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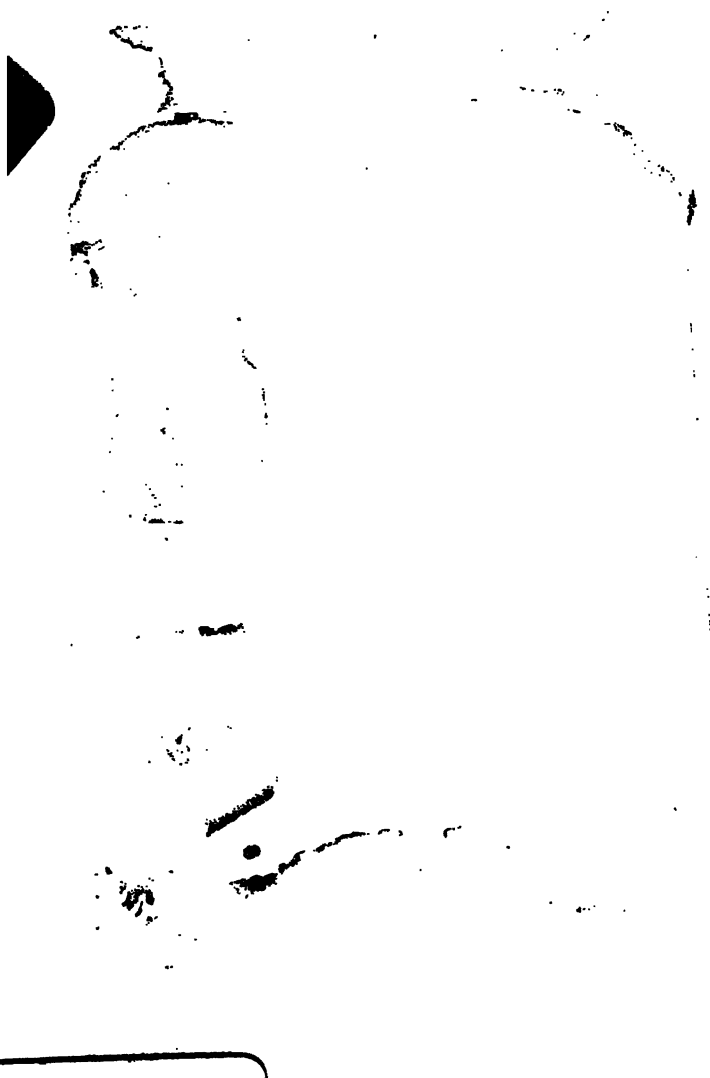
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THE FACE OF AIR

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GEORGE L. KNAPP

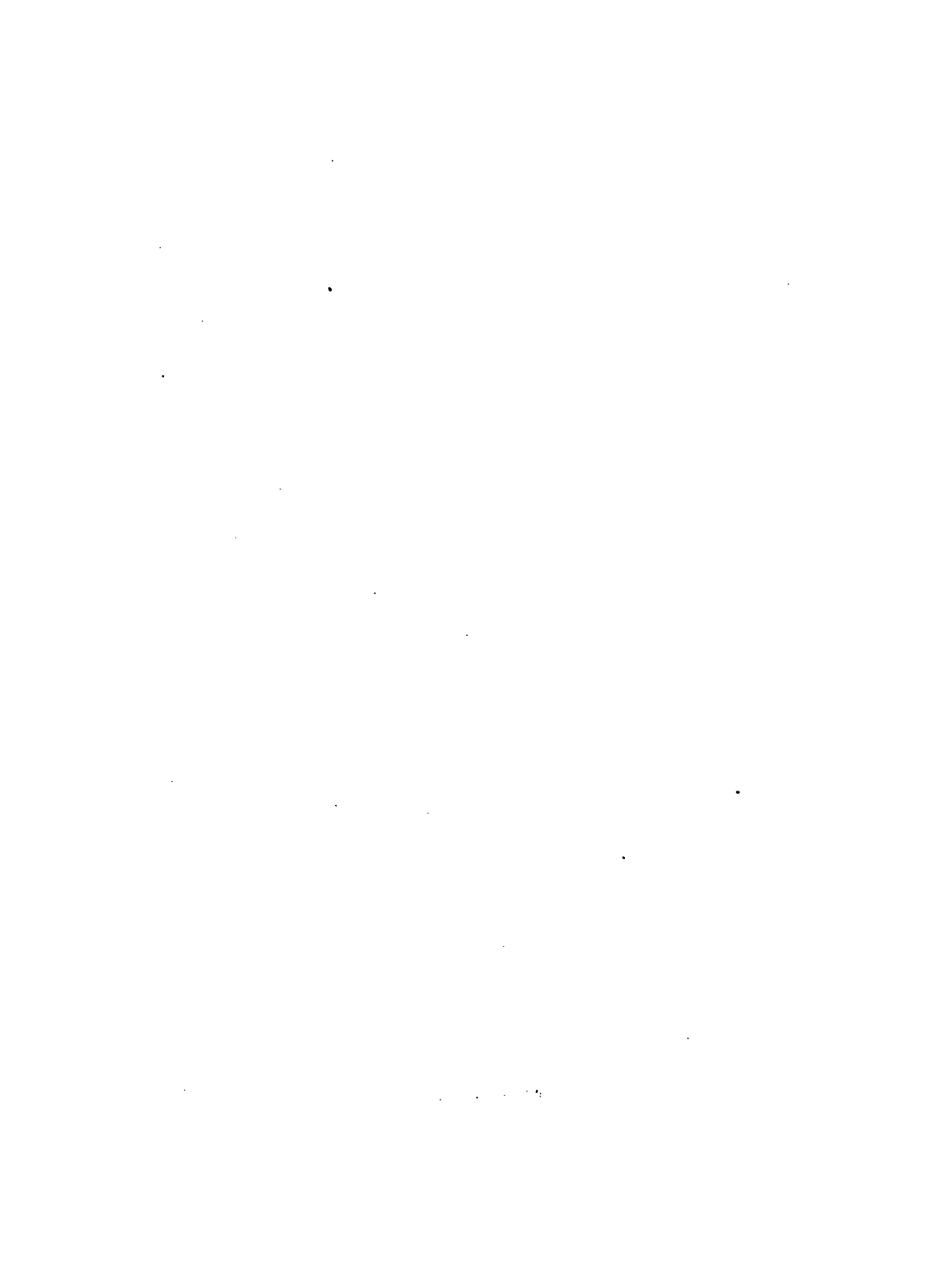




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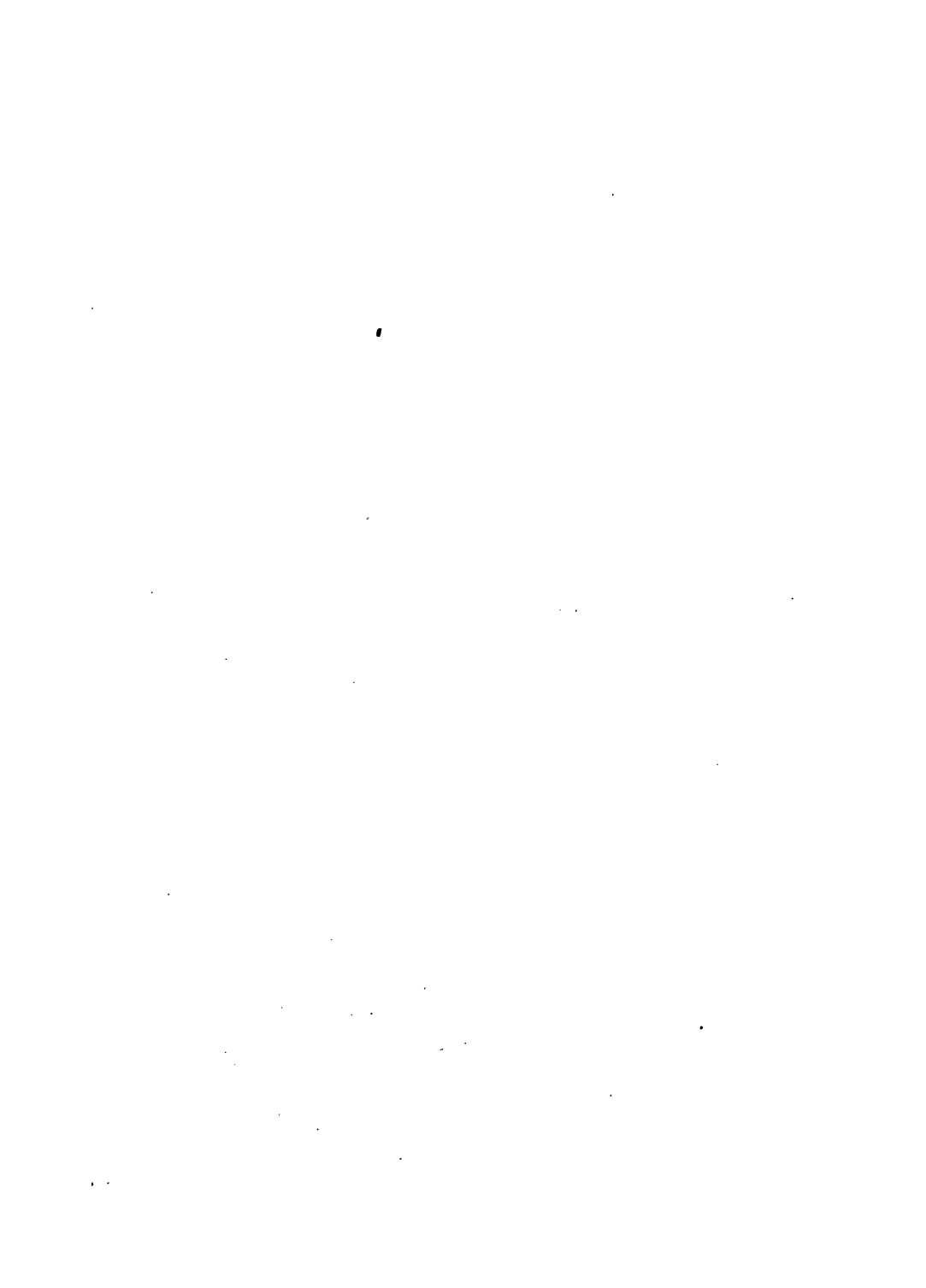
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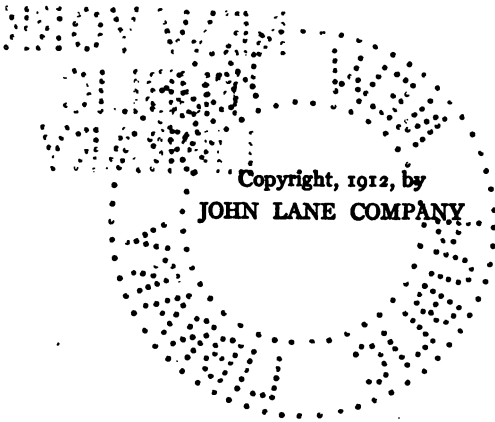
BY
GEORGE L. KNAPP
AUTHOR OF
"THE SCALES OF JUSTICE"



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*To all those—may they be many!—
who love the sea and its mystery.*

1915

NOV

.....

THE PRICE OF EYES

*This is the weird of the woodfolk,
This is the curse of Pan,
This is the doom the gods on high
Suffered to fall on man:
When he would make him master,
Claiming the world his prize,
This is the curse the nose-led folk
Laid on his cunning eyes.*

“Creature of strengthless cunning, laggard
thy legs and slow,
Dull are thine ears to warn thee, helpless thy
nose to know,
Faint is thy heart in danger, weak are thy
hands in war;
But cunning thine eyes to serve thee—and
cunning our curse to mar.

“Up through thy long probation go make thy
trembling way,
A cowering serf by darkness, though a tyrant
prince by day;

Clinging to sun and fire, hugging the sheltering
light,
Building on sight thy kingdom—with half of
the world in night.

“The fragrant wind shall pass thee, and its
message thou mayest not know;
The quiver of life around thee unrecked of
thine ear shall go;
The reek of the trail before thee thou mayest
not guess nor read,
For only thine eyes shall serve thee, who only
thine eyes will heed.

“And when thou hast made thee master, and
cloven thy path to might,
Still shall thy doom pursue thee, the doom of
the price of sight;
Tyrant of all around thee, with the earth agasp
at thy knee,
Still shalt thou tremble and question at all which
thou canst not see.

“Thou shalt spend thy soul in seeking for a
sight of the Viewless Things;
Thou shalt vest with mystic meaning each song
that the poet sings;

Thou shalt call on sign and symbol, crystal and
card and star,
To help thee pierce the darkness, and the gates
of sight unbar.

“Still questing, quarrelling, quailing, under a
sightless sky,
With the sightless air around thee, 'tis thus
thou shalt live and die;
With a viewless goal before thee, and a view-
less force behind,
And a mocking heaven to teach thee that the
fates which rule are blind.”

*This is the weird of the woodfolk,
This is the curse of Pan,
This is the doom the gods on high
Suffered to fall on man.*



The Face of Air

CHAPTER I

THE Nancy Hanks was a schooner of 250 tons; a tramp schooner, owned in part by her captain, Ezra Hawkins. She left New York on her last voyage September third, 1871, bearing a miscellaneous cargo for Pernambuco. Something over two weeks later she was sighted in latitude 24 degrees, 31 minutes N., longitude 65 degrees, 40 minutes W. This was a good bit out of her normal and proper course, as a glance at the map will show. But being out of her course was the least

THE FACE OF AIR

remarkable thing about the Nancy Hanks that fine September day.

