

CHAPTER XVII. LIGHT FROM THE MAN OF WAR.

In the early sunlight of the next day, we tossed close off the buoy and saw the city sparkle in its groves about the foot of the Punch-bowl, and the masts clustering thick in the small harbour. A good breeze, which had risen with the sea, carried us triumphantly through the intricacies of the passage; and we had soon brought up not far from the landing-stairs. I remember to have remarked an ugly horned reptile of a modern warship in the usual moorings across the port, but my mind was so profoundly plunged in melancholy that I paid no heed.

Indeed, I had little time at my disposal. Messieurs Sharpe and Fowler had left the night before in the persuasion that I was a liar of the first magnitude; the genial belief brought them aboard again with the earliest opportunity, proffering help to one who had proved how little he required it, and hospitality to so respectable a character. I had business to mind, I had some need both of assistance and diversion; I liked Fowler--I don't know why; and in short, I let them do with me as they desired. No creditor intervening, I spent the first half of the day inquiring into the conditions of the tea and silk market under the auspices of Sharpe; lunched with him in a private apartment at the Hawaiian Hotel--for Sharpe was a teetotaler in public; and about four in the afternoon was delivered into the hands of Fowler. This gentleman owned a bungalow on the Waikiki beach; and there in company with certain young bloods of Honolulu, I was entertained to a sea-bathe,

indiscriminate cocktails, a dinner, a hula-hula, and (to round off the night), poker and assorted liquors. To lose money in the small hours to pale, intoxicated youth, has always appeared to me a pleasure overrated. In my then frame of mind, I confess I found it even delightful; put up my money (or rather my creditors'), and put down Fowler's champagne with equal avidity and success; and awoke the next morning to a mild headache and the rather agreeable lees of the last night's excitement. The young bloods, many of whom were still far from sober, had taken the kitchen into their own hands, vice the Chinaman deposed; and since each was engaged upon a dish of his own, and none had the least scruple in demolishing his neighbour's handiwork, I became early convinced that many eggs would be broken and few omelets made. The discovery of a jug of milk and a crust of bread enabled me to stay my appetite; and since it was Sunday, when no business could be done, and the festivities were to be renewed that night in the abode of Fowler, it occurred to me to slip silently away and enjoy some air and solitude.

I turned seaward under the dead crater known as Diamond Head. My way was for some time under the shade of certain thickets of green, thorny trees, dotted with houses. Here I enjoyed some pictures of the native life: wide-eyed, naked children, mingled with pigs; a youth asleep under a tree; an old gentleman spelling through glasses his Hawaiian Bible; the somewhat embarrassing spectacle of a lady at her bath in a spring; and the glimpse of gaudy-coloured gowns in the deep shade of the houses. Thence I found a road along the beach itself, wading in sand, opposed and buffeted by the whole weight of the Trade: on one hand, the

glittering and sounding surf, and the bay lively with many sails; on the other, precipitous, arid gullies and sheer cliffs, mounting towards the crater and the blue sky. For all the companionship of skimming vessels, the place struck me with a sense of solitude. There came in my head what I had been told the day before at dinner, of a cavern above in the bowels of the volcano, a place only to be visited with the light of torches, a treasure-house of the bones of priests and warriors, and clamorous with the voice of an unseen river pouring seaward through the crannies of the mountain. At the thought, it was revealed to me suddenly, how the bungalows, and the Fowlers, and the bright busy town and crowding ships, were all children of yesterday; and for centuries before, the obscure life of the natives, with its glories and ambitions, its joys and crimes and agonies, had rolled unseen, like the mountain river, in that sea-girt place. Not Chaldea appeared more ancient, nor the Pyramids of Egypt more abstruse; and I heard time measured by "the drums and trappings" of immemorial conquests, and saw myself the creature of an hour. Over the bankruptcy of Pinkerton and Dodd, of Montana Block, S. F., and the conscientious troubles of the junior partner, the spirit of eternity was seen to smile.

To this mood of philosophic sadness, my excesses of the night before no doubt contributed; for more things than virtue are at times their own reward: but I was greatly healed at least of my distresses. And while I was yet enjoying my abstracted humour, a turn of the beach brought me in view of the signal-station, with its watch-house and flag-staff, perched on the immediate margin of a cliff. The house was new and clean and

bald, and stood naked to the Trades. The wind beat about it in loud squalls; the seaward windows rattled without mercy; the breach of the surf below contributed its increment of noise; and the fall of my foot in the narrow verandah passed unheard by those within.

