

DIGBY GRAND.

CHAPTER II.

WISTWARD HO!

It is proverbially a dispensation of Providence for manning that British navy and giving the waves and winds to the merchant service that a man should seize upon boys of tender years, irresistibly impelling them to adopt the sea as their profession, long before Nature has given them the power of judging for themselves in the knowledge of good and evil. How often do we hear the veteran seaman declare that, had he known the discomforts and miseries to be endured afloat, he would sooner have spent the prime of his manhood two hundred feet down a coal-mine than within the creaking ribs of one of Britannia's wooden walls. But loathsome as is the smell of bilge water, and the other odours that too often emanate from between decks, and uncomfortable as it most assuredly is to have no elbow-room for shaving, short allowance of fresh water for necessary ablutions, and a continually changing fulcrum to stand upon whilst you draw on your boots, yet once on deck, all such petty annoyances are discarded and forgotten. You feel the wild fresh open breeze, the same uncontaminated current that has swept without interruption over its thousand of miles to speed you on your course, the glittering waters are dancing in the sun, there is beauty on the wave and health upon the gale, and if, being a landsman, your enjoyment in all this is enhanced by the sense of variety, you are disposed to admit that, after all, a sea-life has its own peculiar charms.

'With breakfast was ready; what an appetite this sea-air gives one! said old Halberd to me, as we paced the deck of one of her Majesty's vessels denominated Government Transport, No. 7. We had been fairly in blue water for nearly a week; sea-sickness and its accompanying lassitude and misery were now completely got over; the men came readily to the tub to receive their allowance of grog, the potatoes seldom touched by an enfeebled stomach, and we had all settled down to the regularity of a sea life.

In that little speck upon the waste of waters were crowded together seven officers, including Halberd, Esquire Spooner, and myself—one lady, much admired, nay, adored, as ladies always are on board ship, and rejoicing in the name of Tims, whose husband, Captain Tims, was likewise a fellow-voyager—a hundred and fifty men, with a fair proportion of sergeants and corporals, and, fortunately, but few women—and the ship's company, numbering some most eccentric characters, and commanded by honest Captain Merryweather, the most jovial tar that ever paced his fishermen's walk, two steps and overboard, and whose round, good-humored face, and short, square, power of form ever met when I made my morning appearance with the same greeting—'Turned out early, Mr. Grand!—keep all your watches below, eh?' this piece of sea-wagery being usually followed by a sharp interrogative to the man at the wheel, 'How's her head?' 'Thank you, her head is a good deal better, and she has got quite over her sea-sickness, is the reply coming from the pale, wan face of Captain Tims, whose emaciated form is now seen slowly creeping up the hatchway, and whose innocence and inexperience mistook the honest skipper's question as to the course his old tub of a bark was steering, for a courteous inquiry after the health of his lady-wife. Up comes the steward, an important functionary, with hair curling all over his head in a profusion of clustering ringlets that would shame a poodle, and announces breakfast. At that magical word the deck is deserted, and with many compliments to Mrs. Tims, due to her early appearance, we sit down, a right merry hungry party, to our maritime fare.

'Mrs. Tims, will you be good enough to beat up another egg—we want some more milk, and that is our substitute. Major, tell the steward to fry some more ham.'

'After all, salt butter and biscuit beats everything for breakfast, says the enthusiastic Spooner, whose verdancy is a fund of amusement to the skipper. That jovial personage bursts into a hearty laugh, and promises Spooner soft Tommy when he gets to Quebec. This would-be facetious ensue

anything a fun in the country, surely anything is excitement at sea. What should we do without what?—an accomplishment that in my earliest years I foresaw it was necessary to master, and the study of which I saw turned to a tolerably profitable account.

Lauchlin is over in our little ocean-home, and the dead-lights are up, for it has been blowing rather fresh, and is evidently blowing up for a gale. The cabin is small, dark, and somewhat close, but we are roughing it now, and must not be over-particular, more especially as flirting Mrs. Tims bears all the disagreeables of a transport without a murmur, and is now sitting, in the most piquante of caps, teaching Spooner back-gammon. Alas! poor boy, with the guileless enthusiasm of eighteen, he is drinking in deep draughts of love from those mischievous blue eyes—sport to you, Julia Tims! but death (for the present) to poor Spooner; and the only knowledge he is obtaining of the venerable game is a conviction that his most unquestionable is a hit, here, in all human probability, 'a gammon.' The unassuming, accommodating Tims and myself cut as partners, and the Fates ordained that Spooner should be roused from his happy dream to join our game in the seat opposite his commanding officer, of whom he has a wholesome terror, and to endure old Halberd's row in no measured terms, when absence of mind or deficiency of memory should cause the loss of a single trick. This could play a little, and young as I was, I had already learned that skill in all games of chance or skill was the readiest method of getting out an 'indefinite' allowance, and administering to an extravagant disposition. For, with this advantage of superior play on our side, we 'walked into' our adversaries' stake to as large an amount as old Halberd's pay and allowances would stand.

