CLASSICS TO GO

OCEAN TRAMPS

H. DE VERE STACPOOLE

OCEAN TRAMPS

H. De Vere Stacpoole

CHAPTER I.
BUD AND BILLY

I

The moon was rising over Papaleete, over the Pacific Ocean and the bay where the anchor lights were spilling their amber on the water, over the palm trees and flame trees and the fragrant town from which, now clear, now sheltered by the sea wind, came the voices of girls singing to the tune of Hawaiian guitars.

Mixed with the breathing of the tepid wind in the trees, the voices of the girls and the tune of the guitars, came the murmur and sigh of the beach, the last note wanted, the last touch, to a scene of absolutely absurd and impossible loveliness, amidst which, by the water's edge, casting a thirty-foot shadow on the hard white sand, Mr. Harman was walking, blind to the Eden around him.

Billy was on the beach in more senses than one. He was down and out, without friends, without food, without drinks, and almost without tobacco, starving in the midst of plenty, for in Papaleete, if you are a cadger, you may live for ever on the fat of the land, and not only live, but love, drink, smoke, dream under tree shadows and bathe in a sea warm with perpetual summer.

But that was not Billy's way. This gig, four-square, blue-eyed man out of San Francisco could do anything but cadge. It wasn't a question of morals, it was more a question of simplicity.

Billy's morals had mostly been forgotten by Nature, or maybe they had been extracted by San Franciscans and shore-along toughs from Valparaiso up, anyhow and however that may be, the resulting vacuum seemed to have

filled itself up with simplicity, not stupidity, just simplicity. The simplicity of a child that allowed him to go into the most desperate and questionable deals in ward politics and doubtful sea practice, wide-eyed, blue-eyed, and reproaching others for their moral lapses with the unchanging formula: “It don’t pay.”

“Crooked dealing don’t pay,” said Mr. Harman after some crooked deal had failed—never before.

Yet somehow, in some extraordinary way, Billy was lovable, there was nothing mean about him, and that was maybe why he couldn’t cadge, and he had behind those blue eyes and that honest-dog looking, tanned face, a power of cool, uncalculating daring that might have landed him anywhere if he had come on a decent jumping-off place.

As he turned back along the beach, the moonlight struck a figure coming towards him. It was Davis. Fate or some strange chance had thrown Davis and Harman together on the same beach at the same time, and though there was a world of difference between their faces, forms, characters and dispositions, they were alike in this—they couldn’t cadge.

Davis was a lean slip of a man with a chin tuft and a terrific past about which he was quite open. Never satisfied or driven by the craze of adventure, he had overrun two or three fortunes and had beached at Papaleete from a B.P. boat which had picked him up from a trading station down somewhere in the Paumotus, and was glad to get rid of him on the terms of a twenty-dollar loan. The captain laughed when Davis had entered the loan in a pocket-book, but it would be returned with interest some time or another if the borrower lived. That was Davis.

The one remarkable thing about this plain-looking man with the chin tuft and the flat cheek-bones was his quietude, nothing hurried or flurried him. That was perhaps the secret

behind his shooting. He was more than a good shot with a revolver. He was inevitable.

“That’s done,” said Davis, coming up with the other. “Penhill and Jarvis are highballing it at the club, and their Kanakas are playing hopscotch with the hula-hula girls. What’s the matter with you? Don’t go saying you’ve got cold feet.”

“It’s not my feet,” said Mr. Harman, “but I’ve never run off with a ship before and that’s the fact, it’s not like sinkin’ her or pilin’ her. I’ve done most things, but I’ve never run off with a ship before, that’s a fact. I’ve never——”

“Oh, close up!” said Davis. “Didn’t I tell you that Penhill can’t move against us, once I get his ship out, his feet are cut off. I’m the one man living that he’s afraid of, because I’m the one man living that can put him in quod without hurting myself. This thing isn’t running off with a ship. It’s Providence.”

“How do you get at that?” asked Billy doubtfully.

“Well, look at it,” said Davis. “In he comes with the *Araya*, sees me, remembers the trick he played me, tries to pal up, gets a snub on the nose, puts it in his pocket, and then goes on the jag, him and Jarvis, leaving his schooner with a parcel of damn fool Kanakas in charge and me layin’ about dangerous. Kanakas, why they’re worse than that! Island boys that’ll take any white man’s bidding s’long as he feeds them with fried bananas. It’s lovely, that’s what it is, lovely ——” Linking his arm in that of Harman, he was walking him along the sand towards a boat beached and left almost high and dry by the ebbing tide. To the right lay the lights of the town, and almost on the beach sand the long amber glow of the lit club. Harman, walking between the beauty of Papaleete by night and the glory of the moon upon the sea, showed no sign of haste to reach the boat.

