

Chapter 13: The Carpenter's Whimsical Contrivance

The inhabitants came wondering down the shore to look at us; and seeing the ship lie down on one side in such a manner, and heeling in towards the shore, and not seeing our men, who were at work on her bottom with stages, and with their boats on the off-side, they presently concluded that the ship was cast away, and lay fast on the ground. On this supposition they came about us in two or three hours' time with ten or twelve large boats, having some of them eight, some ten men in a boat, intending, no doubt, to have come on board and plundered the ship, and if they found us there, to have carried us away for slaves.

When they came up to the ship, and began to row round her, they discovered us all hard at work on the outside of the ship's bottom and side, washing, and graving, and stopping, as every seafaring man knows how. They stood for a while gazing at us, and we, who were a little surprised, could not imagine what their design was; but being willing to be sure, we took this opportunity to get some of us into the ship, and others to hand down arms and ammunition to those that were at work, to defend themselves with if there should be occasion. And it was no more than need: for in less than a quarter of an hour's consultation, they agreed, it seems, that the ship was really a wreck, and that we were all at work endeavouring to save her, or to save our lives by the help of our boats; and when we handed our arms into the boat, they concluded, by that act, that we were

endeavouring to save some of our goods. Upon this, they took it for granted we all belonged to them, and away they came directly upon our men, as if it had been in a line-of-battle.

Our men, seeing so many of them, began to be frightened, for we lay but in an ill posture to fight, and cried out to us to know what they should do. I immediately called to the men that worked upon the stages to slip them down, and get up the side into the ship, and bade those in the boat to row round and come on board. The few who were on board worked with all the strength and hands we had to bring the ship to rights; however, neither the men upon the stages nor those in the boats could do as they were ordered before the Cochin Chinese were upon them, when two of their boats boarded our longboat, and began to lay hold of the men as their prisoners.

The first man they laid hold of was an English seaman, a stout, strong fellow, who having a musket in his hand, never offered to fire it, but laid it down in the boat, like a fool, as I thought; but he understood his business better than I could teach him, for he grappled the Pagan, and dragged him by main force out of their boat into ours, where, taking him by the ears, he beat his head so against the boat's gunnel that the fellow died in his hands. In the meantime, a Dutchman, who stood next, took up the musket, and with the butt-end of it so laid about him, that he knocked down five of them who attempted to enter the boat. But this was doing little towards resisting thirty or forty men, who, fearless because ignorant of their danger, began to

throw themselves into the longboat, where we had but five men in all to defend it; but the following accident, which deserved our laughter, gave our men a complete victory.

Our carpenter being prepared to grave the outside of the ship, as well as to pay the seams where he had caulked her to stop the leaks, had got two kettles just let down into the boat, one filled with boiling pitch, and the other with rosin, tallow, and oil, and such stuff as the shipwrights use for that work; and the man that attended the carpenter had a great iron ladle in his hand, with which he supplied the men that were at work with the hot stuff. Two of the enemy's men entered the boat just where this fellow stood in the foresheets; he immediately saluted them with a ladle full of the stuff, boiling hot which so burned and scalded them, being half-naked that they roared out like bulls, and, enraged with the fire, leaped both into the sea. The carpenter saw it, and cried out, "Well done, Jack! give them some more of it!" and stepping forward himself, takes one of the mops, and dipping it in the pitch-pot, he and his man threw it among them so plentifully that, in short, of all the men in the three boats, there was not one that escaped being scalded in a most frightful manner, and made such a howling and crying that I never heard a worse noise.

I was never better pleased with a victory in my life; not only as it was a perfect surprise to me, and that our danger was imminent before, but as we got this victory without any bloodshed, except of that man the seaman killed

with his naked hands, and which I was very much concerned at. Although it maybe a just thing, because necessary (for there is no necessary wickedness in nature), yet I thought it was a sad sort of life, when we must be always obliged to be killing our fellow-creatures to preserve ourselves; and, indeed, I think so still; and I would even now suffer a great deal rather than I would take away the life even of the worst person injuring me; and I believe all considering people, who know the value of life, would be of my opinion, if they entered seriously into the consideration of it.