She was empty! She had left New York with a crew of nine men, besides captain and mate; and the captain's wife had accompanied him on the voyage. But captain, wife, mate, and crew had vanished. When sighted, the schooner was yawing, backing, filling; steering herself in an erratic fashion, which at once excited remark on board the ship Aurora, which happened to be the sighting vessel. A hail brought no answer; and a boat was sent to the schooner in charge of the second mate of the Aurora. Everything aboard the Nancy Hanks was found in proper shape, except her people—and they were not found at all. The log was written to within two days of the date of this visit. The crew's weekly

THE FACE OF AIR

wash was spread to dry on deck. A sewing machine, with a hem still under the needle, was found in the captain's cabin. There was no sign of violence or struggle. There had been no serious storm for weeks, nor did the vessel bear any marks of bad weather. Most amazing of all, a full complement of boats seemed to be present; and though doubts were cast on this conclusion later, I still believe it to be correct. But the officers and crew and the woman who had started that hem on the sewing machine *were gone!*

The Aurora put a prize crew aboard the Nancy Hanks, with orders to keep the ship in sight. A squall parted the two vessels; and the next day, when the Aurora again sighted the Nancy Hanks, the Nancy Hanks was again empty! This time, there could

THE FACE OF AIR

be no doubt on the boat question. The prize crew had taken no boat—but the prize crew was gone.

So much of the story is known to all the world. One farther chapter of the uncanny tale is likewise public property. By dint of good luck, much manoeuvring, and offers of high prize money, a second prize crew was induced to go aboard the schooner, this time with orders to take her to the nearest port. The second prize crew went aboard the schooner, trimmed her sails, pointed her nose to the west—and from that moment the Nancy Hanks disappears from the records of the seas. She was never seen again. Three crews within three weeks had shipped on that eerie schooner; and their fate and that of their ship have remained mysteries—until now.

THE FACE OF AIR

For I was one of the second prize crew that went aboard the Nancy Hanks; and the story of what befell us there will explain the fate of those who went before us.

In all the accounts thus far written of the affair the Aurora is described as a small sailing ship, bound for the Barbadoes with a cargo consisting of flour, salt meats and cement. This description is only partly true. The Aurora was a sailing ship, to be sure; but she was not intending to touch at Barbadoes if she could help it; and her cargo contained no more provisions than enough to provide the crew against emergencies. She was really a filibustering ship, carrying the arms, ammunition and leaders designed to overturn the despotism then prevailing in Venezuela, and substi-

THE FACE OF AIR

tute an equally obnoxious despotism in its place. She was likewise carrying some human re-enforcements to the revolutionary cause; and of these I was one.

I was then a youngster of twenty; with a boundless capital of health and strength, a fair allowance, I hope, of courage; but destitute of money, trade, or profession. I came of a dwindling Southern family that had lost everything in the war. My father was killed at Gettysburg; my mother died a few months after the close of the war; and some time before setting out on the uncanny voyage whose story is here to be told I had lost my last near relation, an aunt. My efforts in the youthful enterprise of seeking my fortune had so far brought little but experience, and I was literally down to my last dollar when I met two of the

THE FACE OF AIR

men who were to be my companions on the Nancy Hanks.

It was a rather unusual introduction. The young man who has been temporarily worsted in the world's tussle, and is not yet ready to accept final defeat, gravitates toward trouble as naturally as water runs down hill. Whether this is a preservative instinct, urging youth toward murky waters as offering security; or whether it is merely a surly defiance of the ordinary laws of prudence, I have never been able to decide. In my own case it seemed to be the latter. Enough that on a sweltering August night in 1871 I was sulking down one of the toughest streets in the lower part of New York. I have forgotten what street it was—if, indeed, I ever knew—but it was one which a local gang of toughs had chosen

THE FACE OF AIR

for a midnight promenade. They were drunk and I was surly; and the natural result was a free-for-all fight. I had muscle plus in those days; and more than one of the gang must have carried vivid reminders of the country lad they tried to do. But, in spite of my strength, I was down on my back, fighting in savage silence with both feet and one hand, and hugging the smallest of my antagonists to my breast as a partial shield with the other hand, when help arrived. I heard a hoarse roar, an exclamation in some foreign tongue, a thud of feet on the pavement, a sound of blows; and suddenly the gang was gone. Someone was helping me to my feet. My head was still buzzing from a vicious kick.

“Thank you, officer,” I remember saying; for I took it as a matter of course that

THE FACE OF AIR

my helper was a policeman. There was a laugh in the same hoarse tone that had been a rescue signal. My eyes cleared a bit, and my legs grew steadier. "Where's your uniform?" I enquired stupidly; and then, as another laugh answered me, my jarred brain cells came back to something like their normal function, and I was able to take a look at the men before me.

One was a bullet-headed, bull-necked, bull-chested fellow of about medium height, with thick arms, big hands, and a weathered oak face. Even a landsman like myself could mark him for a sailor; and there was a look of truculent authority in his face which told of accustomed command. The other man, the one who was steadying me by the arm, was taller; lean, wiry, graceful in spite of a certain stiffness which very

THE FACE OF AIR

likely I did not notice till later; and with an indefinable foreign air which I am sure was one of my very first impressions of him.

“You are all right,” the taller man was saying. I can hear yet the curious, unfamiliar intonation with which he uttered the colloquial words. The hoarse tones of the bull-necked sailor broke in once more.

“What makes your head so hard, kid? You ain’t got any sense to pad it with, that’s a cinch, or you wouldn’t be buckin’ these gangs lone-handed this time o’ night. Say, does your mother know you’re out?”

“My mother is dead,” I answered with the literalness of a man whose thoughts are still woolly. The seaman roared again with laughter. His tall companion spoke with the grave courtesy which I was to know so well and love so much.

THE FACE OF AIR

"There, mein sohn, there! Your head, it is dizzy yet. Come, so."

"We'll get him some poison," said the sailor roughly, but not at all unkindly. The man with the foreign accent assented, and I was too woozy to resist, even had I wished to do so. A couple of minutes found the three of us in the saloon of a worthy gentleman who was making an honest living by breaking the law; and my throat was tingling with the bite of something which merited the sailor's phrase, "poison." Whatever it was, it pulled me together for a moment, and I began to take stock of my companions.

The sailor, indeed, was too easily classified to need a second glance. The other man I could not classify at all. There was pride and breeding in the high cut, half

THE FACE OF AIR

melancholy face, in the carefully waxed, straw-yellow mustache, in the long, half-shut grey eyes that peered so thoughtfully into my own. There was martial training, surely, in the poise of those shoulders; yet it was a martial air quite different from that with which I was so familiar at home. I remembered the foreign accent, and wondered if he were not a foreign soldier; but the gold braid which I had been taught to associate with the European army officer was conspicuous by its absence; and no one could look at the man for a moment and think him a private in the ranks. He pushed aside his glass, half empty, and I noticed the aristocratic taper of his hands and the sinewy strength of his wrists.

“You are a stranger in this city, nicht war?” he asked.

THE FACE OF AIR

"Yes," I answered. "You're German," was my next remark. The tall man nodded, still studying me with a thoughtful air.

"What for a living do you do?"

"Nothing," I retorted shortly. "There's nothing to do."

"From the South you are?"

"South Carolina." I remember wondering how he guessed.

"You have no trade?"

"No."

"And your family?"

"I have none."

"And—you will the question pardon, it is a friend who asks. And the money, you have it plenty?"

"Oh, plenty." I turned out my pockets. They held a fifty-cent "shinplaster," three dimes, a nickel, and four copper pennies.

THE FACE OF AIR

I can see the sorry assortment yet. I arrayed it with a boy's half drunken bravado on the table before us. "Plenty of money, lots of it," I repeated foolishly.

The grey eyes twinkled as they looked into mine.

"It is a fortune," said the tall man gravely. "It is wealth, particularly when with youth and courage it is allied. You must be my guest for the night, so far as she is left. In the morning we will talk about—many things." The seaman flashed a look of enquiry at the tall man, who answered with a slight nod as he rose. "Oh, I had forgotten," he exclaimed. "You have not my name. Permit me to introduce myself as Rudolph Steinmetz, at your service, and this, my friend, is Mr. Rogers, mate of the good ship Aurora."

THE FACE OF AIR

"Second mate," corrected the bull-necked man.

"My name is John Harkness," I announced. We shook hands gravely.

I suppose there were orders given and instructions passed, but I do not remember them. I was young, tired, somewhat battered up, and quite unaccustomed to ardent spirits, and the fusel oil cocktail I had drunk had by this time begun to fog such sense as the kicking had left me. All I recollect is Steinmetz bidding me good-night in a room to which I have no remembrance of going, and telling me that he would see me on the morrow.

CHAPTER II

I HAD been awake some minutes the next morning before realizing that I was in a strange place. The realization brought me upright in bed with a swing, and the sudden movement informed me that I had a morning-after headache fit for the oldest rounder in the land. Physical pain claimed precedence over curiosity. There was a washstand in the room, and a dirty pitcher, which proved to be full of cold water. A liberal sousing partly remedied the headache, and as I dried my tousled hair the events of the night before came back to me bit by bit. I remembered them in inverse order; the grave, kindly,

THE FACE OF AIR

humour of a strange man with grey eyes and long yellow mustache; a disreputable looking table with some few coins atop; the taste of villainous liquor; a hoarse roar, a thump of running feet; and then the brain wires snapped into circuit again, and the whole weird night rose clear before me.

It was weird enough, in all conscience; a baffling, puzzling section of a life that seemed not my own; but it gave me a sense of exhilaration, not of dread. I had tasted the sweets of adventure; I had nothing to lose and perhaps much to win; and I had met a man and a situation both of which aroused my boyish curiosity to the full. I dressed quickly—no great merit when one has been put to bed with his shirt on—and whistling blithely, opened the unlocked

THE FACE OF AIR

door, and went out to a boy's kingdom of mystery.

A "he-chambermaid" met me in the hall with the word that my breakfast was waiting. He conducted me to the dining-room, just a shade less dingy than the bedroom and the hall, and seated me before the greasy ham and eggs and muddy coffee which in those days was the all but universal American morning meal. "Mister Rogers an' the Dutch duke'll be in purty soon," he declared, and went out. It took me some moments to realize that Rogers was the hoarse-voiced seaman of the night's adventure, but the phrase "Dutch duke" fitted itself to the trim figure of Steinmetz on the instant.

Rogers was the first to appear.

"Hello, kid," he greeted. "How's that

THE FACE OF AIR

cast iron cocoanut of yourn this morning?"

"Good as new," I answered. Rogers spat at a knot in the floor six or eight feet away, missed, tried again with better success, swore genially, and replied:

"I guess that ain't no lie, kid. If I had a crew with heads like yourn, it ain't no little belayin' pins that'd keep discipline. Now, say. The duke'll be here in a minute to talk to you."

He paused, plainly expecting a reply. Not knowing what reply would serve, I tried a bluff.

"Let him come," I said placidly. "I'm willing."

Rogers looked at me in something very like admiration.

"Say, kid," he said. "I guess your gall's as hard as your nut. Now, look here.

THE FACE OF AIR

We've got a little private business on foot, an' Steiny wants to let you in on it. The old man's willing, see, provided you can keep your mouth shut. Tight shut. Understand?"

The last word was whipped out in a menacing tone, with the lower jaw thrust forward, and the brows drawn down in a scowl. But I declined to be frightened. When one is twenty years old, six feet high, has nothing to lose, and owns far more muscle than brains, he is entitled to a certain indifference to threats. I answered curtly:

"No. I don't understand. And I think you'd better leave it to the duke to explain. When will he be here?"

I shoved back from the table as I spoke, and crossed my legs indifferently. Rogers

THE FACE OF AIR

avored me with a long stare, and this time there was no disguising the admiration in looks and tone.

“You’ll do, kid. You’re all right. I’ll tell the old man you’re all right. Say, if I had your cheek——” He shook his head as one who thinks unutterable things, spat again at his chosen target, hit it in the bull’s eye, informed me that the duke would be in pretty soon, and went out.

Anyone who recalls his own boyhood will understand the pleased anticipation with which I settled down to wait for Steinmetz. Private business; business in which secrecy was essential; and a “Dutch duke” coming to talk with me on the subject. He could not come too soon. Was it smuggling they were up to? Free trade was an hereditary dogma in our family. Was it filibustering?

THE FACE OF 'AIR

Walker was my childhood's hero. Was it —Good Heavens! was it piracy? The thought sent a shiver over me, but only for a moment. Steinmetz was no pirate; of that I was certain. On the whole, filibustering seemed the most probable occupation of my new friends; and if they needed another pair of hands in that business, they were welcome to mine.

The arrival of Steinmetz put an end to my speculations.

“Good morning, my squire of the hard head,” he said, offering his hand with a grave courtesy fit for a president's greeting. It was not especially flattering to think that one's headpiece attracted attention for no other reason than its impenetrability, but I had no inclination to quarrel with Steinmetz. Instead, I shook hands with a sud-

THE FACE OF AIR

den awkwardness very different from my cool impudence when dealing with Rogers.

“Do you feel equal to a business talk this morning?” enquired Steinmetz.

“Perfectly,” I replied.

“Then let us to my room go,” said the “Dutch duke,” and led the way. I followed. As we left the street door I saw a seedy looking individual turn and go inside with a sailor’s roll. It might have been fancy, but I would have sworn the ragged sailor was on guard to keep me from leaving before Steinmetz came.

Steinmetz was lodging in a house somewhat less run down at the heel than the one in which I had spent the night. He had a big, cheerful-looking room on the top floor, with ample windows looking out over the nearby buildings and the bay, flowers on

THE FACE OF AIR

the window ledge, a good-looking rug on the floor, and a huge, imposing-looking bed in the corner. Only at later visits did I become aware that the bed was a bad imitation of the colonial style I had once known at home, that the window plants were cheap and badly cared for, that the roofs nearby were cluttered with the odds and ends of light housekeeping, and that the rug had seen many better days before finding its way to this particular apartment. At present it seemed like a glimpse of another world to a lad in my condition and temper. A big Maltese cat, miaowing cheerfully, greeted us as Steinmetz swung open the door.

