

'Right you are,' he says; 'It's the old Mischief. But that ain't all. Lonsdale's bot her. She was sold at auction the other day, an' he got her dirt cheap—a reg'lar throw in. She's a dashed fine craft; must be all 20 ton. They must have had a scrape gettin' over the bar; she can't draw much less than nine feet o' water.'

'Well, well, well!' says old Josh, 'who'd a thought as he'd a come back here agen! Is he aboard, Sam?'

'I don't know,' says Sam; 'I didn't see him. He might a bin below. They crossed the bar a couple of hours before us. I could see 'em in the moonlight. However, somebody aboard knows the bar pretty well.'

'She's getting under way,' I says, 'I shouldn't wonder if he's agoin' to have us up for assault. Not as it's much use, for we was all masked an' never spoke a word.'

'Well, we never took no more notice, an' after old Josh an' Sam had a yarn about business, Josh he went out to the pits.'

It was about noon when they heard a horse gallopin' full split along the road, an' little Clara come thunderin' along in a cloud o' dust without no hat on, and her hair all finterin' in the wind.

'Oh, Mister Goff, Mister Goff!' she was a hollerin', 'Mister Lonsdale's come ashore from that ship, an' he's bin and carried off Maggie, an' her in a dead faint!'

It didn't take long, I can tell you, for old Josh to pull the gal off an' jump on himself, an' he was off like a rocket. Hal started runnin' too, an' bested the horse for a bit, but he couldn't keep it up.

When Joshua got nigh home he met Andy Jacobs, the publican, ridin' fast towards him.

'You're too late, Joshua,' he says, pullin' up. 'You must get the ketch an' go after him, the cutter's bin runnin' for the bar these 10 minits, there ain't no time to lose. He's makin' for the islands I think. You go aboard an' I'll rouse up a crew in a few minits; Sam's drunk at my place. Courage Joshua, it's only a bit o' a cutter, an' you'll soon run her down.'

'Come on,' says Joshua, turnin' his horse, an' they galloped back to Gosford.

I happened to be passin' Jacobs' place when I see Hal come runnin' towards me, an' from 'o'other way came gallopin' Josh and Andy.

'The ketch! the ketch!' hollered Josh in a voice that made me think the vessel was a-fire, a-sinkin', or somethin'.

'Come aboard and Andy'll send Sam.'

I run down to the wharf with 'em, wonderin' what the devil was up.

'That damned villain Lonsdale has carried off my Maggie,' says old Josh over his shoulder to me as he ran. 'Come an' get the ketch under way, we must give chase.'

'Certainly,' I says, 'I'm your man.'

We'd hardly got aboard the vessel when down comes Sam an' two smart lads runnin' like anything, and Andy brought 'em aboard.

'I'll send a few men round on horseback to the bar,' he sings out from the boat. 'They might be in time to put a charge of shot into him, and bring him up with a round turn as he sails past.'

'Do,' says Josh, cuttin' the cable and runnin' up the foresail with his own hands, while we an' the others was loosin' the mainsail an' gettin' in the boat.

There was a tearin' nor'-easter blowin', an' the foresail began to bring her head round while we was settin' the mainsail.

Old Josh took the tiller, an' before the peak was up her head was round, an' she was beginnin' to slip through the water nicely.

Next we set the jib, an' she felt it at once, an' when we set the topsail we was out of the lee a bit an' she was heelin' over an' bowlin' along, makin' a wash like a steamer. Then up went the mizzen, and we was gettin' the breeze a bit more free, an' she went surgin' ahead in fine style.

'Set the squaresail,' said Joshua, an' tho' we was out of breath an' drippin' with sweat we run it up like winkin'.

We was opinin' out Kincumber, an' the wind came sweepin' down very gusty, bendin' us amost lee side under.

'Sam,' says Joshua, 'get up a spare sail from below and set a raffer.'

We had all the sail as Sam an' me thought we could stagger under, but we got up a tarpaulin an' fixed a yard to it and sheet and tack and sent it aloft. By gosh, I thought it'd whip the topmast out o' her. But didn't she travel through the water!

The cutter'd got a good start an' was goin' through the banks when we got away. When they see us we was comin' they set a squaresail which drew until they was off Blackwall, an' then they had to take it in.

It was pretty plain as we was comin' up on 'em fast.

All of a sudden, when we was off the Sugar Loaf, the squaresails flapped and threw aback, an' we had to take 'em in an' set a jib topsail instead. But it wasn't many minits before the windin' of the channel brought the wind aft, and up went the squaresail agen.

An' so it was see saw in an' out, up an' down, until we was off Blackwall, and fair in the doldrums. All the time we kep' on drawin' up on 'em, an' they was only half the distance ahead as they was when we started. It were a treat to see the old ketch sneakin' up an' sneakin' up on the cutter, between the puffs, an' old Joshua handlin' her like a dizey. First it was 'all sheets flat aft,' then it was 'all sheets free,' then 'flat aft agin'; an' so on, until we was all ready to drop.

