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The 'Twills Rocks' and the Stubborn Captain.

It is related that many years ago, while a frigate was cruising in the Mediterranean, her commander was ordered to ascertain whether there existed, within certain lines of latitude and longitude, a shoal or reef, which had been reported as being there. The captain addressed himself to the task with all the rough earnestness of a British seaman; at the same time entertaining a strong persuasion that nothing of the kind described would be found in the position pointed out.

The officer, however, carefully treasured up his observations and reckonings; and having left the frigate, persuaded the Admiralty to send him on a second expedition, with a small vessel under his own command, in quest of the reported rock, or whatever else it might prove to be.

His voyage was successful; and he returned with the clearly ascertained information that in a certain spot in the Mediterranean there lay a dangerous sunken rock. This fact, for

direction, threatening dark strips of cloud, ran to stream over the sky, and a gale sprang up, which made the sails and cordage creak as though they would burst, while the heaving waves tossed and tried the timber of the well-compacted keel.

Night came on, and the captain paced the decks rather anxiously, and consulted with the master of the ship, whose practical skill and experience rendered him a valuable counsellor. By the light of a lantern they examined a chart, when the master, pointing to the spot whereabouts they were, exclaimed, 'Look here, sir!' There was the recently-discovered point of danger, marked down under the name of the 'Twills Rocks.'

The commander was reminded of former circumstances, and, incensed beyond description at the remembrance, burst out into a passionate speech, abusing the officer who had reported the discovery, and repeating his own determination to sail right over the spot, and so demonstrate that the whole thing was a bugbear, at the same time thumping his fist to give emphasis to his words.

On the ship speeded her way over the rolling billows, and down went the commander into the cabin to join his illustrious passengers, and to tell the story of the sunken rock, thinking to make merry at the expense of the false lieutenant.

'In five minutes,' said he, taking out his watch with a laugh, 'we shall have crossed this terrible spot!'

But the intelligence by no means awakened sympathetic merriment in the company. They were terror-stricken, while he spoke gaily. There was a pause, and then a slight grating touch of something that scratched the bottom of the noble ship—then a noise of alarm from the hatchway—then a shock—then a crash, and a quivering of the hull; and then the bursting of timbers, and the in-gushing of water—the frigate had struck, and was presently a wreck, the masts reeling over into the ocean, and the breakers threatening to swallow up all that remained of the ill-fated vessel!

With desperate energy everything possible was done to save the passengers. The boats were hauled out, and all on board embarked, and were ultimately saved, except a few drunken sailors in the hold and the commander, who would not survive his mad temerity. The last seen of the unhappy man was his white figure, bareheaded and in his shirt, looking out from the dark hull of the frigate, 'the foam bursting round her bows and stern.'

He would not believe. He had possessed the means of ascertaining the truth; he had listened to the arguments and heard the reports of others; there was evidence enough to satisfy an unprejudiced man, but he would not believe.

And is not that captain's history a parable of what is commonly occurring among mankind? Persons will not hearken to those who are wiser than themselves; but, with some fixed idea of their own which, though perfectly unfounded, nothing can move they rush on to their own destruction.

They are deluded by some falsehood they have created or adopted for themselves, while



THE COMMANDER BURST INTO A PASSIONATE SPEECH.

The undertaking was accordingly conducted in a superficial manner, and was speedily terminated by the captain declaring that the report which had occasioned the search was a perfect mistake, and originated in delusion or falsehood.

But an officer on board—a man who had accustomed himself to accurate calculations and observation—was of another mind, and felt convinced that, with more careful and prolonged examination a different result might probably be obtained. None of his arguments, however, availed with the commander, who sharply rebuked him as wanting experience and being a mere theorist.

safety in the navigation of that sea, was of course forthwith carefully marked down in the maps. For this service he was rewarded with promotion. The commander of the frigate hearing of this some time afterwards was highly incensed, and declared that the report was a fraud to get promotion, adding:

'If ever I have the keel of this ship under me in those waters again, and do not carry her clean over where the chart marks a rock, call me a liar, and no seaman to boot.'

Two years afterwards he was bound for Naples, having some public functionaries as passengers on board his vessel. One autumn afternoon, as the ship took a north-easterly