



"SUCCESS TO OLD ENGLAND AND HER NAVY" (p. 158).

## RUNNING THE GAUNTLET OF THE DARDANELLES:

AN EPISODE OF THE RUSSO-TURKISH WAR OF 1770.

"CAPTAIN, what you propose is impossible."

"Admiral, it's possible enough to any man who has pluck."

With these bitter words on their lips, two men stand facing each other on the quarter-deck of the Russian flag-ship

*Vladimir*, as she lies at anchor off the coast of Asia Minor. The one, who wears the uniform

of a Russian admiral, is a man of colossal stature and proportions, but with a broad, heavy, unmeaning face, which shows that his intellect is not on a par with his bodily strength. The other is a short, square, muscular figure, with a firm mouth and keen grey eye—formerly Lieutenant Elphinstone, of the British navy, but now in command of the frigate *Yekaterina* in the Russian Black Sea fleet; and the superior to whom he is speaking so unceremoniously is no other than the imperial admiral himself, Count Gregory Gregorievitch Orloff, the first and basest of the countless favourites of Catherine II.; a man whose worthless name has been rescued from oblivion by one great crime—the murder of Peter III.

It is the morning of July 8th, 1770. The bright blue waters of Tchesmé Bay are cumbered with half-burned spars and masses of shattered timber; the warm dreamy summer sky overhead is blotted with drifting smoke; and along the surrounding hills, bare-legged men in white turbans are hurrying to and fro with looks of dismay, and muttering to each other that the Padishah's war-ships have been destroyed by the "Giaours" of the North. Last night, with a single fire-ship, this short, keen-eyed, blunt-spoken captain burned every vessel in the Turkish squadron; and he is now vainly urging his phlegmatic admiral to follow up the victory by a dash through the Dardanelles upon defenceless Constantinople.

"I tell you, Englishman," growls Orloff, "that I

will *not* send the Empress's fleet to certain destruction in attempting an impregnable passage, just to please you!"

"And I tell your excellency," retorts the other, "that what you fear to attempt with the whole fleet, I will do with one vessel. I'll run my ship through this 'impregnable passage' of yours, and drink the health of the British navy in front of the Sultan's own palace. Good morning!"

Arrived on board of his own vessel, Captain Elphinstone musters his crew—a motley mixture of sallow broad-faced Russians, squat yellow-haired Finns, big-boned beetle-browed Esthonians, and slim wiry Greeks, with two or three brawny, red-whiskered English sailors looking down upon their comrades with a grand compassionate disdain, as creatures whom an inscrutable Providence has doomed to be foreigners, thereby cutting them off, once and for ever, from all chance of becoming good seamen. The captain eyes them all, as they come aft, with the look of one accustomed to judge men at sight, and then speaks, briefly, but very much to the purpose.

"My lads, I'm going to run through the Dardanelles, and fly my flag in the face of those lubbers at Constantinople; if any man's afraid to come with me, let him stand out and say so!"

But not a man moves. The crew are all picked men, who have followed their present leader through many a hot fight, and many a heavy storm; and they have long since learned to know him as the real soul of the fleet nominally commanded by their incompetent admiral. At the very mention of Constantinople, there is a sudden light in every eye which the veteran is at no loss to interpret.

"All right," says he, with a grim smile; "if you're game to poke your heads into the fire, I'm not the man to balk you. Mr. Dugdale, serve out a double ration

all round, and then set every stitch of canvas on her, and away we go!"

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It is a beautiful summer morning, with a fresh breeze from the south-west, when the devoted ship comes up to the mouth of the terrible passage through which no hostile vessel has ever ventured before. The sun is just rising over the Anatolian Mountains, and in its dazzling splendour the wood-crowned islets, and rocky shores, and green sloping hill-sides stand forth in all their beauty. All around, the blue sparkling sea; all above, the rich summer sky. To the west, the little purple island of Tenedos stands watching their advance, as it watched the coming of Agamemnon's fleet against doomed Troy, 3,000 years ago. Far to the north-east, hanging like a snowy cloud upon the sky, towers the great white dome of Mount Olympus. On the right, beyond the wide belt of level plain on which Greek and Trojan battled in the old fighting-days, the distant mountains loom out, blue and shadowy, along the eastern horizon; while, right in front, the deep narrow channel of the famous strait curves outward to the sea, between the bold ridges that flank it on either side.