What bothered him was, not so much the turpitude of the business, as the seeming futility and madness of it, for even

in those days before wireless talked it was next to impossible to steal a ship and make good. Every port in the world is a compound eye for scrutiny, the character of a ship is inquired into as carefully as her health. Harman knew the whole business. There is a cable from Papaleete to Suva, and from Suva to ’Frisco and beyond, and to-morrow morning Penhill had only to speak and the description of the *Araya* and the two vanished beachcombers would be in the hands of the San Francisco authorities before noon; before night all American seaboard ports would be closed to the *Araya*, and by next day at noon, the British Board of Trade would seal Australia and Hong Kong. Chinese ports would be notified in “due course.”

With every bolthole blocked, the *Araya* might still live free for years pottering among the less-known islands, they might even pile her on some rock and make their escape in the boats, but what would be the use of all that? No, the whole thing would have been futile and ridiculous but for the one thing that made it possible—Penhill. Penhill daren’t prosecute. The schooner was his, and he was the only man who could move, and he was tied. Davis said so. Davis had given details which made the matter clear to Harman, yet still he hesitated.

They had reached the boat. It was the *Araya’s*, left confidingly on a beach where no man ever stole boats; there were canoes to be had in plenty, but Davis preferred the boat, he had reasons.

Harman, resting his hand on the gunnel, looked about him for a moment at the deserted beach, still undecided.

His dunnage left at the house of a native woman where he had lodged was unprocurable, he owed a bill. As he stood considering this and other matters, from the groves by the beach diffusing itself through the night, came the voice of a native singing a love song, tender, plaintive, old as

Papaleete and focussing in itself all the softness and beauty that the active soul of Billy Harman had learnt to hate.

He seized the gunnel of the boat and assisted by Davis, shoved her off.

Out on the moonlit water, the town showed up fairylike, its lights twinkling amidst the moving foliage. Away on Huahine, rising steeply like a wall of velvety blackness to the stars, the lights of tiny villages showed like fireflies come to rest; fronting and beneath all this mystery and loveliness showed the definite amber glow of the club where Penhill and Jarvis were drinking themselves blind. That was Papaleete.

No port authorities, no harbour police, no sign of life but the anchor lights of a brigantine and a bêche-de-mer boat—that also was Papaleete. On board the *Araya* the anchor watch was snoring; kicked awake and rubbing its eyes, it jumped to the voice of white authority. The returned boat was a certificate that the new white fellow mas'rs were representatives of white fellow mas'r Penhill and Penhill's character was an antidote to loving inquiries.

"They're a sprightly lot," said Harman as the main boom swung to starboard and the great sail filled, tugging at the sheet. "Monkeys to jump an' no tongues to ask questions."

"That's Penhill," said Davis, "he's milled them into brute beasts, not that they wanted much milling, but there you are, he done his best and I reckon we're profiting by it."

II

Four days later they had cut Capricorn, discovered the sailing qualities of the *Araya*, and taken stock of ship and cargo. There was also Penhill's gold watch and eighteen hundred dollars of ship's money. Davis calculated it all up and said he reckoned that the account between him and Penhill was clear.

He said he reckoned that Penhill had deserved what he got and Harman concurred.

They sat in judgment on Penhill and brought him in guilty. Harman almost felt virtuous.

“I reckon he’ll learn it don’t pay to run crooked,” said he. “I’ve took notice that them sort of chaps always gets scragged in the end. What’s this you said he did you out of?”

“Seventy dollars, and left me on the beach,” replied Davis.

“Same as we’ve done him,” said Harman. “No, it don’t pay. It don’t pay no-how.”

South at first, then due west they made past St. Felix and heading for Caldera on the Chili coast. But Caldera was not Davis’ objective. Buenodiaz, with its land-locked harbour, its lazy ways, its pretty women and negligent Port authorities, was his idea, and smoking Penhill’s cigars under a blazing sun whilst the *Araya* snored along through a Reckitts’-blue sea, he expounded matters to Billy Harman.

“Sell her on the hoof,” said Davis, “innards, outwards, hump, tail and all, that’s my idea. There are ten cent mail boats that’ll take us anywhere up or down the coast, Valparaiso for choice, once we’ve got the dollars in our pockets; there’s big things to be done in Chili with a few dollars by fellows that know the ropes.”

Mr. Harman concurred.

“I’ve been done there myself,” said he, “by chaps that hadn’t cents in their pockets, let alone dollars. Skinned alive I was of every buck to my name in a faro joint at Cubra, and me winning all the time. Hadn’t got half-way down the street to my ship with a pocket full of silver dollars when I put my hand in my pocket and found nothing but stones, filled me up they had with pebbles off the beach, playin’ guitars all the time and smokin’ cigarettes and pretendin’ to hasty-manyana.