Hal wanted to get on the boat when we was off Cox's Point, thinkin' we could catch 'em by rowin', but Josh knew better. Poor Hal didn't understand what doldrums was, an' while we was in 'em he was cursin' an' swearin' dreadful at the wind.

When we rounded Cox's Point an' got the wind steady on the beam for a bit, so as we could all take a spell, we went aft and sat down and watched the cutter.

'What do you think Sam?' says Joshua. 'Will we catch him at the bar?'

'No, I'm afear'd not, the wind's steadier now, an' see how the cutter is walkin' along. I'm wonderin' whether we'll catch her before she hails her wind round Cape Hawke. Once he gets us goin' to wind'ard in a breeze like this, with a smooth sea, I'm afraid he'll just walk right off our weather bow. I'm hopin' he sticks on the bar; there ain't much more'n nine feet now, we're drawin' seven.'

'God grant as he does!' says old Josh. 'But there'll be a "buster" afore sundown, an' I'm goin' to try a little dodge on him. I know there's a buster comin', tho' you can't see it yet, an' I'm goin' to keep to the south'ard of him, so I'll have him under my lee when it comes. But, my God, I don't know what's goin' to happen then; but it's moonlight, an' he'll have a job to give me the slip. Stand by, there. Ease the sheets, here's the wind dead aft agen. Set the squaresail; lively now!'

I name buzzin' down in black puffs, an' we swooped along for a while as if we was goin' to run right atop of the cutter. But it was only a puff, and presently the cutter got it when it passed us, an' drew away agen a bit, an' passed over the bar a quarter of a mile ahead of us.

We were still pretty well under the lee until we opened out Cape Three Points, an' the cutter kep' as close in as she dared without losin' the wind, so as to get the weather gauge of us when we cleared Cape Hawke. But Joshua kep' well out, heading more for Barrenjoey, an' havin' a freer wind, we were makin' better headway than the cutter. He must a larfed when he see us givin' him the weather gauge so liberal. The sea was pretty calm inshore, but when we began to get out a bit it was jumpin' with a kind o' underswell comin' from the sou'east.

We opened out Cape three points together, the cutter well inshore; an' when we hailed our wind she was somethin' less than a quarter of a mile dead to wind'ard of us. They flattened in their sheets, an' I'm blest if that cutter didn't seem to sail right in the wind's eye. Josh sweated up his halcyards till the sails stood like boards, but we couldn't point near as high as they did. Besides, you know a vessel as ain't got a yacht's draught won't sail with the sheets too flat aft. We stood on for an hour or so like this, rompin' through the water very lively; but it wasn't long before we see as the cutter was drawin' away from us steady.

Poor Hal didn't know what to make of it at all. He got seasick going over the bar, an' that didn't make him feel any better.

'Why,' he says with a kind of a moan like, 'she's gettin' away from us now. Can't we do somethin'? Ain't there a gun aboard?'

We hadn't no gun. Nobody'd thought of it in the hurry of gettin' away. We all looked blue, and was silent, watchin' the cutter drawin' further and further away.

'How did it happen, Sam?' I says, goin' up to him as he was leavin' with his arms on the rail for'ard, lookin' at the cutter.

'That's more'n I can tell you,' says he. 'Little Clara come runnin' like a hare into Andy Jacob's bar, an' said as Lonsdale had come ashore from that vessel and carried Maggie off in a faint. First he locked Clara in a shed; but she slipped a loose plank or two, an' bolted. There was a couple of nags tied up at the trough belongin' to some nien in the bar when she came in, an' she got on one an' went to the sawpits, and Andy got on the other and went to 'banus' place.'

'Hup!' I says, 'What do you think o' this racket. He's gettin' away pretty fast now; but that "buster's" comin' up; I see it this half-hour or more.'

'Yes,' says he; 'I bin watchin' it too, an' Joshua's got his eye on it. See how light the wind's gettin'; we'll have it in a quarter o' an hour or so.'

All o' a sudden, while we was speakin', it fell dead calm, an' the vessels stood upright, with booms swingin' about fit to burst the sheets.

'Take in topsail, jib, topsail, jib, and mizzen!' shouted old Josh with his hands to his mouth, an' turnin' agen to watch the line of scud that was spinnin' up from the south'ard.

While we was takin' in sail we could hear the beat of the surf on the beach as plain as could be. It wasn't long before we was under full mainsail and foresail—a big press of canvas to stand a buster in, certainly; but old Josh was at the tiller.

'Wall I'm blowed!' says I, when I got time to look round agen. 'They must be mad or drunk aboard the cutter. They're not goin' to shorten sail—no even take in topsail.'

We all looked on wonderin', with one eye on the comin' buster an' the other on the cutter. After a bit a cat's paw or two come down, darkenin' the water in patches. Then another swishin' along a bit faster, an' we felt it, an' begun to move ahead. Then come another, an' another, flyin' over us towards the cutter, an' the sea to wind'ard was all black, with flecks of white on it. Then, with a hiss an' a hum, an' a gust fit to knock you down, come the buster itself, chuckin' the ketch over on her side and blowin' the water into the air like rain. Joshua put the tiller hard down, an' the vessel come up to the wind shakin' herself like a big dog as is knocked down by a wave on the beach.

