

"MY HAT."

A YANKEE TALE.

(Continued from the last number.)

I dined, slept and breakfasted at Don Pedro's mansion. He provided me with a horse, and himself accompanied me to point out the more remarkable places and views in and around the Havannah. I should have mentioned before, that, immediately after he had read my letter, I had hoisted my private signals, which were duly and correctly answered. I was much amused, but more surprised. Nothing, however, occurred to throw light upon the mystery. I remarked in our ride that the course we took commanded the prospect seawards, and that my host frequently glanced anxiously that way with one eye, while the other was directed to the American squadron, with an expression fidgetty and uneasy. He perceived that I had observed this, and took me into his confidence:—"I am thinking," said he, "that if any of those rascally blockade-runners that sometimes look in here, were to arrive now, how greatly it would swell the imbroglio in which we are involved with those fellows," pointing to the American men-of-war.

"Dear me," I replied, "I should very much like to see a blockade-runner; I believe they are very remarkable vessels."

"They are; and would prove remarkably valuable prizes to our friends yonder." There was some little asperity in this remark, which I thought strange, proceeding from one who had so loudly expressed his devotion to the Federal cause.

At dinner we were honored with the company of the Commodore, who, I could see, treated my host with respect and even confidence. He was justly looked upon as one of the few friends the North had outside her own borders.

After dinner, we went to the opera. Havannah is celebrated for its opera, and we were much pleased with the performance.

The Commodore went on board his ship; I returned with the Don to my former excellent quarters. Before we retired for the night, and in the midst of a conversation on the singers we had heard, Don Pedro, rather abruptly, made the following remark:—"By-the-bye, you said you should like to see these famous blockade-runners. *Would you like to go to Jamaica?*"

"Yes—but—" I hesitated; and well might I do so, remembering Sir Marmaduke and far-off Canada.

Don Pedro resumed:—"My dear sir, I fear you suspect me of an intention to hasten your departure. Do not misjudge me. I have but given expression to a paramount desire to gratify your wishes. As the friend of my very dear friend, Mr. Dubeledge, I shall be delighted if you permit me to add, *and of myself*,—my house could not be more honored than by your presence, or myself in any way more gratified, than by your prolonged stay. Ignore what I have said; another equally convenient opportunity may arise, some months hence."

By this time I had recovered from my surprise, and the task I had undertaken stood vividly before me. I thanked the Don very warmly for his kindness, and expressed my intention of visiting Jamaica with as little delay as possible.

"If you have positively determined to go, an excellent opportunity is available; one of our war steamers sails in the morning to carry a despatch to the English Admiral. You shall go in her."

"Thank you, thank you," I returned; "I feel both honored and obliged by your kindness. I will now beg permission to retire."

At this moment the Don burst into a hearty, almost an outrageous fit of laughter. "Pray excuse me," he said, as soon as he could speak; "an idea, so exceedingly singular occurred to me, that I was unable to control myself. Mr. Dubeledge, in his letter, spoke of the extraordinary partiality—or something more—you felt for the hat you wear; and to prove to you the interest he manifests in all that concerns you, he gave me the most express injunctions to look well after the safety of the said hat; he could not have been more particular had the object been the head. You must permit me, if you please, to lock it up in the office safe until morning."

Hat or head, head or hat; I really began to have doubts as to which was of the most importance. My host was resolved to carry out his whim, and I could only follow him to his office and see this mysterious hat secured by triple locks and bolts innumerable. With another and a louder laugh, in which I was constrained to join, we separated, and I went to bed.

Very early in the morning I was aroused by my host himself. I requested him to come into my room, when he informed me he had received intelligence that the steamer would sail in an hour and that it was necessary for me to be expeditious. No easy task, for I was convulsed with laughter when I turned out and saw that he bore in his hand a magnificent silver salver, strewn with fresh cut flowers, and, in the centre, my abominable old hat. Was this burlesque or an Havanian mode of showing respect? I had not time to stop to enquire. In a very few minutes I was in sailing trim, and down stairs we ran. My host compelled me take some exquisite Curacoa, to guard against any ill effects of the morning air; his carriage was at the door; I jumped in; the Don accompanied me; we drove down to the beach; a boat was in waiting; and within a quarter of an hour I was on board the frigate and we were

