

THE REFUGEES

By A. CONAN DOYLE,
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(Continued from Sunday.)

CHAPTER XVII.

FOR two days the Golden Rod lay becalmed close to Cape la Hague, with the Breton coast extending along the whole of the southern horizon. On the third morning, however, came a sharp breeze, and they drew rapidly away from land until it was but a vague, dim line which blended with the cloud banks.

"I am frightened about my father, Amory," said Adele as they stood together by the shrouds and looked back at the dim cloud upon the horizon which marked the position of that France which they were never to see again.

"What do you mean, Adele? My uncle is hale and hearty, and he will accustom himself to this new life."

"If it only could be so! But I fear, I fear that he is over old for such a change. He says not a word of complaint, but I read upon his face that he is stricken to the heart."

De Catinat was about to suggest that the voyage might restore the merchant's health, when Adele gave a cry of surprise and pointed out over the port quarter.

"Look!" she cried. "There is something floating upon the sea. I saw it upon the crest of a wave."

He looked in the direction in which she pointed, but it was so far from him that he could make nothing of it, not sharper eyes than his had caught a glance of it. Amos Green had seen the first point.

"Captain Ephraim," said he, "there's a boat on the starboard quarter." The New England seaman whipped up his glass.

"Aye, it's a boat," said he, "but an empty one. Maybe it's been washed off from some ship or gone adrift from shore. Put her hard down, Mr. Tomlinson, for it just so happens that I am in need of a boat at present."

Half a minute later the Golden Rod swung round and was running wittily down toward the black spot which still bobbed and danced upon the waves. As they neared her they could see that something was projecting over her side.

"It's a man's head!" cried Amos Green. But Ephraim's grim face grew grimmer. "It's a man's foot," said he. "I



"I think that you are best down below," he said, "I think that you had best take the galley below to the cabin."

Amid a solemn hush they ran alongside this lonely craft which hung out so sinister a signal.

She was a little thirteen foot cockleshell, very broad for her length and so flat in the bottom that she had been meant evidently for river or lake work. Huddled together beneath the seats were three folk, a man in the dress of a respectable artisan, a woman of the same class and a little child about a year old. The boat was half full of water, and the woman and child were stretched with their faces downward, the fair curls of the infant and the dark locks of the mother washing to and fro like water weeds upon the surface. The man lay with a slate colored face, his chin cocking up toward the sky, his eyes turned upward to the whites and his mouth wide open, showing a leathern crinkled tongue like a rotting leaf. In the bows, all huddled in a heap and with a single paddle still grasped in his hand, there crouched a very small man clad in black, an open book lying across his face and one stiff leg jutting upward, with the heel of the foot resting between the rowlocks.

A boat had been lowered by the Golden Rod, and the unfortunate was conveyed upon deck. No particle of food or drink was to be found. Nothing save the single paddle and an open Bible, which lay across the man's face. The woman and child had all been dead a day at the

least, and so, with the short prayers used upon the sea, they were buried from the vessel's side. The small man had at first seemed also to be lifeless, but Amos had detected some slight flutter of his heart, and the faintest haze was left upon the watch glass which was held before his mouth. Wrapped in a dry blanket, he was laid beside the mast, and the mate forced a few drops of rum every few minutes between his lips until the little speck of life which still lingered in him might be fanned to a flame. Meanwhile Ephraim Savage had ordered up the two prisoners whom he had entrapped at Honfleur.

"Very sorry, captain," said the seaman, "but either you had to come with us, d'ye see, or we had to stay with you. They're waiting for me over at Boston, and so in truth I couldn't tarry. Which would you prefer, to go on with us to America or to go back to France?"

"Back to France, if I can find my way, if only to have a word with that fool of a gunner."

"Well, we emptied a bucketful of water over his linstock and priming, d'ye see, so maybe he did all he could. But there's France, where that thickening is, over yonder."

"I see it; I see it! Ah, if my feet were only upon it once more!"

"There is a boat beside us, and you may take it."

"My God, what happiness! Corporal Lemoine, the boat! Let us push off at once."

"But you need a few things first. Good Lord, who ever heard of a man pushin' off like that? Mr. Tomlinson, just sling a keg of water and a barrel of meat and of biscuit into this boat. Hiram Jefferson, bring two oars aft. It's a long pull with the wind in your teeth, but you'll be there by tomorrow night, and the weather is set fair."

The two Frenchmen were soon provided with all that they were likely to require and pushed off with a waving of hats and a shouting of "Bon voyage!" The yard was swung round again, and the Golden Rod turned her bowsprit for the west.

But while these things had been done the senseless man beneath the mast had twitched his eyelids, had drawn a little gasping breath and then finally had opened his eyes. Old Catinat had come upon deck, and at the sight of the man and of his dress he had run forward and had raised his head reverently.

"He is one of the faithful," he cried. "He is one of our pastors. Ah! Now indeed a blessing will be upon our journey!"

