

Brokers' Bay

By W. Clark Russell

Brokers' Bay is situated on the West Coast of England. You may search the map for it in vain, and the reason why I call it by any other name than that it bears will, when you have read this story, be as clear as the mud in the water that brims to the base of Brokers' cliffs. Brokers' Bay is a fine, curving sweep of land. For how many centuries the sea has been sneakily ebbing from it who can imagine? The time has been when the galleon and the carack strained at their hempen ground tackle at anchors six fathoms deep where the white windmill now stands within musket-shot of the Crown and Anchor, and where the church spire darts the gleam of its weathercock above the green thickness of a huddle of dwarf trees near the little vicarage.

About fifty years ago a company of enterprising souls took it into their heads to reclaim some of the land which the subtly and ceaselessly ebbing sea, rising and falling with moon-like regularity, yet receding ever, though noticeably only in spans of half-centuries, was leaving behind it. They armed themselves with the necessary legal powers, they subscribed all the capital they considered needful, and by processes of embanking, draining, manuring, and the like, they succeeded in raising wheat and grass, vegetables and flowers, where, since and long before the days of the painted Briton, shuddering in the November blast, or perspiring away his small clothes under the July sun, nothing had flourished but the dab and the crab.

Vet the speculation on the whole was a failure. It was a patriotic achievement in its way, and those concerned in it deserved well of the nation; for if it be a fine thing to bleed for one's country, how much finer must it be to add to its dimensions to enlarge its latitude and longitude, and extend the home-sovereignty of the monarch? Yet, though a pretty considerable village stood hard by the reclaimed land, houses did not increase. The builder, whose Christian name is Jerry, came down to Brokers' Bay, and took a look around, and went home again, and did nothing. He was not to be decoyed, he said. Brokers' Bay was not the right sort of place to start a town in, he thought. There was too much mud, Mr. Jerry considered. He calculated that when the water was out there was a full mile and three quarters of slime. Oh yes, whilst the slime was still slimy it reflected the sky just the same as if it had been water, and it took a noble blood-red countenance of a hot sunset evening, when the sea was a pink gleaming streak just under the horizon, and it was very pleasing in that sort of way. But what were the doctors going to say about all that mud, and what opportunities would a waste of slush, extending one and three-quarter miles at ebb tide, provide the local historian with when he came to write a guide-book and invent Roman and Early English names for the immediate district, and deal with the salubriousness of the climate, and give an analysis of the drinking water? And what about the bathing? There was none. And what length of pier would be wanted if the seaward end of it was to be permanently water-washed?

The reclaimed ground was divided into lots for building; but nobody built. The soil continued to be cultivated, nevertheless. Two market-gardeners did very well out of it. A butcher rented thirty acres of the pasture land the remainder was variously dealt with in small ways for growing purposes.

Now, that stretch of land had been reclaimed some fifteen years, when a certain master mariner, whom I will call Captain Carey, arrived at the adjacent village with the intention of taking a view of the Brokers' Bay foreshore. News that good land was cheap hereabouts had reached him up at Blyth. He had unexpectedly come into a little fortune, had Captain Carey. For

years he had followed the coasting trade, working his way out through the fore-scuttle into the captain's cabin, and after thirty years of seafaring, rendered more and more uncomfortable by gloomy anticipations of the workhouse in his old age, he had been enriched by the will of an Australian aunt, the amount being some thing between £9000 and £10,000.

Captain Carey had sprung from a West Country stock; his wife was a West Country woman, and when they came into the Australian aunt's legacy they determined to break up their little home at Blyth and settle somewhere on Western soil. So Captain Carey came to Brokers' Bay, and with him traveled his giant son, a youth of prodigious muscle, but of weak intellect. A second Titan son was at this time at sea, working his way towards the quarter-deck aboard an East Indiaman.

Captain Carey's survey of the Brokers' fore-shore determined him on purchasing a plot of land right amidships of the fine curve of reclaimed soil. He bought four acres at a very low figure indeed, and then ordered a small house to be built in the midst of his little estate. His wife and her niece joined him and the giant half-witted son at the adjacent village, and there the family dwelt at the sign of the Seven Bells whilst the house was building.

