ФРЕДЕРИК МАРРИЕТ

THE PIRATE

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Содержание

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Chapter One.
The Bay of Biscay

It was in the latter part of the month of June, of the year seventeen hundred and ninety something, that the angry waves of the Bay of Biscay were gradually subsiding, after a gale of wind as violent as it was unusual during that period of the year. Still they rolled heavily; and, at times, the wind blew up in fitful, angry gusts, as if it would fain renew the elemental combat; but each effort was more feeble, and the dark clouds which had been summoned to the storm, now fled in every quarter before the powerful rays of the sun, who burst their masses asunder with a glorious flood of light and heat; and, as he poured down his resplendent beams, piercing deep into the waters of that portion of the Atlantic to which we now refer, with the exception of one object, hardly visible, as at creation, there was a vast circumference of water, bounded by the fancied canopy of heaven. We have said, with the exception of one object; for in the centre of this picture, so simple, yet so sublime, composed of the three great elements, there was a remnant of the fourth. We say a remnant, for it was but the hull of a vessel, dismasted, water-logged, its upper works only floating occasionally above the waves, when a transient repose from their still violent undulation permitted it to reassume its buoyancy. But this was seldom; one moment it was deluged by the seas, which broke as they poured over its gunwale; and the next, it rose from its submersion, as the water escaped from the portholes at its sides.

How many thousands of vessels—how many millions of property—have been abandoned, and eventually consigned to the all-receiving depths of the ocean, through ignorance or through fear! What a mine of wealth must lie buried in its sands! what riches lie entangled amongst its rocks, or remain suspended in its unfathomable gulf, where the compressed fluid is equal in gravity to that which it encircles, there to remain secured in its embedment from corruption and decay, until the destruction of the universe and the return of chaos!—Yet, immense as the accumulated loss may be, the major part of it has been occasioned from an ignorance of one of the first laws of nature, that of specific gravity. The vessel to which we have referred was, to all appearance, in a situation of as extreme hazard as that of a drowning man clinging to a single rope-yarn; yet, in reality, she was more secure from descending to the abyss below than many gallantly careering on the waters, their occupants dismissing all fear, and only calculating upon a quick arrival into port.

The *Circassian* had sailed from New Orleans, a gallant and well-appointed ship, with a cargo, the major part of which consisted of cotton. The captain was, in the usual acceptation of the term, a good sailor; the crew were hardy and able seamen. As they crossed the Atlantic, they had encountered the gale to which we have referred, were driven down into the Bay of Biscay, where, as we shall hereafter explain, the vessel was dismasted, and sprang a leak, which baffled all their exertions to keep under. It was now five days since the frightened crew had quitted the vessel in two of her boats, one of which had swamped, and every soul that occupied it had perished; the fate of the other was uncertain.

We said that the crew had deserted the vessel, but we did not assert that every existing being had been removed out of her. Had such been the case, we should not have taken up the reader's time in describing inanimate matter. It is life that we portray, and life there still was in the shattered hull thus abandoned to the mockery of the ocean. In the *caboose* of the *Circassian*, that is, in the cooking-house secured on deck, and which fortunately had been so well fixed as to resist the force of the breaking waves, remained three beings—a man, a woman, and a child. The two first mentioned were of that inferior race which have, for so long a period, been procured from the sultry Afric coast, to

toil, but reap not for themselves; the child which lay at the breast of the female was of European blood, now, indeed, deadly pale, as it attempted in vain to draw sustenance from its exhausted nurse, down whose sable cheeks the tears coursed, as she occasionally pressed the infant to her breast, and turned it round to leeward to screen it from the spray which dashed over them at each returning swell. Indifferent to all else, save her little charge, she spoke not, although she shuddered with the cold as the water washed her knees each time that the hull was careened into the wave. Cold and terror had produced a change in her complexion, which now wore a yellow, or sort of copper hue.

The male, who was her companion, sat opposite to her upon the iron range which once had been the receptacle of light and heat, but was now but a weary seat to a drenched and worn-out wretch. He, too, had not spoken for many hours; with the muscles of his face relaxed, his thick lips pouting far in advance of his collapsed cheeks, his high cheekbones prominent as budding horns, his eyes displaying little but their whites, he appeared to be an object of greater misery than the female, whose thoughts were directed to the infant and not unto herself. Yet his feelings were still acute, although his faculties appeared to be deadened by excess of suffering.

"Eh, me!" cried the negro woman faintly, after a long silence, her head falling back with extreme exhaustion. Her companion made no reply, but, roused at the sound of her voice, bent forward, slided open the door a little, and looked out to windward. The heavy spray dashed into his glassy eyes, and obscured his vision; he groaned, and fell back into his former position. "What you tink, Coco?" inquired the negress, covering up more carefully the child, as she bent her head down upon it. A look of despair, and a shudder from cold and hunger, were the only reply.

It was then about eight o'clock in the morning, and the swell of the ocean was fast subsiding. At noon the warmth of the sun was communicated to them through the planks of the *caboose*, while its rays poured a small stream of vivid light through the chinks of the closed panels. The negro appeared gradually to revive; at last he rose, and with some difficulty contrived again to slide open the door. The sea had gradually decreased its violence, and but occasionally broke over the vessel; carefully holding on by the door-jambs, Coco gained the outside, that he might survey the horizon.

"What you see, Coco?" said the female, observing from the *caboose* that his eyes were fixed upon a certain quarter.

"So help me God, me tink me see something; but ab so much salt water in um eye, me no see clear," replied Coco, rubbing away the salt which had crystallised on his face during the morning.

"What you tink um like, Coco?"

"Only one bit cloud," replied he, entering the *caboose*, and resuming his seat upon the grate with a heavy sigh.

"Eh, me!" cried the negress, who had uncovered the child to look at it, and whose powers were sinking fast. "Poor lilly Massa Eddard, him look very bad indeed—him die very soon, me fear. Look, Coco, no ab breath."

The child's head fell back upon the breast of its nurse, and life appeared to be extinct.

"Judy, you no ab milk for piccaninny; suppose um ab no milk, how can live? Eh! stop, Judy, me put lilly fingers in um mouth; suppose Massa Eddard no dead, him pull."

Coco inserted his finger into the child's mouth, and felt a slight drawing pressure. "Judy," cried Coco, "Massa Eddard no dead yet. Try now, suppose you ab lilly drop oder side."

Poor Judy shook her head mournfully, and a tear rolled down her cheek; she was aware that nature was exhausted. "Coco," said she, wiping her cheek with the back of her hand, "me give me heart blood for Massa Eddard; but no ab milk—all gone."

This forcible expression of love for the child, which was used by Judy, gave an idea to Coco. He drew his knife out of his pocket, and very coolly sawed to the bone of his fore-finger. The blood flowed and trickled down to the extremity, which he applied to the mouth of the infant.

"See, Judy, Massa Eddard suck—him not dead," cried Coco, chuckling at the fortunate result of the experiment, and forgetting at the moment their almost hopeless situation.

The child, revived by the strange sustenance, gradually recovered its powers, and in a few minutes it pulled at the finger with a certain degree of vigour.

"Look Judy, how Massa Eddard take it," continued Coco. "Pull away, Massa Eddard, pull away. Coco ab ten finger, and take long while suck em all dry." But the child was soon satisfied, and fell asleep in the arms of Judy.

"Coco, suppose you go see again," observed Judy. The negro again crawled out, and again he scanned the horizon.

"So help me God, dis time me tink, Judy—yes, so help me God, me see a ship!" cried Coco, joyfully.

"Eh!" screamed Judy, faintly, with delight: "den Massa Eddard no die."

"Yes, so help me God—he come dis way!" and Coco, who appeared to have recovered a portion of his former strength and activity, clambered on the top of the *caboose*, where he sat, cross-legged, waving his yellow handkerchief, with the hope of attracting the attention of those on board; for he knew that it was very possible that an object floating little more than level with the water's surface might escape notice.

