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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A MIDDY OF THE KING: A ROMANCE OF THE OLD BRITISH NAVY ***

Harry Collingwood

"A Middy of the King"

Chapter One.

H.M.S. Europa.

I had just dismounted before the rather imposing main entrance to Delamere Hall, situate close to the west Dorset coast, and had handed over my horse to Tom Biddlecome, the groom who had accompanied me in my before-breakfast ride down to the beach for my morning dip, when my father appeared in the portico.

"Good morning, Dick," he greeted me. "I suppose you have been for your swim, as usual. How did you find the water?"

"Grand, sir," I replied; "just the right temperature to put new life into one. Another week, at this rate, ought to see me as well as ever I was."

"Well, your present appearance is scarcely that of an invalid, I must confess," he remarked laughingly. "If you were called upon to submit to a medical examination, I fancy the verdict would be that there is not very much the matter with you. And I am very glad that it is so; for I have just received a letter from my friend Vavassour, in which he informs me that he has been posted to the new frigate *Europa*, launched last week at Portsmouth and now fitting-out; that he has entered your name on her books; and that, if you feel sufficiently recovered to resume duty, he would very strongly advise you to proceed to Portsmouth at once and assist in the operation of fitting-out, as he is of opinion that by doing so you will gain a considerable amount of knowledge that will be of the utmost value to you when you come to sit for your examination. Now, what is your opinion? Do you think you are sufficiently recovered to do as Vavassour suggests; or should I write and ask him to—"

"By no means, my dear father," I interrupted hastily. "I am quite well, and perfectly fit for duty in every respect; indeed, I feel sure that, having advanced so far along the road to recovery, a return to a life of greater activity than that which I have been living of late will be positively beneficial to me. Of course I shall be very sorry to leave you again to a life of solitude."

"Do not think of that, Dick," interrupted my father in his turn. "I assure you that my life here is not nearly so lonely as you seem to imagine. True, there are not many neighbours, but what there are, are eminently satisfactory; also I have my horses, my dogs, my gun, and my rod for outdoor companions, and books to exorcise the loneliness of my evenings; so that you see I am not at all badly off. No doubt I shall miss you after you are gone, my son; but this is not the time to study one's own feelings. Britain just now needs every one of her sons who can strike a blow in her defence; and when I look at your empty chair I shall at least have the pride and satisfaction of knowing that, wherever you may be, you are upholding the honour of your country and your name. Well, well," he sighed, "let us get indoors and to breakfast. There is a letter also for you from Vavassour, and you will be curious to learn what he has to say to you."

Whereupon, linked arm in arm, my father and I entered and made our way to the breakfast room, where we seated ourselves, and were soon busy with the viands placed before us. The letter to which my father had referred lay beside my plate; and, having obtained his permission, I at once broke the seal and glanced at its contents, for I was full of curiosity to learn in detail the splendid news which my father had outlined to me as he stood in the portico.

But before proceeding further with this veracious history it will be well that I should say a word or two about myself, by way of formally introducing myself as it were to the reader, in order that if he feels inclined to follow my fortunes, as set forth in the following pages, he may know just who I am and how matters were standing with me at the moment when this story opens.

To begin, then, I was the only son of Sir Richard Delamere, of Delamere Hall, in the county of Dorsetshire; Baronet, Justice of the Peace, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera; and some sixteen and a half years before the date at which this story starts I had received the name of Richard, after my father, at the baptismal font in the fine old church in the village of Delamere, that nestles snugly in the valley about a mile to the north-eastward of the Hall.

I never knew my mother, for she died in giving me birth; and my father, who adored her living, and revered her memory, was some years older before he fully forgave me for being the unwitting cause of her premature departure from this world. And in this I could sympathise with him as soon as I came to years of understanding, for she was not only, as everybody who had known her asserted, of a most amiable and loveable disposition, but—as her portrait in the big library bore witness—a most lovely woman.

But although I was unfortunate enough never to have known a mother's love, I do not think I was actually very much the worse for the loss; for upon my mother's death her place was most ably and conscientiously filled by my aunt Griselda, my father's maiden sister, who faithfully did her duty both by my father and me until she too passed away when I was about eleven years old, by which time my father had completely conquered his original resentment toward me, and we had become all that father and son ought to be to each other.

Then, after receiving the best education that it was at that time possible for a lad to receive, I had entered the navy as a midshipman, at the age of fourteen, and had gone out to the Mediterranean in the old *Colossus*, two-decker, under the command of Sir Percy Fitzgerald, where, for some two and a half years, we spent our time partly in chasing the French up and down the great inland sea, and partly in blockading the port of Toulon, under Sir John Jervis. It was while engaged upon this latter service that I was so seriously wounded in the head by a flying splinter that I was invalided home to recover, the *Colossus* being opportunely ordered to England at the same time to undergo a general overhaul and refit.

Of course I had not been in the navy for more than two years without making a few friends, among the staunchest of whom I reckoned Mr Henry Vavassour, the first lieutenant of the *Colossus*, and also a friend of my father. This officer was a very dashing fellow, a prime seaman, and a cool, courageous, resolute leader of men—he had frequently been mentioned in dispatches—and I was therefore not at all surprised to learn, as I now did, that he had gained his post rank and had been given the command of a fine ship. His letter to me ran as follows:

“My dear Delamere—I think you will be glad to learn that their Lordships have been pleased to promote me, bestow upon me post rank, and give me the command of the new frigate *Europa*, just launched at Portsmouth. She is an exceedingly fine ship of 1216 tons, mounting 38 guns; and, with smart officers and a good crew, I think she ought, given ordinary luck, to render an excellent account of herself.

“I have been allowed to nominate all my own officers, and I have therefore entered you on the ship's books, not only for your father's sake, but also on account of your excellent behaviour while aboard the *Colossus*; and if, as I hope, you have sufficiently recovered to join, you will again meet one or two of your former shipmates on the quarter-deck of the new ship.

“If you feel fit for duty I would very strongly advise you to join at the earliest possible moment, as at present the *Europa* has only her three lower-masts stepped. She is in the hands of the riggers, and I am of opinion that it would be of the utmost service to you if you could be on the spot to witness the process of rigging; you would thus obtain at first hand an insight into details, which will assuredly stand you in good stead when you come to present yourself for examination. I ought, perhaps, to inform you that in the event of your deciding to act upon my advice it will be necessary for you to take up your quarters temporarily aboard the receiving hulk, but this inconvenience will be more than compensated by the knowledge that you will gain. For myself, I am putting up at the 'George' in the High Street, and it will be well for you to report yourself to me there upon your arrival. I have written to your father, explaining everything; I need therefore add nothing to this beyond the expression of the hope that you may be able to avail yourself to the fullest extent of this splendid opportunity for gaining a great deal of most useful knowledge in a very short time.—Yours sincerely, Henry Vavassour.”

When I had finished the perusal of this exceedingly kind and friendly letter I passed it over to my father, who in his turn read it carefully through, and then passed it back to me with the question:

“Well, Dick, my boy, what do you think of it?”

“Simply, sir, that if you approve I will at once write to Captain Vavassour, thanking him heartily for his very great kindness, and telling him that I will start for Portsmouth to-morrow,” I said.

My father regarded me, rather wistfully I thought, for a few moments, and then said:

“Very well; be it so. Write your letter, by all means, and I will enclose a few lines in it. And,”—suddenly, in a much more cheerful tone of voice, as an idea seemed to suggest itself to him—“I'll tell you what I'll do, Dick, I'll run over to Portsmouth with you, and stay for a few days. A little change will do me good; and I should like very much to see this new ship of yours, as well as to meet Vavassour again, whom I have not seen for quite a number of years. Yes, certainly, I will go over with you.”

Thus it was arranged. We wrote and dispatched our letters, spent the remainder of the day in making our preparations, and started on our journey soon after ten o'clock the next morning, posting it all the way to Portsmouth, where we arrived at six o'clock the same evening, and put up at the “George,” where Captain Vavassour had established himself. Of course, it was scarcely in accordance with strict naval etiquette for me, a mere midshipman, to presume to quarter myself in the hotel that my captain honoured with his patronage, but the circumstances were exceptional in so far as that I was with my father; moreover, it was to be for but one night, and the skipper was far too fine and manly a fellow to take notice of so insignificant a breach of the unwritten law as I was

committing. My father and I dined with him that night, incidentally making the acquaintance of Mr Malcolm Adair, the *Europa's* first lieutenant; and on the following morning, immediately after breakfast, I proceeded on board the receiving hulk, reported myself, then returned to the shore and made my way to Number 3 basin, in which the frigate was undergoing the process of being rigged and prepared for sea.

I had not served for two and a half years in the Mediterranean without learning something of what constituted a good model of a ship, and I no sooner set eyes upon the *Europa* than I fell violently in love with her. She had been launched flying light, and then had been hauled under the masting-sheers to have her three lower-masts stepped, after which it had been necessary to move her to another part of the basin in order to make way for another ship. She had occupied her new berth five days when I first saw her, during which the carpenters, joiners, and painters had been busily employed in finishing off her internal fittings; and when first I beheld her the dockyard people were in the act of warping her across the basin to still another berth, where she was to receive her ballast; thus when my eyes first rested upon her she was floating high out of the water, and I was afforded an excellent opportunity to view and criticise her lines. She was somewhat shallow of hull and flat in the floor, to give her a light draught of water, but to compensate for this she was extraordinarily "beamy," which had the twofold effect of imparting great stiffness under canvas, and affording fine roomy decks. Her sides were as round as an apple—not an inch of "straight" anywhere in them—and, despite her unusual breadth, her lines were the finest and most beautiful that I had ever seen. She carried a full poop, the interior of which constituted the captain's quarters—roomy, light, and airy; and as I noted the length and solidity of her lower-masts the idea occurred to me that, if the remainder of her spars were to be in proportion, her sail-spread, combined with her perfect lines, ought to give her such exceptional speed as would enable her to do just as she pleased with an adversary.

As soon as she was alongside and made fast I went on board and had a good look at her interior, not forgetting to inscribe my name legibly on the most conveniently situated locker in the midshipmen's berth, after which I watched the operation of shipping and stowing her ballast. There was not much of interest or instruction in this part of the work, but when, on the following day, I witnessed the execution of the apparently impossible task of getting the tops aloft and over the mastheads, and was afterwards initiated into the mysteries of measuring for and laying off rigging, getting it into position and setting it up; and beheld the rapidity and assured certainty with which the three bare lower spars were equipped with shrouds, stays, caps, etcetera; the topmasts rose into place, were rigged and fidded; how the yards were sent aloft and secured; and how, in short, the entire fabric became rapidly converted from a mere empty shell into a complicated yet marvellously perfect structure that needed but smart officers, a well-disciplined crew, and the breathing of the winds of heaven to make of her, not only the most beautiful and wonderful product of human skill, but also a formidable self-contained engine of warfare, I mentally confessed that not only was seamanship a most fascinating science, but also that sailors were the most ingenious and adaptable specimens of the entire human race.

The work of fitting-out was pushed forward with all possible expedition. A bare three weeks, therefore, from the day of my arrival in Portsmouth, saw the *Europa* all at aunt, with royal-yards across, sails bent, stores of all descriptions on board and stowed, water-tanks filled, guns mounted, and, in fact, ready for sea in every respect, except that her crew were not on board, and her magazines were empty. Then she was warped out of the basin, her crew turned over to her from the receiving hulk, and she was taken out to Spithead to receive her powder. During all this time my father had remained at Portsmouth, quartered at the "George," spending as much as possible of his time with me in the dockyard; and after the work of the day was over I generally—by favour of Mr Adair, the first lieutenant—dined and spent the evening with him, the discipline of the receiving hulk not being very severe, and nobody caring much at what time I went aboard at night so long as I was present at muster next morning. But on the day that the crew were turned over, and the ship was taken out to Spithead, these little indulgences came to an end; for the frigate was no sooner at anchor than, before the powder hoy arrived alongside, Captain Vavassour came off, the crew were mustered, and he read his commission and hoisted his pennant, from which moment the strictest naval discipline became the order of the day. Nevertheless, when at the conclusion of the above-mentioned ceremony the skipper ordered his gig and returned to the shore, I obtained leave to accompany him, upon condition that I reported myself on board again by eight o'clock. I therefore again, and for the last time during that cruise, dined with my father, after which he accompanied me to the Hard, bade me a most affectionate good-bye, and stood watching the wherry which was conveying me off to the ship, until the boat passed out of the harbour and we vanished from his sight. Not until long afterward did I know that, instead of starting for home the next morning, as he had talked of doing, he crossed over to Gosport the first thing after breakfast, walked to Haslar, and stationed himself on the beach at Gilkicker Point, watching the frigate until she had got under way and passed out of sight to the southward and eastward.

The next morning, at daylight, Blue Peter was hoisted at the fore-royal masthead and a gun fired as a signal that the ship was about to sail; boats were hoisted in and stowed, stock was brought alongside, and the order was given to clear the ship of strangers—sailors' wives and sweethearts who had come off to say a last good-bye, bumboat women who were making a final desperate effort to obtain a settlement of their accounts, and tradesmen of all kinds engaged upon the same errand or intent upon palming off upon the men otherwise unsaleable stock.

Shortly after ten o'clock Captain Vavassour came on board, immediately after which the hands were piped to "up anchor"; and within half-an-hour we were under way and standing out toward Saint Helens, under all plain sail, before a light northerly breeze.

We had not been under way a quarter of an hour before it became apparent to everybody on board that the *Europa* was going to more than justify the exceedingly favourable opinion that we had already formed of her; for, light as was the wind, she slid through the water at a speed that fairly astonished us, her keen stem cleaving the short Channel surges cleanly and with very little noise or fuss, and leaving behind her a wake so smooth and so little disturbed that at a distance of a quarter of a mile it vanished altogether. And when, an hour or so later, having made a good offing, the skipper ordered her to be hauled to the wind on a taut bowline for a short time, to test her speed under those conditions, and then put her about, she went to windward and tacked like a yacht.

Our cruising-ground was a fairly extensive one, stretching from the longitude of Cape la Hague on the one hand to

longitude 10 degrees West on the other, and from latitude 50 degrees North to Cape Finisterre; in other words, it embraced the chops of the Channel and the whole of the Bay of Biscay; and our duty was to protect British commerce on the high seas, and harry the enemy generally. The wide limits of our cruising-ground, and the fact that, for the moment at least, we were free to go whither we pleased within those limits, was a source of the keenest gratification to all hands, for it was just within that area that the privateers of the enemy were then displaying the most activity and doing the greatest amount of mischief; and we were all looking forward hopefully to the prospect of making plenty of captures and recaptures. But those of us who had been shipmates together in the old *Colossus* found an additional source of gratification in the speed of our new craft; for whereas in the *Colossus*—which was possibly the slowest ship ever launched—we had done plenty of chasing, we had never been able to catch anything unless all the conditions were strongly in our favour; while now we hoped to find the state of affairs very much the opposite.

It was not only upon the speed of the *Europa*, however, that we built our hopes of success; for not only was she an unusually fast vessel, but she carried an exceptionally heavy armament for a ship of her class, namely, twenty-four long 24-pounders on her main-deck, and fourteen long 8-pounders on her quarter-deck and fore-castle; while, to crown all, her crew consisted of two hundred and ninety-two men—every one of whom had voluntarily entered. Furthermore, of those two hundred and ninety-two men, no less than one hundred and sixty-five had been aboard the *Colossus*, and had joined after being paid off from that craft; while, on the quarter-deck, the skipper, Mr Galway the second lieutenant, Mr Trimble the master, Maxwell the master's-mate, Gascoigne a midshipman, Mr Purvis the gunner, and myself had all been shipmates together in the same craft.

Having manoeuvred the ship for close upon two hours, with the view of testing her speed and handiness in varying circumstances, so far as was possible under the existing conditions of wind and sea, we bore up and shaped a course for Cape la Hague, which we made just before nightfall. Then, as the breeze seemed inclined to freshen a trifle, rendering the ship more manageable in the strong tides that sweep that part of the coast, the Captain determined to search the bight at the bottom of which lies the French port of Saint Malo, just then notorious for the number of privateers which it fitted out and sent to sea. We accordingly passed in about half-way between Alderney and the mainland, maintaining an offing from the latter of about eight miles, and took in our royals and topgallantsails.

Passing inside the Chausey Islands, breakfast-time the next morning found us off the town, in the harbour of which we saw a number of small fishing and coasting craft, but nothing of importance; we therefore hauled up to the westward, set our topgallantsails, and boarded the fore and main tacks, in order to work out clear of Brehat and secure a good offing; for the glass was dropping, the breeze freshening, there was a "greasy" look about the sky to windward that seemed to portend a blow, and we were on a lee-shore.

As the morning advanced the portents became more pronounced; the wind increased to such an extent that we first had to stow our topgallantsails again and then single-reef the topsails, and a very nasty short, choppy sea quickly got up, into which the frigate plunged viciously to the height of her figurehead, sending deluges of spray over her weather cathead and into the hollow of her foresail until the canvas was darkened with wet half-way up to the yard, while it thickened up away to windward until it became impossible to distinguish anything beyond the distance of a mile, and the wind backed on us until it was out from about North-North-West, with the result that, when at length we made the land, it stretched right athwart our hawse and reached away to windward, as far as the eye could penetrate the mist.

There was nothing for it but to 'bout ship and haul off on the other tack; the crew were therefore piped to stations and the helm eased down, when the ship swept grandly up into the wind and went round like a top, holding her way in a style that delighted as much as it surprised us, and staying almost as quickly as the men could swing the yards.

Eight bells of the afternoon watch had just struck when, the weather clearing suddenly, we made the island of Guernsey, some eight miles ahead, and Jersey somewhat more distant, two points before our starboard beam; and at the same moment two craft were made out, about six miles away from us and broad on our weather-beam, coming down before the wind under a heavy press of sail, and heading as though bound for Saint Malo. They were within half a mile of each other, and appeared to be in company.

The instant that they were seen there was a general rush for telescopes on the part of all the officers on deck; and after a protracted scrutiny of them the general consensus of opinion was that they were a French privateer and a British merchantman which she had captured. Coming down toward us, end-on as they were, it was not easy at first to determine their rig, but both were large ships, one of them being of about six hundred tons, while the other appeared to be fully as big as ourselves. That their eyes were as sharp as our own very soon became evident; for while we were still peering at them through our glasses, we saw a string of flags go soaring aloft on board the smaller craft of the two, and immediately afterward both vessels slightly altered their course, the bigger of the two hauling up a couple of points to the southward and shaping a course that would carry her across our stern at a distance of about two miles, while the other very smartly clewed up her topgallantsails, took a single-reef in her topsails, and slightly hauled her wind, as though with the purpose of intercepting us. This action on their part at once confirmed our suspicions as to their respective characters, and at the same time enabled us to determine that they were both full-rigged ships.

"The smaller will be the privateer, and, therefore, in all probability the faster vessel of the two, Mr Adair," said the skipper. "We will accordingly tackle him first; for I think we can polish him off in time to catch the other fellow before he can get into port. Beat to quarters, if you please, sir, and show our colours."

The first lieutenant gave the order, the drum rattled out its summons, and the ship at once became a hive of activity; the decks were cleared of everything that could possibly interfere with the efficient working of the guns; the guns themselves were cast loose, the half-ports knocked out, screens put up, the magazine opened, powder and shot passed up on deck, cutlasses and pistols served out to the crew, and, in short, every preparation made for battle. Our ensign was streaming out in the breeze, as flat as a board, from the mizen peak, but neither of the strangers had

thus far condescended to show us the colour of their bunting. They had now definitely parted company, the larger of the two edging in for the land with the evident intention of reaching a port, while the other, having hauled her wind, was as evidently preparing to cover the retreat of her prize by engaging us in a running fight and drawing us off-shore to the northward.

Chapter Two.

The Privateer and her Prize.

The smaller of the two craft, having hauled close to the wind, upon the same tack as ourselves, and about two miles dead to windward of us, now hoisted French colours, and fired a gun of defiance, the shot from which, however, fell a long way short of us. We did not attempt to reply to this challenge, for although our long 24-pounders would probably have reached the other ship, the skipper considered the distance too great for our fire to be effective, while the motion of the frigate was so violent that the chances were against our being able to make a hit at all, and Captain Vavassour was noted for the strength of his objection to the wasteful firing away of ammunition. For the moment, therefore, he contented himself with testing the respective speed and weatherliness of the two ships.

We very soon discovered that, so far as these two qualities were concerned, we had caught a Tartar; for although within the first ten minutes of the test it became apparent that we were head-reaching upon the craft to windward, our advantage was so slight that we could scarcely hope to get within effective range of her in less than two hours at least, while during the whole of that time the bigger of the two strangers would be proceeding in the opposite direction at such a rate as would render her ultimate escape a practical certainty.

The skipper looked long and anxiously, first at one craft, then at the other, and finally at the barometer; then he rejoined the first lieutenant, who was giving his attention almost exclusively to the chase to windward.

"This won't do at all, Mr Adair," he said. "That fellow is going through the water almost as fast as we are, and is holding as good a luff. At this rate we shall not get to grips with him before dark, which will probably mean losing the big fellow, if not both of them. I see that the barometer is inclined to rise; we will, therefore, shake the reef out of the topsails, and set the fore and main-topgallant sails. If it becomes a question of 'carrying-on,' I think we ought to have the best of it by a long way."

"Ay, I'm no sayin' ye may no be richt, sir," answered the first lieutenant; "but it'll be an unco strain upon the spars to set thae to'gallants'ls; our new rigging has stretched until it's all hangin' in bights, as ye may see for yoursel' by lookin' at it. Still, it may be worth the tryin': but will ye no see what we can do under whole topsails before settin' the to'gallants'ls?"

"I think not," said the skipper. "We have not the time to spare for tentative measures; and although, as you truly say, the rigging has badly stretched, I think it has scarcely stretched sufficiently seriously to imperil the spars. We shall sail all the better for a little spring and whip in the masts, unless I am greatly mistaken; therefore have the goodness to make sail at once, sir, if you please."

In the face of so decided an opinion as this there was of course nothing further to be said, and five minutes later the *Europa* was leaping and plunging madly through the short, choppy Channel seas, with her topmasts and topgallant-masts whipping like fishing rods under the strain of the increased canvas, while the whole of her fore-deck was deluged with the spray that came in over the weather cathead, in cataracts that leapt almost as high as the foreyard. The chase lost not a moment in following our example, and setting the same canvas as ourselves; but scarcely ten minutes had elapsed before the correctness of the Captain's judgment became manifest, for within that brief space of time it was seen that we were fast head-reaching and weathering upon the Frenchman, who was evidently overpowered by his too heavy press of canvas.

A quarter-of-an-hour later Captain Vavassour gave the order to tack; and while the frigate was in stays, plunging bows under, and quivering to her keel with the furious slatting of her canvas as she swept up into the wind, we had the satisfaction of seeing the Frenchman's mizen-topmast go over the side.

"Now we have him!" ejaculated the Captain, in a tone of exultation. "With his mizen-topsail gone he will no longer be able to maintain so close a luff as ourselves, and within half-an-hour we shall be able to do as we please with him."

That the stranger was strong-handed, and that she carried a thoroughly well-disciplined crew was evident; for by the time that we had paid off on the other tack and had swung our foreyard, her mizen rigging was full of men busy upon the task of clearing away the wreck of the topmast, while others were equally busy in clewing-up and furling the fore-topgallantsail and hauling down and stowing her flying-jib, to enable her to maintain as good a luff as possible. But desperate as were their efforts they could do nothing with us now, at least upon a wind; therefore when we next tacked—which was the moment that we were fairly in her wake—she suddenly put up her helm, squared away dead before the wind, and proceeded to set studdingsails on both sides.

The Captain rubbed his hands and chuckled with delight as he saw this.

"Up helm and after her, Mr Adair," he exclaimed. "It is the very thing I could have wished for; she must be a veritable witch at sailing, if she can beat us before the wind. But we will set our port studdingsails only, to start with, if you please; for if, as I expect, we have the heels of her, I will haul up a point or two and endeavour to close with her to point-blank range."

Another three minutes saw us both sweeping away to leeward like meteors, the chase about a mile distant, broad on our port beam, with studdingsails set on both sides, from her royals down; while we, with studdingsails set to port

only, were edging rapidly in upon her, while fully holding our own with her in other respects. And, oh, what a relief it was to feel the long, easy, floating motion and the level keel of a ship running before wind and sea, in exchange for the short, savage digging into a head sea, with its accompaniments of drenching showers of spray, sickening lee lurches, and a whole gale of wind buffeting one in the face and doing its utmost to drive one's teeth down one's throat.

The Captain's expectations relative to the frigate's behaviour on the new point of sailing were quickly verified; so quickly, indeed, that within a quarter of an hour we found ourselves within easy range of the chase—a fact which was brought home to us by a shot from her passing within a foot of our hammock rail and whizzing between our fore and mainmast.

"Now, Mr Adair," said the skipper, "you may see what you can do with her. Let the captains of the guns try their hands upon her individually, doing their best to cut up her spars and rigging. We want to capture, not to sink her; she is far too fine a ship to be sent to the bottom, therefore spare her hull as much as possible."

The first lieutenant went down on the main-deck and personally repeated the Captain's instructions; and before he returned to the quarter-deck the first of our long 24-pounders spoke its message, the shot passing through the stranger's foresail and narrowly missing the mast. Then our 8-pounders got to work, and very soon we saw loose ropes'-ends streaming out on board her, showing that our fire had not been wholly in vain, although, so far, no damage worth speaking of had been done. Nor were the Frenchmen idle; on the contrary, they fired about four guns to every one of ours, but after that first shot of theirs they appeared to have become flurried and excited, and their aim correspondingly wild; at all events, although some of their shot came near us, while one or two actually flew over us, not one of them came near enough to do us a ropeyarn's worth of damage.

With our own men it was very different; the more often they fired the cooler did they seem to become; and it was amusing to see the eagerness with which, after firing, they watched the effect of each shot, with the evident purpose of correcting their aim next time. The result of this caution on their part soon became apparent, for we had scarcely fired a dozen shots when we saw the stranger's fore-topmast go swooping over the bows; and the next minute she broached-to, losing her main-topgallant-mast and snapping every one of her studdingsail booms in the process.

"Cease firing!" shouted the skipper. "In studdingsails, Mr Adair; clew up and furl your royals and topgallantsails; in flying-jib; and then haul your wind, if you please. The fellow will surely not hold out any longer."

He did, though, pluckily maintaining a fire upon us with two guns run out through his stern ports—evidently hoping to disable us, while his crew worked like demons in their efforts to clear away the wreckage; and it was not until we ranged up on his weather quarter, within biscuit-toss, and threatened him with the whole of our starboard broadside, that he hauled down his colours and surrendered.

The heavy sea that was now running rendered the task of taking possession of the prize exceedingly difficult; nevertheless, by the exercise of the utmost skill and care, the first and second cutters, under the command of Mr Howard, our second lieutenant, and O'Brien, one of the midshipmen, at length managed to get alongside and put a prize-crew of thirty-two men on board her. The boats quickly returned to the ship with the intelligence that the prize was the twenty-six-gun privateer *Belle Marie* of Saint Malo, carrying a total crew of two hundred and thirty men, of whom eighty-seven were at the moment away in prizes, forty of them being on board the British East Indiaman *Masulipatam*—the ship which had by this time passed out of sight in the southern board. The weather conditions being unfavourable for the transfer of the Frenchmen from the prize to the frigate, without the loss of a great deal of valuable time, Captain Vavassour hailed Mr Howard, instructing him to confine the prisoners below, and then, with the aid of the carpenter's crew which we were about to send him, to repair damages as well as he could, and make the best of his way to Portsmouth. It was almost dark by the time that all the necessary arrangements were completed and the boats once more hoisted in, when we wore round and shaped a course which we hoped would enable us to intercept and recapture the Indiaman before she could reach Saint Malo.

This course brought the wind about three points abaft the starboard beam; it was consequently a leading wind, therefore, the business being pressing, we not only showed all plain sail, to our topgallantsails, but also set topmast and lower studdingsails to windward, the yards being braced slightly forward. This was a heavy press of canvas to pile upon the ship, with the wind where it was, and so heavy a sea running, but the Captain evidently considered—as, indeed, did we all—that the circumstances justified a certain measure of recklessness, for we had all observed that the *Masulipatam* was, at all events when going free, almost as fast a ship as the *Belle Marie*; and haste was necessary if we would overtake her before she reached her port.

By four bells in the first watch the wind had moderated sufficiently to permit of our setting all three royals, as well as the weather topgallant studdingsails; and half-an-hour later we sighted the craft of which we were in pursuit about four points on our starboard-bow. She was then about twelve miles distant, and only just distinguishable with the aid of our best night glasses; and the fact that we were still so far astern of her seemed to render it exceedingly doubtful whether she would not, after all, make good her escape. The fear that she would do so was still further strengthened when at midnight we made Cape Fréhel light, with the chase still leading by a full eight miles; the only chance in our favour being that, as the bearing of the light proved, the Indiaman was some three miles to windward of her course, and would have to bear away for it, while we were heading for Saint Malo as straight as we could go. As the night passed on, however, our hopes rose somewhat, for the weather cleared, while the wind softened down; and with the softening of the wind it became apparent that we were gaining more rapidly.

As the time wore on so did the chase grow increasingly exciting, our hopes every moment strengthening, until at length, by three bells in the middle watch, they had merged into a conviction that nothing short of a miracle could save the Indiaman from recapture. Some such conviction must also have forced itself upon the mind of the officer in charge of her, for just after four bells had been struck we saw him suddenly take in his studdingsails and haul his wind, having apparently decided that he must inevitably be taken if he persisted in his endeavour to get into Saint

Malo. By the direction in which he was now steering it seemed probable that he had determined to seek shelter in one of the indentations to the westward of Fréhel, many of which were at that time defended by earthwork batteries for the protection of the French coasting craft from our cruisers and privateers.

This move on the part of the Indiaman's prizemaster proved the man to be possessed of both sagacity and foresight, for it threw us at once some four miles to leeward of him and compelled us forthwith to take in our studdingsails and brace sharp up in order to follow him, while he was now so close to the land that there was every prospect of his being able to get in and anchor under the shelter of a battery before we could overtake him. And that, in the end, was precisely what occurred; for when at length we weathered Cape Fréhel we were just in time to see him entering Pleher Bay, where he presently rounded-to, clewed up his canvas, and let go his anchor.

Naturally, Captain Vavassour was not the sort of man to see a possible rich prize riding at anchor in the enemy's waters without making a determined attempt to secure possession of her; we therefore stood boldly in after the Indiaman until we arrived within half a mile of the entrance of the bay—at that point about two miles across—when two batteries of six guns each, built upon opposite headlands forming the entrance to the bay, opened fire upon us, and with such effect that within five minutes we had been hulled seven times, and had lost two men killed and five wounded. This afforded the skipper all the information that he just then required, namely, the fact that batteries existed, and also the exact position and strength of them—it now appearing that they were armed with 32-pounders. We therefore hove about and got out of range again as quickly as possible; for, as the Captain said, it was no good returning the fire of earthwork batteries; we might have plumped into them every shot we had on board without doing them a farthing's-worth of damage, while, had we attempted to force a passage into the bay with the frigate, they might easily have sunk us.

But the fun was not yet over; as a matter of fact it had really not begun—the affair of the batteries was merely the overture of the little drama which was taking shape in the skipper's brain. We stretched off the land until we were about three miles distant from the mouth of the bay, and then the ship was hove-to and preparation was made for the dispatch of a cutting-out expedition; that is to say, an attack upon the Indiaman by the frigate's boats, with the object of overpowering her prize-crew, cutting her cables, and bringing her out of the harbour.

The launch, yawl, and the two cutters were the boats told off by the Captain for this service, and as soon as the frigate was hove-to the fighting crews of these boats—consisting of the very pick of the ship's crew—were piped away, the boats hoisted out, and the preparation of the craft for the service which they were about to undertake proceeded with. Each of the boats named possessed, as part of her fighting equipment, a gun mounted in the bows upon fore-and-aft slides, those belonging to the launch and yawl being 18-pounder carronades, while the first and second cutters each mounted a 12-pounder. As soon as the boats were in the water they were taken charge of temporarily by their respective coxswains—the best four men in the ship—who at once proceeded to supervise the shipping and mounting of the guns, each coxswain assuring himself, by personal inspection, that this important piece of work was properly executed. The amount of shot likely to be required was next passed down into the boats and carefully stowed upon the bottom-boards, every precaution being taken to provide against it breaking adrift with the rolling and pitching of the boats. The chests containing cartridges for the guns and ammunition for the small-arms were next passed in and stowed, and finally a couple of beakers of water were placed in each boat, together with a small quantity of spirits for use, if necessary, in reviving the wounded. This completed the preparation of the boats for the projected expedition, and was done by the ordinary crews of the boats, the fighting crews meanwhile busying themselves in examining the flints of their pistols, fitting new ones where necessary, loading the pistols and sharpening their cutlasses.

At length the coxswains reported the boats ready, whereupon the officers told off to command them went down the side and carefully inspected them, satisfying themselves that nothing had been forgotten. Then the members of the expedition were mustered on the quarter-deck and inspected by the first lieutenant, who examined each man's weapons and equipment before passing him for service. The officers appointed to proceed upon the expedition were Mr Adair, the first lieutenant, in charge of the launch and in supreme command of the entire expedition; Mr Trimble, the master, in charge of the yawl; Mr Purvis, the gunner, in the first cutter; and Mr O'Donnel, the boatswain, in the second. In addition to these there also went Mr Burroughs, the assistant surgeon, and myself in the launch, and a midshipman in each of the other boats. As I anticipated the possibility of hot work before all was done, I took the precaution to discard my dirk and to provide myself, in place thereof, with a ship's cutlass and a pair of loaded pistols.

The inspection at length satisfactorily ended, the first lieutenant reported to the Captain that all was ready; the Captain—who had already arranged his plans with the officers commanding—gave the word to man boats and shove off, and in another couple of minutes we had started, and the frigate had filled away and was heading to seaward.

Not so the boats. The Captain and Mr Adair, discussing together the plan of operations, had come to the conclusion that it would not be of the slightest use to attempt to bring out the Indiaman in the face of those two batteries which had already given us so convincing a taste of their quality; it had therefore been arranged that, upon shoving off, the boats should be formed into two divisions for the purpose of attacking the batteries and spiking the guns. This, accordingly, was now done, the launch and first cutter forming the starboard division, destined to attack the battery on the western headland, while the yawl and the second cutter, led by the master, constituted the port division, the mission of which was to silence effectually the battery on the eastern headland of the harbour. The first lieutenant and the master made a few brief final arrangements, and then the divisions separated, each steering for its own proper headland, the senior officer leading and the other following close behind, so as to show as inconspicuously as might be on the dark surface of the water, and thus, if luck favoured us, take the Frenchmen unawares.

Meanwhile, the night was passing rapidly away; for we had scarcely got clear of the frigate when seven bells of the middle watch was struck, and, it being then the middle of August, we might expect daylight very shortly, when a surprise would at once become an impossibility; the word was therefore passed for the oarsmen to give way at top speed, and away we all went, as if for a wager, the two divisions heading respectively south-west and south-east, in

the hope that we might get close enough in with the land to escape detection, and even possibly to land, before the coming dawn betrayed us.

Now, although we were travelling at racing pace, our progress was practically noiseless, the only sounds being the dip of oars in the water and the lap and gurgle of the water about the boats' bows, Captain Vavassour having already had the oars of these boats fitted to work in rope grummets shipping over a single stout pin, instead of in the usual rowlocks, and since much care had been used to render the grummets tight-fitting, while the leathers had been well greased, there was none of the usual rattle of oars in rowlocks,—a sound which in quiet weather may often be heard at an almost incredible distance,—nor, thanks to the greasing of the leathers, was there any creaking or grinding of the oars against the pins; and of course no conversation was permitted beyond an occasional whispered order to the coxswain.

In this fashion, then, we pulled shoreward, the distance to be traversed being about three miles; and when at length the dawn broke and there was light enough to enable us to see where we were, we—the starboard division—found ourselves about a quarter of a mile distant from the beach, with both batteries shut out from our view by a slightly projecting bluff; and, thus far, nothing had occurred to lead us to suppose that we had been either heard or seen. As for the frigate, she had disappeared, probably behind Cape Fréhel; there was nothing, therefore, so far as we could see, to put the French on the alert, or to alarm them in any way. We, therefore, now headed the boats straight in for the beach, catching a momentary glimpse as we did so of the other division, apparently doing the same thing.

The beach for which we were heading was composed of firm red sand, sloping rather steeply down into the water, and the sea was smooth; we, therefore, rushed them in until they were high and dry for nearly a quarter of their length, the men leapt out over the bows on to the dry sand, and then, with two boat-keepers in each boat to look after them, they were shoved off again, with orders to keep afloat, and, if threatened, to pull off to a safe distance and await our return.

Our little party, officers included, mustered forty-one men, the second division consisting of three less; and no sooner were we all landed than Mr Adair led us right up to the foot of the low cliffs that bordered the beach, so that it was impossible for any one to detect our presence unless by standing on the very verge of the cliff and looking directly down upon us.

The next thing to be done was to reconnoitre the battery that we intended to attack, and ascertain the easiest way to get inside it. This duty was confided to me, I being the youngest and, presumably, the most active of the party, while—as I afterwards learned—the Captain had assured Mr Adair that both my courage and my discretion might be relied upon.

“Ye clearly understan', noo, Maister Delamere, precisely what ye hae to dae?” observed the first luff, when concluding his instructions to me. “Oor business is tae tak' yon wee bit battery, and to spike the guns. But we're to dae't wi'oot loss o' life on oor ain part, if possible; ye'll therefore approach the place cannily and get as close up to it as maybe wi'oot bein' discovert; and, that done, ye'll be pleased tae keek roun' and ascertain if there's ony way o' gettin' intil it wi'oot haein' to stor-r-m it. If we can creep up and tak' the garrison by surprise, sae muckle the better. Noo, gang awa' wi' ye, laddie; tak' care o' yersel! and get back as soon as ye can, no forgettin' that if ye fin' yoursel' in trouble, ye're to fire a pistol, and we'll come to your help.”

I touched my hat and, turning upon my heel, proceeded forthwith to scramble up the steep face of the cliff, helping myself up by driving my drawn cutlass deep into the stiff clay soil of which the cliff was composed. Reaching the top without much difficulty, I found myself upon somewhat uneven ground, the surface of which sloped slightly down toward the land. The soil was clothed with short, thick grass and closely overgrown with dense clumps of furze bushes, which I at once perceived would afford excellent cover for the approach of our men. Somewhat to my discomfort, however, I saw a flock of sheep grazing at no great distance inland, while about a mile away to the south-west was a small village, in the single street of which I could perceive people already moving about. Clearly, we had no time to lose if we wished to take our friends the enemy by surprise; availing myself, therefore, to the utmost extent of the cover of the furze bushes, I set off in the direction of the battery, which I presently sighted about half a mile away. Stooping low as I ran from bush to bush, and peering cautiously round each before venturing to start for the next, I soon found myself within about thirty yards of the battery, which I saw to be a crescent-shaped affair, facing eastward and thus in conjunction with the battery on the opposite point, completely commanding the entrance of the bay. It was in reality a brick-work structure, consisting of four chambers with arched roofs supporting a gun platform protected by a parapet pierced with embrasures, the brick-work in its turn being protected by an earth-bank thrown up in front of it in the form of a glacis. It mounted six 64-pounders; and the chambers beneath the gun platform I took to be the magazine, general store-room, and soldiers' quarters. The gun platform was approached at either end by a good wide flight of steps; and beside each gun was a goodly pile of shot, while sponges, rammers, handspikes, and the rest of the paraphernalia for loading and training the guns reposed in brackets fixed to the inner face of the parapet. Two sentries were stationed upon the gun platform, pacing to and fro, and evidently keeping a sharp lookout to seaward, and a number of artillerymen were performing their morning ablutions, brushing their clothes, etcetera, in the paved space before the chambers. Strangely enough, the back of the battery was left perfectly open and unprotected by either wall or fence; there was therefore absolutely nothing to prevent its being rushed from the land side. I counted the men in sight to the number of thirty-three, but concluded that there must be others somewhere inside the chambers; and then, having acquired all the information possible under the circumstances, made the best of my way back to where Mr Adair and the rest of our party impatiently awaited me.

Chapter Three.

A Cutting-out Expedition.

In as few words as possible I reported to the first lieutenant the extent of my discoveries, and, in return, received his tersely-expressed commendation of my efforts; after which he briefly addressed his followers, explaining to them the importance of making the attack as complete a surprise as possible, and pointing out the necessity for availing ourselves to the utmost possible extent of the cover afforded us by the gorse bushes while approaching the battery. Then, having told off six of the men for the especial duty of spiking the guns—one man to each gun—he directed me to lead the way, stationing himself alongside me.

Three minutes later the entire party were on top of the cliffs, where we paused for a moment to reconnoitre the ground afresh, and get our breath after the exertion of climbing; then we moved slowly and cautiously forward again, allowing plenty of time for each man to creep across the open spaces from one patch of cover to the next, until in the course of some twenty-five minutes all hands of us were lying down behind a large clump of bushes, some twenty yards from the battery, which I had previously fixed upon as a convenient point from which to start our final rush. Here another brief pause was made, which Mr Adair, kneeling behind a bush, utilised to count heads and make sure that all hands had come up; when, having satisfied himself upon this point, he drew his sword, flourished it over his head as a signal, and, springing to his feet, led us all at top speed in a charge upon the unprotected rear of the battery.

The wild cheer of our lads as they broke cover and rushed across the narrow open space which still separated them from the battery was evidently the first intimation to the garrison that anything was wrong, for our sudden appearance seemed to take them absolutely by surprise, with the result that something very like a panic ensued among them. A few, after staring at us agape and motionless for a second or two, as though unable to comprehend what we were after, came to life and took to their heels, attempting to bolt out of the battery before we could reach it. But our lads quickly stopped them by spreading out in front of them and driving them back at the point of the cutlass; others, seeing the impossibility of retreat in that direction, dashed into one of the chambers beneath the gun platform, slamming the door behind them, regardless of the fact that they were shutting out many of their comrades, and barricading themselves against attack, as we could hear by the sounds proceeding from the inside; while, as for the two sentries on the platform, they simply fired their muskets in the air, flung them down, and vaulted over the parapet on to the glacis, thus making good their escape. The six men charged with the duty of spiking the guns dashed straightway up the steps leading to the gun platform, and at once proceeded to the execution of their task, leaving their comrades below to deal with the garrison; and in less than five minutes the battery was in our possession, and the six guns effectually spiked. True, a few of the artillerymen who had retreated to the interior of the structure thrust muskets through the windows of the chamber and snapped them off at us; but they speedily gave that up and surrendered at discretion upon my approaching a broken window and shouting through it, by Mr Adair's orders, the information that we were about to explode the magazine, and that they had better come out if they did not wish to perish amid the ruins.

When all hands upon both sides were mustered it was found that we had gained possession of the battery without the least injury to either side. The French officer was then directed to march his men—who were of course disarmed—to the village which I had seen earlier in the morning, and which we now learned was called Erquy; and as soon as they were fairly out of the battery the magazine was broken open, the powder barrels rolled together in the middle of the room, the heads knocked out, and a train laid from barrel to barrel, while another party of our men was busily engaged in bringing the six spiked guns together in a cluster immediately over the magazine. A quarter-of-an-hour sufficed to complete these preparations, when one end of a long fuse was buried in one of the barrels of powder, the remainder of the fuse being carried as far as it would go across the paved yard. The men then fell in and, under my command, marched out of the yard and took the way along the cliffs toward the boats, while Mr Adair and the gunner remained behind to fire the fuse and ensure the destruction of the battery. We had been gone about ten minutes, and had almost reached the spot where we were to make our descent to the beach, when the earth shook and jarred violently beneath our feet, a dull, heavy *boom* burst upon the morning silence, a fierce gust of wind suddenly swept over us, and, looking back, we saw an enormous dim-coloured cloud, heavily charged with hurtling débris, dismounted cannon, and masses of shattered brick-work, hovering over the spot where the battery had been. Two minutes later the first luff and the gunner, breathless and panting, came running up to us, and we all plunged down the cliff-face together. The boat-keepers, seeing us coming, headed the boats in toward the beach; and within another five minutes we were once more afloat and pulling quietly alongshore toward the mouth of the bay, intently watching, meanwhile, for some indication of the whereabouts of the other division. We had not long to wait, for we had scarcely pulled a quarter of a mile when the battery on the other headland blew up; and presently the yawl and second cutter came into view from behind the point, pulling hard for the mouth of the bay.

There was, of course, no possibility of further secrecy in regard to our movements, for the blowing-up of the two batteries would sufficiently advertise the presence of an enemy in the neighbourhood, while the fact of having been chased by the frigate during the preceding night would give the Indiaman's prize-crew a tolerably accurate idea of where we came from, and what were our ultimate intentions. We, therefore, made no pretence of concealing ourselves, but—a nice little westerly breeze having sprung up with the rising of the sun—boldly laid in our oars, stepped the boats' masts, and hoisted the sails, by doing which we reckoned upon getting over the ground at greater speed while conserving the strength of our contingent for the attack upon the Indiaman. The master and his party were unable to follow our lead in this respect, for the wind which was fair for us was dead in their teeth; but, on the other hand, we had about two miles more than they to cover. It thus happened that the two divisions of boats arrived at the entrance practically at the same instant, the port division leading only by just barely time enough to step their masts and set their canvas for the run into the bay before we joined them.

The Indiaman was anchored well inshore, about a mile and a half inside the headlands; and as we reached along toward her under sail, with the boats in line abreast, and about thirty fathoms apart, we saw that the prize-crew were busily engaged in preparing to resist our attack, the guns being all run out, while an attempt was being made to fix up a boarding netting on the ship's starboard, or seaward, side. I had brought my telescope along with me in the boat, believing that it might possibly prove useful, and I now focussed it upon the Indiaman with the object of getting some definite idea of the extent of the preparations being made against us. I had no sooner done so than I made the

discovery that there was no netting triced up on the port or shoreward side of the vessel, the Frenchmen apparently taking it for granted that we should dash alongside on the side nearest to us. I immediately reported this discovery to the first lieutenant, at the same time mentioning my idea as to the explanation of the omission, whereupon, having



THE FIGHT FOR THE INDIAMAN

first satisfied himself as to the accuracy of my statement, he hailed the other boats, ordering them all to board the ship on her port side.

of my statement, he hailed the

When we had arrived within about three-quarters of a mile of our quarry she opened fire upon us with round and grape, first firing single guns, and finally whole broadsides, whereupon we diverged well to port and starboard, compelling her to train her guns so far fore and aft, that at length only her two bow guns could be brought effectively to bear, and although a few shot passed through our sails, while the first cutter's mast was shot away, the boats themselves were untouched, and finally the two divisions passed respectively athwart her bows and stern, and shot up alongside her on her inshore side without a single casualty.

The launch hooked on under her bows, and the first cutter made fast to her fore chains, while the yawl grappled her by the mizen chains, and the second cutter by the main. She stood high out of the water, though not so high but that one way or another we were all able to scramble into her channels, from whence it was not difficult to make our way inboard. The French must have felt very foolish when they found us attacking them upon their unprotected side, yet they defended their prize with the utmost gallantry, and for nearly ten minutes the fight raged with great fury. But when once our lads had all contrived to scale the ship's high bulwarks and establish themselves upon her decks they would take no refusal; there was a tremendous popping of pistols and muskets for the first minute or two, and a good deal of smoke drifting hither and thither; then, with wild hurrahs, the Europas dashed forward, cutlass in hand, cutting, slashing, and pointing; the air resounded with cheers, oaths, execrations, and shrill screams of pain; the decks grew slippery with blood, prostrate bodies tripped us up here and there, and then, suddenly, the Frenchmen flung away their weapons and dived below, leaving us the victors of the fight and in undisputed possession of the ship.

To disarm those prisoners who had not already abandoned their weapons, and to secure them in the forecabin, was the work of but a few minutes, after which our boats were veered astern and secured by their painters; the hands jumped aloft and loosed the canvas, then slid down to the deck by way of the backstays to sheet home and hoist away; the cable was cut, and a few minutes later the ship had canted and was standing out to seaward under topsails, topgallantsails, jib, and spanker, while the wounded were being separated from the dead and carefully tended by Burroughs, the assistant surgeon, and a small party told off to help him.

Then came the question of the "butcher's bill," upon going into which we found that we had one man killed and five wounded—two of them rather seriously; while the French casualties amounted to four killed and eleven wounded—three of the latter so seriously that Burroughs questioned whether they would outlast the day.

A few minutes after we had cleared the harbour the frigate appeared in sight from behind Cape Fréhel, and half-an-hour later our prize—the H.E.I. Company's ship, *Masulipatam*, of 1196 tons register, with a full cargo of Indian produce, homeward-bound from Bombay to London—was hove-to under her lee quarter, while Mr Adair had gone on board to make his report. Previous to this, however, I had gone below into the ship's saloons, at the first luff's order, to see how the passengers fared, we having gathered, from the crew of the *Belle Marie*, that they had been left on board. I found them all, to the number of forty-three, men, women, and children, including some half-dozen native nurses, securely locked in their several cabins; and glad enough were they to be released, and to learn that the ship was once more in British hands. It appeared that they had been captured three days before in the Bay of Biscay, and had been not too well treated by their captors, having been robbed by them of all their money, jewellery, and other valuables, to say nothing of other indignities to which they had been subjected. So far, however, as their stolen

property was concerned, I was able to reassure them with the statement that Captain Vavassour would undoubtedly take immediate steps to have it found and restored to them. Having done which, and excused myself upon the plea of urgent business—coupled with a suggestion that the ladies should remain below until the more gruesome evidences of the recent conflict could be effaced—I hurried away to the other end of the ship and effected the release of her officers and crew, who at once ascended to the deck and assisted our own lads to put matters to rights. Fortunately, there were no damages to make good; within half-an-hour, therefore, of joining the frigate, Captain Vavassour had made all his dispositions, placing the prize in charge of Mr Galway, the third lieutenant, with a small prize-crew, in addition to the vessel's own officers and crew; and we made sail in company for Portsmouth, the skipper having decided to see our valuable prize safe into a British port before losing sight of her. This we happily accomplished, anchoring at Spithead shortly after ten o'clock in the morning of the following day, without having sighted anything in the shape of an enemy. We fell in, however, with the *Belle Marie*, off the Needles, Mr Howard having contrived to get up and rig excellent jury fore and mizen-topmasts during the passage; thus, by shortening sail somewhat upon the frigate and the Indiaman, we were enabled to complete the run to Spithead in company, the *Europa* making a brave show as she glided along to the anchorage, escorting her two valuable prizes, both captured within one short week from the beginning of our cruise.

The moment that the anchors were down Captain Vavassour ordered his gig, and went ashore to deliver his dispatches and make his report to the admiral, and I went with him, in charge of the boat, taking with me a letter which I had found time to write to my father, acquainting him with the good fortune that had befallen us. I walked up from the Sallyport to the admiral's office with the skipper, carrying his dispatch-box for him, and leaving the boat in charge of the coxswain; for although, under ordinary circumstances, such a proceeding would probably have resulted in the loss of the whole boat's crew, the amount of prize-money which we had made within the last two days completely banished all thought of desertion in the minds of the men.

Of course the fame of our brilliant double exploit soon spread all over the towns of Portsmouth and Gosport, and although men were at that moment very hard to get, several of the ships in harbour being so short-handed as to be unable to go to sea, it was no sooner made known that we required a few more hands to complete our complement than we had more offers than we had room for. We remained at Spithead only three days, during which we replenished our stock of water, provisions, and ammunition, and then we were once more dispatched by the admiral to our former cruising-ground.

But during that brief interval one or two interesting changes had occurred. In the first place the *Belle Marie*, having been surveyed, was reported to be a practically new ship, perfectly sound, and in every respect admirably adapted for service in the navy; she was therefore purchased by the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, and ordered at once into harbour to undergo such alterations as were deemed necessary, and to refit. Next, Captain Vavassour had spoken so highly in his dispatches of the admirable tact and ability displayed by Mr Adair in his conduct of the expedition against the French batteries, and afterward in the cutting-out of the Indiaman, that our first luff had at once received his promotion and been appointed to the command of the prize—renamed the *Sparta*. This of course created a vacancy on board the *Europa*, which was filled by Mr Howard, who became our new first luff, while Mr Galway also stepped up a ratline and became second. The vacancy created by the promotion of Mr Galway was not filled, but we had no doubt that it would ultimately fall to O'Brien, our senior mid, who was within a month of having served his full time, and to whom an acting order was given. These several changes were in the highest degree satisfactory to all hands of us, for it obviated the necessity for the introduction of strangers among us, while we felt that promotion had gone to the right persons, namely, those who had actually earned it. It is true that, short as our acquaintance with him had been, we were all exceedingly sorry to lose Mr Adair, but our sorrow in this respect was quite counterbalanced by our pleasure in the knowledge that he thoroughly deserved his promotion, and that one more ship's company would be made happy under the rule of a good captain. In this connection I must not omit to mention that, thanks to the highly favourable report that Mr Adair had made of my conduct in the matter of reconnoitring the battery, and afterwards, Captain Vavassour had been pleased to name me in his dispatches, much to the delight of my father, as I subsequently learned.

We sailed again from Spithead on the fourth day after our arrival, and nothing of importance occurred for quite a fortnight, during which we were kicking about in the chops of the Channel, keeping a bright lookout all the while for anything that might chance to come in our way, whether in the shape of captured British merchantmen, privateers, French merchantmen, or otherwise. But luck seemed to be against us, for we sighted nothing but craft flying the British flag, and most of those were men-o'-war. At length, however, the skipper grew disgusted, and determined to see whether better fortune awaited us farther afield. Accordingly, having sighted Ushant broad on the lee-bow, and some ten miles distant, at eight o'clock on a certain morning, with the wind out at about North-West, we stood on until we had brought the island well over our lee quarter, when the helm was shifted, the ship kept away a couple of points, a small pull taken upon the weather braces, and away we went booming into the Bay of Biscay, heading toward Cape Finisterre. We had experienced fresh breezes, but fine, clear weather, from the moment when we had left the Isle of Wight astern; but on this particular day, shortly after noon, the sky became overcast and gloomy, with a thick, murky appearance to windward that portended a change for the worse. This, however, did not greatly trouble us, for with Ushant out of sight astern, the ship heading South-West by compass, and the wind two points free, we had nothing to fear beyond such discomfort as was inseparable from the heavy sea that was now fast getting up. As the day wore on, however, the mercury began to drop rather rapidly; the thickness to windward increased, and it began to rain; the wind freshened steadily, a high, steep sea got up, and everything appeared to threaten a particularly dirty and unpleasant night. By the end of the first dog-watch the wind had increased to half a gale, the sea had drawn abeam, and the ship was rolling her lee hammock-rails under. The Captain, therefore, ordered the topgallantsails to be clewed up and furled, the flying-jib to be stowed, and a couple of reefs to be taken in the topsails; for, as he remarked, we were not bound anywhere in particular, were in no hurry, and might as well snug the ship down for the night while we had daylight enough left to see what we were doing.

The night closed down upon us early, and so dark that we could not see as far as the length of the ship, there being no moon, while the light of the stars was completely obscured by the dense canopy of storm-wrack that

overshadowed us, the only objects visible outside the bulwarks being the faintly phosphorescent heads of the breaking seas as they swept down menacingly upon us from to windward; the air was raw and chill, although it was only the first week in September; the decks were wet and sloppy with the driving rain and spray; and those of us who were on watch looked thoroughly miserable as, encased from head to foot in oilskins and sou'westers, we paced to and fro, availing ourselves to the utmost of such shelter as was afforded by the bulwarks and the boats stowed on the booms. By midnight the wind had further increased to such an extent that sail was still further reduced, the courses being taken off the ship, the jib stowed, and the mizen brailed in, leaving nothing set but the three double-reefed topsails and the fore and main-topmast staysails. Yet, unpleasant as was the weather, we had at least one consolation: the ship behaved splendidly, sailing fast through the water, and going along as dry as a bone, save for the spray that was blown from the crests of the waves and came driving athwart our decks in blinding and drenching showers.

When at length the day broke, it revealed the ship hove-to under close-reefed fore and main topsails, and fore-topmast staysail, the central object in the midst of a grey and desolate picture, the dreary character of which it would be difficult to surpass. It was now blowing a whole gale from the South-West, the wind having backed during the night; the sky was an unbroken expanse of dark, slate-coloured cloud athwart the face of which tattered shreds of dirty grey vapour rapidly swept; the sea, of an opaque greyish-green tint, ran high and steep, crested with great curling heads of pallid froth, flecked here and there with fragments of seaweed, and our horizon was restricted to a circle of little more than a mile in diameter by the driving mist and rain. It was, in short, a thoroughly disagreeable day, and I was by no means sorry that it was my forenoon watch below.