It was quickly put together, and was then gay with a green balcony, and it had motherly lubberly bay windows that made you think of a whaler's boats dangling at cranes, and the entrance was embellished with a singular porch after the design of the retired master mariner, who had recollected seeing something of the sort at Lisbon when he had gone as a boy on a voyage to Portugal.

Captain Carey loved seclusion. Like most retired mariners, he hated to be overlooked. This fondness for privacy, which grows out of a habit of it, may be owing to there being no streets at sea, and no over-the-way. The master of a vessel lives in a cabin all alone by himself—the Crusoe of the after part of the ship. He measures his quarter-deck in lonely walks no eyes glittering above the bulwark rail watch his movements; his behavior as a man, his judgment as a seaman, but not his mode of life as a private individual, are criticized by his crew. Hence, when a man steps ashore after a long period of command at sea, he carries with him a strong love of privacy, and much resolution of retirement. A great number of little cottages by the ocean are occupied by solitary seamen, who pass their time in looking through a telescope at the horizon, in arguing with lonesome men of their own cloth, in smoking pipes at the Lugger Inn or at the sign of the Lord Nelson, and turning in at night and turning out in the morning.

To provide against being overlooked in case others should build hard by, Captain Carey walled his little estate of four acres with a regular bulkhead of a fence, handsomely spiked on top, and too tall even for his giant son to peer over on tiptoe. In a few months the house was built, papered, and in all ways completed; it was then furnished and the ground fenced. Captain Carey and his family now took possession of their new home. There was, first of all, Captain Carey, then Mrs. Carey, next the giant young Carey (who had been known up in Blyth by the name of Mother Carey's chicken), and last, Mrs. Carey's niece, a stout, active girl of twenty, who helped Mrs. Carey in cooking and looking after the house; for Carey, having been robbed, whilst absent on a coasting voyage, of a new coat, a soft hat, a meerschaum pipe, and a few other trifles by a maid-of-all-work, had sworn in hideous fore-castle language never again to keep another servant.

This happy family of Careys were very well pleased with their new home. Old Carey was never weary of stepping out of doors to look at his house. He seemed to find something fresh to admire every time he cast his eyes over the little building. He and his son planted potatoes, onions, cabbages, and other homely vegetables, and dug out and cultivated a very considerable area of kitchen garden. They had not above three miles to walk to attend divine worship. There

were several convenient shops in the adjacent village, not more than two miles and a half distant. There was no roadway to speak of to Carey's house, but in a very few weeks the feet of the family and the tread of the tradespeople tramped out a thin path over the reclaimed land to the village roadway, where it fell with the sweep of the cliff to the level of the reclaimed soil. And the view, on the whole, from Carey's windows was fairly picturesque and pleasing, even when the water was out and the scene was a sweeping flat of mud. Afar on the dark blue edge of the sea hovered the feather-white canvas of ships, easily resolved into denominationable fabrics by Carey's powerful telescope. The western sun glowed in the briny ooze till the whole stretch of the stuff resembled a vast surface of molten gold. Here and there, confronting Carey's house, stood some scores of fangs of rock, and when there was a flood-tide and a fresh in-shore gale the sea snapped and beat and burst upon the beach with as much uproar as though it were all fathomless ocean, instead of a dirty stretch of water with an eighteen-foot rise of tide, and foam so dark and thick with dirt that, after it had blown upon you and dried, it was as though you had ridden through some dozen miles of muddy lanes.

The family had been settled about three months when the eldest son arrived home from the long voyage he had made to China and the East Indies. He was a tall, powerfully-built young man; but his education in his youth had been neglected. Captain Carey, indeed, had not in those days possessed the means to put him to school. Now, however, that the skipper had come into a little fortune of, call it, £10,000, he resolved to qualify his son for a position on the quarter-deck.

"Navigation I can teach him," he said to his wife, "and if he was a master-rigger he couldn't know more about a ship. What he wants is the sort of larning which you and me's deficient in: the being able to talk and write good English, with some sort of knowledge of history and the likes of that; so that, should he ever get command of a passenger ship, why, then, sitting at the head of the cabin table, he won't be ashamed of addressing the ladies and joining in the general conversation."

