



A Roving Commission

G. A. Henty

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A
ROVING
COMMISSION

G·A·HENTY

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A ROVING COMMISSION



"I HAVE HEARD A GREAT DEAL OF YOU, MR. GLOVER," THE ADMIRAL SAID.

A ROVING COMMISSION

OR

***THROUGH THE BLACK INSURRECTION
AT HAYTI***

BY

G. A. HENTY

Author of "With Frederick the Great," "The Dash for Khartoum"
"Both Sides the Border," etc.

WITH TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS BY WILLIAM RAINEY, R.I.

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PREFACE

Horrible as were the atrocities of which the monsters of the French Revolution were guilty, they paled before the fiendish outrages committed by their black imitators in Hayti. Indeed, for some six years the island presented a saturnalia of massacre, attended with indescribable tortures. It may be admitted that the retaliation inflicted by the maddened whites after the first massacre was as full of horrors as were the outrages perpetrated by the blacks, and both were rivalled by the mulattoes when they joined in the general madness for blood. The result was ruin to all concerned. France lost one of her fairest possessions, and a wealthy race of cultivators, many belonging to the best blood of France, were annihilated or driven into poverty among strangers. The mulattoes, many of whom were also wealthy, soon found that the passions they had done so much to foment were too powerful for them; their position under the blacks was far worse and more precarious, than it had been under the whites. The negroes gained a nominal liberty. Nowhere were the slaves so well treated as by the French colonists, and they soon discovered that, so far from profiting by the massacre of their masters and families, they were infinitely worse off than before. They were still obliged to work to some extent to save themselves from starvation; they had none to look to for aid in the time of sickness and old age; hardships and fevers had swept them away wholesale; the trade of the island dwindled almost to nothing; and at last the condition of the negroes in Hayti has fallen to the level of that of the savage African tribes. Unless some strong white power should occupy the island and enforce law and order, sternly repress crime, and demand a certain amount of labour from all able-bodied men, there seems no hope that any amelioration can take place in the present situation.

G. A. HENTY.

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CHAPTER I

A FIGHT WITH A BLOODHOUND



ow, look here, Nathaniel—"

"Drop that, Curtis, you know very well that I won't have it. I can't help having such a beast of a name, and why it was given me I have never been able to make out, and if I had been consulted in the matter all the godfathers and godmothers in the world wouldn't have persuaded me to take such a name. Nat I don't mind. I don't say that it is a name that I should choose; still, I can put up with that, but the other I won't have. You have only just joined the ship, but if you ask the others they will tell you that I have had at least half a dozen fights over the name, and it is an understood thing here that if anyone wants a row with me he has only got to call me Nathaniel, and there is no occasion for any more words after that."

The speaker was a pleasant-faced lad, between fifteen and sixteen, and his words were half in jest half in earnest. He was a general favourite among his mess-mates on board H. M. frigate *Orpheus*. He was full of life and fun, excep[Pg 2]tionally good-tempered, and able to stand any amount of chaff and joking, and it was understood by his comrades that there was but one point that it was unsafe to touch on, and that sore point was his name. It had been the choice of his godmother, a maiden aunt, who had in her earlier days had a disappointment. Nat had once closely questioned his father as to how he came by his name, and the latter had replied testily:

"Well, my boy, your Aunt Eliza, who is, you know, a very good woman—no one can doubt that—had a weakness. I never myself got at the rights of the matter. Anyhow, his name was Nathaniel. I don't think there was ever any formal engagement between them. Her own idea is that he loved her, but that his parents forbade him to think of her; for that was at a time before her Aunt Lydia left all her money to her. Anyhow, he went abroad, and I don't think she ever heard of him again. I am inclined to think it was an entire mistake on her part, and that the young fellow had never had the slightest fancy for her.

However, that was the one romance of her life, and she has clung to it like a limpet to a rock. At any rate when we asked her to be your godmother she said she would be so if we would give you the name of Nathaniel. I own it is not a name that I like myself; but when we raised an objection, she said that the name was very dear to her, and that if you took it she would certainly make you her heir, and more than hinted that if you had any other name she would leave her money to charitable purposes. Well, you see, as she is worth thirty thousand pounds if she is worth a penny, your mother and I both thought it would be folly to allow the money to go out of the family for the sake of a name, which after all is not such a bad name."

"I think it beastly, father, in the first place because it is long."

"Well, my boy, if you like we can shorten it to Nathan."

"Oh, that would be a hundred times worse! Nathan[Pg 3] indeed! Nat is not so bad. If I had been christened Nat I should not have particularly minded it. Why did you not propose that to aunt?"

His father shook his head. "That would never have done. To her he was always Nathaniel. Possibly if they had been married it might some day have become Nat, but, you see, it never got to that."

"Well, of course, father," the boy said with a sigh, "as the thing is done it cannot be helped. And I don't say that aunt isn't a good sort—first-rate in some things, for she has always tipped me well whenever she came here, and she says she is going to allow me fifty pounds a year directly I get my appointment as midshipman; but it is certainly hard on me that she could not have fallen in love with some man with a decent name. Nathaniel is always getting me into rows. Why, the first two or three years I went to school I should say that I had a fight over it once a month. Of course I have not had one lately, for since I licked Smith major fellows are more careful. I expect it will be just as bad in the navy."

So when he first joined Nat had found it, but now that he was nearly sixteen, and very strong and active, and with the experience of many past combats, the name Nathaniel had been dropped. It was six months since the obnoxious Christian name had been used, as it was now by a young fellow of seventeen who had been transferred to the *Orpheus* when the frigate to which he belonged was ordered home. He was tall and lanky, very particular about his dress, spoke in a drawling supercilious way, and had the knack of saying unpleasant things with an air of innocence. Supposing that Glover's name must be Nathaniel, he had thought it smart so to address him, but although

he guessed that it might irritate him, he was unprepared for an explosion on the part of a lad who was proverbially good-tempered.[Pg 4]

"Dear me," he said, in assumed surprise, "I had no idea that you objected so much to be called by your proper name! However, I will, of course, in future use the abbreviation."

"You had better call me Glover," Nat replied sharply. "My friends can call me Nat, but to other people I am Glover, and if you call me out of that name there will be squalls; so I warn you."

Curtis thought it was well not to pursue the subject further. He was no coward, but he had the sense to see that as Nat was a favourite with the others, while he was a new-comer, a fight, even if he were the victor, would not conduce to his popularity among his mess-mates. The president of the mess, a master's mate, a good-tempered fellow, who hated quarrels, broke what would have been an awkward silence by saying:

"We seem to be out of luck altogether this trip; we have been out three weeks and not fired a shot. It is especially hard, for we caught sight of that brigantine we have been in search of, and should have had her if she hadn't run into that channel where there was not water enough for us to follow her."

"Yes, that was rough upon us, and one hates to go back to Port Royal without a prize, after having taken so many that we have come to be considered the luckiest ship on the station," another said. "Still, the cruise is not over yet. I suppose by the way we are laying our course, Marston, we are going into Cape François?"

The mate nodded. "Yes; we want fresh meat, fruit, and water, and it is about the pleasantest place among these islands. I have no doubt, too, that the captain hopes to get some news that may help him to find out where those piratical craft that are doing so much mischief have their rendezvous. They are all so fast that unless in a strong breeze a frigate has no chance whatever of overhauling them; there is no doubt that they are all of Spanish build, and in a light breeze they sail[Pg 5] like witches. I believe our only chance of catching them is in finding them at their head-quarters, wherever that may be, or by coming upon them in a calm in a bay. In that case it would be a boat affair; and a pretty sharp one I should think, for they all carry very strong crews and are heavily armed, and as the scoundrels know that they fight with ropes round their necks they would be awkward customers to tackle."

"Yes, if we happened to find them all together, I don't think the captain would risk sending in the boats. One at a time we could manage, but with three of them mounting about fifty guns between them, and carrying, I should say, from two hundred to two hundred and fifty men, the odds would be very great, and the loss, even if we captured them, so heavy that I hardly think the captain would be justified in attempting it. I should say that he would be more likely to get out all the boats and tow the frigate into easy range. She would give a good account of the whole of them."

"Yes, there is no doubt about that; but even then we should only succeed if the bay was a very narrow one, for otherwise their boats would certainly tow them faster than we could take the frigate along."

It was Glover who spoke last.

"I don't think myself that we shall ever catch them in the frigate. It seems to me that the only chance will be to get hold of an old merchantman, put a strong crew on board and a dozen of our guns, and cruise about until one of them gets a sight of us and comes skimming along to capture us."

"Yes, that would be a good plan; but it has been tried several times with success, and I fancy the pirates would not fall into the trap. Besides, there is very little doubt that they have friends at all these ports, and get early information of any movements of our ships, and would hear of what we were doing long before the disguised ship came near them. It [Pg 6] can hardly be chance, that it matters not which way we cruise these fellows begin their work in another direction altogether. Now that we are here in this great bay, they are probably cruising off the west of Cuba or down by Porto Rico or the Windward Islands. That is the advantage that three or four craft working together have: they are able to keep spies in every port that our ships of war are likely to go into, while a single vessel cannot afford such expenses."

"I don't think that the expenses, Low, would be heavy; the negroes would do it for next to nothing, and so would the mulattoes, simply because they hate the whites. I don't mean the best of the mulattoes, because many of them are gentlemen and good fellows; but the lower class are worse than the negroes, they are up to any devilment, and will do anything they can to injure a white man."

"Poor beggars, one can hardly blame them; they are neither one thing nor the other! These old French planters are as aristocratic as their noblesse at home, and indeed many of them belong to noble families. Even the meanest white—and they are pretty mean some of

them—looks down upon a mulatto, although the latter may have been educated in France and own great plantations. The negroes don't like them because of their strain of white blood. They are treated as if they were pariahs. Their children may not go to school with the whites, they themselves may not sit down in a theatre or kneel at church next to them, they may not use the same restaurants or hotels. No wonder they are discontented."

"It is hard on them," Glover said, "but one can't be surprised that the whites do fight shy of them. Great numbers of them are brutes and no mistake, ready for any crime and up to any wickedness. There is lots of good in the niggers; they are merry fellows; and I must say for these old French planters they use their slaves a great deal better[Pg 7] than they are as a rule treated by our planters in Jamaica. Of course there are bad masters everywhere, but if I were a slave I would certainly rather be under a French master than an English one, or, from what I have heard, than an American."

"Very well, Glover, I will make a note of that, and if you ever misbehave yourself and we have to sell you, I will drop a line to the first luff how your preference lies."

Early the next morning the frigate dropped anchor at Cape François, the largest and most important town in the island, with the exception of the capital of the Spanish portion of San Domingo. The *Orpheus* carried six midshipmen. Four of these had been ashore when on the previous occasion the *Orpheus* had entered the port. Nat Glover and Curtis were the exceptions, Curtis having at that time belonged to the frigate for but a very few weeks, and Nat having been in the first lieutenant's bad books, owing to a scrape into which he had got at the last port they had touched at. After breakfast they went up together to the first lieutenant, whose name was Hill.

"Please, sir, if we are not wanted, can we have leave for the day?"

The lieutenant hesitated, and then said:

"Yes, I think the other four will be enough for the boats. You did not go ashore last time you were here, I think, Mr. Glover," he added with a slight smile.

"No, sir."

"Very well, then, you can go, but don't get into any scrape."

"I will try not to, sir," Nat said demurely.

"Well, I hope your trial will be successful, Mr. Glover, for if not, I can

tell you that it will be a long time before you have leave again. These people don't understand that sort of thing."

"He is a nice lad," Mr. Hill said to the second lieutenant[Pg 8] as the two midshipmen walked away, "and when he has worked off those animal spirits of his he will make a capital officer, but at present he is one of the most mischievous young monkeys I ever came across."

"He does not let them interfere with his duty," the other said. "He is the smartest of our mids; he is well up in navigation, and has any amount of pluck. You remember how he jumped overboard in Port Royal when a marine fell into the water, although the harbour was swarming with sharks. It was a near touch. Luckily we threw a bowline to him, and the two were hauled up together. A few seconds more and it would have been too late, for there was a shark within twenty feet of them."

"Yes, there is no doubt about his pluck, Playford, and indeed I partly owe my life to him. When we captured that piratical brigantine near Santa Lucia I boarded by the stern, and she had such a strong crew that we were being beaten back, and things looked very bad until he with the gig's crew swarmed in over the bow. Even then it was a very tough struggle till they cut their way through the pirates and joined us, and we went at them together, and that youngster fought like a young fiend. He was in the thick of it everywhere, and yet he was as cool as a cucumber. Oh yes, he has the making of a very fine officer. Although I am obliged to be sharp with him, there is not a shadow of harm in the lad, but he certainly has a genius for getting into scrapes."

The two midshipmen went ashore together. "I don't know what you are going to do, Curtis, but after I have walked through the place and had a look at it, I shall hire a horse and ride out into the country."

"It is too hot for riding," the other said. "Of course I shall see what there is to be seen, and then I shall look for a seat in some place in the shade and eat fruit."[Pg 9]

"Well, we may as well walk through the town together," Nat said cheerfully. "From the look of the place I should fancy there was not much in it, and I know the fellows who went on shore before said that the town contained nothing but native huts, a few churches, and two or three dozen old French houses."

Half an hour indeed sufficed to explore the place. When they separated Nat had no difficulty in hiring a horse. He had been accustomed, when in England, to ride a pony, and was therefore at

home in the saddle; he proceeded at a leisurely pace along the road across the flat plain that surrounded Cape François. On either side were plantations,—sugar-cane and tobacco,—and he occasionally passed the abode of some wealthy planter, surrounded by shady trees and gardens gorgeous with tropical plants and flowers. He was going by one of these, half a mile from the town, when he heard a loud scream, raised evidently by a woman in extreme pain or terror. He was just opposite the entrance, and, springing from his horse, he ran in.

On the ground, twenty yards from the gate, lay a girl. A huge hound had hold of her shoulder, and was shaking her violently. Nat drew his dirk and gave a loud shout as he rushed forward. The hound loosed his hold of the girl and turned to meet him, and, springing upon him with a savage growl, threw him to the ground. Nat drove his dirk into the animal as he fell, and threw his left arm across his throat to prevent the dog seizing him there. A moment later the hound had seized it with a grip that extracted a shout of pain from the midshipman. As he again buried his dirk in the hound's side, the dog shifted his hold from Nat's forearm to his shoulder and shook him as if he had been a child.

Nat made no effort to free himself, for he knew that were he to uncover his throat for a moment the dog would[Pg 10] seize him there. Though the pain was terrible he continued to deal stroke after stroke to the dog. One of these blows must have reached the heart, for suddenly its hold relaxed and it rolled over, just as half a dozen negroes armed with sticks came rushing out of the house. Nat tried to raise himself on his right arm, but the pain of the left was so great that he leant back again half-fainting. Presently he felt himself being lifted up and carried along; he heard a lady's voice giving directions, and then for a time he knew no more. When he came to himself he saw the ship's doctor leaning over him.

"What is the matter, doctor?" he asked.

"You are badly hurt, lad, and must lie perfectly quiet. Luckily the messenger who was sent to fetch a doctor, seeing Mr. Curtis and me walking up the street, ran up to us and said that a young officer of our ship was hurt, and that he was sent in to fetch a doctor. He had, in fact, already seen one, and was in the act of returning with him when he met us. Of course I introduced myself to the French doctor as we came along together, for we fortunately got hold of a trap directly, so that no time was lost. The black boy who brought the message told me that you and a young lady had been bitten by a great hound belonging to his master, and that you had killed it. Now, my lad, I am

going to cut off your coat and look at your wounds. The Frenchman is attending to the young lady."

"Mind how you touch my arm, doctor! it is broken somewhere between the elbow and the wrist; I heard it snap when the brute seized me. It threw me down, and I put my arm across over my throat, so as to prevent it from getting at that. It would have been all up with me if it had gripped me there."

"That it would, Glover. I saw the dog lying on the grass[Pg 11] as I came in. It is a big bloodhound; and your presence of mind undoubtedly saved your life."

By this time he had cut the jacket and shirt up to the neck. Nat saw his lips tighten as he caught sight of the wound on the shoulder.

"It is a bad bite, eh, doctor?"

"Yes, it has mangled the flesh badly. The dog seems to have shifted his hold several times."

"Yes, doctor, each time I stabbed him he gave a sort of start, and then caught hold again and shook me furiously. After the first bite I did not seem to feel any pain. I suppose the limb was numbed."

"Very likely, lad. Now I must first of all see what damage was done to the forearm. I am afraid I shall hurt you, but I will be as gentle as I can."

Nat clenched his teeth and pressed his lips tightly together. Not a sound was heard as the examination was being made, although the sweat that started out on his forehead showed how intense was the pain.

"Both bones are broken," the surgeon said to his French colleague, who had just entered the room and came up to the bedside. "The first thing to do is to extemporize some splints, and of course we shall want some stuff for bandages."

"I will get them made at once," the doctor replied. "Madame Demaine said that she put the whole house at my disposal."

He went out, and in a few minutes returned with some thin slips of wood eighteen inches long and a number of strips of sheeting sewn together.

"It is very fortunate," the surgeon said, "that the ends of the bone have kept pretty fairly in their places instead of working through the flesh, which they might very well have done.[Pg 12]"

Very carefully the two surgeons bandaged the arm from the elbow to the finger-tips.

"Now for the shoulder," the doctor said.

They first sponged the wounds and then began feeling the bones again, giving exquisite pain to Nat. Then they drew apart and consulted for two or three minutes.

"This is a much worse business than the other," Dr. Bemish said when he returned to the bedside; "the arm is broken near the shoulder, the collar-bone is broken too, and the flesh is almost in a pulp."

"Don't say I must lose the arm, doctor," Nat said.

"Well, I hope not, Glover, but I can't say for certain. You see I am speaking frankly to you, for I know that you have pluck. The injury to the collar-bone is not in itself serious, but the other is a comminuted fracture."

"What is comminuted, doctor?"

"It means that the bone is splintered, lad. Still, there is no reason why it should not heal again; you have a strong constitution, and Nature works wonders."

For the next half-hour the two surgeons were at work picking out the fragments of bone, getting the ends together, and bandaging the arm and shoulder. Nat fainted under the pain within the first few minutes, and did not recover until the surgeons had completed their work. Then his lips were wetted with brandy and a few drops of brandy and water were poured down his throat. In a minute or two he opened his eyes.

"It is all over now, lad." He lay for sometime without speaking, and then whispered, "How is the girl?"

"Her shoulder is broken," Dr. Bemish replied. "I have not seen her; but the doctor says that it is a comparatively simple case."

"How was it the dog came to bite her?"[Pg 13]

"She was a stranger to it. She is not the daughter of your hostess. It seems her father's plantation is some twelve miles away; he drove her in and left her here with Madame Demaine, who is his sister, while he went into town on business. Madame's own daughter was away, and the girl sauntered down into the garden, when the hound,

not knowing her, sprang upon her, and I have not the least doubt would have killed her had you not arrived."

"Are you going to take me on board, doctor?"

"Not at present, Glover; you need absolute quiet, and if the frigate got into a heavy sea it might undo all our work, and in that case there would be little hope of saving your arm. Madame Demaine told the French doctor that she would nurse you as if you were her own child, and that everything was to be done to make you comfortable. The house is cool, and your wound will have a much better chance of getting well here than in our sick-bay. She wanted to come in to thank you, but I said that, now we had dressed your arm, it was better that you should have nothing to disturb or excite you. When the girl's father returns—and I have no doubt he will do so soon, for as yet, though half-a-dozen boys have been sent down to the town, they have not been able to find him—he must on no account come in to see you at present. Here is a tumbler of fresh lime-juice and water. Doctor Lepel will remain here all night and see that you have everything that you require."

