

BREVET RANK

THE crew of the *Elizabeth Hopkins* sat on deck in the gloaming, gazing idly at the dusky shapes of the barges as they dropped silently down on the tide, or violently discussing the identity of various steamers as they came swiftly past. Even with these amusements the time hung heavily, and they thought longingly of certain cosy bars by the riverside to which they were wont to betake themselves in their spare time.

To-night, in deference to the wishes of the skipper, wishes which approximated closely to those of Royalty in their effects, they remained on board. A new acquaintance of his, a brother captain, who dabbled in mesmerism, was coming to give them a taste of his quality, and the skipper, sitting on the side of the schooner in the faint light which streamed from the galley, was condescendingly explaining to them the marvels of hypnotism.

"I never 'eard the likes of it," said one, with a

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deep breath, as the skipper concluded a marvellous example.

"There's a lot you ain't 'eard of, Bill," said another, whose temper was suffering from lack of beer. "But 'ave you seen all this, sir?"

"Everything," said the skipper, impressively. "He wanted to mesmerise me, an' I said, 'All right,' I ses, 'do it an' welcome—if you can, but I expect my head's a bit too strong for you.'"

"And it was, sir, I'll bet," said the man who had been so candid with Bill.

"He tried everything," said the skipper, "then he give it up; but he's coming aboard to-night, so any of you that likes can come down the cabin and be mesmerised free."

"Why can't he do it on deck?" said the mate, rising from the hatches and stretching his gigantic form.

"'Cos he must have artificial light, George," said the skipper. "He lets me a little bit into the secret, you know, an' he told me he likes to have the men a bit dazed-like first."

Voices sounded from the wharf, and the night-watchman appeared piloting Captain Zingall to the schooner. The crew noticed that he came aboard quite like any other man, descending the ladder with even more care than usual. He was a small man, of much dignity, with light grey

eyes which had been so strained by the exercise of his favourite hobby that they appeared to be starting from his head. He chatted agreeably about freights for some time, and then, at his brother skipper's urgent entreaty, consented to go below and give them a taste of his awful powers.

At first he was not very successful. The men stared at the discs he put into their hands until their eyes ached, but for some time without effect. Bill was the first to yield, and to the astonishment of his friends passed into a soft magnetic slumber, from which he emerged to perform the usual idiotic tricks peculiar to mesmerised subjects.

"It's wonderful what power you 'ave over 'em," said Captain Bradd, respectfully.

Captain Zingall smiled affably. "At the present moment," he said, "that man is my unthinkin' slave, an' whatever I wish him to do he does. Would any of you like him to do anything?"

"Well, sir," said one of the men, "'e owes me 'arf a dollar, an' I think it would be a 'ighly interestin' experiment if you could get 'im to pay me. If anything 'ud make me believe in mesmerism, that would."

"An' he owes me eighteenpence, sir," said another seaman, eagerly.

"One at a time," said the first speaker, sharply.

"An' 'e's owed me five shillin's since I don't know when," said the cook, with dishonest truthfulness.

Captain Zingall turned to his subject. "You owe that man half a crown," he said, pointing, "that one eighteenpence, and that one five shillings. Pay them."

In the most matter-of-fact way in the world, Bill groped in his pockets, and, producing some greasy coins, paid the sums mentioned, to the intense delight of everybody concerned.

"Well, I'm blest," said the mate, staring. "I thought mesmerism was all rubbish. Now bring him to again."

"But don't tell 'im wot 'e's been doin'," said the cook.

Zingall with a few passes brought his subject round, and with a subdued air he took his place with the others.

"What'd it feel like, Bill?" asked Joe. "Can you remember what you did?"

Bill shook his head.

"Don't try to," said the cook, feelingly.

"I should like to put you under the influence," said Zingall, eyeing the mate.

"You couldn't," said that gentleman, promptly.

"Let me try," said Zingall, persuasively.

"Do," said the skipper, "to oblige me, George."

"Well, I don't mind much," said the mate, hesitating; "but no making *me* give those chaps money, you know."

"No, no," said Zingall.

"Wot does 'e mean? Give the chaps money?" said Bill, turning with a startled air to the cook.

"I dunno," said the cook, airily. "Just watch 'im, Bill," he added, anxiously.

But Bill had something better to do, and feeling in his pockets hurriedly strove to balance his cash account. It was impossible to do anything else while he was doing it, and the situation became so strained and his language so weird that the skipper was compelled in the interests of law and morality to order him from the cabin.

"Look at me," said Zingall to the mate after quiet had been restored.

