

VASCO DE GAMA.

BY T. D. F.

"With such mad seas the daring Gama fought,
For many a day, and many a dreadful night,
Incessant laboring round the stormy Cape."

It was a dark and tempestuous night. Clouds were heaped on clouds, the wind howled, the waves rose mountain high, and all was lowering and fearful, when four small ships were seen scudding with bare poles before the tempest,—no land in sight—they the only moving things on the world of waters and of darkness. The watch had been set on board these frail barques, and they moved fearlessly on their destined track, though seemingly all unable to contend with the storm which racked their joints, and whistled threateningly through their spars. In the largest of the four vessels, at whose mast-head floated, even in the night, the small ensign which marked it as the commandant's ship, were collected on this night of storms, a knot of swarthy, weather-beaten men, who, with low voices, almost smothered by the gale, were debating on some subject apparently of deep interest.

"I tell you, Pietro," said one of them, "we shall never see home again, if we go on much further with the captain. Here we have been tossing about in unknown seas, and land we have not seen for many weeks."

"Yes!" interrupted one of the others; "who ever heard of sailing away from land before? The only safe way, all the old commanders say, is to keep close in shore; but we have stretched forth till we have got where there is nothing but tempests, and still the captain cares not, but looks all the time at those maps and charts, as he calls them, which know nothing, and trusts altogether to them and the compass box. He has got us now where there is no bottom to the sea, and if we should chance to go to pieces in the storm, no hope of being saved."

"I for one," said Miguel, the first speaker, "am determined to follow no longer, and if you, Fernando, and Pietro, will stand by me, we will force the captain to return, or put another in his place. All the sailors are dissatisfied, and if we rise will join us."

"But," said Pietro, "our captain is good and kind to us; he is noble and brave, and shares all our danger; besides, he only will know how to get us home. Had we not better trust him a little longer?"

"Peace, fool!" said Miguel, angrily; "you are always for delay. I wish you had never known anything about it; I distrust you. You have not courage enough for a bold attempt."

"I do not fear, Miguel; my comrades know I can face the fire of the enemy without flinching, and you know I can dive into the waters for a friend; but I cannot be treacherous. I am homesick and heart-sick, but I love the captain, and think he has the worst of the trouble. I would rather serve him faithfully a little longer than turn upon him."

"I have given up to you before, Pietro, but I tell you I will not again. Before two days the prow of our vessel shall be turned homeward—by fair means if possible, if not, by force. I swear it! Holy Maria! heard you ever such a tempest? and our captain, kind though you call him, Pietro, sleeps quietly, while we keep watch on this fearful night."

As he spoke a heavy step was heard, and the plotters started back, as a flash of lightning showed them their commander, almost in the midst of them.

"What do you here, my men? There are more than are needed on the watch."

"When the master sleeps it behoves the men to keep double guard," growled Miguel; "and what comfort have we on this shoreless ocean, but to herd together, and talk of those homes we shall never see, and of the watery grave, or the famine death, you seem to destine us for."

"Hold, Miguel! what mean you by these angry words? What do you suffer that I do not share? Have I not left a home as dear to me as yours? Do I take any luxuries or comforts forbidden to you? This is unworthy of you, who have always been so faithful; but I forgive it: this dark night will excuse some complainings, but I trust it will herald a brighter dawn than has yet greeted us. Call now the other watch, the night requires all our care; and instead of thinking of your hardships, remember the glorious reward which will await you when we return to our beloved homes, laden with the treasures of the new kingdom, which will reward our enterprise!"

The men sulkily turned away, unbrightened