

"MY HAT."

A YANKEE TALE.

(Concluded.)

Not a single word was addressed to me, during the relation. I observed a start of surprise, when I mentioned Mr. Dubeledge, and one, yet more marked, when I had to speak of Commodore W—kes. There was conversation in an under tone, which I did not hear; I must except one remark. It occurred in the part of my narrative, when the daughters of General B— appeared on the scene. "Many of you," said the Commander of the vessel in which we were, "know General B—, intimately; did you know of his having any daughters?"

A general negative was given.

"Depend on it, those ladies were the daughters of Jeff. Davis. What a prize we have missed!"

I afterwards discovered that this surmise was correct, and vowed never to put faith in women again.

I must not forget to state, that the allusions, and they were many, to my hat, induced smiles, but there was a significance in them that I could not understand.

Numerous questions were put to me when I concluded; not the slightest prevarication was detected; I had told all and was quite ready to swear to my deposition.

The Captain ordered the purser to be summoned; whispered a few words to him, and then directed him to see that I had another glass of grog, and a berth provided for me. He was also to direct the officers of the watch, to post a sentinel.

I had my grog, was shewn a berth, and directed to turn in. Of what transpired from that moment, until the middle of the next day, I was perfectly unconscious, for I believe I was asleep before my head touched the pillow, and, as I was informed, could be aroused only by being "dowsed"—in due nautical fashion—with three or four buckets of water. When I did succeed in getting my eyes and ears into use, I was greatly surprised by being told that it was twelve o'clock, noon. What could have caused this extraordinary sleep? I was, naturally and by practice, a short and light sleeper. It was a mystery, but as it was only one in a long and uninterrupted sequence of mysteries. I did not trouble myself to think much on the subject. I was hastened on deck, and when there, was ordered to get into a boat that lay alongside. The boat carried me to another vessel, that had her steam up, was under weigh, and ready for departure. She started the moment I got on board: her course was northerly. This was maintained for a couple of days, and then, suddenly, the ship was hove to, and very particular and peremptory orders were given to the look-outs. With myself, I chanced to see that a letter was sent. Of course I did not learn the contents of that letter while on board: I did afterwards; but how, when or where, is of no moment. It will be as well to give it here. It ran as follows:

Ship —, off Savannah,
&c., &c.

COMMODORE:—Herewith I have the honor to transmit you a report of a very extraordinary case. I also send a very extraordinary person, who came on board the — under very extraordinary circumstances. He claims to be acquainted with you. The report embraces his narrative in full; you will also see that he was submitted to a severe and searching examination. We were not satisfied with this, and, by the assistance of the doctor, who mixed his grog, we put him into a sleep from which he was not easily aroused: we took advantage of this, and made a minute scrutiny of himself and of all belonging to him. We even divested him of his shirt; but found nothing that threw light on the affair. His hat, from the part it plays in the narrative, was the chief object of suspicion. Fortunately, we had a man on board intimately acquainted with hat manufacture. It was placed in his hands, and was most thoroughly overhauled. In fact, it was taken completely to pieces, but the labour was thrown away. The man says he could stake his existence on the fact that it has never been tampered with or in any way disturbed since it left the hands of the maker. Under these circumstances, the individual is sent to you to be dealt with as you may see fit. The whole business is so extremely suspicious that every one engaged in the investigation feels there is more in it than has as yet been discovered; but all think the person in question has been a passive instrument in the hands of cleverer people. In a word, all look upon him as more fool than knave.

I have the honor to be,

&c., &c.

To Commodore W—,
Commander W. I. Station.

It will be thought that the man who publishes a letter in which he, himself, is thus complimented, merits all that was said of him.

About an hour after we hove to, the look-out at the mast-head hailed,—"Ship in sight."

"How does she bear?" roared the first lieutenant.

"Right ahead."

"Start the engines," said the Captain, "and steer for her."

On we went, and as the other ship was steering for us, it was not long before we were within signalling distance.

"The Commodore!" said our Captain, as the stranger ran her flags up the mizzen. "This is fortunate."

We had previously shown our bunting.

"Signal Despatches," was the next order.

"Come on board," was the reply.