The tumbler was held to Nat's lips, and he drained it to the bottom. The drink was iced, and seemed to him the most delicious that he had ever tasted.

"I shall come ashore again to see you in the morning. Dr. Lepel will go back with me now, and make up a soothing draught for you both. Remember that above all things it is essential for you to lie quiet. He will put bandages round[Pg 14] your body, and fasten the ends to the bedstead so as to prevent you from turning in your sleep."

"All right, sir; I can assure you that I have no intention of moving. My arm does not hurt me much now, and I would not set it off aching again for any money."

"It is a rum thing," Nat thought to himself, "that I should always be getting into some scrape or other when I go ashore. This is the worst of all by a long way."

A negro girl presently came in noiselessly and placed a small table on the right-hand side of the bed. She then brought in a large jug of the same drink that Nat had before taken, and some oranges and limes both peeled and cut up into small pieces.

"It is lucky it was not the right arm," Nat said to himself. "I suppose one can do without the left pretty well when one gets accustomed to it, though it would be rather awkward going aloft."

In an hour Dr. Lepel returned, and gave him the draught.

"Now try and go to sleep," he said in broken English. "I shall lie down on that sofa, and if you wake up be sure and call me. I am a light sleeper."

"Had you not better stay with the young lady?"

"She will have her mother and her aunt with her, so she will do very well. I hope that you will soon go to sleep."

It was but a few minutes before Nat dozed off. Beyond a numbed feeling his arm was not hurting him very much. Once or twice during the night he woke and took a drink. A slight stir in the room aroused him, and to his surprise he found that the sun was already up. The doctor was feeling his pulse, a negro girl was fanning him, and a lady stood at the foot of the bed looking at him pitifully.

"Do you speak French, monsieur?" she asked.

"A little," he replied, for he had learned French while at [Pg 15] school, and since the frigate had been among the West Indian islands he had studied it for a couple of hours a day, as it was the language that was spoken in all the French islands and might be useful to him if put in charge of a prize.

"Have you slept well?" she asked.

"Very well."

"Does your arm hurt you very much now?"

"It hurts a bit, ma'am, but nothing to make any fuss about."

"You must ask for anything that you want," she said. "I have told off two of my negro girls to wait upon you. Of course they both speak French."

Half an hour later Dr. Bemish arrived.

"You are going on very well, Glover," he said after feeling the lad's pulse and putting his hand on his forehead. "At present you have no fever. You cannot expect to get through without some, but I hardly expected to find you so comfortable this morning. The captain told me to say that he would come and see you to-day, and I can assure you that there is not one among your mess-mates who is not deeply sorry at what has happened, although they all feel proud of your pluck in fighting that great hound with nothing but a dirk."

"They are useless sort of things, doctor, and I cannot think why they

give them to us; but it was a far better weapon yesterday than a sword would have been."

"Yes, it was. The room is nice and cool, isn't it?"

"Wonderfully cool, sir. I was wondering about it before you came in, for it is a great deal cooler than it is on board."

"There are four great pans full of ice in the room, and they have got up matting before each of the windows, and are keeping it soaked with water."

"That is very good of them, doctor. Please thank Madame Demaine for me. She was in here this morning—at least I [Pg 16] suppose it was she—and she did not bother me with thanks, which was a great comfort. You are not going to take these bandages off and put them on again, I hope?"

"Oh, no. We may loosen them a little when inflammation sets in, which it is sure to do sooner or later."

Captain Crosbie came to see Nat that afternoon.

"Well, my lad," he said cheerfully, "I see that you have fallen into good hands, and I am sure that everything that is possible will be done for you. I was talking to the girl's mother and aunt before I came in. Their gratitude to you is quite touching, and they are lamenting that Dr. Bemish has given the strictest orders that they are not to say anything more about it. And now I must not stay and talk; the doctor gave me only two minutes to be in the room with you. I don't know whether the frigate is likely to put in here again soon, but I will take care to let you know from time to time what we are doing and where we are likely to be, so that you can rejoin when the doctor here gives you leave; but mind, you are not to dream of attempting it until he does so, and you must be a discontented spirit indeed if you are not willing to stay for a time in such surroundings. Good-bye, lad! I sincerely trust that it will not be very long before you rejoin us, and I can assure you of a hearty welcome from officers and men."

Three days later, fever set in, but, thanks to the coolness of the room and to the bandages being constantly moistened with iced water, it passed away in the course of a week. For two or three days Nat was light-headed, but he woke one morning feeling strangely weak. It was some minutes before he could remember where he was or how he had got there, but a sharp twinge in his arm brought the facts home to him.

"Thank God that you are better, my brave boy," a voice said in

French, as a cool hand was placed on his forehead; and turning his head Nat saw a lady standing by his bedside. She[Pg 17] was not the one whom he had seen before; tears were streaming down her cheeks, and, evidently unable to speak, she hurried from the room, and a minute later Doctor Lepel entered.

"Madame Duchesne has given me the good news that you are better," he said. "I had just driven up to the door when she ran down."

"Have I been very bad, doctor?"

"Well, you have been pretty bad, my lad, and have been light-headed for the past three or four days, and I did not for a moment expect that you would come round so soon. You must have a magnificent constitution, for most men, even if they recovered at all from such terrible wounds as you have had, would probably have been three or four times as long before the fever had run its course."

"And how is the young lady?"

"She is going on well, and I intended to give permission for her to be carried home in a hammock to-day, but when I spoke of it yesterday to her mother, she said that nothing would induce her to go until you were out of danger. She or Madame Demaine have not left your bedside for the past week, and next to your own good constitution you owe your rapid recovery to their care. I have no doubt that she will go home now, and you are to be moved to Monsieur Duchesne's house as soon as you are strong enough. It lies up among the hills, and the change and cooler air will do you good."

"I have not felt it hot here, doctor, thanks to the care that they have taken in keeping the room cool. I hope now that there is no fear of my losing my arm?"

"No; I think that I can promise you that. In a day or two I shall re-bandage it, and I shall then be able to see how the wounds are getting on; but there can be no doubt that they are doing well, or you would never have shaken off the fever so soon as you have done." [Pg 18]

"Of course the *Orpheus* has sailed, doctor?"

"Yes. She put to sea a week ago. I have a letter here that the captain gave me to hand to you when you were fit to read it. I should not open it now if I were you. You are very weak, and sleep is the best medicine for you. Now, drink a little of this fresh lime-juice. I have no doubt that you will doze off again."

Almost before the door closed on the doctor Nat was asleep. A fortnight later he was able to get up and sit in an easy-chair.

"How long shall I have to keep these bandages on, doctor?"

"I should say in another fortnight or so you might take them off the forearm, for the bones seem to have knit there, but it would be better that you should wear them for another month or six weeks. There would indeed be no use in taking them off earlier, for the bandages on the shoulder and the fracture below it cannot be removed for some time, and you will have to carry your arm in a sling for another three months. I do not mean that you may not move your arm before that, indeed it is desirable that you should do so, but the action must be quiet and simple, and done methodically, and the sling will be necessary at other times to prevent sudden jerks."

"But I shall be able to go away and join my ship before that, surely?"

"Yes, if the arm goes on as well as at present you may be able to do so in a month's time; only you will have to be very careful. You must remember that a fall, or even a lurch against the rail, or a slip in going down below, or anything of that kind, might very well undo our work, for it must be some time before the newly-formed bone is as strong as the old. As I told you the other day, your arm will be some two inches shorter than it was." [Pg 19]

"That won't matter a rap," Nat said.

That afternoon Nat had to submit to what he had dreaded. The doctor had pronounced that he was now quite convalescent, and that there was no fear whatever of a relapse, and Monsieur and Madame Duchesne therefore came over to see him. He had seen the latter but once, and then only for a minute, for she found herself unable to observe the condition on which alone the doctor had allowed her to enter, namely, to repress all emotion. Madame Demaine came in with them. Since her niece had been taken away, she had spent much of her time in Nat's room, talking quietly to him about his English home or his ship, and sometimes reading aloud to him, but studiously avoiding any allusion to the accident. Monsieur Duchesne was a man of some thirty-five years of age, his wife was about five years younger, and they were an exceptionally handsome couple of the best French type. Madame Duchesne pressed forward before the others, and to Nat's embarrassment bent over him and kissed him.

"You cannot tell how we have longed for this time to come," she said. "It seemed so cold and ungrateful that for a whole month we

should have said no word of thanks to you for saving our darling's life, but the doctor would not allow it. He said that the smallest excitement might bring on the fever again, so we have been obliged to abstain. Now he has given us leave to come, and now we have come, what can we say to you? Ah, monsieur, it was our only child that you saved, the joy of our lives! Think of the grief into which we should have been plunged by her loss, and you can then imagine the depth of our gratitude to you."

While she was speaking her husband had taken Nat's right hand and pressed it silently. There were tears in his eyes, and his lips quivered with emotion.

"Pray do not say anything more about it, madam," Nat[Pg 20] said. "Of course I am very glad to have saved your daughter's life, but anyone else would have done the same. You don't suppose that anyone could stand by and see a girl mauled by a dog without rushing forward to save her, even if he had had no arm of any kind, while I had my dirk, which was about as good a weapon for that sort of thing as one could want. Why, Harpur, our youngest middy, who is only fourteen, would have done it. Of course I have had a good deal of pain, but I would have borne twice as much for the sake of the pleasure I feel in having saved your daughter's life, and I am sure that I have had a very nice time of it since I have begun to get better. Madame Demaine has been awfully good to me. If she had been my own mother she could not have been kinder. I felt quite ashamed of being so much trouble to her, and of being fanned and petted as if I had been a sick girl. And how is your daughter getting on? The doctor gave me a very good account of her, but you know one can't always quite believe doctors; they like to say pleasant things to you so as not to upset you."

"She is getting on very well indeed. Of course she has her arm in a sling still, but she is going about the house, and is quite merry and bright again. She wanted to come over with us to-day, but Dr. Lepel would not have it. He said that a sudden jolt over a stone might do a good deal of mischief. However, it will not be long before she sees you, for we have got leave to have you carried over early next week."

CHAPTER II

REJOINED

Four days later Monsieur Duchesne came down with six negroes and a cane lounging chair, on each side of which a long pole had

been securely lashed. Nat's room was on the ground floor, and with wide windows opening to the ground. The chair was brought in. Nat was still shaky on his legs, but he was able to get from the bed into the chair without assistance.

"I shall come over to see you to-morrow," Madame Demaine said, as he thanked her and her husband for their great kindness to him, "and I hope I shall find that the journey has done you no harm."

Four of the negroes took the ends of the poles and raised them onto their shoulders, the other two walked behind to serve as a relay. Monsieur Duchesne mounted his horse and took his place by Nat's side, and the little procession started. The motion was very easy and gentle. It was late in the afternoon when they started, the sun was near the horizon, and a gentle breeze from the sea had sprung up. In half an hour it was dusk, and the two spare negroes lighted torches they had brought with them, and now walked ahead of the bearers. It was full moon, and after having been so long confined in a semi-darkened room, Nat enjoyed intensely the soft air, the dark sky spangled with stars, and the rich tropical foliage showing its outlines clearly in the moonlight.

Presently Monsieur Duchesne said:

"I have a flask of brandy and water with me, Mr. Glover, in case you should feel faint or exhausted."

Nat laughed.[Pg 22]

"Thank you for thinking of it, monsieur, but there is no fatigue whatever in sitting here, and I have enjoyed my ride intensely. It is almost worth getting hurt in order to have such pleasure: we don't get such nights as this in England."

"But you have fine weather sometimes, surely?" Monsieur Duchesne said.

"Oh yes, we often have fine weather, but there are not many nights in the year when one can sit out-of-doors after dark! When it is a warm night there are sure to be heavy dews; besides, the stars are not so bright with us as they are here, nor is the air so soft. I don't mean to say that I don't like our climate better; we never have it so desperately hot as you do, and besides, we like the cold, because it braces one up, and even the rain is welcome as a change, occasionally. Still, I allow that as far as nights go you beat us hollow."

The road presently began to rise, and before they reached the end of the journey they were high above the plain. As they approached the

house the negroes broke into a song, and on their stopping before the wide verandah that surrounded the house, Madame Duchesne and her daughter were standing there to greet them as the bearers gently lowered the chair to the ground. The girl was first beside it.

"Ah, monsieur," she exclaimed as she took his hand, "how grateful I am to you! how I have longed to see you! for I have never seen you yet; and it has seemed hard to me that while aunt and the doctor should have seen you so often, and even mamma should have seen you once, I should never have seen you at all."

"There is not much to see in me at the best of times, mademoiselle," Nat said as he rose to his feet, "and I am almost a scarecrow now. I wanted to see you, too, just to see what you were like, you know." [Pg 23]

He took the arm that Monsieur Duchesne offered him, for although he could have walked that short distance unaided, he did not know the ground, and might have stumbled over something. They went straight from the verandah into a pretty room lighted by a dozen wax candles. He sat down in a chair that was there in readiness for him. The girl placed herself in front of him and looked earnestly at him.

"Well," he said with a laugh, "am I at all like what you pictured me?"

"You are not a scarecrow at all!" she said indignantly. "Why do you say such things of yourself? Of course you are thin, very thin, but even now you look nice. I think you are just what I thought you would be. Now, am I like what you thought I should be?"

"I don't know that I ever attempted to think exactly what you would be," Nat said. "I did not notice your face; I don't even know whether it was turned my way. I did take in that you were a girl somewhere about thirteen years old, but as soon as the dog turned, my attention was pretty fully occupied. Madame Demaine said your name was Myra. I thought that with such a pretty name you ought to be pretty too. I suppose it is rude to say so, but you certainly are, mademoiselle."

The girl laughed.

"It is not rude at all; and please you are to call me Myra and not mademoiselle. Now, you must get strong as soon as you can. Mamma said I might act as your guide, and show you about the plantation, and the slave houses, and everywhere. I have never had a boy friend, and I should think it was very nice."

"My dear," her mother said with a smile, "it is not altogether discreet for a young lady to talk in that way."

"Ah! but I am not a young lady yet, mamma, and I think[Pg 24] it is much nicer to be a girl and to be able to say what one likes. And you are an officer, Monsieur Glover!"

"Well, if I am to call you Myra, you must call me Nat. Monsieur Glover is ridiculous."

"You are very young to be an officer," the girl said.

"Oh, I have been an officer for more than two years," he said. "I was only fourteen when I joined, and I am nearly sixteen now."

"And have you been in battles?"

"Not in a regular battle. You see England is not at war now with anyone, but I have been in two or three fights with pirates and that sort of thing."

"And now, Myra, you must not talk any more," her father said. "You know the doctor gave strict orders that he was to go to bed as soon as he arrived here."

At this moment the door opened and a slave girl brought in a basin of strong broth.

"Well, you may stop to take that."

Nat spent a delightful month at Monsieur Duchesne's plantation. For the first few days he lay in a hammock beneath a shady tree, then he began to walk, at first only for a few minutes, but every day his strength increased. At the end of a fortnight he could walk half a mile, and by the time the month was up he was able to wander about with Myra all over the plantation. Monsieur Duchesne, on his return one day from town, brought a letter for him. It was from the captain himself:

Dear Mr. Glover,—I hope you are getting on well, and are by this time on your legs again. As far as I can see, we are not likely to be at Cape François again for some time, therefore, when you feel quite strong enough, you had better take passage in a craft bound for Jamaica, which is likely to be our head-quarters for some[Pg 25] time. Of course if we are away, you will wait till our return. I have spoken to a friend of mine, Mr. Cummings—his plantation lies high up among the hills—and he has kindly invited you to make his place your home till we return, and it will be very much better for you to be in the pure air up there than in this pestilential place.

Nat would have started the next day, but his host insisted upon his staying for another week.

"You are getting on so well," M. Duchesne said, "that it would be folly indeed to risk throwing yourself back. Every day is making an improvement in you, and a week will make a great difference."

At the end of that week the planter, seeing that Nat was really anxious to rejoin his ship, brought back the news that a vessel in port would sail for Port Royal in two days.

"I have engaged a cabin for you," he said, "for although we shall be sorry indeed to lose you, I know that you want to be off."

"It is not that I want to be off, sir, for I was never happier in all my life, but I feel that I ought to go. It is likely enough that the ship may be short of middies, one or two may be away in prizes, and it will be strange if no one falls sick while they are lying in Port Royal. It would be ungrateful indeed if I wanted to leave you when you are all so wonderfully kind to me."

M. Duchesne drove Nat down to the port the next morning. The midshipman as he left the house felt quite unmanned, for Myra had cried undisguisedly, and Madame Duchesne was also much moved. They passed M. Demaine's house without stopping, as he and his wife had spent the previous evening at the Duchesnes', and had there said good-bye to him.

"It is quite time that I was out of this," Nat said to himself[Pg 26] as he leaned on the rail and looked back at the port. "That sort of life is awfully nice for a time, but it would soon make a fellow so lazy and soft that he would be of no use on board ship. Of course it was all right for a bit, but since I began to use my arm a little, I have wanted to do something. Still, it would have been no good leaving before, for my arm is of no real use yet, and the doctor said that I ought to carry it in a sling for at least another month. But I am sure I ought to feel very grateful to our doctor and Lepel, for I expect I should have lost it altogether if they hadn't taken such pains with it at first. Well, it will be very jolly getting back again. I only hope that the captain won't be wanting to treat me as an invalid."

To Nat's delight he saw, as he entered Port Royal, the *Orpheus* lying there, and without landing he hailed a boat and went on board. As soon as he was made out there was quite a commotion on board the frigate among the sailors on deck and at the side, while those below looked out of the port-holes, and a burst of cheering rose from

all as the boat came alongside. As he came up on to the deck the midshipmen crowded round, shaking him by the hand; and when he went to the quarter-deck to report his return, the lieutenants greeted him as heartily. The captain was on shore. Nat was confused and abashed at the warmth of their greeting.

"It is perfectly ridiculous!" he said almost angrily, as he rejoined the midshipmen; "as if there was anything extraordinary in a fellow fighting a dog!"

"It depends upon the size of the dog and the size of the fellow," Needham, the senior midshipman, said, "and also how he got into the fight."

"The fact is, Needham, if I had killed the dog with the first stroke of my dirk nobody would have thought anything about the matter, and it is just because I could not do so, and[Pg 27] therefore got badly mauled before I managed it, that all this fuss is made! It would have been much more to the point if you had all grumbled, when I came on board, at my being nursed and coddled, while you had to do my duty between you, just because I was such a duffer that I was a couple of minutes in killing the dog instead of managing it at once."

"Well, we might have done so if we had thought of it, but, you see, we did not look at it in that light, Nat," Needham laughed; "there is certainly a good deal in what you say. However, I shall in future look upon my dirk as being of more use than I have hitherto thought; I have always considered it the most absurd weapon that was ever put into anyone's hand to use in action. Not, of course, that one does use it, for one always gets hold of a cutlass when there is fighting to be done. How anyone can ever have had the idea of making a midshipman carry about a thing little better than a pocket-knife, and how they have kept on doing so for years and years, is most astonishing! For the lords of the admiralty must all have been midshipmen themselves at one time, and must have hated the beastly things just as much as we do. If they think a full-sized sword too heavy for us—which it certainly isn't for the seniors—they might give us rapiers, which are no weight to speak of, and would be really useful weapons if we were taught to use them properly.

"Well, we won't say anything more about your affair, Nat, if you don't like it; but we sha'n't think any the less, because we are all proud of you, and whatever you may say, it was a very plucky action. I know that I would rather stand up against the biggest Frenchman than face one of those savage hounds. And how is the arm going on? I see you still have the arm of your jacket snipped open and tied up

with ribbons, and you keep it in a sling."

