

A PRIVATEERSMAN'S LOG.



At the beginning of the present century privateering may be said to have reached its zenith. Mr. Hannay, the head of a great firm of ship-owners, stung to madness at losing so many of his vessels through the French and the Americans, fitted out a perfect little schooner, called the *Tigress*, as a privateer, and appointed to the command a certain Captain Shelvocke.

Splendidly equipped, manned by a numerous and brave crew, and a magnificent sailer to boot, the *Tigress* met with success as soon as she was fairly at sea. Without going farther than the coast of France, and within the compass of a few days, she had done more fighting and achieved more wonderful successes than many a line-of-battle ship in as many years. The French ship, the *Droit Maritime*, was discovered by the *Tigress* in possession of a crew of dead-drunk Englishmen. They were really prisoners of the French, but had succeeded in surprising and overmastering their captors, whom they shut up in the hold. The manner in which they celebrated their freedom was by getting outrageously drunk, every mother's son of them. The Frenchmen were liberated by the crew of the *Tigress* from the hole in which they had been confined, and where several of them had died, and were put in the main hatch under guard. The drunken sailors, when pumped on and made sober, were unceremoniously bundled into the hole they had considered fit enough for the Frenchmen. The result was not foreseen by the first mate, who thus describes the fearful fray that followed:—

“What is the matter, men?” I shouted.

“The Frenchmen have broken into the

forecastle, and are killing the Englishmen!” was the answer.

The uproar that had reached me with a subdued note in the after-part of the vessel was fearfully distinct here. But the full horror of it did not strike me until my men had opened a passage and enabled me to get close to the hatch, down which I looked. Parrell held a lantern, but the gleams penetrated the gloom but a short distance, and merely revealed now and again the glimmering figures of men tearing at one another like wild beasts, while the whole interior of the lugger rang with shrieks and drunken yells, and the crunching of bodies flung against the massive bulkheads and sides of the vessel.

“Madmen!” I shouted, “back to your quarters, or, by heaven, I will sweep the hold with grape! Men! train a carronade forward—depress the muzzle into the forecandle!”

The slide roared along the deck as it was dragged up to the hatch with a force that nearly ripped up the combing. I had hoped the sound would still the monstrous combat; but, like oil upon fire, it only appeared to make it rage more furiously.

“Parrell! lower that lantern! Small-armsmen, take aim and shoot every Frenchman you can distinguish!”

The boatswain's mate bent a rope's-end on to the lantern, and lowered it. Scarcely had it sunk three feet below the deck when a blow shivered it into fragments, and the light was extinguished. What was to be done? It would have been sheer and brutal murder to fire among the seething mass who fought and yelled amid the blackness; but the consideration that the men whom the Frenchmen had fallen upon were half of them stupefied with drink, and that they

were but sixteen opposed to twenty-five, so infuriated our seamen that Parrell and myself had to threaten them with loaded pistols to stop them from leaping into the fore-castle to aid the English.

"Bring another lantern," I shouted. "Parrell, take fifteen men and get down the main-hatch, and carry a couple of lanterns with you. You will take the prisoners in the flank, and shoot every man who refuses to come out of the fore-castle."

This order was immediately executed. Meanwhile a second lantern had been lowered down the fore-hatch by a seaman, who covered the light with a pistol. The horrible struggle still raged, and I thought it the more deadly because it had become less noisy. The combatants had no other weapons than their hands, but by the dim lantern-light I could perceive that they fought with their teeth and feet as well as their fists; and what with the drunken ferocity of the Englishmen on one side, and the mad revengeful spirit of the Frenchmen on the other, the scene of grappling and twisting figures, of motionless bodies stamped upon as a labourer beats down the earth with his hob-nailed boots, of wrestling forms whirling into the sphere of the rays and vanishing into the darkness beyond, aided by the snapping of teeth, the groans of the wounded, the fierce breathing, the sudden thrilling cries of pain, was one of such abounding horror as no man could imagine the like of who had not witnessed it.

