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FOR THE CRAFTSMAN.

## THE CRUISE OF THE THETIS.

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CHAPTER II. IN BISCAY BAY.

(Continued.)

Now, what was the key to Michael Creagh's blind hatred of Masonry? Neither Fitzgerald nor his daughter could have told us; but time reveals everything, and all secrets are open to the historian. There was, after all, some method in the old man's madness; and, to an intellect as narrow as his own, the story of his past grudge might easily make excuse for his abiding vindictive animosity.

Before Alice's mother had been born, the man who was destined to be her husband had wooed, and, as he thought, won, a lady in every respect dissimilar. Mrs. Creagh was a mild, fragile, timid, tender little woman, without other wishes than those framed for her by her protector. Milicent Bateman had been a haughty, resolute, dark-browed, imperious young lady, giving law to all who came within her influence, and making her silken sway as coercive as of steel. Her father was embarrassed, she herself ambitious, and her lover rich; and hence the engagement which his vanity attributed to a reciprocal affection. It was one that she quietly wearied of, and that grew to be intolerable as its course ran on, and when she had miserably learned that her self-command was not omnipotent. She learned this from a young officer of Dragoons then quartered in Mallon. She confessed it by her elopement with him one week before the day appointed for her marriage, and repented it long after, and through a score of bitter years. Michael Creagh's nature was incapable of magnanimity, and this blow and cutting insult but hardened it still more. For the best period of his life he devoted himself patiently and implacably to his rival's ruin. It was not difficult of accomplishment, for Captain Vyvyan was improvident and extravagant, and in the hands of the Jews before much time had gone by, and his enemy easily contrived to spare him no temptation, until, one by one, his resources became exhausted, and the net was so surely binding that it remained but to capture the helpless quarry. Michael had eagerly bought up all Vyvyan's obligations upon which he could lay hands, and the moment had at last come for their triumphant exercise. The Marshalsea Prison was then in existence in its most squalid condition, and the life-long torture of its abject confinement was the doom being savagely premeditated for the luckless soldier. Everything was in training, and the blow was about to fall, when the position of affairs magically changed. Vyvyan's relatives were men of large property, and his friends occupied the highest stations. Of the latter, one called one morning upon his principal creditor, and expressed his desire to make proposals for a composition. In conversation, he accidentally mentioned, among the motives by which he was influenced, the anxiety to save from such utter ruin one to whom he was united by fraternal ties. It is needless to say how the suggestion was received; but the fury of Creagh's passion, and the intense hatred he was all unable to disguise, so disgusted the negotiator, that he returned more than ever

determined to extricate from his danger the object of such a manifest *vendetta*. And he did so, finally, upon representation of the circumstances among connections whom the strange tale interested, and whom it impelled to take more note than heretofore of Milicent's grand, stately style. Vyvyan died in Leghorn, His Majesty's Consul there, and his widow still lived abroad, a staid, sad woman, old beyond her years. And while Michael Creagh had strength to form one bitter, cruel invocation, it was of woe upon the agency by which he had been cheated of his revenge, and which, for his disappointed and unreasoning malice, concentrated in the mystic organization of Masonry.

So much of a retrospect was necessary to make my tale intelligible. With those referred to in its explanation the reader has no farther concern. Their by-gone actions had made the back-ground of the scene we are looking on; but they themselves have no entrance to the stage, nor part in the dialogue.

It is with the fortunes of the *Thetis* that we have to do, and in the wake of the *Thetis* that we are called to follow. The leading wind, that had carried her past Loop-Head and out into the Atlantic, gave her a free sheet across the roll of Biscay, and almost to the latitude of Finisterre. And then, as Garrett was already beginning to plume himself upon a ten day run to Tagers' anchorage, chopped suddenly to a gale from South-west, against which a storm trysail could do no more than head the bow-sprit to the wind; while league after league the short angry seas were drifting the brigantine bodily to leeward. It was as critical a position as can be easily imagined. The vessel laboured very heavily, and, being deeper than her best trim, ran no small danger of straining herself seriously. To run before the cyclone was impossible, with such following masses of sea to break any moment in devastation over the poop; to continue laid-to, gained nothing but the delay of repulse, while involving the risk of ship, crew, and cargo. To take the shelter of the land was the obvious instinct of a sailor; but the land tended towards French waters, and neither Bordeaux nor Bayonne were attractive ports for a British sailor. The dilemma had to be fairly and thoughtfully measured; for upon the judgment of the man with whom the choice lay his own fortunes, and perhaps the lives of his company were absolutely dependent. For three days Fitzgerald hesitated. On the fourth morning, with the glass two-tenths lower than before, and driven some two hundred miles from his course; with the skies still blacker than ever, and the sea lashed to that transient comparative calmness that a sailor dreads more than any fury—he had made up his mind. No cruiser which could help it would be out such weather; and even were it otherwise, the bay was wide and sea-room plenty. So, to the great relief of every soul on board, when the morning watch was changed at eight bells, the word was given to put the helm down and shake out the fore-topsail.

Which manœuvre led to a remarkable adventure. In the first dog-watch, the *Thetis* heading east by south and fairly racing through the water, the look-out reported suddenly "Sail on the weather bow!" Twining his arm round a backstay Garrett sprang on one of the weather carronades with glass