1

The Finding of the Copper Cylinder

IT OCCURRED AS FAR BACK AS 15TH FEBRUARY 1850. It happened on that day that the yacht *Falcon* lay becalmed upon the ocean between the Canaries and the Madeira Islands. This yacht *Falcon* was the property of Lord Featherstone, who, being weary of life in England, had taken a few congenial friends for a winter's cruise in these southern latitudes. They had visited the Azores, the Canaries and the Madeira Islands, and were now on their way to the Mediterranean.

The wind had failed, a deep calm had succeeded and everywhere, as far as the eye could reach, the water was smooth and glassy. The yacht rose and fell at the impulse of the long ocean undulations, and the creaking of the spars sounded out a lazy accompaniment to the motion of the vessel. All around was a watery horizon, except in one place only, towards the south, where far in the distance the Peak of Tenerife rose into the air.

The profound calm, the warm atmosphere, the slow pitching of the yacht and the dull creaking of the spars all combined to lull into a state of indolent repose the people on board. Forward were the crew; some asleep, others smoking, others playing cards. At the stern were Oxenden, the intimate friend of Featherstone, and Dr Congreve, who had come in the double capacity of friend and medical attendant. These two, like the crew, were in a state of dull and languid repose. Suspended between the two masts, in an Indian hammock, lay Featherstone, with a cigar in his mouth and a novel in his hand, which he was pretending to read. The fourth member of the party, Melick, was seated near the mainmast, folding some papers in a peculiar way. His occupation at length attracted the roving eyes of Featherstone, who poked forth his head from his hammock, and said, in a sleepy voice:

"I say, Melick, you're the most energetic fellah I ever saw. By Jove! you're the only one aboard that's busy. What are you doing?"

"Paper boats," said Melick, in a businesslike tone.

"Paper boats! By Jove!" said Featherstone. "What for?"

"I'm going to have a regatta," said Melick. "Anything to kill time, you know."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Featherstone again, raising himself higher in his hammock. "That's not a bad idea. A wegatta! By Jove! Glowious! Glowious! I say, Oxenden, did you hear that?"

"What do you mean by a regatta?" asked Oxenden lazily.

"Oh, I mean a race with these paper boats. We can bet on them, you know."

At this Featherstone sat upright, with his legs dangling out of the hammock.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed again. "Betting! So we can. Do you know, Melick, old chap, I think that's a wegular piece of inspiration. A wegatta! And we can bet on the best boat."

"But there isn't any wind," said Oxenden.

"Well, you know, that's the fun of it," said Melick, who went solemnly on as he spoke, folding his paper boats. "That's the fun of it. For you see if there was a wind we should be going on ourselves, and the regatta couldn't come off, but, as it is, the water is just right. You pick out your boat, and lay your bet on her to race to some given point."

"A given point? But how can we find any?"

"Oh, easily enough; something or anything – a bubble 'll do, or we can pitch out a bit of wood."

Upon this Featherstone descended from his perch, and came near to examine the proceedings, while the other two, eager to take advantage of the new excitement, soon joined him. By this time Melick had finished his paper boats. There were four of them, and they were made of different colours, namely, red, green, yellow and white.

"I'll put these in the water," said Melick, "and then we can lay our bets on them as we choose. But first let us see if there is anything that can be taken as a point of arrival. If there isn't anything, I can pitch out a bit of wood in any direction which may seem best."

Saying this, he went to the side, followed by the others, and all looked out carefully over the water.

"There's a black speck out there," said Oxenden.

"So there is," said Featherstone. "That'll do. I wonder what it is?"

"Oh, a bit of timber," said Melick. "Probably the spar of some ship."

"It don't look like a spar," said the doctor. "It's only a round spot, like the float of some net."

"Oh, it's a spar," said Melick. "It's one end of it, the rest is under water."

The spot thus chosen was a dark, circular object, about a hundred yards away, and certainly did look very much like the extremity of some spar, the rest of which was under water. Whatever it was, however, it served well enough for their present purpose, and no one took any further interest in it, except as the point towards which the paper boats should run in their eventful race.