"Let ten men follow me!" I sang out. "Use your cutlasses only. Hold that lantern steady, my man, and jump down with it as we drive the prisoners aft! The rest remain to guard the hatches."

Snatching a cutlass from the hand of one of the seamen, I sprang into the fore-castle with a string of *Tigresses* after me. It is impossible to describe the scene that followed. It was one of those wild, impetuous, confused struggles which give a man no chance of noticing what hap-

pens. My object was to drive the prisoners out of the narrow fore-castle into the roomier 'tween-decks, where we should at least find space to swing our arms in. The instant I gained my feet I fell sprawling over a body; but quickly recovering myself, and making a sweeping blow with the flat of my cutlass at the arms of a ferocious Englishman who was probably still too drunk to distinguish between friends and foes, and who was levelling his huge claws at my throat, I formed the men into a line, and by dint of thrusting with our hands and feet, and pricking with our cutlasses, we bodily drove the combatants past the fittings of the bulkhead, which the Frenchmen—who knew their vessel better than we—had removed, where, as they arrived, they were seized by Parrell's men and pinioned with lines flung down the hatchway for the purpose.

The Frenchmen offered no resistance, but the English fought like cats, and when their arms were bound behind them and their legs secured they snapped at my men with their teeth, and spat at them in the impotence of their passion. In truth, they were rendered perfect devils by the drink; they took us to be a portion of the Frenchmen who had broken in on their drunken sleep, and their brute courage operating as an instinct, and being all of them very powerful men, we had so much difficulty in pinioning them that I was in momentary fear of the temper of the *Tigresses*, and had several times to warn them not to use their cutlasses.

The lanterns illuminated an extraordinary picture. On one side of the deck were the Frenchmen, some of them bound back to back, some singly pinioned, standing or sitting, their quick savage breathing filling the hollow 'tween-decks with a sharp rushing noise, many of them covered with blood, their clothes half torn from their backs, and whole clouds of steam issuing from their bodies, as you may have seen the smoke rising

from the hide of a driven horse on a winter's day. On the opposite or star-board side were the Englishmen, a small and brutal-looking band, writhing on their bellies, or straining at their bindings as they lay prostrate on their backs, but every man bound by turn upon turn of rope round his limbs, so as to resemble a mummy, or, better still, a fly after the spider has revolved him two or three times.

The *Droit Maritime* was safely taken into Plymouth, where her story made a great stir.

We must give one passage from a description of the storm fiend:—

"Never before in all my life had I witnessed such a sight as it was now my fortune to behold. Stretched across the whole surface of the sky, lay a dense dark cloud, the malignant bluish hue of which as much resembled a quantity of ink smeared across a sheet of paper with a brush as anything I can imagine to liken it to. But this was only the canvas or ground upon which nature had worked a most terrific piece of cloud tapestry. Right round the horizon was stretched what sailors would call a 'grummet' of sooty vapour—dense, motionless—like some gigantic chimney's outpouring that had settled low upon the sea, and choked out of the heavens the very air that should have scattered it. But in the east there hung, as though poised upon the upper line of this horrible inky circle, layer upon layer of huge clouds, each layer overhanging the other like the scales of old armour, the lower tiers being of a blackness that projected, by the sheer relief of the contrast of hue, the portion of the sooty vapour upon which they leant their ponderous and dreadful burdens. Under this sky, the awful character of which no pen could express—for what language could convey that *reactive* quality which informed it with its peculiar horror, the awe, the amazement it excited in the mind, the shock that the first sight of it gave to the

nerves?—under this sky, I say, the sea lay as dark as you shall have beheld it in the twilight, the horizon swallowed up in the gloom and the haze, so that the schooner appeared to be heaving on a small surface of water in the interior of a globe of cloud.

