

"MY HAT."

A YANKEE TALE.

(Continued from the last number.)

You will please—and as if undesignedly—rub your forehead with the little finger of your left hand: if the individual is the right person, he will do the same with the small finger of the right hand. As a further precaution, afterwards repeat a numeral—any one—three times, as 5, 5, 5. If the individual, man or woman, responds by doubling the number you employed, as 10, 10, 10, you may consider you are in safe company. One more direction and I shall wish you *bon voyage*, for the train is about to start. If any one—I mean, of course, of those who have been tested and found genuine—should express himself thus, or in any similar manner,—“Would you like to, take a trip to Jamaica, to Gaudaloupe, to Bermuda, or any other place? consider that the necessities of our business require your presence at the place indicated. That is all I have to say. Good-bye,” said he, extending his hand.

At this moment his eye rested on my hat, and he burst out laughing! “I see,” said the baronet, “you wear your favorite hat. You have quite an affection for that article. My experience teaches me that we are most likely to lose the things we most prize, and I’ll wager you a hundred dollars you don’t bring that hat back with you.”

“Done,” said I, “and I hope the head will come in it.” But of the latter I must confess, and no wonder, that I had some doubt.

The train was moving, and in a moment I was off—on as pretty a game of blind-man’s-buff as ever was played in doors or out. I must not forget to mention that the baronet had remembered that I must eat, drink and be housed on my peregrinations, and had provided accordingly most liberally.

Of my meditations on the rail, I can only say that they were about as wild and obscure as my errand; and *that*, as well as I could judge, was to a wilderness without so much as a deer track to guide me. I arrived in New York in due course, and was soon in the presence of the gentleman to whom I was directed, in the same manner that any package of goods might have been. As I am writing this solely for my own amusement, I shall not attempt a description of this gentleman, (call him, for the present, Mr. Dubeledge) nor of the palace in which he resided, nor of the wondrous splendour that surrounded him. I shall not waste a word about his wife’s diamonds, nor his daughter’s charms, but keep a strict eye on business, and let nothing divert my attention. On my meeting with Mr. Dubeledge, I had gone through my pantomime as directed, and then, gravely represented my numeral. Mr. D. duly responded, and we understood each other—that is, if it can be called understanding, when one party knows all and the other nothing.

This over, Mr. Dubeledge commenced a general conversation by remarking, “You have arrived at a very opportune time, for I shall have the pleasure of introducing you to the most distinguished officer of our glorious naval service, who dines with us to-day. By the bye, our dinner hour is close at hand. We’ll step up stairs for a minute and trim ourselves.”

Up stairs we went, and when I came down again, the company had assembled in the dining room. It comprised my host’s wife and daughter, and a gentleman, in a naval uniform, who had just arrived as I entered, and was speaking to Mrs. Dubeledge. I heard him say, “Permit me most cordially to thank you, for procuring me the command which I so much desired. On the West India station, I hope to be able to do our glorious republic good service, and to repay the Britishers the little debt I owe them for the Trent business.”

My host looked a little glum, and stopped the officer by introducing me, with all ceremony,—name, country, allegiance, &c., &c.—to, as he phrased it, “The most illustrious naval hero of modern times, whose name is a terror to the enemies of our great, free, and happy republic; in a word, to Commodore W.—kes.”

Awed, as I was, by the distinguished presence in which I stood, I managed, in some way or other, to acknowledge the honour conferred on me; but I must confess, as I listened to my host’s glowing eulogium, that reminiscences of Nelson, Collingwood, Napier, and a hundred others, arose vividly before me, and I could not avoid comparing their exploits with the brilliant stoppage of an unarmed vessel on the high seas. They were dissipated by the dinner, to which we at once sat down. And it certainly was a noble dinner, seasoned, perhaps, a little with the ostentation, which was not very unnatural at the table of a great merchant and contractor, into whose coffers, gold was flowing in a wide and continuous stream.