“Permit me to introduce Señor Gato,” said Steinmetz, stooping and lifting the cat. “Señor Gato, my new friend, Mr. Hark-

THE FACE OF AIR

ness. That is right, that is a good omen." For the cat had hopped cheerfully to my shoulder, and was already caressing my cheek with his big, rough tongue. I was almost as fond of cats as of dogs and horses, and to me likewise it seemed a good omen.

"He has the best of cat blood in him, though perhaps too many kinds," said Steinmètz, pointing to a part of the animal's coat that told of a mixed ancestry. "It has damaged his pedigree, but I think it has improved his looks. That is not so unusual, nicht war? And you," he went on with a sharp, soldierly ring to his voice, "you have good blood too, yes?"

Had anyone else asked me that question I might have felt insulted or tempted to boast. Now, most luckily, I did neither.

"My father was a gentleman and a sol-

THE FACE OF AIR

dier," I answered quietly. "I hope not to disgrace him, in spite of the situation in which you found me last night. By the way, I have forgotten to thank you for your timely coming."

He waved away the thanks with a gesture which implied that little things of that sort were commonplaces in his life—as doubtless they were. "It was last night that made me know you for a gentleman. A gentleman whose finances are not so prosperous as once. Is it not so?"

I reddened as I remembered my foolish display of the night before. "I am down and out so far as money is concerned," was the only answer to make. Steinmetz nodded soberly.

"A heart full of courage and a pocket empty of money, nicht war? So. There

THE FACE OF AIR

have many worse combinations been known. But you would like money, if it could fairly come?"

"Of course."

"Good. Then listen, and if you do not approve, forget. I trust you. You have heard of revolutions?"

"Plenty of them." Evidently my guess at filibustering was not far wrong.

"Do you know where the revolutionary centre of the world, it is located?"

"South America," I ventured at a hazard. Steinmetz shook his head as at an expected error.

"New York," he corrected. "Two blocks in this checkerboard city, and you have of every Spanish-American revolution the beginnings. I know. Well, would you like to help make revolutions?"

THE FACE OF AIR

"I would if I could do it with you." There could not have been a better answer, though of that I took small heed. The blond head bowed with pleasure as Steinmetz spoke again.

"I thank you. You shall go with me. You shall be my son-at-arms—I have no other. Now hear."

I heard. It took hours for the telling of details, but the main outlines were sketched in two crisp, inverted-English sentences.

A ship, the *Aurora*, was loading with arms and ammunition to be sent to the revolutionary party of Venezuela. Steinmetz had been commissioned at a handsome salary to secure the arms, see that they were useful as well as threatening, and help in the details of getting them away. He was likewise offered a generalship in the revo-

THE FACE OF AIR

lutionary army, but he meant to have a close hand look at the noble forces before accepting. For the present he wanted my help, since the revolution-purveyors with whom he was dealing had to be watched at every point to keep them from selling sawdust for gunpowder. For the future, if he accepted that generalship in the revolutionary army, I might have a commission under him. To my protestations that I knew nothing of military matters Steinmetz answered that any white man could learn fast enough to keep well ahead of his coffee-colored followers. The pay was fair. The danger was just enough to add spice to the adventure and the mystery. Is it necessary to repeat a boy's response to such a lure?

CHAPTER III

I WAS now fairly enlisted in the noble business of manufacturing revolutions, but my duties for a time were the reverse of arduous. I would accompany Steinmetz on his marketing trips, listen while he chattered with the dealers in second-hand arms, laugh over the many languages which he pressed into service at times to tell the dealers what he thought of them and of the wares they offered; and finally, when the purchases were made, I would camp with them till nightfall, to see that they were not changed by the honest merchants before being packed to send to the ship. The ammunition we packed in

THE FACE OF AIR

barrels labelled "cement," or "flour"; the muskets and rifles were crated as "agricultural machinery"; the hospital supplies, on which Steinmetz insisted, bore the innocent indorsement of "salt meat." I forget how the revolvers were disguised and labelled. Steinmetz was a conscientious revolutionist, and I doubt if ever a patriot cause got more for its money than did the noble junta that convened in the back streets of New York to "liberate" Venezuela.

I met the officers of the Aurora the day after the interview with Steinmetz. The captain was a veteran of the war, named Somers. To most youngsters of to-day the word "veteran" connotes a grizzled individual with a cane and a bronze button; a man full of romantic stories of the past, but with little connection with the busy work of the

THE FACE OF AIR

immediate hour. Captain Somers was the reverse of this ideal. He was scant thirty years of age, without a grey hair in his head or an unsound cell in his body; and, though he had entered the Union navy a volunteer, he had absorbed much of the man-of-war trimness, decision, and iron discipline. He was engaged in a business which some highly respectable governments rank as piracy; and which at the best is grossly illegal. Yet he never strutted as does the traditional bandit, nor skulked like one who fears the law. He seemed to know every policeman and plain clothes operator in the lower half of New York, and I am convinced that they knew him for just what he was. But they did not let their information rest heavy on their minds. It was Captain Somers' business to so manage his af-

THE FACE OF AIR

fairs that a policeman might conceivably remain ignorant of their nature; and, this done, it was the policeman's business to look the other way when a dray-load of second-hand rifles was being crated and delivered. The minions of the law and the captain of the filibustering ship understood each other perfectly.

The first mate of the *Aurora*, *the* mate, as he is always called, was a silent, capable Yankee of the old school, a graduate both of the whaling ship and the steam frigate. I never really knew him, but I could not help knowing his efficiency, and, in a grim sort of way, his kindness as well. The sailors liked him, feared him, and never talked about him. He was a bachelor, considerably older than his captain; and I was told that he had bought and paid for a

THE FACE OF AIR

Connecticut farm. For all I know, he may be living on that farm to-day, managing his pigs and poultry in the same quiet, effective fashion with which he managed his ship.

The second mate, Rogers, was of different stuff altogether. He could do nothing without a tremendous noise, though much of what he did was very well done. He had an assortment of metaphors that would make the fortune of any literary man who could get them through the mails, and he could swear with a vivid force and variety which I have never heard equalled. He had several acts of unusual courage to his credit; he was ranked as a terror, even among the bucko mates of the dwindling American merchant marine. Yet, somehow, I never felt perfect confidence in him. However loud his talk, however strenuous

THE FACE OF AIR

his actions, one always wondered what he would do if loud talk were at a discount, and conditions demanded something more than the ability to haze an insubordinate sailor. Perhaps a conversation between Captain Somers and Steinmetz will set the second mate before you better than words of mine.

“That d——d fool Rogers,” said the captain. “He’d try to walk over hell on a rotten rail if anyone dared him to.”

“He would start,” agreed Steinmetz. “And then in the middle he would lose his head and fall off. Mr. Start-And-Not-Finish Rogers. Yes.” Captain Somers laughed appreciatively, and the subject was changed. But I was to remember the words later.

It was Steinmetz, of course, who made the greatest and most permanent impression

THE FACE OF AIR

on my boyish imagination; who roused in me the hero worship which is half a young man's capital in life. There is nothing cleaner and finer, nothing more wholly unselfish than a boy's whole-hearted admiration of his hero; and Steinmetz was a hero to fit a lad's fondest dreams. He was literally a man without a country; a man who had fought under every flag but his own. He belonged to the older Germany, the pre-Prussian Germany, the Germany of dreams rather than of drill masters; of philosophies rather than of factories. He had taken a dozen useless wounds in the abortive revolutions of 1848, and then, when the iron beak of the Prussian eagle had torn to tatters the dream of a free Federation, Steinmetz had escaped to become a wanderer on the face of the earth. He had no capital

THE FACE OF AIR

but his sword, but that had brought him a living for more than twenty years. There may be a Spanish-American state so small and so peaceful that it had not seen Steinmetz' blade in action, but I doubt it. He was a fair shot, a deadly swordsman, a man of great strength and utterly unconscious courage. The corpses must have been thick in his track at times, and yet he had the gentleness of a child toward those he loved.

"Why did you fight for the Yankees in the war?" I asked him one day. That was a rather sore point with me, and perhaps I was trying, unconsciously, to check my rapidly growing love for the man.

"Because the Yankees for the once were right," he answered. "You will see it some day. I have fought for so many bad causes, in so many foolish wars. You must not

THE FACE OF 'AIR

grudge me the pleasure of for once giving my sword to something good.”

“But why fight for bad causes?” I countered.

“One must eat,” he answered gravely. “It is an unfortunate habit, but I acquired it early. You have the same, I perceive, nicht war?”

I flushed, and well I might, for I had eaten enough for four men, and Steinmetz had just annexed the bill. I am sure no thought of that was in his mind, however. He went on, still gently:

“Who knows for certain when he does good or bad? There is no way of telling. I do good to myself when I fight to make a living, and I fight fair. If these heroes of the coffee colour want to play revolution, why should I not help their play? I help

THE FACE OF 'AIR

them to get it over more quickly, and I do not let them torture each other so much. Besides, it is all but for the moment. Some day this big-boy country of yours will step in and swallow Cuba, swallow Mexico, swallow everything to the Caribbean, and perhaps beyond. We may be paving the way for that swallow with our little revolutions.”

“You didn’t like it when Prussia swallowed your principality,” I answered, smiling at his mixed metaphors.

“That is because I am not Prussian. The greatest meal to the greatest eater, so. Shall we walk?”

We walked. Also, that night we closed the deal for the last arms and ammunition, and the following day saw the stuff safely aboard the Aurora. After which Stein-

THE FACE OF AIR

metz and I sat down to enjoy ourselves while the “patriots” who were paying our expenses wrangled over the division of spoils not yet secured, and worked their debating society overtime to decide questions that could only be settled by a strong man at the critical moment. For such is the way of coffee-coloured revolutions.

CHAPTER IV

THE urge of action is in our blood, and no man, at least of our restless race, can escape his strenuous destiny. Yet age is teaching me that the moments which we recall with the most unalloyed satisfaction are seldom the moments of greatest activity. Rather are they the times when we drift with the stream of events, idle as the driftwood beside us; or make ourselves lotus eaters on enchanted islands of our own wills. My life has been a pleasant one in the main, but there is little of it on which memory dwells so lovingly as on those days of waiting in New York. The prospect of being denounced

THE FACE OF AIR

and arrested never entered my mind, though I am convinced it must have troubled Steinmetz quite a bit. Our work for the time was done, our immediate needs were provided for, we were not even put to the trouble of deciding on the next move. It was ours for a time to be content with the mere living; and for my part I was more than content.

By day I sat mainly in Steinmetz' rooms, playing with Señor Gato, and listening to the soldier's tales of fortune's whims in the four corners of the earth. I have no authority but his own for some rather remarkable stories, but, for me, that is authority enough. He was not a man one could disbelieve. By night we would wander through the city, already great, though with little of its present Titanic splendour; or

THE FACE OF AIR

take a boat and row out over the river or bay. If we went on foot, we went alone, or sometimes Captain Somers or Mr. Rogers would accompany us part of the way. If we took a boat, our unfailing companion was Señor Gato; perched on a thwart, miauwing sociably now and then, and at intervals jumping down to rub against his master's leg or mine, and assure us of his undying affection. He was the only cat I ever knew who had no apparent fear of water, and almost the only cat of my acquaintance with the dog loyalty to persons, rather than the usual feline fondness for places. Steinmetz planned to take the cat with him on the Aurora, and, in case we stopped in Venezuela, the captain would pilot Gato back to New York.

“I want my friends with me as long

THE FACE OF AIR

as possible," said the soldier. "All my friends," he added, looking up at me. "I have not so many."

One night in our wanderings we ran across another ugly gang of toughs; or, for all I know, it may have been the same gang. The experience was very different, however. Steinmetz ordered the crowd to one side, an ugly protuberance in his coat pocket backing the quiet menace of his tone, and then the gang leader, a hulking scamp of about my own age, fought it out with me. The combat was one-sided, I was probably the heavier and certainly far the stronger. Steinmetz smoked quietly through the fray, and when it was over we walked past the beaten thug and his friends without once looking around. This was a trying performance for me, but Stein-

THE FACE OF AIR

metz was as placid as a summer morning.

"Lucky you had that revolver," I said when we had gone a little distance.

"Revolver? I have none. The—what do you call it, bluff?—the bluff was just as good as the gun for that canaille."

"What a poker player you would make!" I exclaimed.

"I would rather play revolutions," he answered. "Donnerwetter! What a muscle you possess!"

"It is nothing."

"It is much. Have you given it the training? Do you fence?"

"A little," I answered. "But I'm afraid I shouldn't have much chance with you."

"You would have no chance with me," he said soberly. "I am the second best swordsman in the world." It was a mere

THE FACE OF AIR

statement of statistical fact, as if he were naming the second largest steam engine.

“Who is the first swordsman?” I queried.

“Monstery,” was the reply. “He can take a sword out of my hand as easily as I could take one out of yours. He did it in Mexico, and a prisoner made me, and then he killed a guard who was giving me abuse. He is German, too; Hohenzollern by the left hand.”

And the rest of that night was occupied in recounting the bits of unwritten history thus brought to the surface.

The days of waiting passed all too quickly and at last came the order for us to go aboard. We went aboard, and waited there in idleness for another twenty-four hours. Then a pompous individual in a long cloak was ushered aboard with elaborate pretense

THE FACE OF AIR

of secrecy, as though a plainclothes policeman were not at that very moment taking observations from the wharf. Rogers winked at me as he caught my enquiring look, the cloaked individual was hustled below; and then the deck rang with orders and echoed with dizzying metaphors as Rogers translated the captain's instructions to the crew. A little puffing tug dragged us out, as a terrier might pilot a pig by the ear; the sails were shaken out and braced to their places, conjured there, it seemed to me, by the second mate's incantations; and we were off on the voyage which some of us were destined to leave forever unfinished.