I had just finished breakfast when a cry of some sort from the deck reached us in the midshipmen's berth; but the straining of the ship, the howling of the wind through the rigging, and the constant crash and gurgle of the water outside rendered it indistinguishable. We heard the answering call of the officer of the watch—also indistinguishable—and were beginning to arrive at the conclusion that the matter, whatever it might be, did not concern us, when the shrilling of the boatswains' pipes, followed by the hoarse bellow of "Hands, make sail!" caused a general stampede for the deck, upon reaching which we learned that during a momentary clearance of the atmosphere a brief glimpse had been caught of a large ship, about a mile to leeward, steering north, under topgallantsails, and that from her general appearance, brief though the sight of her had been, she had been judged to be French. The officer of the watch had, of course, as in duty bound, reported the matter to the Captain, who was at the moment in his cabin, taking breakfast; and the skipper, having heard Mr Galway's story, had promptly given the order to bear up and make sail in chase.

The decks, which but a few minutes earlier had presented such a dreary, deserted appearance, now became in a moment a scene of the most animated bustle and activity. The Captain and first lieutenant—the latter with a speaking-trumpet in his hand—were both on deck, the skipper on the poop gazing eagerly into the thickness to leeward under the sharp of his hand in search of the now invisible stranger; barefooted seamen sprang nimbly hither and thither, some to the braces, some out on to the jib-booms, and others into the rigging on their way aloft to loose the furled canvas; the helm was put up, the fore yard swung, and the after yards squared as the ship paid off; and in less than a minute the yards were alive with men casting off gaskets, untying reef-points, overhauling gear, and generally preparing to clothe the frigate with canvas. By the time that she had paid square off before the wind all was ready, the loosened canvas was bellying out as though impatient to be doing its duty once more, loosened ropes were streaming in the gale, the men had laid in off the yards, and the three topsails went soaring away to the mastheads simultaneously; the fore and main tacks were boarded and the sheets hauled aft; the topgallantsails were in like manner all sheeted home and hoisted at the same instant, the two jibs went sliding up their stays, slatting thunderously the while and threatening to snap the booms, until their sheets were tautened, and away flew the *Europa*, like a started fawn, leaping and plunging through and over the mountainous seas, with a bow-wave roaring and foaming to the height of her hawse-pipes, and with the wind broad over her larboard quarter.

To any one unaccustomed to the sea the change thus wrought in the course of a few short minutes would have seemed marvellous, almost miraculous, indeed; for whereas while we were hove-to, head to wind and sea, the plunging of the ship had been so furious that it was only with the utmost difficulty even the most seasoned among us could maintain our footing; while the howling and shrieking of the wind aloft, and the savage force with which it struck us when the frigate rolled to windward, irresistibly suggested the idea that we were in the grip of a hurricane; now, when we were scudding away almost dead before it, the gale seemed to have suddenly softened to the strength of no more than a moderate breeze; there were no repetitions of those sickening lee lurches as the ship was flung aloft on the steep breast of a mountainous, swift-running sea, but, in place of it, a gentle, rhythmical, pendulum-like swinging roll, and a long, easy, gliding rush forward, with an acre of foam seething and hissing about our bows as those same steep, mountainous seas caught us under the quarter and hurled us headlong forward with our bow-wave roaring and boiling ahead of us, glass-smooth, and clear as crystal.

There were but two drawbacks to our satisfaction, one of which was that the weather still remained so exasperatingly thick that we had not been able to get a further glimpse of the strange ship, while the other was that we only knew our position very approximately, and that by dead reckoning only. This last would have given us no concern at all had we been heading to the southward, for in that direction there was plenty of sea room; but we had now turned round and were rushing back northward—north-north-east by compass, to be exact; and we knew that somewhere ahead of us—whether on the port or the starboard-bow we were not at all certain—were the terrible Penmarks; and, beyond them, the jutting Pointe du Raz, Douarnenez Bay, Pointe de Saint Mathieu, and the dangers that lurk between Ushant and the mainland, all bad enough in themselves, but with an added terror due to the furious currents that swirl round that part of the coast, and of the direction of which one can never be quite certain.

That some such thoughts as these were disturbing the skipper's equanimity soon became apparent, for after pacing the deck thoughtfully for some time he suddenly looked up, and seeing me standing half-way up the poop-ladder, straining my eyes into the thickness ahead in a vain endeavour to get a glimpse of the chase, he called me to him.

"Is it your watch, Mr Delamere?" said he.

"No, sir," answered I, touching my hat, "but I thought I should like to get a sight of the fellow we're after before going below."

"Thank you," he said; "your zeal is very commendable; but I daresay we can muster eyes enough to maintain a lookout without keeping you on deck in your watch below. However, since you are here, perhaps you will oblige me by finding the master and asking him if he has made up his reckoning to eight bells. If he has, request him to be good enough to bring it, with the chart, to me, here, on the quarter-deck. If he has not, say that I shall be obliged if he will do so at once."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered I, touching my hat again as I turned away to descend the hatchway.

Chapter Four.

The French 50-Gun Ship.

I found Mr Trimble in his cabin, in the very act of laying off the ship's position on the chart, after working up his reckoning. I delivered my message, and by way of reply the master rolled up his chart, tucked it under his arm, seized pencil, dividers, and parallel ruler, and started for the deck, with me close in his wake—for I shared the skipper's anxiety to know whereabouts we were.

"Ah! here you are, Mr Trimble," exclaimed the Captain, as the master's head and shoulders rose above the combings of the hatchway. "Have you made up your reckoning?"

"Yes, sir," answered the master, "and pricked her off. We are just about here, by dead reckoning." And he made an effort to spread open the chart on the capstan-head. But the paper was stiff from being almost continuously rolled up; moreover, the wind was troublesome—the two circumstances combining to render it almost impossible for the good man to do as he wished unaided. I saw his difficulty, and, stepping forward, seized the two top corners of the chart and held them down, while the skipper gripped the third corner, and Trimble the fourth.

"There we are, sir—or thereabout," explained the master, pointing with his pencil to a dot surrounded by a small circle, on the paper, with the date written alongside it.

"I see," remarked the skipper thoughtfully, as he intently studied the open chart. "I suppose," he said presently, "you have made ample allowance for leeway, and for our drift while hove-to?"

"Yes, sir," answered the master. "I have allowed a point and a half for leeway, and three knots drift, both of which I reckon are above rather than below the mark."

"Y-e-es," agreed the skipper reflectively; "yes, she will not have made more than that, I should think. And you have, of course, also allowed for tide and current."

"For both, sir," assented the master; "but, of course, you clearly understand, Captain Vavassour, that the currents hereabout are very irregular. I therefore wish you to accept the position of the ship, as there laid down, as merely approximate."

"Yes, I quite understand," answered the skipper. "Now, assuming that position to be correct, Mr Trimble—and we can do nothing else, I think—how far are we from the Penmarks, and how do they bear?"

The master took his dividers, measured the distance, applied the instrument to the margin of the chart, and announced the distance—"Seventy-six miles."

"Good!" ejaculated the skipper. "And their bearing?"

The master laid his parallel ruler down on the chart, with its edge passing through the dot representing the ship's position, and also through the Penmarks; then he carefully slid the ruler along the surface of the chart until that same edge passed through the centre of the compass diagram, and read off the bearing—"No'th-east, half east."

The skipper turned sharply round to the quartermaster.

"How's her head, quartermaster?" he demanded.

The quartermaster glanced into the compass-bowl and answered, "No'-no'th-east, sir!"

"Excellent!" exclaimed the skipper. "Why, at that rate, Mr Trimble, we shall pass outside Ushant, if we keep on as we are going now."

"No doubt, sir," answered the master. "But in my opinion," he continued, "that's where the fellow we sighted a while ago is bound to," and he laid his forefinger on that part of the chart where the word Brest was legibly printed.

"Ah!" ejaculated the skipper, "you are likely enough to be right. But he shall never get there, even if I have to drive the frigate under water to stop him. Hang it! I wish the weather would clear, if only for a moment, and allow us to get a sight of him. Thank you, Mr Trimble; that will do." And he released his hold upon the chart, allowing the corner he had been holding to spring back and curl up. I did the same, and, as the ship took a somewhat heavier roll than usual, glanced out over the bulwarks at the racing, foam-capped surges that reared themselves alongside; and at that moment, as if in direct response to the skipper's forcibly expressed wish, the haze thinned away somewhat to starboard, revealing, square abeam, and apparently about a mile away, a dim, misty, grey shape faintly showing up

through the thickness to starboard.

"Sail ho!" I cried excitedly, pointing her out; "there she is, sir." And even as the words passed my lips there came a shout from the lookout on the forecastle of "Sail ho! A large ship, broad on our starboard beam."

"Ay, ay, I see her—the glass, quick, Mr Delamere," answered the skipper. I jumped for the telescope, drew the tube, and handed it over to the impatient hand outstretched to receive it. By a piece of good fortune the atmosphere inshore of us just then thinned away still more for a few minutes, enabling us to get a tolerably distinct view of the stranger. Captain Vavassour, glass in hand, sprang up the poop-ladder, and, with feet planted wide apart to give himself a good grip of the heaving deck, applied the telescope to his eye. I followed him, that I might be at hand if required. For a long two minutes he stood intently studying the stranger, and speaking to himself the while. "A 50-gun ship," I heard him mutter, "and a Frenchman at that—steering a parallel course to ourselves; yes, very likely making for Brest. Rather a stiff customer to tackle, perhaps, but I'll not let that stop me."

He removed the instrument from his eye, and, seeing me at his elbow, handed it back to me. "Thank you, Mr Delamere," he said. "I shall not require you again, so you had better go below, especially as there is a probability that we may have a busy afternoon." Then he descended to the quarter-deck, where the second lieutenant and the master were standing talking together near the capstan, and gave the quartermaster the order to keep away a point to the eastward, which would have the effect of causing us to converge gradually upon the Frenchman.

When I went on deck at eight bells it was to find that the atmosphere had thickened again, to such an extent, indeed, that although it was estimated that we must now be within half a mile of the French ship, there was not the faintest trace of her to be seen. The skipper, however, considered that he was now as close to her as he desired to be; he therefore ordered the course to be changed back to North-North-East, and, at the moment when I gained the deck, was giving Mr Howard instructions to let the men have their dinner, and then to put out the fires and clear for action.

The keenness of the crew to get to work was evidenced by the fact that although the men's dinner was now ready, it was with the utmost difficulty that they could be persuaded to go below and eat it; and when at length they went, in obedience to the Captain's imperative orders, they returned to the deck in less than ten minutes, and at once set to work of their own accord to put the ship into fighting trim.

It was evident to me that the master was greatly disappointed at not having been able to get a sight of the sun at noon, and I could not help thinking that, as the time passed on, he was not only disappointed but was beginning to grow more than a trifle anxious, especially as shortly after midday the weather became more gloomy and the wind freshened very considerably. He betook himself to the poop, up and down which he paced rapidly, with his hands behind his back, and his eyes fixed abstractedly on the deck, except when he raised them from time to time to gaze long and piercingly ahead.

At length four bells struck, and almost immediately afterward, with a further freshening of the wind, the atmosphere cleared sufficiently to afford us another glimpse of the French ship, which suddenly appeared, with almost startling distinctness, about three-quarters of a mile distant, bearing one point before our starboard beam. A dozen eager voices at the same moment reported her reappearance, and the Captain sprang up on the poop to get another look at her. He was immediately joined by the master, who seemed to be making some very earnest representation to him; but what it was I could not hear, for I was now down on the quarter-deck and had no valid excuse for approaching any nearer. However, whatever it may have been, Captain Vavassour was evidently disinclined to listen to it, for I saw him once or twice shake his head most determinedly, pointing at the same time at the French ship, which still remained distinctly in view. Finally the skipper left the poop and joined Mr Howard on the quarter-deck, conversing very animatedly with him for about five minutes. It was while he was thus engaged that the master suddenly called down to him the intelligence that the stranger had hoisted French colours, upon which he gave the order for our own colours to be hoisted, and, jumping up on the poop, I went to the flag-locker, drew out our big ensign, bent it on to the halliards, and, with the assistance of the master, ran it up to the mizen peak.

Meanwhile, our men had long been at quarters, and the ship ready for action. I was, therefore, not surprised to see the first lieutenant descending to the main-deck, evidently for the purpose of conveying the skipper's final instructions to the captains of the guns. It was going to be a running fight, and we were about to open the ball. But the Frenchmen snatched that honour from us, for as I was descending from the poop to the quarter-deck after having hoisted the ensign, I saw a jet of flame and a cloud of smoke burst from the stranger's port side, and immediately afterwards a heavy shot flew humming high over our mastheads. Almost immediately afterward three of our starboard main-deck guns spoke simultaneously, and, as the smoke from them swept away ahead of us, I heard the captain of the aftermost quarter-deck gun cry out that all three shots had hulled the French ship, for he had seen the splinters fly in three distinct places. Then, at brief intervals, the remaining guns of our starboard main-deck battery were fired; but seemingly without doing very much damage.

The firing now became brisk on both sides, but the French fired much quicker than we did, the reason being—as I afterward learned—that our Captain had given the most imperative orders to the first lieutenant that the gun-captains were not to fire until they had made sure of their aim; and the wisdom of this soon became manifest; for while the French fired upon an average three shots to our one, the damage sustained by us was very trifling, while it was not long before the French ship's sails and rigging became a good deal cut up—to such an extent, indeed, that we were obliged to clew up our topgallantsails, in order to avoid running too far ahead of our adversary.

Suddenly, the simultaneous discharge of three or four of our main-deck guns was followed by a cheer of delight from our lads, and, jumping upon the carriage of one of the quarter-deck guns, I was just in time to see the French ship's mizenmast fall forward, dragging down the main-topgallant-mast with it and passing through the main topsail and mainsail in its fall, splitting them from head to foot. There was at once great confusion on board the Frenchman, and, being thus deprived in a moment of all her after-sail, she immediately fell square off before the wind, or about three points more to the eastward than the course we were steering.

"Hurrah! we have her now," exclaimed the skipper, delightedly rubbing his hands. "Up with your helm, quartermaster, and follow her. Weather braces, Mr Galway; square the yards, and set your topgallantsails again. The land cannot be far off, and now she must strike or we will drive her ashore. Jump down on to the main-deck, Mr Delamere, and request Mr Howard to train his starboard guns as far forward as they will go, and then to rake her every time we luff." (The change in the relative positions of the two vessels caused by both of us squaring away dead before the wind was that the French ship was now almost stern-on to us, broad on our starboard-bow, and about half a mile distant.)

I sprang down the ladder on to the main-deck, and there found the first luff superintending the working of our heavy guns. The men had all stripped to the waist to obtain the utmost possible freedom of movement while hauling upon the tackles and flourishing their handspikes, sponges, and rammers, and, generally speaking, had discarded their hats, knotting bandanna handkerchiefs round their heads in place of them. They were all eager to get to closer quarters with the enemy, and were as merry as crickets, bandying jests with each other in the intervals of toiling at the guns. I delivered my message, and at the same time seized the opportunity to inquire whether any casualties had occurred on that deck. Mr Howard informed me that there had been none thus far; and with this information I returned to the quarter-deck and reported to the Captain.

Brief as had been my visit below, I found upon my return from it that a material alteration had occurred in the relative positions of the two vessels during the interval; we were gaining upon the chase hand over hand, and had shortened the distance between her and ourselves to a short quarter of a mile, which was as close as we wished to go, the skipper having now determined to keep to windward—that is to say, astern—of the Frenchman, and alternately to luff and bear away, passing athwart and athwart her stern on opposite tacks, raking her first with one broadside and then the other, pouring in both round shot and grape. He was in the act of giving orders to clew up the topgallantsails and to haul down a couple of reefs in the topsails, so that we might not gain any farther upon the chase, when I went up to him to make my report, and as soon as he had finished I delivered it, and was again sent down to Mr Howard to acquaint him with Captain Vavassour's plan, at which he expressed the utmost satisfaction, immediately ordering the men in the port battery, which had not yet been engaged, to stand to their guns.

Upon my return to the quarter-deck, after this second visit below, the men were laying in off the yards, after having hauled down a couple of reefs in the topsails, and as soon as they were down on deck the sail-trimmers were sent to the braces, the helm was gently ported, and the frigate was gradually brought to the wind on the starboard tack, exposing her port broadside to the French ship, and as we went surging athwart the enemy's stern the whole of our port battery, both main and quarter-deck guns, was discharged into her, raking her fore and aft. Then our helm was eased up; the frigate paid off, came gradually to the wind on the port tack, and as we again crossed her stern the French ship got the full contents of our starboard battery, with destructive effect, if one might judge by the battered appearance of her stern, her quarter-gallery being shot to pieces and every one of her stern windows broken; thus showing that pretty nearly the whole discharge must have entered her hull and raked her decks from aft forward.

But now that we had adopted the plan of alternately coming to the wind and bearing away again, we began to realise, for the first time, how hard it was blowing; for, when hauled to the wind, the ship was so heavily pressed down by her canvas that at every lee-roll the main-deck port sills were brought down to within a few inches of the boiling sea, and the task of working the guns effectively taxed the skill of the seamen to the utmost; so much so that Mr Howard presently sent up a message to the skipper to ask whether it would be possible to relieve the ship to the extent of taking the mainsail off her.

Captain Vavassour immediately issued the necessary orders; the clew-garnets, buntlines, and leech-lines were manned at the moment that the ship was running off the wind, the tack and sheet were eased up, and the great sail, the most powerful in the ship, was handsomely clewed up, as the men appointed to furl it made their way aloft. The relief to the frigate was immediately apparent; she at once became more lively and buoyant, and, if her speed was decreased at all, the decrease was inappreciable.

This manoeuvre was executed during the time that the frigate's head was being directed to the southward, for the purpose of giving the French ship the contents of our port battery for the second time; and the guns had just been discharged when, as the smoke blew away, we saw that our antagonist had put her helm down and was trying to come to the wind upon the port tack, with the object, as we supposed, of returning our fire. But as her head swept sluggishly round and she began, with apparent difficulty, to come-to, her mainmast went over the side, and she fell off again without having fired a single gun. The sight of the falling mast was greeted by our lads with an enthusiastic cheer, and then our helm was put up to wear round upon the other tack, when the master—who all this time had been anxiously pacing the poop—suddenly ran to the head of the poop-ladder and shouted, "She strikes, sir! she strikes!" and jumping upon the breech of a gun, I saw the tricolour being slowly hauled down from the ensign staff upon which it had been hoisted when her mizenmast fell. The Captain, too, sprang up beside me in time to see the flag go fluttering in over the taffrail as it was hauled down.

A tremendous volley of cheering greeted the intelligence of our success; but our joy was short-lived, for the cheering had scarcely died away and the men turned to secure the guns, when the master came rushing down the poop-ladder and, addressing the skipper, said:

"It is no wonder that the fellow has hauled down his colours, sir. He has made the land, and will be ashore in ten minutes! See, sir, if you will look intently past him you will catch occasional glimpses of leaping whiteness—there, it clears somewhat—do you see the breakers inshore of him? Ay, and now you may also see the loom of the land through the haze!"

The skipper sprang half-way up the poop-ladder, glanced ahead, and finally ascended to the poop, from whence he could get a clear and uninterrupted view ahead and to leeward; then, holding on his hat with one hand while he shaded his eyes with the other, he stared intently to leeward.

"By Jove! Trimble," he exclaimed to the master, who had followed him, "you are right; those are breakers, and that is the land yonder without a doubt. But where in the world are we, man? We must be miles to leeward of your reckoning."

"Yes, sir," answered the master; "there is no denying that. But you must remember, if you please, that the wind headed us and broke us off a couple of points some hours ago, which has made a lot of difference. Then there is no doubt that this strong breeze, blowing dead on shore, has created a powerful in-set, sending us bodily to leeward. I have been exceedingly anxious for the last hour or two, for I know this part of the French coast well, and am fully aware of its extremely treacherous character."

"But where are we, man; where are we?" demanded the Captain, with more than a trace of anxiety and impatience in the tones of his voice.

"Ah, sir, I could tell you better if it would only clear enough to let us see some of the details of the coast more distinctly," answered the master, in tones of anxiety equal to the Captain's own. "But," he continued, "although I cannot say, to within a few miles, precisely where we are, I have not the slightest doubt that we are somewhere within the limits of Audierne Bay."

"Audierne Bay! and the wind blowing half a gale from the sou'-west!" ejaculated the skipper, with a note of something approaching to dismay.

"Yes, sir, Audierne Bay," repeated the master. "It is only there that we could possibly have come within sight of the land at this hour of the day. Perhaps you would like me to bring up the chart, Captain Vavassour."

"Yes; pray do so," answered the skipper.

The master had scarcely disappeared down the hatchway, on his way to his cabin, when the French ship—which, having made an ineffectual effort to round-to, had fallen off again and had continued to run dead to leeward—suddenly broached-to; a terrific sea struck her on her port quarter, turning her broadside-on to us, and her foremast went over the side. Instantly a dozen voices shouted excitedly—"The Frenchman is ashore, sir!"

Yes, there was no doubt about it; for now every sea as it rolled in made a clean breach over her, and we could see her lift to it, rolling over at every blow almost to her beam-ends.

"Ay," muttered the skipper—I was close at his elbow, having followed him that I might be at hand if required—"ay, she is ashore, fast enough, and she will never come off again, for an hour of such pounding as she is now getting will make an end of her. We shall be very lucky indeed if we do not follow. Hillo! Mr Delamere, is that you? Just find Mr Howard, and say I shall be obliged if he can come to me on the quarter-deck."

"Ay, ay, sir," I answered, touching my hat as I started down the poop-ladder. I guessed that I should find the first lieutenant on the gun deck, and there he was, superintending the securing of the guns—a task which needed to be done very carefully and thoroughly; for now that the ship had been brought to the wind she was rolling and pitching most furiously, and if one of our long 24-pounders should chance to strike adrift, the consequences might very easily be disastrous. I delivered the Captain's message, and then followed the first lieutenant on deck, where he joined the skipper and the master, who were already standing at the capstan, with the chart spread open before them on its head. I had no good and sufficient excuse for lingering near them, and therefore passed over to the lee-side of the deck, as became a well-trained midshipman; consequently I only caught a word here and there as I staggered fore and aft in the lee scuppers. I heard the Captain say something about "Audierne Bay," and then, a little later, the master said something about "land takes a westerly trend—Penmarks;" and, finally, the Captain, as though closing a discussion, said, "Very well, then, we will try her, while there is still room, and the sooner the better. Get the mainsail on her again at once, Mr Howard."

I surmised, from this last remark on the part of the Captain, that we were about to make an attempt to tack ship; and indeed it was full time for something to be done, for the breakers were now distinctly visible for a space of about two miles on the lee beam, and they seemed to be rather trending out athwart our bows. It would, therefore, soon be necessary to get the ship round on the other tack, either by staying or wearing, so it would be wise to make the attempt while there was still room to resort to the second expedient, should the first fail.

A few minutes later the mainsail was once more set; and no sooner was the tack boarded and the sheet dragged aft than we felt the difference, which was tremendous. For whereas we had before been going along comfortably enough, despite the heavy rolling and pitching, the moment that she felt the extra pressure, due to the expansion of this large area of canvas to the gale, she lay down to it, until at every lee-roll the muzzles of the quarter-deck guns were buried in the boiling yeast that foamed and swirled giddily past to leeward, and sometimes surged in through the ports, filling the lee-scuppers knee-deep with water. And whereas we had before ridden buoyantly over the head seas, with nothing worse than an occasional shower of spray flying in over the weather cathead, the frigate now plunged her bows savagely right into the very heart of them, quivering to her keel with the violence of the shock, raising a very hurricane of foam and spray about her figurehead, and shipping the green seas in tons over her fore-castle at every dive, while the main tack groaned like a giant in torment as it seemed to strive to tear up the very deck of the ship.

"Keep her clean full, quartermaster, and let her go through it," ordered the skipper.

"Ay, ay, sir; clean full it is," answered the quartermaster, as he gave her an extra spoke of the wheel, while the Captain and the first lieutenant stood together close by the weather bulwarks watching her behaviour, the latter grasping a speaking-trumpet in his hand.

At length, after some eight or ten minutes of suspense, the skipper spoke. "Here comes a 'smooth,' and now I think

you may try her, Mr Howard.”

“Ay, ay, sir,” answered the first luff, and, placing the trumpet to his lips, he shouted, “Hands, ’bout ship!”

Wee-wee-wee-wheetle-eetle-eetle-we-e-e, shrilled the boatswains’ pipes, followed by the hoarse bellow of “Hands, ’bout ship!” and up came the men, hurrying to their several stations. The first lieutenant paused an instant, flinging a lightning glance fore and aft the deck, cried “Ready ho!” through his trumpet, then turned to the quartermaster and said:

“Ease your helm down gently to start with, quartermaster; we will sail her round as far as we can.” Then, keenly watching the behaviour of the ship as she swept up into the wind, he presently signed with his hand, “Hard down!” and cried through his trumpet, “Helm’s a-lee!” whereupon the fore and fore staysail sheets were let go and overhauled. Meanwhile a party of men on the poop had dragged the spankerboom as nearly amidships as they could get it. Presently the square canvas was all a-shiver, slatting furiously and causing the ship to tremble to her keel. “Raise tacks and sheets!” was the next order; and now came the critical moment and the question—Would she hold her way long enough to cant in the proper direction? And, as luck would have it, just then there came hissing and foaming down upon us a particularly heavy sea, into which the frigate dived until she was all a-smother for’ard. Yet, notwithstanding this, her head continued to sweep round—slowly, it is true; still—“Mainsail haul!” bellowed the first luff through his trumpet, and round swung the after yards, the men bracing them well up and rounding in on the main-sheet. Now her head was beginning to pay off, but slowly. The first lieutenant dashes up on the poop and looks over the side—she has begun to gather stern-way.

“Shift over your helm, quartermaster,” he shouts; “over with it!” and stands breathless, awaiting the result. “Ah! that’s better, now she pays off freely,” and presently the main topsail fills with a loud flap. “Fore tack—head bowlines—of all haul!” yells Mr Howard, and the head yards sweep round and are braced hard up, the fore and main tacks are boarded, the weather braces steadied taut, the weather lifts bowsed up, the bowlines hauled, and away goes the saucy *Europa* on the other tack, having stayed triumphantly in a wind and sea that would have compelled most ships to wear.

Chapter Five.

The *Europa* has a narrow Escape.

“Splendidly done, Mr Howard; a very fine bit of seamanship!” exclaimed Captain Vavassour, when at length the frigate was fairly round, and was once more going through the water; “you must allow me to compliment you; to tack ship successfully in such a wind and sea as this is no mean feat, in my opinion, and the slightest error of judgment, a single second of hesitation, must have resulted in failure.”

“Thank you, Captain Vavassour,” answered the first luff, flushing with pleasure at the skipper’s praise. “I feel intensely gratified at your appreciation. But you really make too much of it, sir; it is not I to whom the merit actually belongs, but to the ship herself—she works as handily as a little boat; and I had such perfect confidence in her that I really longed to try the experiment; although I grant you that I do not know another ship with which I should care to make the same attempt under similar conditions.”

“No, indeed,” agreed the Captain. “Still, it is only by making these experiments with a new ship that we can learn just how far she may be depended upon to do a certain thing at a critical moment, and the lesson is a most useful one to learn. It seems inclined to clear a bit, I think, for surely that is the French ship I see yonder—there, just clear of the fore-rigging.”

“Yes, sir, that is she, beyond a doubt,” answered the first lieutenant. “And I fancy we shall see her a good deal more distinctly a few minutes hence, when we bring her more abeam. The driving of a big chap like that ashore, without so much as a single casualty on our part, ought to be a feather in our cap, I think, for she is as good as a lost ship; she will never again leave that berth.”

“No,” agreed the skipper, “I do not believe she will; indeed it appears to me that— The glass if you please, Mr Delamere.”

I handed him the instrument and he applied it to his eye for a full minute or more.

“Yes,” he continued, handing over the telescope to Mr Howard, “I think I am not mistaken; take a squint at her yourself, Howard, and tell me whether she does not look as though her back had already broken.”

In his turn the first luff peered long and earnestly through the tube. At length, lowering it from his eye, he said:

“It is rather difficult to speak with absolute assurance, sir, for the sea breaks so violently over her that it is almost impossible to get a sight of the whole of her hull at any given moment; still I am inclined to say that not only is her back broken, but that she has actually parted in two amidships. If you will look at her very carefully I think you will agree with me that her hull shows a distinct twist, and that her after-end has a much heavier list than her bows.”

At this moment eight bells struck, and as the midshipman who was to relieve me was already on deck, and as I was pretty nearly wet through with the spray that the frigate was now throwing over herself in drenching showers, I went below to change and to get a cup of hot coffee.

The two succeeding hours, constituting the first dog-watch, brought a material change for the worse in the condition of the weather; for while the haze had cleared away, enabling us to see the land distinctly to leeward, some six miles

distant, the wind had increased to such an extent that sail had been reduced to close-reefed topsails and reefed courses, while the sea had risen in proportion and was now so heavy that the frigate was literally smothering herself forward at every plunge. The fact was that she was being terribly over-driven; yet the skipper had no alternative. He dared not relieve the ship of another inch of canvas, for we were on a lee-shore, and embayed, the land astern curving out to windward so far that its farthest visible projection bore a full point on our weather quarter, while our charts told us that beyond that point the dreaded Penmarks stretched out still farther to windward. Moreover it was almost as bad ahead, for although Point du Raz, some seven miles distant, then bore nearly three points on the lee-bow, we knew that stretching out to seaward from that point there was a dangerous reef, with only a comparatively narrow passage between it and the equally dangerous reef stretching out to the southward and eastward from the Isle de Seins, and it was an open question whether we should be able to fetch that passage and pass through it. To all appearance Captain Vavassour was perfectly calm and collected, yet he looked decidedly grave, and I thought it seemed rather portentous that the master should be his companion. The latter appeared to be doing most of the talking, and it was clear to see that he at least was distinctly anxious. At length, apparently by way of reply to a few words from the Captain, he went below and, a minute or two later, returned to the deck with his chart under his arm; then, with a long look into the binnacle, he and the skipper passed into the cabin together. I immediately seized the opportunity to take a squint myself at the compass, noting the exact bearing of the point on the lee-bow and the direction in which the ship was heading. Then I went down below into the midshipmen's berth, where Maxwell, the master's-mate, was laboriously endeavouring to translate some French book with the aid of a grammar and a dictionary.

"Here, drop that, Maxwell," I exclaimed, "and let us have a look at your chart, that we may see what the next hour or two has in store for us. If I am anything of a physiognomist the master is fervently wishing that he was at home with his wife and family to-night, instead of where he is, while the skipper, too, looks anything but cheerful. They have both gone into the cabin, and Trimble has taken his chart with him."

"Well, there is no particular reason why he should not do that, is there?" demanded Maxwell. "And why should he be especially anxious now, more than at any other time? Things are all right on deck, aren't they?"

"Ay," answered I, "up to a certain point they are. But reach down your chart, and produce your parallel ruler and dividers, my hearty; I want to get some sort of notion of what is ahead of us."

"What, are you frightened too, then?" demanded Maxwell, as he pushed away his books and reached up for the chart.

"No, certainly not," answered I. "But it is indisputable that the ship is embayed on a lee-shore, and that it is blowing a whole gale of wind. If, therefore, there is a prospect of our being obliged to swim for our lives presently, I should like to know it."

"Oh, hang it all, man, it surely is not nearly so bad as that, is it?" demanded the mate, as he spread the chart out on the table.

"Oh, isn't it?" retorted Gascoigne, another midshipman, who had just come below in time to hear the tail-end of my remark and Maxwell's reply to it. "It is evident that you have not been on deck within the last hour, or you wouldn't say that. Why, man alive, if you would just pull yourself together enough to become conscious of the antics of the hooker you would understand that she is being driven as no ship ought to be driven without good and sufficient cause. There,"—as the frigate plunged dizzily, rolling at the same moment almost over on her beam-ends and quivering violently throughout her whole fabric at the shock of the sea that had struck her, while plates, pannikins, cups and saucers, knives and forks, books, candles, and a heterogeneous assortment of sundries flew from the racks and shelves with a clattering crash, and constituted a very pretty "general average" on the deck—"what d'ye think of that, my noble knight of the sextant?"

"You just gather up that wreckage, my son, and put the unbroken things back into their places," exclaimed Maxwell. "Also, clap a stopper upon your jawing tackle, younker; you have altogether too much too say, for a little 'un. Here, you Fleming—" to another mid, who was lying upon a locker with his hands clasped under his head by way of a pillow—"rouse and bitt, my hearty, and make yourself useful for once in a way; grab the corners of this chart and hold them down to the table until I give you a spell. That's it. Now then, Delamere, what is it that you want to know?"

"First of all," I said, "prick off the ship's position as it was a quarter of an hour ago. There is Point du Raz. Very well: when I came below it bore exactly North 3 quarters East by compass, distant, say, seven miles. Mark off that bearing and distance, to start with."

Maxwell did so, making a little dot with his pencil on the chart.

"There you are," he said. "Now, what next?"

"The ship was heading North-North-West," I said. "What I want to know is, Are we going to weather that point; and, if so, what lies beyond it?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Maxwell, as the critical nature of our situation began to dawn upon him, "I see—or, rather, we shall see in a minute or two. Gascoigne, were you on deck when the log was last hove? If you were not, you ought to have been, you know, and—"

"I was," interrupted Gascoigne. "She was doing a bare seven, and making two and a half points leeway."

"Whew!" whistled Maxwell; "two and a half points! That's bad. The old girl ought to be ashamed of herself. No self-respecting frigate ought ever to make more than two points leeway."

"Oh, oughtn't she!" jeered Gascoigne. "You just go up on deck and see how every sea that hits her knocks her bodily to leeward, and you'll tell a different story, my friend."

"Well, well, I'll take your word for it this time, young man, just to encourage you a bit, you know. Now, let's see how that works out. How did you say she was heading, Delamere?"

"Nor'-nor'-west," I repeated.

"Nor'-nor'-west," echoed Maxwell, seizing his parallel ruler and applying it to the chart. "And two and a half points of leeway, applied to the right, makes it north, half east; while Point du Raz bears—or bore—north, three-quarters east. Um! It's going to be 'touch and go' with us, I am afraid, at that rate; for while she will doubtless weather the point itself all right, there is that out-jutting reef, which is as likely as not to bring us up with a round turn."

"And supposing we should be lucky enough to scrape past," I inquired, "is there anything beyond that we need worry about? I am almost certain that I heard the master say something about 'Les Stevenets,' or some such name."

"Les Stevenets," repeated Maxwell—"yes, of course; there they are, about two and a half miles to the nor'-west of the point. But I don't see why old Trimble need worry about them, for if we can't weather them there is plenty of room for us to pass them to leeward, after having done which we shall have plenty of time to decide upon our next move. That is our critical point." And he put his finger on Point du Raz. "I'm going on deck to see how things look."

So saying, Maxwell rolled up his chart, put it and his instruments away, turned up the collar of his jacket, and sprang up the ladder, Gascoigne, Fleming, and I following him.

Upon our arrival the first thing I noticed was that the Captain, the first luff, and the master were all standing together close under the shelter of the weather bulwarks, apparently holding a sort of council of war. The weather, I thought, looked somewhat more promising than it had done when I went below; for the sky to windward had broken, displaying a very wild and stormy sunset, it is true, yet the fact that the heavy, lowering canopy of cloud had broken up at all seemed to indicate that the worst would soon be over. But it was still blowing very heavily, and while the atmosphere was now quite clear of mist, permitting us a view to the extreme confines of the horizon, everything—the wild, tumultuously heaving sea to windward, and the land ahead and to leeward—showed a preternaturally hard outline. Point du Raz was now about three miles distant and bore about a point, or maybe a trifle more on the lee-bow, with the surf breaking furiously upon the reef which projected beyond it, while the leeward extremity of the reef jutting out from the easternmost extremity of the Isle de Seins lay dead ahead, smothered in boiling surf, the passage between the two reefs now looking alarmingly narrow. And it was through that passage we must win safety!

I was of course on the lee-side of the deck, so I could only catch an occasional disconnected word of what passed between the trio to windward, but I presently gathered that the master seemed to be endeavouring to persuade the skipper to wear ship while we still had room enough to execute that manoeuvre; but Captain Vavassour appeared to be objecting, upon the plea that, once on the other side of the point, we had nothing more to fear, whereas, should we wear ship now, we should be heading for the Penmarks as soon as we got round upon the other tack, and should reach them, and be faced with the task of weathering them during the hours of darkness. The skipper, it was evident, was all for grappling with the nearest danger, for the reason that we should at least have light enough to see what we were doing; and Mr Howard seemed to side with him.

"But, sir," remonstrated the master desperately, "have you considered what must inevitably happen if a flaw of wind should come round that point, at the critical moment, and break us off, as it is likely enough to do?"

"Well, n-o," answered the Captain slowly, "I had not thought of that, I must confess, for I do not believe that such a thing is at all likely to happen. But I am very much obliged to you for mentioning it, Mr Trimble, for 'forewarned is forearmed,' and in circumstances like the present it is our bounden duty to take every possible precaution for the safety of the ship. I am still of opinion that unless something unforeseen—such, for instance, as the occurrence which you have just suggested—should happen, we shall weather the point, and go clear; but, to provide against anything of that sort, Mr Howard," turning to the first luff, "be good enough to see everything ready for club-hauling the ship. Have the best bower-cable ranged, double-bitt it, and stopper it at, say, thirty fathoms. Mr Galway—where is Mr Galway? Mr Delamere, be good enough to find Mr Galway, and say I want him—or—no, tell him that it may be necessary to club-haul the ship, and request him to muster the carpenter and his mates below, ready to cut away the best bower at the instant that I give the word. Then come back to me; I may want you."

"Ay, ay, sir," I answered, touching my hat; and away I went, heading for the second lieutenant's cabin. I met him just coming out, somebody having already passed the word that the Captain wanted him. I delivered the skipper's message, received his assurance that all should be ready, and then returned to the quarter-deck.

Presently Mr Howard returned to inform Captain Vavassour that his orders had been carried out.

"Very well, sir," answered the skipper. "Let the men go to their stations for tacking ship. Hands by the best bower-anchor! Oblige me, Mr Howard, by seeing personally that the anchor is all ready for letting go, and also that it is let go on the instant, should I give the order. If at the last moment it should become necessary to club-haul, I will personally take charge. Mr Delamere, find one of the boatswain's mates and station him below at the main hatchway, in such a position that he can see you on deck here, with instructions to wind his call to cut the cable the moment that he receives the signal which I will pass on to you."

The critical moment was now close at hand; the point which we were endeavouring to weather was less than a mile ahead, and still far enough on the lee-bow to justify the hope that we might yet go clear. But the scene, generally, was of so alarming a character, and our situation was so critical, that even the bravest man there might well have been excused if he failed to regard it altogether without apprehension. For it was now blowing harder than ever, the sea was breaking with absolutely appalling fury on the reef—speaking eloquently of the fate that awaited us all in the

event of failure—and the over-driven ship, so heavily pressed down by her canvas that the lee-side of her quarter-deck and waist was all afloat, groaned and complained in every timber as she literally fought her way through the opposing seas, smothering herself forward so completely at every mad plunge that those who were standing by to let go the anchor had been compelled to lash themselves firmly at their posts to avoid being washed overboard. Add to all this the fierce shriek and howl of the wind through the rigging aloft, the groaning of the masts in their partners, and of the main tack, as the ship rolled to windward, the thunderous shocks of the seas as they smote our bows and shattered into blinding sheets of spray that flew as high as the foretop and drenched the lee clew of the topsail, and the sight of the spars bending and whipping to the terrific strain that they were called upon to bear,—remembering, too, that if anything should carry away just then it would mean the utter destruction of the ship and the loss of all hands,—and the reader may be able dimly to picture the feelings that animated the ship's company of the *Europa* on that occasion.

Even the skipper looked a shade paler than usual as he slowly brought the speaking-trumpet from behind him and prepared to raise it to his lips. We were now so near the reef that we could hear the hollow booming thunder and crash of the sea breaking upon it; its outer extremity was within half-a-cable's length of our lee-bow, and it was evident that, even if all went well, it was going to be "touch and go" with us, when suddenly the ship came upright and the sails flapped with a report like the discharge of a 32-pounder! That fatal flaw of wind round the Point, which the master had foreseen, had come upon us.

Up went the trumpet to the Captain's lips, and from it issued the bellowing call of—"Hands, 'bout ship! Ready oh, ready! Down helm, quartermaster! Stand by to let go at the word, Mr Howard!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" came the response, faintly heard above the howl of the wind, the thunder of the surf on the rocks to leeward, the heavy "slosh" of a sea in over the bows, and the hair-raising slatting of the canvas overhead.

The ship, in obedience to her lee-helm, had come up about a point, still forging ahead, and bringing the outer extremity of the reef broad on our lee-bow, when suddenly the canvas, with a terrific report, filled again, and the ship careened to her bearings.

"Up helm, quartermaster, hard up with it, and let her go off again! We shall do it yet, by Jupiter!" ejaculated the skipper, in a voice that quivered with excitement, while the master, who had been standing close by all the while, sprang to the wheel and lent his strength to put it over.

"Steady the wheel," was the next order, as the ship paid off again, and once more began to gather way; "thus and no nearer, quartermaster; keep her full, and let her go through the water! What are you about, sir?"—as the ship suddenly griped and the weather leach of the fore-topsail shook.

"It is the undertow—the recoil of the surf from the reef that is hawsing her bows up into the wind, sir," explained the master, as he strained at the wheel, with the sweat trickling down from underneath the rim of his hat. "There—now she falls off again—steady as you go."

As the master let go the wheel, took off his hat, and drew forth a pocket-handkerchief to wipe his streaming visage, the end of the reef drew fair abeam, and so close that I could almost have leaped from the main rigging into the boil of surf that seethed and hissed and swirled about the black fangs of rock that showed here and there above water. But the danger was over, for as the ship went plunging and surging past one could see how, every time she lifted, she was, as it were, dragged bodily to windward by the strong undertow, and a minute later the reef was astern, but fast working out on the weather quarter, showing quite clearly how exceedingly narrow had been our escape.

"Hold on there with the anchor, Mr Howard!" shouted the skipper. The first lieutenant waved his hand and came aft, wet to the skin, and his clothes streaming with water as though he had been overboard—as indeed he had, to all intents and purposes; for while standing on the fore-castle, waiting for the order to let go the anchor, he had been quite as much under water as above it.

"That is as narrow a squeak as I have ever beheld, sir," he exclaimed, as he joined the skipper. "If it had not been for that half-board that we involuntarily made, we should never have done it."

"No," agreed the skipper; "I believe that not even the undertow would have saved us. However, 'all's well that ends well,' so we will first take the mainsail off her, Mr Howard, and then you may splice the main-brace and call the watch. Let her go along clean full, quartermaster; there is nothing to leeward now that we need be afraid of. How's her head?"

"Nor'-nor'-west, sir," answered the quartermaster.

The clewing-up and stowing of the mainsail, without allowing it to thresh itself to ribbons, was a task of no little difficulty, considering the violence with which the gale was still blowing; but our first luff was seaman enough to accomplish it without mishap. No sooner was it off the ship than she once more resumed her former buoyancy of motion, lifting easily over the seas, with only an occasional sprinkling of spray upon the fore-castle, instead of ploughing furiously through them and drowning the whole of the fore-deck, as she had been doing during her endeavour to work out to windward of Point du Raz; so great, indeed, was the improvement in our condition generally that, although it was still blowing very heavily, we all felt as though we had suddenly passed into fine weather after our recent buffeting.

Some three-quarters of an hour later we passed Les Stevenets. I believe we might have weathered them had we really made a serious effort to do so, but there was no need. In this case, unlike that of Point du Raz, we had the option of going to leeward if we chose, and the skipper *did* choose. He had evidently had enough of close shaves for one day, and the moment he recognised that we should have another if he made the attempt to weather that group of rocks, he ordered the helm to be put up, and we passed to leeward of them, giving them a good wide berth. We

had no stomach for again viewing surf-washed rocks at such close quarters as we had been fated to do that day.

By the time that we were well clear of Les Stevenets night had fallen; but for the previous hour the sky had been gradually clearing, so that by the end of the second dog-watch it was a fine, clear, star-lit night. The wind, too, was distinctly moderating; while the sea, although still very high, was longer, more regular, and not quite so steep as it had been; in a word, the gale had broken, and by midnight we were once more under courses and single-reefed topsails. By the end of the middle watch we were able to shake out the reefs in our topsails and set the topgallantsails, after which we hove about and headed south once more, passing well to windward of the Isle de Seins and its outlying reefs about noon next day.

Chapter Six.

We capture a Dutch Frigate.

About a fortnight later, being at the time off Cape Ortegale, cruising under short canvas, we sighted at daybreak a brig in the offing, to windward, steering south, under a press of sail. She was, at the moment of discovery, some eight miles distant, and from her general appearance, and especially from the cut of her canvas, we judged her to be French, and a man-o'-war. We accordingly at once made sail, and hoisted the private signal, of which no notice was taken; we therefore concluded that our suspicions relative to her nationality were well founded, and crowded all sail in chase. No sooner was this act of ours perceived by the stranger than—the weather being fine, and the wind a moderate breeze from West—she hauled her wind and, bracing sharp up, endeavoured to make her escape to windward; the weather conditions, however, were ideal for the frigate, and we overhauled the brig so rapidly that by ten o'clock in the forenoon we were within gunshot of her; whereupon we hoisted our colours and fired a shot across her forefoot as a polite hint to her to heave-to. Her reply to this was to pour in her broadside of seven 8-pounders, the shot from which flew over and between our masts, doing us no damage whatever. Upon perceiving which, and noticing also that we were about to return the compliment by firing our starboard broadside at her, she hurriedly ran up the French ensign and as hurriedly hauled it down again, at the same time backing her mainyard in token of surrender. We thereupon closed with her and took possession, our prize proving to be the fourteen-gun brig *Gironde*, bound from Brest to Toulon. We transferred her crew of seventy to the frigate, and sent her home in charge of Mr Galway, the second lieutenant, and a prize-crew; but before parting company we learned, from certain papers on board her, that on the 19th of the previous month (August) a treaty of alliance, offensive and defensive, between France and Spain, had been signed at Madrid. We were thus at war with Spain, as well as with the Dutch and the French—a piece of news which our lads greeted with cheers of delight when it was communicated to them, for it gave them another enemy to fight—and to conquer.

We were now at practically the southern extremity of our cruising-ground, with the land plainly in view to leeward. Captain Vavassour—who seemed of late to have contracted a marked dislike for anything resembling a lee-shore—therefore decided to work well off the land, until the frigate had gained the track of homeward-bound ships; and there to lie in wait for anything that Dame Fortune might be disposed to send us; in pursuance of which resolution we made sail, upon a taut bowline, as soon as the *Gironde* had parted company, cracking on, and working out an offing of about a hundred miles by daylight the next morning.

The day dawned fresh and clear, with an almost cloudless sky, a moderate breeze from about West by South, and very little sea overrunning the long, regular Biscay swell; it was, in short, perfect Atlantic weather, and about as complete a contrast as could well be imagined to the conditions which had prevailed during our late experience in Audierne Bay.

The weather being of so fine and settled a character, we had been carrying our royals all through the night; but shortly after the Captain made his appearance on deck, at eight bells in the morning watch, the breeze freshened up perceptibly; whereupon, a good offing having been secured, the word was given to clew up and furl all three royals; and a minute or two later the hands were aloft and out on the yards, rolling up the canvas. It was while they were thus engaged—the ship being at the time on the starboard tack, and consequently heading to the southward—that a hail came down simultaneously from the fore and main royal-yards to the effect that a couple of sail were in sight, broad on the lee-bow. To an inquiry on the part of the first lieutenant as to what they looked like, the answer was returned that it was impossible to say just then, as the strangers were so far away that, even from the lofty elevation of the observers, the heads of their royals were only just clear of the horizon.

Mr Howard cast an inquiring eye about him, and his gaze fell upon me.

“Mr Delamere,” he said, “you have a good glass. Just jump below and get it, if you please, and then shin up as far as the main royal-yard and see what you can make out concerning those strangers.”

I did as directed, the hands who had been aloft meeting me in the maintop on their way down.

“What do the strange craft look like, Simmons?” I asked of the smartest of the party.

“Well, sir,” he replied, “as we told Mr Howard, a few minutes ago, we can't make much out of 'em as yet; they'm too far off for that. But I've got pretty good eyes, Mr Delamere, and I think when you brings that glass o' yours to bear on 'em that you'll find one on 'em's got her r'yals stowed, while t'other has hers set. Likewise I've a sort of a notion that if you stays aloft for a matter o' ten minutes or so you'll find that there's three on 'em, instead o' two; at all events just as I was layin' 'im off the yard I thought I caught a glimpse of somethin' showin' now and again that looked like the canvas of another craft just liftin' over the 'orizon.”

“Thanks, Simmons,” said I, “I'll keep a lookout for number three. If she really exists, she ought to declare herself unmistakably within the next few minutes. By the bye, I suppose they are heading this way?”

"To the best o' my knowledge and belief they be, sir," the man answered. "We wasn't on the yard long enough to make exactly sure, but it seemed to me that, even durin' the minute or two that elapsed after we first caught sight of 'em, they lifted a bit."

"Thanks," I said again. "We shall soon see." And I sprang into the topmast rigging and proceeded on my way aloft, while Simmons swung himself down over the rim of the top.

I soon reached my destination and seated myself comfortably on the royal-yard, with my back resting against the mast under my lee. From this elevation the strangers were distinctly visible to the naked eye, for the atmosphere was as clear as crystal; and, even before I had established myself to my liking, my unaided sight had assured me that Simmons' supposition was correct, and that there were three sail, instead of two, to the southward; for the object that the topman had only believed he saw elusively appearing and vanishing on the verge of the distant horizon now stood out clear and sharp as a tiny patch of canvas, showing milk-white in the morning sun, well clear of the other two. I soon brought my telescope—an exceptionally powerful instrument—to bear upon the three patches of canvas that gleamed like tiny shreds of fleecy, summer cloud upon the sharply-ruled edge of the dark-blue sea, and at once discovered that Simmons had been so far right that one of the craft had indeed her royals stowed, and not only that but her topgallantsails also, while the other two appeared to be showing every cloth they could possibly spread, including—as I soon made out—topgallant studdingsails.

Presently, when I had been working away with my telescope for a minute or two, a hail came floating up to me from the deck below of—

"Royal-yard, there! what have you been able to make out respecting the two strange sail to leeward?"

Looking down past my left shoulder, I saw the skipper and the first lieutenant both gazing upward at me. It was the latter who had hailed.

"There are three of them, instead of two, sir," I answered. "And while two of them are carrying royals and topgallant-studding sails, the third has her royals and topgallantsails stowed; from which I infer that two of them are merchantmen, while the third is a man-o'-war—probably a frigate."

A short confab between the Captain and Mr Howard ensued upon the communication of this bit of information; then the skipper hailed:

"How do they bear, now, Mr Delamere? Do they seem to be drawing out athwart our hawse at all?"

"They bear about two and a half points on our lee-bow, at this moment, sir," I replied. "And I think that, if we hold all on as we are going now, we shall weather the leading ship—the one that I take to be a frigate—by about half a mile. They are rising fast, sir—the heads of the leader's topsails are just beginning to show; and if the breeze continues as fresh as it is now we ought to be abreast of them in about,"—I made a rapid calculation—"an hour and a half from this."

Another brief interchange of remarks between the Captain and the first luff followed this communication, then the latter hailed again—

"Thank you, Mr Delamere. That will do for the present. You had better come down and get your breakfast."

My estimate as to the time at which we should close with the strangers was not far out; for when, having snatched a hasty breakfast, I again went on deck, the heads of the leading stranger's topsails were visible above the horizon, she having made sail about a quarter-of-an-hour earlier and hauled to the wind a trifle, as though to intercept us; and as I emerged from the hatchway the drummers began to beat to quarters, Mr Percival, the third lieutenant, having gone into the fore-topmast crosstrees to reconnoitre, and from that lofty outlook having not only confirmed my conjecture as to the leading ship being undoubtedly a frigate, but also expressed his conviction that she was a foreigner.

By the time that we were all ready to engage, if need were, the strange frigate was hull-up; and as she had hauled her wind still farther, and threatened to weather us if we did not mind what we were about, we tacked ship, when it soon became apparent that the *Europa* was much the faster vessel of the two; we, therefore, stood on until we were sure of our ability to pass across the other vessel's bows upon the next tack, when we went about again, and at the same time hoisted our colours. To this challenge the stranger promptly replied by hoisting Dutch colours, thus declaring herself to be an enemy, which declaration our lads greeted with three mighty cheers.

Both ships were now close-hauled, on opposite tacks, the Dutchman heading to the northward upon the port tack, while the *Europa*, on the starboard tack, was heading up high enough to render it certain that we should be able to cross his bows at about the distance of a cable's length. It was Captain Vavassour's intention to do this, if he could, pouring in a raking broadside at the proper moment; but the Dutchman soon let us know that he was not to be caught so easily, for when he arrived at about four points on our lee-bow he suddenly went in stays, giving us his starboard broadside as he did so, and the next moment a storm of 32-pound shot came hurtling about our ears, crashing through our bulwarks, killing two men and wounding five poor fellows, besides cutting up our rigging a good deal. We immediately luffed and returned the compliment, giving him the whole of our port broadside, main-deck and upper-deck guns; and when the smoke blew away we had the satisfaction of seeing that we had shot away his jib-booms, thus depriving him of a considerable amount of head-sail at a most critical moment. Moreover, the loss of his jibs caused him to miss stays and hang in the wind so long that, taking advantage of the opportunity, Captain Vavassour bore up, and, passing close athwart his stern, raked him most effectively with our starboard broadside, receiving only four shot from the Dutchman's stern-chasers in return.

Meanwhile, the Dutch crew went to work with most praiseworthy courage and activity to clear away the wreck, and so to reduce the amount of their after-sail as to get their ship once more under command; but before they could

succeed in doing this we had kept away far enough to give ourselves room to tack, had gone about again, and once more crossed our antagonist's stern, raking him a second time most destructively, at close quarters, with our port broadside, double-shotted. This discharge must have played havoc with his crew, for when at length he had paid off sufficiently to bring his starboard broadside to bear, he was only able to fire a little more than half his guns, while they were so indifferently aimed that only three or four of the shot struck us.

We now had a very great advantage over our antagonist, from the fact that all our spars were intact, while he was greatly hampered by the loss of so much head-sail; but the advantage did not remain with us very long, for at the next exchange of broadsides down came our fore-topmast, at the same instant that the Dutchman's mizenmast went over the side. This put us both upon nearly equal terms, the advantage being rather on the side of our antagonist, if anything; and now we went at it, hammer and tongs, making a running fight of it, broadside to broadside, as fast as the men could load and fire. Now, too, it began to dawn upon us that we had caught a Tartar, for the Dutchman mounted forty guns—32-pound and 28-pound carronades—against our 24-pounders and 8-pounders, while the close range at which we were fighting—about a pistol-shot distance—enabled her heavier metal to punish us severely. But our lads cared very little about this, it appeared, one of them remarking to another in my hearing that an 8-pounder could kill quite as effectively as a 32 at short range, and for his part he would as soon be killed by one as the other. This appeared to be the spirit animating all hands, for they toiled away at their guns, loading and firing with the utmost rapidity, and cheering at every broadside, whether of their own or the enemy. But the work was too hot to last very long. When we had been engaged about half-an-hour we noticed that our antagonist's fire was perceptibly slackening, and when at length we contrived again to pass across her stern, and deliver another raking double-shotted broadside, she hauled down her colours and hailed that she surrendered. The word was at once passed to cease firing, and the battle ended, for which I, at any rate, was not at all sorry; for there had been moments when it appeared to me as though we were both bent upon emulating the famous Kilkenny cats, who fought until nothing but their tails remained!

Now came the task of taking possession of the prize. Investigation revealed the fact that, out of all our boats, only two were in a fit state for immediate service, namely, the second cutter and the Captain's gig, the others having been all more or less damaged by the enemy's shot; the skipper therefore ordered the former to be lowered, directing Mr Percival, the third lieutenant, to go away in her, taking with him as many men as she would carry.

"Mr Delamere," continued Captain Vavassour, "you had better accompany Mr Percival, bringing back the boat with a couple of hands as soon as you have obtained all the essential information. Be as quick as you can, if you please, because I want to be off after those other two craft."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered I, as I turned away to go below and fetch my dirk; and a couple of minutes later we were clear of the *Europa* and pulling away toward the Dutchman, the skipper's injunction to me to hurry being emphasised by the fact that as I passed through the gangway I caught sight of the carpenter and his mates busily engaged upon the task of routing out a new topmast from among the assortment of spare spars that we carried. Meanwhile the other two craft of which the skipper had spoken, and which had all the appearance of being Dutch Indiamen under the convoy of the frigate, had hauled their wind as soon as the action began, and were now some four miles dead to windward, heading about North-West, and cracking on with the evident intention of getting out of sight, if possible, before we could repair damages sufficiently to proceed in pursuit.