“Well, I’m not against landin’ this hooker on them, but I tell you, Bud, it’s my experience, before we comes to close grips with them we’ll be wantin’ to fix our skins on with seccotine.”

“You leave them to me,” said Bud Davis.

“I’ve known the insides and outsides of Chinks,” went on the other, “and I’ve had dealin’s with Greeks up Susun way, oyster boat Levantines will take your back teeth whiles you’re tellin’ them you don’t want buyin’ their dud pearls, but these chaps are in their own class. Jim Satan, that’s what they are, and there’s not a ’Frisco Jew sellin’ dollar watches can walk round the brim of their sombreros.”

“You leave them to me,” said Bud, and the *Araya* snored on.

On and on with a gentle roll over the wind-speckled blue of the endless swell, lifting nothing but ocean, and over ocean vast dawns that turned to torrid noons and died in sunsets like the blaze of burning worlds; till one morning the cry of the Kanaka look-out answered the cry of a great gull flying with them and there before them stood the coast boiling where the sun was breaking above it and stretching to north and south of the sun blaze, solid, remote, in delicately pencilled hills dying from sight in the blue distance. Davis, who knew the coast, altered the helm. They were forty miles or so to the north of their right position, and it was not till afternoon that the harbour of Buenodiaz lay before them with the flame trees showing amidst the flat-topped houses and the blue water lapping the deserted mole. The quay by the mole was deserted and La Plazza, the public square, distinctly to be seen from the sea, lifted slightly as it was by the upward trend of the ground, was empty. Through the glass the houses showed, their green shutters tightly shut and not a soul on the verandas.

It was almost as though some Pelée had erupted and covered the place with the lava of pure desolation clear as

glass.

“Taking their siestas,” said Davis. “Keep her as she goes. I know this harbour and it’s all good holding ground, beyond that buoy.”

Harman at the wheel nodded, and Davis went forward to superintend the fellows getting the anchor ready while the *Araya*, her canvas quivering to the last of the dying breeze, stole in past an old rusty torpedo boat, past a grain ship that seemed dead, on and on, dropping her anchor at least two cable lengths from the mole.

The rattle of the anchor chain made Buenodiaz open one eye. A boat slipped out from the mole. It was the Port Doctor.

Buenodiaz flings its slops into the street and its smells are traditional, but it has a holy horror of imported diseases and its Port Doctor never sleeps—even in siesta time.

With the Doctor came the Customs, smelling of garlic, with whom Davis conversed in the language of the natives, while Harman attended to the liquor and cigars.

The cargo of the *Araya* was copra and turtle shell. Davis had figured and figured over the business, and reckoned he’d take four thousand dollars for the lot.

“Ain’t like cotton,” said he, “don’t know what it’s worth, but I’ll put it at four thousand and not a cent under, at four thousand we shan’t be losers.”

“Well, I reckon we wouldn’t be losers at four cents,” said Harman, “seein’ how we got it, and how about the hooker?”

“Five thousand,” said Davis, “and that’s not half her worth. Nine thousand the lot and I’ll throw the chronometer in.”

“Have you fixed what to do with the Kanakas?” asked the other. “There’s eight of them and they’ve all mouths.”

“There’s never a Kanaka yet could talk Spanish,” said Davis, “and I don’t propose to learn them, but I’ll give them

fifty dollars apiece—maybe—if I make good. But there's time enough to think of that when we have the dollars."

It was the second day after their arrival at Buenodiaz, the sun was setting and the sound of the band playing on La Plazza came across the water; mixed with the faint strains of the band came the sounds of a guitar from one of the ships in the anchorage, and in lapses of the breeze from the sea the scent of the town stole to them, a bouquet co-mingled from drains, flowers, garlic, earth and harbour compounds.

Harman was in one of his meditative fits.

"That chap you brought aboard to-day," said he, "the big one with the whiskers, was he Alonez or was it the little 'un?"

"The big one," said Davis. "He's the chap that'll take the cargo off us and the little one will take the ship—I haven't said a word of the price, haven't said I was particularly wanting to sell, but I've given them a smell of the toasted cheese, and if I know anything of anything, they're setting on their hind legs now in some café smoothing their whiskers and making ready to pounce. They're partners, they own all that block of stores on the Calle San Pedro, and the little one does the shipping business. He's Portuguese, pure. Pereira's his name. I'm going up to his house to-night to talk business."

"Well," said Harman, "if he's going to buy, he's got the specifications, he's been over her from the truck to the lazarette, and I thought he'd be pullin' the nails out of her to see what they were like. When are you goin'?"

"Eight," replied Davis, and at eight o'clock, amidst the usual illuminations and fireworks with which Buenodiaz bedecks herself on most nights, he went, leaving Harman to keep ship. He returned at twelve o'clock and found Harman in his bunk snoring. At breakfast next morning he told of his visit. He had done no business in particular beyond

mentioning the outside price that he could take for the *Araya* should he care to sell her. Mrs. Pereira and her daughter had been there and the girl was a peach.