As it fortunately happened, the frigate, for such she was, continued her course precisely for the wreck, although it had not been perceived by the look-out men at the mast-heads, whose eyes had been directed to the line of the horizon. In less than an hour our little party were threatened with a new danger, that of being run over by the frigate, which was now within a cable's length of them, driving the seas before her in one widely extended foam, as she pursued her rapid and impetuous course. Coco shouted to his utmost, and fortunately attracted the notice of the men who were on the bowsprit, stowing away the foretopmast-staysail, which had been hoisted up to dry after the gale.

"Starboard, hard!" was roared out.

"Starboard it is," was the reply from the quarterdeck, and the helm was shifted without inquiry, as it always is on board of a man-of-war, although, at the same time, it behoves people to be rather careful how they pass such an order, without being prepared with a subsequent and most satisfactory explanation.

The topmast studding-sail flapped and fluttered, the foresail shivered, and the jib filled as the frigate rounded to, narrowly missing the wreck, which was now under the bows, rocking so violently in the white foam of the agitated waters, that it was with difficulty that Coco could, by clinging to the stump of the mainmast, retain his elevated position. The frigate shortened sail, hove to, and lowered down a quarter-boat, and in less than five minutes Coco, Judy, and the infant, were rescued from their awful situation. Poor Judy, who had borne up against all for the sake of the child, placed it in the arms of the officer who relieved them, and then fell back in a state of insensibility, in which condition she was carried on board. Coco, as he took his place in the stern-sheets of the boat, gazed wildly round him, and then broke out into peals of extravagant laughter, which continued without intermission, and were the only replies which he could give to the interrogatories of the quarter-deck, until he fell down in a swoon, and was entrusted to the care of the surgeon.

Chapter Two.
The Bachelor

On the evening of the same day on which the child and the two negroes had been saved from the wreck by the fortunate appearance of the frigate, Mr Witherington, of Finsbury Square, was sitting alone in his dining-room wondering what could have become of the *Circassian*, and why he had not received intelligence of her arrival. Mr Witherington, as we said before, was alone; he had his port and his sherry before him; and although the weather was rather warm, there was a small fire in the grate, because, as Mr Witherington asserted, it looked comfortable. Mr Witherington having watched the ceiling of the room for some time, although there was certainly nothing new to be discovered, filled another glass of wine, and then proceeded to make himself more comfortable by unbuttoning three more buttons of his waistcoat, pushing his wig further off his head, and casting loose all the buttons at the knees of his breeches; he completed his arrangements by dragging towards him two chairs within his reach, putting his legs on one, while he rested his arm on the other. And why was not Mr Witherington to make himself comfortable? He had good health, a good conscience, and eight thousand a-year.

Satisfied with all his little arrangements, Mr Witherington sipped his port wine, and putting down his glass again, fell back in his chair, placed his hands on his breast, interwove his fingers; and in this most comfortable position recommenced his speculations as to the non-arrival of the *Circassian*.

We will leave him to his cogitations while we introduce him more particularly to our readers.

The father of Mr Witherington was a younger son of one of the oldest and proudest families in the West Riding of Yorkshire: he had his choice of the four professions allotted to younger sons whose veins are filled with patrician blood—the army, the navy, the law, and the church. The army did not suit him, he said, as marching and counter-marching were not comfortable; the navy did not suit him, as there was little comfort in gales of wind and mouldy biscuit: the law did not suit him, as he was not sure that he would be at ease with his conscience, which would not be comfortable; the church was also rejected, as it was, with him, connected with the idea of a small stipend, hard duty, a wife and eleven children, which were anything but comfortable. Much to the horror of his family he eschewed all the liberal professions, and embraced the offer of an old backslider of an uncle, who proposed to him a situation in his banking-house, and a partnership as soon as he deserved it; the consequence was, that his relations bade him an indignant farewell, and then made no further inquiries about him: he was as decidedly cut as one of the female branches of the family would have been had she committed a *faux pas*.

Nevertheless, Mr Witherington senior stuck diligently to his business, in a few years was partner, and, at the death of the old gentleman, his uncle, found himself in possession of a good property, and every year coining money at his bank.

Mr Witherington senior then purchased a house in Finsbury Square, and thought it advisable to look out for a wife.

Having still much of the family pride in his composition, he resolved not to muddle the blood of the Witheringtons by any cross from Cateaton Street or Mincing Lane; and, after a proper degree of research, he selected the daughter of a Scotch earl, who went to London with a bevy of nine in a Leith smack to barter blood for wealth. Mr Witherington being so unfortunate as to be the first comer, had the pick of the nine ladies by courtesy; his choice was light-haired, blue-eyed, a little freckled, and very tall, by no means bad-looking, and standing on the list in the family Bible, Number Four. From this union Mr Witherington had issue; first, a daughter, christened Moggy, whom we shall soon have to introduce to our readers as a spinster of forty-seven; and second, Antony Alexander Witherington Esquire, whom we just now have left in a very comfortable position, and in a very brown study.

Mr Witherington senior persuaded his son to enter the banking-house, and, as a dutiful son, he entered it every day; but he did nothing more, having made the fortunate discovery that "his father was born before him;" or, in other words, that his father had plenty of money, and would be necessitated to leave it behind him.

As Mr Witherington senior had always studied comfort, his son had early imbibed the same idea, and carried his feelings, in that respect, to a much greater excess; he divided things into comfortable and uncomfortable. One fine day, Lady Mary Witherington, after paying all the household bills, paid the debt of Nature; that is, she died: her husband paid the undertaker's bill, so it is to be presumed that she was buried.

Mr Witherington senior shortly afterwards had a stroke of apoplexy, which knocked him down. Death, who has no feelings of honour, struck him when down. And Mr Witherington, after having laid a few days in bed, was by a second stroke laid in the same vault as Lady Mary Witherington: and Mr Witherington junior (our Mr Witherington) after deducting 40,000 pounds for his sister's fortune, found himself in possession of a clear 8,000 pounds per annum, and an excellent house in Finsbury Square. Mr Witherington considered this a comfortable income, and he therefore retired altogether from business.

During the lifetime of his parents he had been witness to one or two matrimonial scenes, which had induced him to put down matrimony as one of the things not comfortable: therefore he remained a bachelor.

His sister Moggy also remained unmarried; but whether it was from a very unprepossessing squint which deterred suitors, or from the same dislike to matrimony as her brother had imbibed, it is not in our power to say. Mr Witherington was three years younger than his sister; and although he had for some time worn a wig, it was only because he considered it more comfortable. Mr Witherington's whole character might be summed up in two words—eccentricity and benevolence: eccentric he certainly was, as most bachelors usually are. Man is but a rough pebble without the attrition received from contact with the gentler sex: it is wonderful how the ladies pumice a man down to a smoothness which occasions him to roll over and over with the rest of his species, jostling but not wounding his neighbours, as the waves of circumstances bring him into collision with them.

Mr Witherington roused himself from his deep reverie, and felt for the string connected with the bell-pull, which it was the butler's duty invariably to attach to the arm of his master's chair previous to his last exit from the dining-room; for, as Mr Witherington very truly observed, it was very uncomfortable to be obliged to get up and ring the bell: indeed, more than once Mr Witherington had calculated the advantages and disadvantages of having a daughter about eight years old who could ring bells, air the newspapers, and cut the leaves of a new novel.

When, however, he called to mind that she could not always remain at that precise age, he decided that the balance of comfort was against it.

Mr Witherington, having pulled the bell again, fell into a brown study.

Mr Jonathan, the butler, made his appearance; but observing that his master was occupied, he immediately stopped at the door, erect, motionless, and with a face as melancholy as if he was performing mute at the porch of some departed peer of the realm; for it is an understood thing, that the greater the rank of the defunct the longer must be the face, and, of course, the better must be the pay.

