

The Duel.

By EARL DERR BIGGERS.

THE skipper of the John Henry stood on the deck and gazed wonderingly at the distant quay, where he beheld the newly-hired member of his crew indulging in unusual and picturesque contortions.

"Wot's the matter with 'im," he inquired of the cook, "why don't 'e come on board? We sails in 'arf an hour."

"'E's tryin' to make known 'is awful state," returned the cook, solemnly, "Joe started ashore to fetch 'im, but 'e 'olored not to come a-near 'im. 'E sez 'ow 'e's been exposed to the smallpox."

"Why, that's all right," said the captain, heartily, "tell 'im not to let that worry 'im. I'm not one to 'old anything like that ag'in a man."

There was an eloquent pause. "The smallpox, I said," ventured the cook.

"Well, I'm not deaf—I 'eard you," responded the skipper, testily, "wot of it? 'E ain't likely to get it, an' if 'e does, 'oo's afraid? I've 'ad it, an' so 'as the mate. Joe, row in an' fetch 'im at once."

Another pause ensued, during which the cook shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. His plans for spending that evening with a lady friend in Plymouth had been wrecked by the captain's decision to leave a day early, and in the new hand which the master of the John Henry had engaged there he saw his only salvation. By a vivid recital of the cruelties practised by the skipper, together with a liberal purchase

"Providence nothink," rejoined the skipper, who was no novice in dealing with such situations. "Joe, if you prefers a trial fer mutiny to obeyin' my orders, I'll go ashore fer the new 'and myself."

He started for the ship's boat, but the cook planted himself in his path.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said, "but if that feller comes aboard, me an' the other lads will 'ave to leave. It ain't human to arsk us to stay."

One glance at the faces of the crew told the skipper he need expect no sympathy there.

"Well," he said shortly, "mebbe you're right. Mebbe your lives are worth something, though it's foolish of you never to prove it to me." He walked to the rail and addressed the smallpox victim, who was sitting dejectedly on the edge of the pier. "Go away, pore feller," he shouted, "go away to some quiet spot an' die." Then he turned to the crew, watch in hand. "We sails in ten minutes," he remarked.

This announcement came as a distinct shock, especially to the cook, who heard it at a time of inward rejoicing over his apparent victory.

"Ow about the new 'and?" he inquired timidly.

"It's unfort'nit an' un'appy," the captain returned, "but as I said before, I 'ave't time now to look up a new man. We'll 'ave to sail without. It's come at a very bad time, an' it's 'ard on all of us. But it can't be 'elped. It's Providence, that's wot it is."

"Yes, it'll be pretty 'ard on us all, I guess," he went on, after a pause, "cause the boy'll 'ave to do the cookin', an' 'is repertory ain't large. Soup an' coffee's the extent o' Johnny's pore ability, an' sometimes it's 'ard to tell which 'e means fer which."

"An' why will Johnny 'ave to do the cookin'?" inquired the cook haughtily, but with no little anxiety in his tone.

"Why," answered the skipper sweetly, "because you're goin' to take the place of the pore feller wot was exposed to the smallpox. You can be ready to take your turn at the wheel to-night along with the rest."

The cook drew himself up loftily.

"I'll take no turn at no wheel," he announced, in a dignified tone, "I'll 'ave you know, sir, 'ow I shipped with this vessel as cook, an' 'ow I intend to stay cook to the end o' this 'vy'ge. I ain't ben no common sailor before, an' I ain't goin' to begin now."

"You'll do as I say, my lad," returned the captain warmly; "dooty is dooty, an' when I tell you to do anything, I ain't goin' to 'ave any back talk. You'll do your turn at the wheel, or you'll do twelve months fer mutiny."

"Not ben' used to the work o' a ordinary A.B.," said the cook, with equal warmth, "ow do you expect me to keep awake? I arsk you that."

"Tain't none o' my business 'ow you do it," was the skipper's short reply, "only you gotter to do it, that's all." And he walked away.

