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## THE AVENGER.

A TALE OF THE WESTERN OCEAN.

By the Author of "Tough Yarns."

"Is there no offence in it?  
None—none in the world!  
It bears a moral."

A beautiful bay is the Bay of Massachusetts, with its many inlets and snug coves, and the numerous sunny islets that seem to have quarrelled with the main land, and shoved off to rest upon the bosom of the waters in peace and quietness. With what delight must the persecuted victims of intolerance and bigotry have hailed this refuge after a long voyage! And yet, though driven from the place of their nativity for conscience sake—though their very existence had been held at a price in the home that gave them birth, the love of country still predominated: the treasured name which commanded respect from all the world was cherished with sentiments of pride, and New England became the dwelling of the strangers who had no wealth but industry, no mines but the rich alluvial soil that was to give them daily bread. The early settlers were but few, and these were much diminished by the attacks of the Indians; yet the accounts brought over to England of the fertility of the earth, induced other adventurers to bid farewell to the white shores of Albion, and cross the ocean to the western world. The arbitrary measures of Charles, and the unrestrained oppression of Laud, soon so swelled the number of the expatriated, that one of our historians observes, "in about twenty years after the first settlement, four thousand families, consisting of upwards of twenty-one thousand souls, passed into New England in two hundred and ninety-eight vessels."

The period of which I write, is nearly one hundred and fifty years subsequent to the first landing in Massachusetts Bay, when labour and ingenuity had done more for the hardy settlers than the coveted gold mines of the Spaniards could have effected.

It is no part of my intention in this narrative to touch further upon politics than facts, and the interest of the incidents may require; but it is certain, that the statesmen of Great Britain never committed a more egregious mistake than when they framed obnoxious laws (knowing them to be such) for a distant colony, without either physical strength or moral influence to enforce obedience.

Taxation to a certain degree commenced its career, when, by an act passed in the sixth of George II., duties were imposed on rum, sugar, and molasses, imported into the colonies; but this was evaded by illicit traffic, and no one considered himself disgraced by carrying it on. Smuggling produced a hardy, bold, and intrepid race of seamen, who set the laws at defiance; and numerous men-of-war were stationed along the coast, and in the West Indies, solely for the purpose of repressing it; so that the expense of prevention must have counterbalanced the receipt of customs. Besides, as a considerable portion of the prize was divided among the captors, it was, in many instances, a premium for unjust detention and conviction; and the hatred which grew up between the crews of the men-of-war, and those of the free-trade, was of the most deadly nature.

The accession of George III. to the throne, was the occasion selected by the ministry to attempt that which the wary Sir Robert Walpole had acknowledged he did not possess sufficient courage to undertake, viz. the stamp-act on the British colonies. The settlers were aroused to determined resistance, and the most resolute amongst them were those of Massachusetts Bay. The law was rendered null and void through the hardihood of its opponents, and the alarm of those appointed to administer it. At length,

from the impossibility of effecting the design, the stamp-act was repealed, and its repeal was hailed as a great moral victory, achieved by daring bravery; and thus two important truths were at once impressed upon the conviction of the colonists. First, it was considered as the triumph of right principles over an unjust enactment; and, secondly, it showed them their own power of resisting what they looked upon as oppression. Other modes of taxation, however, were resorted to—the coast-guard was kept up with increased vigilance—an American board of admiralty was established—and extraordinary powers granted to the officers of the navy to enforce the revenue laws.

Amongst the most active of the king's cruisers was the Gaspar schooner, commanded by Lieut D—, a man extremely rigid in the execution of his duty, and indefatigable in his researches after contraband goods. He was also a great stickler for national honour, and compelled all vessels not carrying a pennant to salute his majesty's schooner as they passed, either by striking their colours, or lowering their loftiest sails. Such conduct (and which is reputed to have been exercised with great severity), caused him to be the object of much ill-will. His station was off Rhode Island, and he had, on several occasions, detained the craft, and considerably impeded the traffic, of Mr. John Hancock, a merchant of high standing and great influence in the town of Boston, and who had early taken a leading part against the enactments of the British legislature, so that his fellow-townsmen looked up to him for advice and assistance in cases of emergency. It cannot but be supposed that all in the employ of such a man imbibed from him the same inflexible principles, and the same unchanging love of liberty; but in none did the feeling glow with more fervour and stability than in the breast of one of his young men—Ezekiel Hopkins of Nantucket.