Five minutes sufficed us to span the narrow stretch of water that separated us from our late antagonist; and upon climbing the side we were received at the gangway by an officer of some twenty-five years of age, whose head was swathed in a blood-stained bandage, and who handed his sword to Percival with a dignified bow. This officer, who spoke English quite well, informed us that the ship which we had captured was the Dutch frigate *Gelderland*, of forty guns, homeward-bound from the East Indies with the two ships in sight under convoy. He further informed us that his name was Van Halst, and that at the beginning of the action he had been third lieutenant, whereas, in consequence of the heavy loss inflicted by our raking broadsides, he was now the ship's commanding officer.

Indeed, it appeared that our fire had been fearfully destructive, for in addition to the damage that had been apparent from the *Europa's* decks, we now beheld dismantled guns, shattered, blood-splashed bulwarks, cut rigging hanging everywhere in bights, and shot-scored decks cumbered with dead and dying men—a veritable shambles. Mynheer Van Halst could not tell us the precise extent of the ship's losses in killed and wounded, for there had been no time thus far to ascertain it. The sound members of the crew were still busily engaged in the terrible task of separating the wounded from the slain, and conveying the former below to be attended to by the surgeon; but he told us that she had begun the action with a complement of three hundred and ten officers and men, and that he believed, from what he had seen, quite half of them must have been put *hors de combat*.

Now that the fight was over and his ship taken, poor Van Halst began to show signs of the stress and strain of the engagement; he gradually turned ghastly pale; his lips quivered from time to time to such an extent that, for the few seconds during which the paroxysm lasted, he was scarcely able to articulate. He staggered as he stood talking to us, and at length Percival, who could ill afford to waste time in conversation, gently led him into the handsome cabin under the poop, deposited him on a sofa, found a decanter of brandy and gave him a good stiff dose to revive him, and left him there, with a kindly injunction that he was not to attempt to move until he, Percival, returned.

Having thus disposed, for the time being, of our principal prisoner without, as we hoped, hurting his feelings, the third lieutenant and I took rapid stock of the condition of our prize, Percival mentioning such items of information as he wished to have reported to the skipper, while I jotted them down in my pocket-book, together with such other notes as I believed might be found of interest. Thus, we examined the boats and found three of them absolutely intact, while a fourth could be rendered serviceable in about half-an-hour by the carpenter—our shot having taken effect for the most part on the main-deck. Then we quickly surveyed her stock of spare spars, and came to the conclusion that all her damages in that direction might be made good, except so far as her mizenmast was concerned; she would consequently have to go home brig-rigged, or at best as a barque.

Meanwhile, from the moment when our people first set foot upon her deck they had fallen to upon the work of clearing away the wreckage, saving all that was worth saving, and knotting and splicing rigging, leaving the Dutch crew to look after their wounded comrades and convey them below to the surgeon. At length, after I had been aboard about half-an-hour, I was ready to return to our own ship; I therefore ordered two hands down into the boat alongside, and shoved off for the *Europa*, noting, with great satisfaction as I did so, that the breeze was fast dropping, and that the two Indiamen were still hull-up, not having made very much progress to windward during the time that I had been aboard the prize.

Upon regaining the *Europa's* deck I found it a scene of feverish yet perfectly ordered activity. Everybody was busily engaged in one way or another upon the task of making good the damage to our spars and rigging by the enemy's shot; a strong gang upon the fore-castle had already cleared away the wreck of the fore-topmast, having removed from it, practically uninjured, everything that had been attached to it in the shape of other spars, rigging, and so on—such, for example, as the topgallant-masts and royal-masts, with their sails, yards, and rigging, the topsail-yard and topsail, the cap, crosstrees, and topmast rigging; and the carpenter and his mates had already got the new spar fitted and ready for pointing; while practically all our cut gear had been either knotted or spliced. As for our casualties, I was delighted to learn that they were very light, taking into consideration the determination with which our adversary had fought, our loss in killed and wounded amounting to eight of the former and twenty-two of the latter, of which only seven cases were regarded by the surgeon as really serious.

Captain Vavassour was up on the poop, talking to the master, when I passed in through the gangway. I, therefore, at once made my way to him and, having reported myself in due form as "Come on board, sir," proceeded forthwith to make my report, referring from time to time to my pocket-book in order to assure myself that I was omitting nothing.

"Thank you, Mr Delamere," the skipper said when I had finished; "you seem to have brought me a very full and complete report—complete enough, at all events, to give me a pretty clear idea of the state of affairs aboard the prize. From what you tell me, I judge that Mr Percival will have his hands full for some hours to come; is not that so?"

I answered that that was precisely how the matter appeared to me.

"Very well," he said. "Then as soon as the carpenter has finished here he must go aboard the prize, taking with him as many men as Mr Howard can spare. You shall go with him, remaining aboard the *Gelderland* until the able-bodied portion of her crew can be transferred to this ship, when you will undertake that piece of work, using, if need be, to facilitate the operation, such of the prize's boats as will float. You had better find Mr Howard and acquaint him with this arrangement, and then tell the carpenter what I want him to do. It appears to me that Mr Lucas is now almost, if not quite, ready to turn over to the prize. If so, you had better take him across."

Away I trotted, and presently found the first lieutenant on the fore-castle, supervising the labours of the boatswain and the carpenter, the latter of whom was just putting the finishing touches to his part of the work. I delivered both my messages, picked out fifteen more men to go aboard the prize,—that being all that Mr Howard could spare,—hustled them, with the carpenter and his crew, down the side, and presently found myself again aboard the prize.

Here, short as had been the duration of my absence, I found a great improvement in the appearance of things. Mr Percival and his gang had been working like demons, and had made great advances toward a general clearance of the wreckage—so much so, indeed, that he was quite ready for the Carpenter to start work at once; while, as for the Dutch crew, they had completed their task of carrying below their killed and wounded, and were busily engaged in washing down the main-deck and otherwise obliterating, as far as might be, the evidences of the recent battle. I allowed them to finish this job—although I knew the skipper to be very anxious to be off in chase of the two Indiamen—for I had noticed, while crossing over to the prize on the last occasion, that the wind had fined away to a mere zephyr, and that the Indiamen were still hull-up; while there was every appearance of the weather falling stark calm within the next hour or two. I, therefore, told myself that, taking everything into consideration, there was really no great need for hurry. But I had not to wait very long, for within half-an-hour the Dutchmen had done all that was possible for them to do; and by noon I had completed my somewhat disagreeable task of transferring all the prisoners to the *Europa*, taking with me, on my last trip, the Dutch surgeon's report upon the losses incurred by the *Gelderland* during the action. These, as anticipated by Van Halst, were exceedingly heavy, the killed numbering thirty-two, while the wounded totalled no less than one hundred and thirty-one, of whom at least ten were so desperately hurt that there was little hope of their outlasting the night.

By the time that all this was done, Mr Howard had got our new fore-topmast on end and rigged, the topsail-yard aloft and secured, and the topsail, fore-topmast staysail, and jib set, when we at once filled on the ship and hauled our wind in pursuit of the Indiamen, Mr Percival having received orders to follow us as soon as he could make sail. Then we piped to dinner, all hands having spent a most strenuously busy morning.

At four bells in the afternoon watch the wind had fined down to such an extent that the frigate was making no more than a bare four knots through the water, although we had by this time got up the fore-topgallant and royal-masts again and were once more under all plain sail; while, as for the two Indiamen, built as cargo-carriers rather than for speed, they appeared to scarcely have steerage-way, and seemed to maintain their luff only with the utmost difficulty—indeed, there were times when they fell so broad off as to present their full broadsides to us. But although their capture might now be regarded as practically certain, they were evidently not disposed to yield without making some sort of a struggle for liberty, for they were on opposite tacks, one of them having gone about; the idea, of course, being to separate and widen their distance as much as possible in the hope that by so doing one of them at least might escape, even if the other were captured. Captain Vavassour, however, did not allow these tactics to disconcert him in the least; he fixed upon one of them as the object of his pursuit—altogether disregarding the movements of the other, meanwhile—and devoted all his efforts to close with her, with the result that by two bells in the first dog-watch we were within gunshot of our quarry, when a shot was pitched across his forefoot as a gentle hint to him to heave-to. But he declined to take the hint, and it was not until we sent a shot whistling between his masts that the sturdy old Mynheer could be convinced of the impossibility of escape, when he hoisted his colours to

the peak only to instantly haul them down again and back his mainyard in token of surrender.

“Mr Delamere,” said the Captain, “I shall be obliged to send you to take possession of that ship. Take the cutter, therefore, with a dozen men—armed, of course—and proceed on board at once. You may take Mr Millet (another midshipman) with you, who, with a couple of hands, can bring back the boat and any message which you may find it necessary to send. You will have to depend upon the Dutch crew, principally, to work the ship for you until I can make further arrangements. As soon as you have shoved off I shall proceed in pursuit of the other ship, and you had better follow me, so long as there is wind enough for you to do so; and you must use your own judgment as to the most opportune moment for sending away Mr Millet and the boat.”

A quarter of an hour later, followed by Jack Millet and my crew of twelve, I clambered in over the bulwarks of the motherly old craft that we had brought-to, and formally took possession of the *Haarlem*, Dutch East Indiaman, of 965 tons, homeward-bound from Batavia, full to the hatches with a rich cargo of Eastern produce, and a cuddy-full of passengers who seemed to take their capture very philosophically, especially when I explained to them that they might rely upon being left in undisturbed possession of all their strictly personal effects. With the skipper, however,—a most dignified old fellow, white-haired, and bronzed by nearly half a century of the sea life,—it was different. It appeared that he was part-owner of the ship, having sunk the entire savings of a lifetime in the purchase of fifty shares and a quantity of the cargo in her hold; and although he did his utmost to face his misfortune as a brave man should, the tears started to his eyes as he explained to me that the capture of the ship would leave him and his *frau* absolutely penniless in their old age. I endeavoured to soften the blow to him as much as possible by sympathetically murmuring some idiotic platitude about “the fortune of war,” but of course it was no good; the poor old fellow simply shook his head and ejaculated—“Ay—the fortune of war! It is all very well for you, young sir, who depend upon war to provide you with a career, to talk like that; but think of the thousands who are ruined and whose hearts are left desolate by war; think of the parents who have to mourn the loss of sons cut down by war in the very flower of their manhood, and all because our rulers cannot agree! I tell you, sir, that if all men were what they should be—honourable, honest, upright, and faithful followers of Christ—there need be no war.”

To which I replied that doubtless this was true; but that if we should be compelled to wait for the abolition of war until mankind became perfect, I had a conviction that neither he nor I would live to see it.

Chapter Seven.

Westward Ho!

When, through the captain of the *Haarlem*, as interpreter, I explained to the Dutch crew that it was my intention to call upon them to continue to work the ship, they seemed disposed at the outset to refuse; but I soon brought them to a more reasonable frame of mind by giving them the choice of remaining in their own forecabin and enjoying the liberty of the *Haarlem's* deck, on the one hand, and being transferred to the frigate and confined below, on the other, when it took them but a few minutes to make up their minds that the first alternative was by far the more desirable of the two.

Having arrived at this understanding I filled away, and, with the cutter in tow, stood after the *Europa*, which was now in full pursuit of the second Indiaman—the *Schelde*, of 950 tons, also from Batavia, and with an even more valuable cargo than that carried by the *Haarlem*, as I now learned from the chief mate of the latter. But oh, it was weary work to attempt to turn to windward in a light breeze in the deep, bluff-bowed, squat-sterned, Dutch-built *Haarlem*, after my experience of the smart, lively, swift-sailing British frigate; it was, therefore, with a feeling of the utmost satisfaction that shortly before the end of the second dog-watch I heard the *Europa* once more booming out her summons to surrender, and saw the mainyard of the *Schelde* swing slowly aback in response. For now, the business of taking possession of this third prize once over, we could at least bear up and crowd sail for home, with a free wind to help us over the ground; for by this time Mr Percival had so far made good the damage sustained by the *Gelderland* that he once more had the vessel under command, and was working out toward us on the port tack. And from what I could see of the behaviour of the ship it appeared to me that, even in the guise of a brig, she would be quite able to hold her own with the slow-moving Indiamen.

The *Schelde* and the frigate having hove-to, we were able to close with them in the course of about an hour, when I sent away Jack Millet and two men in the cutter with my report to Captain Vavassour, giving him the name, tonnage, and nature of the cargo of the *Haarlem*, together with such other particulars as I thought he would like to know, and also acquainting him with the fact that the Dutch crew had consented to work the ship. Meanwhile the *Europa* had taken in all her light sails and clewed up her courses, with the evident intention of keeping close company with her prizes.

As soon as the *Schelde* had been taken possession of, and a prize-crew put on board her, Captain Vavassour sent away his gig to me, in charge of young Millet, with written instructions that I was to remain in charge of the *Haarlem*, retaining Jack to help me, and to crowd all sail for Plymouth, taking care to keep in close touch with the rest of the squadron. Jack—good boy—upon receiving his instructions to join me, had had the sense and forethought not only to bring along his own dunnage but mine also; and as soon as we had hoisted in the two chests I sent back the gig, and we proceeded to make ourselves comfortable by taking possession of two staterooms in the cuddy that by good fortune happened to be vacant.

It was close upon four bells in the first watch when at length, all arrangements being completed, the *Europa* hoisted the night signal for us to make sail, upon which, the wind having meanwhile freshened up again a trifle, we wore round and, crowding all sail upon the two Indiamen, shaped a course for Ushant. I remained on deck until I had seen the topgallant, topmast, and lower studdingsails set aboard my command, and then, having had a busy and very tiring day, turned over the charge of the deck to Bateman, a steady old quartermaster who had been spared to me

by Mr Howard, laying strict injunctions upon him to keep a very sharp eye upon the Dutch crew, and then turned-in. Five days later, at daylight, we made the land, and came safely to anchor in Plymouth Sound, just as the breakfast-bell was being rung on board the two Indiamen.

The appearance of the *Europa* in the Sound, accompanied by three prizes, one of which was a more powerful vessel than herself, created great excitement ashore, and we were speedily surrounded by a whole flotilla of boats, the occupants of which clamorously besought permission to come on board and dispose of, either by sale or barter, the varied assortment of goods and commodities that they had brought off; but the strictest orders had been given that no strangers were on any account to be allowed on board, and that no boats or other craft were to be permitted to come alongside, or even approach the prizes; we were, therefore, obliged to possess our souls in patience, and see fresh meat, soft tack, and many other dainties that we would gladly have purchased, taken back to the shore again. Two days later, however, the prizes were taken into the Hamoase and their crews landed, after which the prize-crews returned to the *Europa*, where the joyous news was communicated to us that we were to proceed at once to Portsmouth to refit. We weighed forthwith and stood up channel with a slashing westerly breeze, arriving at Portsmouth on the following day, when all hands were turned over to the guardship, and the frigate was taken into dock.

I obtained leave, without the slightest difficulty, and spent a very happy month with my father, at the expiration of which I was notified that the *Europa* was once more ready for sea, and was requested to join forthwith.

On this occasion I left home and journeyed down to Portsmouth alone, my father happening at the time to be suffering from an attack of gout which, while not sufficiently serious to be alarming, was nevertheless painful enough to preclude travelling. Upon arriving at my destination I called at the George Hotel, where Captain Vavassour usually put up, with the intention of reporting myself to him, but, learning that he was on board the frigate, I at once proceeded to the harbour and, engaging a wherry, transported myself and my belongings to Spithead, where the *Europa* lay at anchor. I was just in time to catch the Captain and report myself before he left the ship for the night, and then I descended to the midshipmen's berth, where I was joyously welcomed by my former shipmates.

Upon inquiring for the latest news, it appeared that certain changes had occurred in the personnel of the ship since we had last all met together. For instance, Mr Howard had most deservedly obtained his promotion and been given a command, while Mr Galway now reigned in his stead aboard the *Europa*. As second and third lieutenants we had two new men, namely, Mr William Gadsby and Mr Edward Sutcliffe, both of whom seemed to have made a fairly favourable impression, on the whole, although—as was, perhaps, only natural—the occupants of the midshipmen's berth seemed just a little inclined to regard them askance as newcomers of whom but little was thus far known. But when, an hour or so later, I again went up on deck and, through Mr Galway, made the acquaintance of the new men, I speedily came to the conclusion that though our new second luff might possibly turn out to be rather a “taut hand,” and perhaps a little inclined to be intolerant of the practical joking to which midshipmen are so prone, yet, on the whole, we should not have much cause to regret the arrival of either himself or Mr Sutcliffe among us, for both of them impressed me as being exceedingly well-bred men. Whether or not they would turn out to be capable seamen, however, was a matter which only time and more intimate association would prove.

As I have already intimated, the frigate had been reported as ready for sea when I received orders to join her; and so she was, save in one most important particular, namely, that she was short-handed. For although, upon our arrival home, all hands had been turned over to the guardship and placed upon her books while our own ship was in the hands of the dockyard people, the admiral had drawn upon them pretty freely, in order to enable other ships to complete their complement and go to sea; so that when the time came for the *Europa* to receive back her crew, it was found that she was nearly fifty men short of her full number. This was all the more unfortunate, in that we had very little time left us in which to make up the deficiency; for we were to sail in three days' time for Plymouth, there to form part of the escort of a large fleet of merchantmen and transports bound to the West Indies under convoy. But now it was that our new second and third lieutenants showed their mettle, for on the very night of my arrival on board they organised two formidable pressgangs, which they led ashore, one party landing at Portsmouth and the other at Gosport; and between them they managed to make a clean sweep of pretty nearly all the crimps' houses within a radius of four miles of the harbour, returning to the ship shortly before daylight the next morning considerably battered and the worse for wear—for they had been engaged in a series of desperate hand-to-hand fights—but bringing with them sixty-three fine, able-bodied merchant seamen, who had been in close hiding while awaiting a berth. A few of these men had already served on board a man-o'-war, and they did not need very much persuasion to induce them to enter again; when the ball having once been set rolling, as it were, the rest followed suit in little batches of twos and threes until by midday the whole of them had “volunteered,” and we had completed our complement.

At daylight, on the third morning after my arrival on board, Blue Peter was hoisted, the fore-topsail was loosed, and a gun was fired as a signal that we were about to proceed to sea; and from that moment until the anchor was lifted all was bustle and confusion—hoisting in and securing the boats, stowing away stock of all descriptions, and clearing the ship of women—wives and sweethearts of the crew—and traders who were anxious to obtain a settlement of accounts. The Captain's gig had been sent ashore immediately after breakfast; and about ten o'clock she returned, bringing off Captain Vavassour; the boatswains piped “All hands up anchor!” and half-an-hour later we were bowling away down the Solent before a fine easterly breeze.

We arrived in Plymouth Sound the next morning, and found assembled there about one hundred and twenty sail of merchantmen bound to various ports on the other side of the Atlantic, in the safe convoy of which to their destination we were to take part. We also found my old ship *Colossus*, the frigate *Astarte*, of thirty-six guns, and two 14-gun-brigs—the *Hebe* and the *Naiad*—at anchor outside the merchant fleet, being the remaining ships of the squadron detailed for convoy duty.

On the day following our arrival at Plymouth the wind shifted and blew hard from the south-west, with almost continuous rain. As these weather conditions prevailed for eight consecutive days, we remained at anchor, awaiting a

change of wind, since it was useless to take to sea a fleet of merchantmen, the greater number of which were so deeply laden and such poor sailers that it would have been impossible for them to make any progress against a wind that was blowing dead in their teeth. During this period of inaction some thirty additional sail arrived at the rendezvous, anxious to avail themselves of the protection of convoy; when, therefore, on the ninth day the weather cleared and the wind hauled round from the south-east, the merchant fleet of which we were to take care during their passage across the Atlantic numbered in all exactly one hundred and fifty-four sail.

The change of weather occurred shortly after midnight, with a steadily rising barometer; at daylight, therefore, the commodore fired a gun and hoisted the signal to weigh, and by eight o'clock the leading ships in the fleet were under way and beating out to sea, led by the *Colossus*, their departure being hastened by much firing of guns and continuous displays of signal flags. The two gun-brigs went out with the first of the fleet, their duty being to marshal the merchantmen into something like order when they got outside; but the *Astarte* and ourselves remained at anchor to quicken up the movements of the laggards and expedite matters generally; and a hard time we had of it, for so short-handed were some of the vessels that we were obliged to send working-parties on board them to assist in making sail and breaking their anchors out of the ground. But by noon the last of them were fairly under way, and as soon as they had passed outside of us we too weighed and stood out after them, flitting hither and thither, hailing first this ship and then that, with imperative orders for them to crowd sail. But oh, what weary, heart-breaking work was this business of whipping-in; for so sluggish were some of the craft that it seemed as though they would never be able to make their way out to the main fleet, which was by this time hove-to in the offing. However, by eight bells in the afternoon watch we had contrived to hustle the last one out to windward of the Eddystone, when the commodore made the signal to fill away; and off we all went, with the wind a couple of points free, the weather braces checked, and the slower coaches among the merchantmen with all their larboard studdingsails set. Then came a signal from the commodore to regulate rate of sailing by that of the slowest craft in the fleet and to keep as close together as prudence would permit; and, finally, a signal to the men-of-war to take the stations assigned to them and to keep a sharp lookout for marauders. This last signal was made purely as a matter of form and duty, and not because it was actually necessary; for although none of us had sighted any suspicious-looking craft on our way round to Plymouth, we felt pretty certain that news of the assembling of the convoy, and of its probable sailing date, would find its way across the Channel, and that, sooner or later, we should discover that a few enterprising privateers were hovering upon its skirts, watching for a favourable opportunity to cut in and secure a prize or two.

The south-easterly wind held long enough to enable us and our charges to get well clear of the Channel and to the southward of Ushant before it changed, and then it gradually veered round until it came out strong from the north-west, when away we all went for Madeira, the slowest ships carrying every rag of canvas that they could stagger under, while the faster craft were unwillingly compelled to shorten down in order that all might keep together, while as for ourselves and the *Astarte*, the utmost that we could show, without running ahead of our station, was double-reefed topsails.

We sighted and passed Madeira on the eighth day out from Plymouth, and two days later, to our great joy, picked up the "Trades," blowing fresh; and thus far we had not sighted a single suspicious sail. Most of us were of opinion that, having been permitted to come thus far without interference, we were now safe, and that with a strong trade-wind wafting along even the slowest coaches among us, at a pace of from six to seven knots an hour, our troubles were all over. But the more knowing ones shook their heads, smiled compassionately at our ignorance, and said, "Wait a bit!"

And they were right. For at daylight on a certain lovely morning, when we were, by our reckoning, some three hundred and twenty miles from the island of Barbadoes, upon going up to the main-topmast crosstrees to take a look round generally, and count the number of sail in sight, I discovered that at last the wolves had entered our fold and were already playing havoc with it. For, to start with, one of our finest and fastest merchantmen had hauled out from the main body, and under a heavy press of canvas was already hull-down in the south-eastern board, being evidently in possession of a prize-crew, while, in the thickest of the ruck, was a very large brigantine, under exceedingly short canvas, yet keeping pace with the slow-sailing merchantmen, first sheering alongside one and hugging her affectionately for a few minutes, and then turning her attention to another and doing likewise. But this was not all, for on the northern flank of the convoy there was a small full-rigged ship, which I felt certain was a stranger, apparently pursuing the same tactics as the brigantine; while far away to the north were both our man-o'-war brigs cracking on in chase of five craft—whether a portion of our convoy or not, I could not at the moment say—which seemed to be manoeuvring with the deliberate purpose of drawing the brigs away from the convoy and so affording the brigantine and the ship an opportunity to put in a good morning's work unmolested.

"On deck, there!" I hailed. "There are two strange sail astern which seem to be running alongside and taking possession of a number of our craft; one large ship is heading south-east and already hull-down from the crosstrees here; and the two brigs—the *Hebe* and the *Naiad*—are about fifteen miles off, in the northern board, chasing five other craft."

"Thank you, Mr Delamere," answered the first lieutenant. "Can you count the number of merchantmen in sight?"

"I'll try to do so, sir," I replied; "but I'm afraid it will be a little difficult, for they are all bunching together, astern, as though for mutual protection, in a manner that is very confusing."

"Still, I shall be glad if you will do your best to get the information," hailed the first luff; to which I replied, as in duty bound—"Ay, ay, sir; I'll have a try."

Therewith I set to work upon my somewhat awkward task, in the middle of which some of the merchantmen began firing their signal guns to attract our attention. The example seemed contagious, for in about five minutes the popping of their 4-pounders was almost continuous, and the smoke became as thick as though a small battle were raging, while ship after ship hoisted the signal for "Enemy in sight!" At length, after being compelled to begin my work all over again two or three times, I managed to complete my count, making of them one hundred and forty-eight. This number I reported to the first lieutenant, down on deck.

"Does that include the six craft which appear to have parted company, Mr Delamere?" hailed Mr Galway.

"No, sir," I replied; "it is the number which are still sailing in convoy."

The first lieutenant conferred for a few minutes with the Captain, who had meanwhile been sent for, and had come on deck, and then hailed again, directing me to come down.

Meanwhile a good deal of signalling had been proceeding between the *Colossus*, ourselves, and the *Astarte*; and just as I reached the deck the order was given to make sail, the two frigates having been instructed to chase the strangers, and for us, in addition, to pursue and recapture the large ship which had by this time vanished altogether in the south-eastern board.

We at once hauled our wind and, acknowledging the signal from the commodore, crowded sail, standing to the southward upon the port tack. We set everything to our royals, although the moment that the ship was brought upon a wind, and the yards braced sharp up, we became conscious of the fact that the Trades were blowing quite strong enough to justify us, under ordinary circumstances, in keeping our topgallantsails stowed. But this was no time for prudence; valuable property was being stolen under our very noses—ay, and murder being committed, too, for aught that we could tell to the contrary—and the marauders must be caught and punished; we therefore cracked on, pressing the beautiful frigate to the utmost limit of her endurance.

And, oh, what a joyous, exhilarating sensation it was to feel the ship alive once more, as it were, heeling steeply over to the shrill piping of the strong salt breeze, bounding from wave to wave, plunging her sharp stem deep into the heart of each oncoming surge, and cleaving its indigo crest asunder in a perfect storm of sparkling foam above which played a miniature rainbow, after being compelled for weeks to moderate our paces to those of the sluggish merchantmen!

Our shift of helm brought that portion of the convoy, in the midst of which the big brigantine was pursuing her nefarious trade, square upon our weather-beam, but as we were now going off practically at right angles to the course steered by the convoy, and as both they and we were sailing at a good rate, our relative positions very quickly altered; and as the brigantine had not yet seen fit to haul out from among the merchantmen, we were beginning to hope that she was too busily employed to notice our movements, and that, before she did so and took the alarm, we should gain the weather-gage of her. But no, they were not going to be quite so easily caught as all that! It happened, however, that at the precise moment when we hauled out from the main body she had run alongside a large transport, carrying troops out to the West Indies; and the officers on board her, having got timely notice of what was happening, had prepared for her visit by turning up the soldiers, some five hundred in number, serving out ball cartridge to them, and causing them to crouch low behind the bulwarks. Then, just as the brigantine ranged up alongside to board, the soldiers at a blast from the bugle had poured in a fire of musketry that had literally swept her crowded decks and filled them with killed and wounded, causing her to haul off in a tremendous hurry, the soldiers continuing to gall her until she contrived to escape by hauling her wind and interposing some of the other ships between herself and the transport. But, even as it was, when at length she hauled out clear of the convoy, and proceeded to make sail, she was a good three miles to windward of us, though about three points abaft the beam.

Of course we heard faintly the rattling crash of the musketry volleys, and were thus able to make a pretty shrewd guess as to what was happening, but it was not until the brigantine had cleared the convoy, and began to make sail, that we could form any idea of the extent to which she had been punished by the soldiers. For these picarooning craft usually go as heavily manned, in proportion to their tonnage, as a man-of-war, and are generally able to make sail quite as smartly. But now sail was made as slowly aboard her as though she had been a short-handed merchantman, seven hands only—for I counted them through my glass—going aloft to shake out the reefs from her topsail, and to loose her topgallantsail and royal, while two more appeared to be as many as could be spared to lay out and loose her standing and flying-jibs. But when at length she was under all plain sail, like ourselves, we saw that we should have our work cut out to catch her, for she developed a most extraordinary turn of speed, although the strong breeze and heavy sea were all in our favour.

By the time that she had got the reefs out of her immense mainsail, and had set an enormous gaff-topsail above it, we had drawn so far ahead of her as to bring her a couple of points upon our weather quarter, whereupon we tacked, the advantage gained being solely due, I imagined, to the slowness of her crew in making sail. When we were round, and full upon the other tack, she was still quite three miles distant, and bore about a point on our lee-bow; but of course she very soon drew out athwart our hawse, and now everything seemed to depend upon which was the more weatherly craft of the two. Seen from the fore-topmast crosstrees—to which I ascended for the purpose of getting a good look at her—she appeared to be one of those immensely beamy, shallow craft, copied from the slavers; and those vessels, I knew, although they generally sailed like witches, were often anything but weatherly. Yet I had heard of vessels thus modelled for the sake of securing speed, and fitted with a very deep keel to ensure weatherliness, where light draught of water was not a consideration; and it remained to be seen whether the brigantine was a craft of this class.

Now that all her canvas was at length set, the heavy loss of men that she had sustained was no very serious disadvantage to her; for with one good man to steer her, she would sail as well with a dozen hands as with a hundred on deck, and there could be no doubt that she was going very fast through the water. The point now was whether, as we converged toward each other—as we were now doing, the two craft being on opposite tacks—we could persuade her, by means of our bow guns, to give in, and so save us the time that would be consumed in a long stern-chase.

Mr Purvis, the gunner, believed that we could, and, having obtained permission from the Captain to try his hand, soon proved himself right by shooting away the chase's fore-topgallant-mast, when the loss of topgallantsail, royal, and flying-jib so far reduced her speed that it quickly became evident she must either strike or run the gauntlet of our entire broadside. She wisely chose the former alternative; and twenty minutes later she was hove-to, with her topsail aback, on the *Europa's* lee quarter.

Chapter Eight.

The Audacieuse Privateer.

"Mr Delamere," said Captain Vavassour, "take a dozen men, and Mr Gascoigne, and secure possession of that brigantine, if you please. Stay a moment,"—as, touching my hat, I was about to dive below for my chest—"you had better have with you Simmons and Henderson, as two out of your dozen, to take charge of the watches, and take also two extra hands to bring back the boat. I will remain here until you have secured your prisoners below—I have not time to tranship them now; and when you have done that you will be pleased to bear up and join the convoy. Now, be as quick as you can, young gentleman, for I am anxious to be off after that merchantman yonder."

"Ay, ay, sir," I answered, touching my hat and turning away to secure my crew. I first found Simmons, the carpenter's mate, and Henderson, a quartermaster, and informing them of the Captain's arrangement, desired them to pick out the best ten men they could lay hands upon, arm them, and get them into the cutter with their bags and hammocks, and then make their own preparations,—by which time Gascoigne and I would be ready,—then I bundled below, found Gascoigne, and set to work to get my own chest and bedding ready.

Ten minutes later the boat was lowered and at the lee gangway; and in another ten minutes we were aboard the prize.

We were received at the brigantine's gangway by a most ruffianly-looking individual, with his left arm in a sling, and his otherwise bare head bound up in bandages through which the blood was even then oozing. As he proffered his sheathed sword he introduced himself as Monsieur Jules Despard, chief mate of the French privateer brigantine *Audacieuse*, of Dunquerque, mounting sixteen long 18-pounders, and a long 32-pounder on her fore-castle, and originally carrying a crew of one hundred and fifty-six men, of whom twenty-five were away in the Indiaman that had vanished in the southern board, while twelve more were aboard one of the vessels of which the gun-brigs were in chase. "Of the remainder, monsieur," he said, "there are but fourteen, beside myself, who are fit for duty. The others, including Captain Le Mesurier, have either been killed outright or severely wounded in the murder-trap which that dastardly transport of yours set for us. It was a base, cowardly act of theirs to permit us to approach them within biscuit-toss, and then shoot us down like—"

"Do you think it was more cowardly than for so heavily armed and manned a vessel as this to range up alongside of and attack a perfectly defenceless craft like the Indiaman which you surprised in the darkness, monsieur?" demanded I. "But," I continued, "I have no time to argue the point just now. Henderson,"—to the quartermaster—"just jump below and see if you can find a spot where the prisoners may be safely confined."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Henderson, touching his hat, as he turned away to inspect the fore-castle. Our friend, Monsieur Jules Despard, appeared to understand English quite well, for as soon as Henderson had vanished he said:

"I presume, monsieur, you have full authority from your captain to accept the parole of such of us as are willing to give it? For myself, I—"

"No, monsieur," I answered, "I have received no such authority; on the contrary, my orders are to confine you all below, for the present at all events and until an opportunity shall occur to transfer you to the frigate."

"But, monsieur, that order surely does not apply to the officers of the ship, as well as the men?" remonstrated the Frenchman. "It is usual to make a distinction—"

"Pardon me, monsieur," I interrupted, "but you do not appear to understand. Is this ship a man-o'-war, or is she merely a privateer? Do you or do you not hold a commission?"

"The ship, of course, is a privateer—a letter-of-marque, as I have already had the honour to inform you," answered Despard; "therefore—"

"Precisely," I cut in. "Doubtless you recognise the difference. But whether you do or not matters nothing; my orders are definite and precise, and it is my duty to carry them out. Should you desire to make any representation to Captain Vavassour, when the frigate rejoins, I shall be happy to transmit it to him; but meanwhile—" and I shrugged my shoulders expressively.

"Very well, Monsieur Enseigne de bateau," he returned, glowering at me savagely, "if you are determined to inflict upon me the indignity of confinement, instead of accepting my proffered parole, I cannot help it. But possibly we may meet again under reversed conditions, and should we do so you will find that my memory for injuries is a good one." And he turned and walked forward, wearing a most ferocious scowl, and hissing execrations between his set teeth.

A minute or two later Henderson returned to the deck with the intelligence that he had found a fine store-room abaft the fore-peak which could be cleared out in a few minutes, and which would afford ample room for such of the prisoners as it would be necessary to put under restraint. Upon hearing this I went down below with him, leaving Simmons in charge of the deck, and personally inspected the place, which appeared to be excellent in every way for the proposed purpose. I, therefore, gave him orders to take five men and clear the place out forthwith, after which he was to get the prisoners below and secure them. And while he was doing this I went aft to the cabin in search of writing materials wherewith to pen a brief report to Captain Vavassour.

The brigantine was built with a monkey poop, extending from the taffrail to within about eight feet of her enormous mainmast, and the main cabin, with the captain's and first and second mates' staterooms, as also the steward's pantry, lay beneath this. This was a most excellent arrangement, for otherwise, the vessel being extraordinarily

beamy and very shallow, there would have been scarcely head-room enough abaft in the ship's run for cabins; whereas the addition of the four-feet height of poop afforded delightfully lofty and airy cabins for the size of the vessel. I found, upon going below, that the chief and second mates' staterooms were situated respectively on the starboard and port sides of the ship, forward of the foot of the companion ladder, with the steward's pantry between them, a window in each cabin, pierced through the front of the poop, affording the occupant an excellent view of whatever might be happening out on deck.

About three feet abaft the foot of the companion ladder a transverse bulkhead extended for the entire width of the ship, and in the centre of this bulkhead was a door which gave access to the cabin. Opening this door and passing on, I found myself in the main cabin, which was an exceedingly roomy and pleasant little apartment, of the full width of the ship, well lighted by a large skylight in the deck above as well as by half-a-dozen large circular ports in the sides. The furniture consisted of a handsomely carved sideboard on one side of the door, balanced by a well-stocked book-case on the other; there were cushioned lockers running fore and aft along the sides of the ship, and a beautifully polished mahogany table, draped with a handsome tablecloth, occupied the centre of the cabin. In one part of the book-case I found a massive inkstand well supplied with pens, and also an abundant supply of stationery; I accordingly sat down and penned my report to Captain Vavassour.

I had but just completed this document when Henderson came down to acquaint me with the fact that all the prisoners who were in the least likely to give trouble were securely lodged below; I, therefore, sealed my report and, taking it on deck, handed it over to one of the two men who were to take the boat back to the frigate, and dispatched them; and a few minutes later—the *Europa* having meanwhile shifted her berth and hove-to again close to leeward of us—the boat passed under the frigate's stern and disappeared from our view. Seeing the boat coming, Mr Galway had manned the tackle-falls in readiness, and a minute later she was run up to the davits, the boatswain's pipe shrilled out, the mainyard was swung, and away went the beautiful craft, like a hound released from the leash, in pursuit of the vanished Indiaman, leaving us to our own devices.

Now we had time to look about us and note the effects of the brigantine's disastrous encounter with the transport. Truly these were terrible enough, in all conscience; for although as soon as the uninjured portion of the crew had made sail upon the vessel, in their unavailing effort to escape, they had employed themselves in separating the wounded from the dead and carrying the former below to the cockpit—where the ship's surgeon was then busily engaged in attending to their hurts—there had not been time enough for them to complete their task, and the slain and wounded still cumbered the decks to such an extent that when, upon the departure of the frigate, I gave the order to bear up and stand after the convoy, our lads could scarcely get at the sheets and braces without trampling some of them under foot. They were everywhere—between the guns, about the hatchways, and especially on the forecastle and in the wake of the port fore-rigging, where they had grouped themselves thickly preparatory to boarding, and where they lay literally in heaps, while the bulwarks were splashed with blood from end to end of the ship, and the lee scuppers were still running with it. She had ranged up on the starboard side of the transport, consequently the dead and wounded lay thickest on the port side of the brigantine; but a few of the crew had apparently run round to shelter themselves under the lee of the longboat—which was stowed on the main hatch—after receiving the first or second volley, and the closeness and deadly character of those volleys was borne witness to by the fact that the boat was literally riddled with bullet-holes, the missiles having evidently passed through and through her and probably laid low every one of those that we found on her starboard side. And if further evidence were needed it was to be found in the fact that the starboard bulwarks—almost as high and solid as those of a man-o'-war—were pitted with bullets, "a long way closer together than the raisins in a sailor's plum-duff," as Henderson caustically remarked.

Our first duty was of course to aid the wounded who had not already been attended to; therefore, while Simmons and three hands busied themselves aloft in clearing away the wreck of the fore-topgallant-mast, the remainder of the prize-crew set about their gruesome task, even Gascoigne lending a hand, while I took the wheel. But the dead were out of all proportion to the wounded, as we soon discovered, for when every individual exhibiting the slightest sign of life had been found and carried below, it proved that they numbered altogether only thirty-three out of a total of one hundred and nineteen, which was the ship's complement when she attempted to capture the transport. Deducting the fourteen prisoners whom we had confined below, the remainder, representing the killed, amounted to no less than seventy-two! These the hard necessities of the case demanded that we should launch overboard without delay, and this we did, getting rid of the whole of them before closing with the convoy.

This done, and the wounded all conveyed below, we had time to think of ourselves, and make arrangements for our own comfort during the coming night. There was no difficulty about this, Gascoigne and I arranging to sling our hammocks in the late captain's stateroom, which left the chief and second mates' staterooms available for Simmons and Henderson. As for the men, they simply screened off a portion of the mess-deck near the main hatchway, and slung their hammocks there, the wounded being accommodated in that portion of the mess-deck forward of the screen. The ship had no hold, in the usual acceptation of the term; that is to say, there was no space for the stowage of cargo, she having been built as a fighting ship pure and simple, the space below the mess-deck being only comfortably sufficient to accommodate the ballast, water-tanks, provisions, and stores generally; thus, although so heavily manned, there was ample room aboard her for the whole of her crew.

The captain's stateroom, wherein Gascoigne and I took up our quarters, was an exceedingly comfortable apartment—a perfect palace, indeed, compared with the midshipmen's berth aboard the *Europa*. It was situated abaft the main cabin; was, like the latter, the full width of the ship, and measured about twelve feet fore and aft. It was lighted by windows reaching right athwart the stern, as well as by a small skylight in the deck above, the combination of the two affording admirable facilities for ventilation. It was very neatly and comfortably, though not extravagantly, furnished—a standing bedplace, with a commodious chest of drawers beneath it, on the starboard side, being balanced by a book-case with drawers for charts on the port side, together with a sort of cabinet in which the ship's chronometers and the captain's sextant were kept. A set of cushioned lockers ran athwart the after-end of the cabin, between the bedplace and the book-case; there was a wash-stand and toilet-table at the foot of the bunk, and a table occupied the centre of the apartment immediately beneath a handsome shaded lamp which hung, suspended by

brass chains, from the skylight. The deck was comfortably carpeted; the chest of drawers was well-stocked with clothing; and a few garments, together with an oilskin coat, leggings, and sou'wester, hung from brass hooks screwed to the fore bulkhead.

When I went on deck again after a brief sojourn below, I was met at the head of the companion ladder by Simmons, who, touching his hat, said:

"What about breakfast, Mr Delamere? We've been too busy to think about it, up to the present; but I believe we can find time to snatch a mouthful of food and drink now; and the men are beginnin' to ask what's the latest news from the galley."

"Ay, to be sure," I answered. "I was just wondering what is the matter with me; but, now that you come to mention it, it means that, like the men, I want my breakfast. Is the galley fire lighted?"

"Yes, sir," answered Simmons, "and the coppers full of cocoa. But we don't know where to find the eatables; and Henderson an' I have been thinkin' that it wouldn't be a bad plan to have the ship's cook and steward up from below and make 'em work for their livin'."

"Certainly," I agreed; "have them up at once, Simmons, by all means, and tell them— No, they will probably not understand you; send them aft to me, and I will tell them what I want done."

A few minutes later the two Frenchmen were brought up on deck to me, and I explained to them that I wanted them to exercise their usual functions,—at which they seemed highly pleased; and small wonder, either, for it was certainly more pleasant to work and be free, than to be cooped up below in idleness. Half-an-hour later we piped to a somewhat belated breakfast, and a very excellent one it was, too—far better than what we had been accustomed to aboard the frigate; and we came to the unanimous conclusion that in whatever other respect the French might be ignorant, they at least understood the art of living well.

Breakfast over, Simmons went to work and routed out a spare fore-topgallant-mast, which he prepared for sending aloft, while the rest of the watch were busy clearing away the wreck forward; and by the time that the new spar was ready for swaying aloft we had overtaken the rest of the convoy, when the commodore sent away a boat, with the first lieutenant of the *Colossus* in her, to receive my report. This I wrote out and handed to him, retaining a copy to be handed to Captain Vavassour; and after a little chat together our visitor instructed me to retain command of the prize until the return of the *Europa*, and meanwhile to take the place of that ship to assist in the protection of the convoy. He also informed me that during our absence the *Astarte* had captured the ship privateer that had been so busy on the outskirts of the convoy a few hours before, while the boats of the *Colossus* and the *Astarte* had recaptured no less than five merchantmen that had been taken possession of by the marauders. As for the *Hebe* and the *Naiad*, they had vanished in the northern board, and as yet there were no signs of their return.

Two days later we arrived at Carlisle Bay, Barbadoes, the *Europa* overtaking us in the offing, in company with the recaptured merchantman of which she had gone in pursuit; while on the evening of the same day the two gun-brigs also arrived, bringing in with them the five vessels which they had started to recapture; thus the little squadron of privateers which had waylaid us, and had made such a bold bid for booty, not only gained nothing but lost their own ships as well, together with a good many lives. But the heaviest loss of all was that sustained by the unfortunate *Audacieuse* in her blundering attack upon the transport; for in addition to the seventy-two killed which we found on board her when we took possession, nine more had died of their wounds before we anchored in Carlisle Bay. The remaining twenty-four wounded, together with those who had been hurt on board the other prizes, were taken ashore and lodged in the hospital at Bridgetown, while the whole of the prisoners were transferred to the *Colossus*. Gascoigne and I fully expected that we should now be ordered to rejoin the *Europa*, but instead of this, to our great delight, we were ordered to remain on board, our crew being increased to twenty-six—that being as many as Captain Vavassour could possibly spare us.

We remained in Carlisle Bay just twenty-four hours; which period we utilised by refilling our water-tanks, laying in a bountiful stock of fruit, vegetables, and poultry, together with as much fresh meat as we believed we could possibly consume before it went bad; and then, leaving in the bay such ships as were bound for Barbadoes, we sailed again for the various islands to which our charges were bound, leaving some at every halting-place, until in the fulness of time we arrived at Port Royal, and the thirty sail or so that remained under our protection were safely moored in Kingston harbour.

We remained at anchor in Port Royal harbour a full week, during which the first lieutenant was more than generous to me in the matter of leave, whereby I was enabled to twice dine and spend the night at the Admiral's Pen, meeting there and making the acquaintance of several military officers from Up Park Camp as well as a number of exceedingly jovial, hearty, hospitable civilians—planters, merchants, and so on, from Kingston and the surrounding neighbourhood. This was my first experience of the West Indies, and after the glorious scenery of the island and the marvellous luxuriance, beauty, and strangeness of the tropical vegetation which everywhere clothed it, I think that what impressed me most was the amazing hospitality of its inhabitants, who positively seemed to vie with each other in their efforts to show us kindness. Did any of us want the loan of a horse or vehicle to make an excursion into the country, we had but to hint at our requirements and we might take our choice of a dozen which were instantly placed at our service; while invitations to dine and spend the night or longer, to join picnics and shooting parties, were literally showered upon us in such abundance that it would have needed at least six months' leave to have enabled me to avail myself of them all. Thus, in addition to the two nights I spent under the Admiral's hospitable roof, I passed one night—and might have passed many more—at Up Park Camp, and three whole days and nights visiting sugar plantations at Saint Thomas-in-the-Vale in the centre of the island. Then came our orders to sail, and I was obliged to bid a regretful farewell to my many kind friends; not, however, until they had extorted from me more promises than I could ever hope to fulfil that I would visit them and make a long stay when next I found myself in the island.

Our orders were to cruise in the Caribbean generally, and among the Lesser Antilles, for the protection of our own commerce and the destruction of that of the enemy; and during the succeeding six months we performed this duty, varied by occasional brief visits to Port Royal and Barbadoes, making a few unimportant captures, but meeting with no adventures worth recording. It was through one of these captures that we first got news of the surrender of the island of Trinidad (on the 17th of February 1797) to the combined naval and military forces under Rear-Admiral John Harvey and Lieutenant-General Sir Ralph Abercromby.

It was some six weeks after the occurrence of the above event that, while cruising off Cape Gallinas, on the *Costa Firme*, with our head to the westward, we found ourselves so nearly becalmed that it became necessary for us to set all our flying kites in order to retain steerage-way. The night fell intensely dark, for the moon, well advanced toward her third quarter, rose late, while the sky had gradually become overcast, great masses of heavy cloud having worked up against the wind, threatening one of those violent thunderstorms which are so frequent in this particular part of the world.

The storm gathered slowly, and when I put in an appearance on deck to stand my watch, at eight bells of the second dog-watch, it had not yet broken, although an occasional faint flicker of sheet-lightning, away to the eastward, warned us that we might expect it to do so within the next hour or so. At the moment of my appearance on deck, however, there was no very immediate prospect of an outbreak, for the wind although light was steady, and the frigate, close-hauled on the port tack, was creeping along at the rate of about three knots per hour, while the gleams of sheet-lightning were exceedingly faint and infrequent, occurring at about ten-minutes' intervals. Very gradually the brilliancy of the flashes, as well as their frequency and duration, increased, until, by two bells, the glimmer of some of them endured for perhaps as long as three seconds, during which the entire sky, with its enormous, fantastic cloud-shapes, from horizon to zenith, was lit up with a faint sulphurous blue glare, strongly suggestive of the idea that we were afloat in the heart of an enormous cavern, momentarily illuminated by the burning of a port-fire.

It was during the flickering of one of these somewhat prolonged gleams that the lookout on the fore-castle-head reported:

"A small sail, three points on the weather-bow, headin' to the east'ard, close under the land."

Mr Galway at once sprang up on the poop, and I followed, both of us intently staring in the direction indicated by the lookout; but the transient gleam had by this time flickered itself out, and we might as well have been staring at a vast curtain of black velvet, for all that we could see. However, by patiently waiting, and persistently staring in the proper direction until the next flash came, we at length contrived to get a momentary glimpse of her, a dozen voices at least exclaiming at the same instant:

"There she is!"

"Did you see her, Mr Delamere?" demanded the first luff, as the darkness again enwrapped us.

"Yes, sir," I answered. "I caught a momentary glimpse of her."

"And what did you make her out to be?" he asked.

Now, it is surprising how much detail the trained eye of a sailor will grasp, even in the brief space of time occupied by a gleam of sheet-lightning; it is due in part, I think, though certainly not wholly, to what scientists describe as "persistence of vision," or the phenomenon which causes an image to remain imprinted upon the retina of the eye for a quite appreciable period after the object has vanished. But I am certain that there is more in it than that, though precisely what it may be I cannot tell; suffice it to say that I was able to answer unhesitatingly:

"A brigantine, sir, of about two hundred tons, under all plain sail. Very low in the water, and a decidedly suspicious-looking customer."

"Just so," answered Galway. "Exactly what I made her out to be. Have the goodness to step down and report the matter to Captain Vavassour, if you please."

There was no need, however; for the Captain, who had been reading in his cabin, had heard voices, and had come up on deck to see what was the matter. Then ensued another brief but intensely exasperating period of waiting until another flash came and once more betrayed the stranger's whereabouts. It came at length, and revealed her still standing to the eastward, and so close under the land that, but for the momentary illumination of her sails by the lightning, she would undoubtedly have slipped past us unseen.

"Ah, yes, there she is; I see her!" exclaimed the skipper. "Wait until we are abreast of her, and then tack, Mr Galway," he continued. "No doubt they can see us a great deal more distinctly than we can see them, and if we tack now, they will doubtless do the same, with the result that they will be both to windward and ahead of us. But if we wait until she gets fairly past us, it will be a point in our favour, because if she stands on we can gradually edge down upon her."

"She seems to be moving through the water very fast, light as is the wind," remarked the first lieutenant. "Ten minutes ago she was broad on our weather-bow, while now she is almost abeam. I expect we shall find that she is quite as fast as ourselves."

Chapter Nine.

The Pirate Brigantine.

We watched the stranger as she was revealed at uncertain but decreasing intervals by the silent sheet-lightning, which was now flickering up all round the horizon, affording us momentary glimpses of the great lowering cloud-masses that overhung our mastheads as though ready to fall and crush us, the shining undulations of the swell, with the small overrunning ripples caused by the faint breathing of the breeze, the distant land, and the brigantine sliding furtively along within its shadow. When at length she had drawn to a bearing two points abaft our beam, the Captain gave the word to tack; and when, three minutes later, we were fairly round, the yards braced up, sheets hauled aft, and the frigate gathering way on the starboard tack, the stranger lay straight ahead of us.

Of course, we had taken the precaution to wait until immediately after a lightning flash before putting our helm down, and, as it happened, the next gleam did not occur until several minutes after we had tacked; the probability, therefore, was that the stranger would know nothing about our manoeuvre until the scene was again illuminated. The question that now interested us was—how would her people act when they made the discovery that we had shifted our helm and were standing in their direction? There were three alternatives open to them. First, they might follow our example—tack, and endeavour to escape to windward if they believed their vessel speedy enough to succeed. Secondly, they might haul their wind and enter the Gulf of Venezuela, along the shores of which there are two or three shallow inlets, in one or the other of which they might take refuge and anchor, in the hope of being able to defend their ship successfully against a boat attack. And, thirdly, if they were perfectly honest—of which we had our doubts—they might proceed steadily on their way, taking no notice of us and our movements. When we next got a sight of them the third alternative seemed to be their intention, for, so far as we could discover, they had started neither tack nor sheet; we therefore proceeded to edge down very cautiously and very gradually toward her, keeping her about a point on our lee-bow.

Now we discovered that our task was not going to be nearly so easy as we had at first thought, for in the very light breath of wind that was then blowing—and which was wholly insufficient to keep our lower canvas “asleep”—the stranger undoubtedly had the heels of us, slipping along so fast, indeed, that within a quarter of an hour of tacking we were running off with the wind abeam and our weather braces checked, instead of being upon a taut bowline, as we had been at the beginning of the chase.

Meanwhile the expected storm, though it had been brewing long, showed unmistakable signs that it was not going to keep us waiting very much longer, for the sheet—lightning was flickering almost incessantly, while a low, deep muttering of distant thunder occasionally made itself heard. The storm seemed to be working up astern of us, for presently a dazzlingly vivid flash of chain-lightning rent the darkness over our weather quarter, quickly followed by a deep, hollow, reverberating peal of thunder that rumbled like the echo of a seventy-four’s broadside. Another and another quickly followed, each nearer than that which had preceded it; and presently, far away astern of us, we saw advancing toward us a sort of wall of vapour, the lower edge of which gleamed white and phosphorescent as the wind in it lashed the surface of the water into foam.

“Hands, shorten sail!” was now the word. The watch sprang to their stations, coils of rope were lifted off their pins and flung to the deck; then in rapid succession followed the orders:—“Royal and topgallant halliards and sheets let go; clew up and furl! Hands by the weather braces; square the yards! Raise main tack and sheet; man the main clew-garnets, buntlines, and leech-lines; clew up cheerily, lads! Up helm, quartermaster, and let her go off. So; steady as you go. Hands by the topsail halliards! Brail in the mizen! Haul down the flying-jib! Here it comes!”

The squall swooped down upon us with a weird, shrieking howl, and a dash of wet that was half rain and half spray; and the next moment, with a tremendous creaking and groaning of timbers and gear, with all three topsail-yards on the caps, and with the chain bobstay half-buried in the foam that heaped itself up about our bows, away went the frigate, like a startled sea-bird, speeding down-wind upon the wings of the squall, enveloped in a sheet of rain that was more than half salt water, with the lightning flickering and darting all round her, and the thunder crashing overhead in a continuous booming roar.

The squall lasted very nearly three-quarters of an hour; but long before that time had elapsed the weather ahead had cleared sufficiently to enable us again to catch sight of the brigantine, now about two points on our starboard-bow, running dead before it, like ourselves, under nothing but a close-reefed topsail and reefed foresail. She was still maintaining her distance from us in the most wonderful manner; but was now—possibly in consequence of having been compelled by the squall to bear up—steering as though to enter the Gulf of Venezuela. We contrived to gain a little upon her by carefully watching our opportunities and making sail by degrees as the squall blew itself out; but in that respect her people were fully as wide awake as we were, and made sail with a boldness and rapidity which most conclusively proved that she was very strongly manned, and, therefore, not in the least likely to be the harmless, innocent trader that they would doubtless have liked to persuade us she was. She was hugging the land so closely that some of us were of opinion that her skipper intended to run her ashore and take to his boats if it should prove impossible to avoid capture in any other way; but the Captain did not believe this, and the master also seemed to be of his opinion.

“His object,” said Trimble, “is undoubtedly to get round Point Espada and fairly into the Gulf. If he can succeed in that, there are plenty of little coves, especially along the western shore, in which he might anchor and, sheltered from our guns, bid defiance to a boat attack.”

“Ah!” observed the skipper, with much meaning. “Well, we shall see. It is perfectly evident that he is anxious to keep out of our clutches, which desire argues a guilty conscience on his part, and only makes me the more determined to overhaul him. Confound it, here comes the rain again! Mr Gascoigne, have the goodness to slip into my cabin and desire my steward to bring my oilskins on deck. Or, stay, the fellow will have turned-in by this time; I will get them myself.”

The rain came swooping down upon us with the tail-end of the squall, and for a quarter of an hour it was so thick that we could see nothing a couple of ships’-lengths outside the bulwarks. Then it cleared away, the clouds dispersed, the stars came out, the wind dropped to a moderate breeze, and presently the moon, with nearly half her disc in shadow,

crept up above the horizon, flooding the heaving waters with ruddy gold that quickly changed to silver as the satellite climbed high enough to clear herself of the vapours that distorted her shape and imparted to her the colour of burnished copper.

But where was the brigantine? Ahead, abeam, on our quarter we looked, but nowhere could we discern the faintest trace of her. We had lost sight of her a bare quarter of an hour, and in that brief space of time she had contrived to vanish as completely as though she had gone to the bottom in deep-water, leaving not so much as a fragment of floating wreckage to furnish a clue to her fate.

The skipper was as much puzzled as he was annoyed, and in his perplexity he turned to the master.