Now, as Mr Witherington is still in profound thought, and Mr Jonathan will stand as long as a hackney-coach horse, we will just leave them as they are, while we introduce the brief history of the latter to our readers. Jonathan Trapp has served as foot*boy*, which term, we believe, is derived from those who are in that humble capacity receiving a *quantum suff.* of the application of the feet of those above them to increase the energy of their service; then as foot*man*; which implies that they have been promoted to the more agreeable right of administering instead of receiving the above dishonourable applications; and lastly, for promotion could go no higher in the family, he had been raised to the

dignity of butler in the service of Mr Witherington senior. Jonathan then fell in love, for butlers are guilty of indiscretions as well as their masters: neither he nor his fair flame, who was a lady's maid in another family, notwithstanding that they had witnessed the consequences of this error in others, would take warning; they gave warning, and they married.

Like most butlers and ladies' maids who pair off, they set up a public-house; and it is but justice to the lady's maid to say, that she would have preferred an eating-house, but was overruled by Jonathan, who argued, that although people would drink when they were not dry, they never would eat unless they were hungry.

Now, although there was truth in the observation, this is certain, that business did not prosper: it has been surmised that Jonathan's tall, lank, lean figure injured his custom, as people are but too much inclined to judge of the goodness of the ale by the rubicund face and rotundity of the landlord; and therefore inferred that there could be no good beer where mine host was the picture of famine. There certainly is much in appearances in this world; and it appears that, in consequence of Jonathan's cadaverous appearance, he very soon appeared in the *Gazette*; but what ruined Jonathan in one profession procured him immediate employment in another. An appraiser, upholsterer, and undertaker, who was called in to value the fixtures, fixed his eye upon Jonathan, and knowing the value of his peculiarly lugubrious appearance, and having a half-brother of equal height, offered him immediate employment as a mute. Jonathan soon forgot to mourn his own loss of a few hundreds in his new occupation of mourning the loss of thousands; and his erect, stiff, statue-like carriage, and long melancholy face, as he stood at the portals of those who had entered the portals of the next world, were but too often a sarcasm upon the grief of the inheritors. Even grief is worth nothing in this trafficking world unless it be paid for. Jonathan buried many, and at last buried his wife. So far all was well; but at last he buried his master, the undertaker, which was not quite so desirable. Although Jonathan wept not, yet did he express mute sorrow as he marshalled him to his long home, and drank to his memory in a pot of porter as he returned from the funeral, perched, with many others, like carrion crows on the top of the hearse.

And now Jonathan was thrown out of employment from a reason which most people would have thought the highest recommendation. Every undertaker refused to take him, because they could not match him. In this unfortunate dilemma, Jonathan thought of Mr Witherington junior; he had served and he had buried Mr Witherington his father, and Lady Mary his mother; he felt that he had strong claims for such variety of services, and he applied to the bachelor. Fortunately for Jonathan, Mr Witherington's butler-incumbent was just about to commit the same folly as Jonathan had done before, and Jonathan was again installed, resolving in his own mind to lead his former life, and have nothing more to do with ladies' maids. But from habit Jonathan still carried himself as a mute on all ordinary occasions—never indulging in an approximation to mirth, except when he perceived that his master was in high spirits, and then rather from a sense of duty than from any real hilarity of heart.

Jonathan was no mean scholar for his station in life, and during his service with the undertaker, he had acquired the English of all the Latin mottoes which are placed upon the hatchments; and these mottoes, when he considered them as apt, he was very apt to quote. We left Jonathan standing at the door; he had closed it, and the handle still remained in his hand. "Jonathan," said Mr Witherington, after a long pause—"I wish to look at the last letter from New York, you will find it on my dressing-table."

Jonathan quitted the room without reply, and made his reappearance with the letter.

"It is a long time that I have been expecting this vessel, Jonathan," observed Mr Witherington, unfolding the letter.

"Yes, sir, a long while; *tempus fugit*," replied the butler in a low tone, half shutting his eyes.

"I hope to God no accident has happened," continued Mr Witherington: "my poor little cousin and her twins e'en now that I speak, they may be all at the bottom of the sea."

"Yes, sir," replied the butler; "the sea defrauds many an honest undertaker of his profits."

"By the blood of the Witheringtons! I may be left without an heir, and shall be obliged to marry, which would be very uncomfortable."

"Very little comfort," echoed Jonathan—"my wife is dead. In caelo quies."

"Well, we must hope for the best; but this suspense is anything but comfortable," observed Mr Witherington, after looking over the contents of the letter for at least the twentieth time.

"That will do, Jonathan; I'll ring for coffee presently;" and Mr Witherington was again alone and with his eyes fixed upon the ceiling.

A cousin of Mr Witherington, and a very great favourite (for Mr Witherington, having a large fortune, and not having anything to do with business, was courted by his relations), had, to a certain degree, committed herself; that is to say, that, notwithstanding the injunctions of her parents, she had fallen in love with a young lieutenant in a marching regiment, whose pedigree was but respectable, and whose fortune was anything but respectable, consisting merely of a subaltern's pay. Poor men, unfortunately, always make love better than those who are rich, because, having less to care about, and not being puffed up with their own consequence, they are not so selfish and think much more of the lady than of themselves. Young ladies, also, who fall in love, never consider whether there is sufficient "to make the pot boil"—probably because young ladies in love lose their appetites, and, not feeling inclined to eat at that time, they imagine that love will always supply the want of food. Now, we will appeal to the married ladies whether we are not right in asserting that, although the collation spread for them and their friends on the day of the marriage is looked upon with almost loathing, they do not find their appetites return with interest soon afterwards. This was precisely the case with Cecilia, or rather, Cecilia Templemore, for she had changed her name the day before. It was also the case with her husband, who always had a good appetite, even during his days of courtship; and the consequence was, that the messman's account, for they lived in barracks, was, in a few weeks, rather alarming. Cecilia applied to her family, who very kindly sent her word that she might starve; but, the advice neither suiting her nor her husband, she then wrote to her cousin Antony, who sent her word that he would be most happy to receive them at his table, and that they should take up their abode in Finsbury Square. This was exactly what they wished; but still there was a certain difficulty; Lieutenant Templemore's regiment was quartered in a town in Yorkshire, which was some trifling distance from Finsbury Square; and to be at Mr Witherington's dinner-table at six p.m., with the necessity of appearing at parade every morning at nine a.m., was a dilemma not to be got out of. Several letters were interchanged upon this knotty subject: and at last it was agreed that Mr Templemore should sell out, and come up to Mr Witherington with his pretty wife: he did so, and found that it was much more comfortable to turn out at nine o'clock in the morning to a good breakfast than to a martial parade. But Mr Templemore had an honest pride and independence of character which would not permit him to eat the bread of idleness, and after a sojourn of two months in most comfortable quarters, without a messman's bill, he frankly stated his feelings to Mr Witherington, and requested his assistance to procure for himself an honourable livelihood. Mr Witherington, who had become attached to them both, would have remonstrated, observing that Cecilia was his own cousin, and that he was a confirmed bachelor; but, in this instance, Mr Templemore was firm, and Mr Witherington very unwillingly consented. A mercantile house of the highest respectability required a partner who could superintend their consignments to America. Mr Witherington advanced the sum required; and, in a few weeks, Mr and Mrs Templemore sailed for New York.