Harman absorbed this news without interest, merely reminding the other that they weren't "dealin' in fruit," but as two more days added themselves together producing nothing but church processions, brass bands and fireworks, Mr. Harman fell out of tune with himself and the world and the ways of this "dam garlic factory." Davis was acting strangely, nearly always ashore and never returning till midnight. He said the deal was going through, but that it took time, that they weren't selling a mustang, that he wouldn't be hustled and that Harman, if he didn't like waiting, had better go and stick his head in the harbour.

Harman closed up, but that night he accompanied Davis ashore, and instead of playing roulette at the little gambling shop in La Plazza, he hung around the Pereiras' house in Assumption Street listening and watching in the moonlight. He heard the tune of a guitar and a girl's voice singing La Paloma, then came a great silence that lasted an hour and a half, and then came Davis. Hidden in a dark corner, Billy saw that he was not alone. A girl was with him, come out to bid him good-night. She was short, dark and lovely, but the look of adoration on her face as she turned it up for a kiss, left Harman quite cold.

Down by-lanes and cut-throat alleys he made his way running, got to the mole before the other and was rowed off in the same boat. On board he invited the other down below and down below he exploded.

"I ain't wantin' to interfere with any man's diversions," said Mr. Harman. "I ain't no prude, women is women, and business is business, do you get what I'm meanin'? I saw you. I ain't accusin' you of nuthin'—but bein' a fool. Us with a stole ship on our backs and Penhill feelin' for us and you playin' the goat with Pereira's daughter. What kind of deal

do you expect to make and a woman hangin’ on to it with her teeth. You needn’t go denyin’ of it. I saw you.”

The male and female run through all things, even partnerships, and in the Harman-Davis syndicate it was Harman who wore the skirts. Davis could not get a word in till the other had worked himself free of his indignation and the subject. Then said Davis: “If you’ll shut your beastly head, I’ll maybe be able to stuff some sense into it. What were you talking about, selling the schooner? It’s sold.”

“Well,” said Harman, “that’s news, and what’s the price, may I ask?”

“Five thousand, and five thousand for the trade, ten thousand dollars, the whole sum to be paid on Friday next.”

“Have you a bit of writin’?” asked Harman, who possessed the French peasant’s instincts for stamped paper.

“I’ve got their cheque,” said Davis, “post dated for next Friday, but I’m not bothering about the money, for the ship and cargo, it doesn’t matter a hill of beans to me whether they pay ten thousand dollars or five. I’ve struck a bigger thing than that. What would you say to half a million dollars?”

“I don’t know,” replied the ingenuous Harman. “I only know chaps generally begin to make asses of themselves when they talk about millions of dollars. It’s my opinion no man ever came out of the big end of the horn with the million dollars in his hand he’d gone in to fetch at the little. Most of the million-dollar men I’ve heard of have started as newsies with their toes stickin’ through their boots—but go on, what was you sayin’?”

“I’m saying I’ve a big thing in sight,” replied the exasperated Davis, “and I’d be a lot surer of it if I felt I hadn’t such a fool partner. It’s this, I’m right into the cockles of the heart of that family, and I’ve got the news through my left ear that there’s trouble in Santiago, that Diaz is going to skip and that a million dollars in gold bars are

coming down to the coast. Diaz is taking his movables with him, and he's gutted the Treasury unknown to the chaps that are moving to shoot him out. He's about sick of the presidency and wants to get away and lead a quiet life."

"I see," said Harman. "That's plain enough, but where do we stand?"

"Well," said Davis, "there's a million dollars' worth of gold bars moving down to the coast here and there's us just come in. Don't it look like Providence? Don't it look like as if there's going to be a conjunction?"

"It do," said Mr. Harman meditatively, "but I'm dashed if I see how we're to conjunct on the evidence you've handed in—but you've got more up your sleeve—pull it out."

"It's not much," said Davis, "only the girl. She's going to keep us wise. I told her I might be able to do a deal with Diaz if I knew where and when he was shipping off the boodle, and she's going to let me know. The Pereiras are all in the business same as furniture-removing chaps, they're doing the move for Diaz, and he's using one of their ships. D'you see? See where we come in, nothing to do but watch and wait with the girl for our eyes and ears—then pounce—How? I don't know, but we'll do it."

"That girl," said Mr. Harman after a moment's silence, "she seems pretty gone on you."

Davis laughed.

"Ain't you gone on her?"

Davis laughed again. Then he opened a locker and helped himself to a drink.