All the while this was doing, my partner and I, who managed the rest of the men on board, had with great dexterity brought the ship almost to rights, and having got the guns into their places again, the gunner called to me to bid our boat get out of the way, for he would let fly among them. I called back again to him, and bid him not offer to fire, for the carpenter would do the work without him; but bid him heat another pitch-kettle, which our cook, who was on board, took care of. However, the enemy was so terrified with what they had met with in their first attack, that they would not come on again; and some of them who were farthest off, seeing the ship swim, as it were, upright, began, as we suppose, to see their mistake, and gave over the enterprise, finding it was not as they expected. Thus we got clear of this merry fight; and having got some rice and some roots and bread, with about sixteen hogs, on board two days before, we resolved to stay here no longer, but go forward, whatever came of it; for we made no doubt but we should be surrounded the next day with rogues enough, perhaps more than our pitch-

kettle would dispose of for us. We therefore got all our things on board the same evening, and the next morning were ready to sail: in the meantime, lying at anchor at some distance from the shore, we were not so much concerned, being now in a fighting posture, as well as in a sailing posture, if any enemy had presented. The next day, having finished our work within board, and finding our ship was perfectly healed of all her leaks, we set sail. We would have gone into the bay of Tonquin, for we wanted to inform ourselves of what was to be known concerning the Dutch ships that had been there; but we durst not stand in there, because we had seen several ships go in, as we supposed, but a little before; so we kept on NE. towards the island of Formosa, as much afraid of being seen by a Dutch or English merchant ship as a Dutch or English merchant ship in the Mediterranean is of an Algerine man- of-war.

When we were thus got to sea, we kept on NE., as if we would go to the Manillas or the Philippine Islands; and this we did that we might not fall into the way of any of the European ships; and then we steered north, till we came to the latitude of 22 degrees 30 seconds, by which means we made the island of Formosa directly, where we came to an anchor, in order to get water and fresh provisions, which the people there, who are very courteous in their manners, supplied us with willingly, and dealt very fairly and punctually with us in all their agreements and bargains. This is what we did not find among other people, and may be owing to the remains of Christianity which was once planted here by a Dutch missionary of

Protestants, and it is a testimony of what I have often observed, viz. that the Christian religion always civilises the people, and reforms their manners, where it is received, whether it works saving effects upon them or no.

From thence we sailed still north, keeping the coast of China at an equal distance, till we knew we were beyond all the ports of China where our European ships usually come; being resolved, if possible, not to fall into any of their hands, especially in this country, where, as our circumstances were, we could not fail of being entirely ruined. Being now come to the latitude of 30 degrees, we resolved to put into the first trading port we should come at; and standing in for the shore, a boat came of two leagues to us with an old Portuguese pilot on board, who, knowing us to be an European ship, came to offer his service, which, indeed, we were glad of and took him on board; upon which, without asking us whither we would go, he dismissed the boat he came in, and sent it back. I thought it was now so much in our choice to make the old man carry us whither we would, that I began to talk to him about carrying us to the Gulf of Nankin, which is the most northern part of the coast of China. The old man said he knew the Gulf of Nankin very well; but smiling, asked us what we would do there? I told him we would sell our cargo and purchase China wares, calicoes, raw silks, tea, wrought silks, &c.; and so we would return by the same course we came. He told us our best port would have been to put in at Macao, where we could not have failed of a market for our opium to our satisfaction, and might for our money have purchased all sorts of China goods as cheap as we could at Nankin.

Not being able to put the old man out of his talk, of which he was very opinionated or conceited, I told him we were gentlemen as well as merchants, and that we had a mind to go and see the great city of Pekin, and the famous court of the monarch of China.

Why, then," says the old man, "you should go to Ningpo, where, by the river which runs into the sea there, you may go up within five leagues of the great canal. This canal is a navigable stream, which goes through the heart of that vast empire of China, crosses all the rivers, passes some considerable hills by the help of sluices and gates, and goes up to the city of Pekin, being in length near two hundred and seventy leagues."

"Well," said I, "Seignior Portuguese, but that is not our business now; the great question is, if you can carry us up to the city of Nankin, from whence we can travel to Pekin afterwards?" He said he could do so very well, and that there was a great Dutch ship gone up that way just before. This gave me a little shock, for a Dutch ship was now our terror, and we had much rather have met the devil, at least if he had not come in too frightful a figure; and we depended upon it that a Dutch ship would be our destruction, for we were in no condition to fight them; all the ships they trade with into those parts being of great burden, and of much greater force than we were.

The old man found me a little confused, and under some concern when he

named a Dutch ship, and said to me, "Sir, you need be under no apprehensions of the Dutch; I suppose they are not now at war with your nation?"