“What do you think has become of her, Mr Trimble?” he demanded. “She cannot have gone ashore and broken up so completely in a quarter of an hour that no sign of her would remain. We should see something at least in the nature of wreckage to give us a hint of what had happened. Yet I see nothing; although if she had been stranded, either purposely or by accident, her wreck ought to be away in there somewhere about abreast of us. And there are no off-shore dangers, are there?”

“The nearest that I know of are The Monks, away out here, some twenty-five miles to the nor’ard and east’ard of us,” answered the master. “The coast inshore of us is, of course, a bit rocky, but there is nothing, so far as I know, in the nature of hidden dangers to cause the wreck of the brigantine. No, sir, it is my belief that there is some snug little secret cove, known to the skipper of that brigantine, and that he took advantage of the rain squall to slip into it, in the hope of dodging us.”

“Ah!” said the skipper, “yes; that is, after all, the only feasible explanation of his disappearance. He is neither ahead nor astern nor to seaward of us; therefore he must be hidden somewhere inshore. Mr Galway,”—to the first lieutenant—“we will shorten sail, if you please, with the ship’s head off the land, remaining in sight of the coast until daylight, when we shall perhaps be able to discover the hiding-place of that brigantine.”

This was done, and during the remainder of the night the *Europa*, under her three topsails, jib and spanker, stood off and on, never going farther from the shore than a distance of six miles, and very gradually working her way back to—as nearly as we could guess it—the spot where we had lost sight of the brigantine. As the night wore on all traces of the recent storm passed away; the sky cleared, the moon and stars beamed down upon us in tropical splendour, affording us an ample sufficiency of light to enable us to maintain an effective watch upon the coast, and ensure that the stranger did not creep out from her place of concealment and give us the slip. The *terral*, or land wind, overpowered by the recent squall, once more resumed its sway and piped up strongly, bringing off to us the warm, fragrant odour of land and vegetation.

At length the day dawned, the sun soared into view above the eastern horizon, and with the coming of the light some half-dozen of the best telescopes in the ship were brought to bear upon the line of coast that lay about five miles distant on our port beam. I happened to be the lucky possessor of an exceptionally good instrument—a present from my father—and I had not been long at work with it when I discovered what was unmistakably a small indentation in the coast-line, sheltered and all but concealed by two headlands which approached each other so closely that, viewed from a distance, they appeared almost to overlap. I immediately directed the first lieutenant’s attention to the spot, at the same time handing him my glass, and he presently picked it up. He agreed with me that it was undoubtedly a cove, or tiny bay of some sort, but was rather of the opinion that it was too small to afford shelter to a vessel of the dimensions of the missing brigantine. Nevertheless, since it was the only opening that we could discover, and was, moreover, about the spot where the stranger had disappeared, it was determined to give the place an overhaul, and the helm was accordingly eased down, the yards braced in, and we began to work in toward it. Then the fighting boats’ crews were told off to overhaul the boats and prepare them for service, yard and stay tackles were got aloft for the purpose of hoisting out the launch, the boat-guns were slung all ready for lowering over the side as soon as the boats should be brought alongside, ammunition boxes were brought on deck, and, in short, every preparation was made for a boat expedition; after which all hands were piped to breakfast.

By the time that this meal was finished the frigate had worked in to within about a mile from the shore, at which point she ran into a calm, the land-breeze having died away. The boats were then got into the water and brought to the gangway, the guns were lowered down and secured to platforms in the bows of the launch and the two cutters, shot was passed down and stowed on the bottom-boards on either side of the keel, the ammunition boxes were stowed in the stern-sheets, and then, all else being ready, those who were to take part in the expedition were mustered for inspection prior to being dispatched on what was likely enough to prove a dangerous errand. But little recked any of us of possible danger; on the contrary, if an onlooker had judged only by the satisfied smirk which our countenances wore, it might have been supposed that we were all bound ashore for a day’s holiday in the woods.

The expedition was to be under the command of Mr Gadsby, the second lieutenant, who would go in the launch; the first cutter was to be commanded by Mr O’Donnel, the boatswain, and the command of the second cutter was entrusted to me. We mustered fifty altogether, including marines; and when at length, after having been carefully inspected by the first lieutenant, we were given the word to shove off, the men who were left behind sprang into the rigging and sped us on our way with a hearty cheer.

We took it very easily as we pulled shoreward, in line abreast, for it was by this time scorching hot, and it was important that the men’s strength should be husbanded to the utmost extent, in view of the possible fight that might be awaiting us at the end of our journey; but I kept a sharp lookout ahead, for, although the country in sight showed no sign of habitations, there was no knowing how soon a masked battery on one, or perhaps each, of the headlands might declare itself by dropping a few shot among us. Nothing, however, happened to hinder our progress over the glass-smooth surface of the water, and in the course of about twenty minutes we reached the opening between the two headlands, and found ourselves in the mouth of a small, practically land-locked cove of some twenty acres in area, with our friend the brigantine in the very centre of it, with four anchors down—two ahead and two astern—with

boarding nettings triced up, ports open, guns run out—eight long 12-pounders in each battery—and her starboard broadside bearing full upon the entrance!

“There she is!” exclaimed a dozen eager voices in chorus; and, while the words were still upon our lips, eight jets of flame burst from her side, followed by eight wreaths of whirling white smoke that instantly commingled, forming a curtain that completely hid her long low black hull from us, and as a shower of grape came hurtling about our ears I saw a big black flag go slowly soaring up to her main truck!

“A self-confessed pirate, by the Piper!” exclaimed Fred Gascoigne, who had calmly crawled out from under the bow-sheets of my boat when we were half-way between the frigate and the shore. “Now—”

“Give way, men!” shouted Gadsby, springing to his feet in the stern-sheets of the launch, and waving his sword above his head. “Give way, and get alongside before they can fire again. Gunners, fire slap at his bulwarks, and we’ll board in the smoke. Marines, fire in through the open ports. Hurrah, lads, put your backs into it!”

At that moment, as the smoke of the brigantine’s broadside thinned away and permitted us again to catch a glimpse of her hull, I noticed a peculiarity about the craft that seemed to offer us a very important advantage; her captain had, in fact, committed the same oversight as the Frenchman in Pleher Bay, and I instantly hailed:

“Launch ahoy! Do you notice, Mr Gadsby, that she has no nettings triced up on her port side? Apparently they are making certain that we intend to go alongside on her starboard side, and—”

“By Jove! Yes, you are right, Delamere,” answered Gadsby. “We will board her on the port side. First cutter on the port quarter; second cutter on her port bow. Keep up your fire, marines. Now, gunners, as soon as you are ready, blaze away!”

The three boat-guns spoke at almost the same instant, and so close were we now to our quarry that our grape-shot literally tore her starboard bulwarks to pieces, and a terrific outburst of shrieks and yells that instantly followed upon the discharge bore eloquent evidence to the terrible havoc that it had wrought among her crew. The moment that we had fired the boats separated, the first cutter making a wide sweep to port in order to pass under the brigantine’s



A TERRIFIC STRUGGLE

counter, while we sheered away to starboard to get under her bows, the launch passing outside of us in order to get a fair run for the brigantine’s waist.

Another minute and we were all alongside and hooked on, and then began a most terrific struggle; for the brigantine seemed crowded with men. We had evidently taken them all a little by surprise, by boarding on her inshore side instead of that side which was presented to us upon entering the cove. It was clear that, like the prize-crew of the Indiaman in Pleher Bay, they had never expected us to think of pulling round under her bows and stern, instead of dashing straight alongside; but of course it was a very easy matter for the pirates to cross the deck from one side to the other as soon as they discovered our intention; and this they did, lining her bulwarks from her head-rails to her taffrail, popping at us with muskets and pistols, thrusting at us with pikes and cutlasses, and hacking at our hands and heads as we endeavoured to climb her side and force our way over her bulwarks and in on deck. But our lads were not to be daunted by any resistance, however desperate. As we surged up alongside they dropped their oars, allowing them to slide overboard and tow by the lanyards, and drawing pistol and cutlass, leapt to their feet and, with a wild cheer, sprang on to the boats’ gunwales and thence to any foothold that they could find, snapping their pistols in the faces of any who dared to show their heads above the rail; while the marines thrust their bayonets through the open ports into the legs of any individual who happened to be within their reach, thus disconcerting the aim of many an otherwise deadly stroke. For a few breathless seconds all was fire, smoke, and fury, pistols cracking, steel rasping upon steel, cheers, execrations, groans, the dull crunching sound of cutlasses sheering through muscle and bone, the

heavy fall of the stricken on deck, the scuffling of feet, and shouts of defiance exchanged between the contending parties; then a few of us contrived to get in on deck, forcing back the pirates and making room for those who followed us, until all who were not too severely hurt to climb the ship's side were inboard. There ensued a deadly hand-to-hand fight in which quarter was neither asked for nor given. The pirates seemed to number about three times as many as ourselves, and were a truly desperate set of ruffians, fighting—as they well knew—with halters round their necks, and doubtless preferring to die in the heat of battle rather than perish ignominiously upon the scaffold.

For a few minutes we had all our work cut out to retain the slight advantage that we had gained. But gradually our lads drove their antagonists back until the latter were all grouped together in a dense mass round the mainmast, with our people hemming them in on every side and pressing them into such a compact crowd that at least half of them were unable to strike an effective blow. They did what they could, however, by hurling their empty pistols into our faces over the heads of their comrades, and I was busily engaged in defending myself from the attack of a herculean negro when one of these heavy missiles struck me, the hammer taking me fairly in the centre of the forehead and so nearly stunning me that for a moment I all but lost consciousness and was completely thrown off my guard. The next second a terrific blow crashed down upon my bare head—my hat having been lost earlier in the mêlée—and I fell to the deck, my last conscious sensation being that I was being trampled upon and by, as it seemed to me, an innumerable crowd of people. Then I swooned.

When I recovered consciousness I found myself in my hammock, in the sick-bay aboard the frigate, with a number of companions in misfortune around me. At first I felt too utterly miserable to take much interest in anything, for my head, swathed in bandages, was aching and smarting so consumedly that for the first quarter of an hour or so I could not bear even the subdued light that entered through the open ports, and was obliged to keep my eyes closed; moreover, I was parched and burnt-up with fever, as weak as a cat, and consumed with an intolerable thirst. I attempted to turn in my hammock, but was unable to do so, and as I still struggled one of the sick-bay attendants came to my side and asked if he could do anything for me. I gasped out something to the effect that I was perishing of thirst, whereupon he brought me a pannikin of tepid water, dipped from a bucket that stood near one of the open ports, and, raising me in my hammock, placed it to my lips. Tepid and insipid as it actually was, I thought I had never tasted anything half so delicious, and I not only drained it to the last drop, but asked for more. This, however, he declined to give me without the surgeon's direct permission, having, as he explained to me, been warned that when I awoke I should probably be suffering severely from thirst, but that I was only to be given a very limited quantity of liquid at the outset and until the surgeon had had an opportunity to examine further into my condition. The man, however, reported the fact of my return to consciousness; and shortly afterward Wilson, the surgeon, came down to see me.

Wilson's "bedside manner" was somewhat bluff, but, nevertheless, judicious; for I had once heard him say, in a confidential moment, that he always, upon principle, made light of his patients' aches and ailments, as he had discovered, by long experience, that this had a good effect upon the invalids, causing them to believe that there was never anything very seriously wrong with them, and thus calling in the aid of their imagination to assist in the curative process. This was illustrated in his behaviour toward me upon the occasion of which I am now speaking. He came and stood by the side of my hammock, looking down upon me with a whimsical expression as he took my wrist in his hand and pressed his fingers lightly upon my pulse.

"Put out your tongue," he ordered abruptly, and I did so obediently. He glanced at it for a few seconds, then remarked:

"Humph! not much the matter with you, I see. How d'ye feel?"

I explained that my head was giving me excruciating pain, and that I felt burnt-up with fever and thirst; at which he laughed.

"Pooh! pooh!" he exclaimed, "that's nothing. Thank your lucky stars that you have got off so lightly as you have. Some of the poor fellows here have lost a limb or two, while others of the boarding party have lost the number of their mess altogether. Yours is simply a broken head; and, since your skull appears to be abnormally thick, I daresay it will very soon mend again. Aches badly, does it? Ah, well, that is an excellent sign; but perhaps you had better remain on the sick list for a few days, and keep to your hammock until the pain passes off—no good going on duty while you are blind with headache, you know. And—yes, now that I am here and you are awake I may as well look at your wound again."

He walked over to the screen, put his head round the end of it, and called sharply:

"Sentry, pass the word for Mr Burroughs to come to me; and ask him to bring a basin of hot water, a sponge, a roll of bandage, and anything else he thinks I am likely to want. Tell him that I am going to dress Mr Delamere's head."

Then, returning to my side, he drew out his penknife and with quick, gentle fingers proceeded to cut away a number of stitches that kept the bandage in place, and when at length he had unwound it he flung it deftly away behind him, though not so deftly but that I caught a glimpse of it out of the corner of my eye and saw that it was drenched with blood. By the time that he had removed the bandage, gently clipping away, with a pair of scissors, the hair that stuck to it here and there, Burroughs, the assistant surgeon, had turned up with hot water and a number of odds and ends, and Wilson took the sponge in his hand, saying:

"Now, I shall probably hurt you a little; but don't yell, if you can help it, because if you do you will disturb the poor fellows around you. So set your teeth and, if you feel anything, just grin and bear it. I will be as gentle as I can."

And he was gentle—no man could have been more so; nevertheless, during the next quarter of an hour he inflicted so much agony upon me as he extracted little splinters of bone with his forceps, and so on, that long before he had

finished I was drenched with perspiration, and felt so sick that I finally swooned again; and he completed his operation upon my senseless body.

That night, I afterward learned, I passed in a state of high delirium, and for several days I had only a very vague idea of where I was and what was happening around me; my predominating sensations being that the top of my head was on fire and blazing furiously, while I was consumed by fever and a thirst that was almost as exquisite a torture as the pain of my head. The only radical difference between the two was that when I was permitted to quench my thirst that particular form of torture was alleviated for a few brief seconds, while the other was continuous and distracting almost to the point of being unendurable. It seemed to me that I lay for an age in that suffocating sick-bay, every moment of the time being heavy with indescribable torment; but as a matter of fact I was there little more than forty-eight hours, the skipper cracking on for Jamaica, in order that several bad cases—of which I was one of the worst—might have the advantage of the lofty, airy wards of the naval hospital at Port Royal, where we arrived on the morning but one after our attack upon the pirate brigantine. I may as well complete the story of that adventure by saying—what I only learned afterward—that we captured the vessel, with a loss to ourselves of five killed, and eighteen wounded, of whom seven—including myself—were so badly hurt that Wilson gravely doubted whether we should ever pull round. As for the pirates, out of a crew of one hundred and twenty-six men, twenty-three were found dead on her deck after we had taken her, and fifty-four were wounded, some of them so desperately that no less than eleven of them died before we anchored in Port Royal harbour. The remainder were in due course brought to trial for piracy, and found guilty. Five of them were hanged at Gallows Point, while the rest were condemned to work on the roads in chains for the remainder of their miserable lives.

Chapter Ten.

Ashore—Invalided.

I have a hazy recollection of suddenly finding myself on deck, still in my hammock; and then, a few minutes later, of being in a boat. Finally, when I next came to myself I discovered that I was no longer in my hammock, but in a bed—a delightful spacious comfortable bed in which there was room for one to stretch oneself, change from one side to the other, and otherwise obtain a little temporary relief when lying long in one posture had become wearisome. Then, instead of being enveloped in stiflingly hot blankets, I lay upon one fragrant, cool, snow-white sheet, with another over me, the bed enclosed by mosquito-netting, and a deliciously cool breeze streaming into the long ward through several wide-open, lofty windows, one of which, immediately opposite the foot of my bed, afforded me an excellent view of a considerable portion of Port Royal harbour, with the Apostles' Battery, crouching at the foot of the Salt Pond Hills, almost immediately opposite, on the other side of the water. One of the hospital orderlies, who was on duty in the ward, came to the side of my bed at once upon finding that I was awake, and gave me a long, satisfying draught of lemonade, cool and exquisitely refreshing, after which I think he must have summoned the doctor to me, for a few minutes later that individual came lightly to the side of my bed, thrust his hand beneath the sheet and felt my pulse.

I afterward learned that this was Dr Loder, chief of the medical staff in the Port Royal Naval Hospital. And oh! what a difference there was between him and Wilson, the *Europa's* surgeon. The latter was bluff, hearty, and slightly inclined to be boisterous in manner; while Dr Loder's every word and every movement, nay his whole appearance, suggested peace, quietness, and perfect restfulness, as well as—by some subtlety of manner—a vague but none the less distinct impression that things were going well with one. He was a tall and rather thin man, with dark-brown hair, beard, and moustache; he was bald on the top of his head, and wore gold-rimmed spectacles through which his fine dark eyes beamed down upon his patients with an expression of sympathy that was in itself as good as a tonic. He asked me a few questions in a quiet, almost caressing tone of voice, gave the orderly who had me in charge certain instructions, and then, patting me gently upon the shoulder, assured me that I should soon be all right again, in a tone of voice that, quiet as it was, somehow seemed to carry absolute conviction with it.

As a matter of fact I really did begin to mend practically from that moment—so rapidly indeed that on the twenty-third day after my admission the wound in my head had so far healed that the bandages were discarded—and three weeks later I was discharged into the guardship cured, the *Europa* having gone to sea again some time before.

But the guardship was no place for me, weak and shaken as I then was by my long and serious spell of illness; and although the Admiral might well, in the press of daily affairs, have been excused had he forgotten so unimportant a detail as the state of my health, he did not; on the contrary, he invited me to spend a week at the Pen, to recuperate, during which his wife, Lady Agnes, was a second mother to me and a hospital nurse combined. From that moment there was no lack of invitations for me to go into the country and regain my strength, my former acquaintances one and all hunting me up and reminding me of several almost forgotten promises that I would visit them.

As the frigate was not expected to return to Port Royal for at least two months, and as, although discharged from the hospital, I was as yet by no means fit for duty, I had not the slightest difficulty in obtaining a month's leave, which I spent most enjoyably with friends whose estates were situated in Saint Thomas-in-the-East and on the northern slopes of the Blue Mountain Range. It is no part of my purpose to enter into a detailed description of life on a Jamaican sugar plantation, nor will I attempt to convey to the reader any definite idea of the Jamaicans' hospitality. Let it suffice to say that I never spent a happier month anywhere, and that the planters, with all their jollity, light-heartedness, and love of fun, were the most genial, kindly, hospitable folk I ever met with, each of them vieing with all the rest in an amicable contest who should show me the most kindness and attention. I went among them an almost total stranger; when I left, I felt as though I were parting with as many brothers and sisters.

Upon reporting myself to the Admiral, at his office, he received me very kindly, asked whether I felt fit to return to duty—to which I replied with a most emphatic Yes—informed me that the *Europa* was not expected for another month at least; then invited me to dine with him that evening at the Pen, and spend the night there.

His table was, as usual, well filled with guests, but they were all civilians, excepting some three or four military officers over from Up Park Camp. The navy was entirely unrepresented, save by myself, the reason being, as I soon learned, that the French, Dutch, and Spanish were all exceedingly active in and about the Caribbean, and there were not enough of our own ships to cope with them; consequently every available craft of any sort flying the British pennant had been sent to sea, and was being kept there.

At length, when all the guests had left the Pen, and Lady Agnes had retired for the night, Sir Peter invited me to accompany him to the broad gallery, covered by a veranda, which stretched right athwart the front of the house, from end to end, and directed one of his negro servants to carry out to it a small table, a box of cigars, a jug of sangaree, and two wicker basket-chairs wherein we seated ourselves preparatory, as I surmised, to a more or less confidential chat of some sort, though what, of such a nature, so important a personage as the Port Admiral could possibly have to say to an insignificant mid like myself, I could not divine.

Sir Peter, however, was not the sort of man to beat about the bush; if he had anything to say he generally said it without any circumlocution, and he did so now. Selecting with care a cigar for himself, lighting it, and pouring out a couple of tumblers of sangaree, he settled himself in his chair, and began by remarking:

"Well, young gentleman, so you have quite recovered from the effects of your wound, eh?—and feel fit and ready for duty once more?"

"Yes, to both questions, Sir Peter," I answered. "But I think I understood you to say that the *Europa* is not expected to return to Port Royal for at least another month—"

"So I did," interrupted the Admiral; "and the question is, What are you going to do with yourself meanwhile? This is no time for an officer to idle about ashore, you know."

"No, sir," I responded, "it certainly is not, and I am exceedingly glad that you have broached the subject, for it affords me an early opportunity to do what I have had it in my mind to do, namely, to ask you whether you cannot find me some better employment than kicking my heels aboard the guardship until the frigate returns."

"Ah!" commented Sir Peter, "so that was what you had in your mind, was it? Have you served your time yet?"

"Yes, sir," I replied, "with nearly three months to spare."

"Good!" remarked my companion. "But of course you have not passed yet? You have not had an opportunity. Have you your log-books with you?"

"Yes, sir," I answered. "When I was sent ashore to the hospital, Captain Vavassour was good enough to send with me all my belongings."

"Where are they—the log-books, I mean—now?" demanded Sir Peter.

"They are aboard the guardship, with the rest of my things," I answered.

"Very well," returned my companion. "You had better go down to Port Royal with me in the morning, and bring your log-books ashore for me to look at. I have a scheme in my head for employing you, but I am not at all sure whether you are fit to undertake a duty of so exceedingly responsible a character as that which I have in my mind; although I don't hesitate to tell you, youngster, that Captain Vavassour gave you a most excellent character in every respect. What sort of a navigator are you? I suppose, like most other young gentlemen, you can fudge a day's work well enough to pass muster, eh?"

I laughed. "I am afraid, sir," I replied, "that too many of us would rather fudge than take the trouble to do our day's work properly. But I got out of that lazy trick some time ago; and now I will not turn my back upon any lad of my own age, whether midshipman, or master's-mate, where navigation is concerned."

"Ah!" he remarked, "that sounds all right. Tell me, what can you do in navigation problems?"

"I can do Plane, Traverse, Middle-Latitude, and Mercator's Sailing," I answered. "I can also do a Day's Work; I can use my quadrant with accuracy; can find the Latitude by a meridian altitude of the sun, moon, or a star; can find the error and rate of the chronometer, and also the longitude by it; can determine the variation of the compass; can find the longitude by a 'lunar'; can do the Pole Star problem; and—well, I think that is about all, sir, thus far."

"And a very creditable 'all,' too," answered the Admiral, evidently well pleased. "And what about your seamanship?" he continued.

"I believe I am pretty good at that too, sir," I said. "I was at Portsmouth, in the dockyard, every day during the fitting-out of the frigate, and watched the whole process of rigging her. When I first saw her she had nothing standing but her three lower-masts."

"Well," remarked Sir Peter, "you ought to have picked up a little knowledge relative to the spars and rigging of a ship during that time. But *did* you? That is the question. Come, I'll put you through your facings a bit, if you are not too sleepy. Supposing that it became necessary for you to get the maintop over the masthead, how would you go to work?"

I considered a moment, recalled the operation as I had witnessed it, and then proceeded to describe what I had seen.

"Yes; very good," commented my companion. "Now, get your lower rigging into place, and set it up."

I described how I would do that; and also answered several other questions, apparently to his satisfaction.

“Very well,” he said, “that’s all rigger’s work; exceedingly important to know, of course, but still not exactly seamanship. Now, young gentleman, suppose yourself to be in command of a fine frigate—as I hope you will be some day, please God. You are turning to windward in a fresh breeze, under all plain sail, and it becomes necessary to tack. Describe the various evolutions.”

I did so; and then the old gentleman gradually took me, still aboard my suppositious frigate, through a rapidly freshening breeze into a regular hurricane, until I had got the ship hove-to under bare poles, with a tarpaulin lashed in the weather mizen rigging, and then he shook hands with me and dismissed me to my room.

The next morning, immediately after first breakfast, we got under way in the Admiral’s ketureen—a sort of gig with a roof to it—and drove down to the wharf at Kingston, where the barge, a fine boat, was waiting for us. The sea-breeze had set in and was piping up merrily, and in about three-quarters of an hour we were alongside the dockyard wall at Port Royal. Here the Admiral left me, with instructions to go off aboard the guardship at once, and bring my log-books ashore for his inspection. This I did, but it was nearly noon before Sir Peter was ready to attend to me, and even then it was after all but a cursory glance that he bestowed upon my books. But, cursory though it was, what he saw appeared to satisfy him, for he was good enough to express his approval as he closed the books and pushed them across the table to me.

“Very good, very good indeed,” he remarked; “far more creditable than mine were when I was your age, I am afraid. I consider you a most promising young officer, and am going to take you under my wing, because I believe you will do me credit. Nay, boy, I want no thanks,”—as I broke in somewhat incoherently in an attempt to express my gratitude—“at least, not in the form of words,” he continued; “words are often spoken under the influence of a strong momentary impulse, and forgotten almost immediately afterward. But if you should desire to show that you are grateful to me for what I intend to do for you, you cannot exhibit it more acceptably than by justifying the very great trust that I am about to repose in you. And I believe you will, for, young as you are, you have proved yourself to be made of the right stuff; you have made good use of your time, and have as much knowledge in that curly pate of yours as many officers of twice your length of service possess. Now, I am not telling you this because I want to make you conceited—far from it; it is simply because I want you to understand that I have formed a very high opinion of you, and that I expect you to live up to it. D’ye understand that, youngster?”

“Quite clearly, Sir Peter,” I answered. “It is exceedingly kind, and most encouraging on your part that you have spoken so frankly as you have, and I can assure you that I am not in the least likely to entertain an unduly high opinion of myself in consequence of it. On the contrary, I am afraid that you have formed altogether too favourable an opinion of me and my qualities; but I shall remember that opinion, and will do my utmost to justify it.”

“Very well,” he answered; “no man can say more than that, and if you fulfil your promise I shall be perfectly satisfied. And now, as to the work upon which I propose to employ you. You must know that there is more work—a good deal more work—to be done on this station than there are ships to do it; consequently, although every ship at my disposal is now at sea, I am continually receiving complaints that the commerce in West Indian waters is inadequately protected. I have applied for additional ships, but have been told that there are none to spare, and that I must do the best I can with what I have. The fact is that the Caribbean and its approaches are not only swarming with privateers, but I have too much reason to believe that there is a strong gang of out-and-out pirates at work as well. I was in hopes that the capture of that pirate brigantine by the *Europa* would put an end to all that kind of work, but it has not; indeed, it has scarcely made any appreciable impression upon the number of outrages of a distinctly piratical character that are being constantly reported to me. I am, of course, not now alluding to vessels that have gone temporarily missing, for they may in most cases be traced to the operations of the enemy; but I refer to those which vanish utterly, leaving no trace of any kind behind them to hint at their fate; and also to those other craft which are fallen in with, derelict, from time to time, plundered, and bearing indications that an attempt has been made to destroy them, either by scuttling them, or setting them on fire. Privateers don’t do that sort of thing, you know. If they capture a ship they generally put a prize-crew aboard her and send her into the nearest port belonging to them. Pirates, however, endeavour to escape identification by destroying all traces of their handiwork and butchering the unfortunate crews of the vessels.

“A case of this kind came to light only last week. The *Kingston Trader* of Bristol, with a very valuable cargo and five thousand pounds in specie, has been overdue about a month, and her consignees have been worrying me accordingly. Last Friday a small turtling schooner arrived from the Windward Passages, reporting that they had seen a wreck ashore near Tête de Chien on the island of Tortuga, off the north-west coast of Saint Domingo. They launched their pirogue, and succeeded in getting close enough to the wreck to identify her as the missing *Kingston Trader*, and also to ascertain that she had been on fire, most of her upper works having been consumed. That is the third case of an almost identical kind that has occurred within the last two months, and I am convinced that it is the work of pirates.

“Now, young gentleman, I am going to give you the job of finding those pirates and bringing them to book. It is work for a *man*, I know, but I have not a man to spare; and I am convinced, from the way in which you answered my questions last night, and from the character which Captain Vavassour has given you, not only that you are a very capable young officer, but also that you have your full share of sound common sense and self-reliance—that you are, in fact, quite as likely to give a good account of yourself over this business as would many a much older man.

“Therefore, since you are certain to pass with flying colours as soon as an opportunity to present yourself for examination offers itself, I intend to give you an acting order as lieutenant, to place you in command of a small schooner with a good strong crew, and to send you off upon a roving commission to do your best to put down these piratical outrages that are so frequently occurring under our very noses. Now, what d’ye think of my scheme, youngster? Is the job too big for you to tackle?”

"No, sir," I answered; "certainly not too big. The only thing I fear is that I may not be sufficiently experienced to execute so responsible a duty as efficiently as it ought to be executed. But I will do my very utmost, Sir Peter, I can promise you that; and if I can only have with me one or two thoroughly steady, reliable men to help me with an occasional word of advice, I believe we shall be able to give a very good account of ourselves."

"Yes," returned Sir Peter, "I believe so too, otherwise I would not dream of sending you. As to experience, well, there is only one way of gaining it, and that is by actually doing a thing; it is rather a rough school, perhaps, but it is the only one in which you can thoroughly learn your lesson, and I am glad to see that you have no idea of shirking it."

"And now, as to this seventy-four of yours. She is a fore-and-aft schooner of one hundred and ten tons, said to have been built at Baltimore. She is something of a freak, her designer having apparently turned his lines end for end and put his bows where his stern should be, and *vice versa*. Nevertheless, his theory seems to have been sound, for I'm told that she is a perfect witch for speed, especially in light weather, and speed is one of the qualities which you must have. She was caught smuggling, and was condemned to be sawn in two; but I thought we might perhaps be able to find a better use for her than that, so I have postponed the operation. She is called the *Wasp*, and if you have as much enterprise as I give you credit for, you ought to make her sting to some purpose. You will find her in Hulk Hole, and— Stop a minute." He rang a bell and a messenger entered.

"Jones," said Sir Peter, "have you any idea where the master-attendant is?"

"Yes, sir," answered the man, "he was outside on the wharf not half a minute ago."

"Then, please, see if you can find him," said the Admiral, "and request him to come here to me. Carline is a very decent fellow," he continued, as soon as the messenger had vanished. "I'll get him to take you aboard and show you the craft—he has the keys of the companion and fore-scuttle, I believe—and you and he can talk matters over together and decide what she will need to fit her for service. Ah! here is Carline. Good morning, Mr Carline. This is Mr Delamere, whom I am going to send out in charge of the *Wasp*, to see what he can do toward putting a stop to these repeated piracies. I want you to take him aboard and let him have a thorough good look at the schooner; after which you and he can draw up a list of what is needed to render her fit for the work which she will have to do. And now, good morning, Mr Delamere. Come up to the Pen to dinner to-night; then you can report to me what you think the craft requires."

"So the Admiral's going to fit out that smugglin' schooner and send you to sea in her, eh?" remarked the master-attendant as soon as we got outside.

I replied that I quite understood that to be Sir Peter's intention.

"Oh, well," he observed, "I don't know how you'll get on with her; she's a queer one to look at, and I expect she'll want some learnin' before you'll be able to handle her properly. Have you had any experience in a fore-and-after?"

"Only in boats," I replied. "The barge of my old ship, the *Colossus*, was rigged as a fore-and-aft schooner, and I've sailed her many's the time; and I suppose all fore-and-afters are handled in pretty much the same way. The matter of mere size won't make very much difference, I imagine."

"Well, I expect you'll find the *Wasp* a bit different," observed my companion; "she's such a queer model, you see—everything about her is exactly the opposite of what we think it should be. She has tremendous beam, and no draught of water worth speakin' of; an outrageously long tapering bow, and a short, squat stern— But there, you'll see her presently. But there's no doubt about it, she can sail—there's nothing in this harbour that can look at her; and as for working, why, I've been told that she has been known to be round and full on the other tack twenty seconds after puttin' the helm down!"

"Well, that is good news at all events," I remarked. "I like a nice, smart-working ship— Why, Henderson, where in the world did you spring from? and how is it that you are not away in the frigate?" I exclaimed, as we encountered a figure that was perfectly familiar to me.

"For the same reason as yourself, Mr Delamere," answered the man, touching his hat. "I was on my beam-ends in the hospital when she went to sea—bowled over in the scrimmage wi' that brigantine, same as you was."

"And where are you, and what doing now?" I demanded.

"Why, sir, I'm aboard the guardship, along wi' another or two of our chaps as was discharged from the hospital about the same time as I was," answered the man—formerly one of the *Europa's* quartermasters.

"Oh, indeed," I replied, very much surprised, for I had not known that there were others as well as myself put ashore from the frigate; "and are you all ready for duty again?" I asked.

"Ay, that we are, sir," answered Henderson, "and shall be glad enough to get to sea and have a mouthful of fresh air once more. This bein' in harbour is all very well for a change, but a man soon gets enough of it; and, a'ter all, it ain't half so comfortable as bein' at sea."

"Then in that case," said I, seeing my way to getting one good hand, at least, "perhaps you may be willing to volunteer for a little schooner that the Admiral is going to give me to go pirate-hunting in?"

"Ay, that indeed I will, Mr Delamere, and glad of the chance," answered Henderson heartily; "and perhaps, sir," he added, "I could help you to two or three more good men, if so be as you happen to want 'em."

"Well, I think it more than likely that I shall," said I, "so just keep your eyes open in that direction. I shall no doubt see you again to-morrow or next day, when we can have a further chat."

Henderson touched his hat and turned away, and the master-attendant and I made our way along the wharf to the landing-steps. Here he directed four men to jump down into his gig and spread the cushions in the stern-sheets, while he went into his office to procure the keys which were to afford us access to the interior of my "seventy-four," as the Admiral had jestingly called her. Then, descending the steps and taking our places in the gig, Carline seized the yoke-lines, gave the word to shove off, and away we went, across the upper end of the harbour and through the boat channel, past Gallows Point, whereon stood the stout posts and beam from which the five ringleaders of the pirates taken aboard the brigantine had been launched into eternity.

Chapter Eleven.

H.M.S. Wasp.

We sighted the *Wasp* immediately upon rounding Gallows Point. She was lying quite by herself, down in the most southerly bight of the Hole, and little more than a cable's length from the beach; consequently we had a clear, uninterrupted view of her the moment that we cleared the Point; and she was lying broadside-on to us, with her head pointing to the southward.

The first thing that impressed me about her was her diminutiveness; in comparison with some of the craft lying in the Hole she looked little more than a mere boat, and the idea of actually going to sea and attempting serious work in such a cockle-shell struck me as little short of an absurdity. But that feeling wore off a bit as we closed with her; and the next thing to attract my attention was the great beauty of her outline. She sat very low upon the water; had an abnormally long, overhanging counter; and her spring, or sheer, was so great that, low as she sat, her bow stood high and dominant above the water. She was painted black from her rail to her copper, the top edge of which was about six inches above her load-line; and she had only her two lower-masts and her bowsprit standing. But her masts were magnificent sticks, lofty enough, apparently, to spread all the canvas that she could possibly carry, without any need of topmasts, and both spars were stepped well forward; the mainmast, indeed, seemed to be almost amidships, giving one a very clear idea of the enormous area which her mainsail would present when fully set. It was not, however, until we got close to her, and Carline caused his boatmen to pull slowly round her, that I detected what the Admiral and the master-attendant meant when they had spoken of the freakish peculiarities of her model; then, indeed, it became apparent that her designer had, as Sir Peter had said, literally turned her lines end for end, as it were. For she had absolutely no "straight of breadth" at all; her sides were as round as an apple, and her long bow, shaped like a wedge with curved instead of straight sides, with just a suggestion of hollowness of the water-line as it approached the stem, started almost as far aft as the point where her mainmast was stepped; while her run, instead of fining away toward the stern-post like the tail of a fish, was quite full, sweeping round under her counter in a semicircle. Then it was that I understood why her counter was so abnormally long; it was not merely a fancy on the part of her designer, intended to give her a smart, rakish appearance, it was for the purpose of giving her, despite the fulness of her run, a clean, easy delivery. Yes, as I looked at her critically, studying her lines from every possible point of view, I could believe that she would prove a quite extraordinary sailer; for there was nothing in that long, keen bow for the water to grip, the knifelike stem would sheer into it, and the gently expanding sides would shoulder it aside with scarcely any resistance, leaving it to close in again aft about her stern-post with a nip that would add to her speed, just as one may make a nut spring from one's fingers by merely pressing upon it. And she would be a good sea-boat, too, for the bow flared out over the water in such a fashion as to lift her over any sea, however steep. Yes, I liked the outside look of her amazingly, and no longer thought the idea of going to sea in such a craft mere folly; on the contrary, I longed for the moment when I should have the opportunity to test her capabilities.

Having scrutinised the exterior of my new command to my heart's content, we went alongside and boarded her. Her gangway was open; and so little freeboard did she show at this point—Carline measured it and found it to be exactly four-feet—that we were able to spring from the boat's gunwale to the schooner's deck without difficulty, and without the need for a side-ladder. I had by this time quite forgotten my first impression of diminutiveness in connection with the craft, and the moment that I passed through the gangway and stood upon her deck I gained a new impression, namely that of spaciousness. For she was extraordinarily beamy; her hatchways were small, and there was nothing in the way of fittings of any kind to cumber up her decks; indeed, so far as actual room to move about upon was concerned, her quarter-deck seemed to be quite as spacious as that of the *Europa*. She was flush-decked fore and aft, and abaft the immensely lofty mainmast there was nothing but the companion, with a seat and lockers on either side of it, a fine big skylight, a very handsome brass binnacle, and the wheel. Her bulwarks were only three feet high, with a fine, solid teak rail; and she was built of hard wood—oak and elm—throughout, and copper fastened.

Carline having unlocked the companion doors, we went below, and found ourselves in a really beautiful little cabin, elegantly fitted up, painted white and gold, well lighted and ventilated from above by the big skylight, and with three large, circular ports on each side as well. There were nice wide, comfortable lockers on each side, running fore and aft, and a fine, solid, handsomely carved mahogany table in the centre; but the cabin looked bare, for all the fittings of every kind had been removed and put into store. Then, abaft the main cabin, there was a small but exceedingly comfortable-looking stateroom, with standing bedplace, drawers beneath, wash-stand, etcetera, and lighted by two circular ports, one at the head and one at the foot of the bedplace, which ran athwartships.

From the cabin we passed into the main hold; and I saw at once that this could easily be fitted up and converted into a berth-deck for all hands by merely running a few deck beams across, laying a deck, and running up a bulkhead. We spent the whole morning aboard, making voluminous notes of the various alterations that would be needed to fit the little vessel for the new service to which she was destined; and that same afternoon she was unmoored, taken alongside the wharf, and a strong gang of dockyard workmen went aboard to begin upon the most obviously necessary work, such as taking out her ballast prior to giving her interior a thorough cleaning, and so on.

That night, at the Pen, after the guests had all left, Sir Peter called upon me to give an account of my day's doings, to tell him what I thought of the *Wasp*, and to produce and read my list of alterations needed to complete the

equipment of the schooner. Of all of these he graciously approved, adding a few suggestions of his own; and on the following morning, after going on board the hooker with me and examining her inside and out, he gave orders for the whole of the work to be proceeded with forthwith. As there were no other ships in port refitting at the moment, it was a slack time at the dockyard, and almost the whole of its resources were available to expedite the work, in consequence of which the schooner was ready for sea a fortnight from the day on which I first boarded her.

Meanwhile, the Admiral had made out and presented to me my acting order; while, for my own part, I had been busy all day and every day, either at the dockyard, superintending the work being done to the *Wasp*, or in hunting up a crew for her. And as I attached very considerable importance to the quality of my crew, and was quite determined to have the very best I could obtain, a large proportion of my time was spent in hunting for good men. Here it was that I found the services of Henderson, late quartermaster of the *Europa*, of especial value, for not only did he enter for the schooner, as he had promised he would when I ran up against him as I was on my way to pay my first visit to the *Wasp*, but, being equally as anxious as myself to have the little vessel well manned, he had persuaded four good men—like himself formerly of the *Europa*, wounded in our fight with the brigantine and now convalescent—to join, thus forming at a stroke the nucleus of a first-rate crew. But he had done a good deal more than this; for in addition to the four men above referred to there were aboard the guardship about a dozen others recently discharged from the hospital and only requiring a few days of pure ocean air to set them on their pins again, and he had persuaded these also to enter. Even this, however, did not complete my obligations to the guardship, for there were aboard her three midshipmen, an assistant surgeon, and a captain's clerk, all of whom had been separated from their ships from some chance cause, and I secured them all; the eldest of the midshipmen—named Willoughby—as master, while the other two, very quiet, respectable lads, named respectively Dundas and Hinton, I took more for their health's sake than for any other reason. The assistant surgeon was named Saunders—him I shipped as surgeon—while Millar, the captain's clerk, came with me as purser; I obtained a gunner's warrant for Henderson, to his great delight; and my remaining officers consisted of a fine, smart boatswain's mate, named Pearce, who came as boatswain, and a carpenter's mate named Mills, who came as carpenter. In addition to these, I had a cabin steward, a cook, and a crew of forty-four men and four boys; I therefore regarded myself as excellently equipped, so far as my crew were concerned. Unfortunately, the schooner was too small to carry an armament to which such a fine crew could do full justice, the utmost that she would carry, with anything like safety, being six long expounders; and even with the weight of these on her deck she seemed to be just a trifle more tender than I altogether liked. It was, however, the best that we could do with her, and with that I had to be content.

Having reported the schooner as ready for sea, and received my orders from the Admiral, we slipped from Number 9 buoy on a certain morning, immediately after breakfast, and proceeded to work out to sea, under single-reefed mainsail, foresail, fore staysail, and Number 2 jib, in the teeth of a fiery sea-breeze that made the palms at Port Royal Point assume the aspect of so many umbrellas turned inside-out, and whirled the sand up from the Palisades in blinding clouds to deposit it again in the harbour and add to the magnitude of the shoal that is steadily encroaching upon the deep-water area.

The little hooker became lively and began to pull at her cable, as though impatient to be off, the moment that the hands tailed on to the throat and peak-halliards of her immense mainsail, and proceeded to hoist away; and when, having set the sail—which, by the way, was beautifully cut, and stood as flat as a board—we slipped, and hauled aft the jib-sheet, she heeled to the pressure of the wind as though preparing to spring, and, with a little swirl of water about her sharp stem as she paid off, proceeded to gather way, and the next moment was sheering through the smooth water of the harbour like a hungry dolphin in pursuit of a shoal of flying-fish. With all her sheets flattened-in she came-to until she was looking up within three points of the wind, careening to her bearings and sweeping as rapidly and almost as noiselessly as a wreath of mist driving to leeward, the only sound she made being a soft hissing at her cutwater as her sharp bow clove the ripples and ploughed up a glass-like sheet of water on either side of it. So closely did she hug the wind that we were able to shave close past the red buoy which marks the edge of Church shoal, handsomely weathering Number 2 buoy, skimming across the De Horsey Patch, and shaving past the buoy on the Harbour shoal. By this time we were out from under the shelter of Port Royal Point, and were beginning to feel the first of the jump that the sea-breeze was kicking up outside; but it appeared to make practically no difference in our speed, our abnormally long, keen, wedge-like bow seemed to cleave the seas without effort or resistance as they came at us, while the flaring overhang lifted the little craft buoyantly over them, with nothing worse than a small playful flash and patter of spray in over the weather cathead to tell of the encounter. It would be difficult to say whether astonishment or delight was the feeling that predominated in the breasts of all hands of us, fore and aft, as we stood watching the really marvellous performance of the little clipper while beating out of harbour. It was not her speed only—although that seemed phenomenal, for she swept past every other craft that was going our way as though they had been at anchor; her weatherliness astounded us quite as much as did her speed, for she looked up a good three points higher than did our square-rigged neighbours, while her oil-smooth wake trailed away astern as straight as a ruled line, with no apparent inclination to trend a hairbreadth towards her weather quarter. She seemed to make no leeway at all!

"Well!" exclaimed Henderson, who was standing by me, close abaft the weather main rigging, watching—as I was—the rapid sliding past us of the various objects ashore, "I've heard people speak of a ship as sailin' like a witch, but I'm only now comin' to rightly understand just exactly what that expression means; it means goin' along precisely as if you was shot out of a gun! Why, Mr Delamere, I don't believe as there's anything afloat that can touch us—not, at all events, in moderately smooth water. What we shall do in a heavy sea remains to be seen; and we shall soon find that out, I reckon, for it's all foamin' white away out there in the offing; but I've a notion that she'll go over it all like a duck, provided that we don't drive her too hard. Look at that, sir,"—as the schooner leapt from the crest of a sea into the hollow beyond, and the foam buzzed and boiled to the level of her lee head-rail and then went glancing away dizzily aft—"ain't that just perfectly beautiful? Never shipped a drop, she didn't! And there again! My eyes! but she *is* a beauty, and no mistake."

"She is certainly behaving wonderfully well," I admitted, my voice all a-quiver with pride. "How does she steer? Is she easy on her helm?" I demanded of the man at the wheel.

"Gripes just the leastest bit in the world, sir, but nothin' worth speakin' about. I could steer her wi' one hand," answered the man; and to prove his words he placed one hand behind him and kept it there for a minute or two while he grasped a spoke of the wheel with the other.

We had by this time brought the Beacon shoal about one point abaft the weather-beam, and I was of opinion that we could weather it on the next tack; I therefore gave the word, "Ready about—Helm's a-lee!" and directed the helmsman to ease down the helm. He let go the wheel for a moment, and the little hooker at once came to the wind with her head-sails slatting and threshing as she spilled the wind out of them; then he began to pull the wheel over toward him, and with one terrific dive into a sea that came rushing at her, and which she split into two showers of diamond spray that leapt half as high as her foremast before it came driving aft in a shower that nearly drenched us to the skin, round she swept like a gun upon its pivot, and was full again upon the other tack almost before we could blink our eyelids. The beauty of a fore-and-after is that she practically works herself, all that is needed being three or four hands on the fore-castle to trim over the jib and fore sheets as she comes round. It was simply child's play compared with the complicated manoeuvres that attend the working of a full-rigged ship, and Henderson laughed aloud in his delight at the simplicity of it.

"Why, Mr Delamere," he declared, "it's like sailin' the *Europa's* launch, only easier. The launch never stayed as smartly as that, not so long as I've knowed her!"

We weathered the Beacon shoal, with room to spare, as I expected we should; and then kept away, with slightly eased sheets, for the passage between Gun and Rackum Cays, after negotiating which we shaped a course for Cow Bay and Yallah Points, off the latter of which we arrived shortly after six bells in the forenoon watch had struck. Still hugging the coast as closely as possible, we arrived off Port Morant about four bells in the afternoon watch, about which time we found the sea-breeze to be merging gradually into the Trade-wind and heading us so badly that at length we were obliged to heave about and head off-shore. Here we soon got into such a boil of a sea that the little hooker threatened to smother herself, and it became necessary for us to haul down a second and a third reef, and to take the jib off her, after which she went along quite comfortably, shipping nothing worse than an occasional sprinkling of spray over her weather-bow. At eight bells of the second dog-watch we handsomely weathered Morant Point on our way out through the Windward Channel, it being my purpose to work out through the Caycos Passage, and then cruise to and fro athwart and to windward of the Windward Passages—that being the cruising-ground which I believed the pirates would be most likely to haunt.

Shortly before daybreak, on the third morning after leaving Port Royal, we found ourselves rapidly drawing into smooth water—so rapidly, indeed, that Pearce, the boatswain, whose watch it was, came down in some alarm and roused me out, fearing that Willoughby, the midshipman who was acting as master, had made a mistake in his reckoning, and that we were about to blunder on to some danger or another. I was able, however, to set the good man's mind at rest by explaining that we were doubtless drawing in under the lee of the Caycos Bank, and that therefore the water might naturally be expected to smoothen. Nevertheless, feeling that I had had a good night's rest, and understanding from Pearce that day would dawn in less than half-an-hour's time, I turned out and, slipping into my trousers and jacket, went up on deck. And very glad I was that I had done so, for I was thus enabled to observe a very curious natural phenomenon, which one might knock about in those seas for years without seeing, for the simple reason that the circumstances must be favourable or the phenomenon is not visible.

The Caycos Bank is a shoal lying some sixty-eight miles off Monte Christi, on the north coast of Hayti. It measures about the same distance from its north-western to its south-eastern extremity, and is about sixty-two miles across from east to west at its widest point; it is consequently of considerable extent, and from the fact that the depth of water over it ranges from six feet to eighteen feet it is not without its dangers, and must be approached with due caution, especially during the hours of darkness. In daylight the danger is not nearly so great, because the north-eastern and north-western edges of the shoal are fringed by a number of cays among which the sea breaks heavily, while the whole surface of the shoal is white water. And it is this same white water which gives rise to the phenomenon above referred to, locally known as "Bank Blink." It is simply the reflection of the phosphorescence of the water in the clouds above; and the darker and more overcast the night, the more distinctly is the reflection seen. The phenomenon is, of course, quite natural and easily to be accounted for, yet its occurrence can scarcely be regarded as less than providential; for there can be no doubt whatever that its appearance in the sky has often been the means of warning navigators that they were approaching this danger, and so causing them to haul off in time to avoid shipwreck.

Upon the night in question, when I first saw it, I found, upon going on deck, that the darkness was profound, the sky being so completely obscured by clouds that not so much as a single star was visible. But away to windward, ranging from about two points on the weather-bow round to square abeam, the clouds from almost overhead to within some fifteen degrees of the horizon were faintly yet quite perceptibly tinged greenish hue, the tinge being strongest about midway between our weather-bow and beam. Pearce had noticed it, it appeared, when I came to question him about it, and had thought that it might possibly portend a change of weather until he had looked at the barometer and found it inclined to rise; then he had become alarmed by the smoothing of the water, which seemed to him far more portentous than the light on the clouds.

I had not been on deck more than a quarter of an hour when the blackness under the lower edge of the bank blink away over our starboard cathead began to pale, first to a cold slaty-grey, and from that, by rapid gradations, to a rich purple, then to crimson, and from crimson to an orange tint so deep as to be almost scarlet, beneath which the horizon loomed out black as ink, the intervening space of water lightening, as it swept toward us, until at the distance of a couple of miles it became a livid bluish-white. This marked the western edge of the shoal, and sufficiently accounted for the smoothing of the deep-water in which we were sailing.

As the orange light spread north and south from the point at which it had originated, at the same time reaching upward from the horizon, the bank blink began to fade, or rather to become merged in and overpowered by it; and the shapes of the heavy, lowering clouds that overhung us began to reveal themselves, their lower edges here and

there suddenly flushing into hues of the richest yet most delicate rose that rapidly strengthened first into scarlet and then to burning gold as the rays of the yet unrisen sun smote upon them. Presently, in the midst of the rich orange light that was now flashing up on the eastern and north-eastern horizon, there emerged a shape of indigo, practically flat-topped, but with two small protuberances, one at each end, which, by a stretch of the imagination, might be termed hills, rising to a height of perhaps sixty or seventy feet. This was the island of West Caycos, the most westerly of the cays on the bank, and ten minutes later we were under its lee and within less than a cable's length from the beach.

But what a change had taken place in the aspect of sea and sky during those ten minutes! As we stood, spellbound, watching the gorgeous changes of colour that were taking place along the eastern horizon, a broad ray of white light, the edges slightly tinged with violet, suddenly shot vertically aloft from the horizon, piercing the cloud-masses as though with the thrust of a spear; and as though there had been magic in the touch those cloud-masses at once began to break up and melt away, assuming, ere they vanished, every conceivable tint of the rainbow, from the deepest and richest hue of purple, through crimson and scarlet, to purest molten gold. And while these wonderful changes of colour were taking place, shaft after shaft of living, quivering light flashed into the sky, radiating like the spokes of a wheel against the warm primrose tints of the horizon—merging by imperceptible degrees into the pure, delicate azure of the sky revealed by the breaking up and dissolution of the clouds—to be followed, a few seconds later, by the appearance above the horizon of a great rim of blazing, palpitating golden fire, the level rays from which shot along the tumbling surface of the ocean, splashing it with a million scintillating points of dazzling light, as the crests of the tiny wavelets curled over and broke under the whipping of the freshening breeze. Then, while we still stood watching, a gauzy veil of rain—"the pride of the morning"—swept down upon us, blotting out the glories of the sunrise for a brief minute or two, then driving away to leeward, leaving our sails and deck dark with wet, and revealing the sun, now fully risen, and the sky clear and pure to windward.

With the freshening of the breeze we rapidly brought West Caycos first abeam and then on our weather quarter, while the high land of Providenciales grew upon the weather-bow. Here we were very nearly getting into an exceedingly awkward scrape, for while I went below to prepare for my morning bath under the head-pump, after witnessing the magnificent sunrise that I have endeavoured to describe, the wind suddenly fell light and died away; and then, while I was dressing after my bath, the sea-breeze suddenly sprang up, blowing half a gale; and there we were, not three miles from the land, with as dangerous a stretch of lee-shore as is to be found in all this region abeam of us. Fortunately the schooner's extraordinary weatherliness stood us in good stead, and enabled us to claw off, but for which we should probably have left her bones, if not our own, there. Our mid-afternoon observations showed us to be in latitude 22 degrees 21 minutes North, and longitude 71 degrees 57 minutes West, which position I considered far enough out for our purpose; we therefore hove about and, under short canvas, proceeded to work our way slowly to the southward and eastward, on the lookout for anything that might chance to come our way.

For several days after this nothing of moment occurred. Finally we found ourselves some two hundred miles to the northward and eastward of the Mona Passage, and I was debating within myself whether to bear up and go back over the ground which I had just traversed, or to continue on and have a look at Porto Rico. But while I was thinking over the question, the lookout in the fore crosstrees reported a sail to windward, quickly succeeded by several others, whereupon we made sail and shaped a course that would enable us to get a somewhat clearer view of them, and, if necessary, to intercept them.

The lookout aloft soon reported that the leading ship was under short canvas, while those which immediately followed her were covered to their trucks, and showing studdingsails as well, from which piece of information it was not difficult for me to guess that the strangers to windward consisted of a convoy of merchantmen, with its escort of men-o'-war. This conjecture of mine soon proved to be correct, for within half-an-hour of their first appearance the leading ships were in sight from the deck, and we made out the biggest of them to be a 74-gun ship, the others in sight obviously being merchantmen. As we closed, with ensign and pennant hoisted, the commodore signalled me to come alongside and send a boat aboard, which I did, going in the boat myself to see what news I could pick up. I thus learned that the ship I had boarded was the *Goliath*, the captain of which was the commodore of the squadron of convoying ships, consisting of—in addition to the *Goliath*—the frigates *Tourmaline* and *Spartiate*, and the gun-brigs *Vulcan*, *Wolverine*, *Spitfire*, and *Tortoise*; the convoy consisting of three hundred and eighty-seven sail of all sorts, bound to the various West Indian ports. I informed the commodore of the nature of the duty upon which I had been sent out by the Admiral on the station, and inquired whether any suspicious craft had been sighted during the passage; to which he grimly replied in the affirmative, but added that they had all been accounted for, and would be found, with prize-crews aboard them, in the main body of the fleet. I stayed on board the seventy-four for a couple of hours, gathering what news the inmates of the ward-room could give me; during which the *Wasp*, under boom-foresail and fore-staysail only, easily kept company with the ponderous two-decker, looking in comparison with her "no bigger as my thumb," as the negroes would say. She excited a great deal of curiosity, on account of her very peculiar model, and likewise a very considerable amount of admiration as she swept along lightly and buoyantly as a seagull over the long undulations of the heavy swell that was running. It was the first time that I had ever beheld her under sail, from outside her own bulwarks, and although, looked down upon from the lofty poop of the *Goliath*, she seemed to be the merest cockle-shell, small enough to be hoisted inboard and stowed upon the two-decker's main hatch, there was still a look of staunchness about her that, coupled with the beauty of her form and the rakish sauciness of her entire appearance, made me feel very proud of the fact that I commanded her, as well as very anxious for an opportunity to show of what she and her crew were capable.

Having extracted all the information I could obtain—which, after all, was not very much—I made my adieux, descended the side, stepped into my boat, and returned to the schooner. Upon rejoining her, we made sail and hauled to the wind, in the hope of finding some picarooning craft hanging on to the skirts of the convoy; but although we hovered in the wake of the latter until the very last of them had disappeared beneath the southern horizon, our hopes were vain; and, finally, I decided to bear up for the Navidad, or Ship Bank, proceed through the Sea of Hayti as far as the entrance of the Windward Channel, and then, if still unsuccessful in my search for traces of the pirate, to work my way back to the Atlantic by the Crooked Island Passage, exploring some of the cays in Austral Bay on the

way, they seeming to me to afford considerable facilities for the establishment of a pirate depot.

Chapter Twelve.

What the Gunner saw.

