



Jack Tier

or, the Florida Reef

Part 2: Chapter 6

She's in a scene of nature's war,
The winds and waters are at strife;
And both with her contending for
The brittle thread of human life.

—Miss Gould.

Spike was sleeping hard in his berth, quite early on the following morning, before the return of light, indeed, when he suddenly started up, rubbed his eyes, and sprang upon deck like a man alarmed. He had heard, or fancied he had heard, a cry. A voice once well known and listened to, seemed to call him in the very portals of his ear. At first he had listened to its words in wonder, entranced like the bird by the snake, the tones recalling scenes and persons that had once possessed a strong control over his rude feelings. Presently the voice became harsher in its utterance, and it said.

“Stephen Spike, awake! The hour is getting late, and you have enemies nearer to you than you imagine. Awake, Stephen, awake!”

When the captain was on his feet, and had plunged his head into a basin of water that stood ready for him in the state-room, he could not have told, for his life, whether he had been dreaming or waking, whether what he had heard was the result of a feverish imagination, or of the laws of nature. The call haunted him all that morning, or until events of importance so pressed upon him as to draw his undivided attention to them alone.

It was not yet day. The men were still in heavy sleep, lying about the decks, for they avoided the small and crowded forecabin in that warm climate, and the night was apparently at its deepest hour. Spike walked forward to look for the man charged



with the anchor-watch. It proved to be Jack Tier, who was standing near the galley, his arms folded as usual, apparently watching the few signs of approaching day that were beginning to be apparent in the western sky. The captain was in none of the best humours with the steward's assistant; but Jack had unaccountably got an ascendancy over his commander, which it was certainly very unusual for any subordinate in the *Swash* to obtain. Spike had deferred more to Mulford than to any mate he had ever before employed; but this was the deference due to superior information, manners, and origin. It was common-place, if not vulgar; whereas, the ascendancy obtained by little Jack Tier was, even to its subject, entirely inexplicable. He was unwilling to admit it to himself in the most secret manner, though he had begun to feel it on all occasions which brought them in contact, and to submit to it as a thing not to be averted.

"Jack Tier," demanded the captain, now that he found himself once more alone with the other, desirous of obtaining his opinion on a point that harassed him, though he knew not why; "Jack Tier, answer me one thing. Do you believe that we saw the form of a dead or of a living man at the foot of the light-house?"

"The dead are never seen leaning against walls in that manner, Stephen Spike," answered Jack, coolly, not even taking the trouble to uncoil his arms. "What you saw was a living man; and you would do well to be on your guard against him. Harry Mulford is not your friend—and there is reason for it."

"Harry Mulford, and living! How can that be, Jack? You know the port in which he chose to run."

"I know the rock on which you chose to abandon him, Captain Spike."

"If so, how could he be living and at the Dry Tortugas. The thing is impossible!"

"The thing is so. You saw Harry Mulford, living and well, and ready to hunt you to the gallows. Beware of him, then; and beware of his handsome wife!"

"Wife! The fellow has no wife—he has always professed to be a single man!"

"The man is married—and I bid you beware of his handsome wife. She, too, will be a witness ag'in you."

"This will be news, then, for Rose Budd. I shall delight in telling it to her, at least."

"'T will be no news to Rose Budd. She was present at the wedding, and will not be taken by surprise. Rose loves Harry too well to let him marry, and she not present at the wedding."

"Jack, you talk strangely! What is the meaning of all this? I am captain of this craft, and will not be trifled with—tell me at once your meaning, fellow."



“My meaning is simple enough, and easily told. Rose Budd is the wife of Harry Mulford.”

“You’re dreaming, fellow, or are wishing to trifle with me!”

“It may be a dream, but it is one that will turn out to be true. If they have found the Poughkeepsie sloop-of-war, as I make no doubt they have by this time, Mulford and Rose are man and wife.”

“Fool! You know not what you say! Rose is at this moment in her berth, sick at heart on account of the young gentleman who preferred to live on the Florida Reef rather than to sail in the *Molly*!”

“Rose is not in her berth, sick or well; neither is she on board this brig at all. She went off in the light-house boat to deliver her lover from the naked rock—and well did she succeed in so doing. God was of her side, Stephen Spike; and a body seldom fails with such a friend to support one.”