"No," said I, "that's true; but I know not what liberties men may take when they are out of the reach of the laws of their own country."

"Why," says he, "you are no pirates; what need you fear? They will not meddle with peaceable merchants, sure." These words put me into the greatest disorder and confusion imaginable; nor was it possible for me to conceal it so, but the old man easily perceived it.

"Sir," says he, "I find you are in some disorder in your thoughts at my talk: pray be pleased to go which way you think fit, and depend upon it, I'll do you all the service I can." Upon this we fell into further discourse, in which, to my alarm and amazement, he spoke of the villainous doings of a certain pirate ship that had long been the talk of mariners in those seas; no other, in a word, than the very ship he was now on board of, and which we had so unluckily purchased. I presently saw there was no help for it but to tell him the plain truth, and explain all the danger and trouble we had suffered through this misadventure, and, in particular, our earnest wish to be speedily quit of the ship altogether; for which reason we had resolved to carry her up to Nankin.

The old man was amazed at this relation, and told us we were in the right to go away to the north; and that, if he might advise us, it should be to sell the ship in China, which we might well do, and buy, or build another in the country; adding that I should meet with customers enough for the ship at Nankin, that a Chinese junk would serve me very well to go back again, and that he would procure me people both to buy one and sell the other.

Well, but, seignior," said I, "as you say they know the ship so well, I may, perhaps, if I follow your measures, be instrumental to bring some honest, innocent men into a terrible broil; for wherever they find the ship they will prove the guilt upon the men, by proving this was the ship."

"Why," says the old man, "I'll find out a way to prevent that; for as I know all those commanders you speak of very well, and shall see them all as they pass by, I will be sure to set them to rights in the thing, and let them know that they had been so much in the wrong; that though the people who were on board at first might run away with the ship, yet it was not true that they had turned pirates; and that, in particular, these were not the men that first went off with the ship, but innocently bought her for their trade; and I am persuaded they will so far believe me as at least to act more cautiously for the time to come."

In about thirteen days' sail we came to an anchor, at the south- west point of the great Gulf of Nankin; where I learned by accident that two Dutch

ships were gone the length before me, and that I should certainly fall into their hands. I consulted my partner again in this exigency, and he was as much at a loss as I was. I then asked the old pilot if there was no creek or harbour which I might put into and pursue my business with the Chinese privately, and be in no danger of the enemy. He told me if I would sail to the southward about forty-two leagues, there was a little port called Quinchang, where the fathers of the mission usually landed from Macao, on their progress to teach the Christian religion to the Chinese, and where no European ships ever put in; and if I thought to put in there, I might consider what further course to take when I was on shore. He confessed, he said, it was not a place for merchants, except that at some certain times they had a kind of a fair there, when the merchants from Japan came over thither to buy Chinese merchandises. The name of the port I may perhaps spell wrong, having lost this, together with the names of many other places set down in a little pocket-book, which was spoiled by the water by an accident; but this I remember, that the Chinese merchants we corresponded with called it by a different name from that which our Portuguese pilot gave it, who pronounced it Quinchang. As we were unanimous in our resolution to go to this place, we weighed the next day, having only gone twice on shore where we were, to get fresh water; on both which occasions the people of the country were very civil, and brought abundance of provisions to sell to us; but nothing without money.

We did not come to the other port (the wind being contrary) for five days; but

it was very much to our satisfaction, and I was thankful when I set my foot on shore, resolving, and my partner too, that if it was possible to dispose of ourselves and effects any other way, though not profitably, we would never more set foot on board that unhappy vessel. Indeed, I must acknowledge, that of all the circumstances of life that ever I had any experience of, nothing makes mankind so completely miserable as that of being in constant fear. Well does the Scripture say, "The fear of man brings a snare"; it is a life of death, and the mind is so entirely oppressed by it, that it is capable of no relief.

Nor did it fail of its usual operations upon the fancy, by heightening every danger; representing the English and Dutch captains to be men incapable of hearing reason, or of distinguishing between honest men and rogues; or between a story calculated for our own turn, made out of nothing, on purpose to deceive, and a true, genuine account of our whole voyage, progress, and design; for we might many ways have convinced any reasonable creatures that we were not pirates; the goods we had on board, the course we steered, our frankly showing ourselves, and entering into such and such ports; and even our very manner, the force we had, the number of men, the few arms, the little ammunition, short provisions; all these would have served to convince any men that we were no pirates. The opium and other goods we had on board would make it appear the ship had been at Bengal. The Dutchmen, who, it was said, had the names of all the men that were in the ship, might easily see that we were a mixture of

English, Portuguese, and Indians, and but two Dutchmen on board. These, and many other particular circumstances, might have made it evident to the understanding of any commander, whose hands we might fall into, that we were no pirates.