"Yes; the doctor made such a point of it that I was[Pg 28] obliged to promise to wear it until Bemish gives me permission to lay it aside." He took it out of the sling and moved it about. "You see I have got the use of it, though I own I have very little strength as yet; still, I manage to use it at meals, which is a comfort. It was hateful being obliged to have my grub cut up for me. How long have you been in harbour here?"

"Three days; and you are in luck to find us here, for I hear that we are off again to-morrow morning. You have missed nothing while you have been away, for we haven't picked up a single prize beyond a little slaver with a hundred niggers on board."

When the captain came off two hours later with Dr. Bemish he sent for Nat.

"I am heartily glad to see you back again, Mr. Glover, and to see you looking so vastly better than when I saw you last; in fact, you look nearly as well as you did before that encounter."

"I have had nothing to do but to eat, sir."

"Well, the question is, how is your arm?"

"It is not very strong yet, sir, but I could really do very well without this sling."

"Well, you see I have to decide whether you had better go up to the hills until we return from our next cruise or take you with us."

"Please, sir, I would much rather go with you."

"Yes; it is not a question of what you like best, but what the doctor thinks best for you. You had better go to him at once, he will examine your arm and report to me, and of course we must act on his decision."

Nat went straight to the doctor.

"Well, you are looking better than I expected," the latter said, holding the lad at arm's-length and looking him up and down; "flesh a good deal more flabby than it used to be[Pg 29]—want of exercise, of course, and the result of being looked after by women. Now, lad, take off your shirt and let me have a regular examination."

He moved the arm in different directions, felt very carefully along each bone, pressing rather hard at the points where these had been

broken, and asking Nat if it hurt him. He replied "No" without hesitation, as long as the doctor was feeling the forearm, but when he came to the upper-arm and shoulder he was obliged to acknowledge that the pressure gave him a bit of a twinge.

"Yes, it could hardly be otherwise," the doctor said; "however, there is no doubt we made a pretty good job of it. Stretch both arms out in front of you and bring the fingers together. Yes, that is just what I expected, it is some two and a half inches shorter than the other; but no one will be likely to notice it."

"Don't you think, doctor, that I can go to sea now? The captain said that you would have to decide."

"I think a month up in the hills would be a very desirable thing, Glover. The bones have knit very well, but it would not take much to break them again."

"I have had quite enough of plantations for the present, doctor, and I do think that sea air would do me more good than anything. I am sure I feel better already for the run from Cape François here."

The doctor smiled. "Well, you see, if you did remain on board you would be out of everything. You certainly would not be fit for boat service, you must see that yourself."

"I can't say that I do, sir; one fights with one's right arm and not with one's left."

"That is so, lad, but you might get hit on the left arm as well as the right. Besides, even on board, you might get hurt while skylarking." [Pg 30]

"I would indeed be most careful, doctor."

"Well, we will see about it, and talk it over with the captain."

All that evening Nat was in a state of alarm whenever anyone came with a message to any of his mess-mates; but when it was almost the hour for lights out he turned into his hammock with great satisfaction, feeling sure that if it had been decided that he must go ashore next morning a message to that effect would have been sent to him. The sound of the boatswain's whistle, followed by the call "All hands to make sail!" settled the question. He had already dressed himself with Needham's assistance, but had remained below lest, if the captain's eye fell on him, he might be sent ashore. As soon, however, as he heard the order he felt sure that all was right, and went up on deck. Here he took up his usual station, passing orders forward and

watching the men at work, until the vessel was under sail. The want of success on the last cruise made all hands even keener than usual to pick up something worth capturing.

"I suppose there is no clue as to the whereabouts of those three pirates," he said to Needham as the latter, after the vessel was fairly under weigh, joined him.

"No; twice we had information from the captains of small craft that they had seen suspicious sail in the distance, but there is no doubt that the niggers had been either bribed or frightened into telling us the story, for in each case, though we remained a fortnight cruising about, we have never caught sight of a suspicious sail. When we returned here we found to our disgust that they must have been at work hundreds of miles away, as several ships were missing, and one that came in had been hotly chased by them, but being a fast sailer escaped by the skin of her teeth. That is the worst of these negroes, one can never believe them, and I think the best way[Pg 31] would be when anyone came and told a yarn, to go and cruise exactly in the opposite direction to that in which he tells us he has seen the pirates."

"It is a pity we cannot punish some of these fellows who give false news," Nat said.

"Yes; but the difficulty is proving that it is false. In the first place, one of these native craft is so much like another that one would not recognize it again; besides, you may be sure that the rascals would give Port Royal a wide berth for a time. On our last cruise we did take with us the negro who brought the news, but that made the case no better. He pretended, of course, to be as anxious as anyone that the pirates should be caught, and as he stuck to his story that he had seen a rakish schooner where he said he did, there was no proof that he was lying, and he pretended to be terribly cut up at not getting the reward promised him if he came across them.

"I have no doubt that he was lying, but there was no way of proving it. You see, the idea of getting hold of a trader and fitting her up with a few guns and some men is all well enough when you have only got to deal with a single schooner or brigantine, but it would be catching a tartar if these three scoundrels were to come upon her at once. Of course they are all heavily armed and carry any number of men, nothing short of the frigate herself would be a match for them. And one thing is certain, we can't disguise her to look like a merchantman. Do what we would, the veriest landlubber would make her out to be what she is, and you may be sure the pirates would

know her to be a ship of war as soon as they got a sight of her topsails."

"You have not heard, I suppose, where our cruising ground is going to be this time?" Nat asked.

"No, and I don't suppose we shall know for a few hours.[Pg 32] You may be sure that whatever course we take now will not be our real course, for I bet odds that after dark some fast little craft will sneak out of harbour to take the pirates news as to the course we are following, and to tell them that we have not taken a negro this time who would lead us a dance in the wrong direction. I should not be surprised if we are going to search the islands round Cuba for a change. We were among the bays and islets up north on our last cruise, and the captain may be determined to try fresh ground."

Needham's guess turned out to be correct, for after darkness fell the ship's course was changed, and her head laid towards Cuba. After cruising for nearly three weeks without success, they were passing along the coast of the mainland, when Nat, who had now given up his sling, went aloft with his telescope. Every eye on deck was turned towards the island, but their continued failures had lessened the eagerness with which they scanned the shore, and, as there was no sign of any break in its outline, it was more from habit than from any hope of seeing anything that they looked at the rugged cliffs that rose forty or fifty feet perpendicularly above the water's edge, and at the forest stretching up the hillsides behind them.

"You have seen nothing, I suppose, Tom?" he asked the sailor stationed in the main-top.

"Not a thing, Mr. Glover."

Nat continued his way up, and took his seat on the yard of the topsail. Leaning back against the mast, he brought his telescope to bear upon the land, and for half an hour scanned every rock and tree. At last something caught his eye.

"Come up here, Tom," he called to the sailor below. "Look there, you see that black streak on the face of the cliff?"

"I see it, yer honour."

"Well, look above the first line of trees exactly over it: isn't that a pole with a truck on the top of it?"[Pg 33]

"You are right, sir! you are right!" the sailor said, as he got the glass to bear upon the object Nat had indicated, "that is the upper

spar of a vessel of some sort, sure enough."

"On deck there!" Nat shouted.

"What is it, Mr. Glover?" the first lieutenant answered.

"I can make out the upper spar of a craft in among the trees over there, sir."

"You are sure that you are not mistaken?"

"Quite sure, sir. With the glass I can make out the truck quite distinctly. It is certainly either the upper spar of a craft of some kind or a flag-staff, of course I cannot say which."

The first lieutenant himself ran up the ratlines and joined Nat. The breeze was very light, and the *Orpheus* was scarcely moving through the water. Nat handed his telescope to Mr. Hill.

"There, sir, it is about a yard to the west of that black streak on the rock."

"I see it," the lieutenant exclaimed after a long gaze at the shore. "You are right, it must be, as you say, either the spar of a ship or a flag-staff; though how a ship could get in there is more than I can say. There, it has gone now!"

"The trees were rather lower at the point where we saw it, and the higher trees have shut it in."

He descended to the deck followed by Nat.

"Well, what do you make of it, Mr. Hill?" enquired the captain, who had come out of his cabin on hearing Nat's hail.

"There is no doubt that Mr. Glover is right, sir, and that it is the upper spar of a craft of some kind, unless it is a flag-staff on shore, and it is hardly the sort of place in which you would expect to find a flag-staff. It is a marvel Mr. Glover made it out, for even with his glass I had a great difficulty in finding it, though he gave me the exact bearing." [Pg 34]

"Thank you, Mr. Glover," the captain said. "At last there seems a chance of our picking up a prize this cruise. The question is, how did she get there?"

"I am pretty sure that we have passed no opening, sir. I have been aloft for the past half-hour, and have made out no break in the rocks."

"That is quite possible," the captain said, "and yet it may be there."

We are a good three-quarters of a mile off the shore, and some of these inlets are so narrow, and the rocks so much the same colour, that unless one knows the entrance is there, one would never suspect it. At any rate we will hold on as we are for a bit."

The hail had set everyone on deck on the *qui vive*, and a dozen telescopes were turned upon the shore.

"Unlikely as it seems, Mr. Hill," the captain said, after they had gone on half a mile without discovering any break in the line of rock, "I am afraid that it must have been a flag-staff that you saw. There may be some plantation there, and the owner may have had one put up in the front of his house. However, it will be worth while to lower a boat and row back along the foot of the cliff for a mile or so, and then a mile ahead of us; if there is an opening we shall be sure to find it. Tell Mr. Playford to take the gig; Mr. Glover can go with him as he is the discoverer."

The boat was lowered at once, and as soon as the officers had taken their place the six men who composed the crew bent their backs to the oars, the coxswain making for a point on the shore about a mile astern of the frigate, which was lying almost becalmed. The men had taken muskets and cutlasses with them, for it was probable enough that a watch might have been set on the cliff, and that, should there be an inlet, a boat might be lying there ready to pounce out upon them as soon as they reached it.[Pg 35]

Every eye was fixed upon the boat as she turned and rowed along within fifty yards of the foot of the rocks.

"I thought I could not have been so blind as to pass the entrance without seeing it," one of the sailors who had been on watch aloft said, in a tone of satisfaction. "Now, I don't mind how soon the boat finds a gap."

But when the boat had paddled on for another mile without a pause, a look of doubt and dissatisfaction showed itself on every face.

"You are quite sure, Mr. Hill," the captain asked, "that it was a staff of some kind that you saw, and not, perhaps, the top of a dead tree whose bark had peeled off?"

"I am quite certain, sir. It was too straight and even for rough wood; and I made out a truck distinctly: but it is certainly strange that no entrance should be discovered. I am afraid that 'tis but a flag-staff after all."

"I can hardly imagine that," the captain said. "I have often seen flag-staffs in front of plantation houses, but never one so high as this must be to show over the trees. If it had been nearer to the edge of the cliff it might have been a signal-post, but they would hardly put it a mile back from the edge of the cliff and bury it among trees. At any rate, if we find no entrance I will send a landing-party ashore to see what it really is, that is to say if we can find any place where the cliff can be scaled."

"What is it, Mr. Needham?" as the midshipman came up and touched his hat.

"The boat is rowing in to shore, sir."

The two officers went to the side.

"They have either found an entrance or some point at which the rock can be scaled—Ah, there they go!" he went on, as the boat disappeared from sight, "though from here there is no appearance whatever of an opening." [Pg 36]

It was some minutes before the boat again appeared. It was at once headed for the frigate.

"Mr. Playford has news for us of some sort," the captain said, "the men are rowing hard." In a few minutes the boat came alongside. The second officer ran up the accommodation ladder.

"Well, Mr. Playford, what is your news?"

"There is an inlet, sir, though if we had not been close in to those rocks I should never have noticed it. It runs almost parallel with the coast for a quarter of a mile. I thought at first that it ended there, but it makes a sharp angle to the south-east, and continues for a mile or so, and at the other end there is a large schooner, I have no doubt a slaver. I fancy they are landing the slaves now. There is a barracoon on the shore and some storehouses."

"Did they see you?"

"No, sir; at least I don't think so. Directly I saw that the passage was going to make a turn, I went close in to the rocks on the other side, and brought up at the corner where I could get a view without there being much fear of our being seen, and indeed I don't think that it would have been possible to make us out unless someone had been watching with a glass."

"We shall soon know whether they saw you, Mr. Playford. If they did

they will probably set all hands to work to tow the schooner out, for though there is not wind enough to give us steerage-way, these slavers will slip along under the slightest breath. They can hardly have made the frigate out. They probably thought the hiding-place so secure that they did not even put a watch on the cliffs. Of course if there was anyone up there they could have seen the boat leave our side, and would have watched her all along.

"Did you see any place at which the cliff could be climbed?"[Pg 37]

"No, sir, and up to the turn the rocks are just as steep inside as they are here, but beyond that the inlet widens out a good deal and the banks slope gradually, and a landing could be effected anywhere there, I should say."

"We will send the boats in as soon as it gets dark, Mr. Hill. If they saw us coming they would drive off the slaves into the woods before we could get there, so the best plan will be to land a strong party at the bend, so that they can get down to the barracoon at the same time that the others board the schooner. No doubt this is a regular nest of slave-traders. It has long been suspected that there was some depot on this side of the island. It has often been observed that slavers when first made out were heading in this direction, and more than once craft that were chased, and, as it seemed, certain to be caught in the morning, have mysteriously disappeared. This hiding-place accounts for it.

"You did not ascertain what depth of water there was at the mouth of the creek, Mr. Playford?"

"Yes, sir, I sounded right across with the boat's grapnel; there is nowhere more than two and a half fathoms, but it is just about that depth right across."

"Then it is evident that we cannot take the frigate in. What is the width at the mouth?"

"About thirty yards."

An hour later the *Orpheus* anchored opposite the mouth of the inlet, which, however, was still invisible.

"I think that, as this may be an important capture, Mr. Hill, it would be as well for you to go in charge of the boats. Mr. Playford will take the command of the landing-party. I should say that twenty marines, under Lieutenant Boldero, and as many blue-jackets, would be ample for that. He had better take the long-boat and one of the gigs, while you take the launch, the pinnace, and the other gig. If they have made

us[Pg 38] out, we may expect a very tough resistance, and it may be that, although Mr. Playford saw nothing of them, they may have a couple of batteries higher up."

"Likely enough, sir."

"You had better let the landing-party have a start of you, so that if they should unmask a battery on the side on which they are, they can rush down at once and silence it."

"Very good, sir."

The sun was now approaching the horizon; as soon as it dipped behind it the boats were lowered, and the sailors, who had already made all preparations, at once took their places in them. Needham was in command of the gig that carried a portion of the landing-party, Nat was in charge of the other gig, and Low was in charge of the pinnace, Mr. Hill going in the launch. Nat had first been told off to the gig now commanded by Needham, but the captain said to the first lieutenant, "You had better take Glover with you, Mr. Hill, and let Needham go with Mr. Playford. Scrambling along on the shore in the dark, one might very well get a heavy fall, and it is as well that Glover should not risk breaking his arm again."

CHAPTER III

A SLAVE DEPOT

Night fell rapidly as soon as the sun had set, and by the time the boats reached the mouth of the inlet it was already dark. The two boats under the second officer entered first, rowed up the inlet to the bend, and landed the marines and sailors on the opposite side; the boarding-party lay on their oars for five minutes and then followed. The men were muffled, and the men ordered to row as noiselessly as they could, following each other closely, and keeping under the left bank. They were about half-way up when the word "Fire!" was shouted in Spanish, and six guns were simultaneously discharged. Had the Spaniards waited a few seconds longer, the three boats would all have been in line with the guns. As it was, a storm of grape sent the water splashing up ahead of the pinnace, which, however, received the contents of the gun nearest to them. It was aimed a little low, and fortunately for the crew the shot had not yet begun to scatter, and the whole charge struck the boat just at the water-level, knocking a great hole in her.

"We are sinking, Mr. Hill," Low said. "Will you come alongside and

pick us up?"

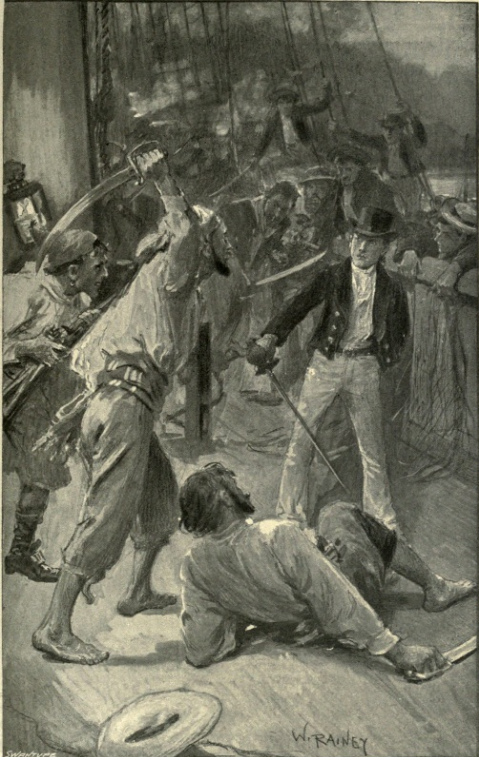
Although the launch was but a length behind, the gunwale of the pinnacle was nearly level with the water as she came alongside. Its occupants were helped on board the launch, which at once held on her way. Half a minute later six guns were fired from the opposite bank. The boats were so close under the shore that their position could not be made out with any certainty. Three men were hit by the grapeshot, but beyond this there were no casualties.

"Keep in as much as you dare," Mr. Hill said to the coxswain; "the battery opposite will be loaded again in a couple of minutes, but as long as we keep in the shadow of the shore their shooting will be wild."

The battery, indeed, soon began to fire again, irregularly, as the guns were loaded. The shot tore up the water ahead and astern of the boats, but it was evident that those at the guns could not make out their precise position. Another five minutes and the boats were headed for the schooner.

"You board at the bow, Mr. Glover, I will make for her quarter. Now, lay out, lads, as hard as you can, the sooner you are there the less chance you have of being hit." [Pg 40]

A moment later a great clamour arose behind them. First came a British cheer; then rapid discharges of pistols and muskets, mingled with the clash of cutlasses and swords; a minute or two later this ceased, and the loud cheer of the marines and seamen told those in the boats that they had carried the battery. The diversion was useful to the boats. Until now the slavers had been ignorant that a party of foes had landed, and the fact that a barracoon full of slaves, and the storehouses, were already threatened, caused something like consternation among them. The consequence was that they fired hastily and without taking time to aim. Before they could load again the boats were alongside, unchecked for an instant by the musketry fire which broke out from the deck of the schooner as soon as cannon had been discharged.



"HEADED BY NAT, THE CREW OF THE GIG LEAPT DOWN ON TO THE DECK."

Boarding-nettings had been run up, but holes were soon chopped in these by the sailors. Headed by Nat, the crew of the gig leapt down on to the deck, for the greater part of the slaver's crew ran aft to oppose what they considered the more dangerous attack made by the occupants of the crowded launch. The defence was successfully maintained until the crew of the gig, keeping close together and brushing aside the resistance of the few men forward, flung themselves upon the main body of the slavers, and with pistol and cutlass hewed their way through them till abreast of the launch. The slavers attacked them furiously, and would speedily have annihilated them, but the crew of the launch, led by Mr. Hill, came swarming over the bulwarks, and, taking the offensive, drove the slavers forward, where, seeing that all was lost, they sprang overboard, striking out for the shore to the right.

Severe fighting was now going on opposite the schooner, where the landing-party were evidently attacking the barracoon and storehouses.

"To the boats, men!" Mr. Hill shouted, "our fellows are [Pg 41]being hard pressed on shore; Mr. Glover, you with the gig's crew will remain in charge here."

