



Jack Tier

or, the Florida Reef



Part 2: Chapter 5

The gull has found her place on shore;
The sun gone down again to rest;
And all is still but ocean's roar;
There stands the man unblest'd.
But see, he moves—he turns, as asking where
His mates? Why looks he with that piteous stare?

—Dana.

Superstition would seem to be a consequence of a state of being, in which so much is shadowed forth, while so little is accurately known. Our far-reaching thoughts range over the vast fields of created things, without penetrating to the secret cause of the existence of even a blade of grass. We can analyze all substances that are brought into our crucibles, tell their combinations and tendencies, give a scientific history of their formation, so far as it is connected with secondary facts, their properties, and their uses; but in each and all, there is a latent natural cause, that baffles all our inquiries, and tells us that we are merely men. This is just as true in morals, as in physics—no man living being equal to attaining the very faith that is necessary to his salvation, without the special aid of the spirit of the godhead; and even with that mighty support, trusting implicitly for all that is connected with a future that we are taught to believe is eternal, to “the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things unseen.” In a word, this earthly probation of ours, was intended for finite beings, in the sense of our present existence, leaving far more to be conjectured, than is understood.

Ignorance and superstition ever bear a close, and even a mathematical relation to each other. The degrees of the one, are regulated by the degrees of the other. He



who knows the least believes the most; while he who has seen the most, without the intelligence to comprehend that which he has seen, feels, perhaps, the strongest inclination to refer those things which to him are mysteries, to the supernatural and marvellous. Sailors have been, from time immemorial, more disposed than men of their class on the land, to indulge in this weakness, which is probably heightened by the circumstance of their living constantly and vividly in the presence of powers that menace equally their lives and their means, without being in any manner subject to their control.

Spike, for a seaman of his degree of education, was not particularly addicted to the weakness to which we have just alluded. Nevertheless, he was not altogether free from it; and recent circumstances contributed to dispose him so much the more to admit a feeling which, like sin itself, is ever the most apt to insinuate itself at moments of extraordinary moral imbecility, and through the openings left by previous transgression. As his brig stood off from the light, the captain paced the deck, greatly disturbed by what had just passed, and unable to account for it. The boat of the Poughkeepsie was entirely concealed by the islet, and there existing no obvious motive for wishing to return, in order to come at the truth, not a thought to that effect, for one moment, crossed the mind of the smuggler. So far from this, indeed, were his wishes, that the *Molly* did not seem to him to go half as fast as usual, in his keen desire to get further and further from a spot where such strange incidents had occurred.

As for the men forward, no argument was wanting to make them believe that something supernatural had just passed before their eyes. It was known to them all, that Mulford had been left on a naked rock, some thirty miles from that spot; and it was not easy to understand how he could now be at the Dry Tortugas, planted, as it might be, on purpose to show himself to the brig, against the tower, in the bright moonlight, “like a pictur’ hung up for his old shipmates to look at.”

Sombre were the tales that were related that night among them, many of which related to the sufferings of men abandoned on desert islands; and all of which bordered, more or less, on the supernatural. The crew connected the disappearance of the boat with Mulford’s apparition, though the logical inference would have been, that the body which required planks to transport it, could scarcely be classed with anything of the world of spirits. The links in arguments, however, are seldom respected by the illiterate and vulgar, who jump to their conclusions, in cases of the marvellous, much as politicians find an expression of the common mind in the prepared opinions of the few who speak for them, totally disregarding the dissenting silence of the million. While



the men were first comparing their opinions on that which, to them, seemed to be so extraordinary, the Señor Montefalderon joined the captain in his walk, and dropped into a discourse touching the events which had attended their departure from the haven of the Dry Tortugas. In this conversation, Don Juan most admirably preserved his countenance, as well as his self-command, effectually preventing the suspicion of any knowledge on his part, that was not common to them both.

“You did leave the port with the salutes observed,” the Mexican commenced, with the slightest accent of a foreigner, or just enough to show that he was not speaking in his mother tongue; “salutes paid and returned.”

“Do you call that saluting, Don Wan? To me, that infernal shot sounded more like an echo, than anything else.”

“And to what do you ascribe it, Don Esteban?”

“I wish I could answer that question. Sometimes I begin to wish I had not left my mate on that naked rock.”

“There is still time to repair the last wrong; we shall go within a few miles of the place where the Señor Enrique was left; and I can take the yawl, with two men, and go in search of him, while you are at work on the wreck.”

“Do you believe it possible that he can be still there?” demanded Spike, looking suddenly and intently at his companion, while his mind was strangely agitated between hatred and dread. “If he is there, who and what was he that we all saw so plainly at the foot of the light-house?”

“How should he have left the rock? He was without food or water; and no man, in all his vigour, could swim this distance. I see no means of his getting here.”

“Unless some wrecker, or turtler, fell in with him, and took him off. Ay, ay, Don Wan; I left him that much of a chance, at least. No man can say I murdered my mate.”

“I am not aware, Don Esteban, that any one has said so hard a thing of you. Still, we have seen neither wrecker nor turtler since we have been here; and that lessens the excellent chance you left Don Enrique.”

“There is no occasion, señor, to be so particular,” growled Spike, a little sullenly, in reply. “The chance, I say, was a good one, when you consider how many of them devils of wreckers hang about these reefs. Let this brig only get fast on a rock, and they would turn up, like sharks, all around us, each with his maw open for salvage. But this is neither here nor there; what puzzles me, was what we saw at the light, half an hour since, and the musket that was fired back at us! I know that the figure at the foot of the tower did not fire, for my eye was on him from first to last; and he had no arms. You



were on the island a good bit, and must have known if the light-house keeper was there or not, Don Wan?”

“The light-house keeper was there, Don Esteban—but he was in his grave.”

“Ay, ay, one, I know, was drowned, and buried with the rest of them; there might, however, have been more than one. You saw none of the people that had gone to Key West, in or about the house, Don Wan?”

“None. If any persons have left the Tortugas to go to Key West, within a few days, not one of them has yet returned.”

“So I supposed. No, it can be none of them. Then I saw his face as plainly as ever I saw it by moon-light, from aft, for’ard. What is your opinion about seeing the dead walk on the ’arth, Don Wan?”

“That I have never seen any such thing myself, Don Esteban, and consequently know nothing about it.”

“So I supposed; I find it hard to believe it, I do. It may be a warning to keep us from-coming any more to the Dry Tortugas; and I must say I have little heart for returning to this place, after all that has fell out here. We can go to the wreck, fish up the doubloons, and be off for Yucatan. Once in one of your ports, I make no question that the merits of the *Molly* will make themselves understood, and that we shall soon agree on a price.”

“What use could we put the brig to, Don Esteban, if we had her all ready for sea?”