Spike was astounded at these words, and not less so at the cool and confident manner with which they were pronounced. Jack spoke in a certain dogmatical, oracular manner, it is true, one that might have lessened his authority with a person over whom he had less influence; but this in no degree diminished its effect on Spike. On the contrary, it even disposed the captain to yield an implicit faith to what he heard, and all so much the more because the facts he was told appeared of themselves to be nearly impossible. It was half a minute before he had sufficiently recovered from his surprise to continue the discourse.

“The light-house boat!” Spike then slowly repeated. “Why, fellow, you told me the light-house boat went adrift from your own hands!”

“So it did,” answered Jack, coolly, “since I cast off the painter—and what is more, went in it.”

“You! This is impossible. You are telling me a fabricated lie. If you had gone away in that boat, how could you now be here? No, no—it is a miserable lie, and Rose is below!”

“Go and look into her state-room, and satisfy yourself with your own eyes.”

Spike did as was suggested. He went below, took a lamp that was always suspended, lighted in the main cabin, and, without ceremony, proceeded to Rose’s state-room, where he soon found that the bird had really flown. A direful execration followed this discovery, one so loud as to awaken Mrs. Budd and Biddy. Determined not to do things by halves, he broke open the door of the widow’s state-room, and ascertained that the person he sought was not there. A fierce explosion of oaths and



denunciations followed, which produced an answer in the customary screams. In the midst of this violent scene, however, questions were put, and answers obtained, that not only served to let the captain know that Jack had told him nothing but truth, but to put an end to everything like amicable relations between himself and the relict of his old commander. Until this explosion, appearances had been observed between them; but, from that moment, there must necessarily be an end of all professions of even civility. Spike was never particularly refined in his intercourse with females, but he now threw aside even its pretension. His rage was so great that he totally forgot his manhood, and lavished on both Mrs. Budd and Biddy epithets that were altogether inexcusable, and many of which it will not do to repeat. Weak and silly as was the widow, she was not without spirit; and on this occasion she was indisposed to submit to all this unmerited abuse in silence. Biddy, as usual, took her cue from her mistress, and between the two, their part of the wordy conflict was kept up with a very respectable degree of animation.

“I know you—I know you, now!” screamed the widow, at the tope of her voice; “and you can no longer deceive me, unworthy son of Neptune as you are! You are unfit to be a lubber, and would be log-booked for an or’nary by every gentleman on board ship. You, a full-jiggered sea-man! No, you are not even half-jiggered, sir; and I tell you so to your face.”

“Yes, and it is n’t half that might be tould the likes of yees!” put in Biddy, as her mistress stopped to breathe. “And it’s Miss Rose you’d have for a wife, when Biddy Noon would be too good for ye! We knows ye, and all about ye, and can give yer history as complate from the day ye was born down to the prisent moment; and not find a good word to say in yer favour in all that time—and a precious time it is, too, for a gentleman that would marry pretthy, young Miss Rose! Och! I scorn to look at ye, yer so ugly!”

“And trying to persuade me you were a friend of my poor, dear Mr. Budd, whose shoe you are unworthy to touch, and who had the heart and soul for the noble profession you disgrace,” cut in the widow, the moment Biddy gave her a chance, by pausing to make a wry face as she pronounced the word “ugly.” “I now believe you capasided them poor Mexicans, in order to get their money; and the moment we cast anchor in a road-side, I’ll go ashore, and complain of you for murder, I will.”

“Do, missus, dear, and I’ll be your bail, will I, and swear to all that happened, and more too. Och! Yer a wretch, to wish to be the husband of Miss Rose, and she so young and pretthy, and you so ould and ugly!”



“Come away—come away, Stephen Spike, and do not stand wrangling with women, when you and your brig, and all that belongs to you, are in danger,” called out Jack Tier from the companion-way. “Day is come; and what is much worse for you, your most dangerous enemy is coming with it.”

Spike was almost livid with rage, and ready to burst out in awful maledictions; but at this summons he sprang to the ladder, and was on deck in a moment. At first, he felt a strong disposition to wreak his vengeance on Tier, but, fortunately for the latter, as the captain’s foot touched the quarter-deck, his eye fell on the Poughkeepsie, then within half a league of the *Swash*, standing in toward the reef, though fully half a mile to leeward. This spectre drove all other subjects from his mind, leaving the captain of the *Swash* in the only character in which he could be said to be respectable, or that of a seaman. Almost instinctively he called all hands, then he gave one brief minute to a survey of his situation.

