

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE SCHOONER EBBA.

It was not till the next morning, and then very leisurely, that the Ebba began to make preparations for her departure. From the extremity of New-Berne quay the crew might have been seen holystoning the deck, after which they loosened the reef lines, under the direction of Efrondat, the boatswain, hoisted in the boats and cleared the halyards.

At eight o'clock the Count d'Artigas had not yet appeared on deck. His companion, Serko the engineer, as he was called on board, had not quitted his cabin. Captain Spade was strolling quietly about giving orders.

The Ebba would have made a splendid racing yacht, though she had never participated in any of the yacht races either on the North American or British coasts. The height of her masts, the extent of the canvas she carried, her shapely, raking hull, denoted her to be a craft of great speed, and her general lines showed that she was also built to weather the roughest gales at sea. In a favorable wind she would probably make twelve knots an hour.

Notwithstanding these advantages, however, she must in a dead calm necessarily suffer from the same disadvantages as other sailing

vessels, and it might have been supposed that the Count d'Artigas would have preferred a steam-yacht with which he could have gone anywhere, at any time, in any weather. But apparently he was satisfied to stick to the old method, even when he made his long trips across the Atlantic.

On this particular morning the wind was blowing gently from the west, which was very favorable to the Ebba, and would enable her to stand straight out of the Neuse, across Pamlico Sound, and through one of the inlets that led to the open sea.

At ten o'clock the Ebba was still rocking lazily at anchor, her stem up stream and her cable tautened by the rapidly ebbing tide. The small buoy that on the previous evening had been moored near the schooner was no longer to be seen, and had doubtless been hoisted in.

Suddenly a gun boomed out and a slight wreath of white smoke arose from the battery. It was answered by other reports from the guns on the chain of islands along the coast.

At this moment the Count d'Artigas and Engineer Serko appeared on deck. Captain Spade went to meet them.

"Guns barking," he said laconically.

"We expected it," replied Serko, shrugging his shoulders. "They are signals to close the passes."

"What has that to do with us?" asked the Count d'Artigas quietly.

"Nothing at all," said the engineer.

They all, of course, knew that the alarm-guns indicated that the disappearance of Thomas Roch and the warder Gaydon from Healthful House had been discovered.

At daybreak the doctor had gone to Pavilion No. 17 to see how his patient had passed the night, and had found no one there. He immediately notified the director, who had the grounds thoroughly searched. It was then discovered that the door in rear of the park was unbolted, and that, though locked, the key had been taken away. It was evident that Roch and his attendant had been carried out that way. But who were the kidnappers? No one could possibly imagine. All that could be ascertained was that at half-past seven on the previous night one of the doctors had attended Thomas Roch, who was suffering from one of his fits, and that when the medical man had left him the invalid was in an unconscious condition. What had happened after the doctor took leave of Gaydon at the end of the garden-path could not even be conjectured.

The news of the disappearance was telegraphed to New Berne, and thence to Raleigh. On receipt of it the Governor had instantly wired orders that no vessel was to be allowed to quit Pamlico Sound without having been first subjected to a most rigorous search. Another dispatch

ordered the cruiser Falcon, which was stationed in the port, to carry out the Governor's instructions in this respect. At the same time measures were taken to keep a strict lookout in every town and village in the State.

The Count d'Artigas could see the Falcon, which was a couple of miles away to the east in the estuary, getting steam up and making hurried preparations to carry out her mission. It would take at least an hour before the warship could be got ready to steam out, and the schooner might by that time have gained a good start.

"Shall I weigh anchor?" demanded Captain Spade.

"Yes, as we have a fair wind; but you can take your time about it," replied the Count d'Artigas.

"The passes of Pamlico Sound will be under observation," observed Engineer Serko, "and no vessel will be able to get out without receiving a visit from gentlemen as inquisitive as they will be indiscreet."

"Never mind, get under way all the same," ordered the Count. "When the officers of the cruiser or the Custom-House officers have been over the Ebba the embargo will be raised. I shall be indeed surprised if we are not allowed to go about our business."

"With a thousand pardons for the liberty taken, and best wishes for a

good voyage and speedy return," chuckled Engineer Serko, following the phrase with a loud and prolonged laugh.

When the news was received at New-Berne, the authorities at first were puzzled to know whether the missing inventor and his keeper had fled or been carried off. As, however, Roch's flight could not have taken place without the connivance of Gaydon, this supposition was speedily abandoned. In the opinion of the director and management of Healthful House the warder was absolutely above suspicion. They must both, then, have been kidnapped.