Such indeed was the darkness that the eye could not follow the run of the swell above half a mile distant from the vessel. Every stitch of canvas had been furled, with the exception of the close-reefed gaff-foresail, and the men were employed in snugging the decks, hauling taut the running rigging, looking to the gun-lashings, and making every preparation for the coming tempest. I particularly noticed the manner in which they glanced up at the sky, and in the direction of the ponderous cloud-layers. Probably no man among them had ever witnessed such a sight; and now that no more running about was necessary, their subdued manner, their alarmed faces, their voices toned into awed whispers, exhibited with singular impressiveness the influence of the portentous heavens upon them.

Presently the boom of thunder came down slow and faint. It grew gradually darker and darker; it was impossible to trace the masts to their topmast points; the binnacle-lamp was lighted, and the candle-flame threw a haze upon the air just as it did at night. The watch below had turned out alarmed by this Egyptian darkness, and blackened the decks with their figures as they stood whispering or shuffled uneasily from place to place.

It is bad enough on land to find one's self under a dense thunder-cloud and waiting for the first flash. At sea the suspense is increased out of all comparison by the feeling that one's vessel is, perhaps, the only point upon the ocean for leagues and leagues for the lightning to aim at. When I first went to sea, the ship I was in was becalmed one afternoon in the Bay of Bengal, in company with a small trading vessel. A

storm gathered, there was a fierce flash of lightning, almost instantaneously followed by an explosion—the whole air seemed to be filled with live embers—and then came a crash of thunder as though heaven were echoing back the deafening explosion of the country-wallah. Such fatalities are, happily, rare; but I had witnessed one of them at a time of life when the impressions a man gets are usually deep and lasting, and I viewed with uncomfortable misgivings these sooty, stooping, overburdened masses of vapour, and the early night their shadows had flung upon sea and sky.

First came the rain; it plumped down as though a travelling waterfall had taken us on its way. The suddenness and weight of the downpour were astounding, and the noise of the gushing and cascading and sluicing of water was as bad as half-a-dozen great cataracts. A blinding flash of lightning streamed across this water-veil and made hail of it, which pounded and hammered and beat down upon us as though buckets of grape and canister were being emptied on our devoted heads. The roaring of this fall was scarcely silenced by the peal of thunder that crashed immediately over us, and the lashed sea looked like snow under the fierce and shattering discharge.

This ceased with the same alarming suddenness with which it had begun, and the moment I could squeeze the water out of my eyes and look about me, I saw the wind coming. There was no need to sing out, for every eye was upon it. The sea was like molten lead everywhere but in the east, where the horizon appeared to be lifted into bluish white ridge, immediately over which the black clouds were twisting and flying like the rushing and eddying of a

ship's wake, or a fierce current full of whirlpools; while to right and left of these tumultuous vaporuous masses there was an opening, not indeed of blue sky, but of the sky as it appears when discoloured by a thin body of smoke, through each of which, but for a brief while only, and travelling towards us like the spoke of a revolving wheel, there slanted a sickly, yellow, unearthly-looking sunbeam, the light of which seemed to blast the very water over which it fled. It was a glimpse, and merely a glimpse, of one of those spectacles of terrific—I had almost said supernatural—grandeur which a man must go to sea to behold. In an instant the tempest had changed the scene into a heaven of flying black vapour and streaming lightning, and an ocean as white as wool, the very swell of which was hurled flat by the fury of the blast, amid which lay the *Tigress*, with the mere shred of gaff-foresail she had exhibited in rags, her lee bulwarks under the foam, her lee foretopmast rigging standing in circles, like iron half hoops, motionless upon the level froth; as you might paint a vessel stranded on her bilge on an Arctic plain of snow." The *Tigress* came safely through the ordeal, and the log of her future career showed that she had many exciting brushes with the enemy, but we must not further follow her in her roving. "An Ocean Free-Lance" (published by Bentley), from which we have extracted these vivid descriptions, is a most interesting work. The characters are intensely human and interesting, while the fertility of invention displayed, the dramatic power manifest in every chapter, the fine scene-painting, and the exciting interest of the narrative, make it exceedingly readable.