“That is a strange question to ask in time of war! Give me such a craft as the *Molly*, with sixty or eighty men on board her, in a war like this, and her ’arnin’s should not fall short of half a million within a twelvemonth.”

“Could we engage you to take charge of her, Don Esteban?”

“That would be ticklish work, Don Wan. But we can see. No one knows what he will do until he is tried. In for a penny, in for a pound. A fellow never knows! Ha! ha! ha! Don Wan, we live in a strange world—yes, in a strange world.”

“We live in strange times, Don Esteban, as the situation of my poor country proves. But let us talk this matter over a little more in confidence.”

And they did thus discuss the subject. It was a singular spectacle to see an honourable man, one full of zeal of the purest nature in behalf of his own country, sounding a traitor as to the terms on which he might be induced to do all the harm he could, to those who claimed his allegiance. Such sights, however, are often seen; our own especial objects too frequently blinding us to the obligations that we owe morality, so far as not to be instrumental in effecting even what we conceive to be good, by



questionable agencies. But the Señor Montefalderon kept in view, principally, his desire to be useful to Mexico, blended a little too strongly, perhaps, with the wishes of a man who was born near the sun, to avenge his wrongs, real or fancied.

While this dialogue was going on between Spike and his passenger, as they paced the quarter-deck, one quite as characteristic occurred in the galley, within twenty feet of them—Simon, the cook, and Josh, the steward, being the interlocutors. As they talked secrets, they conferred together with closed doors, though few were ever disposed to encounter the smoke, grease, and fumes of their narrow domains, unless called thither by hunger.

“What you t’ink of dis matter Josh?” demanded Simon, whose skull having the well-known density of his race, did not let internal ideas out, or external ideas in as readily as most men’s. “Our young mate was at de light-house beyond all controwersy; and how can he be den on dat rock over yonder, too?”

“Dat is imposserbul,” answered Josh; “derefore I says it isn’t true. I surposes you know dat what is imposserbul isn’t true, Simon. Nobody can’t be out yonder and down here at de same time. Dat is imposserbul, Simon. But what I wants to intermate to you, will explain all dis difficulty; and it do show de raal super’ority of a coloured man over de white poperlation. Now, you mark my words, cook, and be full of admiration! Jack Tier came back along wid de Mexican gentle’em, in my anchor-watch, dis very night! You see, in de first place, ebbery t’ing come to pass in nigger’s watch.”

Here the two dark-skinned worthies haw-haw’d to their heart’s content; laughing very much as a magistrate or a minister of the gospel might be fancied to laugh, the first time he saw a clown at a circus. The merriment of a negro will have its course, in spite of ghosts, or of anything else; and neither the cook nor the steward dreamed of putting in another syllable, until their laugh was fairly and duly ended. Then the cook made his remarks.

“How Jack Tier comin’ back explain der differculty, Josh?” asked Simon.

“Didn’t Jack go away wid Miss Rose and de mate, in de boat dat got adrift, you know, in Jack’s watch on deck?”

Here the negroes laughed again, their imaginations happening to picture to each, at the same instant, the mystification about the boat; Bidy having told Josh in confidence, the manner in which the party had returned to the brig, while he and Simon were asleep; which fact the steward had already communicated to the cook. To these two beings, of an order in nature different from all around them, and of a simplicity and of habits that scarce placed them on a level with the intelligence of the humblest white



man, all these circumstances had a sort of mysterious connection, out of which peeped much the most conspicuously to their faculties, the absurdity of the captain's imagining that a boat had got adrift, which had, in truth, been taken away by human hands. Accordingly, they laughed it out; and when they had done laughing, they returned again to the matter before them with renewed interest in the subject.

"Well, how all dat explain dis differculty?" repeated Simon.

"In dis wery manner, cook," returned the steward, with a little dignity in his manner. "Ebbery t'ing depend on understandin', I s'pose you know. If Mr. Mulford got taken off dat rock by Miss Rose and Jack Tier, wid de boat, and den dey comes here altogedder; and den Jack Tier, he get on board and tell Biddy all dis matter, and den Biddy tell Josh, and den Josh tell de cook—what for you surprise, you black debbil, one bit?"

"Dat all!" exclaimed Simon.

"Dat just all—dat ebbery bit of it, don't I say."

Here Simon burst into such a fit of loud laughter, that it induced Spike himself to shove aside the galley-door, and thrust his own frowning visage into the dark hole within, to inquire the cause.

"What's the meaning of this uproar?" demanded the captain, all the more excited because he felt that things had reached a pass that would not permit him to laugh himself. "Do you fancy yourself on the Hook, or at the Five Points?"

The Hook and the Five Points are two pieces of tabooed territory within the limits of the good town of Manhattan, that are getting to be renowned for their rascality and orgies. They probably want nothing but the proclamation of a governor in vindication of their principles, annexed to a pardon of some of their unfortunate children, to render both classical. If we continue to make much further progress in political logic, and in the same direction as that in which we have already proceeded so far, neither will probably long be in want of this illustration. Votes can be given by the virtuous citizens of both these purlieus, as well as by the virtuous citizens of the anti-rent districts, and votes contain the essence of all such principles, as well as of their glorification.

"Do you fancy yourselves on the Hook, or at the Five Points?" demanded Spike, angrily.

"Lor', no sir!" answered Simon, laughing at each pause with all his heart. "Only laughs a little at ghost—dat all, sir."

"Laugh at ghost! Is that a subject to laugh at? Have a care, you black rascal, or he will visit you in your galley here, when you will least want to see him."



“No care much for him, sir,” returned Simon, laughing away as hard as ever. “Sich a ghost oughtn’t to skear little baby.”

“Such a ghost? And what do you know of this ghost more than any other?”

“Well, I seed him, Cap’in Spike; and what a body sees, he is acquainted wid.”

“You saw an image that looked as much like Mr. Mulford, my late mate, as one timber-head in this brig is like another.”

“Yes, sir, he like enough—must say dat—so wery like, couldn’t see any difference.”

As Simon concluded this remark, he burst out into another fit of laughter, in which Josh joined him, heart and soul, as it might be. The uninitiated reader is not to imagine the laughter of those blacks to be very noisy, or to be raised on a sharp, high key. They could make the welkin ring, in sudden bursts of merriment, on occasion; but, at a time like this, they rather caused their diversion to be developed by sounds that came from the depths of their chests. A gleam of suspicion that these blacks were acquainted with some fact that it might be well for him to know, shot across the mind of Spike; but he was turned from further inquiry by a remark of Don Juan, who intimated that the mirth of such persons never had much meaning to it, expressing at the same time a desire to pursue the more important subject in which they were engaged. Admonishing the blacks to be more guarded in their manifestations of merriment, the captain closed the door on them, and resumed his walk up and down the quarter-deck. As soon as left to themselves, the blacks broke out afresh, though in a way so guarded, as to confine their mirth to the galley.