Mr Templemore was active and intelligent; their affairs prospered; and, in a few years, they anticipated a return to their native soil with a competence. But the autumn of the second year after their arrival proved very sickly; the yellow fever raged; and among the thousands who were carried off, Mr Templemore was a victim, about three weeks after his wife had been brought to bed of twins. Mrs Templemore rose from her couch a widow and the mother of two fine boys. The loss of Mr Templemore was replaced by the establishment with which he was connected, and Mr Witherington offered to his cousin that asylum which, in her mournful and unexpected bereavement, she so much

required. In three months her affairs were arranged; and with her little boys hanging at the breasts of two negro nurses,—for no others could be procured who would undertake the voyage,—Mrs Templemore, with Coco as male servant, embarked on board of the good ship *Circassian*, A1, bound to Liverpool.

Chapter Three.
The Gale

Those who, standing on the pier, had witnessed the proud bearing of the *Circassian* as she gave her canvas to the winds, little contemplated her fate: still less did those on board; for confidence is the characteristic of seamen, and they have the happy talent of imparting their confidence to whomsoever may be in their company. We shall pass over the voyage, confining ourselves to a description of the catastrophe.

It was during a gale from the north-west, which had continued for three days, and by which the *Circassian* had been driven into the Bay of Biscay, that at about twelve o'clock at night, a slight lull was perceptible. The captain, who had remained on deck, sent down for the chief mate. "Oswald," said Captain Ingram, "the gale is breaking, and I think before morning we shall have had the worst of it. I shall lie down for an hour or two; call me if there be any change."

Oswald Bareth, a tall, sinewy-built, and handsome specimen of transatlantic growth, examined the whole circumference of the horizon before he replied. At last his eyes were steadily fixed to leeward: "I've a notion not, sir," said he; "I see no signs of clearing off to leeward: only a lull for relief, and a fresh hand at the bellows, depend upon it."

"We have now had it three days," replied Captain Ingram, "and that's the life of a summer gale."

"Yes," rejoined the mate; "but always provided that it don't blow back again. I don't like the look of it, sir; and have it back we shall, as sure as there's snakes in Virginny."

"Well, so be if so be," was the safe reply of the captain. "You must keep a sharp look out, Bareth, and don't leave the deck to call me; send a hand down."

The captain descended to his cabin. Oswald looked at the compass in the binnacle—spoke a few words to the man at the helm—gave one or two terrible kicks in the ribs to some of the men who were caulking—sounded the pump-well—put a fresh quid of tobacco into his cheek, and then proceeded to examine the heavens above. A cloud, much darker and more descending than the others, which obscured the firmament, spread over the zenith, and based itself upon the horizon to leeward. Oswald's eye had been fixed upon it but a few seconds, when he beheld a small lambent gleam of lightning pierce through the most opaque part; then another, and more vivid. Of a sudden the wind lulled, and the *Circassian* righted from her careen. Again the wind howled, and again the vessel was pressed down to her bearings by its force: again another flash of lightning, which was followed by a distant peal of thunder.

"Had the worst of it, did you say, captain? I've a notion that the worst is yet to come," muttered Oswald, still watching the heavens.

"How does she carry her helm, Matthew?" inquired Oswald, walking aft.

"Spoke a-weather."

"I'll have the trysail off her, at any rate," continued the mate. "Aft, there my lads! and lower down the trysail. Keep the sheet fast till it's down, or the flogging will frighten the lady-passenger out of her wits. Well, if ever I own a craft, I'll have no women on board. Dollars shan't tempt me."

The lightning now played in rapid forks; and the loud thunder, which instantaneously followed each flash, proved its near approach. A deluge of slanting rain descended—the wind lulled—roared again—then lulled—shifted a point or two, and the drenched and heavy sails flapped.

"Up with the helm, Mat!" cried Oswald, as a near flash of lightning for a moment blinded, and the accompanying peal of thunder deafened, those on deck. Again the wind blew strong—it ceased, and it was a dead calm. The sails hung down from the yards, and the rain descended in perpendicular torrents, while the ship rocked to and fro in the trough of the sea, and the darkness became suddenly intense.

"Down there, one of you! and call the captain," said Oswald. "By the Lord! we shall have it. Main braces there, men, and square the yards. Be smart! That topsail should have been in," muttered the mate; "but I'm not captain. Square away the yards, my lads!" continued he; "quick, quick!—there's no child's play here!"

Owing to the difficulty of finding and passing the ropes to each other, from the intensity of the darkness, and the deluge of rain which blinded them, the men were not able to execute the order of the mate so soon as it was necessary; and before they could accomplish their task, or Captain Ingram could gain the deck, the wind suddenly burst upon the devoted vessel from the quarter directly opposite to that from which the gale had blown, taking her all a-back, and throwing her on her beam-ends. The man at the helm was hurled over the wheel; while the rest, who were with Oswald at the main-bits, with the coils of ropes, and every other article on deck not secured, were rolled into the scuppers, struggling to extricate themselves from the mass of confusion and the water in which they floundered. The sudden revulsion awoke all the men below, who imagined that the ship was foundering; and, from the only hatchway not secured, they poured up in their shirts with their other garments in their hands, to put them on—if fate permitted.

Oswald Bareth was the first who clambered up from to leeward. He gained the helm, which he put hard up. Captain Ingram and some of the seamen also gained the helm. It is the rendezvous of all good seamen in emergencies of this description: but the howling of the gale—the blinding of the rain and salt spray—the seas checked in their running by the shift of wind, and breaking over the ship in vast masses of water—the tremendous peals of thunder—and the intense darkness which accompanied these horrors, added to the inclined position of the vessel, which obliged them to climb from one part of the deck to another, for some time checked all profitable communication. Their only friend, in this conflict of the elements, was the lightning (unhappy, indeed, the situation in which lightning can be welcomed as a friend); but its vivid and forked flames, darting down upon every quarter of the horizon, enabled them to perceive their situation; and, awful as it was, when momentarily presented to their sight, it was not so awful as darkness and uncertainty. To those who have been accustomed to the difficulties and dangers of a sea-faring life, there are no lines which speak more forcibly to the imagination, or prove the beauty and power of the Greek poet, than those in the noble prayer of Ajax:

"Lord of earth and air,
O king! O father! hear my humble prayer.
Dispel this cloud, that light of heaven restore;
Give me to see—and Ajax asks no more,
If Greece must perish—we Thy will obey;
But *let us perish in the face of day*!"

Oswald gave the helm to two of the seamen, and with his knife cut adrift the axes, which were lashed round the mizen-mast in painted canvas covers. One he retained for himself,—the others he put into the hands of the boatswain and the second mate. To speak so as to be heard was almost impossible, from the tremendous roaring of the wind; but the lamp still burned in the binnacle, and by its feeble light Captain Ingram could distinguish the signs made by the mate, and could give his consent. It was necessary that the ship should be put before the wind; and the helm had no power over her. In a short time the lanyards of the mizen rigging were severed, and the mizen-mast went over the side, almost unperceived by the crew on the other parts of the deck, or even those near, had it not been from blows received by those who were too close to it, from the falling of the topsail-sheets and the rigging about the mast.

Oswald, with his companions, regained the binnacle, and for a little while watched the compass. The ship did not pay off, and appeared to settle down more into the water. Again Oswald made his

signs, and again the captain gave his assent. Forward sprang the undaunted mate, clinging to the bulwark and belaying-pins, and followed by his hardy companions, until they had all three gained the main channels. Here, their exposure to the force of the breaking waves, and the stoutness of the ropes yielding but slowly to the blows of the axes, which were used almost under water, rendered the service one of extreme difficulty and danger. The boatswain was washed over the bulwark and dashed to leeward, where the lee-rigging only saved him from a watery grave. Unsubdued, he again climbed up to windward, rejoined and assisted his companions. The last blow was given by Oswald—the lanyards flew through the dead-eyes—and the tall mast disappeared in the foaming seas. Oswald and his companions hastened from their dangerous position, and rejoined the captain, who, with many of the crew, still remained near the wheel. The ship now slowly paid off and righted. In a few minutes she was flying before the gale, rolling heavily, and occasionally striking upon the wrecks of the masts, which she towed with her by the lee-rigging.