Indeed, it was evident that the resistance on shore was much more obstinate than had been expected. Nat stood watching the boat. Just as it reached the shore one of the sailors shouted, "Look out, sir!" and he saw a big mulatto rushing at him with uplifted sword. His cutlass was still in his hand, and throwing himself on guard he caught the blow as it fell upon it, and in return brought his cutlass down on his opponent's cheek. With a howl of pain the man sprang at him, but Nat leaped aside, and his cutlass fell on the right wrist of the mulatto, whose sword dropped from his hand, and, rushing to the side, he threw himself overboard. In the meantime a fierce struggle was going on between the sailors and seven or eight of the slavers who, being unable to swim, had thrown themselves down by the guns and shammed death, as had Nat's antagonist, who was first mate of the schooner. The fight was short but desperate, and one by one the slavers were run through or cut down, but not before three or four of the sailors had received severe wounds.

"Get a lantern, mate," one of these growled, "and see that there are no more of these skulking hounds alive."

The sailors, furious at what they considered treachery, fetched a light that was burning in the captain's cabin, and without mercy ran through two or three unwounded men whom they found hiding among

the fallen. It was soon clear that the reinforcement that had landed had completely turned the tables. Gradually the din rolled away from the neighbourhood of the storehouses, there was some sharp firing as the enemy fled towards the wood behind, and then all was quiet. Presently there was a shout in Mr. Hill's voice from the shore:

"Schooner ahoy!"[Pg 42]

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Load with grape, Mr. Glover, and send a round or two occasionally into that wood behind the houses; I am going to leave thirty men here under Mr. Playford, and to take the rest over to the opposite side and carry the battery there."

"Ay, ay, sir."

And as the guns pointing on that side had not been discharged, he at once opened fire on the wood. A minute later the launch and gig rowed past the schooner and soon reached the opposite side. Ten minutes passed without any sound of conflict being heard, and Nat had no doubt that the battery had been found deserted. It was not long before the boats were seen returning. They rowed this time to the schooner.

"Mr. Glover," the first lieutenant said as he reached the deck, "do you lower the schooner's cutter, put all the wounded on board, take four of your men and row out to the frigate and report to the captain what has taken place. Tell him that Mr. Playford carried the battery on the right in spite of the guns, and that I have spiked those in the battery on the left, which I found deserted. Say that we have had a sharp fight on shore with a large number of negroes led by two or three white men and some mulattoes, and that I believe there must be some large plantations close at hand whose owners are in league with the slavers. You can say that we found a hundred and twenty slaves in the barracoon, evidently newly landed from the schooner, and that I intend to find the plantations and give them a lesson in the morning. How many wounded have you here?"

"There are fourteen altogether, sir; ten of them were wounded in the first attack, and four have been wounded since by some of the slavers who shammed death."

"There are eight more in the launch, happily we have only two men killed. You had better give all the wounded a drink[Pg 43] of water; I have a flask, and I dare say you have one: empty them both into the bucket."

There was a barrel half full of water on deck; a bucketful of this was drawn, and the two flasks of spirits emptied into it, and a mug of the mixture given to each of the wounded men. They were then assisted down into the schooner's boat; four of the gig's crew took their places in it, and Nat, taking the tiller, told them to row on.

Half an hour later they came alongside the frigate. A sailor ran down the ladder with a lantern. Nat stepped out and mounted to the deck. The captain was standing at the gangway.

"We have been uneasy about you, Mr. Glover. We heard a number of reports of heavier guns than they were likely to carry on board a slaver, and feared that they came from shore batteries."

"Yes, sir, there were two of them mounting six guns each. Mr. Playford, with the landing-party, captured the one on the eastern side; Mr. Hill, after the schooner was taken and the enemy on shore driven off, rowed across and took the other, which he found unoccupied."

"What is the loss?"

"Only two killed, sir, but there are twenty-two wounded, two or three of them by musket-shots, and the rest cutlass wounds. They are all in the boat below, sir."

A party was at once sent down to carry up such of the wounded as were unable to walk. As soon as all were taken below, and the surgeon had begun his work, the captain asked Nat to give him a full account of the proceedings.

"I cannot tell you much of what took place ashore, sir," he said, "as Mr. Hill left me in charge of the schooner. After we had carried her, he went ashore with the crews of the launch and pinnace to help Mr. Playford." [Pg 44]

"Tell me all you know first."

Nat related the opening of the two batteries, and how one had been almost immediately captured by Mr. Playford.

"So the pinnace was sunk?"

"Yes, sir, the enemy's charge struck her between wind and water, and she went down at once; her crew were picked up by the launch. I hear that none of them were injured." Then he told how they had kept under the shelter of the shore, and thus escaped injury from the other battery, and how the schooner had been captured.

"It was lucky that your men got a footing forward, Mr. Glover. You

did well to lead them aft at once, and thus assist Mr. Hill's party to board."

Nat then related the sudden attack by the slavers who had been feigning death.

"It was lucky that it was no worse," the captain said. "No doubt they were fellows who couldn't swim, and if there had been a few more it would have gone hard with you. And now about this fight on shore; it can hardly have been the crew of the schooner, for, by the stout resistance they offered, they must have been all on board."

"Yes, sir."

Nat then gave the message that Mr. Hill had sent.

"No doubt, Mr. Glover; I dare say this place has been used by slavers for years. Probably there are some large barracoons where the slaves are generally housed, and planters who want them either come or send from all parts of the island. I will go ashore myself early to-morrow morning. There is no question that this is an important capture, and it will be a great thing to break up this centre of the slave-trade altogether. Now that their hiding-place has once been discovered, they will know that our cruisers will keep a sharp look-out here, and a vessel once bottled up in this inlet has no chance[Pg 45] whatever of escape. You can go with me, it is thanks to the sharpness of your eyes that we made the discovery."

The sun had not yet shown above the eastern horizon when the captain's gig passed in through the mouth of the inlet, and ten minutes later rowed alongside the wharf in front of the barracoon.

"There is another wharf farther along," the captain said; "we may take that as proof that there are often two of these slavers in here at the same time. Ah, there is Mr. Hill! I congratulate you on your success," he went on, as the first lieutenant joined him; "there is no doubt that this has been a regular rendezvous for the scoundrels. It is well that you attacked after dark, for the cross fire of those batteries, aided by that of the schooner, would have knocked the boats into matchwood."

"That they would have done, sir. I was very glad when I saw the boat coming, as I thought it was probable that you were on board her, and we are rather in a difficulty."

"What is that, Mr. Hill?"

"Well, sir, as soon as we had settled matters here we followed the

enemy, and found a road running up the valley; and as it was along this that most of the fellows who opposed us had no doubt retreated, I thought it as well to follow them up at once. We had evidently been watched, for a musketry fire was opened upon us from the trees on both sides. I sent Mr. Boldero with the marines to clear them out on the left, and Mr. Playford with twenty seamen to do the same on the right, and then I pressed forward with the rest. Presently a crowd of negroes came rushing down from the front, shouting, and firing muskets. We gave them a volley, and they bolted at once. We ran straight on, and a hundred yards farther up came upon a large clearing.

"In the middle stood a house, evidently that of a planter.[Pg 46] A short distance off were some houses, probably inhabited by the mulatto overseers, and a few huts for his white overseers, and some distance behind these were four large barracoons. We made straight for these, for we could hear a shouting there, and had no doubt that the mulattoes were trying to get the slaves out and to drive them away into the wood. However, as soon as we came up the fellows bolted. There were about a hundred slaves in each barracoon. No doubt the fellows who attacked us were the regular plantation hands. I suppose the owner of the place made sure that we should be contented with what we had done, and should not go beyond the head of the inlet; and when the firing began again he sent the plantation men down to stop us until he had removed the slaves. I left Mr. Playford in command there, and brought twenty men back here; and I was just going to send off a message to you saying what had taken place, and asking for instructions. You see, with the slaves we found here, we have over five hundred blacks in our hands. That is extremely awkward."

"Extremely," the captain said thoughtfully. "Well, I will go back with you and see the place. As to the houses—the plantation house and the barracoons—I shall have no hesitation in destroying them. This is evidently a huge slaving establishment, and, as the blacks and their overseers attacked us, we are perfectly justified in destroying this den altogether. If I could catch their owner I should assuredly hang him. The difficulty is what to do with all these unfortunate creatures; the schooner would not hold more than two hundred if packed as close as herrings. However, the other thing is first to be thought of."

Nat followed his commander and the lieutenant to the plantation, or, it should rather be said, to the depot; for the clearing in the valley was but a quarter of a mile long and a few hundred yards wide. It was evident that if the owner[Pg 47] had a plantation it was at some

distance away, and that the men with whom they had fought were principally mulattoes and negroes employed about the place, and in minding the slaves as they were brought in.

They passed straight on to the barracoons. The sailors had already brought the slaves out and knocked off their irons. The poor creatures sat on the ground, evidently bewildered at what had taken place, and uncertain whether they were in the hands of friends or enemies.

"Some of the men have found the cauldrons in which food is cooked," Mr. Hill said, "and are now preparing a meal for them; and as we found some hogsheads of molasses and stores of flour and rice they will get a better meal than they are accustomed to. I have set some of the strongest slaves to pump water into those big troughs there; the poor beggars will feel all the better after a wash."

"They will indeed. I don't suppose they have had one since they were first captured in Africa."

In half an hour a meal was served. As an effort of cooking it could hardly be termed a success, but was a sort of porridge, composed of flour and rice sweetened with molasses. There was some difficulty in serving it out, for only a few mugs and plates were found at the barracoons. These were supplemented by all the plates, dishes, and other utensils in the houses of the owner and overseers. By this time the negroes had been taken in parties of twenties to the troughs, where they had a thorough wash.

"This is all very well, Mr. Hill," the captain said, "but what are we to do with all these people? Of course we must move them down to the water, and burn these buildings, in the first place because the scoundrels who are at the bottom of all this villainy should be punished, and in the second place because in all probability they will collect a large number of [Pg 48] negroes and mulattoes and make an attack. We cannot leave a force here that could defend itself; therefore, whatever we decide upon afterwards, it is clear that all the slaves must be taken down to the houses on the inlet. I should set the men to open all the stores, and load the negroes with everything that can be useful. I expect you will find a good deal of cotton cloth and so on, for no doubt the man here dealt in other articles besides slaves, and he would, moreover, keep cottons and that sort of thing for sending them up the country into market. However, take everything that is worth taking in the way of food or otherwise, and carry it down to the storehouses by the water, then set all the houses and sheds here on fire. When you see them well alight you can bring the men down to the shore; then we must settle as to our course. It is a most

awkward thing our coming upon all these slaves. If there were only those who had been landed from the schooner there would be no difficulty about it, as we should only have to put them on board again, but with four hundred others on our hands I really don't know how to manage. We might stow a hundred in the frigate, though I own I should not like it."

"No, indeed," Mr. Hill murmured; "and four hundred would be out of the question."

The captain returned to the inlet and made an examination of the storehouses there. They were for the most part empty. They were six in number, roughly constructed of timber, and some forty feet long by twenty wide, and consisted only of the one floor. They stood ten feet apart. The barracoon was some twenty yards away. In a short time the slaves began to pour in, all—men, women, and children—carrying burdens proportionate to their strength. They had now come to the conclusion that their new captors were really friends, and with the light-heartedness of their race laughed and chattered as if[Pg 49] their past sufferings were already forgotten. Mr. Playford saw to the storing of their burdens. These filled one of the storehouses to the roof. There was, as the captain had anticipated, a large quantity of cotton cloth among the spoil. Some of these bales were placed outside the store, twenty of the negroes were told off to cut the stuff up into lengths for clothing, and by mid-day the whole of the slaves were, to their delight, attired in their new wraps. Among the goods that had been brought down were a number of implements and tools—axes, hoes, shovels, and long knives. Captain Crosbie had, by this time, quite made up his mind as to the plan to be pursued.

"We must hold this place for a time, Mr. Hill," he said as the latter came down with the last body of sailors, after having seen that all the buildings in the valley were wrapped in flames. "I have been thinking over the question of the slaves, and the only plan that I can see is to go for a two or three day's cruise in the frigate, in hopes of falling in with some native craft with which I can make an arrangement for them to return here with me, and aid in carrying off all these poor creatures. These five storehouses and the barracoon will hold them all pretty comfortably. Two of the storehouses had better be given up to the women and children. We will make a stockade round the buildings, with the ends resting in the water, and get the guns from those batteries and put them in position here. With the help of those on board the schooner, a stout defence can be made to an attack, however formidable. I shall leave Mr. Playford in command with forty men on shore; Mr. Glover will be in charge of the schooner with five-

and-twenty more. The frigate will remain for a couple of days at her present anchorage, and I will send as many men as we can spare ashore to help in finishing the work before she sails.

"In the first place there must be a barrack run up for the men on shore between the barracoon and the storehouses. It [Pg 50] must be made of stout beams. I don't mean squared, but young trees placed side by side so as to be perfectly musket-proof. The palisades should be made of strong saplings, wattled together, say, ten feet high. A hundred and fifty sailors, aided by three hundred and fifty able-bodied negroes, should make quick work of it. The schooner's crew can see to the removal of the guns from the batteries and their establishment upon platforms behind the palisade. I should divide the twelve guns into four batteries, three in each. The armourer shall come off in the morning to get out the spikes, and the carpenters shall come with their tools."

"There are a dozen cross-cut saws among the things that we have brought down, sir."

"That is good. How many axes are there?"

"Four dozen, sir."

"Good! I will send all the hatchets we have on board. I think, Mr. Hill, that you had better take up your position on board the schooner until we sail. How about water? That is a most important point."

"The slaves have brought down a large number of staves, sir. They are evidently intended for sugar hogsheads; they are done up in separate packets. I should say there were a hundred of them."

"That is satisfactory indeed. I will send the cooper ashore, and with a gang of the black fellows he will soon get them all into shape. I see that they have relied upon the stream that comes down from the hills for their supply. One of the first moves of anyone attacking the place would be to divert its course somewhere up in the hills. However, with such a supply as these hogsheads would hold, we could do without the stream for weeks. The twenty marines who came ashore with Lieutenant Boldero will remain as part of the garrison."

The work was at once begun. The sailors looked upon it as [Pg 51] a pleasant change from the ordinary routine of life on board ship, and threw themselves into it vigorously, while the blacks, as soon as they understood what was wanted, proved themselves most useful assistants. Accustomed in their African homes to palisade their villages, they knew exactly what was required. Some, with their hoes,

dug a trench four feet deep; others dragged down the poles as the sailors cut them, erected them in their places, and trod the earth firmly round them. Others cut creepers, or split up suitable wood, and wove them in and out between the poles; and, by the time darkness fell, a surprising amount of work had been accomplished.

One of the storehouses was turned over to those who could not be berthed on board the schooner, most of the slaves preferring to sleep in the open air, which to them was a delightful change after being cooped up for weeks in the crowded hold of a ship, or in the no less crowded barracoons. Sentries were posted as soon as it became dark, but the night passed off without an alarm, and at daybreak all were at work again. The launch returned to the frigate when work was knocked off, and came back with a fresh body of men in the morning, and with the carpenters, coopers, and all the available tools on board. By the evening of the third day the work was completed. Four banks of earth had been thrown up by the negroes against the palisade, and on each of these three guns were mounted. The hut for the garrison had been completed. The hogsheads were put together and filled with water, and a couple of hundred boarding-pikes were put ashore for the use of the negroes.

Nat had been fully employed, with the schooner's crew, in removing the guns from the batteries, and placing them on the platforms constructed by the carpenters on the top of the earthworks.

"It is quite possible," the captain said to Mr. Playford,[Pg 52] "that this creek is used by pirates as well as slavers. They may come in here to sell goods they have captured suitable for use in the islands, such as cotton cloths and tools, and which it would not pay them to carry to their regular rendezvous. It will be great luck if one or two of them should put in here while I am away. It would greatly diminish the difficulty we have of getting the slaves away."

"That would be fortunate indeed, sir. Even if two came in together we could give a good account of them, for as the palisade is mostly on higher ground than the huts, we should only have to slue the guns round and give them such a warm welcome that they would probably haul down their flags at once."

"Yes. You had better tell Mr. Glover to run up the Spanish flag if any doubtful-looking craft is seen to be making for the entrance, and I should always keep a couple of signallers up on the cliff, so as to let you know beforehand what you might have to expect, and to see that there is nothing showing that could excite their suspicions, until it is too late for them to turn back."

Doubtless what was going on in the inlet had been closely watched from the woods, for in the evening of the day on which the frigate sailed away scattered shots were fired from the forest, and the sound of the beating of tom-toms and the blowing of horns could be heard in the direction of the plantation whose buildings they had destroyed.

The lieutenant had gone off to dine with Nat, and they were sitting on deck smoking their cigars when the firing began.

"I almost expected it," he said. "No doubt they have been waiting for the frigate to leave before they did anything, as they would know that at least half of those who have been ashore would re-embark when she left. I have no doubt the[Pg 53] scoundrels whose place we burnt have sent to all the planters in this part of the islands to assemble in force to attack us. If they have seen us making the palisade and mounting the guns, as no doubt they have done, they certainly will not venture to assault the place unless they are in very strong force, but they can make it very unpleasant for us. It is not more than eighty yards to the other side of the creek, and from that hill they would completely command us. You will scarcely be able to keep a man on deck, and we shall have to stay in the shelter of the huts. Of course on this side they would scarcely be able to annoy us, for they would have to come down to the edge of the trees to fire, and as we could fire through the palisade upon them they would get the worst of it."

"We might row across in the boats, sir, and clear the wood of them if they became too troublesome."

"We should run the risk of losing a good many men in doing so, and a good many more as we made our way up through the trees and drove them out, and should gain nothing by it, for as soon as we retired they would reoccupy the position. No; if they get very troublesome I will slue a couple of guns round and occasionally send a round or two of grape among the trees. That will be better than your doing so, because your men at the guns would make an easy mark for them, while we are farther off, and indeed almost out of range of their muskets."

The firing soon died away, but in the morning it was reopened, and it was evident that the number in the wood had largely increased. Bullet after bullet struck the deck of the schooner, and Nat was obliged to order the greater part of the crew to remain below, and to see that those who remained on deck kept under the shelter of the bulwark. Presently a sharp fire broke out from the trees facing the palisade, and this was almost immediately replied to by the blue-

jackets and marines.[Pg 54] The fire of the assailants soon slackened, and Nat thought that it had only been begun with the object of finding out how strong a force had been left behind. Presently two of the guns on shore spoke out, and sent a volley of grape into the wood in which his own assailants were lurking. It had the effect of temporarily silencing the fire from that quarter. This, however, was but for a short time. When it began again it was taken up on the other side also, the party which had made the demonstration against the palisade evidently considering that the schooner, which lay midway between the two shores, was a safer object of attack than the stockade. As the bulwark now offered no shelter, all went below. Two of the men were about to pull up the boat which was lying at the stern, and Nat went to the ladder to take his place in it, when he was hailed from shore.

"You had better stay where you are, Mr. Glover, until it gets dusk. You would only be a mark for every man with a musket, up in the trees above us, and, so far as I can see, there is nothing we can do until they begin work in earnest."

"Very well, sir," Nat shouted back, "I will come off after it gets dusk."

Firing continued all day, but died away at sunset, and soon afterwards Nat went ashore.

"This is very awkward," the lieutenant said. "It is most unpleasant being potted at all day by fellows who won't show themselves, but I can't see that we can help it. By the noise and jabbering that breaks out at times, I should think that there must be some hundreds of them on this side alone, and we shall have to wait till they begin in earnest. Their leaders must know that they can be doing us no harm by their distant fire, and they must sooner or later make an attack on us. You see they have a strong temptation. They must have seen that none of the slaves have been taken away,[Pg 55] and as there are five hundred of them, and I suppose they are worth from twenty to forty pounds a head, it is a big thing, to say nothing of the stores. Then I have no doubt they are thirsting for revenge, and although they must see that they will have to fight very hard to take the place, they must try without delay, for they will know that the frigate will be back again before very long, and will probably bring some craft with her to carry away the slaves. So I think we must put up with their fire till they harden their hearts and attack us in earnest. They will make the attack, I expect, about the centre of the palisade, for your guns would cover both our flanks. If we are hard pressed I will light a port fire, and you had better land with twenty of your men, leaving five to take care of the ship and work a gun or two should they try to take us in flank."

