

contemptuous forbearance. Dupont, approaching him, gave his thoughts audible expression, exclaiming, loud enough for several of the crew to hear, and looking steadily in the Captain's face, 'Lache! He would have turned away, but was arrested by a gripe of steel.

'Ecoutez, monsieur,' said Captain Starkey, 'individually, I hold for nothing whatever you may say; but I am Captain and King in this ship, and I will permit no one to beard me before the crew, and thereby lessen my authority over them. Do you presume again to do so, and I will put you in solitary confinement, perhaps in irons, until we arrive at Jamaica.' He then threw off his startled auditor, and walked forward.

The passengers, colored as well as white, were all on board; the anchor, already a-peak, was brought home; the bows of the ship fell slowly off, and we were in a few moments running before the wind, though but a faint one, for Point Morant.

No one could be many hours on board the Neptune without being fully satisfied that however deficient in duelling courage her Captain might be he was a thorough seaman, and that his crew—about a dozen of as fine fellows as I have ever seen were under the most perfect discipline and command. The service of the vessel was carried on as noiselessly and regularly as on board a ship of war; and a sense of confidence, that should a tempest, or other sea peril overtake us, every reliance might be placed in the professional skill and energy of Captain Starkey, was soon openly or tacitly acknowledged by all on board. The weather throughout happily continued fine, but the wind was light and variable, so that for several days after we had sighted the blue mountains of Jamaica, we scarcely appeared to diminish the distance between them and us.

At last the breeze again blew steadily from the northwest, and we gradually neared Point Morant. We passed it, and opened up the bay at about two o'clock in the morning, when the voyage might be said to be over. This was a great relief to the cabin-passengers—far beyond the ordinary pleasure to land-folks of escaping from the tedium of confinement on shipboard. There was a constraint in the behaviour of everybody that was exceedingly unpleasant.—The Captain presided at the table with freezing civility; the conversation, if such it could be called, was usually restricted to monosyllables; and we were all very heartily glad that we had eaten our last dinner in the Neptune. When we doubled Point Morant, all the passengers, except myself, were in bed, and a quarter of an hour afterwards, Captain Starkey went below, and was soon busy, I understood, with papers in his cabin.

For my part, I was too excited to sleep, and I continued to pace the deck fore and aft with H—the first mate, whose watch it was, eagerly observing the lights on the well-known shore that I had left so many months before with but faint hopes of ever seeing it again. As I thus gazed landward, a bright gleam, as of crimson moonlight, shot across the dark sea, and turning quickly round, I saw that it was caused by a tall jet of flame shooting up from the main hatchway, which two seamen, for some purpose or other, had at that moment partially opened. In my still weak state, the terror of the sight—for the recollection of the barrels of powder on board flashed instantly across my mind—for several moments completely stunned me; and but that I caught instinctively at the railings, I should have fallen prostrate on the deck. A wild outcry of 'Fire! fire!' the most fearful cry that can be heard at sea—mingled with and heightened the dizzy ringing in my brain, and I was barely sufficiently conscious to discern, amidst the runnings to and fro, and the incoherent exclamations of the crew, the sinewy, athletic figure of the Captain leap up, as it were, from the champion-ladder to the deck, and with his trumpet voice command immediate silence, instantly followed by the order again to batten down the blazing hatchway. This, with his own assistance, was promptly effected, and then he disappeared down the fore-castle.

The two or three minutes he was gone, it could scarcely have been more than that, seemed interminable; and so completely did it appear to be recognized that our fate must depend upon his judgment and vigor, that not a word was spoken nor a finger, I think, moved till he reappeared, already scorched and blackened with the fire, and dragging up what seemed a dead body in his arms.—He threw his burden on the deck, and passing swiftly to where Hawkins stood, said in a low, hurried whisper, but audible to me,

'Run down and rouse the passengers, and bring my pistols from the cabin locker.—Quick! eternity hangs on the loss of a moment.' Then turning to the startled but attentive seamen, he said in a rapid but firm voice, 'You well know; men, that I would not on any occasion, or for any motive deceive you. Listen, then, attentively. You drunken brute—he is Lieutenant Arguellas's servant—has fired with his candle the spirits he was stealing, and the hold is a mass of fire which it is useless to waste one precious moment in attempting to extinguish.'

A cry of rage and horror burst from the crew, and they sprang impulsively towards the boats, but the captain's authoritative voice at once arrested their steps. 'Hear me out, will you? Hurry and confusion will destroy us all, but with courage and steadiness every soul on board may be saved before the flames can reach the powder. And remember,' he added, as he took the pistols from Hawkins and cocked one of them, 'that I will send a bullet after any man who disobeys me, and I seldom miss my aim.—Now, then, to your work—steadily and with a will!'

It was marvellous to observe the influence his bold, confident, and commanding bearing and words had upon the men. The panic terror that had seized them gave place to energetic resolution, and in an incredibly short space of time the boats were in the water.

'Well done my fine fellows! There is plenty of time, I again repeat. Four of you—and he named them—remain with me.—Three others jump into each of the large boats, two into the small one, and bring them round to the landward side of the ship. A rush would swamp the boats and we shall be able to keep only one gangway clear.'