Harman's morals, as I have hinted before, were the least conspicuous part of his mental make-up, but he was not without sentiment of a sort. At sing-songs he had been known to sniff over "The Blind Boy," a favourite song of his, and though his ideal of female beauty leant towards sloe-black eyes and apple-red cheeks (shiny or not didn't matter), beauty in distress appealed to him.

The cold-blooded blackguardliness of Davis almost shocked him for a moment—making a girl love him like that just to use her as a spy on her family! The upright man in the soul of Billy Harman, the upright man who had never yet managed somehow to get on his feet, humped his back and tried to rise, but he had half a million dollars on top of him. He moved in his chair uneasily, and refilled his pipe. But all he said was: “Tell us about them gold bars.”

Davis told. A peon runner had come in that afternoon with a chit for Pereira saying that the mules, eight in number, bearing the stuff, would reach Buenodiaz by night-time of the following day.

“The stuff will be shipped to-morrow night, then?” said Harman.

“Well, you don’t think they’d go leaving it on the beach,” replied Davis.

“Didn’t you get out of her what ship they were taking it off on?” asked Harman.

“No,” said Davis, “I didn’t, she don’t know herself, but she’s going to find out.”

“Bud,” said Harman, “give us the straight tip, I’m not wantin’ to prod into your ‘amoors,’ but how far have you nobbled her into this business?”

“Well, as you ask me, I’ll tell you,” replied Bud. “She’s fell into it head first, and up to the heels of her boots, given me the whole show and location all but the name of the hooker which she don’t know yet.”

“You mean to say she’s workin’ for you to collar the stuff?”

“Yep.”

“But where does she come in?”

“She’s coming with us if we can pull off the deal.”

“Oh, Lord!” said Harman. “A petticut—I knew there must be some fly in the ’intment—it was too good to be true. A million dollars rollin’ round waitin’ to be took and a petticut

—I’ve never known one that didn’t mess a job it was wrapped up in.”

“It’s a million to one it don’t come off,” said Davis, removing his boots before turning in, “but there’s just one chance, and that’s her.”

Next morning Mr. Harman did not go ashore. He spent his time fishing over the side, fishing and smoking and dreaming of all sorts of different ways of spending dollars. Now he was rolling round ’Frisco in a carriage, and a boiled shirt with a diamond solitaire in it, calling at the Palatial for drinks. Now he was in the train of quality eastward bound for N’York, smoking a big cigar. He did not delude himself that the deal would come off, but that didn’t matter a bit. The essence of dreams is unreality. There was a chance.

Davis went ashore about eleven o’clock, and did not return till two in the afternoon. When he came back he was a different man. He seemed younger and brighter, and even better dressed, though he had not changed his clothes. Harman, watching him row up to the ship, noticed the difference in him even before he came on board.

He swept him down to the cabin, and before letting him speak, poured out drinks.

“I see it in your mug,” said Harman. “Here, swaller that before handin’ out the news. Cock yourself on the bunk side. Well, what’s the odds now?”

“Twenty to one on,” said Davis, “or a hundred—it’s all the same. It’s as good as done. Bo, we got it.”

“Don’t say!” said Billy.

“Got it, saddle and bridle an’ pedigree and all. She’s given it all in and to-night’s the night.”

“Give us the yarn,” said the other.

“There’s nothing to it; simple as shop-lifting. The stuff will be down at the coast here about dark; it will be taken off soon as it arrives and shipped on board the *Douro*. She’s lying over there, and I’ll point her out to you when we go up.

Then, when the stuff is aboard, she'll put out, but not till sun up. They don't like navigating those outlying reefs in the dark, moon or no."

"Yes," said Harman.

"Well," said Davis, "our little game is to wait till the stuff is aboard, row off, take the Douro, and push out with her. You and me and eight Kanakas ought to do it, there's no guardship, and the fellows on the *Douro* won't put up much of a fight. You see, they're not on the fighting lay; it's the steal softly business with them, and I reckon they'll cave at the first shout."

"Where does the girl come in?" asked Billy, after a moment's pause.

"There's a place called Coimbra seven mile south down the coast," said Davis, fetching a chart from the locker. "Here it is. That point. I've only to put out a blue light and she'll put off in a boat. Pereira's brother lives down at Coimbra, and she's going to-night to stay with him. She'll be on the watch out from one on to sunrise, and she'll easy get taken out in one of the night fishermen's boats."

To all of which Mr. Harman replied, "Damn petticuts!" He was biting his nails. He was no feminist. That is to say, he had an inborn conviction that women tended to spoil shows other than tea parties and such like. Why couldn't this rotten girl have kept out of the business? What did she want coming along for? Seeing that she was letting down her people for the love of Davis, it seemed pretty evident that she was coming along also for the love of him, but Harman was not in the mood to consider things from the girl's point of view.