It was, indeed, time for the *Swash* to be moving. There she lay, with three anchors down, including that of the schooner, all she had, in fact, with the exception of her best bower, and one kedge, with the purchases aloft, in readiness for hooking on to the wreck, and all the extra securities up that had been given to the masts. As for the sloop-of-war, she was under the very same canvas as that with which she had come out from the Dry Tortugas, or her three top-sails, spanker, and jib; but most of her other sails were loose, even to her royals and flying-jibs; though closely gathered into their spars by means of the running gear. In a word, every sailor would know, at a glance, that the ship was merely waiting for the proper moment to spread her wings, when she would be flying through the water at the top of her speed. The weather looked dirty, and the wind was gradually increasing, threatening to blow heavily as the day advanced.

“Unshackle, unshackle!” shouted Spike to the boat-swain, who was the first man that appeared on deck. “The bloody sloop-of-war is upon us, and there is not a moment to lose. We must get the brig clear of the ground in the shortest way we can, and abandon everything. Unshackle, and cast off for’ard and aft, men.”

A few minutes of almost desperate exertion succeeded. No men work like sailors, when the last are in a hurry, their efforts being directed to counteracting squalls, and avoiding emergencies of the most pressing character. Thus was it now with the crew of the *Swash*. The clanking of chains lasted but a minute, when the parts attached to the anchors were thrust through the hawse-holes, or were dropped into the water from other parts of the brig. This at once released the vessel, though a great deal remained to be done to clear her for working, and to put her in the best trim.



“Away with this out-hauler!” again shouted Spike, casting loose the main-brails as he did so; “loose the jibs!”

All went on at once, and the *Swash* moved away from the grave of the poor carpenter with the ease and facility of motion that marked all her evolutions. Then the top-sail was let fall, and presently all the upper square-sails were sheeted home, and hoisted, and the fore-tack was hauled aboard. The *Molly* was soon alive, and jumping into the seas that met her with more power than was common, as she drew out from under the shelter of the reef into rough water. From the time when Spike gave his first order, to that when all his canvas was spread, was just seven minutes.

The Poughkeepsie, with her vastly superior crew, was not idle the while. Although the watch below was not disturbed, she tacked beautifully, and stood off the reef, in a line parallel to the course of the brig, and distant from her about half a mile. Then sail was made, her tacks having been boarded in stays. Spike knew the play of his craft was short legs, for she was so nimble in her movements that he believed she could go about in half the time that would be required for a vessel of the Poughkeepsie’s length. “Ready about,” was his cry, therefore, when less than a mile distant from the reef—“ready about, and let her go round.” Round the *Molly* did go, like a top, being full on the other tack in just fifty-six seconds. The movement of the corvette was more stately, and somewhat more deliberate. Still, she stayed beautifully, and both Spike and the boatswain shook their heads, as they saw her coming into the wind with her sails all lifting and the sheets flowing.

“That fellow will fore-reach a cable’s length before he gets about!” exclaimed Spike. “He will prove too much for us at this sport! Keep her away, my man—keep the brig away for the passage. We must run through the reef, instead of trusting ourselves to our heels in open water.”

The brig was kept away accordingly, and sheets were eased off, and braces just touched, to meet the new line of sailing. As the wind stood, it was possible to lay through the passage on an easy bowline, though the breeze, which was getting to be fresher than Spike wished it to be, promised to haul more to the southward of east, as the day advanced. Nevertheless, this was the *Swash*’s best point of sailing, and all on board of her had strong hopes of her being too much for her pursuer, could she maintain it. Until this feeling began to diffuse itself in the brig, not a countenance was to be seen on her decks that did not betray intense anxiety; but now something like grim smiles passed among the crew, as their craft seemed rather to fly than force her way through the water, toward the entrance of the passage so often adverted to in this narrative.



On the other hand, the Poughkeepsie was admirably sailed and handled. Everybody was now on deck, and the first lieutenant had taken the trumpet. Captain Mull was a man of method, and a thorough man-of-war's man. Whatever he did was done according to rule, and with great system. Just as the *Swash* was about to enter the passage, the drum of the Poughkeepsie beat to quarters. No sooner were the men mustered, in the leeward, or the starboard batteries, than orders were sent to cast loose the guns, and to get them ready for service. Owing to the more leeward position of his vessel, and to the fact that she always head-reached so much in stays, Captain Mull knew that she would not lose much by luffing into the wind, or by making half-boards, while he might gain everything by one well-directed shot.