Although the wind blew with as much violence as before, still it was not with the same noise, now that the ship was before the wind with her after-masts gone. The next service was to clear the ship of the wrecks of the masts; but, although all now assisted, but little could be effected until the day had dawned, and even then it was a service of danger, as the ship rolled gunwale under. Those who performed the duty were slung in ropes, that they might not be washed away; and hardly was it completed, when a heavy roll, assisted by a jerking heave from a sea which struck her on the chess-tree, sent the foremast over the starboard cathead. Thus was the *Circassian* dismasted in the gale.

Chapter Four.
The Leak

The wreck of the foremast was cleared from the ship; the gale continued, but the sun shone brightly and warmly. The *Circassian* was again brought to the wind. All danger was now considered to be over, and the seamen joked and laughed as they were busied in preparing jury-masts to enable them to reach their destined port.

"I wouldn't have cared so much about this spree," said the boatswain, "if it warn't for the mainmast; it was such a beauty. There's not another stick to be found equal to it in the whole length of the Mississippi."

"Bah! man," replied Oswald; "there's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it, and as good sticks growing as ever were felled; but I guess we'll pay pretty dear for our spars when we get to Liverpool,—but that concerns the owners."

The wind, which, at the time of its sudden change to the southward and eastward, had blown with the force of a hurricane, now settled into a regular strong gale, such as sailors are prepared to meet and laugh at. The sky was also bright and clear, and they had not the danger of a lee shore. It was a delightful change after a night of darkness, danger, and confusion and the men worked that they might get sufficient sail on the ship to steady her, and enable them to shape a course.

"I suppose now that we have the trysail on her forward, the captain will be for running for it," observed one who was busy turning in a dead-eye.

"Yes," replied the boatswain; "and with this wind on our quarter we shan't want much sail, I've a notion."

"Well, then, one advantage in losing your mast—you haven't much trouble about the rigging."

"Trouble enough, though, Bill, when we get in," replied another, gruffly; "new lower rigging to parcel and sarve, and every block to turn in afresh."

"Never mind, longer in port—I'll get spliced."

"Why, how often do you mean to get spliced, Bill? You've a wife in every State, to my sartin knowledge."

"I ain't got one at Liverpool, Jack."

"Well, you may take one there, Bill; for you've been sweet upon that nigger girl for these last three weeks."

"Any port in a storm, but she won't do for harbour duty. But the fact is, you're all wrong there, Jack, its the babbies I likes—I likes to see them both together, hanging at the niggers' breasts, I always think of two spider-monkeys nursing two kittens."

"I knows the women, but I never knows the children. It's just six of one and half-a-dozen of the other; ain't it, Bill?"

"Yes; like two bright bullets out of the same mould. I say, Bill, did any of your wives ever have twins?"

"No; nor I don't intend, until the owners give us double pay."

"By-the-bye," interrupted Oswald, who had been standing under the weather bulk-head, listening to the conversation, and watching the work in progress, "we may just as well see if she has made any water with all this straining and buffeting. By the Lord I never thought of that. Carpenter, lay down your adze and sound the well."

The carpenter, who, notwithstanding the uneasiness of the dismasted vessel, was performing his important share of the work, immediately complied with the order. He drew up the rope-yarn, to which an iron rule had been suspended, and lowered down into the pump-well, and perceived that the water was dripping from it. Imagining that it must have been wet from the quantity of water

shipped over all, the carpenter disengaged the rope-yarn from the rule, drew another from the junk lying on the deck, which the seamen were working up, and then carefully proceeded to plumb the well. He hauled it up, and, looking at it for some moments aghast, exclaimed, "*Seven feet* of water in the hold, by God."

If the crew of the *Circassian*, the whole of which were on deck, had been struck with an electric shock, the sudden change of their countenances could not have been greater than was produced by this appalling intelligence.

Heap upon sailors every disaster, every danger which can be accumulated from the waves, the wind, the elements, or the enemy, and they will bear up against them with a courage amounting to heroism. All that they demand is, that the one plank "between them and death" is sound, and they will trust to their own energies, and will be confident in their own skill: but *spring a leak* and they are half paralysed; and if it gain upon them they are subdued; for when they find that their exertions are futile, they are little better than children.

Oswald sprang to the pumps when he heard the carpenter's report. "Try again, Abel—it cannot be: cut away that line; hand us here a dry rope-yarn."

Once more the well was sounded by Oswald, and the result was the same. "We must rig the pumps, my lads," said the mate, endeavouring to conceal his own fears; "half this water must have found its way in when she was on her beam-ends."

This idea, so judiciously thrown out, was caught at by the seamen, who hastened to obey the order, while Oswald went down to acquaint the captain, who, worn out with watching and fatigue, had, now that danger was considered to be over, thrown himself into his cot to obtain a few hours' repose.

"Do you think, Bareth, that we have sprung a leak?" said the captain, earnestly, "She never could have taken in that quantity of water."

"Never, sir," replied the mate; "but she has been so strained, that she may have opened her top-sides. I trust it is no worse."

"What is your opinion, then?"

"I am afraid that the wrecks of the masts have injured her: you may recollect how often we struck against them before we could clear ourselves of them; once, particularly, the mainmast appeared to be right under her bottom, I recollect, and she struck very heavy on it."

"Well, it is God's will: let us get on deck as fast as we can."

When they arrived on deck, the carpenter walked up to the captain, and quietly said to him, "*Seven feet three, sir*." The pumps were then in full action; the men had divided, by the direction of the boatswain, and, stripped naked to the waist, relieved each other every two minutes. For half an hour they laboured incessantly.

This was the half-hour of suspense: the great point to be ascertained was, whether she leaked through the top-sides, and had taken in the water during the second gale; if so, there was every hope of keeping it under. Captain Ingram and the mate remained in silence near the capstan, the former with his watch in his hand, during the time that the sailors exerted themselves to the utmost. It was ten minutes past seven when the half hour had expired; the well was sounded and the line carefully measured—*Seven feet six inches*! So that the water had gained upon them, notwithstanding that they had plied the pumps to the utmost of their strength.

A mute look of despair was exchanged among the crew, but it was followed up by curses and execrations. Captain Ingram remained silent, with his lips compressed.

"It's all over with us!" exclaimed one of the men.

"Not yet, my lads; we have one more chance," said Oswald. "I've a notion that the ship's sides have been opened by the infernal straining of last night, and that she is now taking it in at the top-sides generally: if so, we have only to put her before the wind again, and have another good spell at the pumps. When no longer strained, as she is now with her broadside to the sea, she will close all up again."

"I shouldn't wonder if Mr Bareth is not right," replied the carpenter; "however, that's my notion, too."

"And mine," added Captain Ingram. "Come, my men! never say die while there's a shot in the locker. Let's try her again." And, to encourage the men, Captain Ingram threw off his coat and assisted at the first spell, while Oswald went to the helm and put the ship before the wind.

As the *Circassian* rolled before the gale, the lazy manner in which she righted proved how much water there was in the hold. The seamen exerted themselves for a whole hour without intermission, and the well was again sounded—*eight feet*!

The men did not assert that they would pump no longer; but they too plainly showed their intentions by each resuming in silence his shirt and jacket, which had been taken off at the commencement of his exertions.

"What's to be done, Oswald?" said Captain Ingram, as they walked aft. "You see the men will pump no longer: nor, indeed, would it be of any use. We are doomed."

"The *Circassian* is, sir, I am afraid," replied the mate: "pumping is of no avail; they could not keep her afloat till day-break. We must therefore, trust to our boats, which I believe to be all sound, and quit her before night."

"Crowded boats in such a sea as this!" replied Captain Ingram, shaking his head mournfully.