Melick now let himself down over the side, and placed the paper boats on the water as carefully as possible. After this the four stood watching the little fleet in silence. The water was perfectly still, and there was no perceptible wind, but there were draughts of air caused by the rise and fall of the yacht, and these affected the tiny boats. Gradually they drew apart, the green one drifting astern, the yellow one remaining under the vessel, while the red and the white were carried out in the direction where they were expected to go, with about a foot of space between them.

"Two to one on the red!" cried Featherstone, betting on the one which had gained the lead.

"Done," said Melick, promptly taking his offer.

Oxenden made the same bet, which was taken by Melick and the doctor.

Other bets were now made as to the direction which they would take, as to the distance by which the red would beat the white, as to the time which would be occupied by the race and as to fifty other things which need not be mentioned. All took part in this; the excitement rose high and the betting went on merrily. At length it was noticed that the white was overhauling the red. The excitement grew intense; the betting changed its form, but was still kept up, until at last the two paper boats seemed blended together in one dim spot which gradually faded out of sight.

It was now necessary to determine the state of the race, so Featherstone ordered out the boat. The four were soon embarked, and the men rowed out towards the point which had been chosen as the end of the race. On coming near they found the paper boats stuck together, saturated with water and floating limp on the surface. An animated discussion arose about this. Some of the bets were off, but others remained an open question, and each side insisted upon a different

view of the case. In the midst of this Featherstone's attention was drawn to the dark spot already mentioned as the goal of the race.

"That's a queer-looking thing," said he suddenly. "Pull up, lads, a little; let's see what it is. It doesn't look to me like a spar."

The others, always on the lookout for some new object of interest, were attracted by these words, and looked closely at the thing in question. The men pulled. The boat drew nearer.

"It's some sort of floating vessel," said Oxenden.

"It's not a spar," said Melick, who was at the bow.

And as he said this he reached out and grasped at it. He failed to get it, and did no more than touch it. It moved easily and sank, but soon came up again. A second time he grasped at it, and with both hands. This time he caught it, and then lifted it out of the water into the boat. These proceedings had been watched with the deepest interest, and now, as this curious floating thing made its appearance among them, they all crowded around it in eager excitement.

"It looks like a can of preserved meat," said the doctor.

"It certainly is a can," said Melick, "for it's made of metal, but as to preserved meat, I have my doubts."

The article in question was made of metal, and was cylindrical in shape. It was soldered tight, and evidently contained something. It was about eighteen inches long and eight wide. The nature of the metal was not easily perceptible, for it was coated with slime, and covered over about half its surface with barnacles and seaweed. It was not heavy, and would have floated higher out of the water had it not been for these encumbrances.

"It's some kind of preserved meat," said the doctor.

"Perhaps something good – game, I dare say – yes, Yorkshire game pie. They pot all sorts of things now."

"If it's game," said Oxenden, "it'll be rather high by this time. Man alive! Look at those weeds and shells. It must have been floating for ages."

"It's my belief," said Featherstone, "that it's part of the provisions laid in by Noah for his long voyage in the ark. So come, let's open it, and see what sort of diet the antediluvians had."

"It may be liquor," said Oxenden.

Melick shook his head.

"No," said he. "There's something inside, but whatever it is, it isn't liquor. It's odd, too. The thing is of foreign make, evidently. I never saw anything like it before. It may be Chinese."

"By Jove!" cried Featherstone. "This is getting exciting. Let's go back to the yacht and open it."

The men rowed back to the yacht.

"It's meat of some sort," continued the doctor. "I'm certain of that. It has come in good time. We can have it for dinner."

"You may have my share, then," said Oxenden. "I hereby give and bequeath to you all my right, title and interest in and to anything in the shape of meat that may be inside."

"Meat cans," said Melick, "are never so large as that."

"Oh, I don't know about that," said the doctor.

"They make up pretty large packages of pemmican for the arctic expeditions."

"But they never pack up pemmican in copper cylinders," said Melick, who had been using his knife to scrape off the crust from the vessel.

"Copper!" exclaimed Oxenden. "Is it copper?"

"Look for yourselves," said Melick quickly.

They all looked, and could see, where the knife had cut into the vessel, that it was as he said. It was copper.