The strife commenced by the sloop-of-war, firing her weather bow-gun, single-shotted, at the *Swash*. No damage was done, though the fore-yard of the brig had a very narrow escape. This experiment was repeated three times, without even a rope-yarn being carried away, though the gun was pointed by Wallace himself, and well pointed, too. But it is possible for a shot to come very near its object and still to do no injury. Such was the fact on this occasion, though the "ship's gentleman" was a good deal mortified by the result. Men look so much at success as the test of merit, that few pause to inquire into the reasons of failures, though it frequently happens that adventures prosper by means of their very blunders. Captain Mull now determined on a half-board, for his ship was more to leeward than he desired. Directions were given to the officers in the batteries to be deliberate, and the helm was put down. As the ship shot into the wind, each gun was fired, as it could be brought to bear, until the last of them all was discharged. Then the course of the vessel was changed, the helm being righted before the ship had lost her way, and the sloop-of-war fell off again to her course.

All this was done in such a short period of time as scarcely to cause the Poughkeepsie to lose anything, while it did the *Swash* the most serious injury. The guns had been directed at the brig's spars and sails, Captain Mull desiring no more than to capture his chase, and the destruction they produced aloft was such as to induce Spike and his men, at first, to imagine that the whole hamper above their heads was about to come clattering down on deck. One shot carried away all the weather fore-top-mast rigging of the brig, and would no doubt have brought about the loss of the mast, if another, that almost instantly succeeded it, had not cut the spar itself in two, bringing down, as a matter of course, everything above it. Nearly half of the main-mast was gouged out of that spar, and the gaff was taken fairly out of its jaws. The fore-yard was cut in the slings, and various important ropes were carried away in different parts of the vessel.



Flight, under such circumstances, was impossible, unless some extraordinary external assistance was to be obtained. This Spike saw at once, and he had recourse to the only expedient that remained; which might possibly yet save him. The guns were still belching forth their smoke and flames, when he shouted out the order to put the helm hard up. The width of the passage in which the vessels were was not so great but that he might hope to pass across it, and to enter a channel among the rocks, which was favourably placed for such a purpose, ere the sloop-of-war could overtake him. Whither that channel led, what water it possessed, or whether it were not a shallow cul de sac, were all facts of which Spike was ignorant. The circumstances, however, would not admit of an alternative.

Happily for the execution of Spike's present design, nothing from aloft had fallen into the water, to impede the brig's way. Forward, in particular, she seemed all wreck; her fore-yard having come down altogether, so as to encumber the forecabin, while her top-mast, with its dependent spars and gear, was suspended but a short distance above. Still, nothing had gone over the side, so as actually to touch the water, and the craft obeyed her helm as usual. Away she went, then, for the lateral opening in the reef just mentioned, driven ahead by the pressure of a strong breeze on her sails, which still offered large surfaces to the wind, at a rapid rate. Instead of keeping away to follow, the Poughkeepsie maintained her luff, and just as the *Swash* entered the unknown passage, into which she was blindly plunging, the sloop-of-war was about a quarter of a mile to windward, and standing directly across her stern. Nothing would have been easier, now, than for Captain Mull to destroy his chase; but humanity prevented his firing. He knew that her career must be short, and he fully expected to see her anchor; when it would be easy for him to take possession with his boats. With this expectation, indeed, he shortened sail, furling top-gallant-sails, and hauling up his courage. By this time, the wind had so much freshened, as to induce him to think of putting in a reef, and the step now taken had a double object in view.

To the surprise of all on board the man-of-war, the brig continued on, until she was fully a mile distant, finding her way deeper and deeper among the mazes of the reef without meeting with any impediment! This fact induced Captain Mull to order his Paixhans to throw their shells beyond her, by way of a hint to anchor. While the guns were getting ready, Spike stood on boldly, knowing it was neck or nothing, and beginning to feel a faint revival of hope, as he found himself getting further and further from his pursuers, and the rocks not fetching him up. Even the men, who had begun to murmur at what seemed to them to be risking too much, partook, in a slight degree,