"Are bad enough, I grant; but better than the sea itself. All we can do now is to try and keep the men sober, and if we can do so it will be better than to fatigue them uselessly; they'll want all their strength before they put foot again upon dry land—if ever they are so fortunate. Shall I speak to them?"

"Do, Oswald," replied the captain; "for myself I care little, God knows; but my wife—my children!"

"My lads," said Oswald, going forward to the men, who had waited in moody silence the result of the conference—"as for pumping any longer it would be only wearing out your strength for no good. We must now look to our boats; and a good boat is better than a bad ship. Still this gale and cross-running sea are rather too much for boats at present; we had therefore better stick to the ship as long as we can. Let us set to with a will and get the boats ready, with provisions, water, and what may be needful, and then we must trust to God's mercy and our own endeavours."

"No boat can stand this sea," observed one of the men. "I'm of opinion, as it's to be a short life, it may as well be a merry one. What d'ye say, my lads?" continued he, appealing to the men.

Several of the crew were of the same opinion: but Oswald, stepping forward, seized one of the axes which lay at the main-bits, and going up to the seaman who had spoken, looked him steadfastly in the face:—

"Williams," said the mate, "a short life it may be to all of us, but not a merry one; the meaning of which I understand very well. Sorry I shall be to have your blood, or that of others, on my hands; but as sure as there's a heaven, I'll cleave to the shoulder the first man who attempts to break into the spirit-room. You know I never joke. Shame upon you! Do you call yourselves men, when, for the sake of a little liquor now, you would lose your only chance of getting drunk every day as soon as we get on shore again? There's a time for all things; and I've a notion this is a time to be sober."

As most of the crew sided with Oswald, the weaker party were obliged to submit, and the preparations were commenced. The two boats on the booms were found to be in good condition. One party was employed cutting away the bulwarks, that the boats might be launched over the side, as there were no means of hoisting them out. The well was again sounded. Nine feet of water in the hold, and the ship evidently settling fast. Two hours had now passed, and the gale was not so violent; the sea, also, which at the change of wind had been cross, appeared to have recovered its regular run. All was ready; the sailors, once at work again, had, in some measure, recovered their spirits, and were buoyed up with fresh hopes at the slight change in their favour from the decrease of the wind. The two boats were quite large enough to contain the whole of the crew and passengers; but, as the

sailors said among themselves (proving the kindness of their hearts), “What was to become of those two poor babbies, in an open boat for days and nights, perhaps?” Captain Ingram had gone down to Mrs Templemore, to impart to her their melancholy prospects; and the mother’s heart, as well as the mother’s voice, echoed the words of the seamen, “What will become of my poor babes?”

It was not till nearly six o’clock in the evening that all was ready: the ship was slowly brought to the wind again, and the boats launched over the side. By this time the gale was much abated; but the vessel was full of water, and was expected soon to go down.

There is no time in which coolness and determination are more required than in a situation like the one which we have attempted to describe. It is impossible to know the precise moment at which a water-logged vessel, in a heavy sea, may go down: and its occupants are in a state of mental fever, with the idea of their remaining in her so late that she will suddenly submerge, and leave them to struggle in the waves. This feeling actuated many of the crew of the *Circassian*, and they had already retreated to the boats. All was arranged; Oswald had charge of one boat, and it was agreed that the larger should receive Mrs Templemore and her children, under the protection of Captain Ingram. The number appointed to Oswald’s boat being completed, he shoved off, to make room for the other, and laid-to to leeward, waiting to keep company. Mrs Templemore came up with Captain Ingram, and was assisted by him into the boat. The nurse, with one child, was at last placed by her side; Coco was leading Judy, the other nurse, with the remaining infant in her arms, and Captain Ingram, who had been obliged to go into the boat with the first child, was about to return to assist Judy with the other, when the ship gave a heavy pitch, and her forecastle was buried in the wave: at the same time the gunwale of the boat was stove by coming in contact with the side of the vessel. “She’s down, by God!” exclaimed the alarmed seamen in the boat; shoving off to escape from the vortex.

Captain Ingram, who was standing on the boat’s thwarts to assist Judy, was thrown back into the bottom of the boat; and, before he could extricate himself, the boat was separated from the ship, and had drifted to leeward.

“My child!” screamed the mother: “my child!”

“Pull to again, my lads!” cried Captain Ingram, seizing the tiller.

The men, who had been alarmed at the idea that the ship was going down, now that they saw that she was still afloat, got out the oars and attempted to regain her, but in vain—they could not make head against the sea and wind. Further and further did they drift to leeward, notwithstanding their exertions; while the frantic mother extended her arms, imploring and entreating. Captain Ingram, who had stimulated the sailors to the utmost, perceived that further attempts were useless.

“My child! my child!” screamed Mrs Templemore, standing up, and holding out her arms towards the vessel. At a sign from the captain, the head of the boat was veered round. The bereaved mother knew that all hope was gone, and she fell down in a state of insensibility.

Chapter Five.
The Old Maid

One morning, shortly after the disasters which we have described, Mr Witherington descended to his breakfast-room somewhat earlier than usual, and found his green morocco easy-chair already tenanted by no less a personage than William the footman, who, with his feet on the fender, was so attentively reading the newspaper that he did not hear his master's entrance. "By my ancestor, who fought on his stumps! but I hope you are quite comfortable, Mr William; nay, I beg I may not disturb you, sir."

William, although as impudent as most of his fraternity, was a little taken aback. "I beg your pardon, sir, but Mr Jonathan had not time to look over the paper."

"Nor is it required that he should, that I know of, sir."

"Mr Jonathan says, sir, that it is always right to look over the *deaths*, that news of that kind may not shock you."

"Very considerate, indeed."

"And there is a story there, sir, about a shipwreck."

"A shipwreck! where, William? God bless me! where is it?"

"I am afraid it is the same ship you are so anxious about, sir,—the—I forget the name, sir."

Mr Witherington took the newspaper, and his eye soon caught the paragraph in which the rescue of the two negroes and child from the wreck of the *Circassian* was fully detailed.

"It is indeed!" exclaimed Mr Witherington. "My poor Cecilia in an open boat! one of the boats was seen to go down,—perhaps she's dead—merciful God! one boy saved. Mercy on me! where's Jonathan?"

"Here, sir," replied Jonathan, very solemnly, who had just brought in the eggs, and now stood erect as a mute behind his master's chair, for it was a case of danger, if not of death.

"I must go to Portsmouth immediately after breakfast—shan't eat though—appetite all gone."

"People seldom do, sir, on these melancholy occasions," replied Jonathan. "Will you take your own carriage, sir, or a mourning coach?"

"A mourning coach at fourteen miles an hour, with two pair of horses! Jonathan, you're crazy."

"Will you please to have black silk hatbands and gloves for the coachman and servants who attend you, sir?"

"Confound your shop! no; this is a resurrection, not a death; it appears that the negro thinks only one of the boats went down."

"*Mors omnia vincit*," quoth Jonathan, casting up his eyes.

"Never you mind that; mind your own business. That's the postman's knock—see if there are any letters."

There were several; and amongst the others there was one from Captain Maxwell, of the *Eurydice*, detailing the circumstances already known, and informing Mr Witherington that he had despatched the two negroes and the child to his address by that day's coach, and that one of the officers, who was going to town by the same conveyance, would see them safe to his house.

Captain Maxwell was an old acquaintance of Mr Witherington—had dined at his house in company with the Templemores, and therefore had extracted quite enough information from the negroes to know where to direct them.

"By the blood of my ancestors! they'll be here to night," cried Mr Witherington; "and I have saved my journey. What is to be done? better tell Mary to get rooms ready: d'ye hear, William? beds for one little boy and two niggers."

"Yes, sir," replied William; "but where are the black people to be put?"

"Put! I don't care; one may sleep with cook, the other with Mary."