"It's foreign work," said Melick. "In England we make tin cans for everything. It may be something that's drifted out from Mogadore or some port in Morocco."

"In that case," said Oxenden, "it may contain the mangled remains of one of the wives of some Moorish pasha."

By this time they had reached the yacht and hurried aboard. All were eager to satisfy their curiosity. Search was made for a cold chisel, but to no purpose. Then Featherstone produced a knife which was used to open sardine boxes, but after a faithful trial this proved useless. At length Melick, who had gone off in search of something more effective, made his appearance, armed with an axe. With this he attacked the copper cylinder, and by means of a few dextrous blows succeeded in cutting it open. Then he looked in.

"What do you see?" asked Featherstone.

"Something," said Melick, "but I can't quite make it out."

"If you can't make it out, then shake it out," said Oxenden.

Upon this Melick took the cylinder, turned it upside down, shook it smartly and then lifted it and bounded it against the deck. This served to loosen the contents, which seemed tightly packed, but came gradually down, until at length they could be seen and drawn forth.

Melick drew them forth, and the contents of the mysterious copper cylinder resolved themselves into two packages.

The sight of these packages only served to intensify their curiosity. If it had been some species of food, it would at once have revealed itself, but these packages suggested something more important. What could they be? Were there treasures inside – jewels, or golden ornaments from some Moorish seraglio, or strange coin from far Cathay?

One of the packages was very much larger than the other. It was enclosed in wrappers made of some coarse kind of felt, bound tight with strong cords. The other was much smaller, and was folded in the same material without being bound. This Melick seized and began to open.

"Wait a minute," said Featherstone. "Let's make a bet on it. Five guineas that it's some sort of jewels!"

"Done," said Oxenden.

Melick opened the package, and it was seen that Featherstone had lost. There were no jewels, but one or two sheets of something that looked like paper. It was not paper, however, but some vegetable product which was used for the same purpose. The surface was smooth, but the colour was dingy, and the lines of the vegetable fibres were plainly discernible. These sheets were covered with writing.

"Halloa!" cried Melick. "Why, this is English!"

At this the others crowded around to look on, and Featherstone in his excitement forgot that he had lost his bet. There were three sheets, all covered with writing – one in English, another in French and a third in German. It was the same message, written in these three different languages. But at that moment they scarcely noticed this. All that they saw was the message itself, with its mysterious meaning.

It was as follows:

To the finder of this:
Sir,
I am an Englishman, and have been carried by a series of incredible events to a land from which escape is as impossible as from the grave. I have written this and committed it to the sea, in the hope that the ocean currents may bear it within the reach of civilized man. Oh, unknown friend! whoever you are. I entreat you to let this message be made known in some way to my father, Henry More, Keswick, Cumberland, England, so that he may learn the fate of his son. The

MS accompanying this contains an account of my adventures, which I should like to have forwarded to him. Do this for the sake of that mercy which you may one day wish to have shown to yourself.
Adam More

"By Jove!" cried Featherstone, as he read the above. "This is really getting to be something tremendous."

"This other package must be the manuscript," said Oxenden, "and it'll tell all about it."

"Such a manuscript 'll be better than meat," said the doctor sententiously.

Melick said nothing, but, opening his knife, he cut the cords and unfolded the wrapper. He saw a great collection of leaves, just like those of the letter, of some vegetable substance, smooth as paper and covered with writing.

"It looks like Egyptian papyrus," said the doctor. "That was the common paper of antiquity."

"Never mind the Egyptian papyrus," said Featherstone, in feverish curiosity. "Let's have the contents of the manuscript. You, Melick, read; you're the most energetic of the lot, and when you're tired the rest of us will take turns."

"Read? Why, it'll take a month to read all this," said Melick.

"All the better," said Featherstone. "This calm will probably last a month, and we shall have nothing to interest us."

Melick made no further objection. He was as excited as the rest, and so he began the reading of the manuscript.