"I should not be surprised if they tried to-night. Shall I bring ten of the men on shore at once, sir?"

"Well, perhaps it would be as well. Forty men are not a very large force for this length of palisade and to work some of the guns at the point where they may attack us, and I expect their first rush will be a serious one, and we shall have all our work cut out for us. There is one thing; we can rely, in case of their making a way in, on the slaves. By this time they quite understand that we are friends and that the people who had been firing on us are their enemies, and I believe they would fight like demons rather than fall into their hands again. I have torn up a bale of white calico and have given a strip of it to each man to tie round his head, so that we can tell friend from foe and they can recognize each other in the dark. The enemy won't reckon on that, and will think that they have only a small body of whites to deal with. Do you notice how silent the woods are now? I think we may take that as a sign that they are preparing for mischief." [Pg 56]

"The sooner it comes the better. Have you plenty of port fires, Mr. Playford?"

"Yes, a large boxful came on shore with the last boat yesterday."

Nat went off again, and picked out ten men to land with him.

"Get the other boat down," he said to the petty officer. "You will understand that if any attack is made on the flanks of the work you are to open fire at once upon them with grape. If a blue light is burned at the edge of the water ten men are to land instantly. You will remain in charge of the other five. So far as we know they have no boats, but they may have made a raft, and may intend to try and take the schooner, thinking that the crew will probably be on shore. So you must keep a sharp look-out on the other side as well as this. Light a blue light if you see a strong party coming off, and we will rejoin you at once."

He again landed with the ten men he had chosen.

"I have six men on watch," the lieutenant said, "and have put one of the blacks with each. I fancy their ears are sharper than ours are, and they will hear them coming before our men do."

Having nothing to do, Nat went into the barracoon and the other houses in which the slaves were placed. The contrast between their condition now and when he had seen them four days before, when they had first been found, was striking indeed. Now they were clean, and looked picturesque in their bright calico clothes. The look of dull

and hopeless misery had passed away, and it seemed to him that with the good and plentiful food they had received they were already perceptibly plumper. They would have risen as he entered, but he signed to them to keep their places. They now had room to lie down in comfort, and while some sat chatting in groups others moved about. They were evidently proud of their[Pg 57] arms, and some of them, seizing their pikes or hatchets, made signs how they would fight their enemies. A ship's lantern was burning in each hut.

In the women's huts the scene was still more interesting. The little children ran up to Nat with a new-born confidence in white men. Some of the women brought up babies to show him, and endeavoured to make him understand that these would soon have died had it not been for the sailors. The windows and doors stood open, and the evening breeze cleared the huts of the effluvium always present where a number of negroes congregate together. The sight of the poor creatures enraged Nat still more against the slavers, and made him long for them to begin their attack.

"It is quite pleasant to see them," he said as he joined Mr. Playford. "They are wonderfully changed in this short time. One would hardly have thought it possible. What will become of them?"

"I expect we shall take them to Jamaica, and that there they will be let out as free labourers to the planters. You see there is no law against the slave-trade, though public opinion is so strong on the subject at home that I have no doubt such a law will be passed before long. So, of course, we have not captured the slaves because of their being slaves, but simply as we should capture or destroy other property belonging to an enemy. Then, too, many of the slavers act as pirates if they get the chance, and there can be little doubt that a considerable quantity of the goods we found are the proceeds of piracy. Besides, you must remember that they fired at us before we fired at them. So we have plenty of good reasons for releasing these poor beggars. You see these seas swarm with scoundrels of all kinds, and it is quite safe to assume that all ships that cannot show that they are peaceful traders are engaged in nefarious business of some kind or other."

[Pg 58]

CHAPTER IV

A SHARP FIGHT

Mr. Playford and Nat were still talking when a sailor came up to him with one of the negroes.

"What is it, Tomkins?" the lieutenant asked.

"Well, sir, this 'ere black seems to hear something; he keeps pointing up into the wood and whispering something in his own lingo and looking very excited, so I thought I had better bring him here to you."

"Quite right, Tomkins; no doubt he does hear something, their ears are a good deal better than ours are. I will go up with you."

Accompanied by Nat, Mr. Playford went up on to the bank of earth that had been thrown up against the palisade, and found that the negroes there were all in a state of excitement, pointing in various directions and shaking their pikes angrily.

"They are coming, there is no doubt of that," he said. "I should say, by the motions of the blacks, that they are scattered through the wood. Well, we are ready for them. You had better get your slow matches alight, my lads; don't take the covers off the vents until the last moment, the dew is heavy."

They were joined now by Lieutenant Boldero. "I think I can hear them," he said.

"Yes. I should not have noticed if it had not been for the blacks, but there is certainly a confused noise in the air."

Listening attentively, they could hear a low rustling sound, with sometimes a faint crack as of a breaking stick.

"As soon as we think that they have got to the edge of the[Pg 59] trees we will throw a fireball out in that direction, and then let them have it. We must keep them from getting closer if we can; when they once get near the foot of the palisade we shall not be able to depress our guns enough to fire upon them."

In a short time there was no question that a large number of men were making their way down through the wood. The blacks were now brought out from the houses and ranged along at the foot of the bank, where they were ordered to stay for the present, as were they to man the line they would be exposed to the assailants' bullets, while powerless to do any service until the latter began to attempt to scale the stockade.

"They must be gathering at the edge of the trees now," the

lieutenant said at last. "Now, Tomkins, light that fireball and heave it over."

The ball, which was formed of old junk, was about the size of a man's head. The material had been smeared with tar mixed with sulphur, and Tomkins held in his hand the lanyard attached to it. He applied a slow match to it, and it broke into a blaze at once. Swinging it round his head, he hurled it far in front of him. By its light as it fell a crowd of figures could be seen gathered along the edge of the forest. A fierce yell broke from them, and loud shouts were raised by the leaders ordering them to charge, but before they could get into motion four guns poured a storm of grape among them, followed directly afterwards by the contents of four others. An appalling din of yells and shrieks was heard, but without an instant's hesitation a score of figures in European dress darted forward, followed by a mass of blacks, behind whom came another thirty or forty Europeans or mulattoes driving the negroes before them.

"Pick off the whites!" Lieutenant Boldero shouted to the marines, and a dropping fire of musketry was at once opened.

The distance, however, from the edge of the trees to the [Pg 60] palisades was but some fifty yards; the light was dim and uncertain, and in a minute from the first shot being fired the assailants were swarming along the foot of the palisade. There was no hesitation, and it was evident that the men who led the attack had made every preparation. A number of the assailants carried ladders; these were placed against the wall, and the whites and mulattoes swarmed up, closely followed by the negroes. So sudden and unexpected was this assault that in several places they obtained a footing inside the palisades, but with a wild yell the slaves at once rushed up the bank and fell upon them. At the same moment the boom of the schooner's guns told that they had made out parties of the enemy advancing against the flanks of the works.

The arrival of the slaves soon changed the position. The assailants were cut down, run through, or forced to leap down over the stockade that they had just crossed. In spite of the shouts of the lieutenant, the slaves, thirsting for vengeance, leapt down after them, and fell with such fury upon the assailants that these, seized with a panic, fled. At the edge of the trees, however, the efforts of the whites checked the flight. Guns and pistols were discharged for the first time, and a fierce fight presently raged.

"We must go down and lend them a hand," the lieutenant said. "Keep your men here, Mr. Glover, to get the guns loaded again; I will

take my blue-jackets and the marines. Light a port fire or two, else, in spite of their white head-gear, we shall be hurting our friends."

The sailors and marines soon scrambled down the ladders, and, led by their officers, rushed forward with loud cheers. Their arrival at once decided the fortune of the fray. Rushing through their black allies, they fell with sword and cutlass, musket and bayonet, upon the Europeans, whose pistols had given them a decided advantage over the slaves,[Pg 61] but who could not stand the charge of the marines and seamen. These pursued them for some little distance, but when beyond the range of the lights of the stockade Lieutenant Playford halted them. The slaves, however, continued the pursuit for some time, and then they, too, returned, having overtaken and killed many of their flying enemies.

"There is nothing more to be done till daylight," Mr. Playford said. "Indeed, I do not think that we shall hear any more of these fellows, who, to do them justice, fought well. Our guns must have done a good deal of execution, though they would have done much more had they not been so close; the bullets had hardly begun to scatter. However, we shall see in the morning. It is lucky that we armed the slaves, or it would have gone very hard with us. You see, we had half our men at the guns, and the others were too thinly scattered along the line to be able to defend it against so determined an attack. I expect they never calculated on the slaves being armed, and thought that they had only forty or fifty men to deal with. After the lesson that they have had I don't think they will molest us again, unless there are any troops in the neighbourhood that they can bring up."

The palisades were recrossed and sentries set; grog was served out to the seamen and marines; the slaves were mad with delight, and danced and sang songs of triumph for some time. As soon, however, as the lieutenant motioned them to return to their huts they did so at once. Many of them were wounded more or less severely, but they seemed to think nothing of this, being too much pleased with the vengeance they had taken to care aught for the pain. Nat prepared to return to the schooner with his men, none of whom were, however, seriously hurt, as they had been held in reserve. Altogether, three sailors and a marine had been killed and six severely wounded.[Pg 62]

"Are you going on board, Mr. Playford?"

"No; I shall stay ashore till morning. I do not think that there is the remotest chance of the attack being renewed; however, it is clearly my duty to stay here."

As soon as it was daylight Nat went on shore again, and with ten of his own men, ten marines, and a hundred of the slaves, went over the ground to collect the wounded, and learn the loss of the assailants. All the wounded sailors had been carried into the fort when the fight ceased. Six Spaniards and nine mulattoes lay dead either on the earthen rampart or at the foot of the palisade. All of them were pierced in several places by pikes, or mutilated with blows of axes. Round them lay some twenty plantation negroes, and thirty others had fallen at the edge of the wood, shattered by the discharges of the cannon or killed in the hand-to-hand conflict; among them were twelve of the released slaves. Not a single white or mulatto was found alive.

The party pursued their way for a quarter of a mile into the wood. Here and there were scattered the bodies of the assailants who had been overtaken by their pursuers. The latter had done their work thoroughly, for not a single man was found to be breathing. When they came to a point beyond which the slaves by signs apprised them that they had not gone, they returned, collecting and carrying down the bodies of the dead as they went. They found on their return that two trenches, four feet deep and thirty feet long, had already been dug, at the edge of the forest and as far from the camp as possible. In one of these the bodies of the Spaniards and mulattoes were laid, and in the other that of the negroes. The earth was then filled in.

"It has been an unpleasant job, but a necessary one," Lieutenant Playford said, when he knew that the work was done, and the whole party re-entered the fort. "In a climate like[Pg 63] this the place would have been uninhabitable in a couple of days if we had not buried them all."

In the afternoon two fresh graves were made, and the fallen sailors were reverently laid to rest in one, the dead slaves in the other. Water was brought up in buckets by the negroes from the edge of the creek, and all signs of the conflict on the rampart and at the foot of the palisade either washed away or covered with earth. Then matters resumed their former aspect.

Early the next morning the look-out on the cliff ran down and reported that a large brigantine was just entering the inlet. Mr. Playford shouted the news to Nat.

"I will send off the marines to you," he said. "I will remain here with the blue-jackets."

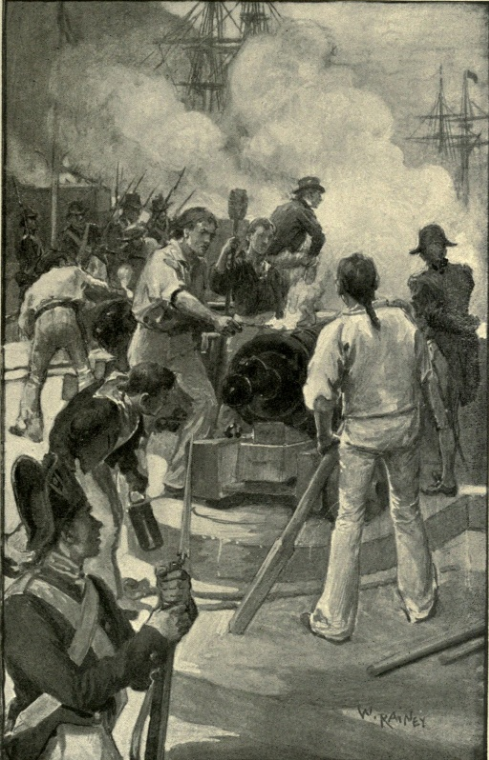
The Spanish flag was at once run up to the peak. In two or three minutes the boat with the marines came alongside. They and the

greater part of the sailors at once lay down on the deck, while the few who remained on foot took off their straw hats and white jumpers, tied handkerchiefs round their heads, and gave themselves as unseamanlike an appearance as possible. Ten minutes later the brigantine appeared round the point; there was scarce a breath of wind, and she had two boats towing her. A flag hung from her mast-head, and as Nat turned his glass upon it he exclaimed to Boldero, who, having removed his coat and cap, was standing by his side:

"It is the black flag; the fellow must be pretty sure of his welcome or he would never venture to haul it up."

In the meantime the guns ashore had been slued round, and were now pointed on a spot somewhat ahead of the schooner. She came slowly along until within some four or five lengths of the latter, then there was a sudden shout on board, followed by a tremendous hubbub. It was clear that[Pg 64] the line of palisades surrounding the huts had been noticed and the guns seen.

The brigantine was crowded with men. She carried twelve guns in her ports, and a long swivel eighteen-pounder in her bow. There was now no longer any motive for concealment, the marines and seamen leapt to their feet with a cheer, and a moment later the schooner's two foremost guns, which would alone bear on the boats, spoke out, while almost at the same moment two of those on the rampart sent a shower of grape into them. Both boats sank immediately, those of the crews who were uninjured swimming to the brigantine. Contradictory orders were shouted on board the pirate. One by one her guns on the port side answered those on the ramparts.



**THE GUNS ON THE RAMPART SEND A SHOWER OF GRAPE INTO
THE PIRATE.**

"Get ready, my lads!" Nat shouted, "she will be alongside directly."

The impetus of the schooner's way was indeed sufficient to take her slowly but surely forward, and the pirate slightly changed his course so as to bring her outside the schooner. Playford saw what his object was, and the remaining guns poured their charges of grape across the deck of the brigantine, committing terrible havoc. Before they could be loaded again she was alongside the schooner, and so covered by her from the fire of the guns on shore. As the vessels came abreast of each other at a distance of two or three feet only, Nat and the young marine officer leapt on to the pirate's deck followed by their men. The resistance of the pirates was desperate. Although they had suffered much loss from the fire of the guns, they were still numerically stronger than their assailants, and, fighting as they did with the desperation of despair, they not only held their ground, but pushed their assailants back towards the bulwark.

For three or four minutes the fight continued without any [Pg 65]marked advantage to either party; the pistols of the seamen and pirates and the muskets of the marines were empty, and they were fighting hand to hand. Then slowly the advantage turned against the pirates, but the issue was still undecided when there was a loud cheer, and Mr. Playford with fifteen sailors leapt on the deck of the pirate from the other side, the approach of the boat having been unnoticed in the heat of the fray. The pirates now broke; their captain had fallen, and, outnumbered and hopeless, some threw down their arms, while others jumped overboard. Those who surrendered were at once bound and batten down in the hold of the schooner, some eight or ten only gained the opposite shore and took to the woods. The victory had not been a bloodless one. Five of the frigate's crew had been killed, and there were few among Nat's command who were not more or less severely wounded.

"It was a sharp fight, Mr. Glover," Mr. Playford said.

"It was indeed, sir. At one time they fairly drove us back, but I think that we should have beaten them even if you had not brought help to us."

"I am sure you would," the lieutenant said warmly. "I could see as I boarded that although the men in front were fighting hard, those in the rear were hanging back as if they had had enough of it. Still, you might have lost more men than you did before you finished with them if we had not turned up. You see, fighting with pirates is quite a different thing from fighting with any other opponents. These fellows know well enough that there is no mercy for them, and that they have

nothing before them but to fight until they die, or to be tried and hanged. The veriest coward would fight till the last with such an alternative as that before him. I would rather fight a hundred and fifty French or Spanish seamen than a hundred pirates. She is a fine roomy craft that we have taken, and I think we shall now be able to carry off[Pg 66] all these blacks. No doubt it will be a close pack for them, but for a short voyage that will not matter. Now let us see to our wounded. After that is done we can get off the hatches and have a look round below. Of course she may have come in here for water, but it is likely that she has at least some booty in her hold."

This proved to be the case. She was half full of goods of a more or less valuable kind, and these, by the marks on the bales and boxes, had evidently formed part of the cargoes of three ships. Two days later the *Orpheus* was seen returning along the coast, and Nat was at once sent off by the lieutenant with his written report of what had taken place since she had sailed. The gig reached the side of the frigate just as the anchor was let go.

"I see your right arm is in a sling, Mr. Glover," the captain said as he handed him the report, "so I suppose that you have had some fighting."

"Yes, sir, we have had some pretty sharp fighting."

"What is your wound?"

"Only a chop with a cutlass, sir."

"Oh, you came to hand-to-hand work, did you?"

Nat gave no answer, for the captain had opened the report and was now running his eye down it.

"Very satisfactory," he said, as he handed it to the first lieutenant. "An attacking force handsomely repulsed and a pirate captured. Very good work indeed, very good. I see Mr. Boldero was wounded, Mr. Glover."

"Yes, sir, he was hit on the head with a pistol-shot. Fortunately the ball glanced off the skull. He was stunned for a time, but is now nearly himself again."

"Here is some work for you, Dr. Bemish," the captain said. "Mr. Playford reports that ten of the cases are serious. I am going ashore in my gig at once, and will take you with me.[Pg 67] You had better send the cutter at once, Mr. Hill, to bring off the wounded. You may as well return in your own boat, Mr. Glover, Mr. Curtis can go in charge of

the cutter. Mr. Needham can go with me."

Nat at once returned to his boat. He was overtaken by the captain's gig when half-way up the inlet. He rowed to the schooner, while the gig made straight for the landing-place where the lieutenant was standing.

"I congratulate you, Mr. Playford," the captain said as he stepped ashore. "You seem to have had a pretty busy time of it since we have been away. I certainly did not think they would attempt to attack you when you had those guns in position, and I did not reckon on the pirate. She is a fine brigantine; the schooner looks quite small beside her."

"Yes, sir, she is over three hundred tons. Her broadside guns are all twelve-pounders, and she carries an eighteen-pounder as a swivel. She had a crew of seventy men, of whom only eight or ten got ashore, the rest were all accounted for except twelve, who are in irons below. The credit of capturing her, sir, really belongs to Mr. Glover, for although I went off to his assistance he would have taken her without my aid, though the pirates were still fighting strongly."

"Well, it has been a very successful business altogether, Mr. Playford. The capture of the brigantine is specially fortunate, as I have failed to come across any native craft as I had hoped to do, but with this extra accommodation we shall be able to manage to carry off all the slaves. I see by your account that Mr. Glover had the marines as well as his own twenty men."