I am no sailor, a fact which will become increasingly apparent in these pages. But I think there are few experiences to stir a

THE FACE OF 'AIR'

young man's blood more than his first voyage at sea. This was my first voyage. I was sailing for the Spanish Main on a mission as lawless, though not as cruel, as any foray which my ancestors, perchance, had made in those same waters. Up to the very moment that the tug let us go, I was, or thought I was, an unreconstructed rebel, a faithful devotee of the Lost Cause. But as we made our way down that bay, through the shipping, I felt that, after all, I was leaving home, and shamefacedly blessed the fortune which in my own despite had made this my country. The wind was fair; the tide, of course, was with us. The hour was near to sunset, and it seemed almost as if the great city were setting with the sun. Our boat was sea kindly to a degree. Landsman though I was, the swing of the

THE FACE OF AIR

open water brought only exhilaration, unmixed with

“That dreadful heaviness of heart,
Or rather, stomach, which, alas! attends
The youthful voyager.”

It may be proper to say that I have felt that heaviness since, and know how great was my initial mercy.

I was taking a last look at the fading city when Steinmetz came up with Señor Gato on his shoulder. Behind him was the steward, with a tray and some glasses. Steinmetz took one and handed me the other.

“To the Brotherhood of Revolutionists,” he said gravely. “May its noble members never lack for lands to save and tyrants to overthrow. Drink!”

We clinked glasses and drank, while

THE FACE OF AIR

Señor Gato intimated that it was really impolite of us not to offer him something, too.

Rogers was bustling about the deck, volleying out orders which were salted and spiced with the queerest profanity to which I have ever listened. Some of it was downright Shakesperian in its sweep and scope; but none of it, alas! will bear transference to paper. We listened and watched for a time, and then I brought up more immediate business.

“Who’s His Nibs in the long cloak?” I enquired.

Steinmetz shrugged his shoulders with a French grace of gesture.

“He is one who will liberate his fatherland—aber nicht. He is one whose heart beats warmly for his oppressed people and an office. He is the reincarnation of Napo-

THE FACE OF AIR

leon, and the superior to Bismarck. He will tell you so later, if you let him. At present he is below, casting up his dinner instead of his noble sentiments." Steinmetz dropped his careful English and swore roundly in the German-Spanish mixture to which he always resorted when his soul was really disturbed. Presently he returned to my own tongue.

"If I had known that pigdog were to be on hand to spoil things, I would for another revolution have looked," he said whimsically.

"Is he so bad as that?"

"He is an ass, a schweinhund, a—what you call spoil-plot. He is a black-and-tan ape, without so much sense as my Gato, nor so much good blood in him, either. It was agreed that Martinez should come, and

THE FACE OF AIR

then, after we are aboard, this mongrel comes instead." Steinmetz concluded his estimate of José Maria Manuel Gonzales with some more German remarks.

"Do you think he will spoil the expedition?"

"I think he will do nothing else. He brings an order from the junta to go to the mouths of the Orinoco, where there is fever even in winter, and the insects eat you alive. Captain Somers doesn't care, he has only to unload the arms. But me—— I do not choose my son-at-arms shall die of fever to please the whim of a black-and-tan patriot," he concluded, laying a hand on my shoulder. "We will back to New York go in the Aurora. If this schweinhund is too troublesome, I shall ask Captain Somers to put us ashore at St. Thomas or Barbadoes."

THE FACE OF AIR

The wind hummed in the rigging, and the vessel rose and fell in long, easy swings to the rhythmical pulse of the ocean. I had never dreamed that a ship made so much noise, nor was it till later that I learned this was a special prerogative of wooden vessels. The sun was down, but the western sky was fairly aflame with red and orange lights. Six bells were struck, six high, piercing notes that vibrated through the ship. A negro sailor forward took the bell for a keynote, and began a deep sea chanty in one of those rich tenor-baritone voices of which his race has so many; a voice that seemed throbbing with feminine overtones. I do not recall a single word of his song; yet no picture of my life is clearer with me than the one the Aurora presented in that evening glow.

THE FACE OF AIR

The steward brought us something to eat on deck. After a time we went below. But the sounds from José Maria's cabin next door, where the patriot was bringing up his meal for re-examination, were not encouraging, and, taking our blankets, we beat a retreat to the deck. It was a bit cold, but, running before the wind as we did, there was nothing of the bone-searching chill one feels on the deck of a driving steamer. Rogers came to us, told us we were ruining the ship's discipline, went to the captain with the matter, and doubtless received an order to let us do as we pleased; for he came back and chatted pleasantly with us in the intervals between remarks to the sailors.

It must have been well past midnight when I went to sleep. Steinmetz had been in the land of dreams for at least two hours.

CHAPTER V

AND now for some days the course of the Aurora was monotonously smooth. Not that the ocean made an easy path for us, or greeted us with smiles. The weather was the raw, lowering sort which I have since learned to look for on the North Atlantic, the winds were light and variable, and our progress was slow. But there was no storm, no danger, no excitement. The most imaginative romancer would be troubled to weave a thrill out of our life those first days, and I am no romancer at all, but an old man, telling as plainly as he may the story of his youth.

There was one constant source of sur-

THE FACE OF AIR

prise to me—the amount of work which the officers found for the crew to do. Morning, noon, and night there was always something. It might be cleaning the decks, which were kept spotless; it might be bracing the ropes, of which there was such an unaccountable number. It might be and was many things, but it was always something; and never for a moment did that crew seem idle. No, I must make one exception to that statement, there was a very little loafing allowed in the anchor watch, at the end of the day; though what was accounted leisure by those sailors would be reckoned hard work enough by many a laborer ashore.

And quite as surprising as the amount of work there was to do was the amount of abuse it took to get that work done. I

THE FACE OF AIR

was familiar with plantation life, I had seen eight hundred negroes working on a cotton crop under none too gentle overseers. But never did I hear such language ladled out to human beings as on the *Aurora*, and never had I known words so frequently backed—and preceded—by blows. The first mate, indeed, cursed his men only in moderation, and but once did I see him resort to force. But Rogers—— His simplest order was accompanied by a perfect gale of curses and epithets, and when anything difficult was to be done the gale took on the proportions of a hurricane. The first day out the negro sailor whose voice I had so much admired the night before made some blunder—my ignorance of the sea kept me from knowing just what it was. Rogers leaped at him like a panther, and

THE FACE OF AIR

calling him names of which a "flat-nosed son of a chimpanzee" was the mildest, knocked him down and fairly kicked him across the deck. The fellow got up and scrambled in a frightened way to his task, while Rogers delivered an oration on the sins of sailors in general and of black sailors in particular.

Steinmetz turned to me at the first lull in the storm of words, and pointed to the flag which had been run up to salute a passing vessel.

"The flag of the free," he said. "On land and sometimes, yes. But on sea she is the flag of the bucko mate. Your country much needs an Uncle Tom's Cabin of the sea."

"Don't other countries need it just as much?" I asked. Steinmetz smiled at my jealous defence of the land my father had

THE FACE OF AIR

died trying to repudiate, and answered:

“All need it, yes, aber, the need of the United States, she is greatest. On a British ship they do not do things so.”

But I remember arguing the matter until Steinmetz called the captain to give testimony as to the superior hazing abilities of Yankee mates.

There was this justification for the barbarity of Rogers and the quiet but incessant “working up” of the mate, that ours was a hard crew to handle. We had more men than we needed at sea, because it would take something of a force to land our little ready-made revolution when we came to the appointed place. A couple of our men were “Souwegians,” two or three were Portuguese from the Azores, and these were capable and not insubordinate sailors.

THE FACE OF AIR

For the rest, ours was a crew of city wharf rats, navy sweepings, Cuban mixed bloods, and negroes, partly from the South and partly from the West Indies. Besides the officers and myself, there was just one American in the ship, and he had taken to the water a year or two previous to avoid complications about a little matter of a Five Points murder. Every man in the crew must have known that our mission was illegal, and that the ship was a floating arsenal. In a case like this it was plainly the business of the officers to see that the men had no time to plot mischief. I am bound to say that they performed this duty thoroughly.

We loafed southward, at first through grey seas and under lowering skies; but in a couple of days the clouds were gone, and

THE FACE OF AIR

the sea took on that brilliant blue which is the despair of painters. The Gulf Stream tossed us choppily for a space, and let us pass. The low, flat, crooked islands of Bermuda sprawled invitingly to starboard for the better part of a day as we lolled by, but we did not stop. British governors have an impertinent habit of asking questions of the ships which visit their ports, and we had no notion of going on the witness stand if we could help it. Day by day the sun mounted higher; night by night the pole star sank lower; and the sea life around us grew more abundant with every lazy league. Once a tramp steamer stormed past us to the north, bringing back for a moment memories of the strenuous hurry we had left behind, and now and then we would sight a white-winged sailing ship.

THE FACE OF AIR

But for the most part the ship was alone with the sea and the sky; a little world swimming in a blue void of its own; a world where bucko mates licked reluctant seamen into order; where a tall soldier of fortune told wondrous tales of adventure to a worshipping boy; or played with a cat while the boy read aloud from the "Ancient Mariner," truest and saltiest of all the poems of the sea. It was a veritable voyage of dreams.

And then, almost as suddenly as the scene shifting in a theatre, the dream ended and the nightmare began.

I had gone to my berth after breakfast to make up a little of the sleep lost the night before. How long I slept is uncertain, perhaps a couple of hours. I awoke with a feeling of some excitement in the

THE FACE OF AIR

air, and a sharp exclamation which reached me from the deck testified that the feeling was correct. I hurried to the deck. Everyone whose duty did not compel his presence elsewhere was crowded to the port rail, staring at a vessel less than a mile away. I took my place beside Steinmetz and stared with the rest.

The vessel was schooner rigged, and was probably somewhat smaller than the *Aurora*. So much even my landsman's eye could tell, though I could see nothing to account for the evident excitement of my companions. The schooner was approaching us in the light wind, with most of her sails set, and each moment the view of her grew clearer. I had just begun to feel a vague sense of something lacking when, without warning, the schooner swung with

THE FACE OF AIR

a curious, irresponsible lurch, and fairly turned her back on us. Through the glass which Steinmetz handed me I could read the name across her stern. It was the Nancy Hanks.

“Well, what do you know about that?” queried Rogers, anticipating a popular vaudeville question by some dozen or score of years. He shook his head as if in answer to his own enquiry, and the mate spoke:

“Steering herself! Nobody at the wheel! Nobody on lookout! Nobody nowhere! Wall, I swan!”

“The Flying Dutchman she is, nicht war?” said Steinmetz. Up forward I saw a Portuguese cross himself at the ominous name, but the mate answered calmly:

“You’re the only Dutchman in these

THE FACE OF AIR

parts, an' I ain't seen you fly. The Nancy Hanks. She left a week or ten days ahead of us."

The captain put down the glass and spoke with naval curtness.

"Mr. Rogers, take a boat and go aboard that schooner. Find out what's the matter with her. Take Mr. Steinmetz with you." I looked a request at him, received a nod for answer, and jumped for the boat.

It would be very thrilling, just now, to tell how a presentment of coming doom hung over us on our way to the strange vessel. But, unfortunately, it would not be true. While the boat was being launched the mate had made a suggestion which seemed quite probable to us all. He surmised that the Nancy Hanks, like ourselves,

THE FACE OF AIR

was engaged in a contraband trade, and that on the near approach of a warship in the night or in a fog the crew had mistakenly fancied themselves discovered, and had taken to the boats. We were wondering how much we could get out of the owners for salvage, and whether this little windfall could be managed without hindering our revolutionary schemes. The boat came skilfully along side, and Rogers sprang aboard with the agility of a cat. Steinmetz was next, and I followed Steinmetz. Rogers was standing, a puzzled frown deepening on his forehead as he stared about.

“Look at the boats,” he commanded.

“Aren’t they all right?” was my idiotic question. Rogers swore impatiently, but without the vivid personal application he would have used in talking to a sailor.

THE FACE OF AIR

"That's just the trouble. They're all right—and they're all here!"

"Then the crew must be sick below," said Steinmetz, sniffing the air as if he expected it to tell him the story of a pestilence. The puzzled frown of Rogers changed to a scowl of alarm, but Steinmetz turned quietly aft, and went down to the cabin. I followed, and this time it was Rogers who brought up the rear. There were no sick men below. There were no dead men. There were no men at all; there was no smell of sickness, no sign of disorder. There was nothing, just nothing; and somehow that nothing was more daunting than many an evil sight would be. There were three staterooms, fitted up rather better than is the rule on vessels of the size of the Nancy Hanks, but all three were empty.

THE FACE OF AIR

Before us stood a sewing machine, with a hem still under the needle. Steinmetz pointed to it, uttering many German exclamations before he took pity on me and spoke in English.

“The Flying Dutchman,” he said again. “But where is the Dutchman’s crew?”

I had no answer to make. Rogers was already turning the leaves of the log. A sharp exclamation from him made us turn quickly.

“This log’s posted to two days ago,” he said, looking at us in utter bewilderment. “What the devil does this thing mean?”

“Suppose at the other papers you look,” suggested Steinmetz. “I will to the fore-castle go. We may find something there.”

We went to the fore-castle, passing the

THE FACE OF AIR

knob of the galley without looking in. The fore-castle was as empty as the cabin!

“Der galley,” said Steinmetz next, and by this time I knew that the Teutonic particle was a sign of strong excitement. “Der galley of der cook. He will amidships be, we have passed him.” Again he led the way, and again I followed at his heels.

The galley was as empty as the fore-castle or the cabin, but hardly as commonplace. A large wooden cage was lashed in one corner. It was much too large to be the cage of a bird, even of a cockatoo; and there was nothing to tell what had occupied it nor that it had been occupied at all. Anyway, it was empty now, and the door was open. I inspected it fruitlessly for a moment, and lifted my head to find

THE FACE OF AIR

Steinmetz peering closely at something written on the galley walls.

“What is it?” I asked.

“Du lieber Gott! I would like to know what it is!” exclaimed Steinmetz. “‘Das Gesicht von Luft,’” he read slowly, and then halted over the translation. “The Sight—no, it must be the Face—The Face of Air.”