"We're lucky with the wind, Mr. Dugdale," says the captain to his English second in command, as cheerily as if he were going on a picnic, instead of into the jaws of a naval Bala-klava. "This breeze is just what we want, for there'll be a pretty strong current against us inside."

"Mr. Turk seems to have taken the alarm already," answers the lieutenant, with a chuckle, pointing to a group of hurrying figures just vanishing over the hill-top, on the right. "Do you think, sir, they'll be able to hurt us much?"

"Can't say," replies the veteran coolly; "but I should think not, myself. You see, when they made these batteries, they didn't arm them with regular guns, but tunnelled holes in the rocks themselves, and crammed *them* with powder and ball,\* like a pack of greenhorns as they are; so, if we don't come right into the line of fire, they can't alter the range to hit us—that's one good job. It's only the *movable* guns that we need be afraid of.—Starboard!"

"Starboard it is!" responds the deep voice of the

\* Some of these curious natural batteries may still be seen furrowing the rocks between Dardanieh and Sestos; but they have long ceased to have any value except as antiquarian curiosities.

steersman; and the gallant ship sweeps rejoicingly into the fatal channel, whence, if the Turkish batteries be such as report speaks them, neither ship nor crew will ever return.

Had the daring band any leisure to take note of the surrounding landscape, they would be well repaid, for every mile of the beautiful scenery which they traverse in this headlong race with death is rich in world-renowned memories. On yonder round grassy knoll, which projects from the steep ridgy outline of the European shore, King Xerxes sat enthroned, ages ago, to watch his motley millions pouring over the Hellespont bridge into Europe. This wide green plain, dotted with tiny white hamlets, which stretches away to the eastward in the glory of the morning sunshine, could tell many a tale of Miltiades, and Cymon, and Lysander. Upon this strip of flat dusty beach, where the tall flat-roofed houses and huge yellow *lazaretto* of Dardanieh now stand massed together, Darius and his few remaining warriors cast themselves down to rest, and to breathe freely for the first time since the commencement of the fatal retreat in which, amid hunger, cold, sickness, crushing fatigue, and the relentless pursuit of a savage enemy, ended their vaunted invasion of Scythia. And yonder, where the green sunny hills fall away suddenly into a deep curving hollow, two small white forts, almost level with the

water's edge, stand facing each other across the swift smooth current—the castles of Sestos and Abydos, where Leander looked his last from amid the roaring waters upon the familiar light far above, and where a yet sadder and darker story was one day to become famous for ever through the genius of Byron.

But both captain and crew have other things to think of, for the storm of war which they have defied is now gathering around them in earnest. All along the hills on either side, red-capped soldiers are hurrying to and fro, bayonets glittering, sabres flashing, artillery-wheels throwing up clouds of dust, while

cries of mingled rage and terror come faintly to their ears as they sweep by. But the crash of cannon-shot which they are momentarily expecting never comes. Turkish neglect has done its accustomed work. Honeycombed guns, rickety carriages, crumbling earth-works, sanded gunpowder, balls that will not fit the bore of their pieces—what can be done with means like these? And if the Turkish squadron be destroyed



"A TORRENT OF WATER BURSTS OVER THE STERN" (p. 158).

(as it must be, or the Russian flag would not be flying *here*), what resistance can *we* make to the enemy's whole fleet?

So argue the faint-hearted among the defenders; but there are men there of another cast—men for whom it suffices that the enemy is before them, and that they are Turkish soldiers. As the adventurous ship sweeps round the sharp curve that hides Abydos from sight, Lieutenant Dugdale, looking up in his leader's face, sees it harden suddenly like congealed metal, as the ready spyglass turns upon a huge grey mass of bare rock that looms out some distance ahead of them.

"See those red caps bobbing in and out of the rocks like rabbits? They're going to give us a shot in passing, sure enough. That's one of the tunnel-batteries I spoke of, and if one of those 300-pound shot hits us, to the bottom we go, every man! Set the stunsails, boys—we'll run past, and chance it."