A sulky crew sailed the John Henry out of Plymouth harbour. During the remainder of that day the cook went about with an ugly look on his face. He avoided friendly conversation. Speculation as to his future course ran high, but nothing could be discovered, for when Joe Martin daringly inquired what his plan of action might be, he answered sharply:

"Do my dooty, an' keep my mouth shet, the same as you ought to be doin'."

That night, a little past midnight, the entire ship, from cabin to fore-castle, was aroused by a sharp, piercing whistle. The men leaped from their bunks and started up the companionway. At the top they met the captain and mate, clad in the garments of sleep, and forming with them a cautious procession, moved noiselessly forward. In a moment they came in sight of the cook, standing peacefully at the wheel, and whistling "God Save the King" in tones calculated to wake the dead resting in the church-yards of London.

"Wot's the meanin' o' this, cook?" inquired the skipper, very red in the face.

"Wot's the meanin' o' wot, sir," asked the cook, innocently.



For some moments cook studied it, all the time holding it upside down.

"Wot's your idee in wakin' up the 'old ship in the middle o' the night by such a ungodly noise?" said the captain, even redder.

"I'm sorry if I 'ave disturbed you, cap'n," said the cook, calmly, "but bein' now at this kind o' work, I 'ave a 'ard time 'oldin' my eyes open. An' so I whistles. It keeps me awake."

"I 'ave no doubt it does," said the skipper, sarcastically, and then starting in enthusiastically, he called the cook all the names he knew. The list exhausted, he tried his hand at invention, with no little success. Finished at last, he turned sheepishly to the crew, for it was plain, as the cook, intimated, that hard names were not the equivalent of sticks and stones. At a loss for a plan of further action, he ordered all below in a terrible voice.

No one slept that night during the cook's watch. What was worse, the next night the same piercing whistle roused crew and officers, and the recording angel's oath account must have been in a sad muddle by morning. For some time the unaccustomed watcher's nightly concerts continued. The captain was roaring mad, and the crew, while naturally delighted to see their chief getting the worst of something had begun to regret the cost at which this pleasure was bought.

It was at this point that old Daniel, master of plots and plans, took the case in hand. For several hours he sat thinking in a corner of the fore-castle, repelling in surly tones the advances of the interested and anxious. At length he announced to the waiting ones the perfection of his scheme, and carried it to the skipper for approval.

"Anythink," said that harassed gentleman, sourly, "anythink at all jest so it shets 'im up."

Early that evening the entire crew, together with the cook, sat smoking in the fore-castle, when Daniel suddenly arose and, going over to his chest, took out an old newspaper.

"I was jest thinkin'," he soliloquised, softly, "as 'ow I fergot to look over that paper wot I bought when I was in London." And sitting close to the smoky lamp, he began to read.

"Wot's the news?" the others inquired, but with little show of interest. Five years before Daniel had bought that paper, and all save the cook had read the date beneath the name.

"Nothin' much," responded Daniel, in an offhand manner, "nothin' but a few murders an' 'angin's an' the like." Then suddenly he sat up very straight, an excited look on his face.

"Wot's this?" he said, so loudly they all started. "Ow lucky," he went on, "ow very lucky fer me to come across this at such a time."

"Wot is it? Read it," they chorused, and Daniel began in a roaring voice:

"Wot is a very strange case 'as appened in the St. George homepittle. A night policeman named John Davis 'as been took there sufferin' great pain from insanity. Them wot lives on 'is beat say as 'ow 'e was accustomed to whistle a well-known tune all durin' the night, an' when them as couldn't sleep hollered at 'im, 'e 'only awere fer answer. 'Is punishment for this cruelty 'as come. The doctors give out as 'ow whistlin' the same tune fer so long 'as turned

'is brain. 'E can't never recover. 'Is leaves one wife and eight children."

Here Daniel glared fiercely at the cook.

"Well," said that gentleman uneasily, "it seems to me as 'ow that's very pore langwidge fer a newspaper."

Daniel turned yellow, which was his way of blushing.