The mate complied, and everybody gazed spellbound at the tussle for supremacy between brute force and occult science. Slowly, very slowly, science triumphed, being interrupted several times by the blood-curdling threats of Bill, as they floated down the companion-way. Then the mate suddenly lurched forward, and would have fallen but that strong hands caught him and restored him to his seat.

"I'm going to show you something now, if I can," said Zingall, wiping his brow; "but I don't

know how it'll come off, because I'm only a beginner at this sort of thing, and I've never tried this before. If you don't mind, cap'n, I'm going to tell him he is Cap'n Bradd, and that you are the mate."

"Go ahead," said the delighted Bradd.

Captain Zingall went ahead full speed. With a few rapid passes he roused the mate from his torpor and fixed him with his glittering eye.

"You are Cap'n Bradd, master o' this ship," he said, slowly.

"Ay, ay," said the mate, earnestly.

"And that's your mate, George," said Zingall, pointing to the deeply interested Bradd.

"Ay, ay," said the mate again, with a sigh.

"Take command, then," said Zingall, leaving him with a satisfied air and seating himself on the locker.

The mate sat up and looked about him with an air of quiet authority.

"George," he said, turning suddenly to the skipper with a very passable imitation of his voice.

"Sir," said the skipper, with a playful glance at Zingall.

"A friend o' mine named Cap'n Zingall is coming aboard to-night," said the mate, slowly.

"Get a little whisky for him out o' my state-room."

"Ay, ay, sir," said the amused Bradd.

"Just a little in the bottom of the bottle'll do," continued the mate; "don't put more in, for he drinks like a fish."

"I never said such a thing, cap'n," said Bradd, in an agitated whisper. "I never thought o' such a thing."

"No, I know you wouldn't," said Zingall, who was staring hard at a nearly empty whisky bottle on the table.

"And don't leave your baccy pouch lying about, George," continued the mate, in a thrilling whisper.

The skipper gave a faint, mirthless little laugh, and looked at him uneasily.

"If ever there was a sponger for baccy, George, it's him," said the mate, in a confidential whisper.

Captain Zingall, who was at that very moment filling his pipe from the pouch which the skipper had himself pushed towards him, laid it carefully on the table again, and gazing steadily at his friend, took out the tobacco already in his pipe and replaced it. In the silence which ensued the mate took up the whisky bottle, and pouring the contents into a tumbler, added a little water, and drank it with relish.

He leaned back on the locker and smacked his lips. There was a faint laugh from one of the

crew, and looking up smartly he seemed to be aware for the first time of their presence. "What are you doin' down here?" he roared. "What do you want?"

"Nothin', sir," said the cook. "Only we thought——"

"Get out at once," vociferated the mate, rising.

"Stay where you are," said the skipper, sharply.

"George!" said the mate, in the squeaky voice in which he chose to personate the skipper.

"Bring him round, Zingall," said the skipper, irritably. "I've had enough o' this. I'll let 'im know who's who."

With a confident smile Zingall got up quietly from the locker, and fixed his terrible gaze on the mate. The mate fell back and gazed at him open-mouthed.

"Who the devil are you staring at?" he demanded, rudely.

Still holding him with his gaze, Zingall clapped his hands together, and stepping up to him blew strongly in his face. The mate, with a perfect scream of rage, picked him up by the middle, and dumping him heavily on the floor, held him there and worried him.

"Help!" cried Zingall, in a smothered voice; "take him off!"

"Why don't you bring him round?" yelled the

skipper, excitably. "What's the good of playing with him?"

Zingall's reply, which was quite irrelevant, consisted almost entirely of impious reflections upon his friend's understanding.

"Blow in 'is face agin, sir," said the cook, bending down kindly.

"Take him off!" yelled Zingall; "he's killing me!"

The skipper flew to the assistance of his friend, but the mate, who was of gigantic strength and stature, simply backed, and crushed him against a bulkhead. Then, as if satisfied, he released the crestfallen Zingall, and stood looking at him.

"Why—don't—you—bring—him—round?" panted the skipper.

"He's out of my control," said Zingall rising nimbly to his feet. "I've heard of such cases before. I'm only new at the work, you know, but I dare say, in a couple of years' time——"

The skipper howled at him, and the mate suddenly alive again to the obnoxious presence of the crew, drove them up the companion ladder, and pursued them to the forecabin.

"This is a pretty kettle o' fish," said Bradd, indignantly. "Why don't you bring him round?"

"Because I can't," said Zingall, shortly. "It'll have to wear off."