"Very well, sir, I'll tell them," replied William, hastening away, delighted at the row which he anticipated in the kitchen.

"If you please, sir," observed Jonathan, "one of the negroes is, I believe, a man."

"Well, what then?"

"Only, sir, the maids may object to sleep with him."

"By all the plagues of the Witheringtons! this is true; well, you may take him, Jonathan—you like that colour."

"Not in the dark, sir," replied Jonathan with a bow.

"Well, then, let them sleep together: so that affair is settled."

"Are they man and wife, sir?" said the butler.

"The devil take them both! how should I know? Let me have my breakfast, and we'll talk over the matter by-and-by."

Mr Witherington applied to his eggs, and muffin, eating his breakfast as fast as he could, without knowing why; but the reason was that he was puzzled and perplexed with the anticipated arrival, and longed to think quietly over the dilemma, for it was a dilemma to an old bachelor. As soon as he had swallowed his second cup of tea he put himself into his easy-chair, in an easy attitude, and was very soon soliloquising as follows:—

"By the blood of the Witheringtons! what am I, an old bachelor, to do with a baby, and a wet-nurse as black as the ace of spades, and another black fellow in the bargain. Send him back again? yes, that's best: but the child—woke every morning at five o'clock with its squalling—obliged to kiss it three times a-day—pleasant!—and then that nigger of a nurse—thick lips—kissing child all day, and then holding it out to me—ignorant as a cow—if child has the stomach-ache she'll cram a pepper-pod down its throat—West India fashion—children never without the stomach-ache!—my poor, poor cousin!—what has become of her and the other child, too?—wish they may pick her up, poor dear! and then she will come and take care of her own children—don't know what to do—great mind to send for sister Moggy—but she's so fussy—won't be in a hurry. Think again."

Here Mr Witherington was interrupted by two taps at the door.

"Come in," said he; and the cook, with her face as red as if she had been dressing a dinner for eighteen, made her appearance without the usual clean apron.

"If you please, sir," said she, curtseying, "I will thank you to suit yourself with another cook."

"Oh, very well," replied Mr Witherington, angry at the interruption.

"And if you please, sir, I should like to go this very day—indeed, sir, I shall not stay."

"Go to the devil! if you please," replied Mr Witherington, angrily; "but first go out and shut the door after you."

The cook retired, and Mr Witherington was again alone.

"Confound the old woman—what a huff she is in! won't cook for black people, I suppose—yes, that's it."

Here Mr Witherington was again interrupted by a second double tap at the door.

"Oh! thought better of it, I suppose. Come in."

It was not the cook, but Mary, the housemaid, that entered.

"If you please, sir," said she, whimpering, "I should wish to leave my situation."

"A conspiracy, by heavens! Well, you may go."

"To-night, sir, if you please," answered the woman.

"This moment, for all I care!" exclaimed Mr Witherington in his wrath.

The housemaid retired; and Mr Witherington took some time to compose himself.

"Servants all going to the devil in this country," said he at last; "proud fools—won't clean rooms after black people, I suppose—yes, that's it, confound them all, black and white! here's my whole

establishment upset by the arrival of a baby. Well, it is very uncomfortable—what shall I do?—send for sister Moggy?—no, I'll send for Jonathan."

Mr Witherington rang the bell, and Jonathan made his appearance.

"What is all this, Jonathan?" said he; "cook angry—Mary crying—both going away—what's it all about?"

"Why, sir, they were told by William that it was your positive order that the two black people were to sleep with them; and I believe he told Mary that the man was to sleep with her."

"Confound that fellow! he's always at mischief; you know, Jonathan, I never meant that."

"I thought not, sir, as it is quite contrary to custom," replied Jonathan.

"Well, then, tell them so, and let's hear no more about it."

Mr Witherington then entered into a consultation with his butler, and acceded to the arrangements proposed by him. The parties arrived in due time, and were properly accommodated. Master Edward was not troubled with the stomach-ache, neither did he wake Mr Witherington at five o'clock in the morning; and, after all, it was not very uncomfortable. But, although things were not quite so uncomfortable as Mr Witherington had anticipated, still they were not comfortable; and Mr Witherington was so annoyed by continual skirmishes with his servants, complaints from Judy, in bad English, of the cook, who, it must be owned, had taken a prejudice against her and Coco, occasional illness of the child, et cetera, that he found his house no longer quiet and peaceable. Three months had now nearly passed, and no tidings of the boats had been received; and Captain Maxwell, who came up to see Mr Witherington, gave it as his decided opinion that they must have foundered in the gale. As, therefore, there appeared to be no chance of Mrs Templemore coming to take care of her child, Mr Witherington at last resolved to write to Bath, where his sister resided, and acquaint her with the whole story, requesting her to come and superintend his domestic concerns. A few days afterwards he received the following reply:—

"*Bath, August.*

"My dear Brother Antony,

"Your letter arrived safe to hand on Wednesday last, and I must say that I was not a little surprised at its contents; indeed, I thought so much about it that I revoked at Lady Betty Blabkin's whist-party, and lost four shillings and sixpence. You say that you have a child at your house belonging to your cousin, who married in so indecorous a manner. I hope what you say is true; but, at the same time, I know what bachelors are guilty of; although, as Lady Betty says, it is better never to talk or even to hint about these improper things. I cannot imagine why men should consider themselves, in an unmarried state, as absolved from that purity which maidens are so careful to preserve; and so says Lady Betty, with whom I had a little conversation on the subject. As, however, the thing is done, she agrees with me that it is better to hush it up as well as we can.

"I presume that you do not intend to make the child your heir, which I should consider as highly improper; and, indeed, Lady Betty tells me that the legacy-duty is ten per cent, and that it cannot be avoided. However, I make it a rule never to talk about these sort of things. As for your request that I will come up and superintend your establishment, I have advised with Lady Betty on the subject, and she agrees with me that, for the honour of the family, it is better that I should come, as it will save appearances. You are in a peck of troubles, as most men are who are free-livers and are led astray by artful and alluring females. However, as Lady Betty says, 'the least said, the soonest mended.'

"I will, therefore, make the necessary arrangements for letting my house, and hope to join you in about ten days; sooner, I cannot, as I find that my engagements extend to that period. Many questions have already been put to me on this unpleasant

subject; but I always give but one answer, which is, that bachelors will be bachelors; and that, at all events, it is not so bad as if you were a married man: for I make it a rule never to talk about, or even to hint about, these sort of things, for, as Lady Betty says, 'Men will get into scrapes, and the sooner things are hushed up the better.' So no more at present from your affectionate sister,

"Margaret Witherington.

"PS. Lady Betty and I both agree that you are very right in hiring two black people to bring the child into your house, as it makes the thing look *foreign* to the neighbours, and we can keep our own secrets.

"M.W."

"Now, by all the sins of the Witheringtons, if this is not enough to drive a man out of his senses! —Confound the suspicious old maid! I'll not let her come into this house. Confound Lady Betty, and all scandal-loving old tabbies like her! Bless me!" continued Mr Witherington, throwing the letter on the table with a deep sigh, "this is anything but comfortable."

But if Mr Witherington found it anything but comfortable at the commencement, he found it unbearable in the sequel.

His sister Moggy arrived, and installed herself in the house with all the pomp and protecting air of one who was the saviour of her brother's reputation and character. When the child was first brought down to her, instead of perceiving at once its likeness to Mr Templemore, which was very strong, she looked at it and at her brother's face with her only eye, and shaking her finger, exclaimed—

"Oh, Antony! Antony! and did you expect to deceive me?—the nose—the mouth exact—Antony, for shame! fie, for shame!"