threading our way through the American ships, which looked at us rather suspiciously, but said nothing. Suppose me safely landed in Jamaica. The Don had favoured me with a letter, directed to a Mr. Sinclair, of Kingston; I had also one for the same gentleman from Mr. Dubeledge. I soon found means to present my missives, and they secured me a kind and cordial reception. The signals again were understood and the responses properly given. Having read the letters, I caught Mr. Sinclair's eye, in which a serio-comic expression was perceptible enough, glancing at myself, in general, and at my hat in particular. I smiled. Mr. Sinclair did the same, but neither said a word on the object of our thoughts. Confound that hat! there really must be more in it than I am aware of. "If it was't for that hundred dollars I'd give it to a nigger." This was a mental reflection. Mr. Sinclair assured me that he would do all in his power to render my stay in Jamaica agreeable, but that, in regard to the more immediate object of my visit, he should not be able to give me any information until the next day.

The immediate object of my visit! what was it? I'm sure I knew no more about it than the Hermit of Vauxhall, the Man in the Moon or any other person, as far removed from the ever-changing stage of this sublunary sphere. I don't intend to waste much space on Jamaica. It is, at best, but a black hole, a swarthy sty, in which blacks rule, revel, and grow fat,—it is surely the white man's purgatory, the nigger's paradise.

The morrow came in due time, and in the course of the morning, Mr. Sinclair came to me with a very long face. He sincerely regretted my disappointment, and was grieved to have to inform me that there was no probability of a — blockade-runner coming into port. *Would I like to go to Hayti?* Those vessels sometimes take a circuitous course and call at strange places. "And I am likely to do the same," thought I. "These people seem to consider that the sight of a blockade-runner is a matter of life or death to me. A fig for their blockade-runners and all other smuggling scoundrels. I hope all who are caught may be brought to an intimate acquaintance with the cat." However, spite of those reflections, I yielded, not very gracefully, I daresay, to my fate, and signified, with a sigh, that moved the dust at a distance of six feet, that I should be delighted to continue my ramblings.

"I hastened to you," said Mr. Sinclair, "with my unpleasant intelligence"—our conversation took place near the harbour—"for the reason that the vessel you see yonder, with her topsails loosed, is bound for Hayti and is only waiting for the captain, who is now in my office, to be off. She belongs to me; will you condescend to accept a passage. You will find every comfort on board. The wind is fair and you will run over in no time."

It was no use struggling against fate; I again expressed consent.

A messenger was sent for my valise.

Mr. Sinclair drew a piece of whip-cord from his pocket. "Permit me—the wind is fresh—to fix a lanyard, as sailors term it, for the security of your hat."

"D—n my hat!" said I. "Good-bye, Mr. Sinclair."

"Good bye, sir; a pleasant voyage. Shall always be delighted to see you. Let me hear from you." And thus I left Jamaica to grope still further in the gloom.

This will never do! I must condense, abbreviate, cut short ruthlessly, or my narrative will grow as lengthy and as tiresome as one of James's novels.

Let me try. All went well, and we anchored in a Haytian harbour. The old enactments all over again. Introductions, signals, dinner, sleep, breakfast, kindness, distinguished attention, the immediate object of my visit, doubts, and the whole supplemented by no probability of a blockade-runner coming into port: "should you like to go to —?"

This, I think, commences compression very well; though I must confess to one grievous omission, *my hat!* an object certainly of more interest, and to which as much attention was paid as to any other person or thing appertaining to this strange eventful narrative, not excepting myself.

In the same manner I wandered from island to island; including Cuba, my journey was divided into exactly a dozen stages. What could be the object of my pilgrimage?—this was my everlasting thought. I could not connect it with business, of any kind; for business was never transacted or even mentioned. I could only conclude that I was an itinerating mark or sign, indicating, by my bodily presence, that certain things were to be done, or certain others omitted. Be this as it may, with the haze all dense about me, I found myself, at last, sleeping beneath the roof of Mr. Twislayd an eminent merchant of Nassau. Here, the scene varies, or, rather, new elements are imported into the drama. I rose in the morning with the expectation that matters would run yet further in their accustomed groove; that my host would soon approach me with his regrets and with the stereotyped phrases, "Would you like to go —?" somewhere else. But it was not to be. In my walk through the small, but bustling and important town, I chanced to pass Mr. Twislayd's offices. He saw me and invited me in. "My letters inform me," he said, "of your long and weary wanderings. But I am happy to say you have at last arrived at a place where your wish can be gratified. Of course, I look with disapprobation on the iniquitous trade of which Nassau is the head-quarters, and most carefully avoid even an indirect participation, and though I have as little as possible to do with those concerned in it, to oblige the friend of that good man and loyal patriot,