By this time the two ships were not more than a few cable lengths apart, and an officer was sent on board the Commodore with despatches. Not a word was said to me, but I presumed that I should soon follow, and I could not avoid reflecting on the reception I should meet with from my former kind acquaintance. I did not entertain any apprehensions for my personal safety. I even went so far as to think that Commodore W—kes was aware of the purpose of my strange wanderings, and privy to all that had been done in the matter. I had ample opportunity to think, for a considerable time elapsed before anything further was done. At last, another signal was made from the Commodore's ship, the purport of which was sufficiently apparent in the order I received to get into a boat. I was rowed to the other vessel with all speed. The Commodore was not on deck, and I was at once conducted to his state-room. He was sitting there by himself, and we were alone. His countenance was serious, clouded; but he civilly pointed to a seat.

"Now, sir," was his first observation—"if you can, I beg of you to throw some light on this perplexing business."

"Commodore, most willingly I would, but I have not the power. I have told all, even to my surmises. Nothing, to my perception, has occurred to give the slightest clue to the puzzle. Indeed, I was in hopes that I could look to you for a solution of the mystery."

"Strange, most strange!" said the Commodore. "Please permit me to look at your hat."

I handed the hat.

The Commodore surveyed it attentively on all sides, and in as well as out; I had great difficulty in restraining a smile when he placed it so close to his eyes that the idea suggested itself he was calling his nose into the scrutiny.

When he had done, he put the hat down, and was silent for some moments. "Are you sure"—this was said in the manner of a man whose thoughts were far away from his subject—"the guns at Savannah were shotted? I need not have asked the question. My officers, who are good judges in such a matter, inform me they were."

He again relapsed into abstraction, and ten minutes or more passed without a word or a movement.

Suddenly he started as out of a dream. "I believe you to be perfectly innocent of wrong in this business, and shall not detain you. That it had an object, I cannot doubt; but what that object was I cannot divine. It perplexes me beyond measure. Dubeledge may, probably, be able to explain. That you have played a part, or served a purpose, is evident enough. We are now somewhere abreast of Charleston. I have ordered certain ships to rendezvous here, and expect them in a few hours. One of them will be despatched to New York to bring down volunteers for the fleet. You shall have a passage in her, and, to this, I append but one condition,—that you call on Mr. Dubeledge and place yourself at his disposal."

"Commodore, pardon me, but I cannot accept your kindness with that proviso. I will call on Mr. Dubeledge, but sooner than be sent another such an errand, or engage myself in any way to that gentleman, I would remain a prisoner with you till the end of the war."

"Well, well, so be it," said the Commodore with a smile. "I don't know that I have any right either to detain or force conditions on you. Too well I remember a former attempt to handle porcupines." The Commodore stopped, and his smile now changed.

Strange as it may appear for a thorough-bred Englishman to make such an avowal,—I sincerely pitied this gentleman. He had, all along, treated me with grievous and distinguished kindness. I believed, still believe him to be a high-minded, honorable man. If he went astray, no ignoble motive conduced; he was misled by an excessive zeal for his country's service.

"One word more," he said. "This business materially alters our relative positions. Pardon me,—I say it with great regret—but you must no longer regard yourself as my guest. You shall receive every necessary attention, but I cannot invite you to my table. We may perhaps meet, in happier times, and when I am no longer bound by the restraints of the service."

I could not fail to acquiesce in this. I thanked the Commodore most sincerely for his favours, and retired from the cabin. I did not see him afterwards.

Early next day, the expected ships arrived. I was transferred to the vessel bound for New York, and was soon on my way to the North. A packet, directed to Mr. Dubeledge, was handed me as I stepped over the side of the flag ship. Once more I began to breathe freely, and to look forward to a peaceful, happy life in my old quiet pursuits.

The passage to New York was pleasant and tolerably quick. In all my peregrinations, however I may have been deluded by men, the elements were true and consistent, and favoured me with remarkably fine weather. I was permitted to go on shore immediately on our arrival, and hastened at once to Mr. Dubeledge. I soon found the gentleman and was warmly welcomed back; to which I have no doubt, I made a sour and surly return, for I was by no means in an angelic state of temper; and the lordly merchant saw it and redoubled his politeness. I handed him his packet and, without deigning to ask an explanation, was about retiring. He begged me, almost imploringly, to remain, at the