

been quitted by the officer in command, who, descending to the beach, preceded by two of his men, stepped into a light skiff that lay chained to the gnarled root of a tree overhanging the current and close under the battery. A few sturdy strokes of the oars soon brought the boat into the centre of the stream, when the stout, broad-built figure and carbuncled face of an officer in the uniform of the forty-first regiment, were successively recognised, as he stood upright in the stern.

"What the deuce brings Tom Raymond to us in such a hurry? I thought the order of the general was that he should on no account leave his post, unless summoned by signal," observed one of the group of younger officers who had first quitted the council hall, and who now waited with interest for the landing of their companion.

"What brings him here, can you ask?" replied one at the side of the questioner, and with a solemnity of tone and manner that caused the whole of the group to turn their eyes upon him, as he mournfully shook his head.

"Aye, *what* brings him here?" repeated more than one voice, while all closed inquiringly around for information.

"Why the thing is as clear as the carbuncles on his own face—the boat, to be sure." And the truism was perpetrated with the same provokingly ludicrous, yet evidently forced, gravity of tone and manner.

"Execrable, Middlemore.—Will you never give over that vile habit of punning?"

"Detestable!" said another.

"Ridiculous!" repeated a third.

"Pshaw! the worst you ever uttered!" exclaimed a fourth, and each, as he thus expressed himself, turned away with a movement of impatience.

"That animal, Raymond, grows like a very porpoise," remarked a young captain, who prided himself on the excessive smallness of his waist. "He thinks that, like the ground-hogs that abound on his island, he must fatten on hickory nuts. Only see how the man melts in the noonday sun. But as you say, Villiers, what can bring him here without an order from the general? And then the gun last fired. Ha! I have it.—He has discovered a Yankee boat stealing along through the other channel."

"No doubt there is *craft* of some description *in the wind*," pursued the incorrigible Middlemore, with the same affected unconsciousness.

"Ha!" returned Captain Molineux, the officer who had commented so freely upon the fat lieutenant in the boat—"Your pun, infamous as it would be at the best, is utterly without point now, for there has not been a breath of wind stirring during the whole morning."

"Pun, did you say?" exclaimed Middlemore, with well affected surprise at the charge, "my dear fellow, I meant no pun."

Further remark was checked by an impatience to learn the cause of Lieutenant Raymond's abrupt appearance, and the officers approached the principal group. The former had now reached the shore, and, shuffling up the bank as fast as his own corpulency and the abruptness of the ascent would permit, hastened to the general, who stood at some little distance awaiting the expected communication of the messenger.

"Well, Mr. Raymond, what is it—what have you discovered from your post?" demanded the General, who, with those around him, found difficulty in repressing a smile at the heated appearance of the fat subaltern, the loud puffing of whose lungs had been audible before he himself drew near enough to address the chief—"something important, I should imagine, if we may judge from the haste with which you appear to have travelled over the short distance that separates us?"

"Something very important, indeed, General," answered the officer, touching his undress cap, and speaking huskily from exertion; "there is a large bark, sir, filled with men, stealing along shore in the American channel, and I can see nothing of the gun boat that should be stationed there. A shot was fired from the eastern battery, in the hope of bringing her to, but, as the guns