But fear, that blind, useless passion, worked another way, and threw us into the vapours; it bewildered our understandings, and set the imagination at work to form a thousand terrible things that perhaps might never happen. We first supposed, as indeed everybody had related to us, that the seamen on board the English and Dutch ships, but especially the Dutch, were so enraged at the name of a pirate, and especially at our beating off their boats and escaping, that they would not give themselves leave to inquire whether we were pirates or no, but would execute us off-hand, without giving us any room for a defence. We reflected that there really was so much apparent evidence before them, that they would scarce inquire after any more; as, first, that the ship was certainly the same, and that some of the seamen among them knew her, and had been on board her; and, secondly, that when we had intelligence at the river of Cambodia that they were coming down to examine us, we fought their boats and fled. Therefore we made no doubt but they were as fully satisfied of our being pirates as we were satisfied of the contrary; and, as I often said, I know not but I should have been apt to have taken those circumstances for evidence, if the tables were turned, and my case was theirs; and have made no scruple of cutting all the crew to pieces, without believing, or perhaps considering, what they might

have to offer in their defence.

But let that be how it will, these were our apprehensions; and both my partner and I scarce slept a night without dreaming of halters and yard-arms; of fighting, and being taken; of killing, and being killed: and one night I was in such a fury in my dream, fancying the Dutchmen had boarded us, and I was knocking one of their seamen down, that I struck my doubled fist against the side of the cabin I lay in with such a force as wounded my hand grievously, broke my knuckles, and cut and bruised the flesh, so that it awaked me out of my sleep. Another apprehension I had was, the cruel usage we might meet with from them if we fell into their hands; then the story of Amboyna came into my head, and how the Dutch might perhaps torture us, as they did our countrymen there, and make some of our men, by extremity of torture, confess to crimes they never were guilty of, or own themselves and all of us to be pirates, and so they would put us to death with a formal appearance of justice; and that they might be tempted to do this for the gain of our ship and cargo, worth altogether four or five thousand pounds. We did not consider that the captains of ships have no authority to act thus; and if we had surrendered prisoners to them, they could not answer the destroying us, or torturing us, but would be accountable for it when they came to their country. However, if they were to act thus with us, what advantage would it be to us that they should be called to an account for it? - or if we were first to be murdered, what satisfaction would it be to us to have them punished when they came home?

I cannot refrain taking notice here what reflections I now had upon the vast variety of my particular circumstances; how hard I thought it that I, who had spent forty years in a life of continual difficulties, and was at last come, as it were, to the port or haven which all men drive at, viz. to have rest and plenty, should be a volunteer in new sorrows by my own unhappy choice, and that I, who had escaped so many dangers in my youth, should now come to be hanged in my old age, and in so remote a place, for a crime which I was not in the least inclined to, much less guilty of. After these thoughts something of religion would come in; and I would be considering that this seemed to me to be a disposition of immediate Providence, and I ought to look upon it and submit to it as such. For, although I was innocent as to men, I was far from being innocent as to my Maker; and I ought to look in and examine what other crimes in my life were most obvious to me, and for which Providence might justly inflict this punishment as a retribution; and thus I ought to submit to this, just as I would to a shipwreck, if it had pleased God to have brought such a disaster upon me.

In its turn natural courage would sometimes take its place, and then I would be talking myself up to vigorous resolutions; that I would not be taken to be barbarously used by a parcel of merciless wretches in cold blood; that it were much better to have fallen into the hands of the savages, though I were sure they would feast upon me when they had taken me, than those who would perhaps glut their rage upon me by inhuman tortures and

barbarities; that in the case of the savages, I always resolved to die fighting to the last gasp, and why should I not do so now? Whenever these thoughts prevailed, I was sure to put myself into a kind of fever with the agitation of a supposed fight; my blood would boil, and my eyes sparkle, as if I was engaged, and I always resolved to take no quarter at their hands; but even at last, if I could resist no longer, I would blow up the ship and all that was in her, and leave them but little booty to boast of.