I have neither time, inclination, nor ability, to describe a feast, at which, I presume, Apicius would have sat contented; and, as the parties at table, had, in so far as I was aware, only a very slight connection with the purpose of my errand, it is hardly worth while to stay my narrative to pourtray them. I may, however, just mention, that the Commodore was middle-aged, and gentlemanly in his manners. My host was in the same period of life, frank, free and hospitable, to an extreme; but a closer survey indicated that he possessed in no ordinary degree, what is known in all the markets of the world, as Yankee shrewdness. Of the ladies, I can only say that Mrs. D. was a full-blown rose, haughtily amiable, and condescendingly dignified, fit mate for a golden spouse. Miss D. was

pretty, crammed full of accomplishments, and most delightfully patronizing to the obscure and unknown stranger; and both were as fine as silk and satin, laces and embroidery, gold and jewels, could make them. The conversation, as may be anticipated, was mainly on the war, and on matters thereunto pertaining. An occasional outburst of anti-English bile was checked, as I plainly perceived, in deference to me. The only conversation during dinner, of which I took particular notice, was commenced by the Commodore, and was as follows:—“Those guns that were last distributed to the fleet are villainous,—they are actually more dangerous to ourselves than to our enemies,—most of them burst the first time they are fired. And as to the clothing, it is such atrocious shoddy, that a moderate breeze blows it clean off a man’s back and leaves him naked!”

Mr. Dubeledge, slightly embarrassed, replied, “No doubt, Commodore, you are quite correct. Unfortunately, such are our necessities, that we are compelled to trust for these things to those rascally Bri— European manufacturers. But our time will come. Strange things happen now-a-days, Commodore: it is just possible these particular articles were shipped for the Confederates.”

“What! what!” exclaimed the Commodore.

“Yes! I believe there are cases where blockade-runners, finding it impossible to get into a Southern port, have run for New York, and landed their cargoes there.”

“The devil!” said the Commodore. “That must be seen to.”

People do not sit long at dinner in New York; they are too busy, and the Commodore had half a dozen engagements during the evening. He had to be present at a public meeting; to receive an ovation at a theatre; to attend a monster oyster supper; to bow to a torch-light procession; to write a patriotic address; and to keep awake to be serenaded. This is nothing uncommon in the career of an American idol: the worship may be short, but, while it lasts, it is very sharp.

We rose from table. The Commodore bade the ladies farewell. Mr. Dubeledge and myself accompanied him to the hall.

“By the bye,” said our host, as he shook hands with the officer, “when do you sail, Commodore?”

“To-morrow.”

“My friend here, (meaning myself), who has a little spare time on his hands, is desirous of a cruise among the West India Islands. Will you give him a passage? I believe it is a matter of indifference to him where he is landed.”

The Commodore very willingly and very cheerfully expressed his readiness to serve Mr. Dubeledge or myself in any way in his power.

The next morning Mr. Dubeledge handed me several letters of introduction to gentlemen in the Islands, and recommended me to lose no time in getting on board, as the Commodore would sail immediately on the receipt of despatches from Washington. I accepted his advice, and was soon on the deck of the N—, a splendid steam corvette of 16 guns. The Commodore was not on board when I arrived, but I was expected, and the officer in charge politely directed me to a cabin, replete with every comfort and convenience. The Commodore came off about noon: the ship had been hove short, and we were very soon under weigh and steering for sea. It was understood that we sailed under sealed orders. So soon as the duty of the ship admitted, the Commodore joined me in my walk on the quarter-deck. Our conversation was of a general character; a great deal about Canada, a little about the war, very little about myself, and nothing at all about the object of my trip. I observed the brisides rising as England chanced to be mentioned, and, as she was quite able to take care of herself, I let her alone thereafter. Early in our conversation I had tried my talismanic pantomime. No result. Evidently the Commodore was not among the initiated. We were not long kept in doubt as to our destination. The land run down, we were to look at our orders. This soon occurred, and we found that we were to make the best of our way for Cuba. Our commander was directed to pick up all the ships he fell in with, look in at the Havannah, and have a few words with the Dons,—who, it appeared, had been rather too polite to the Confederates, and economic in their attentions to the Federals.—We soon reached our destination. A cruise over these summer seas is delicious when the stormy winds do (not) blow. But they are like many quiet, easy-tempered people: rouse them and they are terrible! Fortunately for us, they were all smiles as we dashed over their silvery depths. On our arrival in port, as the Commodore did not invite me to conduct his negotiations, I bade himself and his officers,—from whom I had received the greatest kindness and attention during our voyage, farewell,—and went ashore. Of the result of his friendly call, accompanied by ten ships and 200 guns, I say nothing, for I know nothing; but presume it was satisfactory, for the Grandees were excessively polite. There was feasting without limit, drinking without stint, speech-making without end, and as much powder wasted as there was in any one of Pope’s victories.

Among Mr. Dubeledge’s letters there was one addressed to Don Pedro Ribeira, of the Havannah. I soon found my way to this gentleman’s residence, and, once more, was most courteously received by a merchant prince. The record of my adventures in Cuba can be embraced in a couple of sentences.

(To be continued.)