“Cap’in Spike t’ink dat a ghost!” exclaimed Simon, with contempt.

“Guess if he see raal ghost, he find ’e difference,” answered Josh. “One look at raal sperit wort’ two at dis object.”

Simon’s eyes now opened like two saucers, and they gleamed, by the light of the lamp they had, like dark balls of condensed curiosity, blended with awe, on his companion.

“You ebber see him, Josh?” he asked, glancing over each shoulder hurriedly, as it might be, to make sure that he could not see “him,” too.

“How you t’ink I get so far down the wale of life, Simon, and nebber see sich a t’ing? I seed t’ree of the crew of the ‘Maria Sheffington,’ that was drowned by deir boat’s cap-sizin’, when we lay at Gibraltar, jest as plain as I see you now. Then—”

But it is unnecessary to repeat Josh’s experiences in this way, with which he continued to entertain and terrify Simon for the next half-hour. This is just the



difference between ignorance and knowledge. While Spike himself, and every man in his brig who belonged forward, had strong misgivings as to the earthly character of the figure they had seen at the foot of the light-house, these negroes laughed at their delusion, because they happened to be in the secret of Mulford's escape from the rock, and of that of his actual presence at the Tortugas. When, however, the same superstitious feeling was brought to bear on circumstances that lay without the sphere of their exact information, they became just as dependent and helpless as all around them; more so, indeed, inasmuch as their previous habits and opinions disposed them to a more profound credulity.

It was midnight before any of the crew of the *Swash* sought their rest that night. The captain had to remind them that a day of extraordinary toil was before them, ere he could get one even to quit the deck; and when they did go below, it was to continue to discuss the subject of what they had seen at the Dry Tortugas. It appeared to be the prevalent opinion among the people, that the late event foreboded evil to the *Swash*, and long as most of these men had served in the brig, and much as they had become attached to her, had she gone into port that night, nearly every man forward would have run before morning. But fatigue and wonder, at length, produced their effect, and the vessel was silent as was usual at that hour. Spike himself lay down in his clothes, as he had done ever since Mulford had left him; and the brig continued to toss the spray from her bows, as she bore gallantly up against the trades, working her way to windward. The light was found to be of great service, as it indicated the position of the reef, though it gradually sunk in the western horizon, until near morning it fell entirely below it.

At this hour Spike appeared on deck again, where, for the first time since their interview on the morning of Harry's and Rose's escape, he laid his eyes on Jack Tier. The little dumpling-looking fellow was standing in the waist, with his arms folded sailor-fashion, as composedly as if nothing had occurred to render his meeting with the captain any way of a doubtful character. Spike approached near the person of the steward, whom he surveyed from head to foot, with a sort of contemptuous superiority, ere he spoke.

"So, Master Tier," at length the captain commenced, "you have deigned to turn out at last, have you? I hope the day's duty you've forgotten, will help to pay for the light-house boat, that I understand you've lost for me, also."

"What signifies a great clumsy boat that the brig could n't hoist in nor tow," answered Jack, coolly, turning short round at the same time, but not condescending to



“uncoil” his arms as he did so, a mark of indifference that would probably have helped to mystify the captain, had he even actually suspected that anything was wrong beyond the supposed accident to the boat in question. “If you had had the boat astern, Captain Spike, an order would have been given to cut it adrift the first time the brig made sail on the wind.”

“Nobody knows, Jack; that boat would have been very useful to us while at work about the wreck. You never even turned out this morning to let me know where that craft lay, as you promised to do, but left us to find it out by our wits.”

“There was no occasion for my tellin’ you anything about it, sir, when the mast-heads was to be seen above water. As soon as I heard that them ’ere mast-heads was out of water, I turned over and went to sleep upon it. A man can’t be on the doctor’s list and on duty at the same time.”

Spike looked hard at the little steward, but he made no further allusion to his being off duty, or to his failing to stand pilot to the brig as she came through the passage in quest of the schooner’s remains. The fact was, that he had discovered the mast-heads himself, just as he was on the point of ordering Jack to be called, having allowed him to remain in his berth to the last moment after his watch, according to a species of implied faith that is seldom disregarded among seamen. Once busied on the wreck, Jack was forgotten, having little to do in common with any one on board, but that which the captain termed the “women’s mess.”

“Come aft, Jack,” resumed Spike, after a considerable pause, during the whole of which he had stood regarding the little steward as if studying his person, and through that his character. “Come aft to the trunk; I wish to catechise you a bit.”

“Catechise!” repeated Tier, in an under tone, as he followed the captain to the place mentioned. “It’s a long time since I’ve done anything at that!”

“Ay, come hither,” resumed Spike, seating himself at his ease on the trunk, while Jack stood near by, his arms still folded, and his rotund little form as immovable, under the plunges that the lively brig made into the head-seas that she was obliged to meet, as if a timber-head in the vessel itself. “You keep your sea-legs well, Jack, short as they are.”

“No wonder for that, Captain Spike; for the last twenty years I’ve scarce passed a twelvemonth ashore; and what I did before that, no one can better tell than yourself, since we was ten good years shipmates.”

“So you say, Jack, though I do not remember you as well as you seem to remember me. Do you not make the time too long?”



“Not a day, sir. Ten good and happy years did we sail together, Captain Spike; and all that time in this very—”

“Hush—h-u-s-h, man, hush! There is no need of telling the *Molly*’s age to everybody. I may wish to sell her some day, and then her great experience will be no recommendation. You should recollect that the *Molly* is a female, and the ladies do not like to hear of their ages after five-and-twenty.”

Jack made no answer, but he dropped his arms to their natural position, seeming to wait the captain’s communication, first referring to his tobacco-box and taking a fresh quid.

“If you was with me in the brig, Jack, at the time you mention,” continued Spike, after another long and thoughtful pause, “you must remember many little things that I don’t wish to have known; especially while Mrs. Budd and her handsome niece is aboard here.”

“I understand you, Captain Spike. The ladies shall I’arn no more from me than they know already.”

“Thank ’e for that Jack—thank ’e with all my heart. Shipmates of our standing ought to be fast friends; and so you’ll find me, if you’ll only sail under the true colours, my man.”

At that moment Jack longed to let the captain know how strenuously he had insisted that very night on rejoining his vessel; and this at a time, too, when the brig was falling into disrepute. But this he could not do, without betraying the secret of the lovers—so he chose to say nothing.

“There is no use in blabbing all a man knows, and the galley is a sad place for talking. Galley news is poor news, I suppose you know, Jack.”

“I’ve hear’n say as much on board o’ man-of-war. It’s a great place for the officers to meet and talk, and smoke, in Uncle Sam’s crafts; and what a body hears in such places, is pretty much newspaper stuff, I do suppose.”