Games succeeded game, and rubber gave place to rubber, and the commandant waded furiously. 'Good heaven! Spooner, you trumped your partner's best again! Couldn't you see the ace was out? Why, the devil, you should bottle up your king. Any one but a born fool would have played his knave.' Poor Spooner, sitting on thorns, because Mrs. Tims can overhear all these compliments, and at length, utterly confused by his own losses and his partner's ire, terminates his ill-fated performance by an unequivocal 'revolve,' and the major's ire blazes forth unchecked—'Go to your cabin, sir, and consider yourself under arrest; in the whole course of my experience I never met anything like this. You laugh, Mr. Grand, and well you may, for you have won a small fortune through my partner's inexplicable conduct. Nothing shall persuade me it was not done on purpose, foamed the exasperated major, 'but I'll have a Court of Inquiry. I'll try him for his commission. I'll drive him out of the service; by Jove, I will!'

Enter the poodle-headed steward to lay the cloth for dinner; the angry commandant, whose plumes are always smooth at that interesting hour, is easily appeased, and Spooner has the good taste, as his chief has the good sense, to make no further allusions to the row, the losses, and the arrest. Dinner progresses favorably, although we are compelled to put our plates upon our knees and our glasses in our pockets; for the gale is increasing, and the skipper, contrary to his usual practice, and far against his inclination, is compelled to remain on deck. Ere our meal is concluded, we are startled by the unearthly notes of a speaking-trumpet overhead, followed by a faint reply, 'We are speaking a ship'—and off we all fly to have a look at the stranger. Pitching bows under, with a double reef in her topsails, and some of her belling canvas aback to enable her to hold off and on, a dirty-looking brig looms distinctly against the dark, cloudy back-ground. Her master, in language that none but a seaman could understand, is inquiring his proper longitude, his own reckoning being of the loosest description. She is from Buenos Ayres, bound for Liverpool, and has no more business off the coast of Labrador, her present position, than we should have at Gibraltar. We set her right as to her locality, and laboring on in our diverse courses, we part, never to meet again. She is soon lost to our sight, for driving mists are scudding over the face of the waters, though an occasional warm gleam of sunshine gives a magic charm to the scene.

'What a heavenly day on shore!' says Spooner to me, as we paced the deck, smoking our after-dinner cigars, and ever and anon staggering to leeward when our grasp misses the stave that should have steadied us,

jumping after her to the rocks (not a stroke could he swim), and shutting his eyes to the probable base of drowning and inevitable cold bath that must ensue, he seemed to fancy such a catastrophe would be really delightful; then he thought of asking her to run away with him, which was certainly not very feasible whilst we all remained packed up in a ship of four hundred tons; then he fancied she might get a divorce from Tims—a quiet, easy-going husband, that suited her exactly, and to whom at heart she was really attached—and that he might marry her and sell out of the army; till at length I ventured to ask him if he had ever mentioned the subject, or had hinted his attachment at all explicitly to the lady.

'Why, no; not exactly,' said the suffering youth; 'but she is knitting me a purse, and I told her this morning that I should hate to arrive at Quebec, and I had never been so happy as when on board ship.'

'And did she take the hint?' I inquired, much amused at my companion's cautious advances.

'Why, she said she couldn't bear the sea, and was bored to death with the ship! was the reply; but then I think she did that to pique me!'

The burst of laughter with which I greeted this announcement, discomposed poor Spooner dreadfully; but I pointed out to him the absurdity of his romance, and the ridiculous mistake he was making, to suppose that the harmless flirtation, with which Mrs. Tims was amusing herself, could lead to an infatuation that should lead to sacrifice friends, home, position, and character, for the sake of a boyish greenhorn, an ensign in a marching regiment. Unpalatable as this was, it did the poor old fellow good, and I was proceeding with my lecture, in my new character of Mentor, when a cheer from below decks arose that shook the old transport from stern to stern, and looking to leeward, we descried, with a thrill I never shall forget, the first land we had ever seen since we left the coast of Britain.