Two mornings later—the *Wasp* being at the time off Ysabelica Point, which is the most northerly point of the island of Hayti—I was awakened by young Dundas, one of the two midshipmen whom I had on board. He entered my cabin, laid his hand lightly on my shoulder, and, as I started up at his touch, said:

“I beg your pardon, Mr Delamere, for entering your cabin, but I knocked twice and you did not seem to hear me. The gunner is sorry to have you disturbed, sir, but he would be very much obliged if you would come on deck for a minute or two.”

“Very well,” said I; “I will be up in a brace of shakes. Just turn up the lamp, if you please, youngster, and let us have a little more light on the subject. Ah! that’s better, thanks. Kindly hand me those unmentionables. I say, Mr Dundas, there doesn’t seem to be very much wind. What’s the weather like?”

“Stark calm, sir; smooth water, and as dark as the inside of a cow,” answered the lad.

“Does the weather look threatening, then; or what does—? But never mind; those shoes, if you please. Thanks. That will do. Now I am ready. Away you go, youngster.”

Preceded by the lad, I passed into the fore-cabin and thence up on deck, where, as Dundas had picturesquely intimated, the darkness was profound and the air breathless, save for the small draughts created by the flapping of the great mainsail to the gentle movements of the schooner upon the low undulations of the swell.

As I stepped out on deck I heard Henderson’s voice close at my elbow, although the man himself was invisible.

“Sorry to have been obliged to disturb you, Mr Delamere,” he said, “but something’s happened that I thought you ought to know about.”

“Yes?” I remarked interrogatively. “Well, what was it, Henderson?”

“Well, it’s like this here, sir,” he replied. “We’ve been becalmed this last hour or more, durin’ which the schooner have been boxin’ the compass, while it’s been that close and muggy that one don’t seem to have been able to get air enough to breathe. And the closeness made me feel so drowsy that, to prevent myself from droppin’ off to sleep, I’ve been obliged to keep on my feet, pacing fore and aft atween the main cabin skylight and the main riggin’. The watch have coiled theirselves away somewheres, and I don’t doubt but what they’re snatchin’ a cat-nap—and I haven’t troubled to disturb ‘em, sir, for the lookout on the fo’c’s’le is keepin’ his eyes skinned.

“Well, a few minutes ago—it may be five, or it may be ten—I’d just swung round to walk aft from the main riggin’ when, as my eyes travelled away out here over the port quarter, I got the notion into my head that there was somethin’ goin’ on down there, for it seemed to me that I’d got a glimpse—out of the corner of my eye, as it might be—of a small sparkin’, like—like—well, hang me if I know what it was like, unless it might be twenty or thirty pistols or muskets all being fired close after one another.”

“Ah!” I ejaculated. “And did you hear any sound, Henderson—anything like that of distant firing, for instance?”

“No, Mr Delamere; not a sound, sir,” answered the gunner. “But then,” he continued, “that ain’t very surprisin’ when you comes to think of it, for just listen to what’s goin’ on aboard here—the old hooker ain’t so very noisy, I’ll allow; still, what with the rustlin’ of the canvas overhead, the patter of the reef-points, the creakin’ of the jaws o’ the mainboom, the clank o’ the wheel-chains, and the wash and gurgle of the water alongside with the roll of her, there’s not much chance of pickin’ up sounds comin’ from a distance, is there, sir?”

“No, that is true, there is not,” I admitted. “Did you see, or hear, anything else, Henderson?” I asked.

“No, sir; never another thing,” answered the gunner. “And I’d like ye to understand, Mr Delamere, that I wouldn’t care actually to stand up in court and swear that I really saw what I told ye; for, as I explained, I only caught the thing out o’ the tail-end of my eye, as it might be, and then ‘twas gone again, and I saw nothin’ more. But the impression that I really had seen something was so strong that I felt it was my duty to report it.”

“Of course; you did perfectly right,” I agreed; “particularly in view of the task that has been given us to do. Did the lookout see anything of this appearance of flashes?”

“No, sir,” answered Henderson; “he didn’t. Nat’rally he wouldn’t, for he was keepin’ a lookout ahead and on either bow, while this here flashin’ showed—if it really did show at all, and wasn’t my imagination—out there over the port quarter.”

“Quite so,” I concurred. “Under those circumstances he would not be in the least likely to see the appearance. Did it occur to you to take the bearing of the spot where you thought you saw those flashes?”

“Yes, sir, it did,” answered Henderson. “I stood, just for a second or two, to see if there was any more comin’: and then, not seein’ anything, I went straight to the binnacle and took the bearin’, which I found to be nor’-west and by west, half west.”

With one consent we both walked aft to the binnacle and peered into it. The schooner had swung several points while the gunner had been spinning his somewhat long-winded yarn, for the bearing which he gave now lay about a point over the starboard quarter. I stared into the blackness in that direction, but could see nothing. Then I got the night glass and, setting it to my focus, raised it to my eye, pointing it out over the starboard quarter and sweeping it slowly and carefully to right and left. For a minute or two I saw nothing; then, as I swept the tube along what I judged to be the line of the horizon, a tiny smudge of radiance—so dim as to be scarcely more than a suggestion—seemed to float athwart the lenses and was gone again. There is probably nothing in ordinary life much more difficult than to pick up and retain in the lenses of a telescope, levelled by hand, a spark of light so minute and faint as to be invisible to the unaided eye in the midst of the surrounding darkness, and the difficulty is enhanced when the attempt is made from the deck of a small vessel oscillating though ever so gently on the ridges of a long, low-running swell, and for the life of me I could not again find the feeble glimmer that had seemed to swim athwart the instrument, try as I would.

“It is no good, Henderson,” I said at last, abandoning the attempt in despair, and handing the telescope over to him. “I am almost certain that for a single instant I caught a faint blur of light away out there; but I cannot find it now. Take the glass, and see if you can meet with any better success. But verify your bearing before you do so.”

The schooner had swung a point or two further round by this time, and the bearing now lay broad over the starboard beam, in which direction Henderson pointed his glass. Meanwhile Dundas, the midshipman who had called me, had slipped down below and brought his own telescope on deck, and was working away with it, but neither he nor the gunner met with any luck; and I was about to try my hand again when a slight lessening of the intensity of the darkness away down in the eastern quarter indicated the approach of dawn. In those low latitudes the transition from night to day, and *vice versa*, is extraordinarily rapid, occupying but a few minutes; and, even as we stood watching, the pallor strengthened and spread to right and left and upward, suggesting the stealthy but rapid withdrawal of an infinite number of dark gauze curtains from the face of the firmament, until presently the eastern quadrant of the horizon became visible, the pallid sea showing like a surface of molten lead, sluggishly undulating like the coils of a sleeping snake, while overhead stretched an unbroken pall of dark grey cloud that seemed to promise a drenching downpour of rain before long.

The light from the east stole upward among the clouds and westward along the surface of the sea with amazing rapidity, yet to our impatience its progress seemed exasperatingly slow, for away down in the west the darkness was still profound. And yet, even as we gazed, that darkness seemed to become diluted, as it were, with the advancing light that we could almost see sliding along the surface of the water, until suddenly, as though emerging from an invisible mist, a ghostly object appeared, grey and elusive, against the background of darkness, and with one voice we all three shouted:

“There she is?”

Yes, there she was—a large ship, about seven miles away, lying becalmed, like ourselves, with all plain sail set, to her royals and flying-jib. For perhaps half a minute after our first sight of her the light was too weak and uncertain to enable us to discern details; but as we kept our telescopes persistently bearing upon her, first one distinctive feature and then another became revealed.

“She’s a full-rigged ship, lying broadside-on to us, Mr Delamere,” announced young Dundas.

“So I perceive,” I returned somewhat dryly. “And I notice, also, that she has swung with her head to the southward.”

“She’s a big lump of a craft, not very far short of 900 tons, I should say,” commented Henderson, with his eye still glued to the eye-piece of the schooner’s glass. “And,” he continued, after a slight pause, “I reckon she’s a foreigner; that high poop and them deep-curvin’ headboards never took shape in a British shipyard, I’m prepared to swear to that. Looks to me like a Dutchman. What do you think, Mr Delamere?”

“I agree with you that she is undoubtedly a foreigner,” answered I; “but I don’t think she is Dutch—there is too much gilding and gingerbread-work about her quarters for that. There,”—as the sun broke through the clouds and showed his upper rim above the horizon, flashing a long, level beam along the surface of the water, striking the stranger and causing the stern of her to blaze into a sudden flame of glittering radiance—“do you see that, Henderson? Her quarter is a solid mass of painted and gilded carving. The Dutchman is too economical, too fond of the dollars to lavish so much gold-leaf as that on the adornment of his ship; he prefers to put the money into extra bolts and fastenings. No; that fellow is a Spaniard, or I’m greatly mistaken!”

“Spaniard, or Dutch, or French, it don’t make much difference to us, Mr Delamere,” answered the gunner, as he replaced the telescope in the becket; “she’ll give us a nice little bit o’ prize-money as soon as the breeze comes and enables us to run down alongside her.”

“Ay, that she will—if she doesn’t happen to be a man-o’-war—and I don’t believe she is,” I answered, as I again levelled my glass at her. “No,” I continued, “she is no man-o’-war, although I see she shows a set of teeth; but there are not many of them, they are all small pieces, and half of them may be quakers, for what we can tell to the contrary. She is a Spanish West Indiaman, I believe, bound, no doubt, to Cartagena, or some other port on the Main; and she has probably come in through the Handkerchief, or Turks Islands Passage. Well, there does not seem to be much chance of the wind coming just yet, Henderson, so you had better get your head-pump rigged and muster your scrubbers; meanwhile I will have my bath, as usual, and then get dressed, so as to be all ready by the time that the breeze comes.”

When eight o’clock and breakfast-time arrived there was no perceptible change in the aspect of the weather, which remained stark calm; while the heavy pall of cloud that had shrouded the night sky had thinned away to a kind of dense haze in the midst of which the sun throbbled—a great shapeless splotch of misty light that, notwithstanding its partial veiling, still contrived to impart a scorching quality to the breathless atmosphere.

As I ascended to the deck after breakfast I found Pearce, the boatswain, whose watch it now was, apparently waiting for my reappearance. He held the schooner's glass in his hand, and had evidently spent practically the whole time since eight bells in watching the stranger.

"I've been thinkin', Mr Delamere," he began, "how would it be to get the boats out and go after that chap? We could do it quite comfortable—take possession of her, leave a prize-crew aboard her, and get back to the schooner again before dinner."

"No doubt," I agreed. "But why should we trouble to get the boats into the water and fatigue the men by a long pull in this sweltering heat? That ship can't get away from us without wind; and if I am any judge of the looks of a vessel we shall walk up to her as if she were at anchor as soon as the breeze comes. She is a good seven miles away, a pull of an hour and a half at the least in this weather, and at the end of it the men would be too tired to face resistance effectively, if it were offered—as it very possibly might be. No, I really do not see any necessity to dispatch the boats, just yet at least; do you?"

"Well, 'pon my word, Mr Delamere, I don't know," answered Pearce, scratching his head with a puzzled air. "The way you puts it there don't seem to be no sense at all in doin' of it. And yet, I don't know, sir. The fact is, I'm a bit puzzled about that there ship. Here are we, regularly boxin' the compass, our jibboom pointin' first this way, then that, and then t'other, while that ship haven't veered nothin' to speak of all the time that I've been on deck; she've pointed steady to the south'ard ever since I first set eyes on her, and it seems to me that she've altered her bearin's a bit. I suppose it ain't likely that she've got her boats into the water, towin' on t'other side of her, have she?"

"Good gracious, man, no, surely not!" I ejaculated. "What in the world should they do such a mad thing as that for? What effect would two, or even three, boats have on a big heavy ship like that? They could never hope to tow her below the horizon and out of sight of us before the wind comes; and, if not, why should they tire themselves to death by making such an attempt? I admit that it is rather strange that her head should point so steadily in one direction while we are boxing the compass; but she probably draws twice as much water as we do, and that may have something to do with it."

I took the telescope from Pearce's hands and again levelled it at the stranger. She was still lying broadside-on to us, showing us her port side, and her yards were braced sharp up on the starboard tack, as though—assuming her to have come in through one of the passages—she had had a wind from the westward, while the breeze which had brought us where we were had been from the eastward. The peculiarity of this now struck me for the first time, but it carried no particular significance to my mind beyond the suggestion that possibly she might, after all, be homeward instead of outward bound. But as I stood scanning her through the lenses it gradually dawned upon me that her people seemed to be extraordinarily busy, for I could detect indications that quite a large number of men were actively moving about her decks; and presently, to my astonishment, I noticed that she had a tackle at her mainyard-arm; and while I was still wondering what this might be for, I saw a large case rise slowly above the level of her bulwark and then vanish again, apparently over her rail.

Then, in a second, illumination came to me and I understood everything. There was a craft of some sort alongside her, completely hidden from our view by her hull and canvas, braced as sharp up as possible, and undoubtedly there were boats in the water on the other side of her, employed to keep her broadside-on to us and thus keep the other craft hidden from us; moreover, certain portions of her cargo were being hoisted out and transferred to the hidden vessel. The inference was obvious: the hidden craft was a pirate which had somehow managed to sneak up alongside and surprise her in the pitchy darkness of the early hours of the morning—Henderson had actually caught a glimpse of the very act of capture—and now she was being plundered by the audacious scoundrels under our very eyes.

I laid down the glass and looked sharply round the horizon. The atmosphere was distinctly thickening, to such an extent, indeed, that the sun was now almost blotted out, and there was a greasy look about the sky that seemed to portend bad weather. The sea was still glass-smooth, not the faintest suggestion of a catspaw to be seen in any direction; but there was a certain gloomy, lowering appearance over the western horizon that appeared to promise a breeze before long. It might be hours, however, before it came, and we could not wait for it; for robbery, and very possibly violence, ay, even cold-blooded murder, was being perpetrated at that moment, and speedy intervention was imperative. I felt horribly vexed that we should all have allowed ourselves to be hoodwinked so completely; for although the device was undoubtedly quite clever, the conviction would insist upon forcing itself upon me that I had attached altogether too little importance to the gunner's story of those mysterious flashes, seen "out of the corner of his eye." I told myself that that story ought to have aroused my suspicions, ought to have conveyed a distinct suggestion to my mind; and that, if it had, we should have detected the ruse almost with the first appearance of daylight. This, however, was not the moment for reproaches, either of myself or others, it was the moment for action; and I turned sharply upon the boatswain.

"Mr Pearce," I said, "on the starboard side of that ship there is another craft, completely hidden from us by the hull and canvas of the stranger, and cargo is being hoisted out of the one and transferred to the other. That means that an act of piracy is being perpetrated; and we have been commissioned for the express purpose of suppressing piracy. It is as likely as not that the hidden craft is the identical vessel that we have been sent out to capture, but in any case our duty is clear; we must get up within striking distance and interfere without a moment's loss of time. Now, the question in my mind is this: Should we man and arm boats, and send them away; or should we rig out our sweeps and attempt to sweep the schooner up to the scene of action? Under ordinary circumstances I should be for dispatching the boats; but I don't quite know what to make of the weather. There is no sign of a breeze in any direction at the present moment, but that lowering appearance away to the westward may mean wind; and if it does, it may come down very strong. Should it do so, it would bother the boats, and enable the pirates to slip away; on the other hand, the wind may not come away for several hours yet. This is one of those occasions when experience is valuable, and I shall be glad to have your opinion as to which plan is the better."

Pearce, meanwhile, had been peering through the glass again; but when I finished speaking he laid it down and

turned to me.

“‘Pon my word, Mr Delamere, it’s very difficult to say,” he answered. “While you’ve been talkin’ I’ve been lookin’ at that ship away yonder, and I believe, sir, as you’re right about there bein’ another craft alongside of her, although they’ve so managed things that they might ha’ stayed all day as they are without our bein’ any the wiser, if we hadn’t kept on watchin’ ’em. Yes; it’s a hact of piracy, right enough, I haven’t a doubt; and, as you says—what’s the best thing to be done?”

He paused and gazed earnestly toward the increasing appearance of thickness and greasiness in the western quarter, carefully studying its aspect for a full minute or more; then he turned to me again.

“I don’t like the look of it at all, Mr Delamere,” he said. “There’s bad weather brewin’ yonder—I’m sure of it—but how long it’ll be before it comes no man can say; it may be hours, or it may be on us within the next half-hour or so. What does the barometer say?”

We both stepped to the open skylight and peered down through it at the barometer, which hung in gimbals from the fore transom. The mercury was falling rather rapidly.

“Yes,” Pearce continued, “I don’t like the look of it, sir, and I shouldn’t like to take the responsibility of advisin’ of you to send the boats away. For, ye see, Mr—”

“Yes,” I interrupted, cutting ruthlessly in upon the man’s speech, “I see quite clearly, boatswain, that you and I are of one mind upon that point, therefore there is no need to discuss it further, and we will at once proceed to action. Call all hands if you please, Mr Pearce.”

The next moment the shrill chirruping of Pearce’s pipe and his gruff bellow of “All hands ahoy!” resounded throughout the little vessel, and our decks at once became a scene of animation. The galley fire was extinguished, although the cook was by this time busy upon the preparation of the men’s dinner; screens were fastened up round the hatchways, the magazine was opened, powder and shot were passed up on deck, and the guns were cast loose and loaded, the men dancing about the decks with the glee and activity of schoolboys preparing for a day’s amusement. Then, as soon as we were all ready for action, the heavy sweeps were rigged out, four men to each sweep, and the schooner’s bows were pointed straight for the stranger. To overcome the inertia of the little vessel, and get way upon her, was laborious work, and the men, stripped to their waists, were soon streaming with perspiration; but after the first five minutes’ toil, during which we worked up a speed of about three knots, it proved a comparatively easy matter to keep her going.

It soon became evident that a keen watch upon our movements was being maintained by the pirates; for no sooner had it been made apparent that we intended to close with the strangers than all attempts at further concealment were abandoned, the ship’s courses were clewed up, her yards were squared; to facilitate the hoisting out of cargo, additional tackles were got aloft, and all the signs of greatly increased activity on board her at once became manifest. It now also became apparent that some means had been resorted to for the purpose of keeping her broadside presented to us and her hull interposed between us and the pirate vessel, and that these means had now been abandoned as of no further avail; for within the next ten minutes she swung stem-on to us, and we saw that there was indeed another craft alongside her—a slashing big topsail schooner, immensely beamy, with all her canvas clewed up and furled, and her decks cumbered with bales and packages of all sizes and descriptions, which were being hoisted out of the big ship’s hold and lowered over the side with feverish activity. As the two craft swung round, revealing the presence of the second vessel, our lads gave a cheer of delight and exultation, and applied themselves with such fierce energy to the toil of working the heavy sweeps that they churned the glassy surface of the ocean into a long double row of miniature whirlpools, that went swirling and frothing away from the blades of the sweeps into the wake of the schooner, to the distance of a full quarter of a mile.

Fortunately, however, they were not compelled to toil very long at this exhausting labour; for when we had progressed about a mile a few catspaws came stealing along the surface of the water from the westward, while a dark line gradually extended along the western horizon and advanced steadily in our direction, the catspaws meanwhile multiplying and spreading until, within a quarter of an hour of their first appearance, the sails of the strange ship were wrinkling and flapping to quite a pleasant little breeze. The moment that this happened the pirate schooner cast off and made sail with the rapidity and precision of a man-o’-war, thus demonstrating that she was manned by an exceptionally strong and efficient crew. As soon as she was clear of the ship she was brought to the wind, under an enormous spread of exquisitely cut canvas, and away she went, close-hauled on the port tack, heading to the northward at a pace which made us gape with astonishment; while the ship, with squared yards, gathered stern-way and first fell broadside-on to us, then gradually paid off until she was before the wind, when down she came driving toward us, yawing so broadly to port and starboard that it was easy to see she had nobody at her helm, which seemed to point pretty clearly toward the presumption of tragedy. A quarter of an hour later the catspaws were ruffling the surface of the water here and there all round us, and stirring our canvas at rapidly decreasing intervals, with the true breeze coming fast and close behind them; we, therefore, laid in our sweeps, put the helm up, trimmed our sheets on the port tack, took a long pull and a strong pull upon the halliards all round, and paid off just in time to receive the first of the true breeze into the hollows of our canvas, when, heeling over to the extent of a strake or so, away we too went, with a merry buzzing and seething of water under our bows and along our bends.

Chapter Thirteen.

The Wasp Fights the Pirate Schooner.

The pirate schooner—a craft of apparently two hundred tons or more, very long and low on the water, painted dead

black, with immensely tall, wand-like masts, and an enormous spread of canvas—was now slipping along fast through the water, heading to the northward, and some six miles dead to windward of us. It was a long start, and I foresaw that, fast as the little *Wasp* undoubtedly was, unless something quite unforeseen occurred, a good many things might happen before we could get alongside the enemy. Why such a big powerful vessel—she showed seven ports of a side, and there was something suspiciously like a long 32-pounder on her fore-castle—should turn tail so ignominiously and run from a little shrimp of a craft like the *Wasp* I could not imagine, though I was to receive enlightenment upon that point before long. Our immediate business, however, was not with her, but with the big ship that was coming yawing down the wind toward us.

She was now about five miles distant, and as she came driving along, now stem-on, with her square canvas full, and anon sweeping round until she presented one or the other of her broadsides to us, with only her fore-and-aft canvas drawing, we were enabled to get a very good view of her. She was a big craft, of from nine hundred to a thousand tons, perhaps, and at a distance might very well have been mistaken for a man-o'-war. But she was evidently not that, for she showed only four guns of a side upon her upper-deck, and they were but small, apparently not more than 6-pounders. She was very heavily rigged, with a wide spread to her lower yards, but the heads of her square sails narrowed away to such an extent that her royal-yards looked to be scarcely more than ten feet long. Her hull was painted bright yellowish-brown, with a broad white ribbon round it, and her bottom was painted white, with a black stripe between it and the brown, but below the water-line the white paint was foul with barnacles and sea grass, as we could see when she rolled. She carried, by way of figurehead, the image of a female saint, very elaborately painted and gilded, with a good deal of gilded scroll-work round about it, and her stern and quarters were also elaborately carved and gilded. Her topsides tumbled home enormously, her width on deck being little more than half that at her water-line. Surmounting her stern there was a great poop lantern, almost big enough for a man to stand in. A rough painting of the Crucifixion adorned her fore-topsail. She showed no colours; but she was Spanish, beyond a doubt, and most probably, as I had at first surmised, a West Indiaman.

We manoeuvred the *Wasp* in such a manner as to close with the stranger, as nearly as possible without incurring the risk of being run into and sunk by her in one of her wild sheers, and at the proper moment the schooner was hove-to, the quarter-boat lowered, and with four hands in her, armed with pistols and cutlasses, I jumped in and pulled away for the other craft.

Carefully watching her movements, we contrived to get alongside and hook on without very much difficulty; and then all hands of us swarmed up her towering side and tumbled in on deck, with our drawn pistols in our hands, for there was never any knowing what ghastly trick a pirate might play, or what fiendish trap he might set—they were capable of anything and everything—therefore it behoved us to be wary; but nothing happened. There was not a soul on deck to interfere with us, or to demand our business; and the first thing we did was to put the helm hard over and lay the mainyard aback as she came to the wind. Then I ascended to the poop and took a comprehensive glance round me.

The circumstance that thrust itself most obtrusively forward, demanding immediate notice, was that the main hatchway was gaping wide-open, with a tackle dangling down it from the main-stay, evidently for the purpose of hoisting cargo out of the hold. All round the hatchway the deck was littered with bales and cases of every description, some of them intact, as they had come up out of the hold, while others had been ripped or wrenched open and their contents scattered hither and thither about the decks. There was a cask lying on its bilge, its head knocked out, and perhaps a gallon or so of port wine still in it, while all round about it the deck was dark, wet, and reeking with the fumes of the spilt wine. But there were other and more sinister stains than those of wine on the planks—there were great splashes of blood here and there on bulwarks and deck, much of which was partially hidden by the scattered cargo; but the scene was not nearly so sanguinary or revolting as I had expected to find it, for there were no ensanguined, mutilated corpses to shock the eye, or harrow the imagination, by the sight of their hurts.

Nor, for that matter, were there any living people on board the ship, either in cabins or fore-castle, although there was abundant evidence that both had had their full complement of occupants. The fore-castle, for example, was lumbered up with the chests of the seamen, boots, caps, and various other articles of clothing lying scattered about the deck, while oilskins, sou'westers, and more clothing hung from pegs and nails driven into the timber walls; the bedding in the bunks also was disarranged, as though the men had just rolled out of them; and a large copper slush lamp, suspended from a deck beam, still burned, smoking and flaring to the roll of the ship upon the swell. The confusion here was merely normal, and such as is always to be found in a ship's fore-castle; but the grand saloon presented a very different and terribly suggestive appearance. The whole place was a scene of dreadful disorder and violence, a carouse seeming to have been succeeded by a life and death struggle. For the massive mahogany table was bare, while the cloth that should have covered it lay upon the carpeted deck in a confused heap in the midst of a medley of smashed decanters, glasses, and viands of various descriptions, while the reek of spilled wine, mingled with the odour of gunpowder and tobacco smoke, filled the air; one or two of the handsome mirrors that adorned the cabin were smashed, the cracks radiating from the point of fracture right out to the frame; two or three discharged pistols and a broken sword lay among the débris on the carpet; some of the rich velvet cushions had been torn off the locker and then kicked under the table; and a number of men's, women's, and children's garments lay scattered about the apartment. Nor was this all. The doors of the staterooms on either side of the saloon stood wide-open, hooked back to the bulkheads; and here again the bedding was all in disorder, as though the occupants had leapt hurriedly from the bunks under the influence of some sudden alarm; trunks and boxes were standing open—some of them overturned—and their contents scattered all over the cabin, as though the receptacles had been rummaged in search of jewellery or money, or both. And the soft white linen sheets that formed part of the bedding in one of the cabins was deeply and horribly smeared with scarcely dry blood, with which also the mattress underneath seemed to be soaked! The captain's cabin—or what I took to be such—had likewise been rifled, the charts having been taken from the racks, the chronometer from its padded well in the book-case, and the sextant had vanished, as well as the ship's papers. But we were able to ascertain her name and port of registry, for it was engraved upon the broad brass rim of her steering wheel, and upon her bell: "*Santa Brigitta, Santander.*"

It was evident that there were no living persons on board this fine but ruthlessly despoiled ship, or if there were, they must be in hiding; and with the view of testing this latter point I now swung myself down through the open hatchway

leading to the lazarette, believing that that would be the part of the ship wherein a person might most successfully hide and evade capture. I was no sooner down in this gloomy receptacle, devoted to the stowage of the ship's cabin stores, than I saw that it too had been rummaged, if not actually rifled; but I could detect no sign indicative of the presence of a person, or persons, in hiding; and although I shouted until I was hoarse, no sound save the furtive scurrying of rats reached me by way of reply. But presently, as I stood listening, and my ears became accustomed to the subdued creaking and groaning of the vessel's framework and cargo, another sound came to me—the sound of gurgling, bubbling water; and making my way toward it as best I could down between the casks and cases that cumbered the place, I suddenly dropped down into a void, and found water—salt water, surging and washing to and fro with the movements of the ship, to the height of my knees. I tried to find the source of the inflow, but I was now down in the ship's run, standing upon her steeply sloping side, and I speedily realised that the points of influx were already so far beneath the surface as to be entirely beyond my reach; and the water was coming in fast, too, for even as I stood there I could feel it creeping insidiously up my legs. The scoundrels had evidently followed their usual custom and had scuttled the ship, in order that no tangible evidences of their crime might remain.

Until I made this discovery it had been my intention to put a prize-crew on board her and send her into Port Royal; but with one or more—probably half-a-dozen—bad leaks below the water-level, and utterly beyond our reach, this plan was no longer feasible; and now the only thing to be done was to leave the unfortunate craft to her fate, proceed in chase of the authors of the mischief, and do our utmost to bring them to book. I therefore scrambled up out of the lazarette into the main saloon, made my way out on deck again, and, summoning my boat's crew, descended the deserted ship's side, and pushed off on my way back to the *Wasp*.

But it was with something akin to shock that I looked back at the *Santa Brigitta*, as the boat sped across the short space of water that separated her from the schooner. For although we had only been aboard her a short half-hour, she had settled perceptibly during that time; so deeply, indeed, that as I looked at her I felt convinced she must have been scuttled forward as well as aft, and that the water must be pouring into her from at least a dozen auger-holes. At that rate she would sink long before we could get out of sight of her, although the breeze was now perceptibly stronger than it had been when I boarded the ill-fated ship.

By the time that I had regained the deck of the *Wasp*, and that craft was once more under way, the pirate schooner was hull-down on the north-western horizon, nearly ten miles away. But light breezes and smooth water, such as we had at the moment, constituted absolutely ideal weather for the *Wasp*; it was under precisely such conditions that her marvellous sailing powers showed to the utmost advantage, and, smart as the other schooner had revealed herself to be, I had very little doubt as to our ability to overhaul her and bring her to account. We therefore piled upon the little hooker every rag that we could find a spar or stay for, brought her to the wind, flattened-in her sheets until her mainboom was almost amidships, and generally made all our preparations for a long chase to windward.

But although the weather was at the moment everything that could be desired, from our point of view, I did not by any means like the look of it; the hazy appearance of the atmosphere, far from clearing, was steadily increasing in density, the sun had by this time vanished altogether, and the appearance of gloom away down to the westward was now deepening and, at the same time, working round into the northern quarter of the heavens. Also, the mercury was dropping quite rapidly.

My chief anxiety now was to overhaul the pirate schooner and bring her to action before nightfall; for, with bad weather threatening, unless we could succeed in doing this, there was every likelihood of her giving us the slip during the hours of darkness. A stern-chase is proverbially a long chase, and a chase to windward is apt to be even longer, while a start of some ten miles, under such circumstances, must necessarily prove a heavy handicap to the pursuing vessel; nevertheless I was not without hope that, difficult as our task threatened to be, we might yet accomplish it. For it still wanted nearly an hour to noon, the *Wasp* was slipping along through the water like a racer, and was looking up a full point nearer the wind than our antagonist, and, early as it yet was to form such a conclusion, I felt almost certain that we were head-reaching as well as weathering upon the chase.

As soon as it became apparent that some hours would probably elapse before we could go into action, I gave orders for the guns to be secured and the galley fire to be lighted again, in order that the men might not be deprived of their usual dinner; and this meal was just nicely over when, to our utter amazement, the chase suddenly hoisted the black flag, bore up, and with squared yards came running down with the obvious intention of coming to close quarters with us; whereupon we once more made ready for battle, at the same time shortening sail to our ordinary working canvas. At first I was distinctly puzzled to account for or understand this sudden change of tactics upon the part of the pirates; but a remark of Henderson's seemed to offer a tolerably plausible explanation of it.

"Depend upon it, sir," he suggested, "they only hauled off to give themselves time to stow away the plunder that cumbered their decks when they shoved off from the Spaniard. They wouldn't want to go into action with a lot of bales and cases hamperin' their movements; but now that they've got everything snugly stowed under hatches, they're comin' down to try conclusions with us; and if they really mean business we've a very tidy little job afore us."

"Ay," I assented; "that schooner will prove a very tough nut to crack, Henderson; she carries more than twice our weight of metal, even if I am mistaken in supposing that I saw a long gun on her forecastle; and she appears to be very strongly manned. Our only chance will be to engage her at close quarters, lay her aboard, and carry her by boarding."

"D'ye think they'll be such fools as to let us do that, sir?" caustically demanded the gunner, chewing hard upon his quid, in his evident perplexity.

"N-o," I returned dubiously; "I don't suppose they will—if they can help it. But that is our only chance, all the same, and we must bend all our energies to accomplish it. And there is no particular reason why we should not, so far as I can see, unless of course we are unfortunate enough to have a spar or two knocked away. Good shooting is what is going to decide this fight, Henderson; and we must hope that ours will be better than theirs."

"Ay," agreed the gunner, "there's no harm in hopin' that; but—" He shook his head, and spat vigorously over the side by way of expressing the doubts that were worrying him.

As it turned out, his doubts and apprehensions were by no means without foundation, for when our antagonist arrived within range of her long 32—I was not mistaken as to that matter—she hauled her wind, and opened fire upon us with it, making very excellent practice, too; although it was not until she had fired six shots at us that any of them actually came near enough to do us any damage, and then the shot only passed through our foresail, making a neat hole in the canvas, but doing no further mischief. Her previous attempts, however, had come close enough to us to prove that she had at least one excellent gunner on board her, for every one of the shot fell within two or three fathoms of us at the utmost; and when a man shoots so well at long range he is bound to score a few hits, sooner or later. And this was precisely what Henderson and I most feared; for so long as the pirates chose to play the game of long bowls they might blaze away at us at their leisure, and in perfect safety, their 32-pound shot flying over and over us at a distance far beyond the range of our 9-pounders.

What we now had to do was to shorten the distance between ourselves and our antagonist as quickly as possible, and bring her within reach of our guns before we sustained any very serious damage from her long gun, if fortune would so far favour us; and I thought that possibly I might here be able to make one of the *Wasp's* peculiarities very useful. This peculiarity consisted in the fact—which we had by this time had many opportunities of observing—that, in smooth water, such as then prevailed, the little vessel would, if properly handled, shoot quite an extraordinary distance to windward while in stays; and I had it in my mind to utilise this peculiarity now by making a series of very short boards, getting good way upon her, and then easing her helm very gently down, allowing her to shoot the maximum possible distance to windward every time that we hove about. I mentioned the idea to Henderson, but he had not very much faith in it; his idea being that of most old salts, that the best way to work to windward was to break tacks as seldom as possible; he agreed, however, that it might perhaps be worth while to make the experiment and see what the result would be. We accordingly put my plan into practice, with such good effect that half-an-hour later we had actually succeeded in working up near enough to the pirate to bring her within range of our own guns. But meanwhile she had been most assiduously pegging away at us, in the first instance with her long gun only, but latterly with her 12-pounders—of which she mounted seven in each battery—as well, and we had by no means come off scathless, having been hulled three times, and losing two men killed and five wounded before a single shot of ours had reached her, though our spars had thus far escaped, and our rigging had not suffered to any very serious extent.

With our arrival within range of our own guns, however, matters began to be a little more lively; we were fortunate enough to have some half-a-dozen very excellent shots among us, and these men now began to make play, each man being evidently anxious to win for himself the proud distinction of being the champion shot of the ship, with the result that daylight began to show here and there through the pirate schooner's canvas, severed ropes streamed out from the spars, and the splinters began to fly on board her. Then a particularly lucky shot struck her main-masthead fair, just above the nip of her lower rigging, and the next moment down came her main-topmast, with its huge gaff-topsail, while the peak of her mainsail drooped until the gaff hung almost up and down.

"Hurrah, lads!" I cried exultantly; "now we have her. See how she pays off! She is bound to come to leeward now; she cannot help herself. Down helm, Mr Willoughby, and let her go round. Stand by to give her our starboard broadside as we cross her bows. Slap it right into the eyes of her— Phew! that's a nasty one," as a shot from her 32-pounder came along, smashing right through both our quarter-boats, cutting their keels clean in half, tearing a great gap in the bottom planking of each, filling the air in the immediate neighbourhood with splinters, and whizzing so close past my head that the wind of it whipped my hat off and overboard.

The two craft were now not more than a short half-mile distant, and fast approaching each other, the pirate's loss of after-sail causing her to fall broad off and come foaming down toward us, despite obvious efforts to keep her to the wind, while we on our side were making the most desperate efforts to get to windward and thus secure the advantage of the weather-gage, which, in a sea-fight, often means so much. Conned by Willoughby, who was acting master, the lively little *Wasp* swept round into the wind, fore-reaching magnificently in stays, and then paying smartly off on the starboard tack; and as she did so our three starboard pop-guns barked out, one after the other, and I saw the splinters fly white as the shot struck, close together, about half-way between her starboard hawse-pipe and her cathead, just at the precise moment when she was dead end-on to us. The shot must have raked her from end to end, and quite a small uproar of yells and shrieks that came floating down from her to us on the wings of the freshening breeze told us that they had wrought a very fair amount of execution on board her. But it was evident that her captain knew his business, for the next moment several hands sprang into her fore-rigging; her topsail, topgallantsail and royal were clewed up and furled with exemplary celerity; her jib was hauled down and stowed, and she was again brought to the wind, while half-a-dozen hands swarmed aloft to her mainmast-head to clear away the wreck of her topmast and to pass strops round the shattered stump, to hook the peak-halliard blocks to, and enable them to sway away the peak of the mainsail again. And all the while that this was doing they maintained their fire upon us with the most ferocious energy, and alas! with very deplorable results to the little *Wasp* and her crew, for we were by this time so close to each other that it was practically impossible for either side to miss; and now it was that her superior weight of metal began to tell.

Our casualties were by this time becoming serious, for we had already lost nine men killed outright, while every moment more wounded were being taken down into my cabin, where Saunders, the surgeon, was working like a nigger, affording temporary relief—he could do no more just then—to the injured. We were still devoting all our energies to the task of getting to windward of our antagonist, and firing at her as fast as our leaping guns could be loaded, in the endeavour to disable her, when they succeeded in bringing her again to the wind, and as she rounded-to they gave us their whole broadside of seven 12-pounders, with a shot from their long 32-pounder by way of make-weight. The result was absolutely disastrous, for as the iron shower hurtled about our ears there was a crashing, tearing sound aloft, and away went both our masts over the side, the foremast shot away close to the deck, while the mainmast went about half-way up its length. Nor, bad as this was, was it all, for poor Willoughby, who was standing by my side, had the top of his skull literally shot away, and fell dead into my arms. The next moment the carpenter came to me with the report that we had been hit between wind and water by a 32-pound shot, and that the schooner

was making water fast.

The pirates cheered with ferocious glee as they saw the plight to which they had reduced us, and their captain—a tall, handsome scoundrel, with a very Spanish-looking cast of countenance—had the impudence to leap up on the rail of his vessel and hail us, demanding to know whether we had struck!

“No!” I shouted back fiercely; “and we never will to such a hang-dog, murderous set of scoundrels as man that schooner. Do your worst, you villains. You have the advantage of us this time, but when next we meet it will be my turn!”

“You crow loudly, young cockerel,” retorted the pirate captain scornfully, “but if your men are wise they will leave their guns and go below, for I swear to you that if they fire another shot I will sink you!”

“Sink us, then, and be hanged to you!” I yelled back in reply. Then in my exasperation I whipped a pistol out of my belt, and levelling it at him, pulled the trigger. But he did not mean to be shot if he could help it,—preferring, I suppose, to take the risk of being hanged later on,—and the moment that he saw what I would be at he sprang off his perch so hurriedly that he fell headlong to the deck, while our lads sent up a howl of savage derision.

“Put a charge of grape in on top of your round shot, lads,” I ordered, “and blaze away as fast as you can load. The *Wasp* has lost her wings, but her sting remains, and we’ll make those scoundrels feel it yet before we have done with them!”

The men responded to this with a loud, fierce hurrah, and turned to their guns again as cheerfully as though they were still certain of victory, although there was probably not a man there who did not by that time realise that the chances were all against the gallant little schooner ever reaching port again.

The battle now raged with absolutely maniacal fury, the two schooners being by this time within biscuit-toss of each other, the pirate schooner lying on our weather-beam. The guns—so hot that they threatened to leap over the low rail into the sea—were loaded and fired as fast as the men could serve them, and, fighting at such close quarters, the carnage on both sides was frightful, the bulwarks of both vessels being practically shot away, and the guns and those who served them left absolutely defenceless. Our deck was like a shambles—there seemed to be more dead than living upon it—and the scuppers were all spouting blood, while the pirates were in scarcely better case, although it was now apparent that they had originally outnumbered us by something like three to one. How long the matter would have continued in this fashion it is impossible to say, but after we had thus been fighting almost hand to hand for about a quarter of an hour, during which the pirate schooner gradually drew ahead of us, a lucky shot from one of our guns brought down her mainmast, when she fell broad off, passed across our bows, raking us severely as she went, and then drove rapidly away to leeward, her people having apparently at length come to the conclusion that they had had all that they wanted in the way of fighting.

The moment it became certain that the fight was over I sank down upon the breech of the nearest gun, mopped the blood and perspiration from my face, and tried to understand the scene of ruin and carnage that surrounded me; for, with the cessation of the turmoil and excitement of battle, everything seemed suddenly to assume the inconsequence and unreality of a dream. I could not quite realise that the shot-torn, blood-bespattered wreck over which my gaze wandered wonderingly was the erstwhile smart and dainty little schooner of which I had been so proud, or that those maimed and disfigured forms lying broadcast about the deck were really dead men; also, my head ached most consumedly, there was a loud buzzing in my ears, the silence—or rather the comparative silence that succeeded to the continuous, sharp explosions of the guns, the excited shouts of the men, and the cries of the wounded—seemed weird, uncanny, unnatural; for now there were no sounds save the wash of the water alongside, an intermittent groaning—cut into now and then by the sharp cry of a man under the hands of the surgeon—coming up through the smashed skylight, and the low murmur of the men speaking to each other from time to time where they had flung themselves down exhausted between the guns. The fact was that I was suffering from the reaction that was inevitable after so fierce and protracted a fight—the battle having lasted for over an hour—and I felt that I must bestir myself or I should become light-headed, or hysterical, or something equally foolish. I, therefore, rose to my feet, called to the steward to bring me a glass of water—the water-cask which usually stood on deck having been smashed to staves early in the fight—and then gave orders for the men to secure the guns. I also sent young Hinton down below to ascertain and bring me the particulars of our casualties.

Thus far we had all been much too strenuously engaged, and our attention too fully occupied, to take note of the weather; but now, as I glanced round at the lowering heavens and observed their threatening aspect, I bethought me that, fatigued though we all were, there still remained an abundance of work to be done in preparation for the storm that was evidently brewing. For the sky was now completely overcast with a pall of dense, livid, purplish, slate-coloured cloud that clearly portended a gale; the wind was coming in hot, fierce, intermittent puffs that scourged the sea into miniature foam-flecked waves for a few seconds at a time and then dropped almost to a calm again, and upon looking at the barometer I saw that the mercury had fallen almost half-an-inch since I had last looked at it shortly before the commencement of the fight. The Spaniard had vanished, and the pirate schooner was still running away to leeward.

Presently young Hinton, the midshipman whom I had sent below to ascertain the extent of our casualties, came up to me with a list in his hand which he had himself prepared, Saunders, the surgeon, being at that moment far too busy to spare time for the making up of returns; and from this list I learned the appalling news that, of our entire complement of fifty-eight, all told, we had lost no less than seventeen killed, and thirty-two more or less severely wounded, leaving only a poor paltry nine of us untouched, of whom I was one. Fortunately, of the thirty-two wounded only about half of them were hurt severely enough to be rendered totally unfit for duty; but that was bad enough in all conscience, with the ship dismantled and leaking, and something very like a gale threatening.

I had just finished the perusal of young Hinton’s list when Henderson and the carpenter came up on deck, the former

bringing with him the keys of the magazine, which he had secured, in accordance with an order which I had sent down below to him, while Mills was fresh from his examination of the ship's interior. His report was anything but reassuring, for the news he brought was to the effect that we had been hulled no less than seventeen times, four of the shot that had hulled us being 32-pounders, one of which and two of the pirate's 12-pounders had struck us between wind and water. He added that he had plugged the holes as well as he could, but that there was nearly three feet of water in the hold, that the little ship was very severely strained, and that she was making water at the rate of nearly eight inches an hour!

Chapter Fourteen.

The End of the Wasp.

It was clear that in the face of such a report as that, and the threatening sky that frowned down upon us, it was not a moment in which to indulge in thoughts of rest, however loudly our poor aching bodies might clamour for it. There was much to be done to secure our own safety and that of our injured and helpless comrades, and very little time in which to do it; I therefore directed Pearce, the boatswain, to pipe all hands to splice the main-brace; and when this had been done the little band who were still capable of doing duty were divided into three parties—one of which, under Henderson, was stationed at the pumps, with orders to work at them until they sucked; while a second and much smaller party, under the leadership and guidance of the carpenter, was given the task of temporarily securing the various openings in the deck against the possible influx of water—both the skylight and the companion having been completely wrecked by shot; the third party, under Pearce, the boatswain, devoting itself to the task of clearing away the wreck of the spars, and securing as much as possible of the wreckage in order that we might have the wherewithal to give the schooner a jury rig that would enable us to take her into port. The pirate schooner, meanwhile, had continued to run away to leeward upon a course that would carry her to the northern coast of Hayti in a few hours.

The work went slowly forward—it could not be otherwise with men so utterly exhausted as were the little moiety of the *Wasp's* crew who survived that desperate fight, many of them smarting with the wounds that they had received—and meanwhile the weather grew ever more threatening, stimulating us all to exertions of which I am confident we should have been utterly incapable under more placable circumstances. Not that there was very much to find fault with at the moment, for it was not exactly blowing hard; but the gusts, which for the last hour or more had been sweeping over us, now from this quarter and anon from that, were steadily growing more frequent and stronger, while the sky had become black as night. But before night actually fell we had made shift to pump the schooner dry, the hatches were battened down, the skylight and companion openings had been protected, after a fashion, and we had cleared away the wreck of the mainmast, saving the spar and all attached; and, having done this, the men declared that they must have a meal and some rest before they could again turn-to. And I felt that their claim was just; for indeed they had done wonders, taking all things into consideration. I had not the heart to spur them to further effort just then, for I had worked with them and, therefore, knew from personal experience how utterly exhausted they must feel, and how impossible it would be to get further useful work out of them until they had rested for an hour or two. Indeed, there did not appear to be any good and sufficient reason why I should call upon them for more hard work just then. It is true that much that I intended to do still remained undone, the most important task of all being the getting up of something in the nature of a jury rig; but, short-handed as we now were, that would prove a very formidable task—much too formidable and too protracted to justify the hope that it could be accomplished before the expected gale came; and as I considered the question, and talked it over with Henderson and the boatswain, it seemed that if it could not be completed beforehand, it would really be better on the whole to defer it until after the gale had blown over; I, therefore, gave the order to knock off work and get supper and a rest. Two minutes later the decks were deserted, save by myself, and I was bracing myself up to keep a lookout as best I might.

I felt bound to acknowledge to myself that our situation was very much the reverse of satisfactory; for there we were, totally demoralized, strained and leaking badly, our crew exhausted, and only nine of us unwounded, the land barely twenty-five miles to leeward of us, and, to crown all, a heavy gale springing up. Fortunately, we had been able to make all the provision that was possible to meet the impending struggle—for the wreck of our mainmast was now inboard, while the lanyards of the fore-rigging had been cut away on both sides; and the wreckage of the foremast was now under the schooner's bows, attached to the hull by the stays only, so that it served as a floating anchor, to which the little vessel was already riding head to wind.

I allowed the men two hours in which to rest and refresh themselves, and then once more summoned them on deck; for upon sounding the well I found that, although the schooner had been pumped dry before we had cried "Spell-ho!" there was now eighteen inches of water in her; and I was determined that this leak should be kept down by frequent spells of pumping. It would never do to have the little hooker waterlogged while battling for life in a gale, as there was little doubt that she would be in the course of the next few hours.

In fact, while the men were still toiling at the pumps we got our first real taste of it. For up to that moment the wind had been coming in a steadily-increasing succession of scuffling gusts, each more fierce than its predecessor, first from this quarter of the compass, and then from that, with quite moderate breezes in between, mostly from a northerly direction, that sometimes moderated almost to a calm. But now, after a somewhat longer spell than usual of the moderate breeze, the wind quite suddenly increased in force to that of a full gale, swooping down upon us in a mad scuffle that twirled the little craft about like a teetotum for a minute or two as it howled and raved around us, lashing the whole surface of the sea into one unbroken sheet of foam and spray, and then it settled down and began to blow great guns from the northward, whipping up a nasty short, choppy sea into which, within ten minutes, the little schooner was plunging to the height of her hawse-holes.

This however, as it turned out, was only the beginning of it; for when once the gale had fairly broken loose it steadily

grew more furious, with the result that in about half-an-hour we were plunging bows under, while, to add to our difficulties, the violent motion strained the little vessel and opened her seams to such an extent that, so far from getting the pumps to suck, it needed the utmost exertions of all hands, working in quick relays, to keep the leak from gaining upon us.

Clearly, it would never do to permit such a state of things as that to continue, for the only partially rested men would soon become exhausted by the laborious toil of the pumps; and then what would become of us? I, therefore, summoned a council of war, consisting of the gunner, the carpenter, and the boatswain, to whom I explained my view of the situation, and asked their advice. It was my opinion—founded upon our experiences during the recent fight—that if the pirate schooner was to be tackled successfully, it would have to be by a bigger craft than the *Wasp*, or, at all events, that if the *Wasp* was to be again employed against the pirates, she would certainly have to be equipped with a very much heavier armament; her insignificant little array of six 9-pounders could never be expected to cope successfully with the other craft's fourteen 12-pounders and her long 32. Therefore, I argued, since our present armament could never be of further use to us, so far as the pirates were concerned, while at the present moment they were doing much to make the schooner strain herself to pieces, and were indeed actually imperilling her safety and that of all on board her, why not throw them overboard, and so relieve the little vessel of their weight and give her the best possible chance to weather the gale? Henderson and the boatswain were rather opposed to this plan, the gunner suggesting, as an alternative, that we should cut adrift from the wreckage that was holding us head to wind, and endeavour to get before the wind and scud; and to this view they still adhered, even after I had pointed out to them that the island of Hayti constituted a lee-shore only some twenty-five miles distant, upon which we must inevitably be dashed before morning if we adopted their plan. The carpenter, however, took my view that we must lose the guns in any case if the schooner went ashore, and probably the ship and our lives as well; while by making a timely sacrifice of the guns there was at least a possibility of saving the ship. We were thus two to two; and as I was absolutely convinced that the plan advocated by the gunner and the boatswain involved the destruction of the ship and the drowning of at least as many of the poor fellows below as were too seriously injured to be capable of taking care of themselves, I unhesitatingly decided in favour of my own alternative, and at once gave the order to throw the guns overboard without further ado.

Watching our opportunity, therefore, and taking advantage of the roll of the ship, we launched our 9-pounders overboard, one after the other, until all six of them had vanished in the ocean depths; and the increased liveliness of the little vessel at once demonstrated her relief at the loss of so much weight from her deck.

The carpenter had just sounded the well, and had announced the joyous news that at last the pumps were gaining upon the leak—which announcement was greeted with a feeble cheer from the now utterly exhausted men, who had for so long been toiling at the almost hopeless task of clearing the ship of the inflowing water—when a sudden and dreadful change occurred in the weather. The wind, which had been blowing a whole gale a moment before, fell dead in an instant, an appalling darkness overspread the firmament, and the atmosphere suddenly became so rarefied that it seemed impossible for one to draw a full breath; the sea, which a moment earlier had been breaking furiously, ceased to do so, and instead began to leap high into the air, falling back with a splash that, in the sudden stillness, seemed positively terrifying, and the schooner, swinging broadside-on, rolled so furiously that she momentarily threatened to turn bottom-up, while those of us who were on deck had to seize hurriedly the first fixed portion of the vessel's framework that we could lay hands on, to save ourselves from being pitched overboard like a shot out of a catapult. To continue pumping under such circumstances was impossible, for it needed both hands and all one's strength to merely hold on.

"Now what's goin' to happen, I wonder!" growled the gunner, who was clinging with me to a belaying-pin in a part of the rail that still remained intact in the wake of the main rigging. "I can understand a gale o' wind, Mr Delamere, but this here sudden calm don't seem natural to me."

"It is not natural," said I; "the mere look of the sky is sufficient to assure us of that. There is something behind it, you may be certain, though what it is I am sure I cannot say; possibly it may be a fresh outfly from some other point of the compass, or it may end up with a violent thunderstorm, though I do not think it will; that sky—"

"No, no," interrupted Henderson, "there's no thunder there, sir, ye may take my word for it. Listen, Mr Delamere! D'ye hear that?"

I thought for an instant that he was directing my attention to the pitiful cries and moans that were being extorted from the unhappy wounded down below as they were flung hither and thither by the furious lurches of the schooner, and I was about to make some sort of reply when a low moaning smote upon my ear, increasing with appalling rapidity to a fierce medley of sounds, in which the savage roars of maddened beasts and the shrieks and wailings of mortally terrified human beings seemed to be about equally mingled; a long line of phosphorescent white appeared upon the northern horizon, showing up with ghastly distinctness against the background of black scowling sky; a fierce scuffle of hot wet wind swept over us and was gone again, leaving a taste of salt upon our lips, and with a deafening howl, as of concentrated fury, the tempest leapt upon us, filling the air with drenching spindrift and scudwater, while, taking the schooner fair abeam, it heeled her over until the water was up nearly level with the coamings of her hatchways. For nearly a minute she lay thus, and despite the fact that she was dismasted I believed that she was about to turn turtle with us, when gradually, as the drag of the wreckage ahead brought her round head to wind again, she righted to an even keel once more and rode almost as still as though she were in harbour, while the spindrift and scudwater raked her decks fore and aft like a continuous tempest of small shot, which stung our faces and hands so severely that it was literally impossible to face it, and turning our backs to it and dropping upon our hands and knees, we were driven to creep for shelter wherever we could find it.

The sea had gone down as though by magic, for such was the power of the wind that the slightest irregularity of surface, the slightest lift of a wave, was at once torn off and swept away to leeward in the form of spray so dense that it was impossible to see farther than a few yards in any direction. And perhaps the worst and most terrifying feature of the whole experience was that there was nothing to be done—nothing that we could possibly do to abate

the peril of our situation; we were as absolutely helpless as though we had been bound hand and foot, and could merely crouch impotently waiting for the end, whatever it might be.

But it was not possible for matters to continue very long as they were; the hurricane endured only for about twenty minutes, and then moderated to the strength of a heavy gale, whereupon the sea began to rise again with frightful rapidity; and half-an-hour after the first stroke of the hurricane the schooner was pitching bows under, and shipping increasing quantities of water at every plunge. And now, as we once more bestirred ourselves, we were confronted with a fresh calamity. For our makeshift protection of the damaged companion and skylight, as well as the fore-scuttle, had been swept away, probably at the first stroke of the hurricane, although not one of us had observed it, and already vast quantities of water were pouring into the little vessel's interior, principally through the fore-scuttle. We had scarcely made this alarming discovery when Saunders, the surgeon, who had remained below through all the hubbub, busily engaged in attending to the wounded, came up on deck and confirmed our worst fears by informing us that the schooner was rapidly filling, the water having already risen to the level of the cabin floor!

It was now obvious that the little ship was doomed; the hurricane, coming so close upon the heels of the fight, and smiting us before we had had time to repair our damages, was proving too much for her; she was strained and battered all to pieces, and nothing that we could do out there, short-handed, and buffeted by that pitiless wind and sea, could avail to save her. She was doomed, and now the utmost that lay in our power to do was to make some sort of provision for our own safety and that of our wounded shipmates.

Yet, when one came to consider the question, what could we do? Our boats, badly damaged by the shot of the pirates in the first place, had been utterly destroyed and swept away by the first furious stroke of the hurricane; while by the same agency our decks had been swept clear and clean of everything not actually bolted down, except the wreckage of the mainmast, which we had lashed firmly to ring bolts in the deck before the gale arose. There was that wreckage, it is true, and also the wreckage of the foremast under the bows; if it could possibly be got alongside, a raft of sorts might perhaps be constructed out of that, and there our resources would end. But there was no time for pondering and consideration, whatever was done would have to be done at once; I therefore called the gunner, the carpenter, and the boatswain to me, hastily explained to them my ideas as to the construction of a raft, and bade them muster all available hands and get to work forthwith, while Millar (the purser) and the cabin steward were instructed to get together as large a quantity of provisions and water as possible, wherewith to stock the structure when finished.

Now that the wind had moderated from hurricane force to that of a heavy gale, the sea rose with really startling rapidity, and was already running so high that when we came to set about the task of cutting



AT THE MERCY OF THE SEA

adrift the wreckage of the foremast, with the idea of hauling it alongside and utilising it in the construction of a raft, it at once became evident that the time for undertaking such a piece of work was already past; for even alongside the schooner, and partially under her lee, the wreckage would be swept so violently by the breaking seas that it would be impossible for men to go over the side and work upon it without being washed off and drowned; we were, therefore, compelled to abandon that part of our plan and turn our attention to the construction of a raft on deck which would float clear when the battered hull sank from under our feet. But alas I even that was not to be; for we had scarcely got the wreckage of the mainmast cut adrift from its lashings, and were busily engaged in arranging it, with the topmast and the mainboom, in the form of a triangle as a base upon which to construct a platform, when it happened that the schooner, having just surmounted a sea, got pinned down by the head, in consequence of all the water in her rushing forward as she settled down, stem-on, into the succeeding trough. At this critical moment a yell of dismay from the carpenter caused us all to look up from our work, and we beheld him, with his eyes almost starting from their sockets, glaring and pointing ahead. A single glance in that direction sufficed to account for his terror. For there, sweeping down upon us with deadly implacability, towered a

perfect mountain of a sea, its front almost as steep as the side of a house, and its foaming, hissing crest reared threateningly aloft as high as our lower-mastheads—had they been standing. It was at once apparent to us all that, pinned down as the schooner was at that moment, by the bulk of the water in her interior having concentrated itself in the fore part of her, she could not possibly lift in time to rise over the summit of that on-sweeping sea, it must inevitably break on board her, sweep her from stem to stern, and send her to the bottom! For a second we all stood, petrified with consternation; then, with a yell of "Hold on everybody for your lives!" I dashed to the companion opening and shouted to those below, "On deck, all hands of you; up you come, men, this instant; you have not a second to lose!"