“Ay, ay, that’s it; not to be thought of half-an-hour after it has been spoken. Here’s a doubloon for you, Jack; and all for the sake of old times. Now, tell me, my little fellow, how do the ladies come on? Doesn’t Miss Rose get over her mourning on account of the mate? Aren’t we to have the pleasure of seein’ her on deck soon?”

“I can’t answer for the minds and fancies of young women, Captain Spike. They are difficult to understand; and I would rather not meddle with what I can’t understand.”

“Poh, poh, man; you must get over that. You might be of great use to me, Jack, in a very delicate affair—for you know how it is with women; they must be handled as a man would handle this brig among breakers; Rose, in partic’lar, is as skittish as a colt.”



“Stephen Spike,” said Jack, solemnly, but on so low a key that it entirely changed his usually harsh and cracked voice to one that sounded soft, if not absolutely pleasant, “do you never think of hereafter? Your days are almost run; a very few years, in your calling it may be a very few weeks, or a few hours, and time will be done with you, and eternity will commence.—Do you never think of a hereafter?”

Spike started to his feet, gazing at Jack intently; then he wiped the perspiration from his face, and began to pace the deck rapidly, muttering to himself—“this has been a most accursed night! First the mate, and now this! Blast me, but I thought it was a voice from the grave! Graves! Can’t they keep those that belong to them, or have rocks and waves no graves?”

What more passed through the mind of the captain must remain a secret, for he kept it to himself; nor did he take any further notice of his companion. Jack, finding that he was unobserved, passed quietly below, and took the place in his berth, which he had only temporarily abandoned.

Just as the day dawned, the *Swash* reached the vicinity of the wreck again. Sail was shortened, and the brig stood in until near enough for the purpose of her commander, when she was hove-to, so near the mast-heads that, by lowering the yawl, a line was sent out to the fore-mast, and the brig was hauled close alongside. The direction of the reef at that point formed a lee; and the vessel lay in water sufficiently smooth for her object.

This was done soon after the sun had risen, and Spike now ordered all hands called, and began his operations in earnest. By sounding carefully around the schooner when last here, he had ascertained her situation to his entire satisfaction. She had settled on a shelf of the reef, in such a position that her bows lay in a sort of cradle, while her stern was several feet nearer to the surface than the opposite extremity. This last fact was apparent, indeed, by the masts themselves, the lower mast aft being several feet out of water, while the fore-mast was entirely buried, leaving nothing but the fore-topmast exposed. On these great premises Spike had laid the foundation of the practical problem he intended to solve.

No expectation existed of ever getting the schooner afloat again. All that Spike and the Señor Montefalderon now aimed at, was to obtain the doubloons, which the former thought could be got at in the following manner. He knew that it would be much easier handling the wreck, so far as its gravity was concerned, while the hull continued submerged. He also knew that one end could be raised with a comparatively trifling effort, so long as the other rested on the rock. Under these circumstances, therefore, he



proposed merely to get slings around the after body of the schooner, as near her stern-post, indeed, as would be safe, and to raise that extremity of the vessel to the surface, leaving most of the weight of the craft to rest on the bows. The difference between the power necessary to effect this much, and that which would be required to raise the whole wreck, would be like the difference in power necessary to turn over a log with one end resting on the ground, and turning the same log by lifting it bodily in the arms, and turning it in the air. With the stern once above water, it would be easy to come at the bag of doubloons, which Jack Tier had placed in a locker above the transoms.

The first thing was to secure the brig properly, in order that she might bear the necessary strain. This was done very much as has been described already, in the account of the manner in which she was secured and supported in order to raise the schooner at the Dry Tortugas. An anchor was laid abreast and to windward, and purchases were brought to the masts, as before. Then the bight of the chain brought from the Tortugas, was brought under the schooner's keel, and counter-purchases, leading from both the fore-mast and main-mast of the brig, were brought to it, and set taut. Spike now carefully examined all his fastenings, looking to his cables as well as his mechanical power aloft, heaving in upon this, and veering out upon that, in order to bring the *Molly* square to her work; after which he ordered the people to knock-off for their dinners. By that time, it was high noon.

While Stephen Spike was thus employed on the wreck, matters and things were not neglected at the Tortugas. The Poughkeepsie had no sooner anchored, than Wallace went on board and made his report. Capt. Mull then sent for Mulford, with whom he had a long personal conference. This officer was getting grey, and consequently he had acquired experience. It was evident to Harry, at first, that he was regarded as one who had been willingly engaged in an unlawful pursuit, but who had abandoned it to push dearer interests in another quarter. It was some time before the commander of the sloop-of-war could divest himself of this opinion, though it gradually gave way before the frankness of the mate's manner, and the manliness, simplicity, and justice of his sentiments. Perhaps Rose had some influence also in bringing about this favourable change.

Wallace did not fail to let it be known that turtle-soup was to be had ashore; and many was the guest our heroine had to supply with that agreeable compound, in the course of the morning. Jack Tier had manifested so much skill in the preparation of the dish, that its reputation soon extended to the cabin, and the captain was induced to land, in order to ascertain how far rumour was or was not a liar, on this interesting



occasion. So ample was the custom, indeed, that Wallace had the consideration to send one of the ward-room servants to the light-house, in order to relieve Rose from a duty that was getting to be a little irksome. She was “seeing company” as a bride, in a novel and rather unpleasant manner; and it was in consequence of a suggestion of the “ship’s gentleman,” that the remains of the turtle were transferred to the vessel, and were put into the coppers, *secundum artem*, by the regular cooks.

It was after tickling his palate with a bowl of the soup, and enjoying a half-hour’s conversation with Rose, that Capt. Mull summoned Harry to a final consultation on the subject of their future proceedings. By this time the commander of the Poughkeepsie was in a better humour with his new acquaintance, more disposed to believe him, and infinitely more inclined to listen to his suggestions and advice, than he had been in their previous interviews. Wallace was present in his character of “ship’s gentleman,” or, as having nothing to do, while his senior, the first lieutenant, was working like a horse on board the vessel, in the execution of his round of daily duties.

At this consultation, the parties came into a right understanding of each other’s views and characters. Capt. Mull was slow to yield his confidence, but when he did bestow it, he bestowed it sailor-fashion, or with all his heart. Satisfied at last that he had to do with a young man of honour, and one who was true to the flag, he consulted freely with our mate, asked his advice, and was greatly influenced in the formation of his final decision by the opinions that Harry modestly advanced, maintaining them, however, with solid arguments, and reasons that every seaman could comprehend.