The passengers were by this time rushing upon deck half clad, and in a state of the wildest terror, for they all knew there was a large quantity of gunpowder on board.—The instant the boats touched the starboard side of the bark, the men, white as well as colored, forced their way, with frenzied eagerness before the women and children, careless, apparently, whom they sacrificed, so that they themselves might leap to the shelter of the boats from the fiery volcano raging beneath their feet. Captain Starkey, aided by the four athletic seamen he had selected for the duty, hurled them fiercely back.

'Back, back!' he shouted. 'We must have funeral order here—first the women and children, next the old men. Hand Senora Arguellas along, next the young lady her daughter; quick!'

As Donna Antonia, more dead than alive, was about to be lifted into the boat, a gush of flame burst up through the main hatchway with a roar of an explosion; a tumultuous cry burst from the frenzied passengers, and they jostled each other with frightful violence in their efforts to reach the gangway. Dupont forced his way through the lane of seamen with the energy of a madman, and pressed so suddenly upon Antonia that, but for the utmost exertion of the captain's herculean strength, she must have been precipitated into the water.

'Back, unmanly dastard! back, dog!' roared Captain Starkey, terribly excited by the lady's danger; and a moment after, seizing Dupont fiercely by the collar, he added: 'or, if you will, look there but for a moment'—and he pointed with his pistol hand to the fins of several sharks plainly visible in the glaring light at but a few yards distance from the ship. 'Men,' he added, 'let whoever presses forward out of his turn fall into the water, for shark's bait.'

'Ay, ay sir!' was the prompt mechanical response.

This terrible menace instantly restored order; the colored women and children were next embarked, and the boat appeared full.

'Pull off,' was the order; you are deep enough for safety.'

A cry, faint as the wail of a child arose in the boat. It was heard and understood.

'Stay one moment, pass along Senor Arguellas. Now, then, off with you, and be smart!'

The next boat was quickly loaded; the colored lads and men, all but one, and the three Americans, went in her.

'You are a noble fellow,' said Mr. Desmond, pausing an instant, and catching at the captain's nand; and I was but a fool too'—

'Pass on,' was the reply; 'there is no time bandy compliments.'

The order to shove off had passed the captain's lips when his glance chanced to light upon me, as I leaned, dumb with

terror, just behind him, against the vessel's bulworks.

'Hold on a moment!' he cried. 'Here is a youngster whose weight will not hurt you;' and he fairly lifted me over, and dropped me gently into the boat, whispering as he did so.

'Remember me, Ned, to thy father and mother, should I not see them again.'

There was now only the small boat, capable of safely containing but eight persons and how, it was whispered amongst us—how, in addition to the two seamen already in her, can she take off Lieut. Arguellas, Mr. Dupont, the remaining colored man, the four seamen, and Capt. Starkey? They were, however, all speedily embarked except the captain.

'Can she bear another?' he asked, and although his voice was firm as ever, his countenance, I noticed, was ashy pale, yet full as ever of unswerving resolution.

'We must, and will, sir, since it's you; but we are dangerously overcrowded now, especially with you ugly customers swimming round us.'

Stay one moment; I cannot quit the ship whilst there's a living soul on board.' He stepped hastily forward, and presently reappeared at the gangway with the senseless body of the lieutenant's servant in his arms, and dropped it over the side into the boat. There was a cry of indignation, but it was of no avail. The boat's rope the next instant was cast into the water. 'Now pull for your lives!' The oars, from the instinct of self-preservation, instantly fell into the water, and the boat sprang off. Captain Starkey, now that all except himself were clear of the burning ship, gazed eagerly, with eyes shaded with his hand, in the direction of the shore. Presently he hailed the headmost boat. 'We must have been seen from the shore long ago, and pilot boats ought to be coming out, though I don't see any. If you meet one, bid him be smart; there may be a chance yet.' All this scene, this long agony, which has taken me so many words to depict very imperfectly from my own recollection, and those of others, only lasted, I was afterwards assured by Mr. Desmond, eight minutes from the embarkation of Senora Arguellas till the last boat left the ill fated Neptune.

Never shall I forget the frightful sublimity of the spectacle presented by that flaming ship, the sole object, save ourselves, discernible amidst the vast and heaving darkness, if I may use the term of the night and ocean, occupied as it was with the dreadful thought that the heroic man to whose firmness and presence of mind we all owed our safety, was inevitably doomed to perish. We had not rowed more than a couple of hundred yards, when the flames, leaping up everywhere through the deck, reached the rigging and the few sails set, presenting a complete outline of the bark and her tracery of masts and yards, drawn in line of fire. Captain Starkey, not to throw away the chance he spoke of, had gone out to the end of the bowsprit, having first let the jib and foresail go by the run, and was for a brief space safe from the flames; but what was this but a prolongation of the bitterness of death?