So when this son arrived from China and the East Indies, the father, instead of sending him to sea again, put him to read and study with a clergyman who lived in the adjacent village, a gentleman who could not obtain a living and who disdained a curacy.

Thus it came to pass that Captain Carey lived at home with his two sons and wife and wife's niece.

He stood in a bay window one day, and it entered his head to dig out a pond and place a fountain in the middle of it.

"It'll improve the property," said Captain Carey, turning to his wife and sons, who were lingering at the breakfast-table. "We'll fix a pedestal amidships of the pond and put a female statue upon it—one of them white figures who keep their right hands aloft for the holding of a whirligig fountain. There's nothing prettier than a revolving fountain a-sparkling and a-showering down aver a noode statue."

You'll be striking salt water, father, if you fall a-digging," said the sailor son named Tom.

"And what then?" exclaimed Captain Carey. "Ain't brine as bright to the eye as fresh water? And it's not going to choke the fountain either. Blessed if I don't think the fountain might be set a-playing by the rise and fall of the tide."

When breakfast was ended, the father and the two sons stepped out of doors to decide upon a spot in which to dig the pond for the fountain. After much discussion they agreed to dig in front of the house, about a hundred paces distant, within a stone's throw of the wash of the water when the tide was at its height.

The Captain's grounds lay open to the sea, though they were jealously fenced, as has been already said, at the back and on either hand. There could be no intrusion on the sea-fronting portion of the grounds. The mud came to the embankment, and the embankment was the ocean-limit of Carey's little estate. There was no path, and no right of way if there had been. Selkirk and his goats could scarcely have enjoyed greater seclusion than did Carey and his family. The father and sons proposed to dig out the pond to the shape, depth, and area decided upon, and then bring in a mason to finish it. They went to work next day; it was something to do—something to kill the time which, perhaps, now and again lay a little heavy upon this isolated family. The old skipper dug with vehemence and enjoyment. He had been bred to a life of hard work, and was never happier than when toiling. His giant half-witted son labored with the energy of steam. The sailor son stepped in when he had done with his parson and his studies for the day, and drove his spade into the reclaimed soil with enthusiasm. This went on for several days, and something that resembled the idea of a pond without any water in it began to suggest itself to the eye.

It was on a Friday afternoon in the month of April, as the Captain whom I am calling Carey himself informed me, that this retired skipper, who had not felt well enough that day to dig, was seated in his parlor reading a newspaper and smoking a pipe. Suddenly the door was flung open, and the giant half-witted youth whose name was Jack walked in.

"Father," said he, "ain't gold found in the earth?"

"Nowhere else, sonny," answered the Captain, looking at the giant over the top of the newspaper.

"There's gold in the pond, father," said Jack

"Gold in your eye!" exclaimed the Captain, putting down his pipe and his newspaper. "What saint of gold?" said he, smiling.

"Shiny gold, like the half-sovereign you wance gave me for behavin' myself when you was away."

On this, Captain Carey, without another word, put on his hat and walked with his son to the diggings, which were by this time a pretty considerable trench.

"There," said Jack, pointing, "my spade drove upon him, and I've scraped that much clear."

The Captain looked, and perceived what resembled a fragment of a shaft of metal, dull and yellow, with lines of brightness where Jack's spade had scraped the surface. He at once jumped into the trench and bade Jack fetch his spade. They then dug together, and in about a quarter of an hour succeeded in laying bare a small brass cannon of very antique pattern and manufacture. It was pivoted. They dug a little longer and deeper, and exposed a portion of woodwork. The scantling was extraordinarily thick, and the gun was pivoted to it. The Captain's face was red with excitement.

"Run and see if Tom's in," he cried, "and if he ain't leave word that he's to join us with his spade as soon as he arrives, and then come you back, Jack By the great anchor, if here ain't a foundered ship call me a guffy!"

The sailor son, armed with a spade, appeared on the scene within twenty minutes.

"It's an old brass swivel, father," he shouted. "Jump in," cried the Skipper, "and len's a hand to clear away more of this muck."

The three plied their spades with might and main, and before sundown they had laid bare some eight feet of ship's deck, with about five feet breadth of bulwark, measuring four feet high from the plank. Mrs. Carey and the niece came to the edge of the pit to look. The three diggers, covered with sweat and hot as fire, climbed out, threw down their spades, and the family stood gazing.