"Wear off!" repeated the skipper.

"He's under a delusion now," said Zingall, "an' o' course I can't say how long it'll last, but whatever you do don't cross him in any way."

"Oh, don't cross him," repeated Bradd, with sarcastic inflection, "and you call yourself a mesmerist."

Zingall drew himself up with a little pride. "Well, see what I've done," he said. "The fact is, I was charged full with electricity when I came aboard, and he's got it all now. It's left me weak, and until my will wears off him he's captain o' this ship."

"And what about me?" said Bradd.

"You're the mate," said Zingall, "and mind, for your own sake, you act up to it. If you don't cross him I haven't any doubt it'll be all right, but if you do he'll very likely murder you in a fit of frenzy, and—he wouldn't be responsible. Good-night."

"You're not going?" said Bradd, clutching him by the sleeve.

"I am," said the other. "He seems to have took a violent dislike to me, and if I stay here it'll only make him worse."

He ran lightly up on deck, and avoiding an ugly rush on the part of the mate, who had been

listening, sprang on to the ladder and hastily clambered ashore.

The skipper, worn and scared, looked up as the bogus skipper came below.

"I'm going to bed, George," said the mate, staring at him. "I feel a bit heavy. Give me a call just afore high water."

"Where are you goin' to sleep?" demanded the skipper.

"Goin' to sleep?" said the mate, "why, in my state-room, to be sure."

He took the empty bottle from the table, and opening the door of the state-room, closed it in the face of its frenzied owner, and turned the key in the lock. Then he leaned over the berth, and, cramming the pillow against his mouth, gave way to his feelings until he was nearly suffocated.

Any idea that the skipper might have had of the healing effects of sleep were rudely dispelled when the mate came on deck next morning, and found that they had taken the schooner out without arousing him. His delusion seemed to be stronger than ever, and pushing the skipper from the wheel he took it himself, and read him a short and sharp lecture on the virtues of obedience.

"I know you're a good sort, George Smith," he said, leniently, "nobody could wish for a better, but while I'm master of this here ship it don't

become you to take things upon yourself in the way you do."

"But you don't understand," said the skipper, trying to conquer his temper. "Now look me in the eye, George."

"Who are you calling George?" said the mate, sharply.

"Well, look me in the eye, then," said the skipper, waiving the point.

"I'll look at you in a way you won't like in a minute," said the mate, ferociously.

"I want to explain the position of affairs to you," said the skipper. "Do you remember Cap'n Zingall what was aboard last night?"

"Little dirty-looking man what kept staring at me?" demanded the mate.

"Well, I don't know about 'is being dirty," said the skipper, "but that's the man. Do you know what he did to you, Geo——"

"Eh!" said the mate, sharply.

"He mesmerised you," said the skipper, hastily. "Now keep quite calm. You say you're Benjamin Bradd, master o' this vessel, don't you?"

"I do," said the mate. "Let me hear anybody say as I ain't."

"Yesterday," said the skipper, plucking up courage and speaking very slowly and impressively, "you were George Smith, the mate, but

my friend, Captain Zingall, mesmerised you and made you think you were me."

"I see what it is," said the mate, severely. "You've been drinking; you've been up to my whisky."

"Call the crew up and ask 'em, then," said Bradd, desperately.

"Call 'em up yourself, you lunatic," said the mate, loudly enough for the men to hear. "If anybody dares to play the fool with me I won't leave a whole bone in his body, that's all."

In obedience to the summons of Captain Bradd the crew came up, and being requested by him to tell the mate that he was the mate, and that he was at present labouring under a delusion, stood silently nudging each other and eyeing him uneasily.

"Well," said the latter at length, "why don't you speak and tell George he's gone off his 'ead a bit?"

"It ain't nothing to do with us, sir," said Bill, very respectfully.

"But, damn it all, man," said the mate, taking a mighty grip of his collar, "you know I'm the cap'n, don't you?"

"O' course I do, sir," said Bill.

"There you are, George," said the mate, releasing him, and turning to the frantic Bradd: "you

hear that? Now, look here, you listen to me. Either you've been drinking, or else your 'ead's gone a little bit off. You go down and turn in, and if you don't give me any more of your nonsense I'll overlook it for this once."

He ordered the crew forward again, and being desirous of leaving some permanent mark of his command on the ship, had the galley fresh painted in red and blue, and a lot of old stores, which he had vainly condemned when mate, thrown overboard. The skipper stood by helplessly while it was done, and then went below of his own accord and turned in, as being the only way to retain his sanity, or, at any rate, the clearness of head which he felt to be indispensable at this juncture.