Mulford knew the plans of Spike by means of his own communications with the Señor Montefalderon. Once acquainted with the projects of his old commander, it was easy for him to calculate the time it would require to put them in execution, with the means that were to be found on board the *Swash*. “It will take the brig until near morning,” he said, “to beat up to the place where the wreck lies. Spike will wait for light to commence operations, and several hours will be necessary to moor the brig, and get out the anchors with which he will think it necessary to stay his masts. Then he will hook on, and he may partly raise the hull before night return. More than this he can never do; and it would not surprise me were he merely to get everything ready for heaving on his purchases to-morrow, and suspend further proceedings until the next day, in preference to having so heavy a strain on his spars all night. He has not the force, however, to carry on such duty to a very late hour; and you may count with perfect security, Captain Mull, on his being found alongside of the wreck at sunrise the next day after to-morrow, in all probability with his anchors down, and fast to the



wreck. By timing your own arrival well, nothing will be easier than to get him fairly under your guns, and once under your guns, the brig must give up. When you chased her out of this very port, a few days since, you would have brought her up could you have kept her within range of those terrible shells ten minutes longer.”

“You would then advise my not sailing from this place immediately,” said Mull.

“It will be quite time enough to get under way late in the afternoon, and then under short canvas. Ten hours will be ample time for this ship to beat up to that passage in, and it will be imprudent to arrive too soon; nor do I suppose you will wish to be playing round the reef in the dark.”

To the justice of all this Capt. Mull assented; and the plan of proceedings was deliberately and intelligently formed. As it was necessary for Mulford to go in the ship, in order to act as pilot, no one else on board knowing exactly where to find the wreck, the commander of the Poughkeepsie had the civility to offer the young couple the hospitalities of his own cabin, with one of his state-rooms. This offer Harry gratefully accepted, it being understood that the ship would land them at Key West, as soon as the contemplated duty was executed. Rose felt so much anxiety about her aunt, that any other arrangement would scarcely have pacified her fears.

In consequence of these arrangements, the Poughkeepsie lay quietly at her anchors until near sunset. In the interval her boats were out in all directions, parties of the officers visiting the islet where the powder had exploded, and the islet where the tent, erected for the use of the females, was still standing. As for the light-house island, an order of Capt. Mull’s prevented it from being crowded in a manner unpleasant to Rose, as might otherwise have been the case. The few officers who did land there, however, appeared much struck with the ingenuous simplicity and beauty of the bride, and a manly interest in her welfare was created among them all, principally by means of the representations of the second lieutenant and the chaplain. About five o’clock she went off to the ship, accompanied by Harry, and was hoisted on board in the manner usually practised by vessels of war which have no accommodation-ladder rigged. Rose was immediately installed in her state-room, where she found every convenience necessary to a comfortable though small apartment.

It was quite late in the afternoon, when the boatswain and his mate piped “all hands up anchor!” Harry hastened into the state-room for his charming bride, anxious to show her the movements of a vessel of war on such an occasion. Much as she had seen of the ocean, and of a vessel, within the last few weeks, Rose now found that she had yet a great deal to learn, and that a ship of war had many points to distinguish her from a vessel engaged in commerce.



The Poughkeepsie was only a sloop-of-war, or a corvette, in construction, number of her guns, and rate; but she was a ship of the dimensions of an old-fashioned frigate, measuring about one thousand tons. The frigates of which we read half a century since, were seldom ever as large as this, though they were differently built in having a regular gun-deck, or one armed deck that was entirely covered, with another above it; and on the quarter-deck and forecastle of the last of which were also batteries of lighter guns. To the contrary of all this, the Poughkeepsie had but one armed deck, and on that only twenty guns. These pieces, however, were of unusually heavy calibre, throwing thirty-two pound shot, with the exception of the Paixhans, or Columbiads, which throw shot of even twice that weight. The vessel had a crew of two hundred souls, all told; and she had the spars, anchors, and other equipments of a light frigate.

In another great particular did the Poughkeepsie differ from the corvette-built vessels that were so much in favour at the beginning of the century; a species of craft obtained from the French, who have taught the world so much in connection with naval science, and who, after building some of the best vessels that ever floated, have failed in knowing how to handle them, though not always in that. The Poughkeepsie, while she had no spar, or upper deck, properly speaking, had a poop and a topgallant-forecastle. Within the last were the cabins and other accommodations of the captain; an arrangement that was necessary for a craft of her construction, that carried so many officers, and so large a crew. Without it, sufficient space would not be had for the uses of the last. One gun of a side was in the main cabin, there being a very neat and amply spacious after-cabin between the state-rooms, as is ordinarily the case in all vessels from the size of frigates up to that of three-deckers. It may be well to explain here, while on this subject of construction, that in naval parlance, a ship is called a single-decked vessel; a two-decker, or a three-decker, not from the number of decks she actually possesses, but from the number of gun-decks that she has, or of those that are fully armed. Thus a frigate has four decks, the spar, gun, berth, and orlop (or haul-up) decks; but she is called a "single-decked ship," from the circumstance that only one of these four decks has a complete range of batteries. The two-decker has two of these fully armed decks, and the three-deckers three; though, in fact, the two-decker has five, and the three-decker six decks. Asking pardon for this little digression, which we trust will be found useful to a portion of our readers, we return to the narrative.

Harry conducted Rose to the poop of the Poughkeepsie, where she might enjoy the best view of the operation of getting so large a craft under way, man-of-war fashion. The details were mysteries, of course, and Rose knew no more of the process by which



the chain was brought to the capstan, by the intervention of what is called a messenger, than if she had not been present. She saw two hundred men distributed about the vessel, some at the capstan, some on the forecastle, some in the tops, and others in the waist, and she heard the order to “heave round.” Then the shrill fife commenced the lively air of “the girl I left behind me,” rather more from a habit in the fifer, than from any great regrets for the girls left at the Dry Tortugas, as was betrayed to Mulford by the smiles of the officers, and the glances they cast at Rose. As for the latter, she knew nothing of the air, and was quite unconscious of the sort of parody that the gentlemen of the quarter-deck fancied it conveyed on her own situation.

Rose was principally struck with the quiet that prevailed in the ship, Captain Mull being a silent man himself, and insisting on having a quiet vessel. The first lieutenant was not a noisy officer, and from these two, everybody else on board received their cues. A simple “all ready, sir,” uttered by the first to the captain, in a common tone of voice, answered by a “very well, sir, get your anchor,” in the same tone, set everything in motion. “Stamp and go,” soon followed, and taking the whole scene together, Rose felt a strange excitement come over her. There were the shrill, animating music of the fife; the stamping time of the men at the bars; the perceptible motion of the ship, as she drew ahead to her anchor, and now and then the call between Wallace, who stood between the knight-heads, as commander-in-chief on the forecastle, (the second lieutenant’s station when the captain does not take the trumpet, as very rarely happens,) and the “executive officer” aft, was “carrying on duty,” all conspiring to produce this effect. At length, and it was but a minute or two from the time when the “stamp and go” commenced, Wallace called out “a short stay-peak, sir.” “Heave and pull,” followed, and the men left their bars.

