The climb had been a stiff one. The day was very hot, and, rather purple about the face and breathing heavily, the sailor relapsed on the springy, scented turf close to the cliff's edge and gazed pensively at the vista of shimmering sea spread out before him.

He was a massive, rotund, bull-necked individual, with a face the colour of a ripe tomato, and wore on the sleeves of his jumper two red good conduct badges and the single gun and star of an able seaman, seaman gunner, of His Majesty's Navy. His name was Smith, I discovered, and he was home on seven days' leave. I had met him halfway up the hill ten minutes before, toiling laboriously to the summit like an asthmatic cart-horse, and with his crimson face shining and beady with perspiration. A mutual glance and a casual remark about the excessive heat had led to conversation.

He now sat on the turf mopping his heated countenance with a mottled blue and white handkerchief; but a few minutes later, having recovered himself sufficiently to smoke, produced a pipe, tobacco box, and matches from the interior of his cap.

"You 'aint got a fill o' 'bacca abart you, I suppose, sir?" he queried, exploring the inner recesses of his brass tobacco box with a horny forefinger.

"I'm afraid it's rather weaker stuff than you're used to," I remarked deprecatingly, handing my pouch across.

"Yus," he agreed, examining its contents and proceeding to fill his pipe. "It do look a bit like 'ay, don't it? 'Owever, seein' as 'ow I carn't git no more I'm werry much obliged, sir, I'm sure."

"It's expensive hay," I said weakly, as he handed my property back and lit his pipe. "It costs well over ten shillings a pound."

The ungrateful old sinner puffed out a cloud of smoke. "'Arf a

Bradbury[1]!" he grunted unsympathetically. "You're jokin', sir."

I shook my head.

"But we pays a bob a pound fur 'bacca on board o' the ship," he expostulated. "It's something like 'bacca; grips you by the neck, like."

Evidently the delicate flavour of my best John Cotton did not sufficiently tickle his brazen palate.

For a moment or two there was silence between us as we watched the gulls screaming and wheeling over some object in the water far beneath us.

"Well," I asked, merely to start a conversation, "how d'you like the

Navy?"

"Suits me all right, sir," he said, "seein' as 'ow I've bin in it a matter o' fifteen year. But between you an' me, sir," he hastened to add, "it ain't like wot it wus when I fust jined. It's full o' noo-fangled notions an' sichlike."

"What d'you mean?" I asked in some amazement.

"Carn't say no more, sir. Afore we wus sent on leaf we wus all cautioned special not to git talkin' abart the Service wi' civvies."

I suppose I did look rather unlike a member of His Majesty's land forces, for I was wearing plain clothes and had only come out of hospital four days before, after being wounded for the second time on the western front. (I am speaking of the fighting line in France, not anatomically.) I hastened to explain who I was.

"Sorry I spoke, sir," he apologised. "I thought you wus one o' these 'ere la-de-dah blokes out fur an arrin'. Wot did you say your corpse wus?"

"Corpse! What corpse?"

"Corpse, sir. Rig'mint."

"Oh, I see. I'm only a doctor, a Lieutenant in the R.A.M.C. I'm on sick leave, and crawled up here to-day to get some fresh air and to … er, meet someone I know." I looked at my wrist watch and glanced over my shoulder.

"Young lady, sir?" he queried in a husky, confidential whisper.

I nodded.

"I'm on the same lay meself," he told me, with a throaty sigh and a lovelorn look in his blue eyes. "Expectin' 'er any minit now, seein' as 'ow it's 'er arternoon art. 'Er name's Hamelia, an' I don't come up 'ere to look at the perishin' sea, not 'arf I don't. I gits fair sick o' lookin' at it on board o' the ship."

I was not in the mood for exchanging confidences as to my prospective matrimonial affairs, and my silence must have said as much.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir; but seein' as 'ow you're a doctor, I wonder if you 'appens to know our bloke in the Jackass?"