Time, instead of restoring the mate to his senses, only appeared to confirm him in his folly, and the skipper, after another attempt to convince him, let things drift, resolving to have him put under restraint as soon as they got to port.

They reached Tidescroft in the early afternoon, but before they entered the harbour the mate, as though he had had some subtle intuition that this would be his last command, called the crew to him, and read them a touching little homily upon their behaviour when they should land. He warned them of public-houses and other dangers, and reminded them affectingly of their duties as

husbands and fathers. "Always go home to your wife and children, my lads," he continued with some emotion, "as I go home to mine."

"Why, he ain't got none," whispered Bill, staring.

"Don't be a fool, Bill," said the cook, "he means the cap'n's. Don't you see he's the cap'n now."

It was as clear as noonday, and the agitation of the skipper—a perfect Othello in his way—was awful. He paced the deck incessantly, casting fretful glances ashore, and, as the schooner touched the side of the quay, sprang on to the bulwarks and jumped ashore. The mate watched him with an ill-concealed grin, and then, having made the vessel snug, went below to strengthen himself with a drop of the skipper's whisky for the crowning scene of his play. He came on deck again, and, taking no heed of the whispers of the crew, went ashore.

Meantime, Captain Bradd had reached his house, and was discussing the situation with his astonished spouse. She pooh-poohed the idea of the police and the medical faculty as being likely to cause complications with the owners, and, despite the remonstrances of her husband, insisted upon facing the mate alone.

"Now you go in the kitchen," she said, looking from the window. "Here he comes. You see how I'll settle him."

The skipper looked out of the window and saw the unhappy victim of Captain Zingall slowly approaching. His wife drew him away, and, despite his remonstrances, pushed him into the next room and closed the door.

She sat on the sofa calmly sewing, as the mate, whose hardihood was rapidly failing him, entered. Her manner gave him no assistance whatever, and coming sheepishly in he took a chair.

"I've come home," he said at last.

"So I see, Ben," said Mrs. Bradd, calmly.

"He's told her," said the mate to himself.

"Children all right?" he inquired, after another pause.

"Yes," said Mrs. Bradd, simply. "Little Joe's boots are almost off his feet, though."

"Ah," said the mate, blankly.

"I've been waiting for you to come, Ben," said Mrs. Bradd after a pause. "I want you to change a five-pound note Uncle Dick gave me."

"Can't do it," said the mate, briefly. The absence of Captain Bradd was disquieting to a bashful man in such a position, and he had looked forward to a stormy scene which was to bring him to his senses again.

"Show me what you've got," said Mrs. Bradd, leaning forward.

The mate pulled out an old leather purse and

counted the contents, two pounds and a little silver.

"There isn't five pounds there," said Mrs. Bradd, "but I may as well take last week's housekeeping while you've got it out."

Before the mate could prevent her she had taken the two pounds and put it in her pocket. He looked at her placid face in amazement, but she met his gaze calmly and drummed on the table with her thimble.

"No, no, I want the money myself," said the mate at last. He put his hands to his head and began to prepare for the grand transformation scene. "My head's gone," he said, in a gurgling voice. "What am I doing here? Where am I?"

"Good gracious, what's the matter with the man?" said Mrs. Bradd, with a scream. She snatched up a bowl of flowers and flung the contents in his face as her husband burst into the room. The mate sprang to his feet, spluttering.

"What am I doing here, Cap'n Bradd?" he said in his usual voice.

"He's come round!" said Bradd, ecstatically. "He's come round. Oh, George, you have been playing the fool. Don't you know what you've been doing?"

The mate shook his head, and stared round the room. "I thought we were in London," he said,

putting his hand to his head. "You said Cap'n Zingall was coming aboard. How did we get here? Where am I?"

In a hurried, breathless fashion the skipper told him, the mate regarding him the while with a stare of fixed incredulity.

"I can't understand it," he said at length. "My mind's a perfect blank."

"A perfect blank," said Mrs. Bradd, cheerfully. It might have been accident, but she tapped her pocket as she spoke, and the outwitted mate bit his lip as he realised his blunder, and turned to the door. The couple watched him as he slowly passed up the street.

"It's most extraordinary," said the skipper; "the most extraordinary case I ever heard of."

"So it is," said his wife, "and what's more extraordinary still for you, Ben, you're going to church on Sunday, and what's more extraordinary even than that, you are going to put two golden sovereigns in the plate."