“The face of air?” I repeated blankly. Steinmetz was bending to some more writing, and as I spoke he gave another German exclamation.

“Goethe!” he replied to my look and question. “Goethe! On the walls of a cook, his galley!” One would think from Steinmetz’ tone that this was a mystery compared to which the empty schooner was a commonplace puzzle. He read off a Ger-

THE FACE OF AIR

man couplet, and translated it with a swift sureness very different from his halting rendition of the first inscription. It was the one which in my English translation of Goethe is given thus:

“’Tis thus at the roaring loom of Time
I ply,
And weave for God the garment thou
seest Him by.”

Underneath this, still in German script, were words which Steinmetz translated slowly once more, as if he could not be sure that he had caught their meaning:

“‘I—the garment—have dissolved in air.’”

“The fellow was daffy on air,” was my irreverent remark. “But what in thunder does it mean?”

THE FACE OF AIR

“I do not know. ‘The Face of Air.’ A garment dissolved in air. And Goethe. Goethe, in the original German, in the galley of the cook of a Yankee hooker! Du lieber Gott! The cook is the key to this mystery!” He shook his head gloomily.

We came out to find our boat’s crew huddled together forward, making low remarks and shaking their heads. In a moment Rogers came up from the cabin, shaking *his* head. It seemed to be the official gesture of our little party.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN we got back to the 'Aurora and Rogers made his report the captain's answer was to take the boat and go to the schooner himself. He was gone two hours, during which time Rogers frequently expressed a firm conviction of his ultimate condemnation if he understood the thing, and Steinmetz smoked gloomily, and spat German quotations by the yard. At the end of this time the captain returned, with a brisk, business-like air.

"You're wrong about the boat," was the first thing he said. "There *is* a boat gone, an' that changes the whole shebang. It's just as the mate put it up, I guess. They're

THE FACE OF AIR

in a line of private business, an' something come too close, an' they got nervous an' bolted. When a fellow's running contra-band, it doesn't pay to get scared too soon. They've lost a good schooner, and we've found one."

This oration was purposely pronounced in the hearing of the crew, and had an excellent effect. Captain Somers had earned a reputation which made his words carry weight, and in the light of his matter-of-fact sentences, the mystery seemed to shred away and disappear. I remember thinking it queer that a man should take his wife along if he were running arms through a blockade, but I did not speak. The bo'sun was ordered to take a crew of four men and go on board, and he moved with an alacrity which showed that he, at least, had

THE FACE OF AIR

no thought of troubles awaiting him. He was one of the Souwegians, and a capable sailor; but his little crew contained four of the laziest and most worthless men in the ship. I suppose this was managed by the mates, who took this means of shifting their burdens to the bo'sun.

Down in the cabin Captain Somers was not quite so sure of himself.

"It's a queer business, but there's no use gettin' crazy about it," he declared. "Rogers missed one thing, the cook died five days ago. They found him dead in his galley."

"Dead or alive, that cook is the key to this mystery," said Steinmetz, shaking his head. "You laugh, may you keep on laughing; but I tell you it is so."

"Do you think his ghost came back

THE FACE OF AIR

and drove the crew overboard?" laughed the captain. The German gave his head an obstinate toss.

"I do not know what I think. But the cook is the heart of the puzzle, and not any smuggling business. 'The Face of Air!' Goethe, in a cook's galley, and on a Yankee hooker! That is more strange than a deserted vessel, my friend."

"How did you find out about the boat?" I ventured to ask.

"Been towing one astern," was the brief reply. "Besides, it's common sense. A crew ain't going to swim ashore when they've plenty of boats."

"Why didn't they take the log?" mused the mate. "An' how'd they come to have so big a crew?"

"How do we come to have one?" coun-

THE FACE OF AIR

tered the captain, ignoring the first and most difficult question.

“Do her papers show any queer cargo?” This was my question, and the captain and mate joined in a laugh.

“Ours don’t, my son,” said the captain. “We’re loaded with cement an’ plows an’ stuff.”

We thrashed the matter over for a time before the “black-and-tan patriot” sent his servant to ask for a private confab with the captain. Then Steinmetz and I adjourned to the deck and continued the discussion of the puzzle there. The two vessels slipped southward through the warm water, the schooner being palpably the better sailor of the two. When I expressed wonder that she had got no farther on her course Rogers broke in to tell me that she had stopped

THE FACE OF AIR

at Bermuda. I recall my relief at finding a solution to even this tiny part of the mystery.

The conference between Captain Somers and José Maria Manuel Gonzales came to nothing. Being strictly private, the steward brought us a full report of it the moment it was over. José Maria wanted to set the schooner adrift, partly for superstitious reasons, partly, no doubt, for sheer contrariness, and the captain naturally did not see it that way. Late in the afternoon Steinmetz was called to the cabin for another confab. From my post on deck I could hear their voices, though not their words, which indeed were hardly necessary to understanding. I heard the captain's dictatorial tone, heard an evident approval from Steinmetz, heard a shrill spitting of mixed

THE FACE OF AIR

up language from the Venezuelan, and then a resounding smack. I knew what had happened as well as though I had been present. José Maria Manuel Gonzales had gone too far, and Steinmetz had slapped his face. After a few minutes' silence the tall German joined me on deck.

"Well," I enquired, "did you cuff him up to a peak?"

"How did you know?" he countered, and then swore in German without waiting for an answer. Presently he laughed. "It simplifies matters, at all events," he said. "Tomorrow we go, you and I, aboard the schooner of mystery and make sail for a Yankee port. They may land their own guns."

"Are you going to give it up?" I exclaimed. The boyish disappointment of

THE FACE OF AIR

my tone must have hurt him, but he gave no sign beyond unusual gentleness.

“It is giving us up,” he explained. “I did not want to go to be eaten by insects on the Orinoco, as you know. Now, it would be idle for me to go anywhere with this fellow. Whatever I did would be wrong, and he would find a way to leave his knife in our backs, in some manner. If I leave now, he may get on with the captain; at least, the chance there is. The schooner of mystery, mein lieber kind, is providential. We will drink to the cook’s health aboard her to-morrow. Du lieber Gott! Between a cook who quotes Goethe and a black-and-tan waiter who tries to run revolutions, I prefer the cook.”

“You seem very sure that the cook is the key to the mystery?” The sun had set

THE FACE OF AIR

while we talked, and a bank of storm clouds was showing in the west. I peered off as I spoke through the mixed twilight and moonlight to where the schooner lolled on the sea a couple of miles ahead. The wind had failed utterly, and the sea was rolling in long, metallic-looking swells.

Steinmetz answered thoughtfully, following my gaze the while.

“It saves energy to think so. Here is a mysterious ship that by a mysterious cook has been inhabited. That those two mysteries should be connected it is natural to think, nicht war? Otherwise, we should have to hunt for two explanations instead of one.”

“We may solve it when we get aboard,” I suggested.

“And we may not. Ah, there is Señor

THE FACE OF AIR

Gato. Gato, can you smell a cook's ghost?"

We sat for a time, puzzling over the schooner, petting the cat, and exchanging views on the nature and permanence of the Caribbean "republics." The bank of clouds climbed higher and higher, then seemed to stop climbing, and rolled over the water towards us in a blackish-grey mass. To me it was awe-inspiring enough, to the sailors and even to Steinmetz it was just an ordinary squall. It was the first mate's watch, I remember, and vivid was my admiration for the way the men made the canvas snug under his direction. Then the squall struck with a shower of chilly rain, and we went to our berths.

I was up at daybreak next morning to find the sky clear as ever, though the sea running a bit more roughly in an easterly

THE FACE OF AIR

wind. Rogers was on deck, and I took advantage of a moment's lull in his sulphurous rhetoric to ask where the schooner was.

"Lost her in the night," was the brief answer, as he turned to stir the stumps of a negro sailor by the pure power of anathema. "Pick her up to-day, most like," he added, as he saw my disappointed look. For, boy fashion, I was now as eager to quit the *Aurora* as I had formerly been reluctant.

We nosed through the water for some hours, keeping a sharp lookout for the schooner. When we went to breakfast it was noticeable that José Maria was not present. The wind was light and puffy, but enough to keep us going, and to stir the sea to more action than we had been accustomed to for some days. Steinmetz sat pla-

THE FACE OF AIR

cidly on deck, petting Señor Gato, and occasionally quoting German poetry, which I took to be somehow related to the verses scrawled up in the schooner's galley. A little before noon we heard the cry "Sail, ho!" from the lookout. The *Aurora* altered her course to meet the sail, pointing closer into the wind than a landsman would dream possible. I remember we were eating our dinner on deck when the lookout declared that the sail was the *Nancy Hanks*, headed to meet us.

"Sighted us first," said the taciturn mate. "I hope so," said Steinmetz enigmatically. Rogers opinèd that the bo'sun and the crew he had with him couldn't sight anything.

The two vessels continued to approach each other rapidly. A hush fell over the *Aurora*, broken at last by the voice of the

THE FACE OF AIR

captain as he flung a crisp order to the man at the wheel. "I'll give that bo'sun something to think about in a minute," he added savagely; for the schooner was driving towards us as if to invite a collision. And then, all at once, the whole ship's company cried out in amazement. Just as she had done on the previous day, the Nancy Hanks swung around with a lubberly lurch, her sails slatted viciously as they caught the breeze at this new angle; she heeled well over for an instant, righted herself, and paid off before the wind again. But in that brief space every eye and glass on the Aurora had been trained on the wheel of the Nancy Hanks—and had found no steersman!

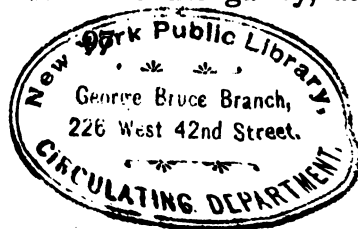
The captain put down his glass and stared for a minute with naked eyes at the

THE FACE OF 'AIR

schooner. Then he snapped out a few orders, and the Aurora came around with a cow-like motion, very different from the quick lurches of the schooner. A boat was lowered. Steinmetz and I followed the captain, in response to his quick order, and in a few minutes we were pulling once more towards the schooner of mystery. But this time there was no speculating as to salvage on the way.

CHAPTER VII

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WHEN we came alongside the schooner Captain Somers first made sure that his navy Colt was loose in its holster, and then went over the vessel's rail as if he were boarding an enemy. No enemy was in sight, however. The little expanse of deck was empty of friend or foe. Somers swept one quick look up and down the deck, called to a sailor to take the wheel, and then, drawing his revolver, plunged into the forecabin, telling us to wait. A moment later he reappeared. "Empty," was all he said, and ran aft to dive into the cabin. This time I followed, but Steinmetz turned to the galley, as if



THE FACE OF AIR

to him this were the one point worth searching.

Captain Somers poked head and gun simultaneously into one of the tiny state-rooms. I did as much for one on the other side. Both were vacant. I drew back, searched the third stateroom with the same result, and turned back to the captain. He was holding the open log, and as I came up he pointed without speaking to a scrawling entry:

“Sept. ——. Took charge of schooner Nancy Hanks with orders to keep Aurora in sight. Squall coming. Reefed——”

It broke off just like that; no period, no sign that the entry was finished, no anything. As I stared the captain stooped and picked up something from the floor. It was a pen.

THE FACE OF AIR

We came up without a word and joined Steinmetz. He was examining something at the foot of the foremast. For a moment the captain stood, looking at the boats; then he went up to them, as if nothing but his sense of touch would convince him that they were real. He made the round twice while I watched him. Whatever doubt there may have been on the boat question before, this time there was none. The prize crew was gone; but the prize crew had *not* taken a boat.

When the captain had made sure of this astounding fact he looked at me as if he would stare me into giving him an explanation of the thing. Steinmetz left the foremast and came near. The captain spoke in a low tone.

THE FACE OF AIR

"Is there something on this vessel that drives men overboard?" he demanded.

"Is there something on this vessel which the garment of flesh dissolves in air?" retorted Steinmetz. "I have something found by the foremast which is queer." He led the way and pointed. It was a piece of broken crockery.

"That's nothing," said the captain. "Some duffer dropped it."

Without answering, Steinmetz pointed to the foremast about three feet above the deck. There was a slight dent in the tough wood, and in the dent were sticking two or three tiny slivers of crockery. It was not much, but it was decisive. The bowl or cup or whatever it was had been flung against the mast.

Captain Somers called to two of the

THE FACE OF AIR

sailors, and ordered them to open the hold. For the next hour the little party of us searched that schooner till it seemed as if a rat could hardly have escaped our inspection. And the search ended as it began, in nothing. The captain at last motioned Steinmütz and myself to the cabin.

"What do you make of this?" he demanded, his hand on the sewing machine as he spoke. Steinmetz shook his head.

"I make of it nothing," he replied slowly. "It is a mystery. And the cook who quotes Goethe is the key to that mystery. More I cannot say."

"But the cook is dead, man," expostulated the captain.

"And the schooner is empty," retorted Steinmetz. He repeated thoughtfully the German couplet scrawled in the galley. I

THE FACE OF AIR

said nothing. The captain pondered for a space.

"Look here!" he exclaimed at length. "The Spaniards know there's a lot of smuggling arms from America to Cuba, don't they?"

"It is possible they have learned it by this time," returned Steinmetz with grave irony. "Well?"

"Well, they don't like it. That is possible, too," added the captain, grinning at his own parody of Steinmetz's words. "And Spain has a navy, hasn't she?"

"It goes by the name of a navy."

"It's enough of a navy for what I'm thinking of. Now suppose Spain has got a gunboat or two in these waters, watching for smugglers. Suppose she thinks the Nancy Hanks is running arms, or maybe

THE FACE OF AIR

knows it. Is there anything to hinder a gunboat catching a schooner like this?"

"She hasn't caught us yet," I ventured, as Steinmetz offered no reply.