The boats continued to increase the distance between them and the blazing ship, amidst a dead silence, broken only by the measured dip of the oars; and many an eye was turned with intense anxiety shoreward, with the hope of desecrating the expected pilot. At length a distinct hail—and I felt my heart stop at the sound—was heard ahead, lustily responded to by the seamen's throats, and presently afterwards a swiftly propelled pilot boat shot out of the thick darkness ahead, almost immediately followed by another.

'What ship is that?' cried a man standing in the bows of the first boat.

'The Neptune, and that is Captain Starkey on the bowsprit!'

I sprang eagerly to my feet, and with all the force I could exert shouted:

'A hundred pounds for the first boat that reaches the ship!'

'That's young Mr. Mainwarning's face and voice!' exclaimed the foremost pilot. 'Hurrah; then, for the prize!' and away both sped with eager vigor, but unaware, certainly, of the peril of the task. In a minute or so another shore boat came up, but after asking a few questions, and seeing how matters stood, remained, and lightened us of a portion of our living cargoes. We were all three too deep in the water, the small boat perilously so.

Great God! the terrible suspense we all felt whilst this was going forward! I can scarcely bear, even now, to think about it. I shut my eyes, and listened with breathless palpitating excitement, for the explosion that should end all. It came! at least

I thought it did—and I sprang convulsively to my feet. So sensitive was my brain, partly, no doubt, from recent sickness as well as fright, that I had mistaken the sudden shout of the boats crew for the dreadful catastrophe. The bowsprit, from the end of which a rope was dangling, was empty! and both pilots, made aware, doubtless, of the danger, were pulling with the eagerness of fear from the ship. The cheering among us was renewed again and again, during which I continued to gaze with arrested breath and fascinated stare at the flaming vessel and fleeing pilot boats. Suddenly a pyramid of flame shot up from the hold of the ship, followed by a deafening roar. I fell, or was knocked down, I know not which; the boat rocked as if caught in a fierce eddy; next came the hiss and splash of numerous heavy bodies falling from a great height into the water; and then the blinding glare and stunning uproar were succeeded by a soundless silence and a thick darkness, in which no man could discern his neighbor. The stillness was broken by a loud, cheerful hail from one of the pilot boats; we recognized the voice, and the simultaneous and ringing shout which burst from us assured the gallant seaman of our own safety, and how exultingly we all rejoiced in his. Half an hour afterwards we were safely landed; and, as the ship and cargo had been specially insured, the only ultimate evil result of this fearful passage, the lives of the passengers and crew of the Neptune, was a heavy loss to the underwriters.

A piece of plate, at the suggestion of Mr. Desmond and his friends, was subscribed and presented to Captain Starkey at a public dinner given at Kingston in his honor—a circumstance that many there will remember. In his speech on returning thanks for the compliment paid him, he explained his motive for resolutely declining to fight a duel with M. Dupont, half a dozen versions of which had got into the newspapers. 'I was very early left an orphan,' he said, 'and was very tenderly reared by a maternal aunt, Mrs. ———.' (He mentioned a name with which hundreds of newspaper readers in England must be still familiar.) 'Her husband—as many here may be aware—fell in a duel in the second month of wedlock. My aunt continued to live dejectedly on till I had passed my nineteenth year; and so vivid an impression did the patient sorrow of her life make on me—so thoroughly did I learn to loathe and detest the barbarous practice that consigned her to a premature grave, that it scarcely required the solemn promise she obtained from me, as the last sigh trembled on her lips, to make me resolve never, under any circumstances, to fight a duel.—As to my behavior during the unfortunate conflagration of the Neptune, which my friend Mr. Desmond has spoken of so flatteringly, I can only say that I did no more than my simple duty in the matter. Both he and I belong to a maritime race, one of whose most pre-emptory maxims it is that the captain must be the last man to quit or give up his ship. Besides I must have been the veriest dastard alive to have quailed in the presence of—that is, in the presence of—that is—' Here Captain Starkey blushed and boggled sadly: he was evidently no orator; but whether it was the sly significance of Senor Arguellas's countenance, which just then happened to be turned towards him, or the glance he threw at the gallery, where Senora Arguellas' grave placidity and Donna Antonia's bright eyes and blushing cheek encountered him that so completely put him out, I cannot say; but he continued to stammer painfully, although the company cheered and laughed with great vehemence and uncommon good humor, in order to give him time. He could not recover himself; and after floundering about through a few more unintelligible sentences, sat down, evidently very hot and uncomfortable, though amidst a little hurricane of hearty cheers and hilarious laughter.

I have but a few more words to say. Captain Starkey has been long settled in the Havana; and Donna Antonia has been just as long Mrs. Starkey. Three little Starkeys have to my knowledge already come to town, and the captain is altogether a rich and prosperous man; but though apparently permanently domiciled in a foreign country, he is I am quite satisfied as true an Englishman and as loyal a subject of Queen Victoria, as when he threw the glass in the Cuban creole's face. I don't know what has become of Dupont; and to tell the truth, I don't much care. Lieutenant Arguellas has attained the rank of major; at last, I suppose he must be the Major Arguellas officially reported to be slightly wounded in the Lopez expedition. And I, also, am pretty well, now, thank you!