But we must hurry over the misery that Mr Witherington's kindness and benevolence brought upon him. Not a day passed—scarcely an hour, without his ears being galled with his sister's insinuations. Judy and Coco were sent back to America; the servants, who had remained so long in his service, gave warning one by one, and afterwards, were changed as often almost as there was a change in the moon. She ruled the house and her brother despotically; and all poor Mr Witherington's comfort was gone until the time arrived when Master Edward was to be sent to school. Mr Witherington then plucked up courage, and after a few stormy months drove his sister back to Bath, and once more found himself comfortable.

Edward came home during the holidays, and was a great favourite; but the idea had become current that he was the son of the old gentleman, and the remarks made were so unpleasant and grating to him, that he was not sorry, much as he was attached to the boy, when he declared his intention to choose the profession of a sailor.

Captain Maxwell introduced him into the service; and afterwards, when, in consequence of ill health and exhaustion, he was himself obliged to leave it for a time, he procured for his *protégé* other ships. We must, therefore, allow some years to pass away, during which time Edward Templemore pursues his career, Mr Witherington grows older and more particular, and his sister Moggy amuses herself with Lady Betty's remarks and her darling game of whist.

During all this period no tidings of the boats, or of Mrs Templemore and her infant, had been heard; it was therefore naturally conjectured that they had all perished, and they were remembered but as things that had been.

Chapter Six.
The Midshipman

The weather side of the quarter-deck of H.M. frigate *Unicorn* was occupied by two very great personages: Captain Plumbton, commanding the ship, who was very great in width if not in height, taking much more than his allowance of the deck, if it were not that he was the proprietor thereof, and entitled to the lion's share. Captain P was not more than four feet ten inches in height; but then he was equal to that in girth: there was quite enough of him, if he had only been *rolled out*. He walked with his coat flying open, his thumbs stuck into the arm holes of his waistcoat, so as to throw his shoulders back and increase his horizontal dimensions. He also held his head well aft, which threw his chest and stomach well forward. He was the prototype of pomposity and good nature, and he strutted like an actor in a procession.

The other personage was the first lieutenant, whom Nature had pleased to fashion in another mould. He was as tall as the captain was short—as thin as his superior was corpulent. His long, lanky legs were nearly up to the captain's shoulders; and he bowed down over the head of his superior, as if he were the crane to hoist up, and the captain the bale of goods to be hoisted. He carried his hands behind his back, with two fingers twisted together; and his chief difficulty appeared to be to reduce his own stride to the parrot march of the captain. His features were sharp and lean as was his body, and wore every appearance of a cross-grained temper.

He had been making divers complaints of divers persons, and the captain had hitherto appeared imperturbable. Captain Plumbton was an even-tempered man, who was satisfied with a good dinner. Lieutenant Markitall was an odd-tempered man, who would quarrel with his bread and butter.

"Quite impossible, sir," continued the first-lieutenant, "to carry on the duty without support."

This oracular observation, which, from the relative forms of the two parties, descended as it were from above, was replied to by the captain with a "Very true."

"Then, sir, I presume you will not object to my putting that man in the report for punishment?"

"I'll think about it, Mr Markitall." This, with Captain Plumbton, was as much as to say, No.

"The young gentlemen, sir, I am sorry to say, are very troublesome."

"Boys always are," replied the captain.

"Yes sir: but the duty must be carried on, and I cannot do without them."

"Very true—midshipmen are very useful."

"But I am sorry to say, sir, that they are not. Now sir, there's Mr Templemore; I can do nothing with him—he does nothing but laugh."

"Laugh!—Mr Markitall, does he laugh at you?"

"Not exactly, sir; but he laughs at everything. If I send him to the mast-head, he goes up laughing; if I call him down, he comes down laughing; if I find fault with him, he laughs the next minute: in fact, sir, he does nothing but laugh. I should particularly wish, sir, that you would speak to him, and see if any interference on your part—"

"Would make him cry—eh? better to laugh than cry in this world. Does he never cry, Mr Markitall?"

"Yes, sir, and very unseasonably. The other day, you may recollect, when you punished Wilson the marine, whom I appointed to take care of his chest and hammock, he was crying the whole time; almost tantamount—at least an indirect species of mutiny on his part, as it implied—"

"That the boy was sorry that his servant was punished; I never flog a man but I'm sorry myself, Mr Markitall."

"Well, I do not press the question of his crying—that I might look over; but his laughing, sir, I must beg that you will take notice of that. Here he is, sir, coming up the hatchway. Mr Templemore, the captain wishes to speak to you."

Now the captain did not wish to speak to him, but, forced upon him as it was by the first-lieutenant, he could do no less. So Mr Templemore touched his hat, and stood before the captain, we regret to say, with such a good-humoured, sly, confiding smirk on his countenance, as at once established the proof of the accusation, and the enormity of the offence.

"So, sir," said Captain Plumbton, stopping in his perambulation, and squaring his shoulders still more, "I find that you laugh at the first-lieutenant."

"I, sir?" replied the boy, the smirk expanding into a broad grin.

"Yes; you, sir," said the first-lieutenant, now drawing up to his full height; "why you're laughing now, sir."

"I can't help it, sir—it's not my fault; and I'm sure it's not yours, sir," added the boy, demurely.

"Are you aware, Edward—Mr Templemore, I mean—of the impropriety of disrespect to your superior officer?"

"I never laughed at Mr Markitall but once, sir, that I can recollect, and that was when he tumbled over the messenger."

"And why did you laugh at him then, sir?"

"I always do laugh when any one tumbles down," replied the lad; "I can't help it, sir."

"Then, sir, I suppose you would laugh if you saw me rolling in the lee-scuppers?" said the captain.

"Oh!" replied the boy, no longer able to contain himself, "I'm sure I should burst myself with laughing—I think I see you now, sir."

"Do you, indeed! I'm very glad that you do not; though I'm afraid, young gentleman, you stand convicted by your own confession."

"Yes, sir, for laughing, if that is any crime; but it's not in the Articles of War."

"No, sir; but disrespect is. You laugh when you go to the mast-head."

"But I obey the order, sir, immediately—Do I not, Mr Markitall?"

"Yes, sir, you obey the order; but, at the same time, your laughing proves that you do not mind the punishment."

"No more I do, sir. I spend half my time at the mast-head, and I'm used to it now."

"But, Mr Templemore, ought you not to feel the disgrace of the punishment?" inquired the captain, severely.

"Yes, sir, if I felt I deserved it I should. I should not laugh, sir, if *you* sent me to the mast-head," replied the boy, assuming a serious countenance.

"You see, Mr Markitall, that he can be grave," observed the captain.

"I've tried all I can to make him so, sir," replied the first-lieutenant; "but I wish to ask Mr Templemore what he means to imply by saying, 'when he deserves it.' Does he mean to say that I have ever punished him unjustly?"

"Yes, sir," replied the boy, boldly; "five times out of six, I am mast-headed for nothing—and that's the reason why I do not mind it."

"For nothing, sir! Do you call laughing nothing?"

"I pay every attention that I can to my duty, sir; I always obey your orders; I try all I can to make you pleased with me—but you are always punishing me."

"Yes, sir, for laughing, and, what is worse, making the ship's company laugh."

"They 'haul and hold' just the same, sir—I think they work all the better for being merry."

"And pray, sir, what business have you to think?" replied the first-lieutenant, now very angry. "Captain Plumbton, as this young gentleman thinks proper to interfere with me and the discipline of the ship, I beg you will see what effect your punishing may have upon him."

“Mr Templemore,” said the captain, “you are, in the first place, too free in your speech, and, in the next place, too fond of laughing. There is, Mr Templemore, a time for all things—a time to be merry, and a time to be serious. The quarter-deck is not a fit place for mirth.”

“I’m sure the gangway is not,” shrewdly interrupted the boy.

“No—you are right, nor the gangway; but you may laugh on the forecastle, and when below with your messmates.”

“No, sir, we may not; Mr Markitall always sends out if he hears us laughing.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.