"Who, your doctor?"

"Yessir. Tall orficer 'e is, close on six foot 'igh, wi' black 'air, wot jined the Navy special fur the war. Name o' Brown."

"I'm afraid I don't know him," I said, puzzling my brains to fit any medical man of my acquaintance to his very loose description.

"'E's a fair corker, sir," my companion grinned.

"In what way?"

"The way 'e gits 'is leg pulled, sir."

I scented a story, and as there was still no flutter of a white skirt down the slope to our right, I desired him to continue.

"Well, sir," he started, "it wus like this 'ere. The Jackass is one o' these 'ere light cruisers, and one mornin' at 'arf parst nine, arter the fust lootenant,—Number One, as we calls 'im,—arter 'e 'ad finished tellin' off the 'ands for their work arter divisions, the doctor 'appened to be standin' close alongside 'im, Number One beckons to the chief buffer..."

"I beg your pardon," I put in, rather mystified. "I'm afraid I don't know very much about the Navy. What's a chief buffer?"

"Chief Bos'un's Mate, wot looks arter the upper deck, sir. Name o' Scroggins. Well, sir, Number One sez to 'im, 'Scroggins,' 'e sez. 'You knows them buoys we was usin' yesterday?'—'Yessir,' I 'ears the chief buffer say. 'You means them wot we 'ad fur that there boat racin' yesterday?'—'Yes,' sez Jimmy the One.[2] 'I wants 'em all bled before seven bells this mornin'.'—'Aye, aye, sir,' sez Scroggins, and goes off to see abart it."

"Bleed the boys!" I murmured in surprise. "Do you mean to tell me they still have these archaic methods in the Navy?"

"Course they does, sir," answered the A. B. "They won't float else."

"What, in case the ship is torpedoed or sunk by a mine?" I asked innocently, very

perplexed. "I'm a medical man myself; but I never knew that bleeding people made them more buoyant!"

"If you arsks me these 'ere questions, sir, I carn't spin no yarn," the sailor interrupted with a twinkle in his eye. "Well, sir, the fust lootenant tells the chief buffer to 'ave the buoys bled, but it so 'appens that the doctor 'eard wot 'e said, so up 'e comes.—'Did I 'ear you tellin' the Chief Bos'un's Mate to 'ave the boys bled?' he arsks.—'You did indeed, Sawbones,' Number One tells 'im.—'But surely that's my bizness?' sez the doctor.—'Your bizness!' sez Number One, frownin' like. ''Ow in 'ell d'you make that art?'—''Cos I'm the medical orficer o' this 'ere ship.'—'Ah,' sez Number One, slow like and grinnin' all over 'is face and tappin' 'is nose. 'You means, doc., that I've no right to order the boys to be bled, wot?'—'That's just 'xactly wot I does mean,' sez the doctor, gittin' a bit rattled like."

"I quite agree with him," I put in. "The First Lieutenant had no business at all to order the boys to be bled. Besides, bleeding is hopelessly..."

"Is it me wot's spinnin' this 'ere yarn or is it you, sir?" interrupted the narrator. "'Cos if it's me, I loses the thread o' wot I'm sayin' if you gits arskin' questions."

"I'm sorry," I sighed. "Please go on."

"Well, sir, Number One and the doctor 'as a reg'lar hargument and bargin' match on the quarterdeck, though I see'd Number One wus larfin' to 'isself the 'ole time. The doctor sez to 'im as 'ow they'd best refer the matter to the skipper; but the fust lootenant sez they carn't do that 'cos the skipper's attendin' a court-martial and won't be back till the arternoon. Then the doc. wants to know if Number One'll give 'im an order in writin' to bleed the boys; but Number One larfs and sez 'e won't be such a fool, and sez that in 'is opinion the buoys should be bled. The doctor then sez the boys don't want bleedin', and arsks Number One if 'e's prepared to haccept 'is advice as a medical orficer. The fust lootenant sez of course 'e will, and sez as 'ow 'e'll arrange to 'ave all the buoys mustered in the sick bay at six bells, and that they needn't be bled if the doctor sez they don't want it."

