'Why, the one that just went over the long distance, of course.'

"My knees quaked and my voice quavered, as I asked how much it was.

"'Just $15.80,' came the maddening reply.

"'Charge it to me,' I shouted, and then chased wildly around the block looking for the fellow. That was another fool trick. To think of a man of my age and experience being such an unmitigated and infernal chump. I'll hunt that fellow to the ends of the earth. But don't you say a word. Mind, now."—Detroit Free Press.

SQUAN CREEK FOLKS.

Thar' wasn't any more lyin', stealin' and back-bitin' goin' on than usual in Squan Creek, when the preacher stood up one Sunday mornin' and said he was goin' to hold revival meetin's in hopes to better the town. It wasn't long before he begun, but nobody exceptin' Aunt Sally Davis attended the first five or six meetin's. She had bin a member of the church for thirty y'ars, but, to obliege the pastor and start things off, she went for'd on the anxious seat and told how wicked she had bin and got converted over agin. She did this four nights runnin', and then she told Jim Crueso, her hired man, that if he didn't help things along she'd discharge him. Jim got converted to keep her company, and then two or three more dropped in, and, finally, the meetin's got a good start. By and by, the pastor came down to the wharf and begin to talk to us, and, arter he had gone, Joe Taylor speaks up and says:

"I've allus bin as innercent as a yearlin' babby, but I'm willin' to go to the meetin's and help save the rest o' ye."

Josephus Harmon scratched his head fur awhile and looked off over the marsh, and then he said:

"If I was to die tonight I'd go straight to Paradise and hev golden wings, but thar's nuthin' mean about me. I'm willin' to attend the meetin's and see that the rest of ye git a fa'r show."

Half a dozen other old shell-backs spoke in the same way, and that night about twenty of us showed up at the meetin'. None of the crowd got hit very hard that night or the next, but on the fourth night Joe Taylor begun to hitch around on the seat and look pale, and purty soon he stood up and begun to talk. Everybody knowed he was an old liar and as stingy as grease, but no one had suspected that he was anything wuss. It jest took us all by surprise when he got up and confessed to stealin' seventeen bushels of oysters from Solomon Tompkins' bed, and of chopppin' up Tim Smith's dory, and of killin' the widder Harper's big dog. Owned right up to all of it and more too, and said he was willin' to pay all damages. That started the gang. When Joe Taylor sot down Jim Renfew got up and wept and said:

"I'm feelin' that I'm the meanest reptile on the face of this airth! I've purtended all along to be a decent man and abide by the law, but I'm a scoundrel of the deepest dye. It was me that burned Henry Scott's boathouse two years ago, and it was me that robbed the postoffice last y'ar. I ar' also the miserable heathen who chopped up Tim Smith's dory, and I'm willin' to go to prison fur my crimes."

When Jim Renfew sot down Tom Doty got up and shed tears and wobbled his chin and said:

"Of all the low-down villains in this world of ours I'm the wust, and I want to be tooken right from here and sent to prison fur the remainder o' my days. It was me that ham strung Uncle Tarbell's mewl; it was me that stole Joe Barber's fifty hens; it was me that begun all the lyin' in Squan Creek. And I also want to own up that it was me that chopped up Tim Smith's dory, and I'm ready to git down on my knees and beg his pardon and pay damages."

That was three different men who had confessed to choppin' up that dory, and the pastor 'peared to be sorter puzzled over it. He didn't say nuthin', however, and when Tom Doty sot down Jason Jackson got up and humbly said:

"It's a wonder I hevn't bin struck by lightnin' or bit to death by a shark, fur I'm nuthin' but a mass o' wickedness. Fur five y'ars I've bin tryin' to see how wicked I could be. I've lied and stole and bore false witness. I've cheated and wronged and robbed. Nobody never did suspect me of murder, but I killed a tin peddler back on the hill road three years ago and sunk his body in Shark Inlet. I'll go with the officers tomorrow and produce the bones. While I'm ownin' up and willin' to be hung, I might as well say that it was me who chopped up Tim Smith's dory. Tim is here, and I'm askin' if he'll take my hand and furgive me."

"Thar' must be some mistake about that dory," says the pastor as Jason sot down. "I remember about it's bein' chopped up, but four of you couldn't hev done it. The next man up better leave the dory out."

The next one to git up was Tim Smith hisself. He'd bin cryin' softly fur half an hour, and it was two or three minutes before he could find his voice to say:

"Thar' hev bin folks here who said they was bad, but they didn't know me. I've laid awake nights to be bad. Thar' ain't a crime but what I'm guilty of, and I don't expect I've got any soul to be saved. I want to be tooken out and hung this very night, and I want everybody in this meetin'-house to spit on my grave when I'm buried. Before I'm hung, however, I want to say that I chopped up that dory myself. I did it to git sympathy and to be mean. Now go ahead and call the hangman."

"Thar's bin a heap o' lyin' about that dory," says the pastor, "and I don't like it. Four of the five of you must hev lied, and if you don't own up this meetin' house may crumble in on us."

Every one of them five stood up and said over agin that he chopped up that dory, and the pastor said it was no use to continue the meetin's if liars was to come thar' and lie. Harrison Pomeroy was goin' to git up and tell how bad he was and how he chopped up that dory, but the pastor choked him off and closed the meetin'. Next day everybody was gabbin' and scandalizin' and callin' everybody else a liar, and the fuss was kept up till all strangers dodged Squan Creek, and even the fish wouldn's come into the bay no more. 'Bout