"It's not a very good newspaper," he said, "an' besides, I 'rd to change the langwidge a bit so as to be understood by them wot's not well eddicated."

"Indeed," returned the cook, shortly, "will ye be so kind as to 'and me the paper, may I arsk?"

Reading was not one of the cook's accomplishments, and knowing this, Daniel willingly handed over the sheet. For some moments the cook studied it, all the time holding it upside down, as Daniel afterwards explained to the delighted crew. Then he thoughtfully laid it down.

"Indeed," he said again, and departed. When the cook had gone to the galley, they all praised Daniel until he turned yellow again.

"Tain't nothin', mates," he modestly assured them, "but I think you'll find that cook is scared out o' 'is cruel 'abit. I arsked 'im this afternoon why 'e allus stuck to the same tune, an' 'e said 'e didn't know no other. In that case, I think as 'ow we'll get our rest to-night."

But in spite of Daniel's prediction, the cook did not see fit to discontinue his concerts that night. When the crew met him on deck the next day they spoke to him sadly concerning it.

"Wot are you thinkin' of, my lad?" Daniel inquired. "Ave you fergot your missis an' the eight little ones? Turn back, we begs you, before it is too late."

"Mebbe the insanity 'as already got a hold o' 'im an' 'e can't turn back," said Bill, pityingly. "Insanity is a awful thing. I knowed a man once 'oo 'ad it; 'e thought 'e was a animal o' 'as kind an' used to roar feraril'."

"The only man I knowed 'oo 'ad it I thought 'e was the Prince o' Wales," put in Joe Martin, "an' 'e was allus mistakin' the fer'sible fer the throne room!"

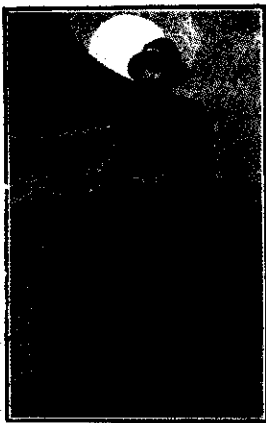
"Two insane men 'as come to my notice," said the mate, who was standing near by with the skipper; "one mistook himself for a hangel, an' the other kept insistin' the people around 'im was articles o' food, an' tried to chew 'em."

"Insanity is a terrible thing," said the captain, sorrowfully. "After the warnin' you 'ave 'ad, cook, I am surprised as you. Turn back, my lad, an' save yourself from such a awful fate."

But the cook was deaf to all entreaties.

That night, instead of being roused by the usual whistle, the crew were awakened by a roar that seemed to shake the entire ship. They rushed up the companionway to the deck, and there beheld the captain and mate backing slowly away from the cook, who had a frightened look on his face.

"I'm the British lion, that's wot I am," he shouted, copping between each word for a roar, "I'm a lion an' I'm goin' to



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of beer, he had induced the new recruit to play false, seeing in the delay which the search for another seaman would occasion his chance for an evening of festivity. But the frivolous manner in which his smallpox story was being received took him unprepared.

"Wot ails you, Joe?" the captain belated. "Ave you quit takin' orders from me?"

Joe cleared his throat, but it was the cook who spoke.

"We're pore men," he said, "but there ain't no law to make us risk our lives for nothink. If that man comes aboard the John Henry, we'll 'ave to go."

"Wot nonsense," the skipper sneered, "you 'ave to die o' somethin', an' why not the smallpox? Wot's a few sailormen, more or less? Why, they's as plenty as flies."

"Of all the 'ard-'earted talk," murmured the cook.

"I 'ad some trouble gittin' this feller," went on the captain, savagely, "an' I ain't goin' to lose 'im now—no, not if 'e's been exposed to a 'ole dictionary o' diseases. To find another like 'im would take a day or more, an' I 'ave't even a minute to spare."

"It's unfort'nit an' un'appy," put in the cook; "it's come at a very bad time, an' it's 'ard on all of us. But it can't be 'elped. It's Providence, that's wot it is."



"Wot if he should mistake the ship for a suppany bun, and eat it?" said the mate.