The process of making sail succeeded. There was no “letting fall” a fore-topsail here, as on board a merchant-man, but all the canvas dropped from the yards, into festoons, at the same instant. Then the three topsails were sheeted home and hoisted, all at once, and all in a single minute of time; the yards were counter-braced, and the capstan-bars were again manned. In two more minutes it was “heave and she’s up and down.” Then “heave and in sight,” and “heave and pull again.” The cat-fall was ready, and it was “hook on,” when the fife seemed to turn its attention to another subject as the men catted the anchor. Literally, all this was done in less time than we have taken to write it down in, and in very little more time than the reader has wasted in perusing what we have here written.

The Poughkeepsie was now “free of bottom,” as it is called, with her anchor catted and fished, and her position maintained in the basin where she lay, by the



counter-bracing of her yards, and the counteracting force of the wind on her sails. It only remained to “fill away,” by bracing her head-yards sharp up, when the vast mass overcame its inertia, and began to move through the water. As this was done, the jib and spanker were set. The two most beautiful things with which we are acquainted, are a graceful and high-bred woman entering or quitting a drawing-room, more particularly the last, and a man-of-war leaving her anchorage in a moderate breeze, and when not hurried for time. On the present occasion, Captain Mull was in no haste, and the ship passed out to windward of the light, as the *Swash* had done the previous night, under her three topsails, spanker and jib, with the light sails loose and flowing, and the courses hanging in the brails.

A great deal is said concerning the defective construction of the light cruisers of the navy, of late years, and complaints are made that they will not sail, as American cruisers ought to sail, and were wont to sail in old times. That there has been some ground for these complaints, we believe; though the evil has been greatly exaggerated, and some explanation may be given, we think, even in the cases in which the strictures are not altogether without justification. The trim of a light, sharp vessel is easily deranged; and officers, in their desire to command as much as possible, often get their vessels of this class too deep. They are, generally, for the sort of cruiser, over-sparred, over-manned, and over-provisioned; consequently, too deep. We recollect a case in which one of these delicate craft, a half-rigged brig, was much abused for “having lost her sailing.” She did, indeed, lose her fore-yard, and, after that, she sailed like a witch, until she got a new one! If the facts were inquired into, in the spirit which ought to govern such inquiries, it would be found that even most of the much-abused “ten sloops” proved to be better vessels than common. The *St. Louis*, the *Vincennes*, the *Concord*, the *Fairfield*, the *Boston*, and the *Falmouth*, are instances of what we mean. In behalf of the *Warren*, and the *Lexington*, we believe no discreet man was ever heard to utter one syllable, except as wholesome crafts. But the *Poughkeepsie* was a very different sort of vessel from any of the “ten sloops.” She was every way a good ship, and, as Jack expressed it, was “a good goer.” The most severe nautical critic could scarcely have found a fault in her, as she passed out between the islets, on the evening of the day mentioned, in the sort of undress we have described. The whole scene, indeed, was impressive, and of singular maritime characteristics.

The little islets scattered about, low, sandy, and untenanted, were the only land in sight—all else was the boundless waste of waters. The solitary light rose like an aquatic monument, as if purposely to give its character to the view. Captain Mull had caused



its lamps to be trimmed and lighted for the very reason that had induced Spike to do the same thing, and the dim star they presented was just struggling into existence, as it might be, as the brilliance left by the setting sun was gradually diminished, and finally disappeared. As for the ship, the hull appeared dark, glossy, and graceful, as is usual with a vessel of war. Her sails were in soft contrast to the colour of the hull, and they offered the variety and divergence from straight lines which are thought necessary to perfect beauty. Those that were set, presented the symmetry in their trim, the flatness in their hoist, and the breadth that distinguish a man-of-war; while those that were loose, floated in the air in every wave and cloud-like swell, that we so often see in light canvas that is released from the yards in a fresh breeze. The ship had an undress look from this circumstance, but it was such an undress as denotes the man or woman of the world. This undress appearance was increased by the piping down of the hammocks, which left the nettings loose, and with a negligent but still knowing look about them.

When half a mile from the islets, the main-yard was braced aback, and the maintopsail was laid to the mast. As soon as the ship had lost her way, two or three boats that had been towing astern, each with its boat-sitter, or keeper, in it, were hauled up alongside, or to the quarters, were “hooked on,” and “run up” to the whistling of the call. All was done at once, and all was done in a couple of minutes. As soon as effected, the maintopsail was again filled, and away the ship glided.

Captain Mull was not in the habit of holding many consultations with his officers. If there be wisdom in a “multitude of counsellors,” he was of opinion it was not on board a man-of-war. Napoleon is reported to have said that one bad general was better than two good ones; meaning that one head to an army, though of inferior quality, is better than a hydra of Solomons, or Cæsars. Captain Mull was much of the same way of thinking, seldom troubling his subordinates with anything but orders. He interfered very little with “working Willy,” though he saw effectually that he did his duty. “The ship’s gentleman” might enjoy his joke as much as he pleased, so long as he chose his time and place with discretion, but in the captain’s presence joking was not tolerated, unless it were after dinner, at his own table, and in his own cabin. Even there it was not precisely such joking as took place daily, not to say hourly, in the midshipmen’s messes.

In making up his mind as to the mode of proceeding on the present occasion, therefore, Captain Mull, while he had heard all that Mulford had to tell him, and had even encouraged Wallace to give his opinions, made up his decision for himself. After learning all that Harry had to communicate, he made his own calculations as to time



and distance, and quietly determined to carry whole sail on the ship for the next four hours. This he did as the wisest course of making sure of getting to windward while he could, and knowing that the vessel could be brought under short canvas at any moment when it might be deemed necessary. The light was a beacon to let him know his distance with almost mathematical precision. It could be seen so many miles at sea, each mile being estimated by so many feet of elevation, and having taken that elevation, he was sure of his distance from the glittering object, so long as it could be seen from his own poop. It was also of use by letting him know the range of the reef, though Captain Mull, unlike Spike, had determined to make one leg off to the northward and eastward until he had brought the light nearly to the horizon, and then to make another to the southward and eastward, believing that the last stretch would bring him to the reef, almost as far to windward as he desired to be. In furtherance of this plan, the sheets of the different sails were drawn home, as soon as the boats were in, and the Poughkeepsie, bending a little to the breeze, gallantly dashed the waves aside, as she went through and over them, at a rate of not less than ten good knots in the hour. As soon as all these arrangements were made, the watch went below, and from that time throughout the night, the ship offered nothing but the quiet manner in which ordinary duty is carried on in a well-regulated vessel of war at sea, between the hours of sun and sun. Leaving the good craft to pursue her way with speed and certainty, we must now return to the *Swash*.