A dreadful, wailing cry of despair floated upward from below in response to my warning, and was echoed by the people on deck as that awful liquid mountain hovered above us, seeming to pause for an instant, as though in sentient enjoyment of our helplessness and terror. The next moment its crest curled over and the whole mass of water seemed to hurl itself headlong upon the hapless schooner, foaming in over her bows and burying them fathoms deep in its heart. I felt the poor shattered hull quiver and tremble beneath me like a frightened thing as the giant wave smote her, and then I was seized by the on-rushing water, swept off my feet, overwhelmed, whirled helplessly hither and thither in the midst of a medley of whirling wreckage, flying ropes'-ends, and struggling men. Opening my eyes I beheld the hull of the schooner, a short distance away, standing almost perpendicular, and slowly gliding downwards, bows first. Even as I looked she vanished into the dark profundity beneath, and then I directed my glances above me. It seemed that I was fathoms deep, for the phosphorescent foam that boiled overhead looked almost as far aloft as a frigate's lower yard; and by the same ghastly phosphorescent light I could distinguish vaguely a number of swirling objects, some of which appeared to be merely inanimate wreckage, while others looked like struggling human beings. Then, suddenly conscious of the fact that I was within the influence of the downward draught of the sinking schooner, and was being dragged down after her, I instinctively struck upward desperately with hands and feet, fighting to return to the surface. I must have been dragged down to a very considerable depth, for I presently lost sight of the phosphorescent light on the surface caused by the breaking of the seas, and found myself involved in pitchy darkness, struggling madly, and with my lungs almost bursting. How long this awful struggle lasted I have no means of determining; probably it was much less than a minute, but the time seemed to drag itself out first to minutes, then to hours, and finally I lost all idea of time, all sense of my terrible situation, all recollection of the dreadful catastrophe that had just happened, and found myself, as in a vivid dream, re-enacting many a long-forgotten episode of earlier days. Then, in a moment, all these scenes vanished, and I was suddenly—I knew not how—on the surface, gasping for breath, half smothered with the seas that were breaking over my head, and convulsively clutching a rope that had somehow found its way into my grasp. Gradually it dawned upon me that this rope must be fast to something—for it alternately tautened and slackened with the sweep and swirl of the sea—thereupon I proceeded to haul cautiously upon it, with the result that I presently found myself alongside the floating wreckage of the mainmast. With some difficulty I at length managed to drag myself up and get astride this substantial spar; and then, finding that it did not roll over and throw me off, as I more than half feared it would, I gradually worked my way along it until I found myself close up against the crosstrees. And then I thought I perceived the reason why the spar maintained its stability so well. The mainsail had been set when the mast was shot away, and the gaff, with the sail attached, still retained its position on the mast, the main halliards having somehow jammed in the block, and this it evidently was that prevented the spar from capsizing. The rope by which I had hauled myself alongside the spar proved to be the end of the peak-halliards, and I thought that if I made this fast, and so prevented the peak from sagging, I should secure still further the stability of the wreckage; I accordingly did so, knotting the bight round one arm of the crosstrees, and then firmly lashing myself to the same arm with the loose end of the halliard.

I was now much better off than when I first found myself overboard, for I had a stout spar to support me, and might remain afloat until I fell off from exhaustion; moreover, even when my end of the spar was submerged—as of course it very frequently was—I was never buried deeper than my armpits, while there were moments when I was hove up clear out of the water altogether. Besides, the water was quite warm. I was therefore by no means uncomfortable, notwithstanding my situation.

Having made myself secure, I next began to look about me with the view of ascertaining how many of my companions in misfortune had survived the catastrophe; for I had not a doubt that a few at least would be as lucky as myself. But to my horror I found that I was the sole occupant of this particular mass of wreckage; and although I shouted at the full power of my lungs until I was hoarse, in the hope that if there were any more survivors they would hear me and thus be guided to the same refuge that I had gained, the sole response was the howling of the gale and the hissing wash of the breaking seas. True, there was a moment when I fancied that I heard a faint shout in reply to my cries, but I concluded that it was only imaginary, for I did not hear—or fancy that I heard—it again. Then, as opportunity offered, I looked about me in quest of other wreckage, thinking that possibly there might be a few fragments to some of which one or more of my shipmates might be clinging, but the darkness was so intense that I could not see farther than some two or three fathoms in either direction; and indeed it was only the faint phosphorescent light given off by the breaking seas that enabled me to see anything at all, even at that short distance. The thought occurred to me that, as whatever floating wreckage there might be would all drive in the same direction, possibly I might be more fortunate in the morning; and with this reflection I composed myself as well as I could to rest, for I was by this time literally half-dead with fatigue.

So utterly exhausted was I that, despite my desperate plight, I believe I actually did lose consciousness in sleep at brief intervals during that terrible night, for the dawn came very much more speedily than I had dared to hope, and with its appearance the gale broke, the wind perceptibly moderating with the rising of the sun. As soon as it was light enough to permit objects to be distinguished I aroused myself from the lethargy that seemed to have gripped me, and proceeded to search the heaving surface of the ocean as well as my aching eyes would allow.

As a matter of fact, there actually were a few small scattered fragments of wreckage floating at no great distance from me, but there was no sign of a human being, far or near. Then I scanned very carefully the horizon in every direction, but particularly to the northward, in the hope of discovering a sail of some sort heading toward me; but the

horizon was bare, save to the southward, where the high land of Hayti loomed up with startling and quite deceptive distinctness. Although I had hoped that I might perchance be so fortunate as to sight a sail, the hope was a very feeble one, and my disappointment by no means acute, for I was perfectly well aware that I was many miles too far to the eastward to render the appearance of a sail of any sort in the least degree probable.

With the pangs of hunger beginning to assail me, and not the smallest fragment of any kind of food wherewith to relieve them, I began for the first time to realise fully the exceeding awkwardness of my situation, and to realise, too, that if deliverance was to come to me I must bestir myself and do what might be possible to meet it, for to remain passively lashed to that inert piece of drifting wreckage might very well mean a slow and agonising death by starvation. Yet, after all, what could I do? The land was my nearest refuge, and that, I considered, must be at least twenty miles distant, altogether too far to dream of swimming to it, although I rather prided myself upon my prowess as a long-distance swimmer. But twenty miles! The idea was ridiculous, especially in that heavy sea, in my exhausted condition, without food, and with no means of getting any. I looked rather longingly at the smaller fragments of wreckage floating in my neighbourhood; if I could but secure one of them of sufficient size to support me partially, yet not large enough materially to hamper my progress through the water, I might perhaps with its aid be able to accomplish the distance, great though it was, before my strength entirely gave out. But the run of the sea and their greater buoyancy were already widening the distance between them and the comparatively massive piece to which I had lashed myself, and I regretted that it had not occurred to me earlier to abandon the mainmast in favour of one of them the moment that the light of dawn revealed them to me.

I struggled into a standing position on the spar that supported me, steadying myself upon my somewhat precarious perch by grasping the arms of the crosstrees, and carefully examined such fragments as came within my ken with the heave of the sea. The detached pieces, which seemed to consist mostly of pieces of planking, with what looked very like a hatch, were all floating together, pretty much in a bunch, with only a few fathoms of water separating any two pieces; I thought that if I could but get in among them surely I ought to be able to find a piece that would serve my purpose. The point that worried me was whether, in my exhausted state, and in so heavy a sea, I dared make the attempt to swim unaided the comparatively short distance that separated me from those coveted fragments; but I reflected that, if I had not the strength to achieve so simple a feat as that, I should certainly never be able to accomplish the longer swim, even with the advantage of a support; the choice seemed therefore to lie between the risk of drowning on the one hand, and that of starvation upon the other; and it took me but a moment to decide in favour of the former. Yes, I told myself, better in every way to drown than to starve, and the sooner the matter was decided, the better.

To give myself the best possible chance I flung off my jacket and kicked off my shoes, retaining only my shirt and trousers. Then, casting off the lashings by which I had secured myself to the shattered mainmast, I stood up, and carefully took the bearings of the *flotsam* relative to the sun, to guide me when swimming. This done, I poised myself upon the spar preparatory to diving off the mast, and had raised my hands above my head, when not half-a-dozen fathoms away, and immediately between me and the spot for which I was bound, I saw the dorsal fins of two enormous sharks sculling quietly to and fro, as though to blockade me and cut me off from my only hope of escape.

Chapter Fifteen.

My Voyage on the Hatch.

I pulled myself up just in the nick of time, for in another second I should have made the plunge, and that would have meant death, a horrible death; for the splash which I should have made upon entering the water must have inevitably attracted the attention of the monsters and brought them upon me with a rush. It almost appeared as though some malicious influence was at work to prevent my escape, as though fate was against me! Yet, after all, it was not fate that was to blame, but my own dullness in not perceiving my chance and availing myself of it the moment that it presented itself. If instead of vacillating, as I had done, I had promptly taken the plunge, I should have accomplished my short swim before the sharks had made their appearance and cut off my retreat. When I first sighted the detached fragments of wreckage the distance which separated them from me was trifling; now it was at least double as far, and was increasing rapidly; soon it would pass out of sight altogether and my last hope would be gone.

I stood watching those two sharks as they swam lazily to and fro between me and the fast receding wreckage. It really looked as though they were aware of my presence, had divined my purpose, and were determined to frustrate it. For what seemed at least half-an-hour, but was probably not more than ten minutes, the voracious fish tacked this way and that, approaching me a little nearer every tack, until at length they were so close that I could have leapt upon the back of the nearer one, so close that I could distinctly see their entire bulk; and the sight turned my blood cold, for they were veritable monsters, one of them being fully twenty feet long from snout to the tip of the unevenly fluked tail, while the other was perhaps three feet shorter. And there was now no room to doubt that they were fully aware of my existence, for every time that they passed me their great goggle eyes glared at me hungrily with an expression which seemed to say—"All right, my boy; you may hold on there as long as you like: but we will wait for you, and get you at last."

I began to cast about in my mind for some means by which I might drive the creatures away. I had a knife with a long, strong, sharp blade, attached to my neck by a lanyard, and I looked about me to see if there was anything available which I could convert into a spear by lashing the knife to it; but there was nothing; and I was still puzzling my brain when suddenly the two fish paused in their patrol, swung quickly round, and the next instant made sail dead to windward, as though they had just caught the scent of some especially tempting morsel.

Now, if ever, was my time, I told myself; the brutes had undoubtedly left me, there were no other sharks in sight, and every second was precious; therefore, without allowing myself an instant for pause and hesitation, I quietly slid off the mainmast into the water and struck out smoothly and steadily for a certain knoll ashore, in line with which I had

last seen the floating fragments that I desired to reach.

It was still blowing quite fresh, and there was a very heavy sea running; but it no longer broke badly, and it was in my favour, every sea that overtook me flinging me forward at least a couple of fathoms, so that I made excellent progress, as I ascertained when I turned for a moment to glance back at the mass of wreckage that I had just abandoned. I saw also that, whatever happened, I must keep on, there must be no thought of turning back, for while the run of the sea was helping me grandly in my progress to leeward, it was powerful enough to render return to my late refuge an impossibility; I, therefore, set my teeth and, with my eyes fixed upon the distant knoll which was to serve me as a guide, struck out with a long, quiet, steady stroke that I knew from experience I could maintain for hours on end, if need were. Of course, I kept a very sharp lookout for the wreckage that I was aiming for, but saw nothing of it for a long time, and more than once a qualm of something very nearly approaching terror seized me, as the idea suggested itself that possibly I had missed my goal, and was every moment leaving it farther behind me. I was fast approaching a state of panic that might very easily have resulted in fatal consequences, when it suddenly occurred to me that, of course, it would be quite impossible for me to see those insignificant fragments of flotsam, unless they and I each happened to be hove up on the crest of a wave at precisely the same moment, and the reflection so far steadied my nerves that I was able successfully to combat the almost irresistible impulse to put forth my whole strength in a frantic struggle to increase my speed through the water and quickly settle the question one way or the other. My reward came to me some ten minutes later when, as I went soaring up on the breast of an unusually high wave, I caught a momentary glimpse of what was undoubtedly a small piece of plank of some sort floating in the midst of a lacework of foam on the crest of a wave immediately in line with the knoll by which I was directing my course, and which, like everything else at a greater distance than some fifty or sixty fathoms, I could only see when on the summit of a wave. But the fragment of plank still seemed to be a terribly long way off, my strength was beginning to flag, and despair was again gripping at my heart when, as I rose upon the next sea, I was cheered by the quite unexpected sight of a considerable quantity of wreckage not more than a hundred fathoms distant. The sight renewed my courage, my composure returned; I was once more calm enough to be able to husband my remaining strength and employ it to the best advantage; I found myself steadily gaining upon the objects of my pursuit; and finally, after a long and dreadfully exhausting struggle, I arrived in the midst of the wreckage.

The first thing I came to happened to be a seaman's chest, which had undoubtedly floated up through the hatchway when the schooner foundered. It floated deep, for in addition to being full of water it evidently contained several articles of the usual kind which a sailor takes to sea with him; but it had a sufficient reserve of buoyancy to afford me an appreciable measure of support, and I clung to it while recovering my breath and resting my wearied limbs after my long swim; it also enabled me to look round at my leisure and make up my mind as to which of the objects in sight would best serve my purpose. There was one of the halves of the wheel grating floating at no great distance from me, but it was a small, thin affair, made of oak, possessing no very great amount of buoyancy, and, although it would undoubtedly be better than nothing at all, I quickly came to the conclusion that there were other pieces that would serve my purpose better. There was, for instance, a hatch—probably one of the main hatches; and after some consideration I decided that I could not do better than secure possession of it. But I wanted something else as well; I could not resign myself to the idea of merely supporting myself upon it and passively allowing the wind and sea to take me whithersoever they would; there was land in sight, and it was my purpose to reach it, if possible, therefore I required something in the nature of a paddle wherewith to propel my hatch and guide it in the right direction; and presently I saw a piece of splintered plank, about four-feet long and six inches wide, which looked more suited to my purpose than anything else in sight. I had by this time quite recovered my breath, and was also somewhat rested; I, therefore, abandoned the chest without more ado, and, swimming first to the piece of plank, secured possession of it, and then, pushing it before me, headed for the hatch, which I soon reached.

To climb up on the hatch was a very much more difficult feat than I had imagined it would be, for my first efforts merely resulted in causing it to turn over; but at length, having considered the matter a little, I managed partly to guide it under me, and partly to climb up on it, until I had it fairly under me, when, to my great delight, I found that it was just buoyant enough to support my weight, and that by carefully seating myself cross-legged, tailor fashion, in the exact centre of it, I could keep it right side up. I next experimented with my makeshift paddle, and although the hatch proved so terribly crank that I was several times in imminent danger of capsizing by the mere sway of my body from side to side, I presently acquired the trick of keeping my balance, and found, to my great delight, that I could actually progress, although only slowly and at the cost of great exertion.

Strangely enough, I had not thus far suffered very greatly from thirst, although something like eighteen hours had elapsed since the last draught had passed my lips; but my sense of hunger was by this time painfully acute. I had no means, however, of satisfying my gnawing craving for food, and I, therefore, addressed myself to the task of paddling my tiny raft shoreward, fully convinced that the only hope of saving my life lay in reaching the land before the scanty remains of my strength became exhausted.

I estimated, from the height of the sun above the horizon, that it was about nine o'clock in the morning when I fairly started upon my shoreward voyage, and the exasperating slowness with which I drew away from the rest of the wreckage caused me to put my speed through the water at not more than a mile an hour at the utmost, while the grey misty appearance of the land for which I was making convinced me that it must be at least twenty miles distant; I had, therefore, something like another twenty-four hours of continuous laborious paddling before me before I might once more hope to feel the solid earth beneath my feet, and find something—were it no more than a little wild fruit—wherewith to stay my hunger. But this was not all: the skin of my hands had become so exceedingly soft and tender through long immersion in the water that the sharp edges of the board which I was using as a paddle quickly caused them to blister, and although I paused long enough in my labours to enable me to trim those sharp edges away with my knife, and to work the board into somewhat more convenient shape, the blistering process continued until within about an hour my palms were quite raw, and smarting most atrociously from the salt in the water. Moreover, I had lost my hat, and the sun struck down so fiercely upon my unprotected head that I was soon nearly delirious with headache and the throbbing of my old wound, received in the attack upon the pirate brigantine on the *Costa Firme*.

Still, headache or no headache, blisters or no blisters, there was the land, yet a long distance off, and it had to be reached before my strength gave out, or my life would pay the forfeit; so I set my teeth and paddled doggedly on, hour after hour, my hunger ever growing keener, while now I began to experience in addition the torments of thirst, my whole body became racked with aches and pains as though I had been unmercifully bruised and beaten, my head throbbled until it seemed as if it would burst open, and, as for my hands, they at length felt as though the rough paddle were white-hot iron; I had certainly never in all my life before experienced such a complication of agonising pains. And, despite it all, the land seemed to draw never an inch nearer.

I think I must at length have become light-headed, for gradually a feeling stole over me that everything—my surroundings, my situation, and my suffering—was unreal; that I was the victim of a peculiarly ghastly and horrible nightmare; and that I should by and by be wakened fortunately to find that I was in my own bunk, and that the events of the past twenty-four hours had been nothing more than an exceptionally vivid and realistic dream. From this state I was partially aroused by seeing a number of glittering objects start out of the sea all round me, while at the same instant I was conscious of receiving a sharp blow on the chest, when, on looking down into my lap, I saw a fine flying-fish wriggling and flapping there, making a gallant but ineffectual effort to hoist himself out of the hollow formed by my crossed legs, and return to the water. For a second or two I stared stupidly down at the struggling creature, and then it seemed to dawn upon my dazed faculties that here at last was food, something that would at least mitigate for a time the fierce pangs of my gnawing hunger, and in a very frenzy of eagerness I clutched the unfortunate fish and bit savagely into its writhing body!

Yes, I know that the idea is inexpressibly repugnant, even revolting, yet I solemnly declare that never in my life before had I tasted anything so exquisitely delicious as that raw fish, never had I so keenly enjoyed a meal. I am glad to believe that there will be very few who can sympathise with or appreciate my enjoyment; for, reader, you must have experienced the first agonies of starvation—which are the worst—before you can do so. But, revolting or not, I am profoundly convinced that I owe my life to that meal, for my senses returned to me at once upon its completion; and although with them there also returned a full appreciation of the acuteness of my physical discomfort, I felt distinctly revived and reinvigorated. Moreover, with the full return of my senses I became aware that, after all, my painful efforts had not been nearly so ineffectual as I had imagined them to be, the land being now appreciably nearer than it had been at daylight that morning, a few of its bolder details being now visible.

And now once more I was sufficiently rational to take cognisance of the flight of time. I was not at all certain of my bearings, but I felt that the sun must certainly have crossed the meridian—that the eternity of suffering through which I had passed could never have been compressed into a short half-hour or so—and if I was correct in this surmise the hour must be somewhere about three o'clock in the afternoon.

Three o'clock in the afternoon! And the land still so far away that many further hours of toil and agony must be endured ere I might hope to reach it! My brain reeled again at the mere prospect of it, and in a perfect frenzy of despair I resumed my paddle, crying aloud mad, incoherent prayers to God that He would either send me help in my extremity, or mercifully put an immediate end to my sufferings. Then another thought came to torment me: in something like three hours the sun would set, darkness would encompass me about, and if the sky should become obscured with clouds and the stars be hidden, how should I continue to find my way? At that idea I looked about me—my mind had been too confused, and too busily occupied with other matters to take intelligent note of the weather during the last few hours—and I was somewhat relieved to observe that the sky was now clear, save for a few scattered, solemnly drifting clouds, that the weather had a tolerably settled appearance, that the wind had moderated to quite a gentle breeze, and that the sea had gone down very considerably and was no longer breaking. This certainly was a point in my favour, since I was not any longer in momentary peril of being capsized or washed off my frail ark; but the advantage was to a certain extent counterbalanced by the fact that the run of the sea was not materially helping me.

Wearily yet desperately I continued to ply my clumsy paddle, first on this side and then on the other, and with alarming rapidity my sufferings seemed to grow in acuteness until I found myself moaning and uttering short, sharp cries of distress with every movement of my body, ay, and with every breath I drew; for now, to add to my discomfort, I suddenly became aware that my lungs were in some way affected, and that the mere act of breathing seemed to tear them asunder. Yet, though my situation appeared to be so utterly hopeless, I doggedly persevered in my efforts, telling myself over and over again, out loud, that if I would but hold out long enough I must, in the natural order of things, eventually reach the shore and succour. I think it was about this time that I finally lost control of myself, for thenceforward I was conscious that I was continually talking to myself—in a hoarse, guttural croak, that even now I shudder to call to mind—now arguing, now encouraging, now reproaching myself, until at length my ideas wandered away to all sorts of incongruous subjects; and by turns I detected myself laughing, singing, praying, apostrophising the sun, the clouds, the distant land, and even the spirits of my drowned companions, whom I imagined to be crowding round me and trying to drag me off the floating hatch. I was aware, in a vague, impersonal fashion, of the gradual decline of the sun toward the west, of his disappearance beneath the horizon, and of the fact that just as the outlines of the land ahead were fading into the gathering darkness a small spark of light sprang into view somewhere in the direction that I was steering for, and then suddenly all grew black about me, there was a singing in my ears—and oblivion.

When consciousness returned, and I opened my eyes, I found myself stretched upon a bed in a large and lofty room, very barely furnished, there being nothing in the apartment save the bed upon which I lay, a large old-fashioned wardrobe, a dressing-table, a small round table by my bedside, and two massive carved chairs upholstered in stamped leather which showed signs of having seen many years of service. It was night, apparently, for the only illumination came from a large handsome lamp that had the appearance of being wrought out of silver. One of the two chairs in the room stood by the side of my bed, and was occupied by a very respectable-looking negress of some forty years of age, or thereabout, sound asleep. Two jugs, one of porcelain and one of cut glass, stood on the table, in company with a large tumbler and a cup with a spoon in it. The glass jug was three-parts full of lemonade, if my eyes did not deceive me, and the sight of it suddenly caused me to become acutely conscious of the fact that I was athirst. Had the negress been awake I would have asked her to give me a drink, but seeing that she was sleeping the sleep

of the just I decided to help myself, and with that intent essayed to raise myself in bed. But I might as well have attempted to lift the house itself, for when I came to move I discerned, to my consternation, that I was so weak I could scarcely stir hand or foot, much less raise my entire body. In my alarm and distress I unwittingly gave vent to a feeble groan, which, faint as it was, proved sufficient to arouse my attendant, who stirred in her chair, adjusted her turban, and then, rising to her feet, leaned over the bed and peered down into my face. For some seconds she stood thus, when—her eyes having adjusted themselves to the rather dim light of the lamp—she perceived that I was awake.

“Ah!” she murmured, in a half whisper, in Spanish, “the Señor is at length himself again, thanks be to all the blessed saints! And how are you feeling, Señor?”

“Very thirsty,” I replied, in the same language, which I spoke fairly well, and to my amazement, though I had intended to speak out loud, my voice was no more than a scarcely audible whisper, which the negress had to bend her head to catch.

“*Bueno!*” she ejaculated, with every evidence of keen satisfaction; “the Señor is thirsty—and he has the Spanish. He shall drink, and then,”—she laid her hand upon my forehead, and I now discovered, to my further astonishment, that my head was swathed in bandages—“yes, then the medicine, and more sleep.”

So saying, she filled the big tumbler with lemonade—how delicious it looked with the thin shreds of lemon and the leaves of mint floating on its surface!—passed her arm very gently beneath my shoulders, raised me to a semi-sitting posture, and applied the tumbler to my lips.

Oh! how good, how delicious, how refreshing was that long, cool draught; how grateful to the parched palate its exquisite acidity of flavour! You talk of nectar; but my belief at that moment was that nectar was merely lemonade under another name! I smacked my lips audibly as I gasped for breath after emptying the tumbler, and my sable friend smiled with satisfaction. Then, still holding me, she poured about a wine-glassful of very dark-brown—almost black—liquid from the porcelain jug into the cup and presented it to me. This, too, I drank, for I was still thirsty; but the “medicine” was by no means so palatable as the lemonade, being of an exceedingly pungent, bitter taste, and I am afraid I made a rather wry face as the negress removed the cup from my lips.

“Ah!” she murmured smilingly, “the Señor does not like that so well as the lemonade, but it is nevertheless the better drink of the two, for it will kill the fever in his blood and give him back his strength, while the lemonade merely refreshes.”

Then, as she gently laid me back on my pillow, and adjusted the sheet—my only covering—about my throat, she continued: “Now the Señor must sleep; and when he awakes Mama Elisa will have some nice nourishing broth ready for him—very good, ah! very good indeed, to make him strong again.”

Whether it was the comfort and refreshment that followed the slaking of my thirst, the effect of the medicine which my kind-hearted nurse had administered, or the cooling night breeze that swept in through the open window and played freely over me, I cannot say,—possibly it might have been a combination of the three,—but, whatever the cause, true it is that my head was scarcely back on the pillow before I sank into a profound and most refreshing sleep, refreshing both to mind and body; for during the hours of unconsciousness that followed my brain remained absolutely quiescent, and I was no longer disturbed or harassed by the vague yet terrifying phantasies, dim memories of which had haunted me during the few minutes of my wakefulness.

When I next opened my eyes the room in which I lay was flooded with brilliant sunshine, that streamed in through a large open window in the wall that faced me, and which also freely admitted an indescribably refreshing breeze, richly laden with the mingled perfumes of a tropical garden. A spray of rose bush, laden with magnificent crimson blooms, swished to and fro before the window, swayed by the breeze, and wafted dashes of its scent-laden breath toward me; and beyond it there stretched a vista of flowering shrubs, orange and banana trees, the straight smooth stems of palms, part of the gigantic trunk of a silk-cotton tree springing from a smooth sward of guinea grass; and beyond it again a thicket of bamboo, the delicate feathery foliage of which closed the view. Splendid butterflies flitted hither and thither, a few humming-birds, poised upon their swiftly-fanning wings, hung over the flowering plants, like living gems, sipping the nectar of the blooms; and occasionally a brilliant green lizard would dart along the broad window-sill in chase of a fly.

For several minutes I lay quite motionless, lost in admiration of the beauty of the picture upon which my eyes rested, and inhaling long breaths of the perfumed air that played about me; then a swiftly awaking consciousness that I was distinctly hungry caused me to turn my head toward the chair which Mama Elisa had occupied when I fell asleep. The chair was still occupied, not by Mama Elisa, however, but by a quadroon girl of about seventeen years of age, clad in the usual garb of the coloured women, namely, a sort of loose chemise of white cotton, and a petticoat, printed in a kind of Paisley pattern, which reached to a little below her knees. Her long black hair hung in two thick plaits down far below her waist; she wore massive gold earrings in her small shapely ears; a necklace of big amber beads encircled her finely-modelled neck, and her otherwise bare feet were shod in low-cut crimson morocco slippers. When I first glimpsed her she was leaning back in a chair, idly waving a palm-leaf fan, while her fine dark eyes gazed abstractedly, and with a somewhat sad expression, methought, upon the brilliant picture presented by the open window; but as I stared she started to her feet and bent over me, gazing intently into my eyes; then she laid her soft, shapely hand for a moment upon my brow, withdrew it again, and murmured, in pure, rich Castilian:

“The Señor is better. He has slept long and well. His skin is cool; the fever has gone. And he is hungry; is it not so?”

I nodded.

“Good!” she exclaimed, with a smile of satisfaction that disclosed two rows of small, perfectly-shaped teeth. “I will go and tell Mama Elisa.”

And before I could say a word, or ask a question, she had vanished through a door in the wall against which stood the head of my bed.

A minute later in came Mama Elisa, smiling all over her honest, still good-looking face, bearing in her hands a large, massive tray, which looked as though it might be solid silver. This tray was draped with a cloth of snow-white damask, upon which were symmetrically arranged a small silver bowl, the steaming contents of which emitted a most savoury, appetising odour, a spoon, a small cruet, a plate upon which lay a slice of white bread and another of dry toast, and a wine-glass containing some liquid of a rich ruby colour, that might possibly be port wine.

“Aha!” she cheerily exclaimed, as she placed the tray and its contents upon the table by the side of the bed, “it is easy to see that the Señor is better; his eyes are brighter; the long sleep has done him good. And now he needs only plenty of nourishing food and careful nursing to set him again upon his feet. Teresita tells me that you are hungry, Señor—which is another good sign. Do you think you could take a little broth, Señor?”

I replied that I had very little doubt upon that point, whereupon the good soul proceeded to crumble a small quantity of the bread into the steaming bowl, after which, slipping her arm under my shoulder and very tenderly raising me, she supported my body against her ample bosom as she fed me from the bowl, a spoonful at a time, coaxing me between whiles to nibble at the toast. The broth was delicious, whatever it might have been made of—I was in no mood to ask the question—and to my own surprise and Mama’s intense gratification I consumed it—in quantity about half-a-pint—to the last drop, and also ate about half a slice of toast. Then came the wine-glass of ruby-coloured liquid, which proved to be, as I had anticipated, port wine, rich and generous, seeming to fill me with new life. And when I had finished my meal and had drained another bumper of lemonade, Teresita was summoned to assist in the process of washing my face and hands and inducting me into clean linen, after which followed another long sleep.

My progress toward recovery was now rapid, although I soon learned that my escape from death had been little short of miraculous. Naturally, as soon as my reason returned to me, and I was strong enough to engage in conversation, I began to inquire where I was, and how I came to be there; but for the first three or four days after the events above described my nurses, Mama Elisa and Teresita, refused to tell me anything save that I was with friends. But at length, when I had so far recovered as to be able to sit up in bed without assistance, Mama Elisa took compassion upon me and proceeded to satisfy my curiosity. She informed me first, that the gale in which the *Wasp* foundered had occurred more than three weeks previously! Then she proceeded to say that on the second day after the gale had moderated, the sea having by that time gone down sufficiently to permit the fishermen once more to proceed to sea in their canoes, one Tomasso, a negro—formerly a slave but now a freeman, in the service of Señor Don Luis Fernando María Calderon y Albuquerque, owner of the Bella Vista estate—had sallied forth from a certain small cove on the estate for the purpose of procuring a supply of fish, as usual. After having been thus engaged for some hours, with very scant success, Tomasso had decided to try his luck farther out; and while padding to seaward his attention had been attracted by the appearance of something floating about a mile away. Paddling in that direction, in the hope that what he saw might be worth picking up, he had at length come alongside the hatchway, with me upon it, in a state of collapse. The negroes on the island had risen in insurrection against the whites only some six years previously, while slavery had been abolished only about four years, the relations between the blacks and the whites on the island were consequently still greatly strained, and many a negro, finding one in that helpless state, would have callously left me to die. Tomasso, however, luckily for me, was not one of that sort: he had always been well treated by his master, and therefore felt no animus against the whites; consequently as soon as he found that a spark of life still remained in my body, he transferred me to his canoe and, abandoning for the moment all further thought of fishing, paddled back to the shore. Then, hauling his canoe up on the beach, he had hastened to the house and acquainted his master, Don Luis, with his find. The latter, a generous, humane, high-spirited fellow, and as noble a specimen of the Spanish hidalgo as one need wish to meet, at once hastened down to the cove and, upon perceiving my condition, gave immediate orders that I was to be carried up to the house, put to bed, and everything possible done to save my life. The nearest reliable doctor being at Santiago, over forty miles distant, on the other side of the mountains, he had quickly decided to put me in the hands of Mama Elisa, born upon his estate, of amply proved fidelity, and marvellously skilled in the use of herbs and the treatment of disease, with the result that, having battled for a fortnight with the raging fever that almost immediately developed itself, she had at length triumphantly brought me to the point of convalescence.

Chapter Sixteen.

A Night Alarm.

Having heard Mama Elisa’s story, the next thing I wanted was, naturally, to see Don Luis and thank him for his extraordinary kindness to me, a stranger, and more than that, an enemy. Accordingly, upon being informed of my desire, and learning from Mama Elisa that I was now well enough to receive a visitor, my host presented himself at my bedside that same evening, and expressed the very great pleasure he felt at finding me making such good progress toward recovery. He accepted my expressions of gratitude with much graciousness, professed himself happy to have been the means of saving the life of a fellow creature, begged me to regard himself, his house, and everything that belonged to him as entirely at my service for as long as I might be pleased to make use of them, and then said he would be glad to learn how I came to be in the plight in which Tomasso had found me, if I felt equal to the task of telling the story. I thought that, for a moment, he looked a trifle disconcerted when I mentioned the fact that I was a British naval officer; but, if so, the expression was quickly suppressed, and he listened with deep attention and much sympathy to my story of our falling in with and boarding the *Santa Brigitta*, our subsequent fight with the pirate schooner, and the foundering of the *Wasp* during the gale.

Somewhat to my surprise, he was quite a young man, scarcely more than thirty years of age. I had somehow got it into my head that, being the owner of so fine an estate as Bella Vista, he must of necessity be at least a middle-aged, if not an elderly man; but I understood when he explained that the estate had originally been purchased, and

afterwards developed, by his father, who, I now learned, had perished in the insurrection of 1791.

At length, after we had been chatting together for fully an hour, Mama Elisa intervened, protesting that I had been sufficiently excited for one day, and quite unceremoniously ordered her master out of the room; upon which Don Luis, laughing heartily at his favourite servant's brusqueness, shook me cordially by the hand, hoped I should soon be well enough to quit my sick chamber, and informed me that he would now do himself the pleasure to visit me for a few minutes daily, if only for the purpose of assuring himself that Mama Elisa had not poisoned me with any of her vile concoctions. After which parting shot at Mama he effected a masterly retreat.

From this time onward I mended rapidly, and on the sixth day after Don Luis's first visit I was well enough to rise from my bed and leave my room for an hour or two. And now I should have been in a ludicrous difficulty in the matter of clothes—for the scanty garments in which I had come ashore were not only ruined by long immersion in sea water, but were also in rags—had it not been for the fortunate circumstance that Don Luis and I were, as nearly as possible of the same height, which enabled him generously to place his wardrobe at my disposal. But while Don Luis was a fine, square-shouldered, well-built fellow, I had shrunk to little more than a skeleton, so that although the clothes fitted me well enough as to their lateral dimensions, in other respects they made me look pretty much of a scarecrow, and I could not avoid seeing the ghost of a smile flickering in Don Luis's eyes when, upon my first appearance in public, so to speak, he presented me in due form to his wife, Doña Inez. But there was no smile on that sweet lady's lips, nor in her eyes as they fell upon me and noted the evidences of suffering in my hollow cheeks and wasted form; on the contrary, she was at once all commiseration and sympathy as she expressed her gratification that it had fallen to the lot of one of her people to find me in the hour of my need, and to bring me to the shelter of her roof instead of leaving me to perish, as might very well have happened had the fisherman who found me been any other than Tomasso.

She was quite a young woman, not more than twenty-five, I thought; a typical Spaniard, with dark melting eyes shaded by very long, curving lashes, an immense quantity of black glossy hair, a clear colourless skin, *petite*, handsome, and exceedingly graceful in her every movement; but, even better than all that, she was kind, gentle in her manner, tender-hearted and sympathetic, and appeared to be absolutely idolised by every man, woman, and child upon the estate.

She received me in her drawing-room, a fine, lofty, spacious apartment occupying approximately half the width of the front part of the house, the other half being occupied by the dining-room, between which and the drawing-room there was a fine hall, roomy enough to be used as a lounge, and very cool and pleasant, since the house stood on the slope of a hill, facing north, and overlooking the sea, while the wide front door stood always open, freely admitting the sea-breeze. The drawing-room was a really handsome room, the floor being of some very beautiful native wood, polished to the brilliancy of a mirror, and covered here and there with mats, rugs, and skins; the walls, of polished satin-wood, arranged in panels, were hung with a few very fine pictures; a few small tables, loaded with miniatures and native curiosities, were arranged apparently haphazard about the room; there was a large, low couch, and about a dozen lounging chairs, and a piece of fancy work and a very handsome guitar lay upon the couch.

The large French casement was wide-open, giving access to a wide gallery reaching right athwart the house from side to side, and shaded from the direct rays of the sun by an overhanging veranda; and into this gallery I was taken, inducted into a low, spacious basket chair, well equipped with cushions, and made thoroughly comfortable: the Señora seating herself on one side of me, and Don Luis establishing himself on the other, each of them obviously doing their utmost to make me feel thoroughly at home. And oh! it was good to sit out there feeling the soft, warm breeze playing about me, to drink in the perfume-laden air, and to gaze abroad upon the sun-bathed, gently sloping lawns interspersed here and there with neat, symmetrically shaped flower-beds, gay with luxuriant, rainbow-tinted blooms, to watch the tall palms swaying as the wind swept through their clashing fronds, to note the magnificent butterflies and the brilliant-plumaged birds flitting hither and thither, with the blue foam-flecked sea, mottled with rich purple cloud shadows, stretching away to the far horizon. I was allowed to sit there for two hours, drawing in renewed health with every breath; and then Mama Elisa and Teresita, her lieutenant, swooped down upon me, declaring that I must not be further fatigued, and marched me back to my room, put me to bed, gave me a dainty little meal of broth and the breast of a roasted chicken, administered a stiff dose of some new concoction, characterised chiefly by its superlative nastiness, and then left me to go to sleep, which I did with amazing promptitude.

This sort of thing continued for a fortnight, my "sitting-up" time being gradually extended until on the fourteenth day Mama Elisa, my medico-in-chief, pronounced me well enough to turn out for second breakfast and to stay up for the remainder of the day. Then, as I gradually recovered my strength, came little walks in the company of Don Luis, Doña Inez, or perhaps both together, at first for a few yards only, as far as a certain flower-bed and back, then to some point near at hand from which a specially charming vista was to be obtained, and finally up into the mountains for a distance of a mile or so.

By the time that this stage of my convalescence was reached I had arrived at the conclusion that it was high time I should think of relieving my kind benefactors of my company, and return to duty, and on a certain day I took advantage of the circumstance of being alone with my host to mention the matter, and to ask him if he could put me in the way of obtaining a passage back to Jamaica, explaining that although, as he was aware, I had not a single coin in my possession, I could pay my passage-money immediately upon my arrival at Port Royal.

"My dear fellow," said Don Luis, laying his hand almost affectionately upon my shoulder, "I knew of course that this must come, sooner or later; we could not reasonably expect to keep you with us always—you naturally desire to return to your profession and your duty as early as possible; but do you not think that you are just a little hasty, a little over-eager, in mentioning this matter to me so soon? After all, you know, you are by no means well, as yet; your strength is no doubt equal to a leisurely walk of two or three miles about the neighbourhood; but do you really think that you are strong enough to return at once to the hardship and exposure of a sailor's life?"

"Yes," I said; "I certainly think so; indeed, I believe I am a great deal stronger than you seem to imagine. Besides, it is quite possible that I may not be sent to sea again immediately upon my return; there may be no ship for me just at the moment when I next turn up at Port Royal, and in that case I may have a short spell of shore duty before again going afloat. But, in any case, I am anxious to return and report to the Admiral the unfortunate result of my encounter with the pirates, and undergo my trial by court-martial for the loss of the *Wasp*."

"Your trial by court-martial?" he gasped. "Surely you do not mean to say that your countrymen will be so cruel as to treat you as a criminal, simply because you were inadequately equipped to cope with an overwhelmingly superior force, and because, after beating off that force, a storm happened to arise ere you had time to make suitable preparation for it? The idea is monstrous, absolutely monstrous!"

I was about to explain to Don Luis that it is a custom of the British Navy to try the officers who are unfortunate enough to lose their ship, no matter what the circumstances may be, but he would not let me speak; he was so full of indignation at what he evidently considered the rank injustice of the thing, and so eager to avail himself of the lever which it seemed to afford for pressing home upon me a certain proposition which he now sprang upon me, that he would not suffer me to utter a single word by way of explanation.

"Wait, my dear fellow, wait!" he exclaimed. "What you have just told me affords me the opportunity to mention what Doña Inez and I have discussed together more than once, without any real hope, however, of being able to bring it to pass. Now, however, I find that if you go back you must surrender yourself a prisoner, and be tried as a criminal for what was certainly no fault of yours, I will speak what is in my mind. Why go back at all? Why not give up the sea, remain here, and be my trusted friend and right-hand man in the management of the estate? I very badly need some one like yourself, some one in whom I can place the most absolute trust; for the estate is altogether too big for me to manage single-handed; and my overseers, while they are good enough men in their way, and no doubt understand their business, are scarcely the kind of men whom I could put upon an equality with myself, or admit to the house and to intimacy with Doña Inez. You, however, are different; you are a gentleman, and although an Englishman—"

"Thanks, Don Luis; a thousand thanks for your extraordinarily friendly and generous proposal," I interrupted; "but what you suggest is impossible. I must return to Port Royal, at all costs; my honour demands it. And, as to your exceedingly kind offer, all I can say is that not even to accept it would I give up a profession to which I am so greatly attached, and of which I am so inexpressibly proud. I am afraid I shall never be able to make you and the Señora understand how deeply moved I am, how profoundly grateful for this really remarkable proof of your kindly feeling toward me, but—"

"Quite so," interrupted my companion, again laying his hand upon my shoulder; "you need say no more; I think I understand. Since you feel that you really must go I will not make any further effort to tempt you, but, on the contrary, will do everything I possibly can to assist your wishes. I will ask you, however, my dear young friend, not to make any reference to this conversation in the presence of Doña Inez; for I am convinced that if she were to become aware that I had actually made this proposal to you, and that you had felt yourself bound to reject it, she would be profoundly disappointed."

We then changed the subject, Don Luis promising to send one of his negroes into the little town of Puerto Plata, some twenty miles distant, to make inquiry as to the possibility of my being able to obtain passage on board one of the small vessels that occasionally traded between that port and Kingston. At the same time the generous fellow gave me to understand that his purse was entirely at my disposal for the purpose of defraying all necessary expenses, and that the loan could be repaid at my own convenience.

The negro messenger was duly dispatched on the following morning; and then, as he was not expected back until the evening of the third day, I had to possess my soul in patience; meanwhile Don Luis, who seemed to have taken a most extraordinary liking for me, allowed matters on the estate practically to look after themselves while he and Doña Inez gave themselves up almost entirely to me, taking me short walks into the adjacent country, and showing me as much as possible of its beauties.

It was on the second night after the occurrence of the above-recorded conversation—or rather in the early hours of the following morning—that I was awakened out of a deep sleep by the sound of galloping hoofs, evidently approaching the house, and before I had found time to rub the sleep out of my eyes and sit up in bed, wondering meanwhile what such unusual sounds might portend, I heard the animals sweep past the end of the house and pull up, with much snorting and scattering of gravel, before the front door; and the next moment footsteps—apparently of several people—were heard ascending the front steps, crossing the wide gallery running along the front of the house, and entering the hall by way of the front door, which stood open day and night, except in bad weather. Then a strong voice pealed out, in Spanish—and methought there was a note of panic in it—

"Hola, there! Don Luis—Don Luis, where are you, man? Arise, I pray you, and at once. I have momentous news for you."

"Who is it? What is it?" I heard Don Luis exclaim, and then came the creak of the bedstead in the adjoining room as the good man leapt from it; and I heard him busy with the flint and steel, endeavouring to obtain a light.

"It is I—de Meñdouça," answered the strange voice, "I and my family. The negroes from the mountains are out again, and, being warned that they were making for Montpelier, I abandoned the place, took horse, and came on here to warn you."

"*Ave Maria!*" Don Luis exclaimed, as he seemed to be scrambling into his clothes. "The negroes out again! I heard that they were showing signs of unrest. I will be with you in a moment. Nay, do not be alarmed, *carissima*, the danger is certainly not immediate; you will have ample time to rise and dress at your leisure."

"Oho!" thought I. "Danger, eh? It is time for me to be making a muster." I therefore rolled out of bed and, without

waiting to strike a light, felt for my clothes, scrambled into them, and made my way to the entrance hall just as Don Luis, having joined his unexpected visitors, had succeeded in lighting the great hall lamp.

The strangers were five in number, and I was hurriedly presented to each of them in turn. First, there was Don Esteban de Meñdouça, a tall, thin, cadaverous-looking man, with intensely dark eyes, a thin crop of hair, exceedingly long moustache with thin, drooping ends, and a pointed Vandyke beard, all dark, but beginning to be sprinkled with grey. Then there was Doña Christina, his wife, a small woman, as dark as her husband, but with a perfectly preserved complexion—fat, and fifty if a day. Next there was Don Pedro de Meñdouça, Don Esteban's elder son, a very proud and haughty-looking man of about twenty-seven years of age; Don Silvio, his brother, some three years younger, and exceedingly like his elder brother, but with a much more agreeable expression of countenance; and lastly, but by no means least in attractiveness, Señorita Eugenia, Don Esteban's daughter, a most lovely young woman of about seventeen years of age, exquisitely fair, and with a pair of melting blue eyes. They all acknowledged the introduction with that stately courtesy which seems natural to the Spaniard; and then, as Don Esteban began his brief story, I had time to take a good look at them all. It was easy enough to see that they had risen from their beds and fled in the utmost haste, for the toilette of each had been very inadequately performed; but despite this the predominating impression which they produced upon me was distinctly favourable. Indeed, the only thing of which I in the least disapproved was the demeanour of Don Pedro de Meñdouça, which struck me as being a good deal more haughty and arrogant than there was any excuse for. The circumstance that, I think, surprised me most was that these people should have fled in such apparent unreasoning panic, abandoning a fine property and absolutely all that they possessed, excepting the horses they had ridden and the clothes they stood up in, to a parcel of lawless negroes. I was soon to learn, however, that it was not lack of courage that had inspired their flight.

"I have no doubt, Don Luis," began Don Esteban, "that you, like myself, have heard rumours of late that the negroes up in the mountains were again beginning to show signs of unrest. But, so far at least as I was concerned, those rumours have been so exceedingly vague and contradictory that I paid little or no attention to them; for, as you are, of course, aware, scarcely a month passes over our heads but some story of an impending outbreak reaches us. Yet it has never come, and I think we have at last all grown to regard the rumours as mere idle talk, without foundation or justification. Consequently I was not only very greatly surprised, but also distinctly incredulous, when one of my house boys aroused me shortly after midnight to-night with the intelligence that the negroes were actually out, and that practically all my own people had abandoned their huts and gone forth to join them! It was this latter circumstance which alarmed me; and when, a little later, I had verified the statement I came to the conclusion that the time for action had arrived, and accordingly we saddled up and came away without further ado. As we came along my sons and I discussed the situation, and ultimately decided that the proper thing, and also the best thing, would be to make for Bella Vista in the first instance, inform you of the facts, and learn your views as to the situation."

"Were you able to learn in what strength the blacks have turned out?" demanded Don Luis.

"No," answered Don Esteban, "I was not; but we know from experience that when they begin these raids they usually divide themselves into a number of small bands, attacking in several directions simultaneously, and depending upon being reinforced by the negroes on the estates which they purpose to attack. Thus, for example, whatever may have been the original strength of the band which set out to attack Montpelier, they have already been augmented by two hundred of my people. Probably they now muster about two hundred and fifty altogether—not more, I should say. Ah! look yonder. Do you see that blaze? That is Montpelier. They have already plundered the house and set it on fire, so you see we did not get away from it any too early."

Looking out through the open door at the back of the house, which could be seen from the hall, we beheld a small, flickering spark of fire, well up on the lower slopes of the mountain, which, even as we gazed, waxed in size and brilliancy. Snatching up a powerful telescope that always hung ready to hand in the hall, and bringing it to bear upon the spark, I was able to make out that it was indeed a large house, from the windows and thatched roof of which flames were bursting in momentarily increasing volumes, while round about it a crowd of negroes were apparently dancing a dance of savage delight at the destruction which they were effecting.

"Yes," I said, as I laid down the glass, "that is undoubtedly your house, Don Esteban; I distinctly remember Doña Inez pointing it out to me while we were out for a walk about a week ago."

At this moment Doña Inez, fully attired, emerged from her room, and there was instantly a cordial interchange of salutations between her and our visitors. Then she turned to me and asked:

"What was that I heard you say just now, Don Ricardo? Surely not that Montpelier is in flames?"

"I deeply regret to say that you heard aright, Señora. Look yonder; you may see the blaze for yourself. And the blacks are dancing round it like so many demons," I answered.

Doña Inez clasped her hands together and wrung them in distress.

"Oh, Don Esteban—Doña Christina—I am so sorry for you all," she exclaimed. "It is horrible; and they will be here next. What do you intend to do, Luis? Must we really run away and leave this beautiful place to be destroyed and ourselves ruined? Is there nothing that can be done to save it?"

"I will not go so far as to say that," answered Don Luis; "on the contrary, I am strongly indisposed to abandon it without a struggle. What say you, Don Ricardo?" turning to me. "You are a fighting man; do you think this house is capable of being defended successfully against an armed but undisciplined rabble of some three hundred blacks?"

"That depends entirely upon how strong a garrison you can muster, my dear friend," answered I. "So far as the house itself is concerned I believe that, given, say, a couple of hours for preparation, it might be put into a very excellent state of defence; but that would be no good at all unless you could raise a garrison of, let us say, thirty fighting men,

and at least as many non-combatants to act as loaders, ambulance party, and so on."

"Thirty fighters, and thirty non-combatants," returned Don Luis. "Surely that might be managed. Why, my 'boys' number more than three hundred, nine-tenths of whom were born and bred upon the estate. A few of them might possibly desert—perhaps twenty-five per cent of them, to put the figure at its very highest; but I feel certain that the bulk of them would stand by me through thick and thin; they have everything to lose and nothing to gain by going over to the outlaws. Oh yes, I am convinced that there should be no difficulty in the matter of raising a sufficient number of fighters."

"So far, then, so good," said I. "The next question is that of weapons—firearms especially. I am afraid, my dear Don Luis, you will scarcely be able to raise thirty guns, with adequate ammunition for the same."

"Ah, true," answered Don Luis, "I had not thought of that. Still—now, let me think a moment—"

"I may as well tell you here," cut in Don Esteban, "that although we could not see our way to defend Montpelier successfully, my sons and I have each brought our guns with us, and they of course will be available, should you decide to make a stand and defend the house."

"But, my dear Don Esteban, you will need them for your own protection on your way to—to—wherever you propose to make for; unless, of course, you choose to throw in your lot with us, which would perhaps be scarcely more dangerous than the attempt to reach one of the towns. For the news of this rising will spread among the negroes like wildfire, and—"

"Precisely," cut in Don Esteban again. "That is exactly my own thought. Therefore, if our presence here will not embarrass you we will gladly remain and take our chance with you."

"My dear Don Esteban," exclaimed Don Luis, "let me hasten to assure you that nothing could possibly give me greater satisfaction than to have the assistance of yourself and your two gallant sons at this critical juncture in my fortunes."

"Then that is settled," exclaimed I, breaking in rather ruthlessly, I am afraid, upon Don Luis' compliments, for which, I considered, there was scant time just then. "That makes three guns to start with. Now, how many more can we muster?"

"Four of my overseers have two guns each, while the remaining two have one each," answered Don Luis. "And each of them possesses a brace of good serviceable pistols in addition. Then, as for me, you must know, my dear Don Ricardo, that firearms are rather a weakness of mine; whenever I see an especially good gun I buy it, if I can, consequently I have a very fair selection in my gun-room, probably about twenty in all, as well as a few brace of pistols, duelling and otherwise."

"Oh, but that is excellent," I exclaimed; "far better than I dared expect. And as to ammunition?"

"I think you will find that we have as much of that as we are at all likely to need, for I always make a point of keeping an ample supply in stock," answered Don Luis.

"Good!" answered I. "The next point to determine is the identity of your garrison. First, there is Don Esteban and his two sons; that makes three. Then there is you and myself—five. Will your six overseers fight, think you, Don Luis?"

"Oh yes, without a doubt," answered Don Luis. "They are most excellent fellows, and devoted to me."

"Then, so far, we muster eleven," said I. "We want nineteen more fighters, and at least thirty good, steady non-fighters, men who can be depended upon to retain their coolness and do exactly as they are told during the confusion and excitement of a fiercely contested fight. Now, Don Luis, can you lay your hand upon forty-nine men of the kind I have indicated—men who are trustworthy enough to be admitted inside these walls at a moment when treachery on the part of any one of them would probably be fatal to us all?"

Don Luis flushed and looked almost angrily at me as I suggested the possibility of treachery on the part of any of his people.

"Really, Don Ricardo," he exclaimed, "put as you put it, you almost make me tremble at the vastness of the responsibility that I am about to undertake. But you shall see. I will at once go down to the huts, choose my men, and bring them up here for your approval." And with that shot at me he walked out at the back door and disappeared into the darkness, while Don Silvio, at his father's request, went out to lead the horses round to the stables, and bring in the guns.

Chapter Seventeen.

The Attack on Bella Vista.

Some twenty-five minutes later Don Luis returned; and so colourless were his lips, so wild his eyes, so dreadfully agitated his entire appearance that I saw in a moment something had gone very radically wrong somewhere. Doña Inez saw it too, and approaching, laid her hand soothingly upon his arm as she anxiously asked:

"What is it, Luis? What is the matter, *mi querido*? Tell me; I can bear it."

"I could never have believed it!" ejaculated Don Luis, clasping his hands in front of him and wringing them, in his

distress and disappointment. "I have always believed every one of my negroes to be absolutely faithful to me; yet now, upon the news that the outlaws are out, more than half of them have left me, and quite possibly will, an hour or two hence, be joining in the attack upon this house. The ungrateful wretches, the—!"

"Precisely," I cut in; "they are all that and more. But what about those who remain? Are any of them trustworthy enough to be permitted to assist us; or must we do the best we can without them?"

"Oh no," answered Don Luis emphatically. "Thank God, I can trust every one of those who remain. And, as for the forty-nine whom I have chosen to come into the house to help us—well, I am going to demonstrate the extent of my faith in them by placing all our lives at their mercy. Oh yes; I have no shadow of doubt, so far as they are concerned."

"Very well, then," said I; "in that case they had better be admitted at once, for all our defences have still to be made. What are you going to do with those who are not wanted?"

"I have given them instructions to go away and conceal themselves in the woods until we have beaten off the attack," answered Don Luis. "Then they will return and help us to put right whatever damage may have been done during the fight."

"Will they?" thought I. "I very much doubt it!" But I kept my doubts to myself, and turned instead to another matter.

"The next thing that we have to consider is the safety of the ladies," said I. "What is to be done with them during the fight?"

Don Luis looked at me rather blankly.

"The ladies!" he ejaculated. "But surely, my dear Don Ricardo, they will be more safe in this house than anywhere else, will they not?"

"It all depends," I answered. "If you think it would be safe for them to start on horseback for the nearest town, either alone or escorted by a few of the most trusty of your negroes—"

"Oh no, no!" exclaimed Doña Inez and Doña Christina in the same breath; "you must not propose anything of that kind, Don Ricardo. We will not be separated from our husbands. If they are to face danger, we will face danger with them."

Then Don Luis broke in. "I do not altogether like your suggestion that the ladies should attempt to make their way to the nearest town," he said. "For, you see, we have no means of knowing what is the state of the intervening country. An hour ago I might have deemed the suggestion an excellent one, but now, after the shameless desertion of half my own 'boys,' I know not what to think."

"I suppose there is no snug, secret place of concealment, such as a cave, or something of that sort, the existence of which is known only to yourselves?" I suggested.

"The very thing!" exclaimed Don Luis enthusiastically. "There *is* such a place, and its existence and locality are known to absolutely no one but Doña Inez and myself—"

"It is useless to speak of it," interrupted Doña Inez in a tone of finality. "I will not go there, or anywhere else; I remain here with you, Luis. If Doña Christina, or Doña Eugenia would like to go, let them do so by all means."

But Doña Christina and Doña Eugenia were quite as emphatic as their hostess in their determination not to be separated from their men-folk; so that question was very soon settled. After that there was nothing to be done but to call up our black auxiliaries, and put the house in as efficient a state of defence as the means at our disposal permitted; and this we at once proceeded to do.