There were two on whom I thus entered unexpectedly: the look-out man, with grizzled beard, keen seaman's eyes, and that brand on his countenance that comes of solitary living; and a visitor, an oldish, oratorical fellow, in the smart tropical array of the British man-o'-war's man, perched on a table, and smoking a cigar. I was made pleasantly welcome, and was soon listening with amusement to the sea-lawyer.

"No, if I hadn't have been born an Englishman," was one of his sentiments, "damn me! I'd rather 'a been born a Frenchy! I'd like to see another nation fit to black their boots." Presently after, he developed his views on home politics with similar trenchancy. "I'd rather be a brute beast than what I'd be a liberal," he said. "Carrying banners and that! a pig's got more sense. Why, look at our chief engineer--they do say he carried a banner with his own 'ands: 'Hooroar for Gladstone!' I suppose, or 'Down with the Aristocracy!' What 'arm does the aristocracy do? Show me a country any good without one! Not the States; why, it's the 'ome of corruption! I knew a man--he was a good man, 'ome born--who was signal quartermaster in the Wyandotte. He told me he could never have got there if he hadn't have 'run with the boys'--told it me as I'm telling you. Now, we're all British subjects here----" he was going on.

"I am afraid I am an American," I said apologetically.

He seemed the least bit taken aback, but recovered himself; and with the ready tact of his betters, paid me the usual British compliment on the riposte. "You don't say so!" he exclaimed. "Well, I give you my word of honour, I'd never have guessed it. Nobody could tell it on you," said he, as though it were some form of liquor.

I thanked him, as I always do, at this particular stage, with his compatriots: not so much perhaps for the compliment to myself and my poor country, as for the revelation (which is ever fresh to me) of Britannic self-sufficiency and taste. And he was so far softened by my gratitude as to add a word of praise on the American method of lacing sails. "You're ahead of us in lacing sails," he said. "You can say that with a clear conscience."

"Thank you," I replied. "I shall certainly do so."

At this rate, we got along swimmingly; and when I rose to retrace my steps to the Fowlery, he at once started to his feet and offered me the welcome solace of his company for the return. I believe I discovered much alacrity at the idea, for the creature (who seemed to be unique, or to represent a type like that of the dodo) entertained me hugely. But when he had produced his hat, I found I was in the way of more than entertainment; for on the ribbon I could read the legend: "H.M.S.

Tempest."

"I say," I began, when our adieus were paid, and we were scrambling down the path from the look-out, "it was your ship that picked up the men on board the Flying Scud, wasn't it?"

"You may say so," said he. "And a blessed good job for the Flying-Scuds. It's a God-forsaken spot, that Midway Island."

"I've just come from there," said I. "It was I who bought the wreck."

"Beg your pardon, sir," cried the sailor: "gen'lem'n in the white schooner?"

"The same," said I.

My friend saluted, as though we were now, for the first time, formally introduced.

"Of course," I continued, "I am rather taken up with the whole story; and I wish you would tell me what you can of how the men were saved."

"It was like this," said he. "We had orders to call at Midway after castaways, and had our distance pretty nigh run down the day before. We steamed half-speed all night, looking to make it about noon; for old Tootles--beg your pardon, sir--the captain--was precious scared of the

place at night. Well, there's nasty, filthy currents round that Midway; YOU know, as has been there; and one on 'em must have set us down. Leastways, about six bells, when we had ought to been miles away, some one sees a sail, and lo and be'old, there was the spars of a full-rigged brig! We raised her pretty fast, and the island after her; and made out she was hard aground, canted on her bilge, and had her ens'n flying, union down. It was breaking 'igh on the reef, and we laid well out, and sent a couple of boats. I didn't go in neither; only stood and looked on; but it seems they was all badly scared and muddled, and didn't know which end was uppermost. One on 'em kep' snivelling and wringing of his 'ands; he come on board all of a sop like a monthly nurse. That Trent, he come first, with his 'and in a bloody rag. I was near 'em as I am to you; and I could make out he was all to bits--'eard his breath rattle in his blooming lungs as he come down the ladder. Yes, they was a scared lot, small blame to 'em, I say! The next after Trent, come him as was mate."

"Goddedaal!" I exclaimed.

