

WITH VILLAINOUS SALTPETRE.

We had not been ten days at sea before my mind misgave me, and I began to dread an unfortunate termination to our voyage, for matters had gone wrong from the very beginning. There had been trouble with the crew, who seemed to have an idea that perennial drunkenness was the proper state of men's existence; and who, as long as a sixpence lasted, obstinately refused to go on board, in many cases having to be hauled from the wharf over the side like so much suspended animation. Then when we had been warped out into the river, and were lying awaiting the captain, we found that he had been taken suddenly and violently ill, so that a week's delay followed, ending in a fresh appointment, and the coming of a new captain—a man of a quiet genial aspect, whose presence seemed to augur a termination of our trouble, and he was welcomed accordingly.

For a merchantman outward-bound is by no means the paradise existing in the minds of ardent school-boys, bitten with a longing for life at sea. Twenty-four hours of the life on board and its discomforts, effectually sickened me; but then I had chosen my vessel for reason of economy, knowing that every five-pound note would be, perhaps, of priceless value in my new home: so I made up my mind not to be discontented, but to bear all that fell to my lot. I had taken my passage to Buenos Ayres, with the full intention of roughing it for some years to come, and therefore I argued that it would be cowardly to turn tail at the first trouble that fell to my share. But really it was trying work, in spite of the strongest determination. The sailors were soon in that pleasant state of despondent misery which succeeds a long debauch, and, as if giving the unfortunate passengers the credit of being the cause of their sufferings, lost no opportunity of visiting the said sufferings upon their heads. I said upon their heads, but the feet as frequently suffered, buckets of water being dashed upon them—of course accidentally—if we ventured on deck during holy-stoning times. We came to grief, too, over ropes, over the stowing of cargo, and in a variety of ways during those first days—our sea-going friends looking upon us as an inferior race of beings, whom, as lubbers, it was their duty to afflict. But by dint of good-temper, this was all pretty well got over, in time for the rough weather we encountered down Channel, and right away across the Bay of Biscay, sufficiently hard to confine us all, sick and well, below hatches for many a dreary day of pitching and tossing, with the ship's timbers groaning and creaking to a degree that seemed to threaten falling to pieces.

Picture to yourselves, you who have not been on shipboard, a gloomy, low-ceiled prison, with stout beams crossing every where and there, the light stealing feebly through the little windows, the air you breathe hot, foul, and stifling, the hatch above you battened down, so that, save at special times, there is no communication with the deck; and nearly every fellow-passenger either bemoaning his hard fate, or else groaning as he lies prone in the helpless misery of sea-sickness. I think that if all the miseries of a rough voyage could be foreseen, those who take trips to far-off lands would be greatly reduced in numbers.

A couple of days' respite came at last in the shape of fine weather; and in the re-action produced by the bright sunshine, and free brisk air we breathed on deck, the troubles of the passengers were forgotten. The captain still seemed all that was genial and pleasant; but there was a flushed and heavy look in his countenance that I did not like, and before long I had another opinion upon the subject; for, in conversation, I found that the second mate had been at the same school as myself; and together we went over the old days and compared notes, as I walked the deck with him far into his watch.

The weather turned foul once more, but this time, through the mate, I contrived to stay on deck, when to my surprise, I found that the greater part of the duty was shifted on the chief mate, the captain seldom showing himself on deck.

"No, I don't think it's from cowardice," said my friend to me, as we walked the deck that night, when the gale had somewhat moderated. "Of course this is in confidence."

I nodded. "Well," he continued, "I don't know what to make of him; sometimes I think he's mad, and sometimes that he is given to drinking. How he got appointed to the ship, I can't tell. Mr. Ray don't say anything, but he is one of those men who think all the more; and of course he'll be particularly careful, lest the captain should think that, as first mate, he is jealous because the command was not placed in his hands."