"She may," retorted the captain. "And suppose she thinks it would throw a bigger scare into others of the same line of business to take the crew out and just let the vessel drift than to sink or capture the ship. Wouldn't that explain it?"

"A war balloon would explain it so much better," said Steinmetz. "A war balloon, with a steam engine, that could drive against the wind and pick men off the decks with a lasso. That would be the perfect explanation. Make your gunboat a balloon, Herr captain."

"Laugh if you want to," said the captain. "It doesn't strike me as so much of a laugh-

THE FACE OF AIR

ing matter. But here! It must be something from the outside, else we'd be jumping overboard, too."

"Give us time," murmured Steinmetz.

"Besides, we've raked the old hooker with a fine-tooth comb, and there ain't nothing wrong aboard her."

"'Das Gesicht von Luft,'" quoted Steinmetz. "The Sight of Air. The Face of Air. That might be aboard."

"Oh, h——!" exclaimed the captain disgustedly.

"Aber," continued Steinmetz after a pause. "There is the practical question. You do not want the salvage on so fine a schooner to lose. That is well. I want to get back to New York for another revolution to look, and to have no more companionship with my black-and-tan Napoleon

THE FACE OF AIR

of the proclamations. That also is well. So. You furnish the men to navigate this vessel, and I the guard will be. We will take her to the nearest port, which will be Nassau, and I will keep watch for the danger. If it comes from the outside, we will try to greet it. If it comes from the inside, so, it will find us interested. And you can divide the salvage with me; for now I have an heir, I must begin a fortune to accumulate." He looked across at me with whimsical affection.

"Will you do it?" asked the captain.

"I will wait with the steersman," returned Steinmetz. "My son-at-arms can bring me Señor Gato and the baggage in the boat that brings the crew. Then we can say good-bye."

"We won't say good-bye," I retorted. "If

THE FACE OF AIR

there's any fun going on this old hooker, I want my share. I'm not afraid of ghosts."

Steinmetz frowned thoughtfully, then smiled. I could see he was balancing the respective dangers of the trip in the schooner and the voyage to the Orinoco. The captain put in a word which decided him, and saved me the trouble of argument.

"If both of you go, there'll be less trouble getting a crew."

"All well," agreed Steinmetz. "It will a better crew want than the first one, however."

"I'll get you the best we have," said the captain.

We returned to the *Aurora*, leaving Steinmetz and a steersman aboard the schooner. An hour or so later I put off once more for the *Nancy Hanks*. On my

THE FACE OF AIR

shoulder sat Señor Gato, balancing himself nonchalantly to the swing of the boat; in the stern sat Rogers, looking as if he wished himself a thousand miles away, and trying to cover his uneasiness by scowling and cursing at the rowers. We boarded the schooner, the boat's crew returned to the Aurora, there was a general hail and farewell, and the two vessels separated for the last time. The Aurora swung back on her southward course. The Nancy Hanks turned west by southwest for the Bahamas.

CHAPTER VIII

BEFORE going farther with this history, it will be well to pause a moment and run over the list of persons now making a temporary home in the Nancy Hanks. Steinmetz the reader knows already, and Rogers, and even as the historian of the party I need no farther introduction. Besides us three and Señor Gato, who was not the least in dignity of our party, there were four sailors. Captain Somers had kept his word and sent us the best he could get, but the best was nothing to cause an officer to boast. One, the steersman who had stayed aboard with Steinmetz, was one of the three Portuguese of whom I have

THE FACE OF AIR

spoken. Doubtless he had a name, but it was so seldom used that I never learned it; he was simply the Portugee, and by far the best sailor and best man of our little crew. One was a huge negro, who claimed Jamaican birth, British citizenship, and the privileges of a Union navy veteran. Privately I doubted if he ever saw Jamaica, and I am sure that his services under Farragut were confined to the cooking and demolishing of provisions. A third was my friend of the Five Points, sea name McCarthy; a likeable, truculent rascal, who feared nothing that he could see, and walked in mortal dread of the invisible. He stood barely five and a half feet above sea level, but he had already thrashed the big negro twice on our voyage, and then fairly grovelled in fear that the black would

THE FACE OF AIR

put the hoodoo on him. Last was a Cuban mixed-blood, Garcia by name; a moderate seaman, but full of the dangerous temper that comes from the mating of Latin blood and black.

All four of the men were used to salt water, though the Portugee was the only first-class sailor among them. All looked on the voyage with superstitious dread. All had come aboard in response to the captain's judicious mingling of offers of big prize money with ridicule of those who feared to take the chance. Rogers himself was in no better case than the sailors before the mast. He had been tricked into saying that he could manage the voyage, no matter what the mystery, and then was given no chance to back out.

And here were seven men mured in a

THE FACE OF AIR

little schooner from which two crews had already disappeared in four days. Is it strange that we felt a bit uneasy as the Aurora dropped below the horizon and left us the sole inhabitants of the visible world? For my part, I confess to a sinking at the heart which I had never felt before, and seldom since. It was not a presentiment of doom, though one needs but little superstition to translate it as such. It was merely the natural dread of the unknown, especially when the veil of the unknown has been lifted just far enough to show that something of unwonted power and fear-someness lies behind.

Rogers, Steinmetz and myself divided the three staterooms between us. Rogers' kit was carried to his room by the negro, and then master and man went on deck

THE FACE OF 'AIR

immediately. Steinmetz came into my cubby hole, sat down on the edge of the bunk, and lifted a humorous grin to me.

“In the language of your country, we are in for it,” he remarked.

“We are,” I returned. “And we don’t know what IT is.”

“True,” he replied with a shrug of his shoulders. “Aber, we shall probably see. I have been thinking of our trip.” He stopped, fished a cigar out of his pocket, lighted it, puffed in silence a few moments. I did not speak. Presently he went on:

“The success of this, our voyage, on the landsmen depends. The Herr Captain Rogers is scared till about the gills he is white. The men are scared, and they know the captain is scared. If a mermaid poked her head up on one side of the ship and said

THE FACE OF AIR

'Boo!' our captain and crew over the other side would go splash."

He stopped to puff again. I ventured a feeble joke. "Well," I said, "do you think mermaids are thick in these parts?"

"They are at least as thick as the heroes in our crew," he retorted. "That would not be a large population. Aber, the point is that you and I must bring this venture through."

"How?"

"One of us must always be on deck. One of us must furnish the moral stamina for the noble crew, and one must a backbone be for the gallant captain. We must watch and watch stand with the rest."

"That is easy," I answered.

"It is doubtless the easiest part of our task," said Steinmetz. "Let us go up."

THE FACE OF AIR

We went on deck. The weather had thickened while we were below and, though there was no fog, the sharp outline of the horizon was blurred, and a leaden tinge was beginning to show in the blue of the sea. Off on the starboard bow some sea creature was playing and tossing the spray. But the distance was too great to identify it with the naked eye, and by the time I had brought the glass the play was over. The Portugee was still at the wheel. The other three members of the crew were on deck—idle. Knowing Rogers' fondness for sailor hazing as I did, it struck me that this sudden tenderness to the little crew boded anything rather than good.

McCarthy was staring fixedly over the port quarter, and I loafed over to see what occupied his attention. It was a shark, one

THE FACE OF AIR

of the largest I have ever seen. We must have been making five or six knots an hour, but the shark seemed hardly to move as he kept our pace. The dorsal fin of him cut the water like the black flag of a submarine pirate.

“He’s a big one, isn’t he?” I remarked, for the sake of making conversation. McCarthy spat thoughtfully into the water before answering.

“An’ he wants to grow bigger. He’s waitin’ for his supper.”

“For his supper?”

“Yep. That’s what he’s waitin’ for.”

It took me a full minute to catch the fatalistic notion which prompted the statement, and to realize that to McCarthy this voracious attendant was a messenger of doom.

THE FACE OF AIR

"We'll see if we can't give him a supper of lead," I answered when at last I grasped the fellow's meaning. I went back to the cabin, and brought up one of the rifles we had transshipped. It was a 44 Winchester, with a soft nosed bullet, and I judged it should make even a shark lose interest in eating. The brute was not thirty feet away. I aimed just forward of his dorsal fin and fired. It could hardly have been a miss, but it might have been for all the shark seemed to care. I could not see that he even flirted his tail.

"See?" said McCarthy, in the tone of a priest confuting a sceptic. I saw, but judged it best not to say so.

"I must be out of practice," was my only rejoinder. "Better luck this time." I drew a bead on the glassy eye of the monster,

THE FACE OF AIR

just below the surface, held it till I felt as sure of the destination of the bullet as if I were to place it there with my fingers, and fired again. This time I scored. There was a wild boiling of the water for a second, and then just vacancy. The shark was gone, and I thought he left a streak of blood behind him.

“‘At supper, not where he eats, but where he is eaten,’” quoted Steinmetz behind me. McCarthy shook his head as if he regretted the passing of the brute.

“What makes you so glum, Mac?” I asked in a low voice, for I did not wish the other sailors to hear. Steinmetz heard the question and turned away, evidently thinking that McCarthy would talk more freely to me alone. McCarthy looked around, lowered his own voice, and made answer:

THE FACE OF AIR

"I wisht I'd never heard of this old hooker!"

"But why?" I persisted. "She seems a comfortable ship to me."

"Comfortable," said McCarthy gloomily. "Comfortable. Well, mebbe. There's two crews before us didn't seem to find her so."

"Oh, they." I waved my hand as if the other crews really did not matter. "The first crew got scared at a Spanish patrol and took to the boat. The next one got nutty or drunk and jumped overboard. You know what a good for nothing bunch they were."

"I ain't so sure about the boat," argued McCarthy.

"Then what do you think did happen to them? Did they go in swimming and forget to come back?"

THE FACE OF AIR

The fellow shook his head reproachfully as though my levity were little short of sacrilege. Then he took another tack.

"There's heaps more things in the sea than most folks knows of. That fellow, now," he jerked his thumb to indicate the vanished shark; "he ain't the only thing that likes man meat."

"Well, what are the others?"

McCarthy looked cautiously around again, and dropped his voice still lower.

"There's sea sarpents! You can laugh if you want to, but I've seen 'em. Lots of men's seen 'em. They could swallow a man like pie."

"I suppose the nigger's been stuffing you with this and trying to sell you a charm on the strength of it. Eh?"

THE FACE OF AIR

McCarthy did not deny the impeachment, but he stuck to his guns.

“There’s somethin’ got ’em. An’ the same somethin’s goin’ to try to get us. I wisht I’d never seen this bloody old hooker!” He went forward at an order from Rogers.

Steinmetz had been talking to the man at the wheel. It was contrary to all rules of good seamanship, of course; but Rogers seemed to have dropped all rules the moment he came to the Nancy Hanks. Presently the German left the wheel and came forward. He had something to tell me, but discouraged my questions with a look easy to interpret. We stood, talking about nothing for a few minutes. Señor Gato rubbed against my leg and purred, and then, getting no encouragement, strolled away. A

THE FACE OF AIR

moment later a sudden noise made me look around.

“Look at the cat! Look at the cat!” I cried out.

Señor Gato was standing, back humped, tail inflated, the shapely outlines of him lost in a fluffy ball about three times his normal size. The breeze was on our quarter, and even as I cried out I noticed that the cat was looking up wind. There was nothing in that direction but Garcia, and the cat did not seem to be looking at him. But Rogers fell foul of the mulatto on the instant.

“What have you been doing to that cat?” he roared. The mixed blood shrugged his shoulders.

“I no do nothing to heem. I no toucha

THE FACE OF AIR

heem witha tena foot steeck. Zat Gato, heem one damn hoodoo!"

"It isn't Garcia," I said in a low voice to Rogers. Steinmetz motioned with his hand and the Cuban drew aside, so that the wind of him could no longer come to the cat's nostrils. Still Señor Gato continued to glare, uttering the most eerie yowls I ever heard, even from the throat of a cat, and spitting softly as if to punctuate his plaint.

"What is it, Señor?" said Steinmetz soothingly, coming forward and stooping over his pet. The cat looked round, took heart from the approach of his master, and began to advance up wind with little, mincing steps, spitting furiously every half inch, and raising a caterwaul fit to scare a stone image. He had progressed in this manner

THE FACE OF AIR

for perhaps three or four feet, when suddenly his long-drawn yowl changed in the middle to a heaven-splitting shriek, and Señor Gato, dignity thrown to the winds, made for the foremast as if seven devils were after each of his nine lives. Not until he reached the cross-trees did he venture to turn and glare back at the deck, and resume his cattish discourse on the evils of the world.

“Now, what in the world was that?” demanded Rogers, and his voice was husky with awe. My own throat felt too dry to speak at all. Steinmetz was quartering the deck up wind from where the cat had stood, poking with his sword as a blind man pokes with a stick. Garcia came nearer and touched his greasy forelock, for cap he had none.

THE FACE OF AIR

“’Scuse me, please, but wot I tell you? Zat Gato, heem one damn hoodoo. Heem devil cat. Le diablo come to give heem orders. Heem see diablo, zat w’y heem spit an’ yowl.”

“Shut your jaw!” shouted Rogers, and one could see how he welcomed the chance to abuse some tangible thing of flesh and blood. “You’ll see the devil, too, if you don’t clew up that tongue! Get forward, you Roman-nosed chocolate drop!”

Garcia went forward. Steinmetz turned from his quest, smiling with his lips, though his eyes showed his utter bewilderment. The big negro had been installed as cook, and he now came to tell us that supper was served. From the fact that he was able to speak, I judged he had been below during the most mysterious part of the proceedings,

THE FACE OF AIR

and so it proved. I rescued Señor Gato from the foremast, for he quite refused to come down at our calling, and together we went to the meal.

CHAPTER IX

WHAT were you looking for?" I asked Steinmetz when we were seated. He shook his head and waited till the negro was out of the room before replying.

"I do not know. And I did not find it, so it does not matter."

Rogers ate in silence for a time; in silence as to speech, I mean; for his revictualling process was anything but noiseless. Then he looked up with a question:

"Recollect that cage in the galley?"