Six long weeks we had been at sea, and truly it was a glorious sight. Rising like a curtain, the mist disclosed the rugged and picturesque coast of Labrador glowing in the lustre of a magnificent sunset. And oh! the richness of those varied tints to eyes so long accustomed to the weary water and the empty sky. Again and again was the cheer caught up and repeated by our delighted soldiers, and even the rough seamen cast a grim smile at that grand iron-bound coast. It is almost worth a voyage to see land for the first time. In our inexperience, we considered ourselves as fairly arrived, and from that moment began calculations and lotteries as to when we should reach our destination. The skipper alone appeared not to join in the general enthusiasm that prevailed. I observed him several times popping in and out of his cabin for constant consultation of the barometer; and I remarked that he remained on deck when, after dusk, we retired to the well-lighted cabin, and set in for our accustomed game at *ving-et-un*, accompanied by a special bowl of punch, brewed by old Halberd, who was a very Falstaff in all matters of drink, and who knew exactly the right proportions that make rum, sugar, and lime-juice a beverage for the gods. We were so absorbed in the changes and chances of our game, that we scarcely remarked the increasing roll of the old transport, as she creaked and laboured in the trough of a heavy sea, and the constant souffle and tramp of feet upon the deck above us; and when I turned in, as sailors call it, for the night, to share a dormitory of some four feet square, with my comrade Spooner, I was too sleepy to think of anything but the disagreeables of being roused at four to keep the morning watch, a duty which I most religiously shirked on every available opportunity.

That must have been a fearful night, ay, even to the gallant hearts on deck and aloft, exposed to the fury of the gale, and striving with right and main to put in practice all that science could teach and seamanship effect to weather the storm. Boxed up in my stifling little cabin, I became conscious by degrees that our ship was rolling and pitching more than my previous experience would have led me to suppose possible. First, my dreams became more and more incoherent and disturbed—then a tremendous lurch that nearly sent me sprawling out of my berth, roused me to a state of complete wakefulness; and there I lay, anxiously listening to the complication of noises that surrounded me, with a horrible misgiving that this might be one of those serious cases of which every one has heard and read, and that as ships were doubtless occasionally

cut in two, and the doomed outlay in the twinkling of an eye—

'My hands may all run masterless, My hawks may fly from tree to tree.'

and then I manned myself, as I thought it was my duty to meet death, come in what shape it might, as a gentleman and a soldier. Though near, his joy hand was this time destined to grasp no other victim, and in a momentary lull, I had time to obtain a view of our position, and to exchange a cheering word or two with the gallant skipper. The night was clear and bright with stars, though blowing what sailors call 'great guns,' and the first thing that struck me was the nakedness of our spars as they danced against the sky, every inch of canvas that could be spared having been taken in. At times, I could see the whole of the vessel, as it were, plunging head-foremost away from me, as I steadied myself near the poop, and tremendous was the havoc made on her decks by a succession of heavy seas—everything had been carried away—seats, blocks, spare spars, hon-coops, everything that was movable: and alas! alas! the last gigantic wave that struck her had borne to his doom honest Bill Sawyer, the smartest foretopman that ever handled sheet.

'No chance of saving him, Mr. Grand,' said poor Merryweather, with a trembling voice; 'the worst of it is now over, and this gale will lull before sunrise; but it is God's providence that we were able to wear the old ship. It was impossible to tack, and this is not a night, sir, to have the coast of Labrador under your lee!'

As I went below I found the companion-stairs and the cabin in a state of indescribable confusion—gentlemen in all sorts of costumes inquiring what had happened, and whether 'anything was the matter?'—all seemed to have turned out except old Halberd, who lay snugly ensconced in his blankets; and when asked by Spooner who went straight to his commanding officer's cabin for orders when he thought there was any danger, 'Whether he did not mean to turn out?' replied, 'Not I; it's no business of mine; I'm only a passenger!' As I groped my way in the dark towards my cabin, a soft hand was put within mine, and a gentle voice whispered in my ear, 'Is the danger over?' 'Thank you, Mr. Grand: good night.' I was soon sound asleep after all my fatigues and excitement; but not before I had offered a short and fervent thanksgiving to Providence for our escape.

Could it be the same world that was melting around us in all the gorgeous brightness of a sunny noon, as one short week afterwards we glided listlessly along between the picturesque banks, whose woods, luxuriant in their verdure, fringe the noble St. Lawrence! A monarch art thou of the waters, thou magnificent river: and wondrous is thy majesty to one whose homage has been hitherto paid in ignorance to the puny wave of our own Father Thames. Historic associations, natural beauty, and early recollections hallow the latter; but what shall we say of that gigantic stream, whose volume, supplied by the inexhaustible depths of Lake Erie, sweeps on through the giddy rapids, and the wondrous plunge of, indescribable Niagara, to beautify the fairest portion of a continent, and only to find repose at length in the mighty bosom of the broad Atlantic Ocean! The first impression of every European on visiting America seems to be the same. Everything is on a larger, grander, and more magnificent scale than in the old country. The rivers are wider, the forests more interminable, the storms darker, the sunshine brighter, and the skies higher, than those to which they have been accustomed at home; and obtrusive as is sometimes the Yankee's noisy admiration of his unequalled States, he has, indeed, a glorious country, and well may he be proud of it.