"And a good name for him too," chuckled the man-o'-war's man, who probably confounded the word with a familiar oath. "A good name too; only it weren't his. He was a gen'lem'n born, sir, as had gone maskewerading. One of our officers knowed him at 'ome, reckonises him, steps up, 'olds out his 'and right off, and says he: "Ullo, Norrie, old chappie!" he says. The other was coming up, as bold as look at it; didn't seem put out--that's where blood tells, sir! Well, no sooner does

he 'ear his born name given him, than he turns as white as the Day of Judgment, stares at Mr. Sebright like he was looking at a ghost, and then (I give you my word of honour) turned to, and doubled up in a dead faint. 'Take him down to my berth,' says Mr. Sebright. "'Tis poor old Norrie Carthew,' he says."

"And what--what sort of a gentleman was this Mr. Carthew?" I gasped.

"The ward-room steward told me he was come of the best blood in England," was my friend's reply: "Eton and 'Arrow bred;--and might have been a bar'net!"

"No, but to look at?" I corrected him.

"The same as you or me," was the uncompromising answer: "not much to look at. I didn't know he was a gen'lem'n; but then, I never see him cleaned up."

"How was that?" I cried. "O yes, I remember: he was sick all the way to 'Frisco, was he not?"

"Sick, or sorry, or something," returned my informant. "My belief, he didn't hanker after showing up. He kep' close; the ward-room steward, what took his meals in, told me he ate nex' to nothing; and he was fetched ashore at 'Frisco on the quiet. Here was how it was. It seems

his brother had took and died, him as had the estate. This one had gone in for his beer, by what I could make out; the old folks at 'ome had turned rusty; no one knew where he had gone to. Here he was, slaving in a merchant brig, shipwrecked on Midway, and packing up his duds for a long voyage in a open boat. He comes on board our ship, and by God, here he is a landed proprietor, and may be in Parliament to-morrow! It's no less than natural he should keep dark: so would you and me in the same box."

"I daresay," said I. "But you saw more of the others?"

"To be sure," says he: "no 'arm in them from what I see. There was one 'Ardy there: colonial born he was, and had been through a power of money. There was no nonsense about 'Ardy; he had been up, and he had come down, and took it so. His 'eart was in the right place; and he was well-informed, and knew French; and Latin, I believe, like a native! I liked that 'Ardy; he was a good-looking boy, too."

"Did they say much about the wreck?" I asked.

"There wasn't much to say, I reckon," replied the man-o'-war's man. "It was all in the papers. 'Ardy used to yarn most about the coins he had gone through; he had lived with book-makers, and jockeys, and pugs, and actors, and all that: a precious low lot!" added this judicious person.

"But it's about here my 'orse is moored, and by your leave I'll be getting ahead."

"One moment," said I. "Is Mr. Sebright on board?"

"No, sir, he's ashore to-day," said the sailor. "I took up a bag for him to the 'otel."

With that we parted. Presently after my friend overtook and passed me on a hired steed which seemed to scorn its cavalier; and I was left in the dust of his passage, a prey to whirling thoughts. For I now stood, or seemed to stand, on the immediate threshold of these mysteries. I knew the name of the man Dickson--his name was Carthew; I knew where the money came from that opposed us at the sale--it was part of Carthew's inheritance; and in my gallery of illustrations to the history of the wreck, one more picture hung; perhaps the most dramatic of the series. It showed me the deck of a warship in that distant part of the great ocean, the officers and seamen looking curiously on; and a man of birth and education, who had been sailing under an alias on a trading brig, and was now rescued from desperate peril, felled like an ox by the bare sound of his own name. I could not fail to be reminded of my own experience at the Occidental telephone. The hero of three styles, Dickson, Goddedaal, or Carthew, must be the owner of a lively--or a loaded--conscience, and the reflection recalled to me the photograph found on board the Flying Scud; just such a man, I reasoned, would be capable of just such starts and crises, and I inclined to think that Goddedaal (or Carthew) was the mainspring of the mystery.

One thing was plain: as long as the Tempest was in reach, I must make the acquaintance of both Sebright and the doctor. To this end, I excused myself with Mr. Fowler, returned to Honolulu, and passed the remainder of the day hanging vainly round the cool verandahs of the hotel. It was near nine o'clock at night before I was rewarded.

"That is the gentleman you were asking for," said the clerk.

I beheld a man in tweeds, of an incomparable languor of demeanour, and carrying a cane with genteel effort. From the name, I had looked to find a sort of Viking and young ruler of the battle and the tempest; and I was the more disappointed, and not a little alarmed, to come face to face with this impracticable type.