2

Adrift in the Antarctic Ocean

My name is Adam More. I am the son of Henry More, apothecary, Keswick, Cumberland. I was mate of the ship *Trevelyan* (Bennet, master), which was chartered by the British Government to convey convicts to Van Dieman's Land. This was in 1843. We made our voyage without any casualty, landed our convicts in Hobart Town and then set forth on our return home. It was the 17th of December when

we left. From the first adverse winds prevailed, and in order to make any progress we were obliged to keep well to the south. At length, on the 6th of January, we sighted Desolation Island. We found it, indeed, a desolate spot. In its vicinity we saw a multitude of smaller islands, perhaps a thousand in number, which made navigation difficult, and forced us to hurry away as fast as possible. But the aspect of this dreary spot was of itself enough to repel us. There were no trees, and the multitude of islands seemed like moss-covered rocks, while the temperature, though in the middle of the Antarctic summer, was from 38° to 58° Fahr.

In order to get rid of these dangerous islands, we stood south and west, and at length found ourselves in south latitude 65°, longitude 60° east. We were fortunate enough not to find any ice, although we were within fifteen hundred miles of the South Pole, and far within that impenetrable icy barrier which, in 1773, had arrested the progress of Captain Cook. Here the wind failed us, and we lay becalmed and drifting. The sea was open all around us, except to the south-east, where there was a low line along the horizon terminating in a lofty promontory, but though it looked like land, we took it for ice. All around us whales and grampuses were gambolling and spouting in vast numbers. The weather was remarkably fine and clear.

For two or three days the calm continued, and we drifted along helplessly, until at length we found ourselves within a few miles of the promontory above mentioned. It looked like land, and seemed to be a rocky island rising from the depths of the sea. It was, however, all covered with ice and snow, and from this there extended eastwards as far as the eye could reach an interminable line of ice, but towards the south-west the sea seemed open to navigation. The promontory was very singular in shape, rising up to a peak which was at least a thousand feet in height, and forming a striking object, easily discovered and readily identified by any future explorer. We named it, after our ship, Trevelyan Peak, and then felt anxious to lose sight of it for ever. But the calm continued, and at length we drifted in close enough to see immense flocks of seals dotting the ice at the foot of the peak.

Upon this I proposed to Agnew, the second mate, that we should go ashore, shoot some seals and bring them back. This was partly for the excitement of the hunt, and partly for the honour of landing in a place never before trodden by the foot of man. Captain Bennet made

some objections, but he was old and cautious, and we were young and venturesome, so we laughed away his scruples and set forth. We did not take any of the crew, owing to the captain's objections. He said that if we chose to throw away our own lives he could not help it, but that he would positively refuse to allow a single man to go with us. We thought this refusal an excess of caution amounting to positive cowardice, but were unable to change his mind. The distance was not great, the adventure was attractive, and so the captain's gig was lowered, and in this Agnew and I rowed ashore. We took with us a double-barrelled rifle apiece, and also a pistol. Agnew took a glass.

We rowed for about three miles, and reached the edge of the ice, which extended far out from the promontory. Here we landed, and secured the boat by means of a small grappling iron, which we thrust into the ice. We then walked towards the promontory for about a mile, and here we found a multitude of seals. These animals were so fearless that they made not the slightest movement as we came up, but stared at us in an indifferent way. We killed two or three, and then debated whether to go to the promontory or not. Agnew was eager to go, so as to touch the actual rock, but I was satisfied with what we had done, and was now desirous of returning. In the midst of this I felt a flake of snow on my cheek. I started and looked up. To my great surprise I saw that the sky had changed since I had last noticed it. When we left the ship it was clear and blue, but now it was overspread with dark, leaden-coloured clouds, and the snowflakes that had fallen were ominous of evil. A snowstorm here, in the vicinity of the ice, was too serious a thing to be disregarded. But one course now remained, and that was an immediate return to the ship.

Each of us seized a seal and dragged it after us to the boat. We reached it and flung them in. Just at that moment a gun sounded over the water. It was from the ship – the signal of alarm – the summons from the captain for our return. We saw now that she had been drifting since we left her, and had moved southwest several miles. The row back promised to be far harder than the pull ashore and, what was worse, the wind was coming up, the sea was rising and the snow was thickening. Neither of us said a word. We saw that our situation was very serious, and that we had been very foolhardy, but words were useless now. The only thing to be done was to pull for the ship with all our strength, and that was what we did.