It can easily be imagined what a sensation the news caused in the town. What! the French inventor who had been so closely guarded had disappeared, and with him the secret of the wonderful fulgurator that nobody had been able to worm out of him? Might not the most serious consequences follow? Might not the discovery of the new engine be lost to America forever? If the daring act had been perpetrated on behalf of another nation, might not that nation, having Thomas Roch in its power, be eventually able to extract from him what the Federal Government had vainly endeavored to obtain? And was it reasonable, was it permissible, to suppose for an instant that he had been carried off for the benefit of a private individual?

Certainly not, was the emphatic reply to the latter question, which was too ridiculous to be entertained. Therefore the whole power of the State was employed in an effort to recover the inventor. In every county of North Carolina a special surveillance was organized on

every road and at every railroad station, and every house in town and country was searched. Every port from Wilmington to Norfolk was closed, and no craft of any description could leave without being thoroughly overhauled. Not only the cruiser Falcon, but every available cutter and launch was sent out with orders to patrol Pamlico Sound and board yachts, merchant vessels and fishing smacks indiscriminately whether anchored or not and search them down to the keelson.

Still the crew of the Ebba prepared calmly to weigh anchor, and the Count d'Artigas did not appear to be in the least concerned at the orders of the authorities and at the consequences that would ensue, if Thomas Roch and his keeper, Gaydon, were found on board.

At last all was ready, the crew manned the capstan bars, the sails were hoisted, and the schooner glided gracefully through the water towards the Sound.

Twenty miles from New-Berne the estuary curves abruptly and shoots off towards the northwest for about the same distance, gradually widening until it empties itself into Pamlico Sound.

The latter is a vast expanse about seventy miles across from Sivan Island to Roanoke. On the seaward side stretches a chain of long and narrow islands, forming a natural breakwater north and south from Cape Lookout to Cape Hatteras and from the latter to Cape Henry, near Norfolk City, in Virginia.

Numerous beacons on the islands and islets form an easy guide for vessels at night seeking refuge from the Atlantic gales, and once inside the chain they are certain of finding plenty of good anchoring grounds.

Several passes afford an outlet from the Sound to the sea. Beyond Sivan Island lighthouse is Ocracoke inlet, and next is the inlet of Hatteras. There are also three others known as Logger Head inlet, New inlet, and Oregon inlet. The Ocracoke was the one nearest the Ebba, and she could make it without tacking, but the Falcon was searching all vessels that passed through. This did not, however, make any particular difference, for by this time all the passes, upon which the guns of the forts had been trained, were guarded by government vessels.

The Ebba, therefore, kept on her way, neither trying to avoid nor offering to approach the searchers. She seemed to be merely a pleasure-yacht out for a morning sail.

No attempt had up to that time been made to accost her. Was she, then, specially privileged, and to be spared the bother of being searched? Was the Count d'Artigas considered too high and mighty a personage to be thus molested, and delayed even for an hour? It was unlikely, for though he was regarded as a distinguished foreigner who lived the life of luxury enjoyed by the favored of fortune, no one, as a matter of fact, knew who he was, nor whence he came, nor whither he was going.

The schooner sped gracefully over the calm waters of the sound, her flag--a gold crescent in the angle of a red field--streaming proudly in the breeze. Count d'Artigas was cosily ensconced in a basket-work chair on the after-deck, conversing with Engineer Serko and Captain Spade.

"They don't seem in a hurry to board us," remarked Serko.

"They can come whenever they think proper," said the Count in a tone of supreme indifference.

"No doubt they are waiting for us at the entrance to the inlet," suggested Captain Spade.

"Let them wait," grunted the wealthy nobleman.

Then he relapsed into his customary unconcerned impassibility.

Captain Spade's hypothesis was doubtless correct. The Falcon had as yet made no move towards the schooner, but would almost certainly do so as soon as the latter reached the inlet, and the Count would have to submit to a search of his vessel if he wished to reach the open sea.

How was it then that he manifested such extraordinary unconcern? Were Thomas Roch and Gaydon so safely hidden that their hiding-place could



not possibly be discovered?

The thing was possible, but perhaps the Count d'Artigas would not have been quite so confident had he been aware that the Ebba had been specially signalled to the warship and revenue cutters as a suspect.