"Yes, sir, I sent Lieutenant Boldero and fourteen marines on board; he had lost six either killed or seriously wounded in the attack here. I own that I had hardly calculated upon the brigantine getting alongside the schooner. I thought that[Pg 68] when we had smashed up her boats, which I made certain we should do, she would be so completely at our mercy that, being becalmed, she would haul down her flag; but she had sufficient way on her to take her alongside the schooner, and her captain put her there so cleverly that I could not fire at her except through the schooner. I saw at once that the whole position was changed, for if he had captured the schooner he might have put all his men into the boats and made a dash for shore; and as I had so few men fit for work it would have been awkward, though with the aid of the blacks I have no doubt I should have driven them off."

"Then I suppose your discharge of grape did not do him very much harm?"

"Not so much as it ought to have done, sir. You see the first two guns we fired destroyed his boats. The other guns were all too weakly handled to be trained on the pirate as he forged ahead, and as far as I could see not one of them did any serious execution among his crew. Yesterday I told off four negroes to each gun, and kept them at work all day learning how to train them under the direction of the sailors. If I had thought of that before we should have swept his decks with such effect that when she got alongside the schooner Mr. Glover's party would have had easy work of it."

"You could hardly think of everything, Mr. Playford, and you certainly did right in sending the marines off to the schooner directly you had news that this brigantine was entering the inlet. No doubt if you had wished to sink her it would have been better to have kept them on shore to help work the guns, but as she is a valuable prize, and we wanted her badly to help carry away the slaves, you were quite right not to try to damage her. You say she is half full of plunder?"

"Yes, sir, and there were nearly eight hundred pounds in [Pg 69] money and thirty-four watches and some jewellery found in the captain's cabin."

"She is a valuable capture, and I should think the admiral would buy her into the service. She is just the sort of craft that we want. The schooner would be too small to tackle one of these heavily-armed pirates with their crowds of men. So your slaves fought well?"

"That they did, sir. If it had been daylight I doubt whether any of the whites who led the attack would have escaped. Of course they had no particular animosity against the negroes, but I believe that they would have followed the whites and mulattoes half across the island."

"Well, do you think that the two craft will carry all the slaves?"

"Hardly, sir; the schooner can stow a hundred and fifty. Of course it will be close work, but there will be room for that number to lie down, and with the hatches both open they will be all right. By rearranging the cargo a bit, two hundred could sleep in the hold of the brigantine. That would still leave rather over one hundred and fifty."

"Well, we must give up part of the hold of the frigate to them," the captain said, "there is no help for it. There are about that number of women and children, are there not?"

"Yes, sir."

"They had better go off in the frigate, then. Of course, the prisoners will be sent off too—I will pay a visit to the brigantine, and then go off

myself, and will send the boats in as soon as I get there. You may as well be getting the men on board at once. As soon as they are all off, you will, of course, set fire to all the sheds here, but you may as well send off a boat-load of stores suitable for them to the frigate, and will, of course, victual these two craft. I shall send you another forty men to fill up the vacancies that have been[Pg 70] caused, and to furnish a crew for the brigantine, of which, of course, you will take the command. You and the schooner will keep in close company. The marines will return to the ship. Mr. Needham will be your second on the brigantine."

"How about the guns, sir? They are all old pieces, and scarcely worth carrying away."

"Yes, but I won't leave them here to be used for defending this place again. You had better take them off their carriages, spike them, get them into the boats, and heave them overboard, well out in deep water. Do you think that you will be able to get everything done before dark, Mr. Playford?"

"Yes, sir, it is only nine o'clock now, and if you will send a strong working party, in addition to those who will be taking the slaves on board, to help with the stores and guns, I have no doubt that I shall be able to get the work done well before sunset."

"Very well. Mr. Hill will come on shore as soon as I return to the frigate."

The work went on without ceasing all day, and the pinnace, which had been recovered and repaired before the frigate sailed, and the launch, went backwards and forwards to the frigate with the women, children, and stores, while the boats of the brigantine and schooner carried the men to those craft, as soon as the stores for the voyage, and the bales of cotton and other goods that would be useful, had been taken off. When the two large boats had finished their work they were employed in carrying out the guns, which had, before the slaves embarked, been brought down by them to the edge of the water. By three o'clock all was finished, and the last boat-load of the sailors rowed out to the prizes, after having set fire to all the huts. These were soon in a blaze, to the delight of the negroes, who danced and shouted for joy. Half of these were sent[Pg 71] below at once, as they crowded the decks to such an extent as to render it impossible for the sailors to work.

Those who remained were ranged in rows by the bulwarks from end to end of the craft; then the anchors were got up, and the sails dropped and sheeted home. The wind was very light, but was

sufficient to give steeage-way, and with the British ensign flying at the peak the two vessels sailed out of the inlet and joined the frigate, which began to make sail as soon as they were seen issuing from the narrow mouth. Glad indeed were all on board the three vessels when, after a voyage unmarked by any adventure, they entered Port Royal, for although the negroes, feeling confident that they were in good hands, had been docile and obedient, they were still terribly in the way.

Though all had been made to take a bath every morning, the odour in the crowded prizes was almost overpoweringly strong. On arrival, the negroes were landed and lodged in some large government storehouses near the fort. Each was presented with ten yards of cloth on leaving for the shore, and they were, before being housed, permitted to sort themselves, so that families and friends might be together. Interpreters explained to them that it would be impossible to send them back to their friends in Africa, but that they would be apportioned out among the plantations of the island. The wages they were to receive were explained to them, and they were told that a government official would visit each plantation in turn, and would listen to any complaints that might be made as to their food and treatment, and at the end of three years all who wished it could either change masters or take up a piece of land, build a hut, and cultivate it on their own account.

The poor creatures were well satisfied with this. They were overjoyed at being united to their relations and friends,[Pg 72] and to know that they would still be together; and were assured that they would be well cared for, and in time be as much their own masters as if at their villages in Africa. The schooner was sold; the brigantine was, as the captain had expected, bought into the service; Mr. Playford was offered and accepted the command of her. Mr. Normandy took his place as second lieutenant of the *Orpheus*, and Mr. Marston received his promotion and the post of third officer. As the *Cerf*—which was the name of the brigantine—was to be considered as a tender of the frigate, those on board her were still borne on her books. Curtis and Glover were appointed to her, with a petty officer and forty men.

The pirates were tried and executed, with the exception of one, who was a mere lad. He had, he asserted, been forced to join the pirates—being spared by them when the rest of his comrades had been murdered, as they had lost their cook's mate, and required someone to fill his place. This, however, would not have saved his life had he not promised to lead his new captors to the chief rendezvous

of the pirates, which had so long eluded the search that had been made for it. He acknowledged, however, that he was not acquainted with its exact position. He had sailed in and out four or five times, and had only a general idea of its position, but asserted that he should certainly know the island if he saw it. A fortnight after reaching Port Royal, the frigate and brigantine sailed in company.

The indications given by the boy pointed to an island lying a short distance off the northern coast of Venezuela.

There were originally, he said, four vessels working together, three brigantines and a large schooner, one of which had arrived from France only a short time before the *Cerf* sailed on her last voyage. The entrance to the pirates' stronghold was on the south side of the island, and was, he said,[Pg 73] so well concealed that vessels might sail past the place a thousand times without noticing it. There were two batteries at the water's edge, inside the entrance, each mounting twelve eighteen-pounder guns that had been taken from prizes. The channel here was not more than fifty yards across. A very heavy boom was at all times swung across it just above the batteries, and this was opened only when one of the craft entered or left.

There was, however, he said, a spot on the outer side of the island where a landing could be effected, at a little ravine that ran down to the shore. This was thickly wooded, and some large trees growing at its mouth almost hid it from passing vessels. At other points the shore was steep, but there was so much vegetation on every ledge where trees or bushes could obtain a foothold, that from the sea it would seem that the cliffs were not too steep to scale.

The prisoner had been placed on board the *Cerf*, which, as soon as she was fairly at sea, was altered as far as possible in appearance by a white band with ports painted along her sides; a false stem of an entirely different shape from her own was fastened to her, her light upper spars sent down and replaced by stumpy ones, and other changes made that would help to alter her appearance.

Were she recognized by the pirates as she sailed past their island it would at once be suspected that one of the men recently captured had revealed the rendezvous, and that she was cruising near it to obtain an exact idea of the best mode of attack before other craft came up to assist her. They had no doubt that the pirates had already received news of the surprise and capture of the brigantine. Some of the men who escaped would doubtless have made for the nearest port, and hired a negro craft to take them to their own island, which they would have reached before the *Orpheus*[Pg 74] arrived at Port

Royal with her prizes. The pirates too were on their guard, and would either have deserted their head-quarters altogether or have added to their defences. The sight of their late consort would confirm their fears that their whereabouts had become known, and it was therefore of importance that her identity should not be suspected.

Changed as she now was, she might be taken for a man-of-war brigantine. Her height out of water had been increased by four feet by painted canvas fastened to battens. She had ten ports painted on each side, and looked a very different craft from the smart brigantine that had sailed away from the island. It had at first been suggested by Mr. Playford that she should be disguised so as to look like a trader, but Captain Crosbie had decided against this.

"There are," he said, "three of these pirates, and even two of them might together be more than a match for you. By all accounts they are each of them as strong as you are in point of armament, and would carry at least twice as many men as you have. Even if you beat them off it could only be at a very great cost of life, and I certainly should not like you to undertake such an enterprise unless you had at least double the strength of men, which I could not spare you. By going in the guise of a vessel of war they would not care to meddle with you. They would know that there would be no chance of booty and a certainty of hard fighting, and of getting their own craft badly knocked about, so that it will be in all respects best to avoid a fight. They may in that case not connect you with us at all, but take you to be some freshly-arrived craft. You had best hoist the Stars and Stripes as you pass along the coast."

When the changes were all effected the ships parted company. The brigantine was to sail east until within a short distance of Grenada, then to cruise westward along the coast[Pg 75] of the mainland; thus going, there would be less suspicion on the part of those who saw her that she was coming from Jamaica. A rendezvous was appointed at the island of Oruba, lying off the mouth of the Gulf of Venezuela.

Their prisoner was French, and he was very closely questioned by Lieutenant Playford, who spoke that language well. He said that they always sailed north to begin with, then sometimes they kept east, and certainly he heard the names of Guadeloupe and St. Lucia. At other times, after sailing north they steered north-west, and came to a great island, which he had no doubt was San Domingo. It was not in this craft that he sailed, he was only transferred to her with some of the others for that cruise only. After they had once made either the

western islands or San Domingo, they cruised about in all directions.

"The great point is," Mr. Playford said to the midshipmen after a long talk with the prisoner, "that at starting they generally hung about these islands, Guadeloupe, St. Lucia, and so on, for some time, and it was considered their best cruising ground, though also the most dangerous one, as we have always some cruisers in those waters. That would certainly place the island somewhere off the north coast of Caracas. He declared that the first day out they generally passed the western point of an island of considerable size with some high hills. The only island that answers to that account is, as you see in the chart, Margarita. Therefore I feel convinced that the pirate hold is in one of these groups, off Caracas, either Chimana, Borshcha, or these two islets called Piritu Islands. Altogether, you see, there are over a dozen of these islands scattered along near the mainland.

"It is quite out of the general course of trade, as nothing would go into that bay except a craft bound for San Diego, or this place marked Barcelona, lying a short distance up the[Pg 76] river. They would take care not to molest any of the little traders frequenting these ports, and might lie in an inlet in one of these islands for years without their being ever suspected, unless perhaps by some of the native fishermen, who probably supply them with fish and fruit from the mainland. Anyhow, I don't suppose a British cruiser is seen along that coast once a year."

CHAPTER V

A PIRATE HOLD

A fortnight later the *Cerf* passed along under easy sail between the island of Margarita and the mainland. She was now getting very close to the spot where, if the prisoner was right, the pirates' hold lay. The Stars and Stripes was hanging from the peak, and with her high bulwarks and ten ports on each side no one would have suspected that she was not, as she seemed, an American man-of-war, heavily armed. Passing close to another island, they headed more south into the bay as they neared Caracas. Every foot of the islands was closely scanned. Five miles farther, they came abreast of the Chimana isles, and pointing to one of these that lay nearer the shore than the others, the prisoner exclaimed that he was certain that that was the island.

"I am sure of it," he exclaimed, "both from the look of the island itself, and from that high range of mountains on the mainland to the south-east."

"You are quite sure?"

"Certain, captain; there are the large trees I spoke of growing down close to the water. It is behind them that there is a little ravine by which one can climb up."[Pg 77]

No alteration was made in the ship's course, but she continued her way until sunset, when she dropped anchor off the mouth of the river La Pasqua, some twenty miles west of the islands.

As soon as it was dark Curtis was sent off in a gig manned by six rowers. The oars were muffled; the orders were to row round the island within an oar's length of the shore, and to find the entrance to the channel, which, if the prisoner was right as to the place, should be on the side facing the mainland. Pierre, the French lad, was taken with them. It was a long row to the island, but the gig was a fast one, and, at three o'clock in the morning, she returned with the news that Pierre's information had been correct. They had found the opening but had not entered it, as Mr. Playford had given strict orders on this point, thinking it probable that there would be a sharp look-out kept in the batteries, especially as the supposed cruiser would certainly have been closely watched as she passed.

An hour later the anchor was got up and the *Cerf* sailed for Oruba, off which she arrived three days later. There were no signs of the frigate, and indeed the *Cerf* had arrived at the rendezvous before the time fixed. At daybreak on the third morning the topsails of the *Orpheus* were made out from the mast-head, and four hours later she and the *Cerf* met, and Mr. Playford went on board the frigate to report.

"This is good news indeed," the captain said when he heard that the haunt of the pirates had been discovered. "Of course you have taken the exact position of the island, for we must, if possible, take them by surprise?"

"Yes, sir; it lies as nearly as possible in 64° 30' west longitude and 10° 22' north latitude."

"We will lay our course east, Mr. Playford, for, of course, you will keep company with us. The water is deep all along[Pg 78] the coast, and there seems to be from thirty to thirty-eight fathoms to within a mile or two of the coast. I shall lay my course outside the Windward Islands as far as Blanquilla, thence an almost due south course will take us clear of the western point of Margarita and down to this island. We will discuss our plan of attack later on."

On the morning of the third day after leaving Oruba the island of Blanquilla was sighted. The frigate made the signal for Mr. Playford to go on board, and on entering the captain's cabin he found him and Mr. Hill examining the chart.

"You see, Mr. Playford, we are now as nearly as possible a hundred miles north of the island; with this wind we should pass the point of Margarita at about four o'clock in the afternoon; if it freshens we will take in sail, I want to be off the island say three or four hours before daybreak. You will send that French lad on board when you go back; as soon as we anchor he will go in the gig with Mr. Hill to reconnoitre and make sure that there is no mistake about the place. When he finds that it is all right he will come back. The boats will be in the water, and the men on board in readiness, and will at once start, so that the landing may, if possible, be effected just at daybreak at this ravine on the north of the island. At the same hour you will sail in and take up your place opposite the mouth of the harbour, and fight anything that tries to come out.

"It is quite possible that as soon as our party attack the place on the land side any craft there may be there will cut their cables and try to make off. On no account try to enter; the batteries would blow you out of the water. You will start as soon as the boats leave the ship, and will therefore have light enough for you to go in and to avoid making any mistake, for you see there are half a dozen islands lying close together. There is no objection to their seeing you, and indeed I should[Pg 79] be rather glad if they do, for in that case they are the less likely to discover the landing-party, and though they must see the frigate they will think that she is only lying there to cut them off if they try to escape. They will be manning their batteries and getting everything ready to give you a warm reception, and I hope that we shall drop upon them as if out of the clouds.

"Mr. Hill will command the landing-party, which will consist of a hundred and fifty seamen and the thirty marines, which, with the advantage of surprise, ought to be sufficient. As you report that the island is less than a mile long and not much more than half a mile across, the landing-party will soon be at work. After they have landed, Mr. Hill will divide them into two parties, and will endeavour to make his way round the inlet, keeping up among the trees, and then rush down upon the batteries. When he has captured these he will fire three guns as a signal to you. You will have your boats in readiness, and will at once tow the schooner in, and, on reaching the boom, bring her broadside to bear upon any craft there, and generally aid the landing-party with your guns. If, by good luck, the three craft we

have been so long looking for are all there you will have a strong force to tackle; you may certainly take it that their crews will together mount up to three hundred men, and it is likely that there may be a hundred others who form what we may call the garrison of the place when they are away."

"Very well, sir."

The two vessels headed south under easy canvas, passed the point of Margarita at the hour that had been arranged, and then taking in still more sail proceeded slowly on until, about one o'clock in the morning, the island could be made out with the night-glasses. Then both were laid to, Captain Crosbie having forbidden anchoring, in the first place owing to the great depth of water, and in the next because, although the [Pg 80] island was three miles away, the chain-cable running out might be heard at night if the pirates had anyone on watch on the hill. Nat, whose watch it was, saw the gig shoot away from the side of the frigate. An hour later and there was a bustle and stir on board the *Orpheus*, and all her boats were lowered. At five bells the crew began to take their places in them, and soon afterwards the gig returned. The watch below were called up and sail was made, and at half-past three the boats started, and the *Cerf* was headed towards the land. Dawn was just breaking when they reached the island. All was still. It had been arranged that, unless discovered, the attack on the batteries was not to be made until five o'clock, and just at that hour the *Cerf* arrived off the narrow entrance to the port. Half an hour before, a musket had been discharged on the hill above them, and it was clear that their coming had been observed; but as no sound of conflict could be heard inland there was every reason to suppose that the pirates had no suspicion of a landing having been effected on the other side.

"That is what I call being punctual," Nat said to Curtis as two bells rang out just as they opened the passage.

A light kedge anchor was dropped, and as this was done a patter of musketry broke out from the hill above them. Their action showed that the arrival of the brigantine was no matter of chance, but that she was there expressly with the intention of attacking the pirates' stronghold, and those who had been watching her, therefore, saw that any further attempt at concealment was useless. In the night the canvas band had been taken down, as there was no longer any reason for concealing the identity of the brigantine. The musketry fire only lasted for a minute, for suddenly a roar of battle broke out within a hundred yards of the mouth of the entrance. The sailors burst into a loud cheer. It was evident that the landing-party had met with

complete success so far, and had approached[Pg 81] the batteries unobserved, and that a hand-to-hand fight was going on.

Above the cracking of pistols the cheers of the seamen could be plainly heard, but in two or three minutes the uproar died away, and then three guns were fired at short intervals. The boats were already in the water, the kedge lifted, and the crews bending forward in readiness for the signal.

"Take her in, lads!" the lieutenant shouted, and the schooner's head at once began to turn towards the inlet.

A moment later two broadsides were fired.

"There are two of their craft in there!" Curtis exclaimed. "Now our fellows have carried the batteries they have opened fire on them."

As he spoke there was another broadside, which was answered by a hurrah from all on deck. It was clear that they had had the good luck to catch all the pirates at once. Three minutes' rowing and the boom was in sight. Mr. Playford called to one of the boats to take a rope from the stern to the battery on the right-hand side, and ordered the others to cease rowing.

"We have way enough on her!" he shouted. "As soon as you get near the boom take her head round to port, and carry the rope to shore. You can fasten it to the chain at the end of the boom."

As he gave the order a gun spoke out from the battery on the right, followed almost immediately by one on the left.

"They are slueing the guns round!" Nat exclaimed. "We shall be having our share of the fun in another minute or two."

They could now obtain a view into the piece of water inside the passage. It was nearly circular, and some three hundred yards across. Two brigantines and a schooner were lying in line, within fifty yards of the opposite shore. A large range[Pg 82] of storehouses stood by the water's edge, while the hillsides were dotted with huts, and dwelling-places of larger size. By the time that the brigantine was got into position by the side of the boom the pirates had loaded again, and several shots struck her.

Her guns were already loaded, and those on board poured a broadside into the brigantine at the end of the line. The sailors in the battery were working with might and main to slue all the guns round to bear upon the pirates. On the hillsides above them a scattered fire of musketry was being kept up, and Mr. Hill hailed the schooner.