“Whatever is it?” cried Mrs. Carey.

“A foundered ship,” answered her husband.

“A whole ship, uncle?” exclaimed the niece.

“A three-hundred-ton ship,” answered the Skipper. “D’ye want to know if she’s all here? I can’t tell you that; but if there ain’t solidness enough for a *Ryle Jarge* running fore and aft in this unearthed piece, I’m no sailor man.”

“What sort of ship will she be?” said the half-witted Jack.

“Something two hundred year old, if the whole job hain’t some antiquarian roose like to the burying of Roman baths for the digging of ’em up again as an advertisement for the place. Who was a-reigning two hundred year ago?”

Here every eye was directed at the sailor son, who, after rubbing his nose and looking hard at the horizon, answered, “Crummell.”

“Then it’s a ship of Crummell’s time,” cried the Captain, to whom the name of Crummell did not seem familiar, “and if so be she’s all here and intact, bloomed if she won’t be a fortune to us as a show.”

That night, both at and after supper, all the talk of the family was about the foundered ship in the garden. The giant lad’s excitement was such that even the mother owned to herself he had never been more fluent and imbecile.

D’ye think it’s a whole ship, father?” said Tom the sailor.

“More’n likely. That there brass cannon ought to give us her age. Haven’t I heered tell of a Spanish invasion of this country in bygone years, when the Dons was blowed to the nor’rad, and a score of their galleons cast away upon the British coasts? At a time like this a man feels not being a scholar. Tom, fetch down your history book, and see if there’s a piece wrote in it about that there Spanish job.”

The sailor brought a history of England to the lamp, and with fingers square-ended as broken carrots, and with palms dark with dragging upon tarry ropes, groped patiently through the pages till he came to a part of the story that told of the Spanish Armada. This was read aloud, and the family listened with attention.

“Well, she may prove to be one of them Spanish galleons after all,” said Captain Carey. “She’ll not be the first ship that’s been dug up out of land which the sea’s flowed over in its day. There was Jimmy Perkins of Sunderland—” And here he spun them a yarn.

“What’ll be inside the ship, I wonder?” exclaimed the niece.

“Ah!” said the young giant Jack, opening his mouth.

“Them galleons went pretty richly freighted, I’ve heered,” said the Skipper. “When I was a boy they used to tell of their going afloat with a store of dollars in their holds, their bottoms flush to the hatches with the choicest goods, gold and silver candle-sticks and crucifixes in the cabins for the captains and mates to say their prayers afore.”

“Jacky thought the cannon gold,” said Mrs. Carey. “He may be right, Thomas, though a little quick in finding out. There may be gold deeper down.”

Well, now,” cried the Skipper. “I’ll tell you what I’ve made up my mind to do. We’ll keep this here find a secret. Tom, you, me, and Jack’ll go to work day arter day until we see what lies buried. There’s no call for any of us to say a word about this discovery. We’re pretty well out of sight, the fence stands high, and if so be as any visitor or tradesman should catch a view of the trench they’ll not be able to see what’s inside without drawing close to the brink, which, of course, won’t be permitted. If that foundered craft,” he cried, with great excitement, pointing towards the window, “is intact, as I before observed, then let her hold contain what it may, all

mud or all dollars, all slush or all silk, as a show she ought to be worth a matter of a thousand pound to us. But not a word to anybody till we've looked inside of her. If there's treasure, why, it's to be ourn. There's to be no dividing of it with the authorities, and so I says plainly, let the law be what it will. Here's this house and grounds to be paid for, Tom to be eddicated and sent to sea in a ship he holds a share in, Jack to be made independent of me, and Eliza to be provided for; and we'll see," he shouted, hitting the table a blow with his clenched fist, "if that there foundered ship ain't a-going to work out this traverse the same as if she was chock-a-block with bullion."

Thus was the procedure settled, and next morning early the father and two sons went to work with their spades.