However, there was no use complaining. With the chance of a million dollars for nothing, one must expect a few thorns, so he kept his head closed whilst Davis, taking him on deck, drew a lightning sketch of the plan of campaign.

First they had to shift the *Araya's* moorings so as to get closer to the *Douro*, then they had to put the Kanakas wise, and more especially Taute the cook and leader, then they had just to lay low, wait for midnight, and pounce.

"Righto," said Mr. Harman, "and if we're shiftin' moorin's, let's shift now."

They did, not drawing too noticeably near the *Douro*, but near enough to keep watch on her. Near enough to count the sun-blisters on her side with a glass. She was of smaller tonnage than the *Araya* and ketch-rigged. She had never been a beauty, and she wasn't one now; she had no charms to mellow with age.

Night had fallen on Buenodiaz, and the band on La Plazza had ceased braying. Eleven o'clock was striking. Cathedral and churches tinkling and tankling and clanging the hour; a drunken crew had just put off for the grain ship lying farther out, and silence was falling on the scene, when, whizz-bang, off went the fireworks.

"Damn the place!" cried Harman, whose nerves were on edge. "It's clangin' and prayin' and stinkin' all day and closes down only to go off in your face—some saint's day or 'nuther, I expect."

Davis said nothing. He was watching the blue and pink of bursting rockets and the fiery, fuzzy worms reflecting themselves in the harbour.

They had seen several boats stealthily approaching the *Douro*. Everything seemed going to time and the wind was steady.

An hour passed during which Buenodiaz, forgetting saints and frivolity, fell asleep, leaving the world to the keeping of the moon.

Convents, churches and cathedral were chiming midnight when the Kanakas, having crowded into the boat of the *Araya*, Davis and Harman got into the stem sheets and pushed off.

As they drew close, the *Douro*, with her anchor light burning, showed no sign of life, bow to the sea on a taut anchor chain, she rode the flooding tide, she seemed nodding to them as she pitched gently to the heave of the swell, and as they rubbed up alongside and Harman grasped the rail, he saw that the deck was clear.

“Down below, every man Jack of them,” he whispered back at Davis. “I can hear ’em snoring. Foc’s’le hatch first.”

He led the way to the foc’s’le hatch and closed it gently, turning at a stroke the foc’s’le into a prison. Then they came to the saloon hatch, stood and listened.

Not a sound.

“They’re all in the foc’s’le,” whispered Harman. “Just like Spaniards, ain’t it? No time to waste, we’ve gotta see the stuff’s here; give’s your matches.” He stepped down, followed by the other, reached the saloon, and struck a light.

Yes, the stuff was there, a sight enough to turn a stronger head than Harman’s, boxes and boxes on the floor and on the couch, evidently just brought on board and disposed of in a hurry, and all marked with the magic name: Juan Diaz.

Harman tried to lift one of them. It was not large, yet he could scarcely stir it. Then with eyes aflame and hammering hearts, they made up the companion way, closed the hatch, and, while Davis got the canvas on her, Harman stood by to knock the shackle off the anchor chain.

As town and mole and harbour dropped astern, the *Douro* close-hauled and steered by Davis, Harman standing by the steersman, saw the helm going over and found they were heading north.

“And how about pickin’ up that girl?” asked Billy, “Coimbra don’t lay this way.”

“Oh, I reckon she’ll wait,” replied Davis.

“You’re givin’ her the good-bye?”

“Seems so,” said Davis.

Hannan chuckled. Then he lit a cigar. If girls chose to fall in love and trust chaps like Davis, it wasn't his affair.

At sunrise he slipped down to see after some food. Davis heard him hammering down below, and knew that he was sampling the gold, he smiled with the full knowledge that it was there and that Billy couldn't get away with it, when up from the saloon dashed Billy.

Like a man demented, he rushed forward, opened the foc's'le hatch and shouted down it to the imprisoned Spaniards.

"Come up, you blighters," cried Mr. Harman. Then he dived down, found emptiness and returned on deck.

He held on to the rail as he faced Davis.

"Ten thousand dollars' worth of trade and ship," said Harman, "that's what we've given them for a stinkin' ketch and a couple o' hundred weight of sand. Sand an' pebbles that's what's in them boxes. You and your girls! No, you can't put back, they'd jug us for stealin' this bum boat. Take your gruel and swaller it! Why, bless your livin' innocence, the whole of that garlic factory was in it, it's my belief, from the Port Doctor up, and they'll be havin' fireworks to-night to celebrate."

Billy paused, spat into the sea.

"No," said he, turning his remarks to the universe in general. "It don't pay. Runnin' crooked don't pay—nohow."

CHAPTER II.
MANDELBAUM

What would you do were you to find yourself on a stolen sixty-ton ketch off the middle coast of Chile with a crew of Kanakas, less than ten days' provisions on board, no money to speak of, and a healthy and lively dread of touching at a Chile port?