"Mr. Playford, will you land a party of fifteen men on each side to clear the hills of those rascals? I don't think there are many of them, but they are doing us a good deal of damage, for they can hardly miss us closely packed as we are here."

"Ay, ay, sir. You hear the orders, gentlemen. Mr. Curtis, you land with fifteen men on the starboard side, and do you, Mr. Glover, take the party that lands to port. Clear the scoundrels out—give no quarter!"

The boats had just returned. The two midshipmen leapt into them, and a few strokes took them ashore.

"Up the hill, lads!" Nat shouted. "Don't fire until you are at close quarters. Give them one volley if they are together, then sling your guns, and go at them with the cutlass!"

There was but little fighting, however, for there were only ten or twelve pirates on either side, as their main force was distributed between the batteries and the ships. They were therefore very easily driven off, five or six of them being killed and the rest flying with all speed towards their village, where those who had escaped from the batteries were already going off in boats to the ships. The two midshipmen therefore returned to the schooner.[Pg 83]

"Don't come on board!" Mr. Playford shouted. "See if you can free one end of the boom. If so we will go in and engage one of those craft."

It was found that the boom was fastened at Nat's side, and the chain was soon unwound from the stump of a large tree. Then the two boats together got hold of the end of the boom and swung it round so that the schooner could pass. The enemy kept up a heavy fire upon them while they were doing this, and just as the job was completed, Curtis's boat was smashed to pieces by a round shot. The breeze was very light, but it was in the right direction.

"Shall we tow, sir?" Nat called to his commander.

"Certainly not. Get your men on board at once."

The sails, which had been loosely furled, were dropped again, and the brigantine stole past the batteries, which saluted her with a rousing cheer, while the guns were worked with redoubled energy to keep down the fire of the pirates. The *Cerf* was swept with round shot and grape by the guns of the three piratical craft, but the distance to be traversed was so small, and the fire from the battery to which the

pirates working their guns were exposed was so heavy, that the men fired wildly, and the *Cerf* suffered less than might have been expected while crossing the intervening two hundred yards of water. She was steered straight for the schooner, and as her bowsprit ran in between the pirate's masts the crew, who had been crouching forward, leapt down on to her deck, headed by their commander and the two midshipmen.

The pirates, although they had suffered heavily, were still in sufficient force to offer an efficient resistance, but their courage had been shaken by the suddenness of the attack. They had lain down to sleep with the assurance that the port was unknown and unsuspected, that the batteries that guarded it could sink any hostile ship that attempted to enter, and[Pg 84] their dismay when these batteries were attacked and carried by an enemy who seemed to spring out of the earth, and their only retreat cut off, was overwhelming.

Already the heavy guns of the battery had done terrible execution. Two of the guns on that side had been dismounted, and a third of the crew killed; consequently, although a small portion of the number led by their captain fought desperately, and were killed to the last man, the majority leapt overboard at once and swam ashore. Leaving ten men in charge of the prize, the lieutenant called all the rest back on board the *Cerf*, which remained in the position in which she had run head on to the schooner, and she was now able to bring her broadsides into play upon the brigantines, the pieces forward raking them from stem to stern, while the batteries continued their terrible fire. In a few minutes the pirates began to take to the boats, which were lying by their sides just as they had come off from the shore. Once begun, the movement spread rapidly. The boats were soon crowded, and those who could not find places in them leapt overboard.

"Take the boat and a dozen men, Mr. Curtis, and haul down the black flag of the craft to starboard; and you, Mr. Glover, take one of the prize's boats and do the same to the other brigantine."

They turned to execute the order when all on board the *Cerf* were hurled to the deck—one of the brigantines had blown up with a tremendous explosion, that brought most of the huts on the hillside to the ground, carried away both masts of the *Cerf*, and drove fragments of wreckage high into the air, whence they fell partly in the pool, partly on shore. Fortunately for the *Cerf* only a few fragments of any size struck her deck, the pieces for the most part falling in a wider circle. Numbers of the pirates who had just landed from their

boats were killed, and many more were injured by being hurled down[Pg 85] on to the rocks, dazed and half-stunned. Those on board the *Cerf* who had escaped severe injury rose to their feet.

Not more than twenty-five did so. Lieutenant Playford lay dead, crushed under a mast; Curtis had been hurled against one of the guns and his brains dashed out; ten of the sailors had been killed either by the falling masts or by being dashed against the bulwarks; twelve had fallen under the enemy's fire as the *Cerf* crossed the pool; twelve others were hurt more or less either by the enemy's missiles or by the shock. It was three or four minutes before the silence that followed was broken. Then Mr. Hill hailed across the water:

"*Cerf* ahoy! have you suffered much?"

"Terribly," Nat shouted back; "Lieutenant Playford and Mr. Curtis are both killed. We have only twenty-five men in any way fit for service left."

"If you have got a boat that will swim send it ashore."

Nat looked over the side, the boat had been stove by a falling fragment; then he crossed to the prize, and found that one of the boats was uninjured. Four men were just getting into it, when Mr. Hill hailed again:

"Let them bring a rope with them, Mr. Glover; we will tow you over here."

The end of a hawser was put into the boat, and the men rowed with it to the battery.

"Mr. Glover!" the lieutenant again hailed.

"Yes, sir."

"I am sending the boat back again. I think that had they put a slow match in the magazine of the other brigantine it would have exploded before this. However, you had better remain where you are for a quarter of an hour, to be sure; then, before you move, board the brigantine and flood the magazine. Otherwise, as soon as you have left, some of these desperadoes might swim off to her and put a match there." [Pg 86]

"Very well, sir, I will go at once if you like."

"No, there is no use running any unnecessary risk. You had better flood the schooner's magazine first."

"Ay, ay, sir."

Taking half a dozen hands with buckets, Nat went on board the prize and soon flooded the magazine; then he and those who were able to help did all they could for the wounded, several of whom, who had only been stunned, were presently on their legs again. When the quarter of an hour had passed he asked for volunteers. All the survivors stepped forward.

"Four men will be enough," he said. "Bring buckets with you."

It was not without a feeling of awe that Nat and the four sailors stepped on to the deck of the brigantine, for although he was convinced that had a match been lighted the explosion would have taken place long before, as it was now five-and-twenty minutes since the crew had deserted her, neither he nor the men had entirely recovered from the severe shock of the explosion. He led the way below; all was quiet; the door of the magazine was open, but there was no smell of burning powder, and they entered fearlessly.

"All right, lads; now as quick as you like with your buckets."

An abundance of water was thrown in; then, to make quite certain, Nat locked the door of the magazine, and put the key in his pocket. A cheer broke from the men in the battery as he and his companions again took their places in the boat and rowed to the *Cerf*. He was hailed again by Mr. Hill.

"I have changed my mind, Mr. Glover; now that I know there is no risk of another explosion, I think perhaps you had best remain where you are. We will give you a pull to get you free of the schooner, then you had better range the *Cerf* alongside of her; keep your guns and those of the [Pg 87] brigantine both loaded with grape; send your boat ashore to fetch off the wounded."

"I have two boats now, sir; one of the brigantine's was left behind, and is uninjured."

"Then send them both ashore, the sooner we get the wounded off the better. I am going to move forward with all my men; we have spiked the guns here, and if they should come down into the batteries again you can clear them out. You will, of course, help us, if we meet with strong resistance, with your guns on the shore-side."

"Ay, ay, sir."

The two boats were sent ashore, and the wounded came off with Dr. Bemish. As soon as they all came on board Nat said:

"I will leave you with the wounded here, doctor, with four of my men to help you. We are so littered up that we could hardly work the guns, and as you see, three of them were dismounted by the explosion; besides, the prize alongside would hamper us, therefore I will take the rest of the men on board the brigantine."

"I think that will be a very good plan, my lad," the doctor replied. "I quite agree with you, that with the spars and wreckage on one side and the prize on the other, you are practically helpless."

The men were at once set to work bringing up powder cartridges from the magazine; grape and round-shot they would find on board the brigantine.

In ten minutes the guns of that craft were reloaded. The two bodies of men from the batteries had by this time reached the storehouses. Not a shot had been fired, but a minute later there was a loud word of command, followed by a fierce yell, and in a moment both parties were engaged, a heavy fire being opened upon them from every spot of vantage on the hillside in front of them.[Pg 88]

"Now, my lads, give them a dose of grape!" Nat shouted. "I expect they are two to one to our fellows still. Train them carefully."

Gun after gun sent showers of grape among the hidden foe, who were for the most part lying behind the cactus hedges of the gardens that surrounded the huts. The three forward guns assisted Mr. Hill's party, while the others aided that commanded by Needham. Although but four men to a gun, the sailors worked so hard that the pieces were discharged as rapidly as if they had been manned by a full complement, and their effect was visible in the diminution of the enemy's fire, and by the line of smoke gradually mounting the hill, showing that the pirates were falling back, while the cheers of the sailors and marines as they pressed steadily upwards, rapidly plying their muskets, rose louder and louder. Near the upper edge of the cleared ground the pirates made a stand, but the fire of the guns proved too much for them, and they took to the forest. Presently a sailor ran down to the shore.

"The first lieutenant says, sir, will you please continue your fire into the forest. He is going to cut down all the hedges and fire the huts, so that they will have to pass over open ground if they attack again."

"Tell Mr. Hill I will do so," Nat shouted back.

It was not long after the fire had been turned in that direction before the puffs of smoke that darted out from the edge of the forest ceased

altogether. The sailors could now be seen slashing away with their cutlasses at the lines of cactus hedge, while the huts that still stood were speedily in flames. Numbers of women and children now came down to the shore, where they were placed in charge of six of the marines and a non-commissioned officer. A quarter of an hour later, while Nat was watching what was going on on shore, one of the men touched him.[Pg 89]

"Look, sir, they are going down to the batteries!"

The men were at once ordered across to the guns on the other side, and these opened with grape upon two bodies of pirates, each some seventy or eighty strong, who were rushing down to the batteries. The discharge of the six guns did terrible execution, but the survivors without pausing dashed down to the works. Cries of disappointment and rage broke out from them on finding the guns spiked, and before they could be reloaded they ran up the hill again, and were in shelter in the forest.

"I fancy that is about the end of it," Nat said to the petty officer standing by his side. "I don't think that above fifty of either party got safely away."

"Not more than that, sir. I expect it has taken the fight out of them."

"It was a hopeless attempt, for although, if the guns had been loaded, they might have sunk us, our fellows on shore would soon have been upon them again, and it would have come to the same thing."

"Yes, sir, the same thing to the pirates, but not the same thing to us."

"No, you are right there; those twenty-four guns loaded with ball would have sent us to the bottom in no time. You see, our men only used grape before, and aimed at the decks."

Mr. Hill now hailed from the shore again:

"Mr. Glover!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Have the goodness to send your boat ashore, I want to send a note off to the captain. On their way the men must stop at the boats on the other side of the island, and tell the boat keepers to bring them round here at once."

Four men were sent ashore in the boat, and one of the petty

officers took his place in the stern, with a hasty note [Pg 90] which the first lieutenant had written in pencil stating that the loss had been very heavy, that the work of rooting out the pirates had not yet been completed, and that he should be glad of some more men to occupy the village while he searched the woods. The boat started at once, and twenty minutes later the captain's gig shot into the cove. As soon as the report of the first gun was heard on board the frigate, and there was no longer any motive for remaining at a distance, her head had been turned to the island, and the boat had met her but half a mile away from the entrance.

After reading the note, Captain Crosbie sent one of the gigs to order the boats round to the inlet, and proceeded in his own boat to investigate the state of affairs, ordering the *Cerf's* boat to row ahead of the frigate, which was to work in under very reduced sail, sounding as she went, and was, if the water was deep enough, to anchor off the mouth of the cove.

"Then you found all the pirates here, Mr. Hill?" the captain said as he landed.

"Yes, sir, but they blew up one of their craft when they left her."

"Yes, of course we heard the report; it shook the frigate as if she had struck on a rock. It must have been tremendous here."

"Yes, sir, she must have had an immense deal of powder in her magazine; the shock was something terrible. Although we were over there in that battery, every one of us was thrown to the ground and several were killed. Two of the guns were dismantled."

"It was a veritable battle for a time, Mr. Hill. It sounded like a naval engagement on a large scale."

"Yes, we had twenty-four guns in the batteries all at work, and the guns of the *Cerf*, while the three pirates had the same number in their broadsides, besides two heavy swivel-guns." [Pg 91]

"You say the loss is heavy. What does it amount to?"

"I cannot tell you exactly, sir. There were twenty-five killed on board the *Cerf*, in addition to Mr. Playford and Mr. Curtis. The two officers and about half the men were, Mr. Glover reported, killed by the explosion, which, as you see, dismantled her."

"Dear me! That is heavy indeed, and I most deeply regret the death of the two officers."

"So do I indeed, sir. Mr. Playford was an excellent officer, and as good a fellow as ever walked. Mr. Curtis would have made, I am sure, a good officer in time. I hardly thought he would when he first joined, but he was improving greatly, and he showed great courage in working to remove the boom under a very heavy fire from the pirates, which sunk his boat under him."

"Your division, Mr. Hill—what are your casualties?"

"We took the batteries almost without loss, sir, but in the duel with the pirates we lost in the two batteries fourteen killed; nine more were killed by the explosion; we sent eighteen off to the *Cerf* all seriously wounded; as to contusions and minor hurts, I should say that there is not a man who escaped them."

"Well, well, that is a heavy bill indeed; forty-eight men killed and two officers—why, we should probably have lost less in an action against a frigate of our own size! However, we have destroyed this nest of pirates, and have captured three of their four ships, the other is blown up. Now, what is the state of things here?"

"There are, I believe, some hundred and fifty or two hundred of the pirates still on the island. They are divided into two parties, and the last firing you heard was when they rushed down into the batteries, thinking, no doubt, to take revenge by sinking the brigantine and the two prizes. Mr.[Pg 92] Glover opened fire upon them with grape with great effect. When they got into the battery they found that I had spiked the guns, which I did when I left them, thinking they might make just such a move. I sent off to you, sir, in order that the storehouses and buildings might be held while we cleared the wood on one side down to the mouth of the cove. When we have done that we can do the same on the other side."

"Did you have any casualties in taking the village?"

"Several wounded, sir, none killed. Mr. Glover drove them out with grape, and so rendered our work comparatively easy. I am sorry to say that almost the last shot fired by them hit Mr. Needham high up in the left arm. The doctor came ashore a few minutes ago, after attending to the wounded sent on board the *Cerf*. He examined the arm, and tells me that the bone is completely smashed, and that he must amputate it half-way between the elbow and shoulder."

"That is bad indeed. However, it is better than if it had been his right arm. Mr. Harpur," said the captain to the midshipman who had come ashore with him, "take the gig off and meet the boats. Tell the launch and pinnace to go alongside the frigate, and request Mr.

Normandy to send Mr. Marston ashore with fifty more men. What on earth are we to do with these poor creatures?" he went on to the first lieutenant as the gig rowed away. "Of course we must take them to Jamaica. Theirs is a terrible position. No doubt they have all been captured in the prizes the villains have taken, and most of them must have seen their husbands or fathers murdered before their eyes. Some of them may have been here long enough to become accustomed to their lot, many of them may have been captured lately. What is to become of them I don't know.

"You have not opened any of the storehouses yet?"

"No, sir, we have been pretty busy, you see. We cut[Pg 93] down all the cactus hedges round the huts high up on the hill, so as to keep the pirates from working down and making a fresh attack upon us. As to the other houses, I have given strict orders that no one is to enter them. The men have piled arms and are lying down by them; many of them have not completely recovered from the shock of the explosion, and all are bruised more or less by being hurled on to the rocks or against the guns. I fancy the doctor will have his hands full for many a day."

"Well, you must pick out twenty or so from those most fit for duty. They can join the men I sent for and finish the business. The rest can be on guard here, in case the party on the other side take it into their heads to make an attack."

CHAPTER VI

THE NEGRO RISING

While waiting for the arrival of the reinforcements, Captain Crosbie went on board the *Cerf*. The wounded had all been carried below, where cots had been slung for them. After their wounds were dressed, he went round saying a few words to each, enquiring into the nature of their injuries. No attempt had been made to remedy the confusion on deck, except that the bodies of those that could be moved had been laid side by side. That of Mr. Playford and the others who had been crushed by the falling masts still lay beneath them, as the four men left on board were unable to do anything to extricate them until help arrived. The captain then went on board the prize.

"Mr. Hill has spoken in the highest terms of the service[Pg 94] that you have rendered, Mr. Glover, though I have not yet heard the full

details. As the only surviving officer of the *Cerf*, you had better, when you have time, draw out a full report for me of the work done by her. It will be another half-hour before we again commence operations against the pirates, and I shall be obliged if you will go on board the *Cerf* with your men and endeavour to get the body of Mr. Playford and the others from underneath the masts. Nothing more can be done at present, but it is painful that they should be lying there. I fancy that with hand-spikes you will have no very great difficulty in raising the butt of the mast high enough to draw the bodies from under it. As soon as you have done that, bring the men back here. When the advance begins you will shell the wood ahead of it."

"We will put you ashore first, sir; this is the only boat we have that will float."

Captain Crosbie on landing went among the women, who were between seventy and eighty in number. Some burst into tears when he spoke to them, others seemed dazed and quite unconscious that they were being addressed. Feeling almost unmanned by the moving spectacle, Captain Crosbie was relieved when the two boats filled with men entered the mouth of the cove. As soon as they came alongside, the men leapt out in high spirits at the prospect of having a share in the fray. Mr. Hill had already picked out twenty of his own party.

"I will myself take the command here, Mr. Hill. I don't wish to interfere with the credit that you will gain by this affair, therefore I leave the arrangement of your party in your hands."

Mr. Hill marched the seventy men straight up the hill.

"You will march straight on, Mr. Marston, until you reach the edge of the cliff, then you will return. See that the men[Pg 95] are placed at regular intervals. You will then face to the right and the line will advance. No quarter will be given, except to men who throw down their arms and beg for it. I do not suppose that many will do so, as they know what their fate will be if they are taken to Port Royal. We have reason to believe that there cannot be more than eighty or so on this side, but if they keep in a body and make a rush at the line they will no doubt be able to break through. However, that we must risk, and I hardly think that they will attempt it, for they know that they must sooner or later fall into our hands. They will only starve if they conceal themselves. Some may prefer death in that way, or may think that after we have left they may manage to get taken across to the mainland in native fishing-boats. However, search the ground closely. These men are steeped in blood; they have been the scourge of

these seas for the past five or six years, and have never yet shown mercy."

Mr. Hill then placed himself in the centre of the line, while Mr. Marston again took his place on the right. It was not until they had worked round nearly to the entrance that opposition was met with; then they came upon a spot where a mass of rock cropped up among the trees, and as they approached this a sharp fire of musketry broke out. Mr. Hill ordered the two ends of the line to advance so as to form a semicircle round the rock. When they were in position he gave the word to charge, and with a cheer the sailors dashed forward. Led by their officers, they scrambled up the rocks like cats, discharged their muskets into the pirates grouped on its summit, and then threw themselves upon them cutlass in hand. In three minutes all was over; not a man asked for mercy, but all died fighting desperately to the end. Four of the sailors were killed, several severely wounded. These were carried or helped down to the shore, and the rest of the party then scattered[Pg 96] through the woods; but the closest search failed to discover a single man in hiding, although only some fifty of them had been accounted for. Returning to the point from which they had started, the party then proceeded to search the forest at the other side of the cove.

Here, however, they met with no resistance. A few dead were found, but the forest was deserted. After searching in vain for some time it was concluded that the survivors had probably gone down the face of the cliff and hidden there in caves or in thickets in places that could only be reached by men well acquainted with the ground.

