

# THE SHARK,

A RECOLLECTION OF THE WEST INDIES.

RY ANDREW L. PICKEN.

"But ah!—a shark bit through his waist,  
His heart's blood dyed the main."

BRYAN AND PEREENE.

LORD BYRON has sung so often and so well of the splendours of Italy and Greece, that every village *bas bleu* and library lounge has learnt to prate of "Egean waves" and "Adrian gondoliers," and though, I believe, his descriptions are as creditable as they are delightful, yet I must lament that his lordship had never been in the West Indies, or the beauties of the Occident would at least have shared his eulogium. He had never seen the sun setting on the blue mountains of Jamaica—rising like pyramids of opal, and gleaming with a thousand prismatic hues. He had never beheld its meridian glories sleeping upon the waveless bosom of the Caribbean sea, nor heard the wild choral songs of the turtles and manati-men, converted by the elysian softness of the land winds into the most fairy-like harmony; and though

"I ply but vainly on a broken string,"

I have at least the advantage of him in this respect. I have seen and heard both.

Of the places in the West Indies to which the varied excursions of the coasting trader may lead him, that of the gulf or inlet of Dulce, on the southern extremity of the peninsula of Yucatan, is, in every point of romantic loveliness, perhaps the most delightful. Seldom frequented, but for the purpose of inland smuggling, or log wood cutting, it presents a scene as lonely and silent as in the era of early discovery might have greeted the galleons of Alvarado and Columbus. Sometimes after scudding in a "vein of wind," as the currents are termed that prevail in those latitudes, threading the delicate windings of the inlet, like a bird upon the wing—through sounds so narrow that the cocoa-trees and palmettos that sentinel the shores are hustled and disturbed in the passage—you are bluffed up in a dead calm in the very centre of an amphitheatre of hills, clothed to their summits with luxuriant foliage, and reflected, as in a mirror, by waters as blue and translucent as the skies that hang over them. John Martin might have been *clairvoyant* of such a paradise when he dreamt of his "Naiad's Isle," or the "Temptation," for such a scene

could only have been present to the gloomy painter in his most serene and cloudless mood.

I was overtaken, during one of the last voyages of the *Mayflower*, in such place as I have described, by one of those breathless calms that are common to the last month of the dry season. The sun had declined below the superior heights, but a flood of radiance still lingered like a diadem around them, and poured lavishly through the divisions of the lower hills upon the waveless surface of the waters, affording the most fairy-like contrast of light and shade. The anchorage where we lay was "glassed in light," and the little vessel seemed like a white-winged albatross sleeping in middle air; but the shores had already darkened into a dreamy purple hue, and even the most prominent features were growing shapeless and indistinct. The fireflies were sailing across the gulf with their topaz-coloured lights, like troupes of elves, and here and there were glimpses of gypsy fires to be traced by their white winding smoke, seen flickering through the bush as the evening deepened. I had two Spanish passengers on board—as silent and unsocial as if they had supped with Trophonius—who had purchased largely at Honduras, of Sheffield and Manchester goods, and engaged me to carry them up the gulf, as far as Moodian Landing—the terminus of an Indian byroad, much used for the contraband trade—in order to evade the harbour dues of Omoa. They regarded our delay with every manifestation of impatience and dismay, and besought the aid of every saint that rose to their memory, or could be numbered on their chaplets. Night closed in, however, and the schooner floated like a log; nothing seemed stirring but the tame marmoset that was still sporting in the shrouds, as if invulnerable, either to drowsiness or fatigue, and the senores sulkily resisted every attempt I made to comfort them under their disappointment. One of them took up his guitar and played, thus affording a little music to the blue devils, while the other stretched himself out, as if for sleep, on his bales and packages; and I, after idly pacing the quarter deck,