The Count's visit to Healthful House on the previous day had now attracted particular attention to him and his schooner. Evidently, at the time, the director could have had no reason to suspect the motive of his visit. But a few hours later, Thomas Roch and his keeper had been carried off. No one else from outside had been near the pavilion that day. It was admitted that it would have been an easy matter for the Count's companion, while the former distracted the director's attention, to push back the bolts of the door in the wall and steal the key. Then the fact that the Ebba was anchored in rear of, and only a few hundred yards from, the estate, was in itself suspicious. Nothing would have been easier for the desperadoes than to enter by the door, surprise their victims, and carry them off to the schooner.

These suspicions, neither the director nor the personnel of the establishment had at first liked to give expression to, but when the Ebba was seen to weigh anchor and head for the open sea, they appeared to be confirmed.

They were communicated to the authorities of New-Berne, who immediately ordered the commander of the Falcon to intercept the schooner, to search her minutely high and low, and from stem to stern,

and on no account to let her proceed, unless he was absolutely certain that Roch and Gaydon were not on board.

Assuredly the Count d'Artigas could have had no idea that his vessel was the object of such stringent orders; but even if he had, it is questionable whether this superbly haughty and disdainful nobleman would have manifested any particular anxiety.

Towards three o'clock, the warship which was cruising before the inlet, after having sent search parties aboard a few fishing-smacks, suddenly manoeuvred to the entrance of the pass, and awaited the approaching schooner. The latter surely did not imagine that she could force a passage in spite of the cruiser, or escape from a vessel propelled by steam. Besides, had she attempted such a foolhardy trick, a couple of shots from the Falcon's guns would speedily have constrained her to lay to.

Presently a boat, manned by two officers and ten sailors, put off from the cruiser and rowed towards the Ebba. When they were only about half a cable's length off, one of the men rose and waved a flag.

"That's a signal to stop," said Engineer Serko.

"Precisely," remarked the Count d'Artigas.

"We shall have to lay to."

"Then lay to."

Captain Spade went forward and gave the necessary orders, and in a few minutes the vessel slackened speed, and was soon merely drifting with the tide.

The Falcon's boat pulled alongside, and a man in the bows held on to her with a boat-hook. The gangway was lowered by a couple of hands on the schooner, and the two officers, followed by eight of their men, climbed on deck.

They found the crew of the Ebba drawn up in line on the forecastle.

The officer in command of the boarding-party--a first lieutenant--advanced towards the owner of the schooner, and the following questions and answers were exchanged:

"This schooner belongs to the Count d'Artigas, to whom, I presume, I have the honor of speaking?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is her name?"

"The Ebba."

"She is commanded by?--"

"Captain Spade."

"What is his nationality?"

"Hindo-Malay."

The officer scrutinized the schooner's flag, while the Count d'Artigas added:

"Will you be good enough to tell me, sir, to what circumstance I owe the pleasure of your visit on board my vessel?"

"Orders have been received," replied the officer, "to search every vessel now anchored in Pamlico Sound, or which attempts to leave it."

He did not deem it necessary to insist upon this point since the Ebba, above every other, was to be subjected to the bother of a rigorous examination.

"You, of course, sir, have no intention of refusing me permission to go over your schooner?"

"Assuredly not, sir. My vessel is at your disposal from peaks to bilges. Only I should like to know why all the vessels which happen to be in Pamlico Sound to-day are being subjected to this formality."

"I see no reason why you should not be informed, Monsieur the Count," replied the officer. "The governor of North Carolina has been apprised that Healthful House has been broken into and two persons kidnapped, and the authorities merely wish to satisfy themselves that the persons carried off have not been embarked during the night."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed the Count, feigning surprise. "And who are the persons who have thus disappeared from Healthful House?"

"An inventor--a madman--and his keeper."

"A madman, sir? Do you, may I ask, refer to the Frenchman, Thomas Roch?"

"The same."

"The Thomas Roch whom I saw yesterday during my visit to the establishment--whom I questioned in presence of the director--who was seized with a violent paroxysm just as Captain Spade and I were leaving?"

The officer observed the stranger with the keenest attention, in an effort to surmise anything suspicious in his attitude or remarks.

"It is incredible!" added the Count, as though he had just heard about the outrage for the first time.