I nodded. Steinmetz showed by his face that he knew what Rogers had in mind, so the mate addressed his next remark to me.

"It's gone," he said.

THE FACE OF AIR

"Gone?" I repeated incredulously.

"Gone," he repeated. "Gone," he said again when the negro had left the cabin once more. "I don't like this business. I don't like it for a cent."

"Maybe the other crew thought it was a hoodoo and threw it overboard."

"And who threw them overboard?" he countered. "They're gone, as much gone as the cage. They didn't take no boats, and we didn't see the tracks where they was walkin' on the water. There's just one place for 'em to go, an' that's to the bottom."

"But why should they go there?" I asked. Rogers did not answer, perhaps because Steinmetz signalled to him that the negro was waiting in the passage. Rogers called the fellow, sent him on some errand which I have forgotten, and then brought up the

THE FACE OF AIR

subject which I fancy had been at the back of all our minds.

“I wonder what killed the first cook.”

“The log only says he was found dead,” replied Steinmetz. Rogers grunted as one who has heard an improbable story before.

“He might have had too much belayin’ pin before he was found. Same as that coon’ll get if he sneaks ’round in that passage any more,” he added in a louder tone. There was a swift scurrying of feet, and the mate went on:

“Anyhow, the cook’s dead. An’ he’s the only man that’s known to have died aboard this schooner. An’ now there’s something hauntin’ the cursed hooker that scares cats into fits, an’ makes men tumble overboard. What do you make of that?”

“I don’t make a ghost of it, if that’s what

THE FACE OF AIR

you're driving at," I responded. Steinmetz fed Señor Gato a bit of gravy-soaked bread, and spoke with judicial gravity.

"The talk of a ghost is foolishness, like the talk of a devil cat."

"And like the talk of a sea serpent," I added, repeating McCarthy's speculations for their benefit. For the first time since coming to the schooner, Rogers laughed. But it was not a very hearty laugh, and he stopped it to say:

"Well, you can poke fun at all these ideas, but what's your own?"

"I have none," I answered, after waiting a moment for Steinmetz to speak. "I have no doubt there's a perfectly simple explanation of the whole business, if we could just find it."

"Simple explanation!" exclaimed Rogers.

THE FACE OF 'AIR

He got no further. From above came a slap and the sound of an oath, a strange, whining squeak, and then a yell of frank terror and the pad-pad of bare feet in rapid flight. Rogers seemed to negotiate the route to the deck in a single twisting movement, and Steinmetz and myself were not far behind.

McCarthy was standing, half way between the two masts, his fists clenched, and looking about him as if for something to strike. The big negro was huddled in a heap against the lee rail, his arms clasped over his eyes, and whimpering softly. The man at the wheel was looking up at the main mast with wide eyes of panic. I followed the direction of his look. The mast was perfectly normal, the sails were drawing just as before; but up near the cross-

THE FACE OF AIR

trees a loose end of rope was shaking violently, irrationally, as if the spirit of St. Vitus had got into the inanimate thing. I whipped out my revolver, but did not shoot. There was nothing to shoot at. Above, below, at each side of the rope, there was absolutely nothing in the nature of a living creature in sight. The rope stopped its movements as if it had seen me draw the gun. I circled the mast cautiously, looking up the while, but could see nothing other than the perfectly normal gear of a sailing schooner. Suddenly I became aware that Rogers was speaking.

“A simple explanation!” he was saying. “A perfectly simple explanation! Oh, sure! You!” he roared at McCarthy. “What’s the matter with you?”

“Somethin’ touched me,” said McCarthy

THE FACE OF AIR

stupidly, as if the touch had sent his wits wool gathering. "I ain't hurted none, but somethin' touched me."

"You'll feel something else touch you if you throw any more fits on this deck," stormed Rogers. "Here, you black whelp! What's eating you?"

"Voodoo!" said the negro softly. He uncovered his eyes, and rolled them about him as only a frightened negro can. Rogers caught him by the throat and shook him violently. He seemed hardly to feel it.

"What touched you?" I asked McCarthy.

"I—I don't know, sir." The truculent man-fighter seemed to shrink and shiver. "It was soft, an' it went down my hand like that——" he made a caressing motion. "An' then I looked down, an' there wa'n't nothing there at all!" His voice rose to

THE FACE OF AIR

something like a shriek. "I hit at it, an' it run into the coon. He felt it, too."

"Did it hurt you?" asked Steinmetz.

"No, sir."

"Was it warm or cold?"

"I don't rightly know, sir."

"A simple explanation!" Rogers dwelt on the words as if they were a personal affront. "A simple explanation, perfectly simple! Oh, h——l, yes!"

"Let us see what we can discover," said Steinmetz.

We beat the deck like a thicket from stem to stern. We went down to the fore-castle and explored that. We went to the galley and solemnly inspected the place where the cage had been and was not, and where the German script still mocked us with its riddle. We stared at the masts,

THE FACE OF AIR

and with many misgivings and a chilliness at the spine which was more than uncomfortable I climbed first one and then the other. We quizzed the crew. And we were as empty of explanations at the end of our work as at the beginning of it. Rogers summoned us to the cabin.

“What are we going to do about this?” he demanded brusquely.

Steinmetz lifted his eyebrows in polite surprise.

“I was not aware there was anything to do about it.” he said. The mate scowled gloomily.

“The men won’t stand for much more of this sort of thing,” he said at length.

“The men will have to stand for it if you do your duty,” exclaimed Steinmetz sharply. “They are not of our voyage the

THE FACE OF AIR

masters. Do you ask them whether they will clean the deck or reef the sails?"

"That's different," said Rogers sullenly.

"Not unless you yourself the difference make," said Steinmetz. "I came on this schooner to sail to Nassau. To Nassau we will sail."

"The men'll take to the boats if we leave 'em up there alone," argued Rogers.

"They will not be alone," snapped Steinmetz. "Donnerwetter, be a man once!"

Rogers straightened up and glared for a moment, but the eyes which met him were well accustomed to glaring. In a moment the mate dropped his truculent look, though he still sat straight. "That is better," went on Steinmetz. "John and myself, we will take watch and watch with you. There is no danger, except to cowards."

THE FACE OF AIR

"The other crews thought there was danger," said Rogers.

"They may have found it in the boat or in the ocean," was the answer. "With all the mystery, no man has met harm while he has stuck to this vessel. It is running away that is dangerous—and I will see that the danger is not lessened," he added significantly.

Rogers turned after a moment and went on deck. I received a few instructions from Steinmetz and followed, while the soldier turned in, carefully carrying Señor Gato to the stateroom with him.

I have often wondered since why the very aimlessness and harmlessness of the happenings did not guide us to the truth. I have often wished we had both turned in that night and left the mate and the crew

THE FACE OF AIR

to run away if they liked. They would have done it, past a doubt; but it would have been better for at least one of us if they had. We could doubtless have worked the schooner to land somehow. But wishes, like regrets, usually come too late; and as for guessing at the truth, it was hard enough to realize it when proven.

I took a good strategic position near the galley, where I could keep both wheel and fo'c'sle hatch under surveillance, and began my watch. I was careful likewise to so place myself that no one could get at me from the rear, for I had my doubts about the means Garcia might take to get away from the neighbourhood of his "devil cat." If Rogers knew my opinion of him, he gave no sign. Our first introduction had taught him the strength of my muscles and the

THE FACE OF AIR

hardness of my skull, and he knew that I was even better armed than himself. He came over and began to talk with me about a former voyage; but neither of us felt any interest in the topic, and, in spite of my efforts, it was soon dropped. Rogers strolled away, and I was left to enjoy the night alone. I have seldom seen a more beautiful one. There was just enough haze to weave a royal robe for the moon—a robe with a silver train that glimmered across the waves. The Portugee at the wheel might have been a bronze statue most of the time, for he hardly turned a spoke. I grew intolerably sleepy, and paced the deck to keep awake. But the ship remained as peaceful as the night.

Eight bells struck, and Rogers went below, after giving a few orders to McCarthy,

THE FACE OF AIR

who relieved the Portugee at the wheel. I remained on deck, intending to call Steinmetz later; but he heard the changing watch and came up immediately, leaving Señor Gato below. I made my brief report, and then for a while we paced the deck together, commenting in low tones on the curious voyage. It must have been a full hour before I went below. Rogers stuck his head out of his cabin as I came, and looked at me wonderingly.

“When did you go up?” he asked.

“I haven’t been down,” was my answer. Rogers looked mystified.

“I’m sure I heard somebody in your bunk,” he said. “Is Steinmetz——”

He broke off suddenly. The nameless fear had gripped both of us once more. I drew my revolver, and swung open the door

THE FACE OF AIR

of my tiny cabin. The evil-smelling lamp in the passage cast a yellow light on the berth, a light that swung grotesquely with the rolling of the ship. The little room was empty.

"I heard something, I'll swear I did," insisted Rogers. We both stepped inside. "Beg pardon," said Rogers, for no reason that I could see, though I was too puzzled to ask questions.

"Do you leave your blankets in that shape?" enquired Rogers after a moment, pointing to a rather disorderly crumple near the foot. He put his hand down as if to rearrange the covers, and jumped back so sharply that he nearly knocked me down.

"It's—it's—WARM!" he gasped.

With an effort, I stooped and felt. The mate was right. A circle of the blankets,

THE FACE OF AIR

something over a foot in diameter, was distinctly warm to the touch. It was such a mark as a terrier might leave, after curling up on his master's bed. Then I laughed foolishly in sudden relief.

"Why, the cat, of course!"

Rogers shook his head.

"Cat's fastened in the other berth. Been there ever since I come down."

I turned to Steinmetz' room and looked. Again the mate was right. The door was shut, and inside lay Señor Gato, curled up snugly on his master's bunk. I went back to my own room and touched the blankets again. They were still warm, though less so than the moment before. Plainly it could not have been the cat. I stooped and put my nose to the covers. There was an odor, a very perceptible odor; but for the

THE FACE OF AIR

life of me, I could not tell what it was. Rogers followed my example, sniffed for a moment, and then we both stood straight.

I can see that scene yet; I have relived it more than once in my dreams. I can see the tiny cabin, the narrow bunk, the slightly disarranged blankets. I can see the yellow light swing back and forth to the roll of the ship, feel again the effort with which my unpractised legs met the roll, and see Rogers, yellow pale in the yellow gleam, looking about him with sick eyes of fear. I can smell the evil lamp, and through its reek I can catch once more the pungent odor of that warm spot on the blankets. And always with the scene comes back the grotesque phrase in which Steinmetz summed up the combative but unre-

THE FACE OF AIR

liable seaman: "Mr. Start-And-Not-Finish Rogers."

It seemed ages before he spoke. In reality, it was probably two minutes. He hesitated as if the fear of being laughed at had not quite given place to the stronger terror which was overmastering him.

"The—the cook. The one that's dead, you know. Do—do you suppose——?"

"No!" I answered sharply, and then I thought of another tack, and grinned broadly. "Would a ghost leave a warm spot on the blankets?" I demanded.

It was the logic of unreason, and therefore it worked. "That's so," said Rogers, in a less awe-struck tone. "That's so. A — a ghost wouldn't be warm, would it?" He considered a moment. "And a cook couldn't curl up that small, could he?"

THE FACE OF AIR

"Of course not," I answered promptly.

The coming and going of ideas in Rogers' mind was almost a visible process. His brow cleared, then clouded again, and, once more looking about him, he asked:

"Do you suppose—it could have been something—something from the sea?"

"The blankets aren't wet," I replied soberly, stooping once more to feel them. Rogers looked at me as if he believed there might be something other than bone in my hard head.

"That's so, too. I never thought of that, either. Say, you're all right, not to laugh at a fellow. But what do you suppose it was?"

"The cat, of course," I insisted. "The door wasn't fast, it swung open with the roll of the ship. Old Gato came in to see

THE FACE OF AIR

his pal, waited a while, got tired and went back, and another roll shut the door. That's what you heard, and we're a pair of fools to be scared. And now I'm going to bed."

"Not—not there?" demanded Rogers incredulously as I started to undress.

"Where else?" I retorted. Boyish bravado would have carried me through now, but it seemed good policy to show Rogers an indifference which I was far from feeling. He stared at me for a moment, and then with a more confident step went back to his larger room across the passage. I was asleep in five minutes.

CHAPTER X

IT was still dark in the cabin when I awoke, though my sleep seemed to have been of the usual length. Someone had put out the lamp, but the smell of stale kerosene smoke was still thick on the air, and the air itself had a sticky feeling which I could not understand. I dressed hurriedly by the sense of touch, went on deck, and saw what had caused the untimely darkness. The schooner was wrapped in a thick, white blanket of fog, fog so thick that one could not see twenty feet ahead of him. The mainmast towered ghostly in the gloom; the foremast I could not see at all. Voices oddly muffled came out of the

THE FACE OF AIR

fog, and water from the yards and sails drummed unevenly on the deck. Moving shadows crossed back and forth through this darkness visible, and soon, by the knobby loom of the galley, I made out a taller shadow coming my way. It was Steinmetz.

“Have you seen Señor Gato?” was his instant question.

“No,” I answered. “Isn’t he with you?”

“He is gone,” said Steinmetz, shaking his head. “That chocolate scamp has thrown him overboard. Du lieber Gott! I have half a mind to send him along for company!”

“Let us make sure,” I suggested, and we went together to make a quick search of the cabins. They showed no Gato. Steinmetz had already drawn the fo’c’sle, and

THE FACE OF AIR

had called back and forth along the deck. Señor Gato was gone, but there was still a question as to the manner of his going. I told my friend of the warm spot on the blankets the night before. He listened intently.

“And it was too big a warm place for the cat?” he inquired. “You are sure of that, very sure?”

“Perfectly sure. I didn’t say so to Rogers, because there was no use adding to his scare, but I took a rough measurement of the place with my hands.”