That was the exact position of Mr. William Harman and his friend, Bud Davis, one bright morning on board the ketch *Douro* and thirty miles nor'-west of Buenodiaz—about.

The *Douro* was heading west-nor'-west, the morning was perfect, the Pacific calm, and Billy, seated on the hatch cover, was expressing the opinion that running straight was the best course to adopt in a world where reefs were frequent and sharks abundant.

"No," said he, "runnin' crooked don't pay, nohow. There ain't enough softies about to make it pay, ain't enough mugs about, as I've told you more'n once. Happy I was on Papaleete beach and then you comes along that night and says, 'Let's take Penhill's ship,' says you. 'There she lays, the *Araya*, sixty-ton schooner, and he drinkin' himself blind at the club and he can't touch us,' says you, 'for he's mortal afraid of what I know about him. It's as safe as cheeses,' says you, and off we put and out we took her—safe as cheeses, seein' Penhill couldn't touch us, weren't we?"

"Oh, close up," said Davis.

"I ain't rubbin' it in, I'm just tellin' you. Nobody couldn't touch us, and bold we put into Buenodiaz, reckonin' to sell her on the hoof, cargo and all, and she worth ten thousand dollars if she was worth a bean, and then what happens? Pereira offers to buy her, cargo and all, and while you were dickerin' with him, his daughter hands you that yarn about

the *Douro* havin’ a million dollars in bar gold on board of her, and what does we do?” Mr. Harman’s voice rose a tone or two. “We leaves ten thousand dollars’ worth of ship and cargo and rows over to this old tub, boards her, lifts the hook, cracks on sail and puts out to find nothin’ in them boxes but sand an’ pebbles—half a ton of beach, that’s what them darned turkey bustards had landed on us in swop for a schooner and cargo worth ten thousand dollars if she was piled, let alone ridin’ at her moorings in Buenodiaz harbour.”

“Well,” said Davis, “you needn’t shout it. You were in it as well as me. I guess we were both fools, but we haven’t come off empty-handed—we’ve got a ship under our feet, though we’re in a bad way, I’ll admit. Can’t you see the game that’s been played on us? This hooker is worth four thousand dollars any day in the week; they’ve let us run off with her, they set her as a trap for us, but they’ll want her back. If we put into any Chile port, we’ll be nabbed and put to work in the salt mines while these blighters will get their ship back.”

“Sure,” said Harman, “but we ain’t goin’ to.”

“How d’ye mean?”

“We ain’t goin’ to put into no Chile port.” Davis sighed, rose, went below and fetched up the top of one of the gold-boxes, then with a stump of pencil he drew a rough map of South America, indicating the appalling coast-line of Chile while the ingenuous Harman looked on open-mouthed and open-eyed.

“There you are,” said the map-maker, “a hundred thousand miles long and nothing but seaboard and there we are—nothing but the Horn to the south and Bolivia to the north, and the Bolivians are hand in fist with the Chilians, and, moreover, there’s sure to be gunboats out to look for us. That’s why I’m holding on west. We’ve got to get to sea and trust in Providence.”

“Well,” said the disgusted Harman, “I reckon if Providence is our stand-by and if it made Chile same’s your map shows her, we’re done for. There ain’t no sense in it; no, sir, there ain’t no sense in a country all foreshore stringed out like that, with scarce room for a bathin’ machine, and them yellow-bellied Bolivians at one end of it and the Horn at the other. It ain’t playin’ it fair on a man, it ain’t more nor less than a trap, that’s what I call it, it ain’t more nor less than ——”

“Oh, shut up,” said Davis, “wasting your wind. We’re in it and we’ve got to get out. Now I’ve just given you our position: we’re running near due west into open sea, with only ten days’ grub, nothing to strike but Easter Island and the mail line from ’Frisco to Montevideo. We’ve the chance to pick up grub from a ship; failing that, either we’ll eat the Kanakas or the Kanakas will eat us. I’m not being funny. How do you take it? Shall us hold on or push down to Valparaiso and take our gruel?”

“What did you say those mines were?” asked Harman.

“Which mines?”

“Those mines the Chile blighters put chaps like us to work in.”

“Salt mines.”

Mr. Harman meditated for a moment. “Well,” said he at last, “I reckon I’ll take my chance on the Kanakas.”

The *Douro* had nothing about her of any use for navigation but the rudder and the compass in the binnacle and the tell-tale compass fixed in the roof of the saloon. Pereira, when he had baited her as a trap for the unfortunates to run away with, had left nothing of value. He and the beauties working with him reckoned to get her back, no doubt, as Davis had indicated, but they knew that the fox sometimes manages to escape, carrying the trap with him, so they left nothing to grieve about except the

hull, sticks, strings, canvas, bunk bedding and a few tin plates and cooking implements.