No more was then said; but before many days had passed we found that the man who had been entrusted with a fine vessel, a valuable cargo, and more than all, the lives of passengers and crew, was one of those unfortunate beings who not content with the enjoyment of good things of this life, are in the habit of having intemperate outbreaks, when the impulse to drink commencing, perhaps, with the stimulants taken in some time of peril, grows perfectly uncontrollable, and culminates at length in one of those horrible fits of mania known as delirium tremens.

It was enough to make any landsman nervous as to our fate, should the heavy weather continue; but there was still the satisfaction of knowing that the two mates were thorough seamen, who would, no doubt, take upon themselves the management of the ship, should there be any real danger. These feelings did not trouble me long, for the weather again brightening, hope rose, and day after day glided pleasantly by. We saw but little of the captain, and only learned that he was confined by indisposition to his cot, the cause of this indisposition being only known to a few; but I could see that the first-mate, Mr. Ray, looked more anxious than usual; and taking the opportunity of being on deck one night, I had a long talk with my friend, to learn that the captain only recovered from one fit to seek the means for bringing on another.

"Pity we did not leave him behind altogether," I said at last.

"I've thought so a dozen times," said my friend, for this sailing with a madman on board does not suit my book."

The days glided slowly by with varying weather. The latitudes were reached. There was a little horse-play as we crossed the line; then a shark was caught, and at times a dolphin or bonito; and at last, panting with the heat, we lay beneath the almost vertical sun, without a breath of wind to fill the sails as they hung from the yards, the vessel gently rolling in the swell as the sea heaved and fell without so

much as a ripple visible. Rough coverings were rigged up; but in spite of all that could be done to mitigate it, the heat was unbearable, beating down upon our heads, and reflected from the sea, which shone like a vast mirror of polished metal. Gaping seams with the tar oozing forth, rails and stanchions so heated that a hand could not be borne upon them, and the 'tween decks stifling as an oven, it was no wonder that we were constantly longing for the comparative cool of the night: but even then there was not time for the temperature to grow much lower before the sun once more rose, each day apparently hotter than the last.

We were seated one evening, watching the last glow of the setting sun, when Anderson, the second-mate, made the remark that he thought a change was coming; and then our attention was taken up by Mr. Ray passing close by us, and descending as if to the captain's cabin.

"How has he been to-day?" I said, as Mr. Ray disappeared.

"Worse than ever," was the reply. "If I were Ray, I'd make a prisoner of him, and take sole command. He'd be quite justified in so doing."

Further conversation was cut short by the re-appearance of the mate, who beckoned hastily to my companion.

"Something wrong!" he exclaimed, as he leaped to his feet; and quite as quickly I followed him to the hatchway.

"Good heavens, Anderson!" exclaimed Mr. Ray, "what's to be done? He's raving mad."

"Have you no medicines?" I said.

"Medicines? Yes; but how are we to deal with a man in his state? Just listen."

In effect, as he ceased speaking, there came from below the sound of breaking chairs, smashing glass, and a noise as of some one leaping from side to side of the cabin, followed by a tremendous battering at the door.

"I've locked him in," said Ray, "for he's not fit to come on deck. But get help, and we must secure him, and strap him into a cot."

A short consultation was held; and then it was decided to call one of the seamen, a sturdy quiet man, and to do all as quietly as possible, so as not to alarm the rest of the passengers and crew.

Anderson fetched the old sailor, who came rolling up, turning the lump of tobacco in his mouth; and from his remark it was evident he had been enlightened upon the business in hand.

"Ah," he growled, "what a thing it is as any one will go on wasting precious liquors, and turning blessings into poison? I knowed this would be the end on it."

"Don't preach, man," said Ray, angrily, "but come along. Now look here," he whispered as we descended; "as soon as I open the door, all step quietly in together. He'll dash at us the same as he did at me a while ago; but he can only tackle one man at once, so that while he is engaged the others must secure him."

We had hardly nerved ourselves for our task, and the mate was holding up his hand as a signal as he unlocked the door, when we were staggered by the sharp report of a pistol, simultaneous with which there was a dull thud close by my ear; and I started back with the knowledge that a bullet had just passed through the cabin door and whistled by my head. Then came a loud harsh laugh, followed by a couple more pistol-shots, both of which passed through the panel of the door.