Don Luis seemed naturally to look to me to take the lead in our warlike preparations; and this I as naturally did, finding that he had only very hazy notions of how to set to work. In the first place, the house itself was excellently adapted for defence, the outside walls being built of stone, and about two feet thick, to keep out the heat, while the roof was tiled; there was consequently very little danger of the place being set on fire from the outside, and ourselves burnt out of it. Its chief weakness consisted in the exceptionally large size of the door and window openings; but I thought I could see a way to minimise that evil. While out walking with Don Luis and his wife, I had noticed a spot that I remarked at the time might be very easily converted into an excellent sand and gravel pit; while only a few days prior to the eventful morning when Don Esteban de Meñdouça and his party had burst in upon us with the news of the negro outbreak, Don Luis had received a large consignment of new sacks destined to receive the crop of coffee, cocoa, and other products that were at that moment coming forward upon the estate.

Now, the moment that the question of defending the house was raised, these sacks and the sand pit came into my mind. The first thing I did, therefore, was to get hold of the six overseers, instruct them to organise into gangs the blacks who still remained on the estate: equip one party of them with pick and shovel; set a second party to bring the sacks from the store, as required; a third party to fill the sacks with the gravel and sand as excavated; and the remainder to carry the filled sacks up to the house on hand-barrows and arrange them in the door and window openings under my direction. While this was being done, Don Luis produced his stock of firearms and ammunition; then he, Don Esteban, and Don Pedro set to work to clean them, oil the locks, and generally put the weapons in reliable working order; while Don Silvio, aided by his sister and Doña Inez, lighted a fire in the dining-room and went to work upon the task of casting bullets for the pistols, it proving upon examination that only a very small stock of these remained on hand. And, lastly, while Mama Elisa and Teresita busied themselves in the detached kitchen, cooking an ample supply of food for the little garrison, Doña Christina so far laid aside her dignity as to prepare the dining-room table and set it for breakfast; for day was by this time breaking, and we had decided that it would be

sound policy to snatch a meal, if possible, before the fight began.

My scheme of defence consisted in blocking up all the door and window openings throughout the building with a good substantial wall of sand-bags, leaving here and there small loopholes just wide enough to admit of a musket being pointed through them. My musketrymen would be stationed at these loopholes, each man having an assistant who would stand by to pass him a fresh cartridge and bullet as soon as his weapon was discharged; and of course the musketrymen and their assistants would be moved from room to room as required, according to the point against which the attack was most strongly directed. I considered that we ought to stand a very good chance of making an effective defence, because it would be exceedingly difficult for our assailants to force a way into the building so long as our sand-bag walls stood firmly, and I believed it would require more courage than a negro possessed to charge home to them and overthrow them in the face of such a fire as we could direct upon them from the advantageous position which we should occupy. Moreover, we should possess the important advantage of being almost completely protected from their fire, and consequently should be able to take aim coolly and collectedly, while they would be fully exposed, there being no better cover for them than a few scattered bushes here and there, which I determined to remove, should there be time after our more important defences were complete.

At length, after some two hours of the most strenuous work that those negroes had ever performed in their lives, we had done everything that it was possible to do; so, first stationing a dozen of our best men at various commanding points, to act as pickets and give us timely warning of the approach of the enemy, we went to breakfast, most of us with excellent appetites, although I am bound to admit that the ladies did not eat much. When the meal was over, without any news from our pickets, I went out through an opening that we had purposely left in the front door barricade, and took a good look round. Passing from picket to picket, I questioned each man closely as to whether he had seen any signs of the enemy; but they all replied in the negative. Indeed, although I carefully scanned every open space I could see, even examining it with the telescope, not the faintest indication of lurking danger could I anywhere discover, although Montpelier was by this time a mere smouldering ruin, to all appearance utterly deserted.

I was about to return to the house to inquire whether, after all, we might not have taken too much for granted in assuming as a certainty that Bella Vista would be attacked, when one of the pickets uttered a shout and, raising his hand, pointed. I looked in the direction indicated, and there, sure enough, I beheld a party of negroes marching confidently toward the house. How many there were I could not tell—for they were just then winding their way through thick detached masses of scrub beyond the boundaries of the estate—but the confident manner of their approach led me to suppose that they believed they were quite strong enough to achieve an easy conquest of the place.

Raising a whistle to my lips, I blew a shrill call, not only as a warning to those in the house to be on the *qui vive*, but also as a signal for the pickets to fall back; then, when I had made sure that the latter were all on the run toward the house, I brought my telescope to bear upon the approaching party, with the view of learning a little more concerning their equipment and, if possible, their numbers.

The first thing that impressed me with regard to them was that they were a remarkably fine, stalwart-looking set of men, hard, wiry, and full of endurance, as indeed might be expected from the history of them which I had gathered by snatches from Don Luis during our preparations that morning. It appeared that they were practically all runaway slaves, or the descendants of such, who had made good their escape from the various plantations on the island before slavery was abolished a few years prior to the date of this story. These men had established themselves in mountain fastnesses, so difficult of approach and so easy to defend that, although the attempt had often been made, it had been found impossible to dislodge them. In those mountain fastnesses they had increased and multiplied prodigiously, raising their own cattle, growing their own corn, and supporting themselves generally in a state of comfort, if not of actual luxury, that to those who had not seen it, seemed incredible. To them fled every criminal, for every desperate character in the island found welcome and a safe sanctuary among them. Of course, they were all outlaws; their hand against every man, and every man's hand against them; and of late—that is to say, within a year or so of the time of which I am now writing—they had adopted a policy of sallying forth from their mountain retreats at irregular intervals, attacking isolated plantations, looting and destroying the buildings, and either murdering or carrying off captive the whites; their avowed intention being to terrorise and drive every white person off the island and make it their own. Although most of them had been brought up in the Catholic religion, it was said that they had all reverted to heathenism, and were addicted to the practice of voodooism, snake worship, and other hideous barbaric rites.

But although the physique of the men was good enough, I did not think very much of their equipment. It appeared that about every fourth man of them carried a firearm of some kind, with powder flask suspended by a cord round his neck, and bullet pouch attached to his belt, while the remainder carried cutlasses, pikes, and, in some cases, axes, cane knives, or even scythe blades lashed to the end of long poles.

Having learned as much of the approaching enemy as it was possible for me to ascertain without exposing myself to the risk of capture by having my retreat cut off, I retired in good order to the house, pausing at the detached kitchen on my way, and ordering Mama Elisa and Teresita to hasten at once to the house, with such provisions as they had been able to prepare. I waited until they were fairly on the way, and then set fire to the place, for it was within about sixty yards of the house, and would have afforded excellent cover for a dozen sharpshooters who, from its shelter, might have galled us rather severely. It was a flimsy structure, the walls built of wattles plastered with mud, while the roof was of thatch; by the time, therefore, that I reached the house it was blazing furiously, and a quarter of an hour later was a mere heap of smouldering ashes.

The sight of the blazing kitchen caused the approaching outlaws to raise a shout of triumph—possibly they were under the impression that the building had been fired by some of the negroes belonging to the estate who were about to join forces with them and had already begun the work of destruction—but when they saw me retiring toward the house their shouts quickly changed their note from triumph to anger, and several of them who carried guns

halted, dropped on one knee, and proceeded to take pot shots at me. A few of their bullets came quite near—indeed, much too near to be pleasant; but the bulk of them flew wide, and I made good my retreat to the house, untouched, and was at once admitted by my friends, who immediately proceeded to block up with sand-bags the aperture by which I had entered.

The moment that the motley army of our assailants came close enough to the house to enable them to see that it had been put into a state of defence, they halted, and some half-a-dozen of them clustered about an immensely tall and powerful-looking negro who was attired in the stained and somewhat tattered uniform of a Spanish infantry colonel, and wore a sword buckled about his waist, with a pair of big horse pistols thrust into his belt. Apparently they were conferring together as to what was to be done under the unexpected circumstances; for it now appeared that, so completely had they succeeded in terrorising the whites, serious resistance to their raids had practically become a thing of the past.

The appearance among the attacking force of the big negro above-mentioned seemed to fill Don Luis and Don Esteban with consternation, for they recognised him at once as the chief of the outlaws, and a man with a reputation for ruthless savagery that had caused his name to become a word of terror among the whites on the island, only to be mentioned with bated breath.

“It is Petion himself!” gasped Don Esteban in accents of dismay, “and if we should be so unfortunate as to fall into his hands after resisting him, our fate will be too dreadful for description! Would it not be better,” he suggested, with quivering ashen lips, “that we should surrender at discretion, without attempting resistance? If we do so we shall probably be shot, out of hand; but even that would be preferable to being carried off into the mountains, and there dying a lingering death by torture, as we know that many other whites have done who have dared to resist Petion.”

“No, certainly not!” answered Don Luis with decision. “I will never agree to it. Our young friend, Don Ricardo, here, seems to be of opinion that the house is capable of being defended effectively, and he ought to know, since fighting is his trade. And I do not suppose that the mere fact of Petion’s appearance among our assailants is going to make him alter his opinion. Is it, Don Ricardo?”

“By no means,” said I. “Rather the other way about. For if we can only contrive to bowl over Mister Petion—”

Don Esteban uttered an ejaculation of horror. “Kill Petion!” he exclaimed. “My good sir, I most fervently hope that no one in this house will be so ill-advised as to attempt Petion’s life. For if anything were to happen to him his followers would be so incensed, so utterly maddened with fury, that they would simply pull the place down about our ears, and drag us out from among the ruins to die a death of unimaginable horror!”

“My dear Don Esteban,” I retorted, “do you really believe that those fellows will fight any the more courageously if their leader happens to be slain? Because I do not; on the contrary, I am firmly convinced that if the head is destroyed the body will also lose vitality, and very speedily collapse. Therefore I, for one, shall make it a point of honour to do my best to kill Petion, if he will only afford me the chance, and I very strongly recommend that the rest should do the same. If Petion falls, his followers will very soon be discouraged.”

“Yes, yes, I quite agree with you, Don Ricardo,” exclaimed Don Luis. “Nothing is so likely to discourage those fellows as to see their leader fall, therefore let us kill Petion, if we can—although he is popularly believed to bear a charmed life.”

“It will need a very much more potent charm than any that he is at all likely to possess to stop a bullet, if I can only get a fair shot at him,” I exclaimed. “But, come, gentlemen, let us get back to our posts. We must watch their every move now, or they may take us unawares and play us some very ugly trick.”

Our dialogue had lasted less than five minutes; but, brief as it was, it had outlasted the consultation between Petion and his lieutenants, who, I was annoyed to find upon returning to my point of observation, had retired and were now out of sight.

A period of suspense lasting nearly ten minutes now ensued, at the end of which a whistle sounded shrilly from somewhere, and at the sound of it the whole band of outlaws, numbering somewhere about four hundred, suddenly broke cover and, with a yell, came charging down upon all sides of the house, firing as they ran. Their aim was not bad, considering that none of them paused to bring their pieces up to the shoulder, but just pointed the weapon in the direction of the house and pulled the trigger while still on the run. But although we heard several of the bullets strike the walls and roof, not one came through our loopholes, or penetrated to the interior of the house, and none of us were hit. The next second an irregular, straggling sort of volley rattled out from the house by way of reply; but I could not see that anybody was a penny the worse for it, at least on that side of the house where I was stationed. So far as I was concerned, I had not attempted to fire, having made up my mind that I would not pull trigger during the fight until I could be certain of making a hit; but the negro who had been told off to help in the defence of the window at which I was stationed had simply thrust his musket through his loophole and blazed away, apparently without taking the trouble even to sight along the barrel.

“My friend,” I said, digging him savagely in the ribs, “which of those fellows was it that you aimed at?”

“Which of them, Señor?” he echoed in astonishment. “I did not aim at any one in particular; I simply fired my piece, believing that the bullet would be certain to hit some one.”

“Just so,” I retorted. “Well, that is not at all the way to win a fight, for, you see, your bullet has hit no one. Next time you shoot, aim straight at some particular individual, and make sure that your gun is pointing straight before you pull the trigger. For example—you see that big man running straight toward us, the man with the scythe on the end of a pole? Well, keep your eye on him for a moment, and see what happens.”

The man in question was coming straight for our window, with the intention, probably, of attempting to dislodge some of the sand-bags and force his way into the house. He was only about ten yards away when, having carefully covered his chest with my two sights, I gently pressed the trigger. When the smoke blew away the fellow was lying motionless upon his face, and some twenty others who had been following him had come to an abrupt halt, and were gazing with indecision, first at the house and next at him.

"Another cartridge, quick!" I whispered, thrusting my hand out behind me. A small, soft hand met mine, thrusting a cartridge between my fingers, and glancing hastily over my shoulder, in some surprise, I saw that it was Teresita who had established herself as my assistant. The next moment I had bitten off the end of the cartridge, poured the powder down the barrel, thrust the empty paper after it by way of a wad, and was ramming a bullet home on top of all. Then, peeping through the loophole as I cocked the lock, I saw that a party of four of his comrades had picked up the stricken man, and were just about to carry him away, while the others were in full retreat for a clump of bushes not very far away, probably for the purpose of securing cover while they reloaded their weapons. The four bearers, however, were still within easy range, and, taking careful aim for a moment, I caught one of them fair between the shoulders, and down he went on top of the man who was being carried away. The other three at once took to their heels and ran, but did not finally get away scot free, for I snatched the now reloaded musket from my assistant's hand and was lucky enough to bring one of them down with a shot in the leg, though he was up and limping away the next instant.

"There," I said to the negro who was supposed to be helping me; "you see how it is done? Very well; see to it, my friend, that you make no more misses." And he did not; or, at least, not very often. Meanwhile, the firing from the other rooms had been proceeding pretty briskly, though with what results, so far as the other three sides of the house were concerned, I could not tell. But it had been fairly effective on my side of the building; for, in addition to the three men for whom I had accounted, there were five motionless figures lying on the grass within view of my loophole, while I had seen others go staggering away palpably hit. I imagined that the outlaws were somewhat disconcerted at finding so many guns in the house, and had not very much stomach for a fight, wherein it was possible that a good many of them might get very seriously hurt. Hitherto, it appeared, the utmost resistance which they had met with had amounted to nothing more formidable than a few hasty, ill-aimed shots, followed by the immediate retreat of the defending party. But this adventure upon which they were now engaged was quite a different matter. Here was a good, solidly built house, constructed of materials which it was scarcely possible to set fire to from the outside, well barricaded, and evidently full of resolute men quite determined to sell their lives dearly. Oh yes, this was quite different, and it looked as though they did not half like it, for, having failed in that first rush, they had now withdrawn out of range and were apparently discussing some new scheme of operations. During this pause I visited the other rooms in succession to see how the occupants had been faring, and what measure of success they had met with. The result of my inspection was the discovery that twenty-seven of the attacking party had lost that number of their mess, while nearly double as many had been more or less seriously hurt in that first rush; which was quite as good as could reasonably have been expected; and it seemed fully to account for the shyness which the enemy was now exhibiting. I stated what had happened at my own window, urged every man individually to keep quite cool, and to take careful aim before pulling trigger; and then returned to my post, just in time to see some sixty negroes emerge from the bush bearing the trunk of a palm-tree which they had cut down, and which they were apparently about to employ as a battering-ram with which to batter in some of our defences. The men in the adjoining room saw it at the same moment, and instantly, in spite of the warning which I had so recently given, two shots rang out from the window at which they were stationed. The range, however, was too long, and nobody was hurt. Hurrying from my own room into the one from which the shots had come, I found that it was occupied by one of the overseers and a negro. I was engaged in giving them as severe a lecture as my knowledge of Spanish permitted, when there was a sudden call for all hands from the front of the house, and, rushing round, I saw that a party of about a hundred of the enemy were charging across the lawns in open order, leaping from side to side as they came, in a manner admirably adapted to render our aim utterly ineffective. A man was crouching at every loophole in the room, with the barrel of his piece projecting through it, and even as I entered one of the pieces spoke, ineffectively. The man who fired was Don Pedro, and he turned from the loophole with a savage execration at his failure.

"It is not of the slightest use to attempt to pick them off at long range while they are jumping about in that fashion," I exclaimed. "Wait until they are so close that you can make sure of them, and then shoot. To drop them at twenty yards, or even ten, or five, is just as effective as though you bowled them over at a hundred. And as each man fires, let him step aside and make room for another."

While I was thus exhorting my companions I stepped to the loophole which had just been vacated by Don Pedro, and thrust the muzzle of my weapon through it, sighting along the barrel. There was an individual coming toward me, jumping from side to side like the rest, first to the right, then to the left. I watched him for a moment or two, and noticed that each spring of his to the left brought him exactly in line with a tall, slender tree stem, some distance in his rear; I, therefore, aimed straight for this stem, and then waited until he made his next spring to the left, when I pulled the trigger, and down he toppled. Almost at the same instant three or four other shots rang out, and each proved sufficiently well aimed to reach its mark. A few seconds later another half-dozen shots followed, and down went four more of the charging negroes. The effect was instantaneous; at least half of them halted, in manifest indecision, some wheeled abruptly round and fled, and only about a dozen of the boldest maintained their rush. Another quick discharge brought even these to a halt, with the loss of four of their number; and while they stood, hesitating whether to advance or retreat, we peppered them again, to their manifest astonishment and consternation—possibly they thought that, with our guns empty, they were reasonably safe for a minute or so—whereupon they turned and fled, leaving six of their comrades prostrate on the ground. At this moment a cry from Teresita sent us all with a rush, helter-skelter, to the room which I had originally undertaken to defend; and here we found a critical state of affairs indeed. For while we had all been engaged in checking the rush upon the front of the house, the party with the palm-tree battering-ram had, under cover of various patches of vegetation, stolen up to within a hundred yards of the side, and were now manifestly preparing to make a rush across the open, bearing their battering-ram with them. Thanks, however, to Teresita's warning cry, we were just in good time to pour in a brisk fire upon them almost before

they had fairly started upon their rush, and three or four men went down, throwing the others into momentary confusion, which afforded us the opportunity to treat them to a second volley. As this second volley crashed out I, having reloaded my weapon, stepped forward to take my place at a loophole just vacated by some one else, and as I did so I observed that the whole party had been thrown into great confusion by the second volley, the tree trunk having fallen to the ground, or been dropped. That, however, was not all; the negro dressed in Spanish infantry uniform had come to the front and was standing stock still, with his back toward the house, haranguing the battering-ram contingent and apparently urging them to pick up the tree again and make another attempt. The opportunity was too good to be lost, for he was within long range, and it was quite worth while to throw away a shot on the chance of hitting him; I therefore levelled my piece, aiming steadily at an imaginary point about two inches immediately above his head—feeling certain that, with this amount of elevation, I should get him somewhere—and pulled the trigger. The smoke of the discharge obscured my view for a second or two, but a wild shout of triumph from those in the next room told me that my shot had been successful; and then, as the smoke drifted away, I saw the fellow lying prone on the ground, with his men standing staring at him, as though fascinated, yet seemingly afraid to approach and attempt to raise him. As I stood, still peering through the loophole at the scene, my empty piece was gently withdrawn from my hand by some one behind me, and a loaded one substituted for it, whereupon I chose another mark and fired, bringing that man down also. This second casualty, at such long range, seemed to galvanise the party into sudden life; for, raising their weapons, they poured in a straggling, irregular, but ineffective volley, as though in obedience to an order, and then turned and raced for the nearest cover, followed by a few dropping shots, which at least served to freshen their way, if it did nothing else.

The entire attacking party now took cover, and opened fire upon the house at long range. Apparently they possessed little or no skill in the use of firearms, for, although a few shots struck the house, not one of them came anywhere near the loopholes, and every one of the garrison remained unscathed. Our foes were amply strong enough to have carried the building by assault had they but possessed the courage and resolution to charge across the open, right up to the house, and tear down but a single one of our barricades; but they had already learned by experience that this meant certain death to some of them; and while, if report did not belie them, they were all ready enough to take the lives of others with every accompaniment of the most atrocious cruelty, there was apparently none among them willing to contribute to the success of his party by sacrificing his own. This innocuous fusillade of the house continued for nearly two hours, during which we made no pretence of reply except when some individual, in a temporary access of courage, attempted to slip across from one piece of cover to another situated a few yards nearer the house, when he was immediately subjected to a volley that either laid him low, or sent him scuttling back, like a scared rabbit, to his former place of refuge.

Chapter Eighteen.

Captured by the Negro Outlaws.

At length, about ten o'clock in the forenoon, the fire of the outlaws ceased, and for aught that we could tell to the contrary they might have abandoned the attack altogether and retired. But the situation was one of far too much peril to permit us to take anything for granted; while, therefore, the main body of our party, so to speak, seized the opportunity thus afforded to snatch a hasty but much-needed meal, a watcher, with loaded weapon, was stationed at each door and window of the house, with instructions to maintain a sharp lookout, and immediately to report any movement that he might detect on the part of the enemy.

But the minutes passed, the meal was concluded, and still everything remained tranquil; so perfectly tranquil, indeed, that at length we could come to but one of two conclusions—either the outlaws had withdrawn altogether, or they were elaborating some scheme for a renewed attack of a particularly deep and cunning character, of the nature of which it behoved us to secure some hint of information, by hook or by crook.

I suggested that I should go forth alone, and, keeping well in the open in order that I might be effectively covered by the guns of the others in the event of anything in the nature of treachery being attempted, take a look round in the immediate neighbourhood of the house, and endeavour to ascertain what the outlaws were doing, or, if they had gone, what had become of them. At first no one would listen to the suggestion; it was denounced as too utterly hazardous to be entertained for a moment; and when I pointed out that it could only be hazardous if the enemy still remained upon the ground, Don Silvio proposed, by way of amendment, that the men should all sally forth in a body, for mutual protection. But to this I would not agree, arguing—very reasonably, I think—that if the outlaws had departed it would be as safe for me to go forth as for the whole of us; while, if treachery happened to be afoot, the safety of the female portion of the party absolutely depended upon the men remaining in the house ready to defend it in the event of a renewed attack. These arguments of mine, coupled with the necessity, which everybody at length recognised, for us to make a move of some sort, finally prevailed; and about noon I left the house, armed with a musket and a brace of pistols, all loaded, and fortified by some item of advice from each of my companions.

My first act was to examine carefully the bodies that lay round about the house, taking those that lay nearest at hand, and then passing on to the others. The result of this examination was the discovery that the fallen numbered in all sixty-seven, fourteen of whom were still alive, but so seriously injured that they had been unable to withdraw to the safety of cover. I inquired of each of these men what had become of their companions, but they were unable to answer me; they could but groan—“*Agua, agua, por amor de Dios!*”

I informed them that they should be supplied with water, and otherwise looked after, as soon as I had satisfied myself that their friends had retired and that no further danger from them was to be apprehended; but I at the same time reminded them that they could scarcely expect much consideration from people whom they had so wantonly attacked. When at length I came to the body of Petion I found that life was extinct, the fellow having been shot clean through the heart I was somewhat surprised that his followers had made no attempt to carry off his body; and that they had not done so I took to be a sign of pretty thorough demoralisation on their part I conducted my examination

of the ground with the utmost circumspection; for I knew not at what moment a volley might rattle out at me from one or another of the large clumps of ornamental shrubs that were scattered about here and there upon the lawns, or the still larger masses of bamboo, palmetto, and other wild vegetation that at one particular spot was still allowed to flourish almost within musket-shot of the house; but nothing happened, and no sign of the enemy was to be discovered; I, therefore, at length came to the conclusion that, finding the house was not to be captured except at the sacrifice of a very considerable number of lives, the outlaws had withdrawn, and were now on their way to attack some estate, the owners of which were incapable of making so resolute and effective a defence as ourselves.

I began to wonder in which direction our assailants had gone, remembering that much of the effectiveness of the defence of Bella Vista had been due to the early warning given by Don Esteban de Meñdouça, which had afforded us the time to make the necessary preparations; and it occurred to me that if the route taken by the outlaws could be determined, it might be possible to pass on the warning, and so enable somebody else to prepare a warm reception for them. I, therefore, proceeded to examine the ground carefully, quartering it now in this direction and now in the other, in search of some mark or sign which should furnish us with a clue. Nor was my search by any means barren of results, for after a time I came to a spot where the guinea grass had been well trampled, indicating, to my mind, that this was the point where the various divisions of the attacking party, including their wounded, had rallied, and from which they had begun their retreat. And in this belief I was fully confirmed, a little later, by finding that the footmarks led away in a direction that gradually trended round toward the back of the house, past the coffee plantation, and so back toward the mountains.

Now, if they had decided to retreat to their mountain fastnesses, there was no need to trouble further about them, at least for the moment. But in my walks in the same direction with Don Luis I had noticed several paths which, I had been informed, led to certain plantations in the neighbourhood; and it was of course quite possible that the brigands might be making for one of these; I, therefore, determined to follow up the trail while it was fresh, and endeavour to obtain some definite clue to their actual destination. My first idea was to return to the house, acquaint the occupants with the result of my investigations thus far, inform them as to my further plans, and then retrace my steps to the spot where I at that moment stood; but I reflected that to do all this meant the loss of some twenty minutes or more, which might make all the difference between success and failure to my plan, so I determined to push on at once, and immediately proceeded to do so.

I had not proceeded very far before I had conclusive evidence that I was on the right track by coming upon a wounded negro, who lay fair in the middle of the path, groaning piteously as he clasped his head, swathed in a blood-stained bandage, between his hands. I asked him if he was badly hurt.

"*Sí, señor,*" he answered; "hurt to the death, I fear, unless I can obtain speedy help. I could walk no farther, and my companions have abandoned me. Take me to the house, I pray you, Señor, and let my hurt be attended to. It will be horrible to die here alone in the open; moreover, the ants will find me before long, and consider what my fate will then be."

Dreadful enough, no doubt, if the man were as bad as he considered himself to be. But I did not believe he was; for though his voice seemed feeble enough when he began to speak it distinctly gained in strength as he went on, and I very speedily came to the conclusion that his weakness was more than half imaginary; also I was not very greatly disposed to be tender-hearted over the sufferings of such fiends as these negro outlaws had proved themselves to be; instead, therefore, of responding to his appeal I asked him curtly:

"Which way have your companions gone?"

"Straight up toward the mountains," he answered, pointing upward along the path in which I was standing.

"Very well," I said. "It is necessary that I should verify your statement; I am, therefore, going on a little farther. But I shall soon be back; and I will then help you to the house and have your wound attended to, although that will avail you little, for I warn you that you and the rest of the wounded will be handed over to the authorities forthwith. And that means for you, death upon the gallows."

The fellow grunted. "Even that will be less disagreeable than being devoured alive by the ants," he answered.

Without bandying further words with him I continued my way up the path, which took a rather sharp turn a few yards farther on. As I rounded the bend I was somewhat surprised to see two more men lying in the road: one of whom seemed to be either dead or in a swoon, while the other appeared to be almost in a state of collapse.

"The inhuman villains," I thought, "to abandon their wounded in this heartless fashion! Surely they might have somehow made shift to carry off their injured comrades with them, for they must be fully aware that if the unfortunate wretches fall into the hands of the authorities they will meet with short shrift. Well, we seem to have punished them rather more severely than I had thought; I should not be very greatly surprised if I find a few more poor beggars in the same plight before I have finished my walk."

With these thoughts uppermost in my mind I approached the prostrate figures, one of whom was moaning most piteously, while the other lay still, with half-closed eyes staring upward at the sky.

"Well, *picaro,*" I said to the man who was moaning, "what is the matter with you?"



IN THE HANDS OF THE OUTLAWS

"Oh, Señor," he gasped, "for the love of God help me to get into the shadow of yonder bush. I am perishing of thirst, and this scorching sun is adding to my torments. If you will raise me to my knees perhaps I can manage to crawl to— Ah, good! I have him! Quick, José, help me! He is strong as a horse, and— So, that is right; now kneel upon him while I lash his wrists together. And Miguel,"—as the man I had left in the road a minute before came running up—"take the gun and those pistols, they will be safer in your hands than in his."

The surprise was perfectly managed. Completely taken off my guard by the admirably assumed helplessness of the three scoundrels, I was easily captured. For as I incautiously laid down my gun for a moment to place my hands under the arms of the moaning hypocrite who had begged me to assist him, the rascal flung his arms and legs round me, pinning me in a grip that for the moment held me helpless, and dragged me to the ground, rolling over on top of me, while the other, springing with equal suddenness into vigorous life and activity, also flung himself upon me and held me face downward in the sandy soil while his comrade swiftly bound my hands behind my back with the long silken sash which he had rapidly unwound from his waist. While he was doing this up came the third man, who had been so dreadfully afraid of being devoured alive by the ants, and took possession of my weapons. Now, when it was too late, the truth dawned upon me; the villains, far from being seriously hurt, were as sound as I was, and had simply been left behind in feigned helplessness upon the off-chance that some one of the whites might incautiously venture out, as I had done, with the object of ascertaining where the retreating brigands were actually going, and thus be captured.

Oh! how I execrated my folly, now that it was too late, and I was being hurried along the rough path by the jubilant trio who had captured me and who were in a great hurry to rejoin the main body of outlaws. And how fervently I hoped and prayed that none of the rest of the whites at Bella Vista might be as foolish as I had been. My thoughts went back to the wounded men lying scattered here and there round the house and within musket-shot of it, and for a moment my soul sickened with dread as I thought of what might happen if they too were merely shamming. But the fear was only momentary; I remembered that the hurts of every one of them were visibly, indisputably real, serious enough to disable and render them harmless; and I hoped that my failure to return would put the whole household upon its guard and, by demonstrating to them my imprudence, open their eyes to the fact that all danger was not necessarily over because the brigands had withdrawn.

My companions were in high feather at having achieved my capture, and extolled the shrewdness of a certain Mateo—who, I gathered from their remarks, was their new chief, in place of the deceased Petion—in having devised so ingenious a trap as the one into which I had unsuspectingly fallen. Moreover, they endeavoured to beguile the way by drawing vivid word-pictures—presumably in the hope of frightening me and enjoying my terror—of the unspeakable torments that would be inflicted upon me by way of appeasing the manes of those of their comrades who had fallen in the attack upon the house. Truly I might very well have been excused had I blenched at the prospect which, according to them, lay before me; for if they were to be believed, it was not an hour or two, but several days of excruciating suffering which I might expect. However, I did not by any means believe all that they said. They might be clever enough actors, so far as shamming being wounded was concerned, but in the finer art of inflicting suffering in anticipation they were mere clumsy bunglers, for they lacked that finer sense of dissimulation which endows a man with the power of lying with conviction; they allowed their motive to become apparent; and, seeing this, I disappointed them by laughing in their faces. Besides, whether what they said was truth or falsehood, I was not going to afford a trio of sable outlaws the satisfaction of boasting that they had succeeded in frightening an Englishman.

Enlivening the way with such conversation as I have hinted at, we trudged along the upward path for a distance of about a mile and a half, when we suddenly came upon a wide-open space where the main body of the outlaws had

halted to rest and refresh themselves, and also, as I soon became aware by the trend of the general conversation, to determine whether they should return to their head-quarters, or proceed to attack some other estate in the immediate neighbourhood.

My appearance, in the character of a prisoner, was the signal for a great yell of ferocious delight on the part of the outlaws, immediately followed by a brisk fusillade of scurrilous, ribald jests concerning the sport that they would have with me upon their return to their mountain stronghold; and so bloodcurdling were the suggestions thrown out by some of those fiends that I confess a qualm of fear surged over me for a second or two; for I saw at once that, unlike my captors, these ruffians were not endeavouring merely to frighten me, but were in deadly earnest. Not that I feared death; no man who ever knew me could dub me coward. In the heat of battle, or under most ordinary circumstances I can face death—ay, and have faced it a hundred times—without a tremor; but to be triced up, helpless, and to have one's strength sapped and one's life slowly drained away by a long drawn-out succession of unspeakable torments is a prospect that I venture to say few can bring themselves to face without some manifestation of discomposure. Although my cheeks and lips may have blanched for a moment, I permitted no further and greater sign of fear to escape me. I returned their glances of fiendish ferocity with an unquailing eye, and listened to their diabolical jests in apparently unruffled silence, as I was conducted through their ranks by my captors toward a small hillock, overshadowed by a gigantic *bois immortelle*, upon which sat a negro in solitary state, appeasing his hunger by wolfishly tearing, with his strong white teeth, the flesh from three or four roast ribs of goat which he grasped with both hands.

I do not think I ever encountered a lower, or more bestial type of humanity than was this man. He was a pure-blooded black, of almost herculean proportions, and evidently of enormous strength, as are many of the pure-blooded West African negroes; but one completely lost sight of his splendid physique in contemplation of the expression of low cunning and ferocious cruelty that blazed out of his small, narrow eyes and contorted his wide, flat nostrils, his thick, blubber lips, and his unnaturally prominent chin and jaws; he was the very embodiment and picture of all the most savage and debasing passions that characterise the worst specimens of humanity, and reminded me of nothing so much as a combination of snake, tiger, and monkey clothed in the outward semblance of a human form. "Heaven have mercy upon the unfortunate who stirs this brute to anger!" thought I. He was undoubtedly well aware of the feelings of horror and repulsion that he inspired in the breasts of others, and seemed rather to pride himself upon it, I thought; for as I was led forward into his presence he paused in his wolfish feeding and glared upon me with an expression of concentrated malignity that seemed to freeze the very marrow in my bones. But I believed that he was deliberately striving to frighten me, and horrified though I actually was, I was determined he should not have the satisfaction of feeling that he had succeeded. I, therefore, steadily returned his stare with all the coolness and nonchalance I could summon to my aid, and after the lapse of a full minute or more he turned his glance aside to one of the men who held me, and said:

"Well, Carlos, my ruse succeeded, it would appear. But it is a poor sort of capture that you have made; I hoped you would contrive to get hold of Don Luis, or at least of Don Esteban, or one of his sons; but who is this? He is a mere boy!"

"True, he is," answered the man addressed as Carlos—the scoundrel who had taken advantage of an appeal to my humanity to catch me unawares. "But," he continued, "boy though he is, he is as strong as a young lion, and will afford us sport for three or four days, if things are carefully managed; and after that—" He added a few words in some language that I did not understand.

"But who is he, and what is he?" snarled the other. "He does not look like a Spaniard."

"He is not a Spaniard," answered Carlos. "Pepe, one of the Bella Vista 'boys' who joined us last night, told me that there was a young Englishman in the house who had been found by old Tomasso, Don Luis' fisherman, floating about on a piece of wreckage, nearly dead, and had been brought ashore by him and, at Don Luis' orders, taken up to the house and nursed back to health by Mama Elisa; and without doubt this is he."

"Is this so?" demanded the quintessence of ugliness, turning his gaze upon me.

"It is," answered I. "And perhaps it may prevent misunderstanding and attachment of blame to the wrong people if I explain that it is I who am responsible for the defence of Bella Vista and the losses that you have sustained. It was I who supervised the erection of the barricades, and who also arranged the plan upon which we fought."

"A-h!" he breathed, and the note of diabolical malignity with which he contrived to imbue that single word sent a shudder of fear through me, so intense was it. "Then, perhaps," he continued, "you may be able to tell us whose hand it was who slew Petion, our late leader?"

"As well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb," thought I, and answered at once "Yes. As a matter of fact I am responsible for that, too; and I am glad of it. It was my finger that pulled the trigger that sent the bullet through his heart; and my only regret is that you did not stay long enough to enable me to send a few more of you after him."

Carlos, my captor, actually released my arm and stepped a pace away, the better to gaze upon me, so astounded was he at the unimaginable rashness of my speech. And, to speak truth, I was astounded at myself; I knew perfectly well that I was in all probability only adding fuel to the flame which would ultimately consume me, yet some perverse influence altogether beyond my control seemed to urge me to speak as I did, whether I would or no. And, strangest circumstance of all, my words, instead of evoking from my questioner the white-hot explosion of wrath that I fully expected, seemed to gratify the man rather than otherwise, for he grinned appreciation as he gazed into my flashing eyes. Then a thought seemed to suddenly strike him.

"You were picked up floating upon a piece of wreckage, you say?" he remarked. "Now, I wonder whether, by any chance, that piece of wreckage happened to belong to the British man-o'-war schooner that engaged a pirate

schooner a few miles in the offing, about a month or two ago?"

"It did," I answered. "It belonged to His Britannic Majesty's schooner *Wasp*, which foundered in the gale that sprang up immediately after the engagement; and I, her commander, was, so far as I know, the only person saved."

"You her commander!" he reiterated incredulously. "Why, you are only a boy!"

"Nevertheless, what I have told you is the truth," I answered.

The fellow sat considering this statement for so long a time that I began to wonder whether perchance it was destined to affect my fate in any way. At length, however, he appeared to have arrived at a decision, for, drawing a greasy notebook from one pocket and a stub of pencil from another, he proceeded with much labour to indite a communication of some kind upon it, which, when completed, he folded in a peculiar way and handed to Carlos, at the same time giving him, in a tongue with which I had no acquaintance, what I took to be certain instructions. Whatever the nature of the communication may have been it appeared to meet with Carlos' emphatic disapproval, for he began to argue strenuously with the other, the argument lasting some ten minutes and rapidly growing more heated, until finally something was said that apparently convinced him of the futility of further dispute on his part. Then he suddenly desisted and, seizing me by the arm, dragged me away to a spot where we were somewhat isolated from the rest of the camp, where he left me in charge of his companions José and Miguel while he went off elsewhere. His absence, however, was of but brief duration, for presently he returned, followed by two other negroes who bore in a large calabash an ample supply of boiled rice, roasted yams, and substantial portions of roast goat mutton, which they deposited on the ground within easy reach of us before they departed and left us to ourselves.

As soon as they had gone fairly out of ear-shot Carlos turned to me and, pointing to the provisions, said, as he released me from my bonds:

"Help yourself, and eat freely, Señor Englishman, for we have a long march before we are likely to again see a decent meal."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed. "Is your camp, or head-quarters, or whatever you call it, so far off, then, as that would seem to imply?"

"We are not going to head-quarters," he replied rather tartly; "and you may thank the good God that it is so; for, whatever may be your mode of death, you may accept my assurance that it will not be anything like so protracted or unpleasant as that which awaited you among the mountains yonder."

"Well," said I, "that at least is good hearing. But if we are not going to head-quarters, pray where are we going?"

"My orders from Mateo, our new chief—whose beauty doubtless impressed you," he replied, with a grin, "are to conduct you down to the coast and deliver you over to his very good friend Manuel Garcia, the pirate, whose schooner *Tiburón* you and your crew punished so severely when—according to your own admission, mind—you engaged her some little time ago. Mateo is under the impression that Garcia would be peculiarly gratified to find in his power the officer who commanded the schooner which mauled the *Tiburón* so severely; so, as you have confessed that you are the man, he has decided to make a present of you to his friend, and to take the risk of the rumpus that will certainly arise when the band learns that it is not to have the pleasure of amusing itself with you."

"And how far is your friend Garcia's lair from here?" I demanded.

"Not very far," was the answer. "But it will take us until close upon sunset to do the distance, because Mateo prefers that we should not start until the rest of the band are on the move. He fears that if you were seen going toward the sea, instead of up into the mountains, some of our 'lambs' might begin to ask awkward questions, and insist upon your accompanying them. Therefore, if you feel at all tired, you had better avail yourself of the present opportunity to snatch a little sleep."

As a matter of fact I did not feel in the least tired, but I wanted an opportunity to think quietly over this change in my prospects; I, therefore, gladly accepted the suggestion made by Carlos and, stretching myself out beneath the shade of an adjacent clump of bush, closed my eyes and, before I knew it, was fast asleep.

I was awakened by the sound of many voices and the stir of many feet, and sat up to see that the whole band of marauders was in motion; and ten minutes later there was nothing to betray their presence save a cloud of dun-coloured dust rising into the air over the tops of the bushes. It appeared to me, however, that instead of wending their way toward the mountains they were bearing away in a westerly direction toward a spot where, at a distance of some eight or ten miles, I knew a group of extensive and prosperous plantations existed. As soon as the last of the stragglers had vanished, Carlos rose to his feet and said:

"Now, Señor Englishman, if you are sufficiently rested we will be moving; because, if it should be noticed that you are not among them, some of our people might return to look for you; and it would be very bad indeed for you if they should do that—and find you."

"I am quite ready," I answered, as I sprang to my feet; and in another minute our little party also—consisting of Carlos, José, Miguel, and myself—had disappeared from the scene.

Our way lay in precisely the opposite direction to that taken by the raiders; that is to say, while they marched toward the west, we followed a narrow, winding footpath that, if it could be said to have any definite direction at all, trended toward the east. For three hours we trudged steadily onward, Carlos, with one of my pistols in his belt, in addition to his own weapons, walking on one side of me, with José, similarly equipped, on the other, while Miguel, with my gun upon his shoulder, brought up the rear. For several miles we traversed the lower slopes of the range, winding hither

and thither but steadily working our way eastward, now passing over sterile, rocky ground, sparsely dotted here and there with clumps of thorny scrub, and anon opening out a glorious prospect of gently undulating, fertile country, dotted with plantations,—the smoke-blackened roofless walls of some of the mansions built on them clearly suggesting a recent visit from the late Petion and his fellow-outlaws,—and, beyond all, the grand old ocean, blue, save where darkened by the drifting cloud shadows, and flecked here and there with white from the scourging of the trade-wind. At length, however, when the sun had declined to within a span's length of the western horizon, we bore away sharply toward the north, and presently came in sight of an indentation in the coast which, at the first glimpse, had the appearance of being land-locked; but which, as we approached it more closely, I saw was really a nearly circular bay about a mile in diameter, the entrance of which was most effectively masked by a small islet stretching completely across it and leaving only two narrow passages, one to the east and the other to the west of it. A small felucca lay at anchor a cable's length from the shore; and when at length we reached the lip of the basin-like depression, the bottom of which formed the bay, or cove rather, I perceived, to my amazement, that a sort of village of quite respectable extent had been built along its southern margin, some of the buildings being so large that I at once set them down as storehouses. A number of people were moving about the buildings; and quite a dozen boats were hauled up on the beach above high-water mark.

And now I noticed a very remarkable peculiarity in connection with the cove: the sides of the basin wherein it lay consisted everywhere of perfectly vertical cliffs, some two hundred feet high, so that, look where I would, I could at first discover no way down into it. Looking a little closer, however, I presently became aware of an exceedingly narrow and dangerous zigzag path traversing the cliff-face, about a quarter of a mile farther on, and toward this we at once made our way. A quarter of an hour later, having first encountered a sentry at the upper end of the path, to whom Carlos whispered some password which I could not catch, we found ourselves safely at the base of the cliff and at the extreme end of the village. Arrived here, we directed our steps toward the most important-looking house in the place, at the door of which Carlos knocked. An ancient, frosty-headed negro responded to the knock and, in reply to Carlos' question, stated that Don Manuel Garcia was at the moment away in the schooner, but that Señor Fernandez was, as usual, in charge of the settlement, and possibly might do as well; to which suggestion Carlos assented, whereupon we were ushered into a large bare room, furnished in such a manner as to suggest the idea that it was chiefly used as a council chamber, and the door was shut upon us.

Chapter Nineteen.

In the Pirate's Stronghold.

Here we waited nearly half-an-hour, at the conclusion of which a door at the upper end of the chamber opened, and a tall, rather good-looking man, dressed entirely in white, entered. At his appearance Carlos sprang to his feet and, saluting, handed over the note which Mateo had scrawled. The stranger, who was none other than "Don" Victor Fernandez, Captain Manuel Garcia's second-in-command, took the note, read it, glanced at me curiously, and then nodded curtly to Carlos and his companions.

"Good!" he ejaculated. "The Captain will highly appreciate the thoughtfulness of your new chief, Mateo, in sending him this Englishman. In his name I desire to tender his warmest thanks to Mateo, and request you to convey them, with every expression of his highest consideration. Do you leave us to-night, or will you remain until the morning? If the latter—"

"*Mille gracias, señor!*" answered Carlos; "we should greatly like to stay here for the night, and rest, for this day has been an exceptionally trying and fatiguing one for us; but Mateo's instructions that we should rejoin him at the earliest possible moment were imperative and must not be neglected. But if we may be permitted to stay long enough to share your people's supper, we will gladly do so."

"So be it," answered Fernandez. "Find Pacheco, and tell him that you will sup in the great hall with the rest of the hands, and then request him to come to me." Whereupon Carlos and his two fellow-cut-throats saluted and retired.

For a minute or two after the departure of the trio, Fernandez sat meditatively regarding me in silence, twisting and turning Mateo's note in his fingers meanwhile. At length, with just the ghost of a smile flickering over his features, he said, tapping the note in his hand:

"The worthy Mateo tells me that you were the officer in command of the little schooner that gave the *Tiburón* such a severe dressing down a little while ago. Is that really the fact?"

"Yes," I answered, "I am proud to say that it is."

"Well," he returned, "I can scarcely credit it. Why, you are only a boy!"

"So people are constantly reminding me," I retorted. "But in the British Navy boys soon learn to do men's work."

"So it would appear," assented my interlocutor, apparently in no wise offended at my brusque method of answering him. "And you are an Englishman, of course. What is your name?"

I told him.

"Well, Señor Delamere," he said, "it is perhaps a lucky thing for you that Captain Garcia went to sea four days ago in the refitted *Tiburón*, and that he may possibly not return for nearly a month. Had he been here at this moment I do not for an instant believe that he would have given you the chance that I am going to offer you; for he has vowed that if ever he can lay hands upon you he will make such an example of you as will strike terror to the heart of his every enemy. Of course I sympathise with him to a great extent, for he has never in his life had such a trouncing as

you gave him with that ridiculous little schooner of yours; and, apart from other considerations, his self-love has been very severely wounded. Therefore, being a man who never forgets nor forgives an injury, he will not be satisfied until he has salved his wounded pride by making you pay in full in a manner that will cause every sailor in West Indian waters to shudder with horror. But I am not vindictive—as he is; I am always willing to subordinate revenge to the good of the community, by which, of course, I mean our community, the little republic which at present is bounded by the cliffs which enclose this cove, but which in process of time is destined to include the whole of this magnificent island of Hayti and—who knows?—possibly the entire group of islands now known as the West Indies. And you, young as you are, have proved yourself to be a formidable enemy; you have courage, resolution, and apparently all the other qualities that go to the making of a successful leader; therefore I think it a thousand pities that you should be wasted, uselessly expended, in the mere gratification of a petty revenge which will benefit nobody anything; on the contrary, I am convinced that we should gain immensely by making you one of ourselves— Nay, do not interrupt me, please; hear me to the end before you attempt to reply. In the absence of Garcia I am supreme here; I can secure your election as a member of our band, and once a member, you are absolutely safe from Garcia, for it is one of the rules of our brotherhood that ‘One is for all, and all are for one;’ private jealousies and animosities are absolutely forbidden, and the punishment for transgressing this law is *death*, let the offender be who he will.

“Now, that is one argument in favour of your joining us. But there are others. We are weak, as yet, it is true; but that is because, as a community, we are still very young. We are, however, gaining strength almost daily; every capture we make adds to our numbers, because we give our prisoners the choice between joining us, and—death; and nine of every ten choose the former. Also, we are rapidly accumulating wealth, which is power; and with the power which unlimited wealth will give us, added to the power of constantly increasing numbers, all things are possible to us, even to the conquest of the world! Now, a lad of your intelligence ought to be able to see, without much persuasion, how tremendous an advantage it will be to belong to such a formidable band as we shall soon become, therefore I put it to you in a nutshell—Will you join us?”

Upon discovering the direction in which my companion’s arguments were trending, my first impulse had been to interrupt him indignantly by declaring that I saw through his purpose, and would have naught to do with it. But he would not permit me to do this; he insisted upon saying his say to the end; and while he was doing this I had time for reflection. I perceived that the man was an enthusiastic visionary possessed of such boundless ambition that he was able to see nothing except the impossible goal which he and his fellow-leaders had set before themselves. I saw that this fellow Fernandez, at all events, had dwelt upon the mad scheme of conquest, first of Hayti, then of the West Indian Islands, and ultimately, as he had declared, of the whole world, until it had become an obsession with him in which all difficulties were swept away and his gorgeous dream had seemed to be a thing already almost within reach. It occurred to me that by pretending to listen to this dreamer, to appear to treat his dreams as though it was possible for them to eventually materialise, and to seem to weigh the proposal seriously which he had made to me, I might gain time enough to mature some plan of escape, and to put it into effect before the return of the *Tiburón* and my arch-enemy Garcia; and while, as a general rule, I most emphatically disapprove of everything that savours of deception, I felt that, taking all the circumstances of the case into consideration, I should be perfectly justified in practising such dissimulation as might be necessary to extricate myself from the exceedingly awkward situation in which I now found myself.

Therefore when, with eyes ablaze with enthusiasm, Fernandez flashed the question at me, “Will you join us?” I hesitated just for a second or two, and then replied:

“I suppose you hardly expect me to answer offhand so momentous a question as that, do you? It is all very well, of course, for you, who have given the matter much careful thought, to feel so confident as you do that your plans are capable of realisation, but with me it is very different; the entire idea is absolutely new to me, and—if I may be permitted to say so—looks little short of chimerical.”

“But it is *not* chimerical,” Fernandez impatiently insisted; “on the contrary, it is perfectly feasible and, as we have planned it, absolutely certain of realisation.”

There is no need for me to repeat at length all the arguments that this man adduced in support of his contention; let it suffice me to say that I listened to him with deep attention—for I wanted to learn as many particulars as I possibly could concerning the plans of this extraordinary band, with a view to future contingencies—and when at length I left his presence I believe I also left him under the impression that he had more than half convinced me of the advisability of acceding to his proposal.

Meanwhile the man Pacheco, in obedience to the command conveyed through Carlos, had been patiently waiting in the antechamber for the summons to appear and receive the commands of Fernandez concerning me; and now, the interview being at an end, the former was called into the room.

“Pacheco,” said Fernandez, “this young gentleman is Señor Delamere, the officer who commanded the small British man-o-war schooner that lately attacked the *Tiburón*. His vessel foundered in the gale that sprang up immediately after the action, and he contrived somehow to make his way to the shore, where he was nursed back to health and strength in the hacienda of Bella Vista, belonging to Señor Don Luis Calderon y Albuquerque. That hacienda was attacked by Petion and his band in the early hours of this morning, and—as Carlos has doubtless already told you—Petion was killed during the attack, while Señor Delamere subsequently fell into the hands of Mateo, Petion’s second-in-command, who very thoughtfully sent him on to us.

“Now, Señor Delamere, being, although still very young, a naval officer of considerable experience and undoubted courage, will be an acquisition of the utmost value to us if we can but succeed in inducing him to join us—and I have hopes, very great hopes of doing so. I, therefore, want you to take him in charge for the present, showing him the utmost consideration, and allowing him free range of the settlement,—since it will be impossible for him to escape,—because I desire him to become thoroughly acquainted with all our resources, and to see for himself the perfection of all our arrangements for securing the success of our great enterprise.”

I could scarcely believe my ears when I heard Fernandez give this extraordinary and, as I deemed it, most imprudent order. It seemed too good to be true! Why, if the foolish man had but known it, there was nothing I could possibly have more ardently wished for than liberty to range freely the settlement and become fully acquainted with all its resources! If I had ever dreamed of such a possibility as this it would not have needed that I should be brought a prisoner to the place; I should have been but too eager to make my way to it voluntarily. But, of course, it was much better as it was, for now all that I had to do was to keep my eyes and ears wide-open, learn everything I possibly could, and, generally, make the very best use of my time before the return of Garcia, while humouring Fernandez to the top of his bent in his delusion that he would ultimately convince me of the advantage of joining the band. Moreover, I believed I should not have much difficulty in accomplishing this last; for, although I was at first somewhat at a loss to understand his great eagerness to secure me as a recruit, it became perfectly intelligible when I learned a little later on that the only weak point in the entire scheme consisted in the extreme scarcity of trained sailors capable of undertaking the more important executive duties. Seamen, of the kind to be found in a ship's fore-castle, they possessed, not exactly in abundance, but sufficient for their ordinary necessities; but it appeared that, apart from Garcia, his first lieutenant, and one other, they had not a single navigator among them; and it was easy to understand that, if anything untoward should happen to either of these men, the activities of the brotherhood would be seriously crippled, while a fatality that swept the whole of them away might well mean the utter ruin of all their hopes. I did not learn this quite at once, for it seemed to be the one item of information upon which Fernandez desired me to remain ignorant; but, mingling freely with everybody, as I was permitted to do, it was impossible for them to prevent the secret from ultimately leaking out, and I had not been in the settlement more than three days before I became acquainted with it, and with a good many other things as well.

For instance, I learned that of the three navigators which the community boasted, two—namely, Garcia and another—were on board the *Tiburón*, while the third was in command of a most respectable-looking brig, which, provided with a complete set of false papers, was engaged in conveying to various ports such portions of the cargoes of plundered ships as were not needed by the pirates themselves, disposing of the same for cash, and procuring with that cash such commodities as were required from time to time. The felucca that lay at anchor in the bay had also been similarly employed; but she was now idle, the man who had commanded her being with Garcia in the *Tiburón*, in place of an officer who had been killed in the action with the *Wasp*.

At the time of my arrival this extraordinary pirate settlement, or community, consisted of some forty seamen of various nationalities—except Englishmen—who had thrown in their lot with Garcia, Fernandez, and the rest; and about a hundred others who, although not seamen, were most useful for the performance of such strictly shore duty as the erection of houses, the loading and discharging of the trading brig, the storage of the various commodities needed by the community, the working up of rough spars into spare masts, yards, booms, etcetera, for the brig and schooner, the making of spare sails for the same, and, in short, the execution of all those multitudinous kinds of work that are essential to the comfort of man in his civilised condition. And exceedingly comfortable the rascals made themselves, for the houses were well-built, and in many cases beautifully furnished; also they enjoyed many luxuries, procured either from the cargoes of plundered ships, or purchased out of the proceeds of the sale of such plunder as they did not require for their own use.

It was not long before I discovered that there was a mystery of some sort attaching to the felucca that lay at anchor in the bay. I had made more than one attempt to go on board her, with the object of giving her an overhaul, but each attempt had been quietly met and frustrated in such a way that I soon grew to understand I could not persist further without exciting grave suspicion, which was the one thing of all others that I most desired to avoid. For it was this felucca that I regarded as my only possible means of escape from the pirates, and, that being the case, it was of the utmost importance that I should do nothing to betray the thought that lurked at the back of my mind. She was a fine, sturdy-looking little craft, measuring somewhere about sixty tons; and I felt that if I could but once get aboard her, and get enough sail hoisted to take me out to sea, the most difficult part of my adventure would be over; for Jamaica lay to leeward, and I could not very well lose my way, even if I were compelled to go to sea without a chart. It is true that the rig of a felucca—namely, a single latteen-sail, its head stretched along an enormously long, tapering yard, hoisted to the top of a stout, stumpy mast raking well forward—is not precisely the rig that I would willingly choose to go to sea alone with; but beggars must not be choosers, and it seemed to me to be Hobson's choice—that or nothing. I must therefore make up my mind to face the difficulties of the rig and do the best I could with it, or remain until Garcia's return, and so miss my only chance. Of course, there was just the bare possibility that I might find a man, or even two or three, willing to share the adventure with me—for I could scarcely believe that every member of the community had quite willingly joined it without compulsion of any kind—but I had no intention of jeopardising my chances of success by making inquiries, of however cautious a character. If such men were to be found it would have to be almost by pure accident; meanwhile it was for me to make my plans in such a manner that, if necessary, they could be carried out single-handed.

But it was imperative that I should visit the felucca, by hook or by crook; and since I had already discovered that it could not be managed during the day, there was nothing for it but to make the attempt at night. Now, I was in Pacheco's charge, he was responsible for me, and although I was nominally free to come and go as I would, it was not long before I discovered that it was practically impossible for me to get out of his sight for more than five or ten minutes at a time, except at night time, when I was granted the privilege of a small room to myself in his house. Even then, for the first week of my sojourn, I could scarcely stir in my bed but at the creaking of it he would be at my door, inquiring why I was moving, and whether I required anything, the questioning being, I fancied, simply for the purpose of assuring himself that I was still in the room. But as the days—or rather the nights—went on his vigilance gradually relaxed, for I so shaped my speech as to convey the impression that, at least in my own mind, I had practically decided to join the band. It was this, perhaps, that so far threw him off his guard as to betray him, on a certain night, into the indulgence of his favourite vice, which was a too-marked devotion to the rum bottle. For several nights in succession—ever since I had been placed in his charge, in fact—he had been perforce compelled to remain perfectly sober in order that he might keep a strict watch upon me, but at length when, while we were sitting at table together, taking supper, I allowed him to believe that I had finally decided to go to Fernandez the next morning and take the oath, he ventured to celebrate my conversion by drinking my health in a stiff nor'wester of rum and water—rather

more rum than water. That act of weakness was his undoing, for at the first taste of the spirit after his forced abstinence he completely lost all control of himself, and could no more refrain from taking a second tumbler than he could have flown. The second naturally led to a third, and the third to a fourth; whereupon, recognising that my chance was at hand, I yawned twice or thrice most portentously, complained of fatigue, and retired to my room, he following as far as the door and locking me in, as was his custom before going to his own room. But that troubled me not a whit, for the house was of one story only, and to slip out of it by way of the open window was almost as easy as walking out through the door, once my gaoler became so deeply wrapped in sleep that my stealthy movements would not awake him.