So she was sailing pretty blind with nothing to smell at but the North Pole, to use Davis' words as he spat over the side at the leaping blue sea, while Harman, leaning beside him on the rail, concurred.

The one bright spot in the whole position was the seventeen hundred dollars or so of the *Araya's* ship money still safe in Davis' pocket.

It proved its worth some six days later when, close on the San Francisco-Montevideo mail line, they flagged a big freighter and got provisions enough to last them for a month, then, "more feeling than feet under them," to use Harman's expression, they pushed along, protected by the gods of Marco Polo, and the early navigators, untrusting in a compass that might be untrustable through blazing days and nights of stars, smoking—they had got tobacco from the freighter—yarning, lazing and putting their faith in luck.

"Anyhow," said the philosophic Harman, "we ain't got no dam chronometer to be slippin' cogs or goin' wrong, nor no glass to be floppin' about and frightenin' a chap's gizzard out of him with indications of cyclones and such, nor no charts to be thumbin', nor no sextan' to be squintin' at the sun with. I tell you, Bud, I ain't never felt freer than this. I reckon it's the same with money. Come to think of it, money's no catch, when all's said and done with, what between banks bustin' and sharks laying for a chap, not to speak of women and sich, and sore heads an' brown tongues in the morning. Money buys trouble, that's all I've ever seen of it, and it's the same all through."

"Well, that wasn't your song on the beach at Papaleete," said Davis, "and seems to me you weren't backward in making a grab for that gold at Buenodiaz."

"Maybe I wasn't," replied the other, and the conversation wilted while on the tepid wind from the dark-blue sea came

the sound of the bow wash answered by the lazy creak of block and cordage.

No longer steering west, but northward towards the line, the *Douro* brought them nights of more velvety darkness and more tremendous stars, seas more impossibly blue, till, one dawn that looked like a flock of red flamingoes escaping across an horizon of boiling gold, Bud, on the look-out, cried “Land!” and the great sun leaping up astern stripped the curtain away with a laugh and showed them coco-nut trees beyond a broken sea, and beyond the coco-nut trees a misty blue stillness incredibly wonderful and beautiful, till, in a flash, vagueness vanishing, a great lagoon blazed out, with the gulls circling above it, gold and rose and marble-flake white.

Before this miracle Harman stood unimpressed.

“We’d have been right into that darned thing in another hour if the sun hadn’t lifted,” said he, “unless maybe the noise of the reef would have fended us off—hark to it!”

They could hear it coming up against the wind, a long, low rumble like the sound of a far-off train, and now, as the *Douro* drew in, they could see the foam spouting as the flood tide raced through the passage broad before them, and showing the vast harbour of the lagoon.

“The opening seems all right,” said Davis.

“Deep enough to float a battleship,” replied the other, “and no sign of rocks in it. Shove her in.”

The *Douro* did not require any shoving. Driven by the wind and tide she came through the break like a gull, and as the great lagoon spread before them they could see the whole vast inner beach with one sweep of the eye.

It was an oval-shaped atoll, a pond, maybe, four miles from rim to rim at its broadest part, heavy here and there with groves of palm and jack-fruit trees, and showing a village of grass-roofed houses by the trees on the northern

beach, where, on the blinding white sands, canoes were lying, and from which a boat was just putting off.

“They’ve sighted us,” said Davis.

“Seems so,” replied Harman, running forward to superintend the fellows who were getting the anchor ready, while the *Douro*, shaking the wind out of her sails, lost way, and the hook fell in ten-fathom water, the rumble of the chain coming back in faintest echoes from the painted shore.

The boat drew on. It was manned by Kanakas naked as Noah, and steered by a white man. A huge man with a broad and red and bulbous face, who came on board leg over rail without a word of greeting, gazed around him with a pair of protruding light-blue eyes, and, then, finding his voice, addressed Harman:

“Where the blazes have *you* blown in from?” asked the stranger.

“Gentlemen,” said Clayton, for Clayton was his name, and they were all down below sampling a bottle of rum wangled by the genius of Harman out of the purser of the freighter, “Gentlemen, I’m not divin’ into your business. A ship in ballast without charts or chronometer, not knowing where she is, and not willin’ to say where she comes from, may be on the square and may be not.”

“We ain’t,” said Harman bluntly.

“That bein’ so,” said Clayton, quite unmoved, “we can deal without circumlocuting round the show, and get to the point, which is this: I’m wantin’ your ship.”

“Spread yourself,” said Davis, “and tip the bottle.”

Clayton obeyed.

“I’m willin’ to buy her of you,” said he, “lock, stock, barrel and Kanakas, no questions asked, no questions answered, only terms.”

“What’s your terms?” asked Harman.