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THE AVENGER.*

A TALE OF THE WESTERN OCEAN.

By the Author of "Tough Yarns."

"Is there an offence in it?
None—none in the world!
It bears a moral."

But the mystery was soon solved by the simultaneous appearance of a number of boats; and, in a moment, before any preparations for defence could be made, the schooner was boarded in all directions by armed men, who carried every thing before them. The lieutenant grasped a hand-pike and knocked down the first man who approached, but was himself levelled by the blow of a sabre; and, whilst on the deck, several of the assailants gathered round him, each threatening his life. "He has made many a poor fellow swing!" exclaimed one; "let's make a running bow-line in the squaresail out-hauler, and land him up like a cod-fish to dry."

"Away with him—away with him!" was now the simultaneous shout; "let him die the death; and the lieutenant felt his arms firmly pinioned by a piece of stout cord, whilst a running noose was placed around his neck. "Kneel, sir, and pray," urged the third man who had spoken; "your time is but short, yet there is mercy at the eleventh hour to those who believe." To gain time the lieutenant knelt, and his assailants stood over him with their heads uncovered, fanatically repeating texts of scripture whilst meditating a deed of blood.

Hopkins, the leader of the party, had insisted, previously to boarding, that, after the crew of the schooner had been secured, they should suffer no further molestation than the loss of freedom. He, himself, had been busily engaged in getting Melicent into one of the boats, and placing combustibles in the schooner's tween-decks. The Gaspar's people were ordered to get their beds and things on deck ready for departure, and some time elapsed before he went ast; for, notwithstanding what he deemed his injuries, he felt a delicacy in insulting the lieutenant by his presence. But, observing a gang assembled, apparently doing nothing, he hastened to the spot to chide them.

"Are your prayers for mercy ended?" inquired the fanatic, who had desired the lieutenant to pray.

"How?—what is this?" exclaimed Ezekiel, as he rushed in amongst them. "Are ye men or devils? Put up your pistol, Henderson!—would you commit murder?" and with his own hand he cast off the noose from the lieutenant's neck. "Stand back, I say," for the fanatics crowded on him to stay his purpose. "Now, by yon star-lit heaven, I swear, the first who lays a finger on this officer, shall meet the fate you proposed for him." The men slowly and reluctantly retired. "Jasper," said he, to a young man who advanced, "have an eye upon those fellows—they think of nothing but blood. Let the people get their duds in readiness, and bear a-hand. Mr. D—," he continued, turning to the officer, "you see, sir, we have met again, and though you have sought my life, and would have sacrificed it, I thank my God that I have been instrumental in saving yours. Direct your servants to hand up your clothes, or any property you may wish to save, for another hour will see this schooner burned down to the water's edge."

"You have performed a noble act, young man," said the lieutenant, "and I am grateful for it; nor can I prove my gratitude better than by earnestly and solemnly entreating you to withdraw these wilful and mistaken men, and return to your allegiance to your sovereign."

"You probably mean well, sir," returned Hopkins, "but it is an idle waste of breath. I give you, sir, one quarter of an hour to prepare for departure; by that time —," he checked himself, and left the officer to his own discretion.

At the expiration of the allotted period, the schooner's men were ordered into their boats—the combustibles were fired—the smoke and flame came pouring up the hatchways—the boats shoved off—and, in another quarter of an hour, the raging element enveloped the schooner in one large and continuous mass of fire. Ezekiel and his select friends landed at the cove, and accompanied Melicent to the cottage. They found the neighbourhood aroused by the flames; and fearfully grieved the red blaze on the smooth surface of the dark waters, till one sudden explosion tossed the burning fragments into the air, and then all settled into obscurity and gloom. The inmates of the cottage were in unutterable distress—the disappearance of her daughter had distracted Mrs. Hargood—her protracted absence increased the malady under which she was labouring, and nature was making its last struggle when the party arrived. She lived but to know her child, to stretch forth her feeble hands to dispense the unheard blessing, and closed her eyes for ever.

Sad was the shock to the daughter of her affections, and Ezekiel knew well that immediate consolation under such a bereavement was impossible. He, however, had a short interview with Melicent, and, having consigned her to the care of a respectable widow lady who resided in the neighbourhood, he hastened away to join his comrades. The burning of the schooner was considered so during an act, that government offered a reward of five hundred pounds for the discovery and conviction of those engaged in it; but though many of them were known, and publicly walked the streets of Providence, no one could be found to give evidence against them. The lieutenant was severely wounded, and underwent a protracted confinement, but ultimately recovered. As soon as a decent interval had elapsed, Hopkins (who had given up his West India voyage) was united to Melicent, and the cottage continued to be her home, though it was but seldom, and then in secret, that her husband could share it with her.