"I can easily understand, sir, how uneasy the authorities must be," he went on, "in view of Thomas Roch's personality, and I cannot but approve of the measures taken. I need hardly say that neither the French inventor nor his keeper is on board the Ebba. However, you can assure yourself of the fact by examining the schooner as minutely as you desire. Captain Spade, show these gentlemen over the vessel."

Then saluting the lieutenant of the Falcon coldly, the Count d'Artigas sank into his deck-chair again and replaced his cigar between his lips, while the two officers and eight sailors, conducted by Captain Spade, began their search.

In the first place they descended the main hatchway to the after saloon--a luxuriously-appointed place, filled with art objects of great value, hung with rich tapestries and hangings, and wainscotted with costly woods.

It goes without saying that this and the adjoining cabins were searched with a care that could not have been surpassed by the most experienced detectives. Moreover, Captain Spade assisted them by every means in his power, obviously anxious that they should not preserve the slightest suspicion of the Ebba's owner.

After the grand saloon and cabins, the elegant dining-saloon was visited. Then the cook's galley, Captain Spade's cabin, and the quarters of the crew in the fore-castle were overhauled, but no sign of Thomas Roch or Gaydon was to be seen.

Next, every inch of the hold, etc., was examined, with the aid of a couple of lanterns. Water-kegs, wine, brandy, whisky and beer barrels, biscuit-boxes, in fact, all the provision boxes and everything the hold contained, including the stock of coal, was moved and probed, and even the bilges were scrutinized, but all in vain.

Evidently the suspicion that the Count d'Artigas had carried off the missing men was unfounded and unjust. Even a rat could not have escaped the notice of the vigilant searchers, leave alone two men.

When they returned on deck, however, the officers, as a matter of precaution looked into the boats hanging on the davits, and punched the lowered sails, with the same result.

It only remained for them, therefore, to take leave of the Count d'Artigas.

"You must pardon us for having disturbed you, Monsieur the Count," said the lieutenant.

"You were compelled to obey your orders, gentlemen."

"It was merely a formality, of course," ventured the officer.

By a slight inclination of the head the Count signified that he was quite willing to accept this euphemism.

"I assure you, gentlemen, that I have had no hand in this kidnapping."

"We can no longer believe so, Monsieur the Count, and will withdraw."

"As you please. Is the Ebba now free to proceed?"

"Certainly."

"Then au revoir, gentlemen, au revoir, for I am an habitué of this coast and shall soon be back again. I hope that ere my return you will have discovered the author of the outrage, and have Thomas Roch safely back in Healthful House. It is a consummation devoutly to be wished in the interest of the United States--I might even say of the whole world."

The two officers courteously saluted the Count, who responded with a nod. Captain Spade accompanied them to the gangway, and they were soon making for the cruiser, which had steamed near to pick them up.

Meanwhile the breeze had freshened considerably, and when, at a sign from d'Artigas, Captain Spade set sail again, the Ebba skimmed swiftly through the inlet, and half an hour after was standing out to sea.

For an hour she continued steering east-northeast, and then, the wind, being merely a land breeze, dropped, and the schooner lay becalmed,



her sails limp, and her flag drooping like a wet rag. It seemed that it would be impossible for the vessel to continue her voyage that night unless a breeze sprang up, and of this there was no sign.

Since the schooner had cleared the inlet Captain Spade had stood in the bows gazing into the water, now to port, now to starboard, as if on the lookout for something. Presently he shouted in a stentorian voice:

"Furl sail!"

The sailors rushed to their posts, and in an instant the sails came rattling down and were furled.

Was it Count d'Artigas' intention to wait there till daybreak brought a breeze with it? Presumably, or the sails would have remained hoisted to catch the faintest puff.

A boat was lowered and Captain Spade jumped into it, accompanied by a sailor, who paddled it towards an object that was floating on the water a few yards away.

This object was a small buoy, similar to that which had floated on the bosom of the Neuse when the Ebba lay off Healthful House.

The buoy, with a towline affixed to it, was lifted into the boat that was then paddled to the bow of the Ella, from the deck of which

another hawser was cast to the captain, who made it fast to the towline of the buoy. Having dropped the latter overboard again, the captain and the sailor returned to the ship and the boat was hoisted in.

Almost immediately the hawser tautened, and the Elba, though not a stitch of canvas had been set, sped off in an easterly direction at a speed that could not have been less than ten knots an hour.

Night was falling fast, and soon the rapidly receding lights along the American coast were lost in the mist on the horizon.