“It would be hard to enlarge that same scare,” said Steinmetz. “In the phrase of your good country, he is scared stiff. So are they all. And now this verdamnt fog! Soon if we do not look out a ship without a crew we shall be. They could get a boat

THE FACE OF AIR

overboard and slip away without our knowledge now.”

“They wouldn’t dare, in this fog.”

“Panic dares all things. There was trouble in the fo’c’sle last night, also.”

“What was it?”

“Their clothes were moved, piled in a heap. So much I gathered out of their frightened lies. At first they laid it to each other, and the little Irishman slugged the big negro—the Portugee pried them apart. The negro says he never touched the clothes, and now McCarthy believes him.”

“I wonder they dared to undress.”

“They won’t dare it again. My boy,” and Steinmetz took my arm, and looked around very carefully at the white blackness before continuing, “of all the voyages on which I ever sailed, this the most mys-

THE FACE OF AIR

terious is. If we had a man in command, we could weather it. Now——”

The pause was more eloquent than speech. I tried to face the problem squarely, but I got small comfort from the inspection. There was professional knowledge on board the *Nancy Hanks*; and there was courage of the sort to face the unknown. But the two qualities were hopelessly divorced. Those who would dare could not do; and those who could do would not dare. If the tension once reached the breaking point—and it seemed barely short of that now—Rogers would go with his panic-stricken crew; and nothing could save the voyage from disaster. Nay, I suppose it would have been mutiny for Steinmetz and myself to resist any order the mate in his terror might give; but, to

THE FACE OF AIR

be frank about it, that phase of the difficulty was the least of our troubles.

We were pacing the deck as we talked and pondered. The fog seemed thicker than ever. We had reached the forward limit of our beat and were ready to turn, when from a shadowy hummock on the port side, a smaller shadow seemed to separate itself. It moved, lengthened, and a ghostly, misshapen hand outlined itself in the fog; a hand such as one sees in evil dreams; a hand that reached and clutched. Long fingers opened, and closed, and opened again; and a thin shred of an arm seemed to connect them with the deeper shadow below. And then, it vanished. It did not withdraw, did not fade. One moment, it was; and the next, the fog parted, and the hand was not.

THE FACE OF AIR

We stood as if petrified for a moment, and then with a tigerish bound which went far to explain his triumph in arms, Steinmetz sprang for the place where the hand had been. It seemed impossible that anything could move quickly enough to evade him, but he merely stumbled over the coil of rope which was the shadowy hummock, and brought up against the rail. He groped with his arms, clutching frantically, and catching nothing more substantial than the thinning mist. He plunged his hand into the hollow of the coil of rope, but it was empty. He straightened up, swearing in German, and struck his forehead with his open hand. The fog was lifting and shredding away. Looking aft, I could see the foremast and the galley, and near the gal-

THE FACE OF AIR

ley Rogers and the black cook were standing with their heads very close together. Rogers started and turned away as we looked.

“See?” muttered Steinmetz. The wheel came into view, with Garcia in charge of it. The cook started to enter the galley, stopped stumbling as one who has brought up against an unexpected barrier, jumped back with a yell; and then——

Out of the galley came a plate. It whizzed through the air, missed the cook’s head by a foot, and went over the side. A second plate smashed against the rail; a cup caught the negro squarely in the face; a light kettle clattered to the deck; and then, as a third plate struck him amidships, the black gave a scream like the squeal of a

THE FACE OF 'AIR'

horse in mortal agony, and bolted. He dived—there is no other word for it—down the fo'c'sle hatch.

As the negro ran forward Steinmetz bounded aft and, drawing his sword as he ran, plunged into the galley. The eruption of dishes stopped. Steinmetz poked sharply around with his sword with no result, then whirled and clutched at something which I could not see. The grip was fruitless, but he emerged from the galley with a look of dawning triumph on his face—a look that turned to rage as he glanced aft. One of the boats was gone from its place. I sprang to the side and looked over. The boat had been lowered, and was lying alongside; and even in that hurried glimpse I could see that she was roughly provisioned for a voyage.

THE FACE OF AIR

“Thought you would leave us, eh?” demanded Steinmetz, his bare sword flashing within an inch of the face of the cowering mate. “Aber, you won’t. Get those fellows from the fo’c’sle up. You go with him,” he added to me. “I have it now! Gott! The face of air! Get them up!”

“Come!” I yelled in the mate’s ear, and plunged into the fo’c’sle ahead of him.

The negro was cowering in the farthest corner, moaning prayers to deities which his ancestors had brought from the Congo. The Portugee and McCarthy stood petrified at our sudden entry. They had been packing a kit. McCarthy held a candle, and this and the glimmer from the hatch furnished the sole light in the place. It was plain that the men and Rogers had joined in planning the desertion of the ship.

THE FACE OF AIR

"Tumble up!" commanded Rogers, but there was no heart to the order. "The Dutchman thinks he's got the thing. Come on up."

The negro stopped moaning long enough to look around. McCarthy stooped and set the candle in a wire loop at the end of a bunk before speaking. "Ain't we goin', after all?" he demanded.

"Not yet," I answered, when Rogers failed to speak. "Go on deck as the mate tells you." The nigger buried his face in his arms again, and, seeing that he did not mean to obey, I crossed the fo'c'sle, and caught him sharply by the ear. "Here, you!" I exclaimed. "Get on deck!"

And in a breath came the climax. Even as I yanked the shivering black by the ear, I heard a scream from the Portugee, a

THE FACE OF AIR

groan from Rogers, an oath from McCarthy. I dropped the negro and looked around, and my hair rose on my head as I saw the candle flit across the fo'c'sle. It was not thrown as the dishes were thrown; it moved as if carried by a child, a child unsteady on his legs. It went to a bunk, stopped a moment, and started on to another.

I whipped out my revolver and fired. It was a clean miss, but the candle dropped to the floor, and in a second I followed it. The fist of the huge negro struck me on the back of the head, and his feet trampled me as he led the headlong rout for the deck. "A ghost carrying candles!" I heard McCarthy shriek, and then, with difficulty, I scrambled to my feet and made after the crazy sailors.

THE FACE OF AIR

“Get back!” roared Steinmetz, and I reached the deck in time to see the stampeded mob halt for a second before the flash of his sword. We might have won yet, had we not forgotten Garcia. I saw him leap from somewhere near the wheel, and his knife gleamed through the air and sunk almost to the hilt under Steinmetz’ upraised arm. The soldier sank to the deck, still holding his sword, and the sailors leaped for the boat. I had to run aft to get a shot, and Garcia was on the rail when my bullet reached him. He sprang up standing, clasping one hand on his stomach and the other over his kidneys, stood there for an interminable second, and then with a sort of tired sigh, pitched head-first to the water.

The others had already gained the boat,

THE FACE OF AIR

but they halted before the menace of my revolver.

“Come back, you curs!” I yelled, and whatever authority my voice may have lacked was supplied by the gun. They hung irresolute. “Come back and get Steinmetz or I’ll blow your heads off!” I repeated.

The Portugee dropped his oar. “Eet is right,” he said. He crossed himself, muttering, and climbed back aboard. It took a direct threat to bring Rogers, but he came.

“I am finished!” gasped Steinmetz as we stooped to raise him. “But there is no need to go. I the mystery have solved. The Face of Air——” He broke off and his features set with the pain of our moving him, and then he pointed forward. A thin

THE FACE OF AIR

line of smoke was coming up the fo'c'sle hatch. The candle had done its work.

The smoke settled any doubt I may have had on the course to pursue. Carefully as we might, we lowered Steinmetz to the boat, followed ourselves; and then the men grabbed their oars and pulled frantically away from the ship. At perhaps a hundred feet distant I gave the order to stop till we could care for my companion. Again I had to use direct threats to bring Rogers to compliance; but the Portugee once more set the example of obedience and helped my clumsy efforts to remove the knife and bandage the wound of my companion. The smoke column grew larger each second, rising straight in the still air.

A shrill, whining yelp, a sound like the cry of a child half frightened and half dis-

THE FACE OF AIR

tressed came from the haunted schooner. A rope, flapping loose from the foremast, tightened suddenly in grotesque jerks, as if some creature were climbing it; then suddenly swung loose again. At the same instant there was a splash in the water ten or twelve feet from the side of the vessel, and a widening, V-shaped wake pointed our way.

And then, at the crest of a little wavelet, I saw a Thing like a big air bubble in the water; a bubble that moved and squirmed like a land creature swimming; a bubble with misshapen legs, and hairy body, and weird, half human looking feet. A cry went up from the boat's crew, but not a man retained wit enough to think of his oars. Steinmetz caught the hand with which I was trying to stanch his bleeding

THE FACE OF AIR

and pulled himself to a sitting posture. McCarthy snatched something from the bottom of the boat and threw it at the Thing. It fell short, and the tough 'long-shore fighter, his truculent courage all gone, dropped on his knees and screamed to me to shoot.

“Shoot, man, shoot! and Mother of God bless the bullet!” he yelled. I raised my pistol and fired. The bullet went high, and the Thing dived.

“The Face of Air! The Face of Air!” cried Steinmetz.

A Face of Air it was, and the face of an African ape as well. There was the bushy beard, from which real air bubbles detached and floated to the surface; the crest of hair that simulated a high forehead; a

THE FACE OF AIR

caricature of a man shaped of air by some grisly joker of the sea. As in a dream, I seemed to see the explanation of the whole ghastly voyage; but understanding brought no relief from horror. The head disappeared above the surface, and the wake came nearer. I fired again, and that shrill, whining yelp told that the bullet had found its mark. An arm shot above the water, was outlined for a moment in dripping spray; disappeared; and then the head sank and became horribly visible once more. The long arms lashed the water, and hands like the one we had seen in the fog swept the Thing nearer. I fired again, but it still came on. A hand shot up once more, a spray struck me in the face, a wet patch appeared on the edge of the boat; and then,

THE FACE OF AIR

almost touching the Thing, I fired my last shot. There was no more outcry; but the pitifully crooked legs stretched out helplessly, the Face of Air showed once more in the water; and with staring eyes still fixed on us, sank from sight.

We pulled a little further, for the flames were now raging on the schooner, and stopped again to do what we might for my master-at-arms. It was a hopeless case from the first. He died within an hour, and we buried him over the side at sunset. Two days later we were picked up by some Bahama wreckers. I forget what story Rogers told to account for our condition, but it was accepted. Once in a seaport, we scattered. There was no need to pledge

THE FACE OF AIR

each other to secrecy. Two dead men, an abandoned schooner, and nothing to explain these things but a tale which no jury would believe—these were better guarantees of silence than many oaths.

It was years before I followed the back track of that mysterious cook who scrawled fragments of Goethe on the walls of his galley. I learned that he was a substitute, taken on at the last moment, when the cook originally engaged failed for some reason to appear. The cage was covered when he appeared at the shipping office, and he would not allow anyone to touch it. Casting farther, I found that an old German chemist, long believed to be mad, disappeared from his lodgings about the time of the sailing of the *Nancy Hanks*. When I

THE FACE OF AIR

made sure that this old chemist likewise had a mysterious cage in his quarters, the identification was complete enough for me.

What the old chemist did is easy to tell. How he did it remains—and I hope will continue to remain—a mystery. He found some way of decolourizing the luckless ape, and of reducing its tissues to the same refractive index as that of air. This done, the creature would be invisible under ordinary conditions; but in the water or in a fog would come into sight. So long as the old chemist lived he kept his ghostly pet safe. He died; perhaps he spent his last effort lifting the cage door; at any rate, the invisible ape was at large. After that, the catastrophe. Sailors' superstitions magnified the horror and the weirdness of the en-

THE FACE OF 'AIR

suing events; but I am not superstitious, and I protest that an angry tiger would be less daunting than the harmless, viewless mischief of that ghostly Thing.

I like to think that the first crew escaped in a boat from the haunted schooner, and that events like those which happened to us kept their lips sealed. For the four rapsallions whom we first put aboard the Nancy Hanks I have no hope, and no very great regret; though the bo'sun who led them deserved better followers, and a fairer fortune. As the record stands, at least six men, and all too probably eighteen, were driven to their death by a Thing that never meant them harm; were sacrificed to the wizard dream of a crazy chemist. To this day it costs me a serious effort to visit the

THE FACE OF AIR

monkey department of a menagerie. The pungent smell brings back a memory of tiny cabins and rolling floors, and shifting yellow lights, and frightened men staring at an empty bunk; and the creatures in the cages call up the picture of that other creature in the water, that Thing, with the Face of Air.

L'ENVOI

*Strike the bell and call the watch; now the
tale is ended;*

*Now the black-winged night comes down,
brooding sullenly.*

*Turn we to our berths below, there by sleep
befriended*

*Rest until the morning breaks in glory on
the sea:*

*Sea that keeps the world alway back to youth
returning,*

*Hollow sea, that mocks at men when they
dare the main,*

*Playing with their puny might, laughing at
their learning,—*

*Till in humbleness they grow children once
again.*

*Till they grow as children small, labored
knowledge scorning;*

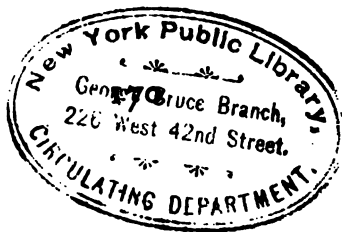
*Till they bow in humble awe to her
mystery;*

THE FACE OF 'AIR

*Then the sea gives back the dreams of the
world's young morning,
Gives the heart of youth to all who serve
upon the sea.*

*Theirs the simple eye to mark mystic sign and
wonder
Where the book-wise landsman prates
learnedly of law;
Theirs to keep the primal faith, buried ages
under,
Theirs to see each sun anew, as our sires
saw.*

*See! the sun is rising red; hark! the watch is
changing;
Over ocean's pastures his white horses
gallop free;
And our hopes are forth once more, forward
blithely ranging—
All the world is young again when morn-
ing's on the sea.*



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