"I believe I have the pleasure of addressing Lieutenant Sebright," said I, stepping forward.

"Aw, yes," replied the hero; "but, aw! I dawn't knaw you, do I?" (He spoke for all the world like Lord Foppington in the old play--a proof of the perennial nature of man's affectations. But his limping dialect, I scorn to continue to reproduce.)

"It was with the intention of making myself known, that I have taken this step," said I, entirely unabashed (for impudence begets in me its like--perhaps my only martial attribute). "We have a common subject of

interest, to me very lively; and I believe I may be in a position to be of some service to a friend of yours--to give him, at least, some very welcome information."

The last clause was a sop to my conscience: I could not pretend, even to myself, either the power or the will to serve Mr. Carthew; but I felt sure he would like to hear the Flying Scud was burned.

"I don't know--I--I don't understand you," stammered my victim. "I don't have any friends in Honolulu, don't you know?"

"The friend to whom I refer is English," I replied. "It is Mr. Carthew, whom you picked up at Midway. My firm has bought the wreck; I am just returned from breaking her up; and--to make my business quite clear to you--I have a communication it is necessary I should make; and have to trouble you for Mr. Carthew's address."

It will be seen how rapidly I had dropped all hope of interesting the frigid British bear. He, on his side, was plainly on thorns at my insistence; I judged he was suffering torments of alarm lest I should prove an undesirable acquaintance; diagnosed him for a shy, dull, vain, unamiable animal, without adequate defence--a sort of dishoused snail; and concluded, rightly enough, that he would consent to anything to bring our interview to a conclusion. A moment later, he had fled, leaving me with a sheet of paper, thus inscribed:--

Norris Carthew,

Stallbridge-le-Carthew,

Dorset.

I might have cried victory, the field of battle and some of the enemy's baggage remaining in my occupation. As a matter of fact, my moral sufferings during the engagement had rivalled those of Mr. Sebright; I was left incapable of fresh hostilities; I owned that the navy of old England was (for me) invincible as of yore; and giving up all thought of the doctor, inclined to salute her veteran flag, in the future, from a prudent distance. Such was my inclination, when I retired to rest; and my first experience the next morning strengthened it to certainty. For I had the pleasure of encountering my fair antagonist on his way on board; and he honoured me with a recognition so disgustingly dry, that my impatience overflowed, and (recalling the tactics of Nelson) I neglected to perceive or to return it.

Judge of my astonishment, some half-hour later, to receive a note of invitation from the Tempest.

"Dear Sir," it began, "we are all naturally very much interested in the wreck of the Flying Scud, and as soon as I mentioned that I had the pleasure of making your acquaintance, a very general wish was expressed that you would come and dine on board. It will give us all the greatest

pleasure to see you to-night, or in case you should be otherwise engaged, to luncheon either to-morrow or to-day." A note of the hours followed, and the document wound up with the name of "J. Lascelles Sebright," under an undeniable statement that he was sincerely mine.

"No, Mr. Lascelles Sebright," I reflected, "you are not, but I begin to suspect that (like the lady in the song) you are another's. You have mentioned your adventure, my friend; you have been blown up; you have got your orders; this note has been dictated; and I am asked on board (in spite of your melancholy protests) not to meet the men, and not to talk about the Flying Scud, but to undergo the scrutiny of some one interested in Carthew: the doctor, for a wager. And for a second wager, all this springs from your facility in giving the address." I lost no time in answering the billet, electing for the earliest occasion; and at the appointed hour, a somewhat blackguard-looking boat's crew from the *Norah Creina* conveyed me under the guns of the *Tempest*.

The ward-room appeared pleased to see me; Sebright's brother officers, in contrast to himself, took a boyish interest in my cruise; and much was talked of the Flying Scud; of how she had been lost, of how I had found her, and of the weather, the anchorage, and the currents about Midway Island. Carthew was referred to more than once without embarrassment; the parallel case of a late Earl of Aberdeen, who died mate on board a Yankee schooner, was adduced. If they told me little of the man, it was because they had not much to tell, and only felt an interest in his recognition and pity for his prolonged ill-health. I

could never think the subject was avoided; and it was clear that the officers, far from practising concealment, had nothing to conceal.

