

by the alluring vision which their captain had held up to them. The splendid hopes had faded, which, in the early part of their voyage, they had conjured up of the glorious lands they hoped to discover—the Christian domains of Prester John, the report of whose magnificence had reached them in their far-off homes, and where they hoped to meet the welcome of brethren, and to establish those commercial relations which should place their country on a level with, if not above, the republics of Italy, which had so long monopolized the trade of the coast. But cold, anxiety, watching and fear, had dimmed the hope which at first burned so steadily in the breasts of these hardy mariners, tossed on an unknown ocean, far out of sight of land, with naught to guide them but the compass, that wonderful instrument, the new-found friend of the mariner, which they had hardly known long enough to trust. They were saddened, and ready to relinquish all hope of future gain, could they only once more return to their home and country. The captain had watched with deep anxiety, from day to day, the increase of this spirit of discontent, which he could but too plainly read in the bent brows, the heavy steps, and sullen replies of his men; but his own indomitable spirit was uncrushed, and each morning dawned with fresh hope upon him, but each night came with disappointment. By the calculations he had made during his voyage, he thought he could not be far from realizing his hopes; and the very storm which he was now encountering, convinced him that he was in that “sea of tempests” which drove back his predecessor, Bartholomew Diaz, ere half his purpose was accomplished.

The few words which the captain had heard on the evening on which our history commences, had alarmed him. Pietro and Miguel, he had trusted in, as the most faithful of his followers; and when he found they too were infected with the feeling of distrust, which had been so long silently expressed by the others, he trembled lest the fruits of his perseverance might be snatched from him, before he had time to pluck them; but he determined to keep a steady watch, and not to be surprised into any change of plan.

The storm continued to rage throughout the night and the following day, and the tossed barque made but little progress; fortunately, her companions kept pace with her, and the weariness was a little softened by the constant exchange of signals. At the close of the second day, the storm ceased, the wind died away, a heavy calm settled upon every thing—but all was still dark and hopeless. The very clouds seemed to brood over the unhappy vessel. The commander paced

the deck till long after midnight, looking in vain for some glimmering of light, some friendly star peeping forth from the night of darkness, to encourage him with its first beams, with the hope of a brighter morrow, but in vain. At last, wearied and exhausted, he retired to his cabin, and all on board the vessel was profound silence. Soon, however, two or three dark forms were seen emerging with stealthy steps from behind the ropes and bulwarks, where they had been ensconced. They met at the helm, held a short, whispered conference, and then proceeded towards the cabin. They opened the door, which was unfastened, and saw their commander sitting at a table, tracing his way upon some charts that lay before him. A pair of the rude pistols of the time, and a cutlass, were by him. As he heard the door open, he sprang up, seized one of the pistols, and cried:

“Stand! Come no nearer, or ye are dead men! What mean you by thus coming upon me at this hour?”

At his threatening words, the men shrank back for a moment, but Miguel was at their head, and he was not easily daunted.

“I tell you boldly, Captain, that we come for your life, or your promise to turn with tomorrow’s sun, to our homes; and we will not leave you without one or the other.”

“Miguel!” said the commander; “why do you stir up this disturbance? I am doing all I can for you; but I tell you I will never be forced to give up the glorious prospect before me, without a longer effort to accomplish it. But I am willing to concede so much,—that if in one week, with fair wind, we do not meet with land, I will alter my direction.”

“You have too long deceived us,” said Miguel; “the cry of ‘land ho!’ has been too often shouted in our night watches, for us again to trust you, and I repeat, unless you will promise us on the dawn of day to retrace your steps, we must and will put some one in your place who will do our bidding.”

“Never!” firmly said the captain.

“You have signed your own death warrant,” said the desperate sailor, and drawing a small knife from his belt, he sprang forward, but ere he could reach the captain, the loaded pistol was discharged with true aim, and he fell upon the floor, the life-blood gushing from his mutinous heart. His few followers looked aghast, and seemed at first to give way, but Fernando, uttering a cry of revenge, leapt over the body of his comrade, and seized the captain, who, snatching up the other pistol, levelled it at his new assailant, and fired. But it was faithless to its trust, and