Captain Spike had found the mooring of his brig a much more difficult task, on this occasion, than on that of his former attempt to raise the schooner. Then he had to lift the wreck bodily, and he knew that laying the *Swash* a few feet further ahead or astern, could be of no great moment, inasmuch as the moment the schooner was off the bottom, she would swing in perpendicularly to the purchases. But now one end of the schooner, her bows, was to remain fast, and it became of importance to be certain that the purchases were so placed as to bring the least strain on the masts while they acted most directly on the after body of the vessel to be lifted. This point gave Spike more trouble than he had anticipated. Fully one half of the remainder of the day, even after he had begun to heave upon his purchases, was spent in rectifying mistakes in connection with this matter, and in getting up additional securities to his masts.

In one respect Spike had, from the first, made a good disposition. The masts of the brig raked materially, and by bringing the head of the *Swash* in the direction of the schooner, he converted this fact, which might otherwise have been of great disadvantage, into a circumstance that was favourable. In consequence of the brig's



having been thus moored, the strain, which necessarily led forward, came nearly in a line with the masts, and the latter were much better able to support it. Notwithstanding this advantage, however, it was found expedient to get up preventer-stays, and to give the spars all the additional support could be conveniently bestowed. Hours were passed in making these preliminary, or it might be better to say, secondary arrangements.

It was past five in the afternoon when the people of the *Swash* began to heave on their purchases as finally disposed. After much creaking, and the settling of straps and lashings into their places, it was found that everything stood, and the work went on. In ten minutes Spike found he had the weight of the schooner, so far as he should be obliged to sustain it at all, until the stern rose above the surface; and he felt reasonably secure of the doubloons. Further than this he did not intend to make any experiment on her, the Señor Montefalderon having abandoned all idea of recovering the vessel itself, now so much of the cargo was lost. The powder was mostly consumed, and that which remained in the hull must, by this time, be injured by dampness, if not ruined. So reasoned Don Juan at least.

As the utmost care was necessary, the capstan and wind-lass were made to do their several duties with great caution. As inch by inch was gained, the extra supports of the masts were examined, and it was found that a much heavier strain now came on the masts than when the schooner was raised before. This was altogether owing to the direction in which it came, and to the fact that the anchor planted off abeam was not of as much use as on the former occasion, in consequence of its not lying so much in a straight line with the direction of the purchases. Spike began to have misgivings on account of his masts, and this so much the more because the wind appeared to haul a little further to the northward, and the weather to look unsettled. Should a swell roll into the bight of the reef where the brig lay, by raising the hull a little too rudely, there would be the imminent danger of at least springing, if not of absolutely carrying away both the principal spars. It was therefore necessary to resort to extraordinary precautions, in order to obviate this danger.

The captain was indebted to his boatswain, who was now in fact acting as his mate, for the suggestion of the plan next adopted. Two of the largest spare spars of the brig were got out, with their heads securely lashed to the links of the chain by which the wreck was suspended, one on each side of the schooner. Pig-iron and shot were lashed to the heels of these spars, which carried them to the bottom. As the spars were of a greater length than was necessary to reach the rock, they necessarily lay at an inclination, which was lessened every inch the after body of the wreck was raised, thus forming props to the hull of the schooner.



Spike was delighted with the success of this scheme, of which he was assured by a single experiment in heaving. After getting the spars well planted at their heels, he even ordered the men to slacken the purchases a little, and found that he could actually relieve the brig from the strain, by causing the wreck to be supported altogether by these shores. This was a vast relief from the cares of the approaching night, and indeed alone prevented the necessity of the work's going on without interruption, or rest, until the end was obtained.

The people of the *Swash* were just assured of the comfortable fact related, as the Poughkeepsie was passing out from among the islets of the Dry Tortugas. They imagined themselves happy in having thus made a sufficient provision against the most formidable of all the dangers that beset them, at the very moment when the best laid plan for their destruction was on the point of being executed. In this respect, they resembled millions of others of their fellows, who hang suspended over the vast abyss of eternity, totally unconscious of the irretrievable character of the fall that is so soon to occur. Spike, as has been just stated, was highly pleased with his own expedient, and he pointed it out with exultation to the Señor Montefalderon, as soon as it was completed.

“A nicer fit was never made by a Lunnun leg-maker, Don Wan,” the captain cried, after going over the explanations connected with the shores—“there she stands, at an angle of fifty, with two as good limbs under her as a body could wish. I could now cast off everything, and leave the wreck in what they call ‘statu quo,’ which, I suppose, means on its pins, like a statue. The tafferel is not six inches below the surface of the water, and half an hour of heaving will bring the stern in sight.”

“Your work seems ingeniously contrived to get up one extremity of the vessel, Don Esteban,” returned the Mexican; “but are you quite certain that the doubloons are in her?”

This question was put because the functionary of a government in which money was very apt to stick in passing from hand to hand was naturally suspicious, and he found it difficult to believe that Mulford, Jack Tier, and even Bidy, under all the circumstances, had not paid special attention to their own interests.

“The bag was placed in one of the transom-lockers before the schooner capsized,” returned the captain, “as Jack Tier informs me; if so, it remains there still. Even the sharks will not touch gold, Don Wan.”

“Would it not be well to call Jack, and hear his account of the matter once more, now we appear to be so near the Eldorado of our wishes?”

Spike assented, and Jack was summoned to the quarter-deck. The little fellow had scarce showed himself throughout the day, and he now made his appearance with a slow step, and reluctantly.



“You’ve made no mistake about them ’ere doubloons, I take it, Master Tier?” said Spike, in a very nautical sort of style of addressing an inferior. “You know them to be in one of the transom-lockers?”

Jack mounted on the breech of one of the guns, and looked over the bulwarks at the dispositions that had been made about the wreck. The tafferel of the schooner actually came in sight, when a little swell passed over it, leaving it for an instant in the trough. The steward thus caught a glimpse again of the craft on board which he had seen so much hazard, and he shook his head and seemed to be thinking of anything but the question which had just been put to him.

“Well, about that gold?” asked Spike, impatiently.

“The sight of that craft has brought other thoughts than gold into my mind, Captain Spike,” answered Jack, gravely, “and it would be well for all us mariners, if we thought less of gold and more of the dangers we run. For hours and hours did I stand over eternity, on the bottom of that schooner, Don Wan, holdin’ my life, as it might be, at the marcy of a few bubbles of air.”

“What has all that to do with the gold? Have you deceived me about that locker, little rascal?”

“No, sir, I’ve not deceived you—no, Captain Spike, no. The bag is in the upper transom-locker, on the starboard side. There I put it with my own hands, and a good lift it was; and there you’ll find it, if you’ll cut through the quarter-deck at the spot I can p’int out to you.”

