

Wharton, and we shall have to cut her out, sir. She's a footy little brig, but I should have thought a fore-and-after would have been more handy."

"It was a mutiny, sir."

"Ah, indeed?"

"Yes, sir, I heard of it at Manila—a bad business, sir. Captain and two mates murdered. This Hulton, or Hairy Hudson, as they call him, led the mutiny. He's a Londoner, sir, but as cruel a villain as ever walked."

"That's Hairy Hudson on the after rail, sir."

"The low, impertinent blackguard! He'll play some other antics before we are done with him. Could you reach him with the long eighteen, Mr. Smeaton?"

"Another cable length will do it, sir."

The brig yawed as they spoke, and as she came round a spurt of smoke whiffed out from her quarter. It was a pure piece of bravado, for the gun could scarcely carry half way. Then with a jaunty swing the little ship came into the wind again and shot round a fresh curve of the winding channel.

"The water's shoaling rapidly, sir," reported the second lieutenant.

"There's six fathoms by the chart."

"Four by the lead, sir."

"When we clear this point we shall see how we lie. Ha! I thought as much! Lay her to Mr. Wharton. Now we have got her at our mercy."

The frigate was quite out of sight just as the two ships came out of the river-like estuary. As she came around the curve, the two ships were seen to converge at a point about a mile distant. In the angle, as near shore as she could get, the brig was lying with her broadside towards her pursuer and a wisp of black cloth streaming from her mizzen. The lean lieutenant, who had reappeared upon deck with a cutlass strapped to his side and two pistols rammed into his belt, peered curiously at the ensign.

"Is it the Jolly Rogers, sir?" he asked. But the captain was furious. "He may hang where his breeches are hanging before I have done with him," said he. "What boats will you want Mr. Wharton?"

"We should do with the launch and the jolly boat."

"Take four and make a clean job of it. Pipe away the crews at once and I'll work her in and help you with the long eighteens."

With a rattle of ropes and a creaking of blocks the four boats splashed into the water. Their crews clustered thickly into them, barefooted sailors, stolid marines, laughing middies, and in the sheets of each the senior officers with their stern schoolmaster faces. The captain, his elbows on the binnacle, still watched the distant brig. Her crew were tricing up the boarding netting, dragging round the starboard guns, knocking new portholes for them, and making every other preparation for a desperate resistance. In the thick of it all a huge man, bearded to the eyes, with a red nightcap upon his head, was straining and stooping and hauling. The captain watched him with a sour smile and then, snapping up his glass, he turned upon his heel. For an instant he stood staring.

"Call back the boats!" he cried, in his thin, creaking voice. "Clear away for action there! Cast loose those main-deck guns. Brace back the yards, Mr. Smeaton, and stand by to go about when she has weigh enough."

Round the curve of the estuary was coming a huge vessel. The great yellow bowsprit and white-winged figure-head were jutting out from the cluster

of palm trees, while high above them towered three immense masts with the tri-color flag floating superbly from the mizzen. Round she came, the deep blue water creaming under her fore-foot, until her long, curving black side, her line of shining copper beneath and of snow-white hammocks above, and the thick clusters of men who peered over her bulwarks, were all in full view. Her lower yards were stung, her ports were triced up and her guns run out all ready for action. Lying behind one of the promontories of the island the lookout men of the Gloire upon the shore had seen the cul-de-sac into which the British frigate had headed, so that Captain de Milon had served the Leda as Captain Johnson had the Slapping Sal.

But the splendid discipline of the British service was at its best in such a crisis. The boats flew back, their crews clustered aboard, they were swung up at the davits, and the fall ropes made fast. Hammocks were brought up and stowed, bulkheads sent down, ports and magazines opened, the fires put out in the galley and the drums beat to quarters. Swarms of men set the headsails and brought the frigate round, while the gun crews threw off their jackets and shirts, tightened their belts and ran out their eighteen-pounders, peering through the open portholes at the stately Frenchman. The wind was very light. Hardly a ripple showed itself upon the clear blue water, but the sails blew gently out as the breeze came over the wooded banks. The Frenchmen had gone about also and both ships were now heading slowly for the sea under fore-and-aft canvas, the Gloire one hundred yards in advance. She luffed up to cross the Leda's bows, but the British ship came around also and the two rippled slowly on in such a silence that the ringing of the ramrods as the French marines drove home their charges changed quite loudly upon the ear.

