

THE CRAFTSMAN, HAMILTON, 15th MARCH, 1869.

FOR THE CRAFTSMAN.

THE CRUISE OF THE THETIS.

BY G. S.

CHAPTER I. THE DEPARTURE.

She was the tightest, trimmest, daintiest little craft that ever ran the race of Tarbert, or dropped anchor in the Pool. And her captain was the frankest, heartiest, dashingest young sailor that ever sprang up the steps of Francis Quay, or reported to Lloyd's agent, in Clarestreet. Master and vessel were well matched; and Limerick had good right to be fond of both, as she is to the present day, long after they two have been love down forever, and their joint flag ruffles but the breeze of the Infinite, or the wavelets of the Shoreless Sea.

The *Thetis* was a brigantine of 300 tons burthen, and Garrett Fitzgerald was a gentleman of twenty-eight years old. I say "a gentleman," advisedly, for he claimed close kindred with the Knights of Kerry and of Glin. A younger son, who had, between Beigh Castle and Scatterry, handled sheet and tiller since his little hands could handle anything, and to whose infant vocabulary, "port," "starbord," and "steady," were among the first lispings words that came. He had risked his whole small fortune in the purchase of the vessel, which he had named from the beautiful-haired goddess of the sea. That vessel he loved as sailors used to love their ships long ago. Nothing that he could afford was too good for her equipment or adornment. From Lough Foyle to Kinsale you could not have found another so amply found, or so completely, and even luxuriously, fitted. We should have less disasters now-a-days did our skippers carry with them as full spare suits of sound canvas, and as many serviceable sea-worthy boats as were rolled in the *Thetis*' locker, and swung from the *Thetis*' davits. And, if her saloon and state-rooms were not of the largest, they were beyond question of the cosiest; and though you may find more gilt and ginger-bread in the caddy of an Indiaman of to-day, you will look far before discovering more home-like comforts of design, or greater practical luxury of furniture.

For, you see, for this particular Fitzgerald, his ship was his castle; his whole domain was contained between his fore-castle head and his taffrail, his cabin was his keep, and his bulwarks his battlements. The analogy was not so fanciful as may appear, for the brigantine carried quite a heavy armament—six smart brass carronades shewing their saucy muzzles through the mid-ship ports, and one long nine-pounder trained aft upon the little quarter deck, capable of solid service as a stern chaser. Those were the days of our old wars with the Directory, and there was something more than the ordinary sea-risks to be faced upon each merchant voyage. It was this consideration that had given the tapering masts their long rake, that ran the main-boom so disproportionately beyond the counter, and that had set yards across forward, that seemed each to carry a permanent studding-sail boom. It was this that had sharpened the entry and tapered off the run, until the model before you deserved palpably a name not then invented, and stood confessed a clipper from stem to stern-

post. It was this two, perhaps, which lent to her captain and owner, something of the prompt resolute air of command, and proud half-defiant bearing such as might well mark a man whose life and fortune hung year by year upon his skill and courage alone. And it was this, too, that was spoken of in the easy swing of his step and the lofty carriage of his head, as in the afternoon of Tuesday the 4th May, 1795, he walked briskly down Castle Street in the English Town to his boat, moored by old Thomond Bridge.

Garrett Fitzgerald was a handsome man, as any lady in Limerick would have told you. There were not a few of those to be met in the streets or noticed in the windows that fine spring evening, any one of whom would have been grateful for more than a passing greeting. But the young sailor was pre-occupied and thoughtful beyond his wont, and it was but recognition of the slightest that marked his consciousness of the beauty for which his town so long was famed. He had parted from his companions at the door of a house in Mary Street, one of those old houses with stone balustrades and carved architraves, and flagged halls, where long ago lived and revelled the aristocracy of the soil, and laughed to confusion both Ginckel and King William. But since then its occupancy had been marvellously altered, and its old roistering character departed, while a Power mightier than was ever swayed by James, held court within its wainscoted walls. In that house was the Lodge-room of No. 13, the oldest Lodge but one (No. 12) now existing under the I. C. That room Fitzgerald had entered an hour before as a Fellow-Craft, and was now leaving as a Master Mason. So that he had, as we have seen, something solemn to think upon, making his way toward the North Strand, and laughing eyes and pouting lips had, for once, mistaken their opportunity. With a new sense of responsibility and of power, it might be of fresh difficulties and perplexities as well, with the novel rapture of one from whose vision a fresh scale has fallen, and to whom has been given a glimpse into the arcana of the Infinite undreamed before, the young Master was in no mood for idle frivolities. And his command was unusually curt as he settled down in the stern-sheets of the gig, and, grasping the tiller-ropes, gave the word "give way!"

The *Thetis* was lying just below the town, about where Wallaby Bridge now stands. The canons that hung loose in trail and clew-line told the same story as the blue-peter fluttering at the fore—that her harbour idleness was spent, and that her bows were to be shortly kissed once more with the joyous welcome of blue water. From her main floated—in the good old fashion of the day—the saltire gulls upon an argent field that has marked for so many centuries the might of the great house of Leinster. While from her peak drooped haughtily the heavy folds of the Green Ensign, which used to mark Irish vessels in the simple times before Fenianism was invented, and when an honest man and a gentleman need have no fear of misconception in combining the emblems of attachment to his native country, and of loyalty to the sovereignty of the realm.

A fleet of merchantmen was to rendezvous in the Cove on the 24th June, and sail thence under convoy for the Spanish ports of the Mediterranean. But Fitzgerald was weary of convoys, and of the