Affairs grew worse and worse between the colonies and the parent country. The land-forces were increased, large naval armaments spread along the coasts, and commerce was so restricted, especially in the province of Massachusetts, that the merchants beheld the advance of ruin, which they felt it impossible to check or to avoid. The unloading of the tea-ships, and the destruction of their cargoes, to the amount of twenty thousand pounds, in the port of Boston (in which Hopkins took a leading part, the assailants being disguised as Mohawk Indians), brought down heavier vengeance on that town; so that the lading or unloading of any goods or merchandise, except stores for his majesty's service, was entirely prohibited, and several ships of the line arrived to enforce the prohibition.

"We have no alternative, Jasper," said Ezekiel to the young man, who has been already introduced in the attack upon the schooner; "the seamen are fast quitting the port, for they will not starve. Wretchedness to those we love is engraven on the scroll of our destiny—we have no alternative. What say you, then, if we make out our own commissions, and hoist our own flag!"

"Your course is mine," returned Jasper. "I wish to steer by no other than the compass in your binnacle. We have been shipmates and messmates from boyhood, and I am ready to hold on by you to the last."

"It shall be so," exclaimed his companion. "These Englishers shall not have it all their own way upon the

ocean—there shall be AN AVENGER afloat upon the deep; and though they may call us pirates, what is there in a name?"

A few months subsequent to this, orders were issued to the different men-of-war upon the station, directing that a strict look-out should be kept for a remarkably fine flush-deck ship, that had fitted out at Nantucket as a whaler, but had secretly taken in arms and ammunition to cruise as a pirate. She mounted eighteen long brass twelve-pounders, with a long thirty-two pounder a-midship, on a traversing carriage; was well supplied with whale-boats, and had a crew of one hundred and forty men, principally belonging to Boston, Providence, and Nantucket. She was a remarkably fast sailer, and had already committed several acts of aggression against the cruisers in the service of his majesty—in fact, for speed and daring, nothing could surpass the FIERCE AVENGER: even her colours gave indications of her character, as they showed bloody stripes upon a white field. Accounts from the Gulf of Florida teemed with the desperate acts of the marauders. British ships, both outward and homeward bound, were plundered, but personal property was respected, and cruelty was never shown.

Great alarm prevailed amongst the merchants, and anxious inquiries were constantly made at the seaports, under a hope that some of the British cruisers would fall in with and take her; but no information was obtained of her proceedings for several months, till the news was communicated that a ship answering her description had been seen off Cape Cod, where she had boarded a government transport, and amply supplied herself with ammunition and stores. The cruisers were immediately on the alert; two frigates sailed from Boston to look for the outlaw, but no tidings could be gained of her beyond his having been seen off Nantucket, and even as far in the bight as Martha's Vineyard; but nothing further was known, as it did not appear that he had held any communication with the shore, and, as he stood out to sea under a press of canvass, it was conjectured that he had proceeded on another cruise.

Melicent Hopkins had remained at the cottage respected and beloved by her neighbours, who now looked upon her as one of themselves. She had given birth to a fine boy, whose resemblance to his father she loved to contemplate as a source of never-ending gratification—but with it came a woman's fears for a husband's safety. She knew the perilous occupation in which he was engaged, and sickly apprehension would oftentimes sadden the pleasure of witnessing the innocent and infantile tricks of her smiling boy. Report had, from time to time, spread information of Ezekiel's "whereabouts. Mr. Hancock, of Boston, had repeatedly communicated all the intelligence he could glean, and she cherished the hope that brighter, happier days would yet dawn upon them. Terror would sometimes agitate and distress her when she thought of her husband's danger, and the large reward (fifteen hundred pounds) that was offered for his apprehension.

Melicent was sitting in her little parlour nursing her sleeping infant. The lamp shed forth its shining light,—the curtains at the windows were drawn, when a neighbour called in to say that her husband had just arrived from Boston, and brought intelligence that the fierce pirate "The Avenger," was on the coast. Melicent trembled in every limb—she laid her boy in his wicker dormitory, whilst agitation forced the perspiration from every pore. She struggled to be tranquil, but the mingled feelings of hope and dread overpowered her, and she sank to the earth. The kind neighbour raised her up—a flood of tears brought relief, her mind new strengthened, an

*Concluded from last week.