I moved quite carelessly about the room for a minute or two, and then flung myself heavily upon the bed, fully dressed; and as I did so I heard Pacheco go tiptoeing clumsily back to the table, stumbling against a chair on the way, and muttering imprecations at his own clumsiness as he went. A further gurgling of liquor being poured into a glass followed, then a deep sigh of satisfaction as the glass was emptied, the bang of it as it was noisily replaced on the table, and finally the man's staggering footsteps along the floor as he made his way to his own room. Then came the kicking off of his shoes, followed by other sounds indicative of the fact that he was undressing, a heavy creaking of the bedstead as he flung himself upon it, and, a minute or two later, deep snoring.

But it was still much too early for me to think of making a move, for sounds reached me from the outside which told me that quite a number of people were still up and about; I therefore waited, with such



"I HEADED THE BOAT IN THE DIRECTION OF THE FELUCCA"

patience as I could muster, until these had all ceased, and then allowed something like another half-hour to elapse, in order to make all sure—for this was a case where it were better to be half-an-hour late than half-a-minute too early, and by undue haste spoil everything.

At length, however, the complete absence of all sound suggestive, of human movement outside, and the steady, regular, resonant snore of Pacheco in the next room, encouraged me to make my preliminary move, which I did by rising, slowly and with infinite caution, to a sitting position on my bed. This done, I next got off the bed altogether, not, however, without causing the thing to give forth sundry most alarming creaks, each of which brought my heart into my mouth. But the snoring in the next room went on steadily, without pause or break, and two minutes later I found myself standing, barefooted, outside my window, ready to scramble back into the room upon the first suggestion of danger. Nothing happened, however; and with my shoes in my hand I next proceeded to creep very cautiously round to the front of the house.

The night was clear, with no moon, but the sky was brilliant with stars affording even more light than I really wanted; and at length, having peered cautiously round me and noted that the buildings were all dark, showing that the inhabitants had retired to rest, I stole slowly, crouching, across the open and so down to the beach. Among the boats drawn up on the sand there was a small Norwegian boat, much used as a dinghy, and consequently not drawn as far up on the beach as the others; this was the craft that I was on the lookout for, and by and by I found her, half afloat, and secured by her painter to a small anchor dug well into the sand. Lifting the anchor with the utmost care, I noiselessly deposited it in her bows, and then, making sure that her oars were in her, I lifted her bow and slid her off the sand until she was fairly afloat, when I gently turned her round, gave her a vigorous push, and scrambled in over her stern, taking care to do everything without noise. Then, throwing out an oar over the stern, I headed the boat in the direction of the scarcely visible felucca, and proceeded to scull off to her.

Thus far everything had gone smoothly and without the ghost of a hitch, but the really difficult part of my enterprise was still to come. I estimated that a good four hundred miles lay between the cove and Port Royal harbour, which distance, at an average speed of six knots, would take me the best part of three days and nights to cover, under the most favourable conditions. To do this, I should need both food and water, and I had not the most remote idea

whether either was to be found on board the felucca, although I hoped they might be, for I had seen half-a-dozen men go off to her regularly every day, for some purpose which I could not divine, unless perchance it were to pump her out. But food and water were absolutely necessary to ensure my success, and unless I could find at least a sufficiency to last me three days, I must return and take measures to provide a supply; for to start without would be simply courting disaster. That, however, was a point which could only be settled upon my arrival on board.

Taking the matter very easily, husbanding all my strength for the exceedingly difficult task of getting the felucca under way single-handed—in the event of all things conspiring to render such a decided step justifiable—and sculling so gently that I scarcely raised a ripple on the highly phosphorescent water, I at length glided quietly up alongside the felucca and, taking the end of the boat's painter with me, climbed in over the vessel's low bulwarks, passed the dinghy astern, made her fast, and forthwith proceeded to overhaul the craft which I had thus surreptitiously visited.

My first visit was to her tiny cabin, the companion door of which I found unlocked. But when I got below it was so intensely dark that I could see nothing, and I felt that at all costs I must have a light, or it would be morning, and my flight would be discovered long before I could learn all that I wanted to ascertain. I, therefore, went on deck again, loosed the immense sail, and spread a fold of it over the small skylight in order to mask the light in the cabin—should I be fortunate enough to obtain one—and then went forward to the fore-castle to hunt for a lantern of some sort. I found the fore-scuttle not only closed, but also secured by a stout iron bar, the slotted end of which was passed over a staple and secured by a padlock. Fortunately, however, the individual who had last visited the little vessel had been too careless or too lazy to remove the key from the lock, therefore all I had to do was to turn the key, remove the padlock from the staple, throw back the bar, lift off the cover, and my way down into the fore-castle was clear. But I had no sooner lifted off the hatch cover and was preparing to descend than, to my utter consternation, I became aware of the fact that the fore-castle was inhabited. For as I flung my leg in over the coamings I distinctly heard a sound of stirring, followed, to my amazement, by the drowsy muttering of a voice in English, grumbling:

"What the blazes do they want now; and who comes off here at this time o' night? 'Taint time to turn out yet, I'll swear, for I don't seem to have been asleep more'n five minutes!"

English! Then the speaker must certainly be a friend, and without more ado I dropped down into the little fore-castle, exclaiming:

"Hillo, there! Who are you, my friend; and what the dickens are you doing locked up here in this fore-castle?"

"Who am I?" retorted the voice. "Why, I'm an Englishman; my name's Tom Brown, and the name of my mate here is Joe Cutler; both of us late of His Britannic Majesty's schooner *Wasp*, what foundered in a gale o' wind somewheres off this here coast a while since. We was picked up off a bit of wreckage by the crew of this here hooker—what turned out to be something in the piratical line—and brought into harbour. And since we've been here we've been made to work like niggers because we wouldn't jine the 'brotherhood,' as they calls theirselves. Latterly we've been kept aboard this here feluccer, because it appears that there's some chap ashore there as they don't want to see us. Ay, and if it comes to that, perhaps you're the chap. Seems to me as I've heard your voice before. Who are you at all, gov'nor?"

"My name is Delamere," I replied, "and I commanded—"

"Of course, of course," interrupted Brown; "Mr Delamere it is! I knowed that I knowed that voice of yours, sir. Here, you Joe, rouse and bitt, man; here's the skipper come to life again. Half a minute, sir, and we'll have a light. Joe, you lighted the 'glim' last; what did ye do wi' the tinder-box?"

The two men were broad awake, out of their bunks, and bustling about almost before one could draw a breath, and the next moment they had lighted a lantern, in the dim glimmer of which they stood up side by side, saluting, as I stared into their faces scarcely able to credit such a stupendous piece of good fortune as the unexpected discovery of these two men, not only Englishmen, but actually members of my own late crew!

"My lads," I exclaimed, as they stood before me at attention, "I am more glad than I can express, not only to find that you, like myself, have managed to escape with your lives, but also that you are here, aboard this felucca. For I fully intended to make the somewhat desperate attempt to escape in her single-handed; but the presence of you two men puts a very different complexion upon the affair. What I might have been wholly unable to accomplish alone, we three can together manage with ease. There is only one possible difficulty in our way: Can you tell me whether there happens to be any food and water aboard this craft?"

"Yes, sir," answered Brown, "there's both, for we're fed every day out of the ship's stores. There's the scuttle butt on deck nearly full o' water, and there's grub down in the lazarette, but how much I don't know."

"Then let us go at once and ascertain," said I, "for my escape may be discovered at any moment, and naturally this would be where they would first look for me. Mask that lantern with your jacket, one of you, and bring it along aft. Every second is now of importance to us."

It took us but a few minutes to penetrate to the little vessel's lazarette, where we found an ample supply of provisions of all kinds for a much larger crew than ourselves and a much longer voyage than we contemplated.

"Very well," I remarked, as I ran my eye over the array of biscuit and flour barrels and the casks, some of which were branded "prime mess beef," while others contained potatoes and sundry other commodities, "that will do; we shall certainly not starve during the next few days, whatever else may happen to us. Now clap on that hatch again, and we will go on deck, slip the cable, and make sail without further ado."

The Beginning of the End.

As I turned to quit the cabin I suddenly became aware that a bell was furiously jangling somewhere; and, dashing up the companion ladder to the deck, I discovered that the sounds proceeded from the shore, where lights were beginning to flash, one after the other, in rapid succession until the whole settlement appeared to be awake and stirring.

“On deck, both of you, at once!” I shouted, sending my voice down through the open companion. “Never mind about the hatch; leave everything as it is, for the moment, and clap on to these main halliards; there is an alarm of some sort ashore, and if it happens to be that they have discovered me to be missing, they will come off to this felucca the first thing. Yes, and by Jove, if I am not mistaken there is a boat shoving off already. Look, lads,”—as the two men came tumbling up on deck—“is that not the sparkle of oars in the water, there, right in the heart of that deep shadow?”

“Ay, sir, it do look uncommon like it, and no mistake—yes; that’s the sea fire shinin’ to the stroke of oars, right enough,” exclaimed Cutler. “And they’re comin’ along as though they meant business, too! Mr Delamere, it’d be a good plan, sir, if you was to jump for’ard and cast that cable off the bitts while Tom and me here sees about mastheadin’ this here yard; there won’t be so very much room to spare atween us by the time that this here hooker’s paid off and gathered way.”

“You are right, Joe, there will not,” answered I; and, dashing forward to the windlass bitts, I proceeded to throw off turn after turn of the stiff hempen cable that held the felucca to her anchor, until the last turn was gone and the flakes went writhing and twisting out through the hawse-hole; then, as the end disappeared with a splash I dashed aft and rammed the tiller hard over to port—noticing, as I did so, that a large boat, pulling eight oars, was less than a hundred fathoms distant from us, and coming up to us hand over hand. Then, catching a turn of the main-sheet round a cleat, I jumped forward again to where the two seamen were dragging desperately at the halliard which hoisted the heavy sail.

“Put your backs into it, men,” I cried, as I tailed on to the fall of the tackle; “there is a large boat close aboard of us! It will be ‘touch and go’ with us, even if we are able to scrape clear at all.”

Fiercely we dragged at the fall of the fourfold tackle that formed the working end of the halliard, and at each pull the great, heavy, swaying yard slid a few inches up the short, thick mast, as though reluctantly, while away on our weather quarter we heard the fierce shouts of the men in the approaching boat as they encouraged each other, punctuated by the quick jerk of the oars in the rowlocks, and the swish of the water as the oar-blades clipped into it. With the passage of every second those menacing sounds drew appreciably nearer, dominating even the thunderous rustle and slatting of the sail that slowly climbed into the air over our heads, while the felucca, now fast gathering stern-way, and at the same time paying off, was driving steadily down toward the boat at a rate that seemed to render our capture inevitable.

At length, with a final jerk that made the little craft tremble to her keel, the big single sail filled, and the felucca careened to her bearings, as her canvas caught the full pressure of the wind. At the same instant I heard an oar-blade clatter as it was hastily laid in, and an exultant cheer arise from immediately under our counter.

“Catch a turn with the halliards, quick, and then lay aft,” I gasped. “The villains are alongside, and will be in over our quarter before we can do anything to prevent them if we are not smart.”

As I spoke I passed the rope under, then over, a belaying-pin before surrendering it to Cutler to complete the operation of belaying, and then bounded aft, followed by Tom Brown, who had snatched a handspike from the rack as he passed it. My first act was to drag the tiller over to windward and pass a turn of the tiller rope round the head of it, to help the felucca to pay off; for she was now gathering headway. Then I sprang to the taffrail and looked over it. The pursuing boat had actually overtaken us, and the man who pulled “bow,” having laid in his oar, had grabbed the gunwale of the small boat in which I had come off from the shore—and which I had dropped astern upon boarding the felucca—and was now hauling his own boat up alongside her, while some half-dozen of his companions had risen to their feet and were scrambling into the smaller boat, apparently with some idea of climbing aboard us by shinning up her painter. But the felucca had by this time gathered way, and was moving so fast through the water that it was as much as the man could do to hold on, and quite beyond his power to haul the one boat any closer to the other. For a couple of breathless seconds longer he hung on desperately, and then, with a yell of savage disappointment, was obliged to let go, while somebody in the stern—I fancy it must have been Fernandez—seeing how things were going, shouted to the crew to throw out their oars again and give way. But before this could be done the big boat was half-a-dozen fathoms astern, and we were leaving her so rapidly that for her to overtake us was a manifest impossibility. Meanwhile the small boat, with six men in her, was towing astern of the felucca, with her nose raised high in the air and the water bubbling and boiling up to the level of the top of her transom, and even slopping in over it occasionally, so that it was impossible for any of her occupants to move, lest by so doing they should cause her to fill and swamp. The said occupants therefore did what they could in the way of relieving their feelings by vigorously anathematising us in good sonorous Spanish, and explaining, in short, pithy sentences, the sort of treatment that we might confidently look for when next they got us into their power. Then one of them happened to remember that all this time a brace of loaded pistols were sticking in his belt, whereupon he whipped them out and blazed away at us, his companions promptly following suit, but, luckily, without doing us the slightest injury.

By this time the felucca was rapidly nearing the weathermost extremity of the island that guarded and masked the entrance of the bay, and presently we weathered it handsomely and bore up to pass out to sea, gliding between the two Heads a minute later. We were now fairly outside, and with the first plunge of the little vessel’s sharp stem into the surges that met us as we swept into the open sea a yell of dismay arose from the occupants of the boat astern, who cried out that they were being swamped, and implored us, for the love of all the saints, to cast them off before they were washed out and drowned. I could not resist the temptation to retort that even, if that happened, they

would still be getting less than their deserts; then, adding that I hoped I should soon have the pleasure of seeing them all hanged at Gallows Point, I cast off the painter and set them adrift, leaving them to get back into the cove as best they could, with only one pair of small oars among them. We stood on, close-hauled, until we had gained an offing of about three miles, when we put the helm down, tacked, and lay-to, it being my intention to remain off the entrance of the pirates' cove until daylight, in order that I might obtain bearings and landmarks, which would enable me to identify the locality of the spot upon my return to destroy the settlement—as I was determined to do.

It was well that I took this precaution, for when daylight came we found that, so admirably had nature masked the cove, it was impossible for us to discover it until we again stood close in; and even then we could by no means make sure of the spot until we were within a cable's length of it. Then, however, by means of a carefully taken set of compass bearings, I obtained the means which would enable me to run in from a distance and hit off the place with unerring precision.

We duly arrived in Port Royal harbour early on the fourth morning after our escape from Pirate Cove—as by common consent we called it—our passage being of a perfectly uneventful character. As may be supposed, I kept a sharp lookout for the arrival of the Admiral from Kingston; and the moment that his barge hove in sight I hailed a shore boat—the felucca not possessing a boat of any kind—and landed for the purpose of making my report.

He was surprised, but at the same time very pleased to see me, shaking me warmly by the hand as the office messenger closed the door behind me, after showing me into his presence.

"Well, youngster," he exclaimed, "I am very glad to see you back again, all alive and kicking; for to tell you the truth you have been absent so long that I had given you and the *Wasp* up for lost. Well, and what luck have you had? Strange that I did not notice the little schooner at anchor as I came down; for I have been on the lookout for her now a long while."

"Ah!" I replied; "I am grieved to say, Sir Peter, that you will never again set eyes on the *Wasp*, for she lies at the bottom of the Sea of Hayti, with all her crew, I am afraid, save myself and two others."

"Tut, tut, tut!" exclaimed the Admiral; "that is bad news indeed. Tell me how it happened."

As briefly as possible I related the entire history of the cruise, including my adventures upon the island of Hayti, and my escape from the pirates, winding up by pointing out the felucca, which lay in full view of the office window.

The old gentleman remained silent and sunk in deep thought for several minutes after I had concluded my story, shaking his head occasionally as he thought the matter over. At length, however, he looked up, and said:

"It is a sad business, very sad, losing all those poor fellows, but I do not blame you, boy, in the least; you did what you could, and did it very well, too! To fight and beat off so immensely superior a force as that of the pirates was a very creditable feat, I consider; and all might have been well had it not been for that gale springing up at so inopportune a moment. Well, well, it cannot be helped; these things happen sometimes, in spite of all that we can do. But there is generally a lesson to be learned from every mishap, if we will but look for it, and the lesson conveyed in this case is that we made a mistake in the arming of the *Wasp*. Instead of fitting her with those six long 9-pounders, we ought to have mounted a long 18 and a long 32 upon her deck, then you would have been able to play a game of long bowls with the pirates and fight them upon practically equal terms. As it was, you were badly peppered before you could reach her at all with your own guns. Well, it cannot now be helped; the little hooker is gone, and there's an end of it. Now, the thing to consider is what is next to be done. What is your own idea? You have been among the rascals, and know their strength; I suppose you have some sort of a notion of how they can best be circumvented, eh?"

"Yes, sir," I said. "It seems to me that there are two ways of dealing with the pirates. One way is, to waylay their schooner at sea, capture her, and then go into the Cove and destroy the settlement. To do that effectively we must have a vessel as fast, as heavily armed, and as strongly manned as their own craft—"

"Which we don't happen to possess just now, worse luck!" cut in the Admiral. "What is your other plan?"

I explained the alternative scheme—which I regarded as the more effective of the two—in pretty full detail; and as I unfolded it I saw the old gentleman's eyes begin to sparkle. When at length I came to an end he dashed his fist down upon the table, and exclaimed with enthusiasm:

"That's the plan, boy; that ought to do the trick! But I've no vessel to spare you, so you'll have to take the felucca, and do the best you can with her. Strictly speaking, you know, I ought to put you under arrest, and not employ you again until after you have been tried for the loss of the *Wasp*; but the circumstances are such that we cannot afford to waste time in mere formalities just now; and I will take the responsibility of sending you to sea again at once. You will be a bit crowded aboard the little hooker, I'm afraid, but that can't be helped; and if all goes well it ought not to be for long. Now, go and find Carline, talk over the matter with him, and then come up to the Pen to dinner to-night—seven o'clock, sharp—and report to me what you have arranged."

I took the hint, and went, very well pleased, on the whole, with the result of my interview. For I must confess that I had gone to that interview not altogether without trepidation; it was quite possible—I had told myself—that the Admiral might find fault with the manner in which I had engaged the pirate schooner; he might have picked holes in my tactics, or something of that sort; he might even have considered that the *Wasp* might have been saved, after the fight, had we acted otherwise than we did; but, to my great relief, there was not a word of blame from him; on the contrary, he had murmured a word or two of approval here and there while I had been telling my tale, and was now about to prove his undiminished confidence in me by entrusting me with the command of another expedition against the same formidable foe. I could not possibly have hoped for a more favourable reception.

I soon found the Master-Attendant, and inexorably button-holed him while I explained what I wanted done, although the poor man was frightfully busy just then, several ships being in harbour, refitting after having been in action with the enemy. But, let him protest as he might, I would not release him until he had agreed to do everything that I required; the result being that when the dockyard men knocked off work to go to dinner that day, the felucca was already alongside the wharf, and more than half her ballast out of her; while, when the dockyard bell rang at six o'clock that night, signalling the cessation of work for the day, her hold had been swept clean, a quantity of dunnage laid in it, and four 68-pounders stowed on the top thereof, well packed up all round to prevent them from shifting when the craft was at sea. But although I remained on the spot until the last moment, supervising matters in order that everything might be done to my satisfaction, I still managed to reach the Pen by seven o'clock—a smart sailing boat up to Kingston, and a ketureen from thence out to the Pen being my means of conveyance.

Sir Peter was as much surprised as pleased when I reported to him the amount of progress that I had made during the day.

“It is wonderful!” he exclaimed. “How in the world did you manage it?”

“Simply by sticking to the Master-Attendant, and so preventing him from doing anything else until he had attended to my requirements,” I replied.

The Admiral laughed in enjoyment of the picture his mind conjured up of the Master-Attendant vainly trying to shake me off.

“Poor Carline!” he remarked. “How he must have suffered before he could bring himself to the point of setting aside all his other work to attend to you. He is a good man, a most excellent fellow in every way; but he has one fault—he allows himself to be too much trammelled by routine. With him everything, irrespective of its importance, must be attended to in its proper order; and now that you have jolted him out of his groove it will be days before he will be able to get comfortably back into it.”

I have no doubt Sir Peter was right, but I did not wait to see; all I know is that by noon the next day I had brought the unhappy man into the frame of mind that caused him to yield prompt attention to my requirements, rather than waste valuable time in a fruitless endeavour to evade them; with the result that, three days later, the felucca was ready for the next expedition which I was to lead against the pirates.

The moment that my preparations were complete I reported to the Admiral, and received his formal instructions to proceed to sea at once; and that same evening we weighed and stood out of harbour with the first of the land-breeze. We now had to make a passage to windward; and although I hugged the southern coast of Jamaica as closely as I dared, thus availing myself to the fullest possible extent of the land-breeze as far as Morant Point, it was not until daybreak of the ninth day after sailing from Port Royal that we arrived off the entrance to the Pirate Cove. Here we were baffled for a couple of hours, waiting for the springing up of the sea-breeze; but we caught the first breathing of it, and took it in with us, arriving at the anchorage about one bell in the forenoon watch.

My plan of campaign was perfectly simple. I intended to enter the Cove, and, if the pirate schooner should happen to be in harbour, run straight alongside her, and board before her crew should have time to clear away their guns and bring them to bear upon the felucca.

I had a strong enough crew to do this, and had no doubt as to our ability to carry the schooner in the face of the most determined resistance that the pirates could offer. Then, the schooner captured and her crew safely confined below, the establishment ashore would have no alternative but to surrender at discretion, or be annihilated by the schooner's guns. There was only one weak point that I could see in this scheme, which was that a considerable number of the men constituting the shore portion of the establishment might escape into the interior of the island, unless some means were devised to prevent them. It was, however, not very difficult to accomplish this; for it will be remembered that there was but one way of entrance to—and egress from—the Cove on the land side, namely, a narrow and very dangerous zigzag path down the face of the perpendicular cliff, a gap in which, wide enough to prevent all effectual possibility of passage that way, might easily be made by the explosion of a bag of powder. The preparations for the little expedition which was to accomplish this piece of work were made during the time that we were lying becalmed off the mouth of the Cove; and when at length we entered, a boat, containing four seamen in charge of a midshipman, who had been most carefully instructed concerning the precise nature of the duty which he was to perform, was cast adrift, just inside the Heads, but outside the islet which masked the entrance. While they pulled away for the shore we in the felucca stood on into the Cove, every man of us with his sword or cutlass girded to his waist, and a brace of loaded pistols thrust into his belt, standing ready to leap aboard the schooner—should she happen to be in the roadstead.

We had no sooner cleared the islet, however, and fairly entered the Cove, than we discovered that the schooner was not in harbour, and that consequently we should be obliged to adopt the modification of plan which I had devised in view of such a very possible contingency. But although the *Tiburón* was not in the Cove, the anchorage was not tenantless, a brig of some two hundred and seventy tons being moored therein, while apparently every boat belonging to the settlement, as well as her own, was passing to and fro between her and the shore, those bound shoreward being loaded to the gunwale, while those coming from it were light. At the first glimpse of this somewhat unexpected sight, I jumped to the conclusion that the vessel was a prize; but almost instantly I remembered that, in addition to the *Tiburón*, the pirates owned a brig, by means of which they disposed of such captured booty as they did not require for their own use, purchasing with the proceeds other goods of which they stood in need; and I had very little doubt that the craft before us was the brig in question. Be that as it might, our first task was, obviously, to secure possession of the vessel; and the felucca was accordingly at once headed for her.

So busily employed were the pirates aboard the brig in the task of hoisting out cargo and striking it into the boats alongside that we were quite half-way across the bay before they discovered our presence, although the people

ashore, who were unloading the boats, did their utmost to warn their comrades, by hailing and pointing. But no sooner was the felucca seen and recognised than the whole place was thrown into a state of consternation. The alarm bell ashore was rung, the people made a dash for their weapons, and then, tumbling the goods haphazard out of the boats on to the sand, sprang in and pulled might and main for the brig, while those on board her swarmed up out of the hold and down over the side into the half-loaded or empty boats, and gave way for the shore in a very panic of confusion.

But although the brig was moored well in, so that the boats passing to and fro might have but a short distance to travel, we in the felucca were alongside and had secured undisputed possession of the vessel before the boats with their armed crews had traversed half the distance between her and the shore; seeing which, the occupants paused and drew together, as if to confer and to await further developments. Of this brief pause we promptly availed ourselves by getting the brig under way and working her and the felucca out toward the entrance, when, much to our astonishment, the boats with one accord turned round and pulled back to the beach. This unexpected action on their part was a great relief to me, for I had fully expected that they would make a concerted effort to recapture the brig, or the felucca, or both, by boarding, in which case we should have had our hands full, and must almost certainly have lost a few men. But probably they believed the felucca to be armed with cannon, and fully expected to be received with liberal doses of grape and canister, which would fully account for their sudden and unexpected display of prudence. Be that as it may, we were allowed to work both craft out to sea without molestation; when, having hurriedly overhauled our prize and found that she was amply provisioned for a much longer voyage than that to Port Royal, I put her in command of my second midshipman, with a prize-crew of ten men, and, giving him instructions to report to the Admiral without delay, dispatched him forthwith. Then, transferring myself and the remainder of my following back to the felucca, we re-entered the Cove and came to an anchor outside of but close to the islet that masked the entrance, and in such a position that the little craft could be warped right in alongside a bit of cliff that dropped sheer down into the water. We had scarcely done this when a deep, hollow *boom*, echoing and re-echoing along the face of the cliff that enclosed the Cove, told us that the party which had been dispatched to breach the road up the face of the cliff, and so cut off the retreat of the pirates toward the interior of the island, had accomplished its task.

Time was now all important to us; for, of course, we could not tell at what moment Garcia, the arch-pirate, and his crew in the *Tiburón*, might put in an appearance upon the scene; and we had a few very important preparations to make before we could consider ourselves ready to deal with him; therefore we had no sooner let go the felucca's anchor than we lowered the only other boat that we had brought with us, and ran warps away to the shore of the islet, securing them to such rocks as were most convenient for our purpose. This done, we warped the little craft right in alongside the cliff, and made her secure; after which our next task was to carry ashore two stout hawsers which we had brought with us for the purpose, and convey them to the top of the cliff under which the felucca lay moored. Then we rigged a pair of sheers over the vessel's hatchway, and proceeded to hoist our 68-pounders out of the hold—one at a time, of course. Then, having got the first gun on deck—already prepared in Port Royal dockyard, by being encased in a stout cylindrical packing of planks—we passed the bights of our two hawsers round it, one at each end, and with all hands tailing on—except one, whom we set to watch as a sentinel—proceeded to parbuckle it up the face of the cliff. It was a stiff job, but, all our preparations having been made beforehand, everything went without a hitch; and when we knocked off work for the night all four guns were landed, together with their carriages; while, so far as we could discover, the pirates ashore remained in absolute ignorance not only of our doings but also of our whereabouts.

The same night, waiting until the darkness was sufficient to hide our movements from the pirates ashore, the gunner, the boatswain, the carpenter and I ascended to the highest point of the little islet, in search of a suitable spot upon which to construct our projected battery, and were fortunate enough to find it on the very summit itself. It was, indeed, perfectly ideal for its purpose, for it commanded not only the whole of the interior of the Cove, with the settlement ashore, but also both entrances, and the open sea, for a space of about a mile. And it possessed the further advantage that it needed but very little labour to completely adapt it for our purpose. So eager was I to complete our preparations that I would fain have set the men to work upon it that night; but they had already done extraordinarily well in getting the four guns landed and mounted upon their carriages; I therefore decided, though somewhat reluctantly, to let them have a long, unbroken night's rest; and when the next day arrived I was glad that I had been wise enough to do so, for they came to their work fresh, and laboured with a will. As for me, I spent the night doing sentry-go, for I fully expected to receive a visit from the shore some time during the hours of darkness. But nothing happened; and when at length day dawned and I was relieved, I was inclined to believe that our efforts to conceal our presence on the island from the pirates had been successful.

With the dawning of a new day, however, the critical period was past, and I cared very little whether the inhabitants of the settlement did or did not discover our whereabouts. We, therefore, got all hands to work the moment that it was light enough to see; and by the time that the pirates ashore began to show themselves, two of our four 68-pounders were in place on the spot which we had chosen for our battery, and were ready to open fire at a moment's notice. But the Cove was too small, and the islet too close to the settlement for us to conceal our whereabouts or our movements, when once we began to work upon the summit, where we were in full view of every eye within a range of a couple of miles; and the pirates ashore had not been on the move more than half-an-hour before it became apparent that our presence had been discovered. The indications that this was the case were clear and unmistakable; the alarm bell clanged out its summons, and instantly all work ceased and every man was seen to be hurrying toward the building in which I had been interviewed by Fernandez upon my arrival in the settlement. This could mean but one thing, namely, a speedy attack upon the islet; and in anticipation of this we hastened the completion of our preparations, so that we might be quite ready to meet that attack when it came. Our first business was to get the remaining two guns into position, and bring up to the battery our entire stock of ammunition. This did not cost us more than half-an-hour's strenuous labour, at the completion of which all hands went to work to tumble a sufficient quantity of ballast into the felucca to enable her to stand up under sail; and the moment that this was done I sent her out to sea, with a midshipman and four hands on board—in order that she might not fall into the hands of the pirates—with instructions to return only when the British ensign should be displayed from the battery.

Scarcely was the felucca under way when the sentinel who had been left in the battery, to keep watch upon the movements of the pirates ashore, summoned us to our posts; and upon our arrival there we at once saw that our preparations had not been completed a moment too soon. For, as we topped the hill that obstructed the view of the Cove from the seaward side of the islet, we saw the whole male population of the settlement, numbering about one hundred and forty, marching down to the beach, with the evident intention of embarking in their boats and pulling off to attack us. With the aid of my telescope I could distinctly distinguish the figure of Fernandez, who was assuming the direction of operations; and I could not but admire the strictness of the discipline which he appeared to exercise over his followers, for the fellows seemed amenable to his briefest order. They possessed exactly twenty boats in all, ranging in size from a craft capable of accommodating forty men down to the little Norwegian dinghy in which I had made my escape, and it was evident that every man of the party had been previously told off to some particular boat; for upon their arrival at the beach the hitherto compact body at once dissolved into twenty separate detachments, each of which made its way, in a perfectly orderly manner, to a particular boat; the whole flotilla being launched and manned at Fernandez' word of command. This done, the boats were turned round with their bows pointing straight for the islet, and—again at the word of command—the oars, as one, dropped into the water and the expedition advanced to the attack in a long straight line.

The boats had not so much as a single gun among them, their crew being armed simply with cutlass, pistol, and musket; I therefore felt no apprehension at all concerning the result of the coming conflict, but rather a somewhat unaccountable pity for the unfortunate wretches who seemed to be quite unaware that they were advancing to their doom. But this singular feeling of pity was quickly swamped by the reflection of the fate that would certainly be ours, should we by any chance be foolish enough to let the pirates get the better of us; and since it was important that we should make the utmost of our opportunities, I gave orders for the four guns to be loaded with grape and carefully aimed at the four largest boats. This was done, and the four pieces spoke their deadly message almost simultaneously, the smoke momentarily obscuring our vision, while the thunder of the discharge echoed and re-echoed round the cliffs in a long series of slowly decreasing reverberations. But long before these had died away the breeze had swept aside the pall of smoke that hid the boats from us, and we saw that, so carefully had the guns been aimed, each shot had taken effect, the four boats at which they had been discharged being now mere shapeless masses of wreckage, among which a few men struggled, here and there, to keep themselves afloat.

The casualties among the pirates must have been appalling, for I estimated that those four boats, being the largest in the entire flotilla, must have contained at least half the total number of men comprising the expedition, and, so far as I could ascertain, with the aid of my telescope, the survivors of the four crews scarcely numbered a dozen in all! Of course the nearest boats at once closed in upon the wreckage, with the object of rescuing those few survivors, and in so doing some half-a-dozen of them became bunched close together for about a minute. Such an opportunity was too good to be missed, and our guns having meanwhile been smartly loaded again, two of them were brought to bear upon the bunch, and simultaneously discharged. The result of these two shots was scarcely as effective as that of the previous discharge—possibly because the gun-captains had become a little flurried and excited—nevertheless two of the boats aimed at were blown to pieces, while two or three of the others showed signs of more or less serious damage, and the occupants were thrown into such dire confusion that, abandoning all further effort to save their comrades, they took to their oars and seemed intent only upon getting apart as quickly as possible, an example which was immediately followed by the remaining boats, the crews of which opened out until there was at least a couple of fathoms of clear water separating boat from boat.

For a few seconds I was under the impression that the havoc thus quickly wrought by our guns had so far discouraged the pirates that they intended to abandon the attack upon the islet—for there were several very evident signs of hesitation among them—but presently, apparently in response to the exhortations of Fernandez, who pulled along the line in a fast gig, the oars dipped once more, and the remnant of the flotilla most gallantly resumed its advance, amid cheers and yells of encouragement and defiance that clearly reached us on the islet.

Chapter Twenty One.

The Extermination of the Pirates.

Nothing could possibly have been better, from our point of view, than the foolhardy gallantry of the pirates in thus persistently pressing home their attack upon the islet, for the advantage was all on our side, and must remain so until the enemy had landed and come to hand-grips with us; and it was imperative that, in order to ensure our own success, as many as possible of our foes should be put *hors de combat* before the fight became a hand-to-hand mêlée. It certainly seemed, at the first blush, to be rather cowardly to pelt the poor beggars with grape while they were unable to strike a blow in return; but the feeling was, after all, one of very weak, false sentimentality. Every man of them was an outlaw and, even if not yet an actual murderer at least a potential one, and a consorter with cruel, cowardly brutes in human shape who would destroy without mercy if they were not themselves destroyed—who were, in fact, worse than wild beasts; for whereas the latter take life merely to satisfy the cravings of nature, the average pirate slew for the sheer love of slaying, and in order that he might gratify the unnatural lust that caused him to revel in the sight of human suffering. Therefore, after the first qualm of reluctance, I felt no compunction in ordering the gunners to ply their weapons upon the advancing enemy with all the skill at their command. And right willingly did the men obey my order, sponging, loading, priming, pointing, and firing with the fell determination of men who knew that they must slay or themselves be slain; aiming so carefully that every shot was made to tell with disastrous effect; so that the advancing boats gradually fell into confusion as shot after shot whistled through them, sinking a boat here, shattering another there, and killing or maiming so many of her crew that she could neither advance farther nor retire, but lay upon the water a mere drifting, blood-bespattered wreck. Had the distance between the beach and the islet been half as far again as it actually was, there can be no doubt that the entire expedition would have been swept out of existence; as it was, nine out of the twenty boats which left the settlement survived to reach the islet, and were grounded upon the beach just below the battery. As the keels grated in upon the shingle their crews sprang out, dragged the boats well up, so that they would not go adrift, and then, sinking

upon one knee, emptied their muskets at us, to cover the landing of their comrades; we, on our part, holding our fire in readiness to meet the rush upon the battery that was now imminent.

Here Fernandez, still unwounded, exhibited the only bit of sound generalship that had distinguished the attack; for instead of allowing his men to charge up the slope promiscuously as they landed, to be cut down or bowled over by our pistols, in detail, he ordered them to form up, in single file and open order, until the last boat had arrived, probably guessing that we were without muskets, and knowing that he and his men were for the moment beyond pistol-shot. Then, after allowing them time to recharge their muskets, and a minute or two additional in which to recover their breath and prepare for the desperate up-hill rush at the battery, he gave the word to advance, himself leading the way, while we, with naked cutlass in one hand and pistol in the other, crouched behind our low breastwork, watching the toiling figures scrambling and struggling up the steep, almost precipitous slope.

They had advanced about half-way, and Fernandez, still leading, was just about within pistol range, when I rose to my feet, sprang up on the low earth parapet which we had constructed, raised my sword above my head, and, in as loud and authoritative a voice as I could command, shouted, in Spanish:

“Halt!”

Then, as the advancing pirates wavered and hesitated, in astonishment at my unexpected action, I continued:

“Fernandez, and you others, I call upon you to throw down your arms and surrender, in order to prevent the further sacrifice of life. You can do no good by persevering further in this futile attack, for we are the masters of the situation, and we can shoot down every man of you before it will be possible for you to reach the spot where I stand. To push on will simply mean—”

Crack! One of the pirates, crouching behind another, had coolly levelled his musket and taken a pot shot at me, the bullet passing through my hat and searing my skull like a white-hot wire, so that I toppled over with the shock and fell back into the arms of one of my men. The yell of savage joy raised by the pirates at the sight of my fall was echoed by my own men as they sprang to their feet, intending to leap over the low parapet and charge down upon the advancing foe to avenge me. But I was not really hurt, and, shaking off the grip of the man who held me, I cried out in time to stay them, adjuring them, by all that they held dear, to stand fast where they were, and finish the fight in the battery itself. And splendidly they obeyed me, although they might well have been excused had they ignored my command; for the firing of that musket-shot served as the signal for a general fusillade on both sides, in the course of which four of our men fell. But ours was the commanding position, and by the time that the pirates had emptied their muskets and pistols at us we had brought them to a standstill, with more than half their number down. After that there was no possibility of further restraining our lads, nor, indeed, was there any need. We, therefore, poured out over the low earthwork and down the few yards of slope that still intervened between us and the enemy, and the next moment were engaged in a hand-to-hand, life-and-death conflict, neither side expecting or giving quarter. For the few seconds that it lasted it was warm work, the pirates fighting desperately—since they knew that, if taken alive, the halter awaited them—and then, in the space of a minute it was all over. The last of our foes was down—as well as a few more men on our own side—and we who remained unhurt stood gasping for breath, and mopping our perspiring brows as we glared hungrily about us for more foes to conquer. But there were none; and presently pulling ourselves together, we gathered up our own wounded and carried them to such shade as could be found, where the surgeon’s mate, who formed one of our company, at once got to work upon them, attending to their hurts. Meanwhile the ensign was hoisted as a signal to the felucca to return to the harbour; and then such of us as could be spared went out to disarm the wounded pirates and afterwards afford them such relief as lay in our power, while others again gleaned the weapons and ammunition of the fallen, recognising that they might possibly be useful in our fight with the crew of the *Tiburón* later on.

Then, having made all arrangements for the conduct of the work on the islet during the next few hours, I took the two largest boats that had survived the passage across the waters of the Cove, and with a dozen men, armed to the teeth, under the leadership of myself and the boatswain, pulled away to the settlement, to see how matters stood in that direction. As I had anticipated, there was not a man left in the place—not even a boy above fourteen years of age; every male above that age had been detailed to take part in the attempt to capture the islet, which Fernandez had fully recognised to be the key of the entire position. And now, of the hundred and fifty who had taken part in the disastrous attempt, every one was either slain, or lay wounded in our hands.

While I was taking stock generally of the situation, so to speak, and making my further plans, the boatswain, assisted by the seamen whom we had brought ashore with us, made a careful and systematic search of every building in the place, removing every weapon, everything that could be used as such, and all ammunition, and transferring them to the two boats prior to our return to the islet. There were not many weapons, and not a very great quantity of ammunition; but there was more than we could conveniently stow in the boats. We, therefore, took a portion of it out to about the middle of the bay and there threw it overboard, returning for the remainder and conveying it to the islet. The most important result of our visit to the shore, however, consisted in the information, freely given me by one of the women, that, so far as she had been able to gather from the conversation of the men, the *Tiburón* and her crew might be expected to arrive in the Cove at any moment.

By the time that I and my party got back to the islet the day was well advanced, the felucca had returned to the Cove and was now anchored inside the islet, close to its southern shore, and the surgeon, although still busy among the wounded pirates, had doctored up the whole of our own wounded and made them comfortable. As might have been expected from the peculiar character of the engagement and the enormous advantage of position which we enjoyed, our casualties were singularly light, consisting only of five killed and nine wounded. But in the case of the pirates there was a very different story to tell. I had ascertained, while ashore, that they left the settlement one hundred and fifty strong; and now all that remained of them amounted to just thirty-seven wounded, of whom at least one quarter would probably succumb to their hurts. Those thirty-seven I caused to be put into the boats, as soon as they had, been attended to, and conveyed to the settlement, where I turned them over to the care of the women folk, who, I

thought, would probably be able to give them more attention and better nursing than we could hope to afford. The next day, at the urgent request of several of the women, I also caused our own wounded to be taken ashore, where, under the supervision of the surgeon, they were taken in hand and most tenderly cared for. The dead—both our own and as many as we could find belonging to the pirates—were hastily sewn up in canvas, weighted, and launched overboard from the felucca, which was taken well out to sea for the purpose.

It was about three bells in the forenoon watch, on the fifth day after the attack upon the islet, that two sail were sighted by the lookout, standing in toward the Cove; and half-an-hour later I was able to identify one of them as the infamous *Tiburón*, while the other was a large craft, apparently British, judging by her build and the cut of her canvas; doubtless a capture.

We had long ago made every possible preparation to give the pirate schooner a warm reception upon her arrival, going even to the length of surrounding our battery with a parapet and masking the latter by covering it with sods of growing grass. We had now, therefore, nothing to do but patiently to await the arrival of the enemy, confident that he would sail right into the Cove, unsuspectingly, and never get so much as a hint of our presence until we should open fire upon him.

As we had planned so matters turned out; the two vessels entered the Cove together and simultaneously came to an anchor, the big craft—upon the stern of which we descried the words *Berwick Castle: Bristol*—anchoring about a cable's length east of the schooner and, very fortunately for those chiefly concerned, well out of our line of fire.

We waited until we saw the anchors of both vessels splash into the placid waters of the Cove, and heard the rumble of their cables as they smoked out through the hawse-pipes; then, while the gunners brought the four 68-pounders, loaded with round shot and grape, to bear upon the crowded deck of the pirate schooner, another party raised a rough flagstaff, to which a British ensign had been nailed, and dropped its heel into a socket already prepared for it. Even then it was nearly a minute before our presence was discovered by the pirates, who were at that moment busily clewing-up and hauling down their canvas preparatory to stowing it. But the boatswain, the gunner, and I all had our telescopes focussed upon the schooner, keenly watching every movement on board her, and it was not long before I recognised upon her quarter-deck, issuing orders and generally carrying himself with an air of authority, the handsome rascal who, during the fight between the *Tiburón* and the *Wasp*, had hailed us asking whether we had struck. Almost on the instant of recognising him I saw a man run up to him, excitedly say something to him, and point toward the islet. The handsome rascal—who was without doubt the pirate captain, Manuel Garcia himself—stood, stared amazed for a few seconds at the islet, and then made a dash for the companion, from which he withdrew a telescope, which he levelled in our direction. For perhaps a quarter of a minute he kept the tube steadily pointed toward us; then with a gesture of mad ferocity he dashed the instrument to the deck, and, seizing his speaking-trumpet, placed it to his lips. The effect was an instant stoppage of the operation of clewing-up and hauling down aboard the *Tiburón*, while every eye in her was, as by one impulse, directed toward the islet. But the pause endured only for a space of a few seconds, just long enough to enable the gazers to identify the flag flying on the islet as the British ensign, thereupon everybody seemed to be galvanised into instant, breathless activity again. Now, however, the former processes were reversed; the men who were already half-way aloft, intent upon furling the canvas, started to return to the deck, others sprang to the sheets and halliards and began to sheet home and hoist away as if for their lives, and, in short, it was evident that the pirates contemplated getting under way again and attempting to escape out to sea.

It was at this moment that the boatswain, who still had his glass focussed on the schooner, cried out:

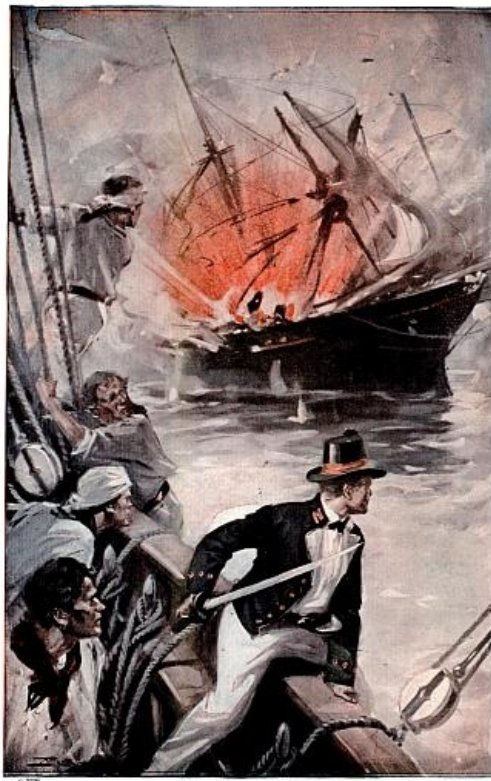
"They're goin' to cut her cable, Mr Delamere! Look, sir, and you'll see a chap hurrying for'ard with an axe in his hand."

"Is that so?" I exclaimed. "Then bring Number 1 gun to bear on the schooner's fore-castle and sweep it clear. Quick, before they can cut her adrift! It will never do to have her drifting all over the Cove."

I was interrupted by the crashing report of Number 1, which, with the others, had already been most carefully trained upon the schooner; and as the smoke blew away we saw the vessel's port bulwark, all about the cathead, thickly dotted with white marks where the shot had struck, while the fore-castle, which had been crowded with men a moment before, was now clear; not so much as a single head showed above the rail.

"Give them the other three guns, as quick as you please; and keep up your fire, with grape only, until you receive further orders," I cried. And almost as the words left my lips the other three guns bellowed their terrible message, in response to which the men on the *Tiburón's* deck seemed to shrink and disappear. But although a good many of them went down, enough were still left to enable them to man their port broadside of seven 12-pounders, as well as their long 32; and with astounding rapidity they brought the whole of these guns to bear upon the spot from which the jets of flame and smoke issued, marking the position of our guns, while they defiantly ran up the black flag to their main truck.

Now the action raged fast and furious, both sides loading and firing as rapidly as they could, although I continually exhorted our own gunners to give themselves plenty of time to take careful aim. The enemy quickly got our range to a nicety, and their shot came screaming about our ears and plumping into our earthen rampart in an almost continuous shower, blinding us with the dust and dirt that they threw up, and occasionally sending the splinters flying in all directions when the shot happened to strike a stone. Yet, marvellous to relate, although several of us were suffering from severe contusions caused by those flying splinters of rock, not one of us was, thus far, actually disabled, while, within ten minutes from the beginning of the firing, that of the schooner slackened perceptibly, showing plainly how severe was the punishment which we were inflicting upon her. This was further exemplified by the fact that presently a man was seen to be hailing the *Berwick Castle*, in response to which two boats were lowered, and, crowded with men, pulled over to the schooner. Thus reinforced, the *Tiburón's* fire breezed up again for a few minutes; then it gradually slackened again; and finally, when the action had been in progress some twenty



THE SCHOONER BLOWS UP

minutes, it died away reluctantly hauled down, a minute later, in token of surrender.

altogether, the black flag being slowly and

“Cease firing, lads,” I cried; “the schooner has struck. Now, while the guns’ crews remain here, ready to open fire again, if need be, the rest of us will go aboard and take possession.” And, with a wild cheer, some thirty of us leaped the ruins of our parapet and dashed headlong down the steep slope to the little strip of beach where half-a-dozen boats were drawn partly up out of the water.

To pounce upon those boats, rush them afloat, and then tumble helter-skelter in over the gunwales was the work of seconds only; then, throwing out the oars, away we went for the pirate schooner, keeping well apart, in case of a treacherous resumption of firing on the part of the pirates. But nothing occurred, everything remained silent—almost ominously so—on board the schooner, one head only showing above the torn and splintered bulwarks—that of a man who, apparently wounded, clung to the main-topmast backstay, seeming to watch our approach. As we drew nearer that head gradually assumed a recognisable appearance in my eyes, until at length I felt convinced that it was that of Garcia himself. Suddenly, as I watched, the fellow disappeared, not as though he had sunk to the deck exhausted but rather as though he had gone elsewhere at a run, and with his disappearance a strong suspicion of some diabolical treachery on his part gripped me. I wrestled with it for a few seconds—until in fact we were within half-a-dozen fathoms of the schooner’s side; then, influenced by some irresistible impulse, I sprang to my feet and shouted:

“Hold water all! we will go alongside the ship first, and see what is the state of things there. The schooner is safe; she cannot escape; but while we are aboard her who can tell what may be happening aboard the ship? Round with the boats, men, and pull alongside the Englishman!”

With one accord the boats swept round and headed for the *Berwick Castle*, and a couple of minutes later we were alongside and swarming up her lofty sides. I was in the act of swinging in over her rail, in the wake of her main rigging, when a terrific concussion shook the vessel from stem to stern, a loud *boom*, like the explosion of a pent volcano, rent the air, and, looking in the direction of the sound, we saw a vast sheet of flame and smoke suddenly burst from the schooner; her masts, guns, and a vast quantity of *débris*—among which we recognised some thirty or forty human bodies—went hurtling high into the air; her sides opened out, showing her ribs here and there black against the white flame; and then the torn and dismembered hull sank in the midst of the seething waters of the Cove, followed by the plunging *débris* as it came down again after its flight into the air. My instinct had warned me aright; the man I had seen was, beyond all doubt, Garcia himself; and he had fired the vessel’s magazine in the hope of blowing us all into the air with him as we boarded!

“By the Living Jingo, sir, that was a lucky thought of yours to order us to board this ship first!” gasped the boatswain, with white and quivering lips, as he clung to the rail. “Where would we all ha’ been if we’d gone on and boarded that schooner, as we at first intended to?”

As soon as our somewhat shaken nerves would permit we proceeded to search the *Berwick Castle*, in the hope of finding some at least of her crew, but there was no trace of them beyond the seamen’s chests in the forecabin and the clothing of the master and officers in their respective cabins, all of which showed signs of having been made free with by the captors; the crew had vanished, to the last man, having doubtless been offered, in accordance with the pirates’ usual policy, the alternative of service under the black flag, or—death. And apparently, to their eternal honour, they had chosen the latter.

My story is done, for there is no need to weary the reader with prosaic details regarding the arrangements which I made for the removal of the women from the pirate settlement prior to its destruction, or how the latter was accomplished. Let it suffice me to say that the destruction was so thorough and complete that no encouragement

was left for other pirates to adopt the place as a rendezvous; and, so far as I am aware, no other pirates ever attempted to do so.

We sailed for Port Royal that same afternoon, about two hours before sunset; and just as the great luminary was about to sink gorgeously beneath the western horizon the wind failed us and afforded me the opportunity to do something which I very greatly desired to do, namely, to call upon my friends Don Luis and Doña Inez, the two warm-hearted friends who had played the Good Samaritan, and treated me with such generous hospitality, when I had been brought to their house, more dead than alive, after the loss of the *Wasp*. Thus far I had had no opportunity to pay them a visit, but now, by a lucky chance, the wind happened to fail us when we were within a couple of miles of the shore, and almost exactly abreast of Bella Vista, which was distinctly visible from the deck of the *Berwick Castle*, in the strong light of the setting sun.

I took my glass and carefully examined the shore, found the beach upon which I had been landed, saw that the water was smooth enough to permit of my landing, and recognised that here was an opportunity to visit my friends, and express my gratitude for all that they had done for me, which might never occur again. Next, I turned my glass upon Bella Vista itself, and saw that the doors and windows were opened, the latter draped with curtains, and I fancied I could even make out one or more persons seated under the shadow of the veranda; it was pretty certain, therefore, that my friends were at home, and I at once made up my mind to visit them, as I felt that I might with safety, for the calm would last about two hours, and then the land-breeze would spring up, and the *Berwick Castle* could then work close inshore and heave-to until I should rejoin her.

My preparations were soon made, and within ten minutes of arriving at my decision to go ashore, having left the boatswain in charge and given him all necessary instructions, I was in the boat and heading for the beach. Of course it was quite dark some time before the boat's keel grated upon the sand; but that fact did not greatly trouble me, for I knew my way quite well, and had very little difficulty in finding the path which led up to the house.

The building was by this time lighted up, and as I approached I heard voices, among which that of Don Luis was easily distinguishable. Then, as I ascended the steps which led up to the gallery running round the house, I heard Doña Inez speak, and the next moment she stepped out through the drawing-room window, and caught sight of me.

For a moment she stopped dead, with a startled look in her eyes; then, with a little scream of delight she darted forward, seized my hands, and impulsively kissed me on both cheeks in the Spanish fashion, much to my embarrassment.

"Luis—Luis," she cried, still holding my hands, "come hither quickly, *caro mio*, and see the most welcome sight that you have seen for many a day!"

"Why, yes, of course I will," responded Don Luis. And the next moment he too stepped out on to the gallery, straight up to me, and, like his wife, kissed me!

"Welcome! a thousand welcomes, my dear Don Ricardo!" he exclaimed, snatching my hands from his wife's clasp. "But where on earth have you sprung from?"

"From yonder," I answered, pointing to seaward where the lantern at the *Berwick Castle's* gaff-end shone like a star through the darkness.

"Well, you are just in time for dinner," he exclaimed, "so come in. There are others here who will rejoice to once more see you whom we thought dead long ago." And as these two dear, warm-hearted, impulsive friends dragged me in through the open window I became aware that the entire Meñdouça family were in the drawing-room; and by them, too, I was very cordially welcomed, though, naturally, with a little more restraint than that displayed by Don Luis and his wife.

Oh! what a dinner that was, and how genuinely delighted they all were to see me—not excepting Mama Elisa and Teresita, both of whom insisted upon seeing me when they learned that I was in the house. Of course I had to relate to them in detail everything that had happened to me, from the moment when I went forth to reconnoitre on the memorable day of the attack on Bella Vista by the blacks, and many and loud were the ejaculations of amazement as I reached the most telling points of my story. It appeared that they had waited anxiously for my return, and had only finally given up hope at nightfall, by which time they had arrived at the conclusion that the blacks had got me and carried me away into the mountains to torture me to death. They told me that they had mourned for me as for a brother, and their delight at finding I still lived convinced me of the truth of the assertion. Later I learned that the Meñdouça family were still enjoying Don Luis' hospitality, pending the rebuilding of Montpelier.

It was not until after ten o'clock that night that I succeeded in dragging myself away from Bella Vista, and only then upon the promise, which I most willingly gave, to keep in touch with them by letter, and repeat my visit as often as possible. But so far as the latter part of my promise was concerned, fate was against me, for I never again was privileged to meet any of them.

It was six bells of the first watch when I reached the *Berwick Castle*, by which time the land-breeze was piping up strong; and as soon as the boat was hoisted to the davits we filled away for Port Royal, where we arrived in due course, and landed our prisoners, to the number of twenty-three. Three weeks later they underwent their trial for piracy on the high seas, and, the evidence against them being overwhelming, they were all hanged at Gallows Point a fortnight after their conviction.

As for me and my crew, we obtained full and even generous recognition for our exploit, the merchants of the various West Indian islands combining together to present me with an exceedingly handsome service of plate, and to subscribe to a purse the contents of which was to be divided *pro rata* among the other officers and men of the expedition. The Admiral was good enough to express unbounded satisfaction at what he was pleased to term "the

unusual skill and discretion” with which the task of exterminating a most formidable nest of pirates had been carried out; and he took considerable pains to afford me an early opportunity, not only to undergo the formalities of a court-martial for the loss of the *Wasp*, but also to pass my examination. Immediately after this latter event he presented me with my commission to a crack frigate; and in her I subsequently saw much exciting service, lasting up to the short-lived peace of Amiens, toward the end of the year 1801, by which time I had attained to the rank of post-captain. But although many of my subsequent experiences as an officer of the British Royal Navy were sufficiently strange and exciting, it was never again my lot to cross swords with a pirate; for “pirating” became an occupation to be shunned, so far as the West Indian waters were concerned, for several years after the memorable example made by the British Government in the inexorable hunting down and destruction of the notorious Garcia, the pirate of Hayti, and his formidable band.

[Chapter 1](#) | [Chapter 2](#) | [Chapter 3](#) | [Chapter 4](#) | [Chapter 5](#) | [Chapter 6](#) | [Chapter 7](#) | [Chapter 8](#) | [Chapter 9](#) | [Chapter 10](#) | [Chapter 11](#) | [Chapter 12](#) | [Chapter 13](#) | [Chapter 14](#) | [Chapter 15](#) | [Chapter 16](#) | [Chapter 17](#) | [Chapter 18](#) | [Chapter 19](#) | [Chapter 20](#) | [Chapter 21](#) |

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A MIDDY OF THE KING: A ROMANCE OF THE OLD BRITISH NAVY ***

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