

gradually closer, the men who were swarming in her bows doubtless wondering much what the brig meant by dawdling about in those seas with no more sail set than the jib and a corner of the spanker.

Well, when you can neither fight nor run away, you must surrender; but first I thought it would be well to show our colours. The ensign was already abaft for hoisting, and I ran it up to the peak. Scarce had its folds fluttered on the breeze when a vivid flash burst forth from the felucca's side, and a round shot screamed over my head, ricochetting in the water astern.

I ducked my head as the shot from the felucca passed over; and then I looked round (although there was nobody on deck) half ashamed. There was no reason for shame in reality. Somehow, as the adventurous readers will find by-and-by, one generally does duck at one's very first shot.

If only I could have returned the compliment! Well, there was an old iron gun sticking out of a port on the starboard side. On the other side a wooden "quaker" showed itself for the sake of uniformity, and no doubt served equally well to awe the natives—for which purpose both sham and real gun were intended.

Shot there was none left; the few there were on board had been all used when the mate and the rest of the crew were buried, but a cartridge or two were stowed away below. Why not return the note of defiance with a blank gun? It was a regular boy's idea, which may possibly account for the glee with which I ran below for the cartridge, jammed it into the gun, shook some loose powder into the vent, and then fired off the old-fashioned piece of ordnance with a red-hot poker which happened to be conveniently left inside the bars of the galley fire.

From what I know of those matters now I should say that when the gun went off I must have had a narrow squeak for life; however, it did not burst, although it made what seemed to me a tremendous noise.

Rather proud of the exploit, I looked towards the felucca. The blank gun had evidently startled or puzzled her, for she suddenly altered her course and stood away. It was but a short respite; the empty state of our decks could be plainly, too plainly, seen from her mast-head. Changing course again, she came within pistol-shot, hove to, and lowered two boats.

In despair I watched while the boats, crowded with armed men, left the felucca's side, and pulled rapidly towards the brig. When about half way they stopped. By a sort of instinct I threw myself flat on the deck behind the bulwarks. Well for me that I did so. The next moment a storm of musket-bullets whistled through the rigging.

I did not wait for a second discharge; any useless show of resistance would only bring instant death, not only on myself, but upon poor Captain Southport. So I hauled down the ensign in token of surrender, and then taking my place at the gangway, watched the approach of the boats with anything but pleasant feelings. Still, if death was to be my lot, I felt that I would rather meet it at once openly than be dragged from some place of concealment below and cruelly murdered.

As the first boat came alongside, a tall dark man in a seaman's dress, but wearing also a Spanish well-braided jacket and a crimson silk sash, sprang on board and seized me by the arm. Then, noticing my youth and unarmed state, he released me with an expression of surprise, demanding in Spanish the name of the ship and what had become of the crew.

I only shook my head. My unsuspected knowledge of Spanish had served me in good stead once before, and might do so again. With a gesture of impatience, the captain, as I soon perceived him to be, called to his side from among the swarm of men who covered the deck of

my poor little brig, and repeated the question through him as an interpreter. This black fellow, I found subsequently, had been a slave, captured and liberated by an English cruiser, and he was now showing his gratitude by joining the ranks of the enslavers of his countrymen.

I spoke the simple truth in reply.

"All dead of fever, except the captain and myself, and the captain was only just now recovering."

"Any English man-of-war met with lately?"

How keenly the Spaniard looked at me as he asked that question, and how I should have liked to be able to reply,

"Yes, you rascal, there is one coming down upon you within a few hours' sail."

But here again I could only speak the truth, and say, "No."

They left me alone after this, the Spanish captain evidently relieved by the answer to his last inquiry, and thinking me, apparently, too insignificant to do any harm.

Then the plundering went on, but the cargo, though valuable, was not easy to remove while both vessels were at sea, and a sort of council of war was held to decide as to its disposal. Now came in my knowledge of Spanish; for, leaning unnoticed over the side, I was able to make out a good deal of what was said, although many remarks of course escaped me.

The felucca, I found, was on her way to a river a good deal south of the Camaroons, where she would ship her slaves, the factory being situated up a creek, in whose sluggish mangrove-bordered waters a dozen pirates or slavers might lie concealed. It was now decided that a small prize crew should be placed on board the captured brig, and that she should follow the felucca to this place of rendezvous. When once safely hidden in the intricacies of the creek the valuable part of the cargo might be removed at leisure, and the prize afterwards destroyed, if it should be thought advisable.

An under officer or mate, called Antonio, was ordered to take charge of the brig, with five of the felucca's men, quite a sufficient crew, it was thought, to navigate such a small craft as far as the river—a few days' sail at most.

"Besides," the Spaniard remarked, "there was the English boy; make him work."

I had heard all I cared for now, and was turning away, fearing to be noticed, when a question from Antonio made me once more stop to listen.

"What shall we do with this same *machacho Inglese* when we get to the creek?"

"Do?" answered his chief, with a shrug of the shoulders; "oh, anything you like. Send him on shore as a servant to the factory, or pitch him overboard among the crocodiles. What does it matter?"

"Thank you," thought I, as under cover of the brutal laugh that responded to the captain's remark, I slipped quietly away. "It is just as well to know what sort of mercy is to be expected at your hands."

It was time to see how my own captain had been faring, and I went down to the cabin rather anxiously. However, he had not been ill-treated.

"No doubt they thought me dying, and not worth taking any trouble about," he said. "Several of them came in here, just gave me a look, and then began searching in every drawer or cupboard for liquor. They didn't find any, though, and they went on deck again, growling and muttering *aarambas* without end. But I hear some boats pulling away. Is it possible the plunderers are leaving the ship?"

"Only some of them, unluckily."

Then I told the plan that I had overheard, and how a prize crew was to be left behind.