of the same feeling, and began to execute the order they had received to try to get the launch into the water, with some appearance of an intention to succeed. Previously, the work could scarcely be said to go on at all; but two or three of the older seamen now bestirred themselves, and suggestions were made and attended to, that promised results. But it was no easy thing to get the launch out of a half-rigged brig, that had lost her fore-yard, and which carried nothing square abaft. A derrick was used in common, to lift the stern of the boat, but a derrick would now be useless aft, without an assistant forward. While these things were in discussion, under the superintendence of the boatswain, and Spike was standing between the knight-heads, conning the craft, the sloop-of-war let fly the first of her hollow shot. Down came the hurtling mass upon the *Swash*, keeping every head elevated and all eyes looking for the dark object, as it went booming through the air above their heads. The shot passed fully a mile to leeward, where it exploded. This great range had been given to the first shot, with a view to admonish the captain how long he must continue under the guns of the ship, and as advice to come to. The second gun followed immediately. Its shot was seen to ricochet, directly in a line with the brig, making leaps of about half a mile in length. It struck the water about fifty yards astern of the vessel, bounded directly over her decks, passing through the main-sail and some of the fallen hamper forward, and exploded about a hundred yards ahead. As usually happens with such projectiles, most of the fragments were either scattered laterally, or went on, impelled by the original momentum.

The effect of this last gun on the crew of the *Swash* was instantaneous and deep. The faint gleamings of hope vanished at once, and a lively consciousness of the desperate nature of their condition succeeded in every mind. The launch was forgotten, and, after conferring together for a moment, the men went in a body, with the boatswain at their head, to the forecastle, and offered a remonstrance to their commander, on the subject of holding out any longer, under circumstances so very hazardous, and which menaced their lives in so many different ways. Spike listened to them with eyes that fairly glared with fury. He ordered them back to their duty in a voice of thunder, tapping the breast of his jacket, where he was known to carry revolvers, with a significance that could convey but one meaning.

It is wonderful the ascendancy that men sometimes obtain over their fellows, by means of character, the habits of command, and obedience, and intimidation. Spike was a stern disciplinarian, relying on that and ample pay for the unlimited control he often found it necessary to exercise over his crew. On the present occasion, his people were profoundly alarmed, but habitual deference and submission to their



leader counteracted the feeling, and held them in suspense. They were fully aware of the nature of the position they occupied in a legal sense, and were deeply reluctant to increase the appearances of crime; but most of them had been extricated from so many grave difficulties in former instances, by the coolness, nerve and readiness of the captain, that a latent ray of hope was perhaps dimly shining in the rude breast of every old sea-dog among them. As a consequence of these several causes, they abandoned their remonstrance, for the moment at least, and made a show of returning to their duty; though it was in a sullen and moody manner.

It was easier, however, to make a show of hoisting out the launch, than to effect the object. This was soon made apparent on trial, and Spike himself gave the matter up. He ordered the yawl to be lowered, got alongside, and to be prepared for the reception of the crew, by putting into it a small provision of food and water. All this time the brig was rushing madly to leeward, among rocks and breakers, without any other guide than that which the visible dangers afforded. Spike knew no more where he was going than the meanest man in his vessel. His sole aim was to get away from his pursuers, and to save his neck from the rope. He magnified the danger of punishment that he really ran, for he best knew the extent and nature of his crimes, of which the few that have been laid before the reader, while they might have been amongst the most prominent, as viewed through the statutes and international law, were far from the gravest he had committed in the eyes of morals.

About this time the Señor Montefalderon went forward to confer with Spike. The calmness of this gentleman's demeanour, the simplicity and coolness of his movements, denoted a conscience that saw no particular ground for alarm. He wished to escape captivity, that he might continue to serve his country, but no other apprehension troubled him.

"Do you intend to trust yourself in the yawl, Don Esteban?" demanded the Mexican quietly. "If so, is she not too small to contain so many as we shall make altogether?"

Spike's answer was given in a low voice; and it evidently came from a very husky throat.

"Speak lower, Don Wan," he said. "The boat would be greatly overloaded with all hands in it, especially among the breakers, and blowing as it does; but we may leave some of the party behind."

"The brig must go on the rocks, sooner or later, Don Esteban; when she does, she will go to pieces in an hour.



"I expect to hear her strike every minute, señor; the moment she does, we must be off. I have had my eye on that ship for some time, expecting to see her lower her cutters and gigs to board us. You will not be out of the way, Don Wan; but there is no need of being talkative on the subject of our escape."

Spike now turned his back on the Mexican, looking anxiously ahead, with the desire to get as far into the reef as possible with his brig, which he conned with great skill and coolness. The Señor Montefalderon left him. With the chivalry and consideration of a man and a gentleman, he went in quest of Mrs. Budd and Biddy. A hint sufficed for them, and gathering together a few necessities they were in the yawl in the next three minutes. This movement was unseen by Spike, or he might have prevented it. His eyes were now riveted on the channel ahead. It had been fully his original intention to make off in the boat, the instant the brig struck, abandoning not only Don Juan, with Mrs. Budd and Biddy to their fates, but most of the crew. A private order had been given to the boatswain, and three of the ablest-bodied among the seamen, each and all of whom kept the secret with religious fidelity, as it was believed their own personal safety might be connected with the success of this plan.