We was all right then, an' we got time to look at the cutter. She was layin' over all, standin' near flat on the water, and the spray must a bin drivin' very near over her masthead. While we was lookin' the topsail sheet was let



OLD JOSH.

go, or carried away, an' with a report like a gunshot the sail tore to smithereens, leaving scarce a shred. She righted a little then, and tried to come up, in the wind. She jumped high forward as she came up, an' then plunged in, showing her bowsprit and the foot of her jib into a green sea. The bowsprit broke like a carrot, and the jib blew away to leeward. That eased her a whole lot, and they got up the tack of the mainsail a bit, an' stood on fair out to see, layin' over down to the hatches, an' making such headway, with the spray flyin' over her that we could hardly hold her, tho' we was sailin' a good rap fall.

We were expectin' to see the cutter go about every minit and run back for shelter.

'She can't keep on long like that,' says Joshua at last. 'When the sea gets up it'll smother her, an' it's gittin' up now.'

He was right, the cutter was jumpin' half out of the sea, an' pluggin' in agen nearly up to the mast, an' the effect was as the speed was bein' knocked off of her.

Old Joshua watched her mighty keen for some minits without sayin' a word, an' then he seemed to make up his mind all of a sudden.

'Stan' by the main sheet,' he hollered, and we sprang to the ropes.

'Ease away,' says he, puttin' the tiller hard up. 'Steady.'

We flew away to leeward, thunderin' the foam under our bow and spoutin' it up under the counter like a creek in flood. We shot past the cutter's stern and Josh put the tiller hard down, shoutin' 'Aft mainsheet.'

We brought up just to leeward of the cutter, flappin' and jumpin' an' drenched with spray.

'Go about!' hollered Joshua, wavin' his fist to Lonsdale, who was sittin' in the cockpit steerin'.

'Go about!' we all hollered.

But Lonsdale sat still and steered with the water hiss'n' all round him, as cool as a cucumber, an' never took no notice. He must a bin drunk, I believe, or mad.

'Go about, you villain!' yelled Hal, pickin' up a oar and shakin' it at him. But he didn't take no more notice than if we was a phantom ketch.

But we was drawin' ahead of him a bit, an' Hal run aft yellin' to Lonsdale to go about. Josh didn't quite know what to do for the minit, an' we all stood still undecided.

'Head him off, carn't yer? Head him off,' hollered Hal. 'He'll give us the slip. Head him off! Head him off!'

You see, it seemed to Hal something like roundin' up a steer on Bathurst Plains.

We'd fallen a bit to leeward of him though we drawn ahead a length or so.

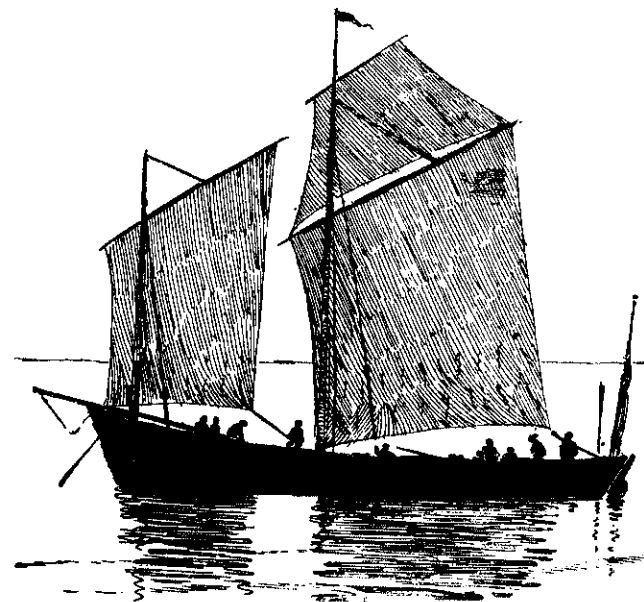
'Head her off, carn't you?' roared Hal, runnin' up to the tiller; an' afore we knowed what he was up to blowed if he didn't jam the tiller hard down, sendin' old Josh head over heels into the lee scuppers.

'Look out!' we sang out, rushin' aft. 'What're you up to, Hal? Hard up! Hard a starboard for God's sake!'

It was too late.

The ketch come up to the wind shootin'. She rose a top of a big sea as if she were agoin' to poke her bowsprit into the sky, an' the next minit down she come, right aboard the cutter, a treadin' on her deck amidships with her fore-foot an' squashin' it in like a eggshell. The cutter's mast and sails come aboard of us with a crash, an' we was locked together, bumpin' awful for a couple of minits or so. It was somethin' terrible. Our bowsprit an' topmast was gone an' the cutter's mast was through our mainsail. It was a reg'lar tangle up, an' I see two men from the cutter climb aboard of us over the weather bow.

It seemed we was hangin' together for a long while,



THE DAIRYMAID, KETCH.