"Not much sea-room, Mr. Wharton," remarked the captain.

"I have fought action in less, sir."

"We must keep our distance and trust to our gunnery. She is very heavily manned and if she gets alongside we might find ourselves in trouble."

"I see the shakoos of soldiers aboard of her."

"Two companies of light Infantry from Martinique. Now we have her. Hard a port, and let her have it as we cross her stern."

The keen eyes of the little commander had seen the surface ripple, which told of a passing breeze. He had used it to dart across behind the big Frenchman and to rake her with every gun as he passed. But once past her the Leda had to come back in the wind to keep out of shoal water. The manoeuvre brought her on to the starboard side of the Frenchman, and the trim little frigate seemed to heel right over under the crashing broadside, which burst from the gaping ports. A moment later her topmen were swarming aloft to set her topsails and royals and she strove to cross the Gloire's bows and rake her again. The French captain, however, brought his frigate's head round, and the two rode side by side within easy pistol shot, pouring broadsides into each other in one of those murderous duels which, could they all be recorded, would mottle our charts with blood.

In that heavy tropical air with so faint a breeze, the smoke formed a thick bank round the two vessels, from which the topmasts only protruded. Neither could see anything of the enemy

save the throbs of fire in the darkness, and the guns were sponged and trained and fired into a dense wall of vapor. On the poop and the fore-castle the marines, in two little red lines, were pouring in their volleys, but neither they nor the seamen gunners could see what effect their fire was having. Nor indeed could they tell how far they were suffering themselves, for standing at a gun one could but hazily see that up on the right and the left. But above the roar of the cannon came the sharper sound of the piping shot, the crashing of riven planks and the occasional heavy thud as spar or block came hurtling on the deck. The lieutenants paced up and down behind the line of guns, while Capt. Johnson fanned the smoke away with his cocked hat and peered eagerly out.

"This is rare, Bobby," said he as the lieutenant joined him. Then suddenly restraining himself he said: "What have we lost, Mr. Wharton?"

"Our maintopsail yard and our gaff, sir."

"Where's the flag?"

"Gone overboard, sir."

"They'll think we have struck. Lash a boat's ensign on the starboard arm of the mizzen cross jack yard."

"Yes, sir."

A round shot dashed the binnacle to pieces between them. A second knocked two marines into a bloody, palpitating mass. For a moment the smoke rose and the English captain saw that his adversary's heavier metal was producing a horrible effect. The Leda was a shattered wreck. Her deck was strewn with corpses. Several of her portholes were knocked into one, and one of her eighteen-pounder guns had been thrown right back on her breech and pointed straight up to the sky. The thin line of marines still loaded and fired, but half the guns were silent and their crews were piled thickly round them.

"Stand by to repel boarders!" yelled the captain.

"Cutlasses, lads! cutlasses!" roared Wharton.

"Hold your volley till they touch!" cried the captain of marines.

The huge loom of the Frenchman was seen bursting through the smoke. Thick clusters of boarders hung upon her sides and shrouds. A final broadside leaped from her ports, and the mainmast of the Leda snapping short off a few feet above deck spun into the air and crashed down upon the port guns, killing ten men and putting the whole battery out of action. An instant later the two ships scraped together and the starboard bower anchor of the Gloire caught the mizzen chain of the Leda upon the port side. With a yell the black swarm of boarders steadied themselves for a spring.

But their feet were never to reach that blood-stained deck. From somewhere there came a well-aimed whiff of grape, and another, and another. The English marines and seamen, waiting with cutlass and musket behind the silent guns, saw with amazement the dark masses thinning and shredding away. At the same time the port boarders of the Frenchmen burst into a roar.

"Clear away the wreck," roared the captain. "What the devil are they firing at?"

"Get the guns clear!" panted the lieutenant. "We'll do them yet, boys!"

"They're running! They're running! they're running!"

And it was true. The Frenchman had ceased to fire, and was intent only upon clapping on every sail that she could carry.

But that shouting hundred could not