All disembarkations are much the same, whether the released prisoners be an apoplectic alderman, with his fat wife and numerous daughters, stepping ashore at Ostend; or a draft of gallant musketeers bidding farewell to the coop which Government has provided for a long and tedious voyage. Beautiful Quebec glittered as usual in the sun; and our march up to the Citadel, a mile and a half, and every inch of it against the collar, convinced us that, as the acquisition of what sailors call sea-legs is most desirable to encounter a son-wester in the Atlantic, so are those same sea-legs very numbered and paralytic members to carry their owners up a steep and gravelled hill in anything like soldier-like style. We were received at headquarters—the strongly-fortified, and jealously-guarded citadel—with the welcome due to

more honorable third another. The Colonel had a Spanish servant, a forbidding-looking rascal as mast should wish to see, but who had stuck to his master, and served him faithfully through all the ups and downs of his professional career. Rumour whispered that this fellow once let up in his cups a frightful history of the signora's jealousy and its consequences. Tall, handsome, of a spare athletic figure, with luxuriant black hair and whiskers, an adept at all feats of grace and skill, as at all games of chance or science; an extraordinary horseman, an unerring shot, a draughtsman of no mean pretensions, and a musician of exquisite taste, the Colonel was one to make sad havoc in the female heart; and many a fair one has loved that beautiful face, with its reckless bandit expression, 'not wisely, but too well.' He knew his advantages, none better, and pushed them to the utmost; but when first I was acquainted with him, the number of his conquests appeared only to enhance his feelings of bitterness and contempt for the whole sex.

Watched by his wife with a jealousy that I fear had too much foundation, he was at last discovered. A Spanish woman roused, and more especially by such a passion, is not a character to hesitate for fear of consequences, and the young and beautiful rival—some whispered, too near a relative—fell by the wife's hand. Nor was her revenge satisfied with one victim; like a fury she turned from her sister's prostrate form upon the horror-stricken Cartouch; and the only circumstantial evidence borne by this ghastly tale is in the fact, that whenever the Colonel's neck was bared, a long, grisly cicatrice disclosed itself, extending from ear to chin, as of one who had at some time received a deadly and frightful wound in the throat. When ladies resort to extreme measures such as these, a separation is decidedly advisable, and from that hour it was said Cartouch never saw his wife again. Assuredly, his habits were not those of married life; and whether he was not happier in a state of single-blessedness and independence, it is not for me to decide. Some affected to disbelieve the whole story of his marriage and its concluding tragedy; some said the Colonel had actually run away with the sister, and deserted her as he had deserted his wife. He never touched upon the subject himself, nor should I have liked to change places with that man who might be bold enough to interrogate him with regard to it; so it is impossible to say what may be the true version of the story. All I know is, that coming unexpectedly into his barrack-room upon one occasion, I found this hardened and sarcastic rascal—this man of bitter feelings and iron heart, in tears of agony, which he vainly strove to conceal; and hastily covered with his handkerchief, there lay on the table a long silky lock of glossy raven hair.

With all his faults—and they are many and inexcusable—I could not help liking Colonel Cartouch. From the first, notwithstanding the difference of our ranks and ages we had become constant associates and allies. Our pursuits and pleasures are similar; the Mentor, with his advantage of experience, of course far outstripping his young competitor; but then it was his greatest delight to instruct and train 'little Grand,' as he called me, in all those accomplishments which we deemed so indispensable. It was the Colonel's team which I first learned to handle, as my instructor called it, 'like a workman.' It was the Colonel who first taught me to tie my own flies, and throw them to an inch, although the only unwooded space around me was the stream I was fishing. It was the Colonel who showed me how to 'screw' and 'twist' at Billiards in a manner that would have made my old antagonist Levant's hair stand on end; who proved to me why the sound and practical whist-player must pull through in the long run, and why it was advisable to decline playing cards with a casual stranger of whom one knew nothing—more particularly if he happened to be a Frenchman. His explanations simplified the whole system of drill in the field, and regimental economy in the orderly room, for there were few better officers than Cartouch. His knowledge of life and intimate acquaintance with our hospitable civilian friends, put me quite at ease at all usages of Canadian society; and repaying, as I did, all these advantages from the Colonel's friendship, it was no wonder that I was above all others prejudiced in his favour, more especially as I fancied I could detect seeds of good and evidences of kind feeling, in that reckless character, for which others did not give it credit. Of course our command-