I need hardly say that we beat a retreat directly; and as we stood once more on deck, the first mate wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and looked from one to the other, as much as to say: "What shall we do?"

It was indeed a trying position; and for a few moments no one spoke. Then Mr. Ray seemed to recover himself and spoke out firmly and quietly:

"We should only be casting away our lives if we were to go in now. The only plan I can suggest is, to watch him through the skylight and go in when he is asleep."

"I don't think he can do any mischief in the meantime," I said; "but we must seize him soon."

"Mischief!" said the old sailor drily. "Well, I dunno; but what if he keep on popping off that revolver thing! We shall be having a bullet in amongst the powder, and a blow-up."

"Powder?" I said.

"Yes; in the magazine."

"Is there powder on board?" I said with a strange tremor in my voice, as I turned to Anderson.

"Yes, a heavy lot of it," he said huskily; and as he spoke his eyes glanced involuntarily in the direction of the boats.

Another shot made us all start; and now passengers and crew began to collect, eagerly asking what was wrong—questions, though, which in dread of a rush at the boats, we forebore to answer.

The peril, though, was indeed great, for in one small cabin, especially strengthened for its reception, a large quantity of powder was stored; and if one bullet happened to pass through, the chances were that the heat involved in its passage would explode it all, and in a moment the whole vessel would be blown to atoms.

There were two courses open to us; to seize the boats at once, and push off; or make a bold and manly effort to subdue the madman, in whose hands our lives now seemed to hang.

The same feeling must have pervaded all our breasts as we stood and looked at one another, and then I saw the old sailor wet the palms of his hands and rub them gently together.

"We must run in on him, Master Ray," he said.

"Could we not shoot him down through the skylight?" said the chief mate; and then, as if blushing at his own proposition, he added hastily: "No, no; that would be like murder. We must dash in on him at all risks. But what's that? Look out; he's coming on deck."

As he spoke, we heard the cabin door unlocked; then the rattling of keys and the crashing of a door, when Ray cautiously peered down the hatch; and as he knelt there gazing down I could see a tremor running through his whole frame, and when at last he turned to us, his voice was so husky as to be almost inaudible, when he whispered: "He's got into the powder room!"

I shall never forget his countenance as he gazed up at us with his eyes fixed—rigid to a degree. For a few moments, horror and dread of impending death seemed to have robbed him of all power. Then he sprang up, the man once more

"Quick!" he exclaimed, "for your lives."

Then leading the way, he dashed down the cabin stairs, we

following him, but only to find our progress arrested by the closed door, which resisted all our efforts.

"Listen!" whispered Ray; and then he continued: "Good heavens, if he were to fire now!"

The next moment there was a sound which seemed to make every nerve in my body thrill, and I frankly own that had my limbs obeyed my will, I should have rushed on deck, seized a coop or grating, and leaped over the side, for plainly enough to be heard came a sharp crackling noise, and it wanted not the mate's word to enlighten us as he hissed out: "Lucifers!"

"Here, quick, for God's sake!" exclaimed Anderson. "Look here; we are forcing the wrong way at the door."

He dragged at it, but in vain, for a few minutes, till running on deck, the old sailor returned in an instant with a couple of marline-spikes, which were inserted just as we once more heard the crackle of a match.

"Quick! It's for dear life!" cried Ray; and the door crashed, gave way, and flew open, to reveal to us, standing, perfectly unmoved by our forcible entry, the captain holding a lighted splint to an iron-bound chest, which was already blackened and charred at the edge.

For a few moments, we could none of us stir. It seemed as if at the slightest motion on our part, the chest—which I afterwards learned was filled with cartridges for the supply of one of the petty armies engaged in the Paraguayan war—would explode, followed by the other chests and kegs piled around. Then came the captain's low chuckling laugh, and we heard him say: "This will drive you out, then, strong as you are."

Then, with a gesture of impatience, he threw down the burnt-out splint, took a fresh match from the box he held, and was about to strike it, when with a cry that did not sound human, Anderson leaped upon him, and with one tremendous blow struck him down, trampling on him the next moment as he applied his moist lips to the charred and smoking edge of the chest.