So far, then, all seemed natural, and yet the doctor troubled me. This was a tall, rugged, plain man, on the wrong side of fifty, already gray, and with a restless mouth and bushy eyebrows: he spoke seldom, but then with gaiety; and his great, quaking, silent laughter was infectious.

I could make out that he was at once the quiz of the ward-room and perfectly respected; and I made sure that he observed me covertly. It is certain I returned the compliment. If Carthew had feigned sickness--and all seemed to point in that direction--here was the man who knew all--or certainly knew much. His strong, sterling face progressively and silently persuaded of his full knowledge. That was not the mouth, these were not the eyes, of one who would act in ignorance, or could be led at random. Nor again was it the face of a man squeamish in the case of malefactors; there was even a touch of Brutus there, and something of the hanging judge. In short, he seemed the last character for the part assigned him in my theories; and wonder and curiosity contended in my mind.

Luncheon was over, and an adjournment to the smoking-room proposed, when

(upon a sudden impulse) I burned my ships, and pleading indisposition, requested to consult the doctor.

"There is nothing the matter with my body, Dr. Urquart," said I, as soon

as we were alone.

He hummed, his mouth worked, he regarded me steadily with his gray eyes, but resolutely held his peace.

"I want to talk to you about the Flying Scud and Mr. Carthew," I resumed. "Come: you must have expected this. I am sure you know all; you are shrewd, and must have a guess that I know much. How are we to stand to one another? and how am I to stand to Mr. Carthew?"

"I do not fully understand you," he replied, after a pause; and then, after another: "It is the spirit I refer to, Mr. Dodd."

"The spirit of my inquiries?" I asked.

He nodded.

"I think we are at cross-purposes," said I. "The spirit is precisely what I came in quest of. I bought the Flying Scud at a ruinous figure, run up by Mr. Carthew through an agent; and I am, in consequence, a bankrupt. But if I have found no fortune in the wreck, I have found unmistakable evidences of foul play. Conceive my position: I am ruined through this man, whom I never saw; I might very well desire revenge or compensation; and I think you will admit I have the means to extort

either."

He made no sign in answer to this challenge.

"Can you not understand, then," I resumed, "the spirit in which I come to one who is surely in the secret, and ask him, honestly and plainly: How do I stand to Mr. Carthew?"

"I must ask you to be more explicit," said he.

"You do not help me much," I retorted. "But see if you can understand: my conscience is not very fine-spun; still, I have one. Now, there are degrees of foul play, to some of which I have no particular objection. I am sure with Mr. Carthew, I am not at all the person to forgo an advantage; and I have much curiosity. But on the other hand, I have no taste for persecution; and I ask you to believe that I am not the man to make bad worse, or heap trouble on the unfortunate."

"Yes; I think I understand," said he. "Suppose I pass you my word that, whatever may have occurred, there were excuses--great excuses--I may say, very great?"

"It would have weight with me, doctor," I replied.

"I may go further," he pursued. "Suppose I had been there, or you had been there: after a certain event had taken place, it's a grave question

what we might have done--it's even a question what we could have done--ourselves. Or take me. I will be plain with you, and own that I am in possession of the facts. You have a shrewd guess how I have acted in that knowledge. May I ask you to judge from the character of my action, something of the nature of that knowledge, which I have no call, nor yet no title, to share with you?"

I cannot convey a sense of the rugged conviction and judicial emphasis of Dr. Urquart's speech. To those who did not hear him, it may appear as if he fed me on enigmas; to myself, who heard, I seemed to have received a lesson and a compliment.

"I thank you," I said. "I feel you have said as much as possible, and more than I had any right to ask. I take that as a mark of confidence, which I will try to deserve. I hope, sir, you will let me regard you as a friend."

He evaded my proffered friendship with a blunt proposal to rejoin the mess; and yet a moment later, contrived to alleviate the snub. For, as we entered the smoking-room, he laid his hand on my shoulder with a kind familiarity.

"I have just prescribed for Mr. Dodd," says he, "a glass of our Madeira."

I have never again met Dr. Urquart: but he wrote himself so clear

upon my memory that I think I see him still. And indeed I had cause to remember the man for the sake of his communication. It was hard enough to make a theory fit the circumstances of the Flying Scud; but one in which the chief actor should stand the least excused, and might retain the esteem or at least the pity of a man like Dr. Urquart, failed me utterly. Here at least was the end of my discoveries; I learned no more, till I learned all; and my reader has the evidence complete. Is he more astute than I was? or, like me, does he give it up?