This information seemed to give a renewed energy to all the native cupidity of the captain, who called the men from their suppers, and ordered them to commence heaving anew. The word was passed to the crew that “it was now for doubloons,” and they went to the bars and handspikes, notwithstanding the sun had set, cheerfully and cheering.

All Spike’s expedients admirably answered the intended purposes. The stern of the schooner rose gradually, and at each lift the heels of the shores dropped in more perpendicularly, carried by the weights attached to them, and the spars stood as firm props to secure all that was gained. In a quarter of an hour, most of that part of the stern which was within five or six feet of the tafferel, rose above the water, coming fairly in view.

Spike now shouted to the men to “pall!” then he directed the falls to be very gradually eased off, in order to ascertain if the shores would still do their duty. The experiment was successful, and presently the wreck stood in its upright position,



sustained entirely by the two spars. As the last were now nearly perpendicular, they were capable of bearing a very heavy weight, and Spike was so anxious to relieve his own brig from the strain she had been enduring, that he ordered the lashings of the blocks to be loosened, trusting to his shores to do their duty. Against this confidence the boatswain ventured a remonstrance, but the gold was too near to allow the captain to listen or reply. The carpenter was ordered over on the wreck with his tools, while Spike, the Señor Montefalderon, and two men to row the boat and keep it steady, went in the yawl to watch the progress of the work. Jack Tier was ordered to stand in the chains, and to point out, as nearly as possible, the place where the carpenter was to cut.

When all was ready, Spike gave the word, and the chips began to fly. By the use of the saw and the axe, a hole large enough to admit two or three men at a time, was soon made in the deck, and the sounding for the much-coveted locker commenced. By this time, it was quite dark; and a lantern was passed down from the brig, in order to enable those who searched for the locker to see. Spike had breasted the yawl close up to the hole, where it was held by the men, while the captain himself passed the lantern and his own head into the opening to reconnoitre.

“Ay, it’s all right!” cried the voice of the captain from within his cell-like cavity. “I can just see the lid of the locker that Jack means, and we shall soon have what we are a’ter. Carpenter, you may as well slip off your clothes at once, and go inside; I will point out to you the place where to find the locker. You’re certain, Jack, it was the starboard locker?”

“Ay, ay, sir, the starboard locker, and no other.”

The carpenter had soon got into the hole, as naked as when he was born. It was a gloomy-looking place for a man to descend into at that hour, the light from the lantern being no great matter, and half the time it was shaded by the manner in which Spike was compelled to hold it.

“Take care and get a good footing, carpenter,” said the captain, in a kinder tone than common, “before you let go with your hands; but I suppose you can swim, as a matter of course?”

“No, sir, not a stroke—I never could make out in the water at all.”

“Have the more ’care, then. Had I known as much, I would have sent another hand down; but mind your footing. More to the left, man—more to the left. That is the lid of the locker—your hand is on it; why do you not open it?”

“It is swelled by the water, sir, and will need a chisel, or some tool of that sort. Just call out to one of the men, sir, if you please, to pass me a chisel from my tool-chest. A good stout one will be best.”



This order was given, and, during the delay it caused, Spike encouraged the carpenter to be cool, and above all to mind his footing. His own eagerness to get at the gold was so great that he kept his head in at the hole, completely cutting off the man within from all communication with the outer world.

“What’s the matter with you?” demanded Spike, a little sternly. “You shiver, and yet the water cannot be cold in this latitude. No, my hand makes it just the right warmth to be pleasant.”

“It’s not the water, Captain Spike—I wish they would come with the chisel. Did you hear nothing, sir? I’m certain I did!”

“Hear!—What is there here to be heard, unless there may be some fish inside, thrashing about to get out of the vessel’s hold?”

“I am sure I heard something like a groan, Captain Spike. I wish you would let me come out, sir, and I’ll go for the chisel myself; them men will never find it.”

“Stay where you are, coward! are you afraid of dead men standing against walls? Stay where you are. Ah! here is the chisel—now let us see what you can do with it.”

“I am certain I heard another groan, Captain Spike. I cannot work, sir. I’m of no use here—do let me come out, sir, and send a hand down that can swim.”

Spike uttered a terrible malediction on the miserable carpenter, one we do not care to repeat; then he cast the light of the lantern full in the man’s face. The quivering flesh, the pallid face, and the whole countenance wrought up almost to a frenzy of terror, astonished, as well as alarmed him.

“What ails you, man?” said the captain in a voice of thunder. “Clap in the chisel, or I’ll hurl you off into the water. There is nothing here, dead or alive, to harm ye!”

“The groan, sir—I hear it again! Do let me come out, Captain Spike.”

Spike himself, this time, heard what even he took for a groan. It came from the depths of the vessel, apparently, and was sufficiently distinct and audible. Astonished, yet appalled, he thrust his shoulders into the aperture, as if to dare the demon that tormented him, and was met by the carpenter endeavouring to escape. In the struggle that ensued, the lantern was dropped into the water, leaving the half-frenzied combatants contending in the dark. The groan was renewed, when the truth flashed on the minds of both.

“The shores! The shores!” exclaimed the carpenter from within. “The shores!” repeated Spike, throwing himself back into the boat, and shouting to his men to “see all clear of the wreck!” The grating of one of the shores on the coral beneath was now heard plainer than ever, and the lower extremity slipped outward, not astern, as had



been apprehended, letting the wreck slowly settle to the bottom again. One piercing shriek arose from the narrow cavity within; then the gurgling of water into the aperture was heard, when naught of sound could be distinguished but the sullen and steady wash of the waves of the gulf over the rocks of the reef.

The impression made by this accident was most profound. A fatality appeared to attend the brig; and most of the men connected the sad occurrence of this night with the strange appearance of the previous evening. Even the Señor Montefalderon was disposed to abandon the doubloons, and he urged Spike to make the best of his way for Yucatan, to seek a friendly harbour. The captain wavered, but avarice was too strong a passion in him to be easily diverted from its object, and he refused to give up his purpose.

As the wreck was entirely free from the brig when it went down for the third time, no injury was sustained by the last on this occasion. By renewing the lashings, everything would be ready to begin the work anew—and this, Spike was resolved to attempt in the morning. The men were too much fatigued, and it was too dark to think of pushing matters any further that night; and it was very questionable whether they could have been got to work. Orders were consequently given for all hands to turn in, the captain, relieved by Don Juan and Jack Tier, having arranged to keep the watches of the night.

“This is a sad accident, Don Esteban,” observed the Mexican, as he and Spike paced the quarter-deck together, just before the last turned in; “a sad accident! My miserable schooner seems to be deserted by its patron saint. Then your poor carpenter!”

“Yes, he was a good fellow enough with a saw, or an adze,” answered Spike, yawning. “But we get used to such things at sea. It’s neither more nor less than a carpenter expended. Good night, Señor Don Wan; in the morning we’ll be at that gold ag’in.”