It was to prove a long, laborious job; they knew *that*, but were determined all the same to keep the strange business in the family, and to solve the secret of the buried craft as darkly and mysteriously as though they were bent on perpetrating some deed of horror. The quantity of soil they threw up formed an embankment which concealed the trench and their own laboring figures as they progressed. Tom went away to his studies for two or three hours in the day; saving this and the interruption of meal-times their toil was unintermittent. In three weeks they had disclosed enough of the poop-royal, poop, and quarter-deck of the strangely shaped craft to satisfy them that, at all events, a very large portion of the after part of the vessel lay solid in its centuries-old grave of mud.

In this time they had exhumed and scraped the whole breadth or beam of her upper decks to a distance of about twenty-two feet forward from the taffrail. Their notion was to clear her from end to end betwixt the lines of her bulwarks only to satisfy themselves that she was a whole ship. Day after day they labored in their secret fashion, and the people of the district never for an instant imagined that they were at work on anything more than an entrenchment of extraordinary size, depth and length, for some purpose known only to themselves.

It took them to the middle of July to expose the upper decks of the vessel; and then there lay, a truly marvellous and even beautiful sight, buried some ten feet below the level of the soil, the complete and quite perfect fabric of a little antique ship of war, about one hundred feet long and thirty feet broad, with two after decks or poops descending like steps to the quarter-deck, and the bows shelving downwards like the slope of a beach into what promised to prove a complicated curling of headboards and some nightmare device of figure-head. Four little brass cannons were pivoted on the poop rails, and on her main deck she mounted eight guns of that ancient sort called sakers. The wood of her was as hard as iron, and black as old oak with the saturation of soil and brine and time's secret hardening process. The masts were clean gone from the deck, and there was no sign of a bowsprit. Never was there a more wonderful picture than that ancient ship as she lay in her grave with her grin of old-world artillery running the fat squab length of her, the whole structure, flat still in the soil to the level of the bulwark rails, affecting the eye as some marvellous illusion of nature; as some wild, romantic vegetable or mineral caprice of the drained but sodden soil.

Our little family of diggers, having disentombed the decks and bulwarks to the whole length of the giant Jack's extraordinary discovery, next proceeded, all as secretly as though they were preparing for some hideous crime, to uproot the covers of the main-hatch, which were as hard-fixed as though they had been of Portland stone cemented into a pier. With much hammering, however—and they were three powerful men—they succeeded in splitting the cover, and the stubborn, wonderful old piece of timber-frame was picked out of the y of the hatch in splinters.

And now they looked down into a black well, from which Captain Carey speedily withdrew his head, sniffing and spitting.

“Run for a candle, Jack,” said he.

A candle was lighted and lowered, and when it had sunk half a dozen feet the flame went out as though the wick had been suddenly pinched by the fingers of a spirit. So that a current of air should sweeten the hold, they went aft with their hatchets and hammers, and, after prodigious labor, splintered and cleared away the cover of a little booby hatch just under the break of the lower poop. They next got open the small fore hatch, and at the end of two days, when they lowered a lighted candle, the flame burnt freely.

Now what did they find inside this buried ship? Carey had counted upon mud to the hatchways, and scores of curios and amazing relics of Crummell’s or another’s period to be dug out of the solid mass. Instead, the interior was as dry as a nut whose kernel has rotted into dust. *This* was as extraordinary as any other feature of the discovery. The three men, each bearing a lighted lantern, descended the ladder they had lowered through the hatch, and gained the bottom of the ship, where they walked upon what had undoubtedly been cargo in its time, though it might now have passed for a sort of dunnage of lava, dry, harsh, and gritty, and powdering under the tread. A basket was loaded with the stuff, and hoisted into the daylight and examined, but the family could make nothing of it. As far as could be gathered the original freight of the ship had been bale goods, skins, fine wool, and the like, East India or Spice Island commodities, which some sort of chemical action had transformed into a heap of indistinguishable stuff, as slender in comparison with its radical bulk as the cinders of a rag to the rag that is burnt.

“Nothing to make our fortunes with here,” said Captain Carey, as he stood in the bottom of this wonderful old ship’s hold with his two sons, the three of them holding up their lanterns and glancing with gleaming eyes and marvelling minds around. “What’s abaft that bulkhead? We’ll see to it arter dinner.”

They went to dinner, and then returned to the ship, and applied themselves to hacking at the bulkhead so as effect an entry. This bulkhead, which partitioned the after from the main and fore holds, was of the hardness of steel. They let fly at it in vain. The hollow hold reverberated the blows of axe and chopper with the clangor of an iron ship-building yard.