So we pushed off, and rowed as we had never rowed before. Our progress was difficult. The sea grew steadily rougher; the wind increased; the snow thickened; and, worst of all, the day was drawing to a close. We had miscalculated both as to distance and time. Even if it had continued calm, we should have had to row back in the dark, but now the sun was setting, and with the darkness we had to encounter the gathering storm and the blinding snow. We rowed in silence. At every stroke our situation grew more serious. The wind was from the south, and therefore favoured us to some extent, and also made less of a sea than would have been produced by a wind from any other quarter, but then this south wind brought dangers of its own, which we were soon to feel – new dangers and worse ones. For this south wind drove the ship further from us, and at the same time broke up the vast fields of ice and impelled the fractured masses northwards. But this was a danger which we did not know just then. At that time we were rowing for the ship and, amid the darkness and the blinding snow and the dashing waves, we heard from time to time the report of signal guns fired from the ship to guide us back. These were our only guide, for the darkness and the snow had drawn the ship from our sight, and we had to be guided by our hearing only.

We were rowing for our lives, and we knew it, but every moment our situation grew more desperate. Each new report of the gun seemed to sound further away. We seemed always to be rowing in the wrong direction. At each report we had to shift the boat's course somewhat, and pull towards the last point from which the gun seemed to sound. With all this the wind was increasing rapidly to a gale, the sea was rising and breaking over the boat, the snow was blinding us with its ever thickening sleet. The darkness deepened, and at length had grown so intense that nothing whatever could be seen – neither sea nor sky, not even the boat itself – yet we dared not stop; we had to row. Our lives depended on our efforts. We had to row, guided by the sound of the ship's gun, which the ever varying wind incessantly changed, till our minds grew all confused, and we rowed blindly and mechanically.

So we laboured for hours at the oars, and the storm continually increased, and the sea continually rose, while the snow fell thicker and the darkness grew intenser. The reports of the gun now grew fainter; what was worse, they were heard at longer intervals, and this showed us that Captain Bennet was losing heart; that he was giving us up; that

he despaired of finding us, and was now firing only an occasional gun out of a mournful sense of duty. This thought reduced us to despair. It seemed as if all our efforts had only served to take us further away from the ship, and deprived us of all motive for rowing any harder than was barely necessary to keep the boat steady. After a time Agnew dropped his oar and began to bail out the boat – a work which was needed – for, in spite of our care, she had shipped many seas, and was one third full of water. He worked away at this while I managed the boat, and then we took turns at bailing. In this way we passed the dreary night.

Morning came at last. The wind was not so violent, but the snow was so thick that we could only see for a little distance around us. The ship was nowhere visible, nor were there any signs of her. The last gun had been fired during the night. All that we could see was the dim outline of a gaunt iceberg – an ominous spectacle. Not knowing what else to do, we rowed on as before, keeping in what seemed our best course, though this was mere conjecture, and we knew all the time that we might be going wrong. There was no compass in the boat, nor could we tell the sun's position through the thick snow. We rowed with the wind, thinking that it was blowing towards the north, and would carry us in that direction. We still hoped to come within sound of the ship's gun, and kept straining our ears incessantly to hear the wished-for report. But no such sound ever came again, and we heard nothing except the plash of the waves and the crash of breaking ice. Thus all that day we rowed along, resting at intervals when exhausted, and then resuming our labours, until at length night came, and again to the snow and ice and waves was added the horror of great darkness. We passed that night in deep misery. We had eaten nothing since we left the ship, but, though exhausted by long fasting and severe labour, the despair of our hearts took away all desire for food. We were worn out with hard work, yet the cold was too great to allow us to take rest, and we were compelled to row so as to keep ourselves from perishing. But fatigue and drowsiness overcame us, and we often sank into sleep even while rowing, and then after a brief slumber we would awake with benumbed limbs to wrestle again with the oars. In this way we passed that night.

Another morning came, and we found to our great joy that the snow had ceased. We looked eagerly around to see if there were any signs of the ship. Nothing could be seen of her. Far away on one side rose a peak, which looked like the place where we had landed. Judging from