A few miles from, and below, the town of Providence, on the shore of a snug little bay, stood a rustic cottage, that, for beauty of situation and neatness of appearance, might have vied with many a modern erection of a similar nature on our own shores. It was inhabited by the widow of a deceased officer in his majesty's service, and her only daughter, an interesting and pretty girl of nineteen, who had attracted the attention of Lieutenant D—, of the Gaspar, and gained his admiration as far as it was in his nature to cherish the passion. But Melicent Hargood entertained no responsive sentiment, for her affections had already been bestowed upon Ezekiel Hopkins, then not only one of the best looking young men of the day, but acknowledged to be the foremost in every gallant feat or perilous exercise; and though the lieutenant was graciously sanctioned and supported as a staunch royalist and naval officer by Mrs. Hargood, whose husband had been both, Ezekiel found a much stronger ally in the young lady's heart, notwithstanding he had been forbidden the house, and only paid his visits by stealth. It may naturally be concluded, that strong hostility and angry feeling pervaded the mind of each of the suitors. The lieutenant however, relying on his rank, and the assurances of the mother, treated his rival with contempt; whilst Ezekiel, being of sanguine temperament, could not brook the haughty demeanour and rudeness of the schooner's commander.

It was in the twilight of lovely evening, the sun had disappeared behind the mountains, but the sky was still glowing with his radiance, when a whale-boat pulled up along shore, and landed Ezekiel in a small grotto-like cave, about a mile from the cottage, where it left him, and pursued its course to the town. The young man leaped upon the beach, and stood concealed behind a jutting point

of rock, that had often served him on a similar occasion. He did not wait long, for a white muslin dress fluttered in the breeze—Melicent turned the projecting point, and in an instant, was in the arms of her warm-hearted lover.

"My own noble-minded lady," exclaimed Ezekiel, "you have not then been induced to forget your humble sailor for that tyrannical man, who claims you as his right because he wears the king's uniform."

"Hush, Ezekiel," returned the maiden, "perhaps I have come to tell you that our correspondence must end, and Lieutenant D—, is to be my future guardian."

"Nay, Melicent, nay," rejoined the young man with impassioned energy, "you cannot mean it. You love him not—he is a stranger to such a holy sentiment—and would you, dare you, Melicent," he uttered solemnly, "give your hand, and bind yourself to one whom you must loathe? No, no, dearest," added he, "you have conjured up a phantom, merely to chill my blood on this warm and beauteous evening. Speak, dearest, speak! Is the rest of my existence to be bound in shallows and in misery, without one sunny smile to break in upon the dark tempests of the soul? Nay, nay, you are but trifling with me."

"Indeed, indeed, Ezekiel," remonstrated she, as the rolling tears formed a channel down her pale cheek, "I would not have so thoughtlessly expressed myself, could I have foreseen my foolish words would thus have stirred you. No, Ezekiel, I am unchanged, and unchangeable, though——"

She was stopped by a wild and hysterical burst of laughter from the young man, which echo repeated in many unnatural sounds; as he strained her to his heart, and then sinking on his knees, as the big drops oozed from every pore with previous agony, and his eyes were dim with the overflowing of succeeding joy, he uttered, "Gracious Heaven, I thank thee!" He bowed his head upon his hands, and the strong man wept like a child.

"Since last we met, Melicent," said he, as soon as his emotion had subsided, "I have had an interview with that haughty officer—he has seized my vessel—put me in gaol—threatened me with the heaviest penalties, and, so help me Heaven! unjustly; for my only fault was not striking my colours to him. I have escaped from prison, love, through the assistance of some old ship-mates, and here I am, that you may read my fate. Say, love—oh! speak the words again, that your affection is unchanged, and unchangeable."

"It is, Ezekiel—it is," returned she, as her white arm was thrown over his shoulder, and her pallid cheek was pressed to his breast. "My Creator will bear witness to constancy and truth. Yet, Ezekiel, I am hourly urged by my mother to accept the lieutenant's offers. He has even been to the cottage this afternoon, and probably may be there at this very moment. I am beset with trials—the people look upon us with suspicious eyes as being royalists—and oh, Ezekiel! were you but in the same cause——"

"Avast!" exclaimed the young man, with a shudder at the proposal; but instantly recollecting himself, he uttered, "Forgive me, my own love! circumstances have made me impetuous, and I forget myself. I am no enemy to your king, Melicent—no traitor to his crown: it is the false friends to both that are inking him to think ill of subjects that would reverence his person, and respect his authority. But I am a man, Melicent—God has made me a man; and I will not be a slave to crouch and bend to my fellow-creatures. My ancestors were driven from their country and their home. They arrived here, destitute and friendless; planted the soil, reaped the fruits, and became independent. Is their industry to be taxed for