The captain was not stunned, though; and directly after, a fearful struggle took place amid these kegs, my part being confined to the securing of the match-box, which I tore from his hand, trembling as I did so, lest it should explode. Then came the loud panting breathing of the wretched man, as held down by four strong men, he bowed his body up again and again with a power that was almost superhuman.

But the danger was now passed; and without losing a moment, we dragged him out into his own cabin. Water was abundantly applied to the charred side of the box; and Mr. Ray's first act was to make the carpenter screw up the door in a way that restored confidence as every screw was driven in. I say his first act; for his second was to sit down on the deck and cover his face with his hands, and remain in that position for fully half an hour.

Constant watching, binding, and the use of potent drugs, placed the captain out of the reach of means to place us again in peril. But though a breeze sprang up next day, and our well-managed ship prosperously finished her voyage, I never laid down to sleep the rest of the time without a shudder, and never once dropped off without waking with a start from a horrible dream of seeing the captain, match-box in hand, applying a light to the edge of the cartridge chest.—*Chambers' Journal.*

ONE OF MR. LINCOLN'S MERCIFUL ACTS.—Col. Forney tells the following in the Washington *Sunday Chronicle*, among his interesting "Anecdotes of Public Men": "While I was Secretary of the Senate, there was scarcely an hour during any day that I was not called upon to help somebody who had friends or kindred in the army, or had business in the departments, or was anxious to get some poor fellow out of the Old Capitol Prison. These constant appeals were incessant demands upon the time of a very busy man, but the labour was a labour of love, and I am glad to remember that I never undertook it reluctantly. One day a very energetic lady called on me to take her to the President and aid her to get a private soldier pardoned who had been sentenced to death for desertion, and was to be shot the very next morning. We were much pressed in the Senate, and she had to wait a long time before I could accompany her to the White House. It was late in the afternoon when we got there, and yet the Cabinet was still in session. I sent my name in for Mr. Lincoln, and he came out evidently in profound thought and full of some great subject. I stated the object of our call, and leaving the lady in one of the ante-chambers, returned to the Senate, which had not yet adjourned. The case made a deep impression on me, but I forgot it in the excitement of the debate and the work of my office, until, perhaps, near ten o'clock that night, when my female friend came rushing into my room, radiant with delight, with the pardon in her hand. "I have been up there ever since," she said. "The Cabinet adjourned, and I sat waiting for the President to come out and tell me the fate of my poor soldier, whose case I placed in his hands after you left; but I waited in vain—there was no Mr. Lincoln. So I thought I would go up to the door of his Cabinet chamber and knock. I did so, and, as there was no answer, I opened it and passed in, and there was the worn President asleep, and his head on the table resting on his arms, and my boy's pardon signed at his side. I quietly waked him, blessed him for his good deed, and came here to tell you the glorious news. You have helped me to save a human life." This is the material, if not for solemn history, at least for those better lessons which speak to us from the lives of the just and the pure.

FOXES AS SHEEP-HERDERS.—The Stockton (California) *Republican* vouches for the following story: "People often wonder at the remarkable instinct displayed by well-trained shepherd dogs, but what will they say when we tell them of a band of sheep that is guarded by foxes alone. The story seems improbable, but of its truth we have the most undoubted proof. On Whiskey Hill, four miles from Milton, may be seen, almost any day, a large flock of sheep herded by foxes. These guardians of the little lambs are three in number—one gray fox and the other two of the species known as the red fox. In point of intelligence, these novel shepherds are said to greatly surpass the best trained shepherd dogs. They perform their work well, and from morning to night are on the alert. The gray one seems to control, and in a great measure to direct, the actions of the other two. A gentleman informs us that he saw the gray fox pursue and attack a hog that had seized a lamb and was making off with it. The contest was short and sharp, and resulted in the hog dropping the lamb and beating a hasty retreat. The fox picked up the apparently uninjured lamb and carried it back to the flock."