But the man smiled gently and shook his head. "I fear that I may not come



Kneeling hand in hand before the dying pastor.

this journey with you," said he, "for the Lord has called me upon a farther journey of my own. I have had my summons, and I am ready. I am indeed the pastor of the temple at Isigny, and when we heard the orders of the wicked king I and two of the faithful, with their little one, put forth to the hope that we might come to England. But on the first day there came a wave which swept away one of our oars and all that was in the boat—our bread, our keg, and we were left with no hope save in him. And then he began to call to us, one at a time, first the child and then the woman and then the man, until I only am left, though I feel that my own time is not long. But, since ye are also of the faithful, may I not serve you in any way before I go?"

The merchant shook his head, and then suddenly a thought flashed upon him, and he ran, with joy upon his face, and whispered eagerly to Amos Green. Amos laughed and strode across to the captain.

"It's time," said Ephraim Savage grimly.

Then the whisperers went to De Catinat. He sprang in the air, and his eyes shone with delight. And then they went down to Adele in her cabin, and she started and blushed and turned her

sweet face away and patted her hair with her hands as woman will when a sudden call is made upon her. And so, since haste was needful and since even there upon the lonely sea there was one coming who might at any moment snap their purpose, they found themselves in a few minutes—this gallant man and this pure woman—kneeling hand in hand before the dying pastor, who raised his thin arm feebly in benediction as he muttered the words which should make them forever one. Ere the stars had waned again one more toiler had found rest aboard of the Golden Rod, and the scattered flock from Isigny had found their pastor once more.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FOR three weeks the wind kept at east or northeast, always at a brisk breeze and freshening sometimes into half a gale. The Golden Rod sped merrily upon her way, with every sail drawing a low and aloft, so that by the end of the third week Amos and Ephraim Savage were reckoning out the hours before they would look upon their native land once more.

"Tomorrow we should make land by my reckoning," said Captain Savage. "Ah, tomorrow! And what will it be—Mount Desert, Cape Cod, Long Island?"

"Nay, lad; we are in the latitude of the St. Lawrence and are more likely to see the Acadia coast. Then, with this wind, a day should carry us south, or two at the most. A few more such voyages, and I shall buy myself a fair brick house in Green lane of north Boston, where I can look down on the bay or on the Charles or the Mystic and see the ships comin' and goin'. So I would end my life in peace and quiet."

The mate's watch that night was from 12 to 4, and the moon was shining brightly for the first hour of it. In the early morning, however, it clouded over, and the Golden Rod plunged into one of those dim, clammy mists which lie on all that tract of ocean. So thick was it that from the poop one could just make out the loom of the foremast, but could see nothing of the foretopmast staysail or the jib. The wind was northeast, with a very keen edge to it, and the dainty brigantine lay over, scudding along with her lee rails within hand's touch of the water. It had suddenly turned very cold—so cold that the mate stamped up and down the poop, and his four seamen shivered together under the shelter of the bulwarks. And then in a moment one of them was up, thrusting his forefinger into the air and screaming, while a huge white wall sprang out of the darkness at the very end of the bowsprit, and the ship struck with a force which snapped her two masts like dried reeds in a wind and changed her in an instant to a crushed and shapeless heap of spars and wreckage.

The mate had shot the length of the poop at the shock and had narrowly escaped from the falling mast, while of his four men two had been hurled through the huge gap which yawned in the bows, while a third had dashed his head to pieces against the stock of the anchor. Tomlinson staggered forward to find the whole front part of the vessel driven inward and a single seaman sitting dazed amid splintered spars, flapping sails and writhing, lashing cordage. It was still as dark as pitch, and, save the white crest of a leaping wave, nothing was to be seen beyond the side of the vessel. The mate was peering round him in despair at the ruin which had come so suddenly upon them, when he found Captain Ephraim at his elbow, half clad, but as wooden and serene as ever.

"An iceberg," said he, sniffing at the chill air. "Did you not smell it, friend Tomlinson?"

"Truly I found it cold, Captain Savage, but I set it down to the mist." "There is a mist ever set around them, though the Lord in his wisdom knows best why, for it is a sore trial to poor sailor men. She makes water fast, Mr. Tomlinson."

The other watch had swarmed upon deck, and one of them was measuring the well. "There is three feet of water," he cried, "and the pumps sucked dry yesterday!" "Hiram Jefferson and John Moreton, to the pumps!" cried the captain. "Mr. Tomlinson, clear away the longboat and let us see if we may set her right!"

"The longboat has stove two planks!" cried a seaman.

"The jolly boat, then!"

"She is in three pieces."

"Where is Amos Green?"

"Here, Captain Ephraim. What can I do?"

"And I?" asked De Catinat eagerly.

Adele and her father had been wrapped in mantles and placed for shelter in the lee of the roundhouse. "Tell him that he can take his spell at the pumps," said the captain to Amos. "And you, Amos, you are a handy man with a tool. Get into yonder longboat with a lantern."

"Very good. Lower away. Keep up the pumping there. Mr. Tomlinson, see that provisions and water are ready, as much as she will hold. Come with me, Hiram Jefferson."

The seaman and the captain swung themselves down into the tossing boat, the latter with a lantern strapped to his waist. Together they made their way until they were under her mangled bows. The captain shook his head when he saw the extent of the damage. "Cut away the foresail and pass it over," said he.

(To Be Continued.)

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