"It wus all I could do to stop meself larfin', 'specially when Number One sings art fur the chief buffer. 'Scroggins,' 'e sez, ''ave all o' them there buoys wot I wus talkin' abart in the sick bay by eleven o'clock punctual.'—Scroggins seems a bit startled. 'In the sick bay, sir?' 'e arsks.—'Yus,' sez Number One, grinnin' to 'isself and winkin' at the chief buffer. 'In the sick bay by six bells sharp.'—'Werry good, sir,' sez Scroggins, tumblin' to wot wus up, 'cos 'e saw the doctor standin' there. I 'eard all o' wot 'appened, and I tells all my pals. The chief buffer does the same, and so does Number One, so at six bells, when the sick bay stooard 'ad bin sent by Jimmy the One to tell the doctor as 'ow the buoys wus ready for bleedin', almost all the orficers and abart 'arf the ship's company 'ad mustered artside the sick bay under the fo'c'sle to see wot 'appened.

"Presently the doctor comes along, sees the crowd, but goes inside without sayin' nothin'. But soon we 'ears 'im lettin' go at the sick bay stooard inside. 'Wot the devil's the meanin' o' this?' 'e wants to know.—'Fust lootenant's orders, sir,' sez the stooard.—'Fust lootenant be damned,' the doctor sings art. 'I'll report 'im to the captain. S'welp me, I will!'—And wi' that 'e comes artside werry rattled and walks aft without sayin' a word to no one. I feels a bit sorry for 'im, sir," the story teller went on, "'cos Number One 'ad bin pullin' 'is leg agen."

"Pulling his leg?" I echoed.

"Yes, sir," said the seaman, bursting with merriment. "'Cos the sick bay, and it weren't none too large, was all but filled up wi' six 'efty great casks, wi' flagstaffs and sinkers complete. They wus the buoys Number One 'ad bin talkin' abart all along."

I could not help laughing.

"I see," I said. "The First Lieutenant meant BUOYS and the doctor the ship's BOYS, what?"

He nodded.

"But tell me," I asked. "What about the bleeding?"

"Bleedin', sir! Why, d'you mean to tell me you don't know wot bleedin' a buoy is?"

"I'm afraid my nautical knowledge is very limited," I apologised.

"It's surprisin' wot some shoregoin' blokes don't know abart th' Navy, sir," said the burly one with some contempt, chuckling away to himself. "But if you reely wants to know, bleedin' a buoy means borin' a small 'ole in 'im to let the water art, 'cos they all leaks a bit arter they've bin in the sea. But I must say good arternoon, sir," he added hurriedly, glancing over his shoulder and rising to his feet. "'Ere's my gal comin', and there's another abart 'arf a cable astern of 'er wot I expec's is yourn. Good arternoon, sir, and don't git stoppin' no more o' them there bullets." He touched his forelock.

"But tell me?" I said. "Did the first lieutenant and doctor make it up all right?"

"Bet your life they did, sir," he said with a laugh, moving off. "Them haffairs wus almost o' daily hoccurrence."

"Good luck to you," I called out after him, "and thank you for a most instructive twenty minutes!"

He looked back over his shoulder; his bright red face broadened into a huge smile, and he deliberately winked twice.

I had to hurry away, for already the sailor nearly had his arm round his housemaid's waist, while my Anne, at least half an hour late, was panting wearily towards where I stood.

"Who is your sailor friend?" was her first question.

"Ananias the Second," I answered, for at the back of my mind I had a vague suspicion that the first lieutenant of the Jackass was not the only member of her ship's company who delighted in pulling people's legs.

[1] A "Bradbury" is one of the new £1 notes. So called from the signature at the bottom.

[2] "Jimmy the One," a lower-deck nickname for the First Lieutenant.