“We must enter by an after-hatch of it’s to be done,” said Captain Carey.

With infinite labor, which expended the day and ran into the whole of the following morning, they contrived to break their way through the front of the lower poop. Here the air was as foul as ever it had been in the hold. They could do nothing for many hours. When at last the atmosphere was sweet enough to breathe they entered, and found themselves in a cabin that was unusually lofty owing to the superstructure of the poop-royal. The interior was as dry as the hold had been. So effectually had accident or contrivance, or the secret processes of the ship’s grave, sealed every aperture that, standing in this now wind-swept cabin, you might have supposed the little fabric had never shipped a bucketful of water from the hour of her launch. Several human skeletons lay upon the deck. The Captain and his Sons held the lanterns to the bones, and handled the rags which had been their raiment, but the colorless stuff went to pieces. It mouldered in the grasp as dry sand streams from the clenched fist.

Five cabins were bulkheaded off this black, long-buried interior. The Captain and his sons searched them, but everything that was not of timber appeared to have undergone the same transformation that was visible in what had doubtless been the cargo in the hold. They found chairs of a venerable pattern, cresset-like lamps, such as Milton describes, bunk bedsteads, upon which were faintly distinguishable the tracings of what might have been paintings and gilt-work.

“What d’ye think of this, boys, for a show?” cried Captain Carey, whose voice was tremulous with excitement and astonishment. “If there ain’t two thousand pound in the job as a sight-going consarn, tell me we’re all a-dreaming, and that the whole boiling’s a lie. And now to see what’s under hatches here.”

A small square of hatchway was visible just abaft the black oblong table that centred the interior. They opened this hatch without labor. The cementing process of the ship’s grave had not apparently worked very actively in this cabin, yet the foul air of the after-hold forced them once more upon no less than three days of inactivity; for to sweeten the place they were obliged to construct a windsail, whose breezy heel rendered the atmosphere fit for human respiration in a few hours.

On descending they found just such another accumulation of lava-like remains of freight as they had met with in the main-hold. But they also noticed a bulkhead ten feet abaft the sternpost. They chopped their way through it and stood for awhile peering around them under the lanterns which they held above their heads. The gleams illuminated a quantity of ancient furniture—sofas and chairs and little tables, and framed squares and ovals of obliterated paintings. Captain Carey put his hand upon a couch and drew away his fist full of pale and rotted upholstery.

“Are those things cases yonder?” said the sailor son, and the three of them made their way to a corner of the hold and stood looking for a moment or two at four square chests heavily clamped with iron.

“What’s here?” said Captain Carey.

The giant Jack stooped and strove to stir one of the boxes.

“Stand aside!” roared the Skipper, and with half a dozen strokes of his axe, he split open the lid of one of the chests.

The three faces came together in a huddle, and the light shone upon lines of linked and minted metal.

“Pick out one of ’em, Tom,” said Captain Carey, in a faint voice, “my hands are a-trembling too much to do it.”

They were Spanish silver coins, subsequently ascertained to have been minted in times which proved the age of this sunken and recovered ship contemporaneous with the early years of the reign of our Second Charles. Captain Carey told me that he realized £6400 on them.

But this lucky family did better yet with their incredible discovery; for after the Captain had secreted the money in his house, he called in workmen, who dug away the soil from the buried ship until she was exposed to the blige on which she rested. This done, he carried out his resolution to make a show of her by erecting a shed for the fabric, stationing a doorkeeper at the entrance, and charging sixpence for admission. Many hundreds, indeed many thousands, came from all parts to view the wonderful ship, that was ascertained, by what is called an “expert “ in naval affairs, to have been the *Sancte Ineas*, captured by the privateer Amazon, and lost whilst proceeding in charge of a prize crew to an English port. It was further discovered that her lading had consisted of coffee, cochineal, indigo, hides in the hair, bales of fine wool and fur. But down to this hour it was never known that Captain Carey had found hidden, and, in course of time, cleverly turned into good English money, four chests, of Spanish silver, worth, at all events to this happy family of Brokers’ Bay, £6400. For my own part, I have honorably, kept my worthy friend’s secret,