Nothing is so contagious as alarm. It requires not only great natural steadiness of nerve, but much acquired firmness to remain unmoved when sudden terror has seized on the minds of those around us. Habitual respect had prevented the crew from interfering with the movements of the Mexican, who not only descended into the boat with his female companions uninterrupted, but also took with him the little bag of doubloons which fell to his share from the first raising of the schooner. Josh and Jack Tier assisted in getting Mrs. Budd and Biddy over the side, and both took their own places in the yawl, as soon as this pious duty was discharged. This served as a hint to others near at hand; and man after man left his work to steal into the yawl, until every living being had disappeared from the deck of the *Swash*, Spike himself excepted. The man at the wheel had been the last to desert his post, nor would he have done so then, but for a signal from the boatswain, with whom he was a favourite.

It is certain there was a secret desire among the people of the *Swash*, who were now crowded into a boat not large enough to contain more than half their number with safety, to push off from the brig's side, and abandon her commander and owner to his fate. All had passed so soon, however, and events succeeded each other with so much rapidity, that little time was given for consultation. Habit kept them in their places, though the appearances around them were strong motives for taking care of themselves.



Notwithstanding the time necessary to relate the foregoing events, a quarter of an hour had not elapsed, from the moment when the *Swash* entered this unknown channel among the rocks, ere she struck. No sooner was her helm deserted than she broached-to, and Spike was in the act of denouncing the steerage, ignorant of its cause, when the brig was thrown, broadside-to, on a sharp, angular bed of rocks. It was fortunate for the boat, and all in it, that it was brought to leeward by the broaching-to of the vessel, and that the water was still sufficiently deep around them to prevent the waves from breaking. Breakers there were, however, in thousands, on every side; and the seamen understood that their situation was almost desperately perilous, without shipwreck coming to increase the danger.

The storm itself was scarcely more noisy and boisterous than was Spike, when he ascertained the manner in which his people had behaved. At first, he believed it was their plan to abandon him to his fate; but, on rushing to the lee-gangway, Don Juan Montefalderon assured him that no such intention existed, and that he would not allow the boat to be cast off until the captain was received on board. This brief respite gave Spike a moment to care for his portion of the doubloons; and he rushed to his state-room to secure them, together with his quadrant.

The grinding of the brig's bottom on the coral, announced a speedy breaking up of the craft, while her commander was thus employed. So violent were some of the shocks with which she came down on the hard bed in which she was now cradled, that Spike expected to see her burst asunder, while he was yet on her decks. The cracking of timbers told him that all was over with the *Swash*, nor had he got back as far as the gangway with his prize, before he saw plainly that the vessel had broken her back, as it is termed, and that her plank-sheer was opening in a way that threatened to permit a separation of the craft into two sections, one forward and the other aft. Notwithstanding all these portentous proofs that the minutes of the *Molly* were numbered, and the danger that existed of his being abandoned by his crew, Spike paused a moment, ere he went over the vessel's side, to take a hasty survey of the reef. His object was to get a general idea of the position of the breakers, with a view to avoid them. As much of the interest of that which is to succeed is connected with these particular dangers, it may be well to explain their character, along with a few other points of a similar bearing.

The brig had gone ashore fully two miles within the passage she had entered, and which, indeed, terminated at the very spot where she had struck. The Poughkeepsie was standing off and on, in the main channel, with her boats in the water, evidently preparing to carry the brig in that mode. As for the breakers, they whitened the surface



of the ocean in all directions around the wreck, far as the eye could reach, but in two. The passage in which the Poughkeepsie was standing to and fro was clear of them, of course; and about a mile and a half to the northward, Spike saw that he should be in open water, or altogether on the northern side of the reef, could he only get there. The gravest dangers would exist in the passage, which led among breakers on all sides, and very possibly among rocks so near the surface as absolutely to obstruct the way. In one sense, however, the breakers were useful. By avoiding them as much as possible, and by keeping in the unbroken water, the boat would be running in the channels of the reef, and consequently would be the safer. The result of the survey, short as it was, and it did not last a minute, was to give Spike something like a plan; and when he went over the side, and got into the boat, it was with a determination to work his way out of the reef to its northern edge, as soon as possible, and then to skirt it as near as he could, in his flight toward the Dry Tortugas.