Onward sweeps the noble vessel before the freshening breeze; but keen eyes are watching her from behind those frowning crags, and, just as she comes opposite the fatal spot, the match is applied to the powder. For one moment the life of every man on board hangs by a hair; but the discharge "baulks" an instant, and that instant is sufficient to save them. The next moment comes a crash as if the earth were rent asunder—a sheet of flame spouts from the black yawning mouth—then there is a deafening splash, and a torrent of water bursts over the stern, drenching all who stand near it. The ball (a huge mass of stone weighing over 300 pounds) has fallen barely ten feet behind them!

"Near shave, that!" says the captain coolly; "but a miss is as good as a mile, anyhow!"

Away, away, past green sunny slopes checkered with massive buttresses of grey rock; past steep crumbling ridges, on which tiny black goats are hanging like flies; past cool sheltered inlets sleeping in floating shadow; till at length the straggling white streets and tumble-down fortifications of Gallipoli start up suddenly along a grassy headland in front of them, in the glory of the evening sunlight.

A wild clamour of mingled outcries along the shore—a passing vision of dark fierce faces and hurrying figures, and weapons brandished in vain menace—an ineffectual crackle of musketry from the nearest angle of the wall—and then the last peril is past, and before them lies the open sea. As they round the point, the English cabin-boy—a lad after Captain Marryat's own heart—springs up on the bulwarks, and, putting his thumb to his nose in a vulgar but expressive gesture, shouts to the baffled assailants—

"Good-bye, Johnny! Any message for Constantinople?"

And the daring band, echoing the taunt with a shout of laughter, sweep by towards the point where, opening out broad and bright between the receding shores, lies the smooth surface of the Sea of Marmora.

Night overtakes them as they enter it; but Captain Elphinstone is not here for the first time, and he holds

his course unswervingly through the darkness, with but one thought in his mind—to reach Constantinople. All night the brave south-westerly wind fills their sails, as if cheering them on; and with the first gleam of sunrise they pass the green curving shores of "Prince's Islands," and see before them, outspread for many a mile along the blue shining sea, the serried roofs, and tall white minarets, and stately mosques, and countless palaces of imperial Constantinople.

At this early hour but few persons are yet abroad; but the sight of the terrible Russian flag suffices to rouse the whole capital. Not a gun mounted on the seaward batteries—not a regiment in fighting order—the enemy's first ship already in sight, and the rest doubtless close behind—well may Constantinople tremble! Within less than half an hour, every street leading down to the harbour is one roaring swarm of struggling figures and convulsed faces, livid with fear or black with rage; and a mingled uproar of cries of dismay, savage curses on the "Moscov," wild prayers to Allah and the Prophet, and bloodthirsty yells for the heads of the Grand Vizier and his officers rend the very air.

And then, in the midst of all the maddening din, are heard the quick, stern tones of Captain Elphinstone's voice:

"Nikolai! bring me up a bottle of rum, and some sugar and hot water—sharp!"

The Greek steward, himself an old privateersman, obeys with a grin of unfeigned delight on his scarred face; and the crew, clustered on the fore-castle, bend forward to see their leader drink his toast in the teeth of all Constantinople. The grog is mixed with an unflinching hand; the captain rises from his seat, and, turning towards the raging thousands that line the shore, shouts, at the full pitch of his mighty voice—

"Success to Old England and her navy, and may every Turkish lubber go straight to the bottom!"

He drains the tumbler as he speaks, and, flinging it scornfully towards the infuriated Turks, calls to his lieutenant—

"Now, Mr. Dugdale, put her head about, and off we go again."

"What! without giving 'em even one broadside, sir?" says the surprised officer.

"What's the good of killing poor beggars who can't resist?" answers the stout-hearted sailor; "besides, d'ye think I'm going to do the Russians' work for 'em, if they haven't the pluck to do it themselves? The minute I see that old porpoise of an admiral again, I'll just chuck my commission in his face; I'm not going to serve any longer with a pack of lubbers who daren't take a good chance when it's offered them!"

Captain Elphinstone kept his word, and the Russian navy saw him no more. Little did the simple-hearted hero think that he had done a deed whose fame should endure for ever; and as little could he foresee that it would be surpassed, a century later, by another seaman on the opposite side of the world, whose name was ADMIRAL FARRAGUT.

D. K.