After two hours' vain search, Mr. Hill led the party down to the shore again. While he had been away the captain had had the storehouses opened. These were filled with booty of all kinds, the plunder of at least fifty ships, as they judged by the chronometers, the marks on bales, and other articles. Here were thousands of cases of wine, ranges of barrels of rum, hogsheads of sugar, coffee, and other colonial produce, quantities of bales of cotton cloths used for the slaves, furniture of all kinds, enormous numbers of trunks and boxes containing wearing apparel, bales of silks and satins, and an immense amount of table-linen.

In the centre of one of the storehouses was a chamber constructed of stone four feet thick with an arched roof. The entrance was closed by two iron doors, one within the other, and these were so strong that it was necessary to drag up a six-pounder cannon to batter them in. When at last an entrance was forced, the strong-room was found to contain upwards of seventy thousand pounds in coin, hundreds of

watches, and a large amount of jewellery, much of which was of Spanish manufacture, and a great many church vessels and ornaments of silver. It was evident that, although no doubt a certain proportion of the spoil had been divided at the time[Pg 97] of capture, the main bulk had been stored there for division some day when the haunt should be finally abandoned. The sailors now set about examining the bodies of the pirates who had been killed on the shore by the explosion. It was found that in almost every case they wore belts under their clothes, and that these contained from ten to a hundred pieces of gold. A systematic search was then made, and, in all, the money found upon the dead pirates amounted to six thousand pounds, which was added to the store taken from the treasury.

The work of emptying the storehouses, getting up jury-masts on board the *Cerf*, and doing the absolutely necessary repairs to her and the prizes occupied three days. The women had been placed in the brigantine after the craft had been thoroughly washed down and scoured, and she had been taken out and anchored near the frigate, to which the wounded had all been conveyed as soon as the fight was over. On the evening of the third day the storehouses and other buildings still standing were all burned, the cannon were taken on board the frigate, and the next morning the four vessels got up sail and started in company for Jamaica. Nat was left in command of the *Cerf* with fifteen men. Low was in command of the schooner with twelve men. Mr. Marston had charge of the captured brigantine with fifteen men, all that could be spared from the diminished crew of the frigate. Nat had had time, when the long day's work was over, to row off every evening to see Needham, whose arm had been amputated an hour after the fight was ended. He was, the doctor said, going on well, and was in very good spirits.

"This is sure to give me my step," he said to Glover. "I shall have served my time in six months, and Marston's rank will of course be confirmed, now that poor Playford's death has made the vacancy permanent. You have another year to serve, have you not, Glover?"[Pg 98]

"Yes, rather more. However, of course this affair will help me too, as soon as I have passed."

"It ought to, old fellow, considering you were the only officer left on board the *Cerf*, and that you unfastened the boom under that tremendous fire, to say nothing of carrying the schooner and running the risk of being blown up when you went on board the brigantine. You will get your swab as soon as you have passed. You see it has been a big thing; fifty-eight men killed and a hundred and four put

down as wounded; and the breaking up of this pirate's nest makes it the most important affair there has been out here for years. The other ships on the station will all feel quite jealous of us. There will be a goodish bit of prize-money, too, which is not to be despised. Over eighty thousand pounds in gold and, I should say, over twenty thousand pounds in goods, makes even a midshipman's share something considerable. How is your arm, Glover?"

"Well, it has been hurting me a bit. I am not conscious of having used it particularly, but I suppose when I was thrown down by that explosion it must have got wrenched somehow."

"Well, if I were you I would ask Dr. Bemish to have a look at it."

Glover did so. It was black and blue from the shoulder down to the elbow, and very tender to the touch.

"I don't think anything is broken," the doctor said, "but it has been a very close shave. At any rate, it is just as well that I should put on splints and bandage it, and you must take to your sling again and keep to it for some time. It is not tender above the shoulder, is it?"

"No, doctor; I think it is all right there."

"That is lucky. You ought to go on the sick-list."

"I cannot do that, sir. It would be giving up the command[Pg 99] of the brigantine, and I would put up with anything rather than that."

They had fine weather and a leading wind to Jamaica, and their arrival there with the two captured prizes and the news that the piratical haunt had been completely destroyed, created quite a sensation, which was heightened by the rescue of so many females from the hands of the pirates. Some fifteen of these found friends in the island, and the scene when they were handed over to them was painful in the extreme. A third of the number were French, and there were also some eighteen Spaniards. All were temporarily taken in and cared for by families at Port Royal, and were sent off as soon as opportunity offered either to the islands for which they had been bound when captured, or to their friends in Europe.

Mr. Hill, in his report, had done full justice to the work done by the *Cerf*, and had mentioned Nat's going on board the brigantine to drown her magazine, and the great service that he had rendered in covering the advance of the sailors by the guns of that craft, and in inflicting such heavy punishment upon the two parties that had attempted to possess themselves of the batteries, and the admiral sent for him and personally congratulated him on his work.

"I will see that as soon as you have passed, Mr. Glover, you shall have your commission as acting lieutenant. I have not forgotten what Captain Crosbie told me of your gallant action at Cape François."

Mr. Hill was at once appointed to the command of a frigate whose captain had died of yellow fever, and received the rank of commander pending its confirmation from home; and Mr. Philpot, second lieutenant of that frigate, was appointed first lieutenant of the *Orpheus* in his place. The schooner and the *Cerf* were sold, for the latter had suffered so much damage forward by the fire concentrated upon her by the pirates'[Pg 100] ships that she was considered unfit for further service. The other brigantine was bought into the service. The plunder taken was sold by auction, and the proceeds, together with the sum fetched by the three prizes, brought the total up to one hundred and five thousand pounds, a larger sum than had ever been captured by any vessel on the station.

The new brigantine was re-christened the *Falcon*, and Mr. Low was placed in command, with two midshipmen from other ships on the station under him. She was not, like the *Cerf*, a tender to the *Orpheus*, as the frigate could no longer spare a crew for her, having, in addition to the loss in action, been obliged to send thirty men to hospital on shore. The brigantine was therefore manned by drafts from other ships of war on the station. Needham was also left on shore, being promoted at once to the rank of lieutenant, which left Nat for the time senior midshipman of the *Orpheus*, which was now directed to cruise in the neighbourhood of Hayti, where complaints had been received of vessels being missing.

Two months after leaving Jamaica the *Orpheus* again put in to Cape François. Nat was still wearing his arm in a sling. There had been a good deal of swelling and inflammation, but this had now abated, and in his opinion his arm was perfectly well again, but the doctor insisted that he should as a precautionary measure still use the sling. The frigate needed some repairs, having carried away some spars in a hurricane a week previously, and on the day of their arrival the captain sent for Nat, and said kindly:

"We shall be here for a week, Mr. Glover, and the doctor thinks that another run among the hills will do you good, therefore you can go and stay with your friends there until we sail again. If you return this day week that will do. You have stuck to your work well, for Doctor Bemish said that for the first month at least you ought to have been on[Pg 101] the sick-list, and at any rate you deserve a holiday for your share in that fight."

On landing Nat went first to Monsieur Duchesne's office. The planter had but just driven in, and his horse and trap were still standing at the door. The negro driver gave a friendly grin as he saw him.

"Glad to see you, sah, bery glad; eberyone will be glad. Hope you all well, sah?"

"Thank you, Cæsar. All well at the plantation, I hope?" and he went into the office, where he was most warmly received by Monsieur Duchesne.

"I had been told that your ship came into port at daybreak, my dear Monsieur Glover, and I should have come off to ask after you as soon as I had answered my letters, and to carry you off if the captain would give you leave. But I see your arm is still in a sling. You have not hurt it, I hope?"

"I hurt it in that fight we had with the pirates. I dare say you heard of it."

"Everyone has heard of it," the planter said. "It was splendid, and there is not one here who does not feel grateful indeed to your ship for having rid us of all those scoundrels, who have been doing us so much harm for years. You have not hurt it much, I hope?"

"It was bad for a bit, but it is all right again now. The doctor orders me to keep to the sling for some time longer, though I am sure there is not the least necessity for it."

"And now about your leave, shall I go off to the ship, think you?"

"The captain himself gave me leave this morning for a week without my even asking for it."

"That is good news indeed. My carriage is at the door; I fortunately told Cæsar to wait, as there are some things to take back. My wife and Myra will be delighted to see you,[Pg 102] they talk of you always, and will be glad indeed to have you with them again. My boy has gone out to buy the matters required by madame, he will be back in a few minutes."

A quarter of an hour later Nat was on his way out to the plantation, where he was received with a welcome of the warmest kind by Madame Duchesne and her daughter. Both were greatly concerned at finding that his arm had again been injured.

"It is hard indeed," Myra said, "that I should be so well and strong

again, and that you should still be suffering for what you did for me."

"I do not think," he said, "that that business has really anything to do with the last one. A pirate ship blew up close to us; the shock was tremendous. The masts of the brigantine I was in snapped off as if they had been carrots, everyone on deck was thrown down, twelve were killed outright, and the rest of us were all a great deal bruised and hurt. The doctor said that he thought my arm might very well have been broken even had it not been for that accident, and as I came off better than most of the others, I certainly have no reason to complain. It is really quite well again now, and I can use it for almost all purposes. I consider it absurd that I should wear this sling, and would take it off at once, only the doctor made me promise that I would generally wear it; indeed, on board I always took my arm out when I wanted to use it, and he said himself that a certain amount of exercise was good for me."

Monsieur Duchesne came home as usual just at sunset. Nat noticed that at dinner he was evidently preoccupied, though he endeavoured to join in the conversation as cheerily as usual. After the ladies had left the table he said:

"You may have noticed that I am *distrain*, Monsieur Glover, but it is an anxious time for all of us on the island, and has[Pg 103] been so, indeed, for some time. You see we are divided into three classes: there are the pure whites, the mulattoes, and the negroes, and even these are subdivided. There are the old settlers, men who, like myself, belong to noble French families, and who, I hope, keep up the best traditions of our country; there are the poor whites, landless men who are discontented with their position, and hate those who are better off, while they stand aloof from the mulattoes. These, again, are equally divided. Many of them are rich men with plantations. They send their sons and daughters over to France to be educated, and take it much amiss that we, who are of pure blood, do not associate with them. Then, again, there are the negroes, who number no fewer than five hundred thousand, while we whites are but forty thousand. We went on well enough together until the States General met in France. It was a bad affair that, for us as well as for France. From that time there has been a ferment. We sent over deputies, eighteen of them, but the Assembly only allowed six to take their seats, and while they snubbed us, the young mulattoes were treated with the greatest favour.

"Then came the news that the Assembly had passed a declaration asserting all men to be free and equal. You may imagine what a shock this was to us. Some of the mulattoes, in their excitement, took

up arms to show that they were free, but they were easily put down. However, when the National Assembly heard of the excitement and dissatisfaction caused among the French in all their colonies, they made another decree authorizing each colony to elect its own legislative assembly. Our assembly here lost their heads on finding power in their hands, and passed a constitution which practically renounced all allegiance to France. Some riots broke out, and things would have been very serious had not, on the eleventh of October last year (1790), a decree been passed by the [Pg 104] National Assembly modifying the former one. However, on the fifteenth of May they passed another, declaring all people of colour in the French colonies, born of free parents, entitled to vote for members of the colonial assembly, and to be elected to seats themselves.

"When the news came here six weeks ago, you can imagine the excitement. Meetings were held, and it was even proposed to throw off allegiance to France and to hoist the British flag instead of ours. Happily calmer thoughts came, and matters cooled down, but there can be no doubt that the state of affairs is critical. The mulattoes, who outnumber the whites, do not know how to contain themselves with joy, and disputes between them and the whites take place daily. Then there are the negroes. You see, the decree does nothing for them. It is hard to know what the negroes think, even whether they care that they are not to have a vote is not known to us. It is clear that it would be of little advantage to them, and, you see, no one who was not out of his mind could think of giving a vote to them, for their vote would be five times as large as that of the whites and mulattoes together. We should have an assembly composed entirely of slaves, and these slaves would at once vote that all the land and property in the island should be divided among themselves. What think you of that, Monsieur Glover?"

"It would be madness indeed," Nat agreed.

"Then, you see, even if they did not do that they would declare themselves free, and we should all be ruined. *Sapristi!* it makes one's blood cold to think of such a thing. But, nevertheless, the negroes are like children, they can be led by a little talk, and among them there are men of some intelligence who could work the rest up to a state of madness. I do not say that this will come—Heaven defend us from such a calamity!—still, monsieur, you will comprehend that we all feel as if we [Pg 105] were sitting on the edge of a volcano. Such strange things happen. What may not occur next? You will understand that I do not talk of these things before my wife and child. They, of course, know about the past, but as for the future they do not trouble

themselves at all. I have spoken to some of my friends, and they laugh at the idea of the slaves rising. They say, truly enough, that they are far better treated here than in your British colonies. But then there has been no revolution in England. People have not been stirred up to a state of excitement. The nation has not lost its head, as in France. I say that it is possible there may be trouble with the slaves."

"Not here, surely, monsieur? Your negroes seem to me to be contented and happy, and I am sure they are well treated."

"That is undoubtedly so; but, as I told you, the negroes are like children, they will laugh one minute and scream with rage the next. There is never any saying what they may do. I can hardly bring myself to think that such a thing could happen, but I have taken to carrying pistols in my pockets, and I have stored some arms in that closet in the hall; at least I should have them handy, and I doubt not that the house servants will remain true, and I hope many of my slaves. It is for this that I have gathered the arms together."

"But surely you would have warning?"

"At the first whisper I should, of course, drive my wife and child down to the town, where we should be safe, for there the whites are strong, and we have no fear of an attack. However, we must trust that such a thing may never happen, or that if it does, it may be in the far distance. But come when it will, everyone should receive warning in plenty of time to make all preparations. It seems to me impossible that a plot of any magnitude could be passed from end to end of this island, and be known to so vast a number of negroes, without some of [Pg 106] them warning their masters of the danger, for there are tens of thousands who are almost like members of their masters' families."

"I should say it is quite impossible that any extensive plot could be hatched without its being known in a very short time to everyone," Nat agreed; "and in any case, although those who live far in the interior of the island might have reason to fear, should the negroes break out, I can hardly think that, within little more than an hour's drive from the city, you need feel any uneasiness whatever."

"No, I feel that there ought to be no trouble here, at any rate unless there is a successful insurrection in other parts of the island; no doubt that would be infectious elsewhere. But the negroes near the town would be the last to join in such a movement, for they might be sure that the whites there would take speedy vengeance on all within their reach. However, let us think no more of it at present; my wife and Myra will be wondering what we can find to talk about so long."

Nat lay awake for some time that night thinking of what Monsieur Duchesne had said. He had heard vaguely, while he was there before, of the manner in which the revolution in France had affected the island, but it was a subject that was little discussed at the planter's. Having all the feelings and prejudices of the old *noblesse* of France, he had from the first been opposed to the popular movement in Paris, and had held himself altogether aloof from the demonstration on the island. The subject was painful to him, and he had seldom alluded to it in his family circle. It seemed to Nat inconceivable that any general movement could be planned among the blacks without warning being received by the planters. When he went out next day he looked with more attention than before at the slaves working on the plantations. It seemed to him [Pg 107] that their demeanour was quieter than usual; the mulatto overseers seemed to pay less attention to them, and he was surprised to come upon three of them talking earnestly together, whereas, hitherto, he had always seen them on different parts of the estate.

On the following morning, the 23rd of August, Monsieur Duchesne started as usual soon after seven o'clock, for the heat was now intense, and it was dangerous to be out after the sun had obtained its full power. An hour later Nat was sitting in the verandah behind the house with Madame Duchesne and Myra, when an old negress ran out; her eyes were wide open with terror and excitement, and her face was almost pale.

"Madame and mam'selle must fly and hide themselves!" she exclaimed. "Nigger come in half an hour ago wid news dat slabes rise last night in many places all ober de country and kill all de whites. Dinah hear dat all people expect dat, only not for anoder two days. Oberseers de leaders now. Dey come here quick wid all de field hands. Not a moment to be lost. Fly for your libes!"

"Impossible!" Madame Duchesne exclaimed, as she and Myra sprang to their feet alarmed, but incredulous.

"It may be true, madame," Nat exclaimed. "For God's sake run with Myra in among the shrubbery there; I will join you in a moment. If it is a false alarm all the better; but it may be true, and there is not a moment to lose. Do you hear those shouts?"

A burst of yells and shouts rose in the air a short distance away.

"Run! run!" Nat exclaimed as he dashed into the house, rushed to the closet in the hall, seized two brace of pistols, a sword, and half a dozen packets of cartridges for the pistols, and then ran out into the

verandah just in time to see the white dresses of the ladies disappear into the shrubbery close to the[Pg 108] entrance of the verandah. Some wraps which they sometimes put on to keep off the evening dew when they were sitting out of doors were hung up close by him. Hastily snatching these off their hooks, he dashed off at full speed, for the tumult was now approaching the front of the house. The ladies had stopped just within the cover of the bushes. "Run!" he cried; "there is not a moment to lose. They will be searching for us as soon as they find that we are not in the house."

The belt of foliage extended all round the garden, and, keeping inside, they ran to the other end. Fortunately, adjoining the garden was a plantation of sugar-cane which had not yet been cut, for although the greater portion of the cane is cut in April, freshly made plantations planted at that time are not fit to cut until the autumn of the following year. The canes were ten feet high, and as the rows were three feet apart, there was plenty of room to run between them. Scarcely a word was spoken as they hurried along. The plantation was some four hundred yards across; beyond it stretched another of equal size, extending to the edge of the forest. The canes here, which had been cut four months before, were three feet high; at other times many negroes would have been at work hoeing the ground round the roots, but when Nat looked out cautiously from the edge of the higher canes not a soul was to be seen.

"I think it is perfectly safe," he said; "but you had better put on the dark wraps, your light dresses would be seen a long distance away. We had better move a short distance farther to the right before we attempt to go straight on. If you will walk one after the other, treading in each other's steps, I will take off my shoes and follow you; that will destroy your traces, and the marks of my bare feet might be taken for those of a negro. Please do not lose a moment," he said, as he saw that Madame Duchesne was about to speak; "there[Pg 109] will be time to talk when we get into the forest and settle what we had best do."

They had gone but a few yards when Nat's eye caught sight of a hoe lying on the ground a short distance along one of the rows of the young canes. He ran and fetched it, the others stopping while he did so. Then as he went along he carefully obliterated his footsteps, and continued to do so until when, after walking thirty or forty yards farther, he turned into the young plantation. The surface of the ground was almost dust-dry, and between the rows of the growing canes a track had been worn by the feet of the slaves, who every two or three days hoed round the roots; here, therefore, there was no occasion to use

the hoe, as the ground was so hard that his feet left no marks upon it. In a few minutes they entered the wood and went in some little distance; then they stopped. They could still hear the yells of the negroes, who, Nat doubted not, were engaged in plundering the house, after which he felt sure that there would be an eager search for the fugitives.

The ground had been rising all the way.

"I see you need a few minutes' rest," he said to Madame Duchesne, who was so much shaken that it was evident she could walk but little farther. "I will go back to the edge of the wood and see if there are any signs of their following us."

Just as he reached the open ground there was a louder outburst than usual of exulting cries; he saw a column of smoke rising from the trees, and knew that the negroes had set the house on fire. He returned at once to the ladies. Madame Duchesne had sunk on the ground. Myra was kneeling beside her.

"We must go on, madame," he said; "the scoundrels have fired the house." [Pg 110]

She rose to her feet.

"I am better now," she said with a calmness that greatly pleased Nat. "It seemed a dream at first. What does it all mean, Nat?" for she as well as her daughter had come to address him by that name.

"I fear it is a general rising of the blacks throughout the island," he replied. "Monsieur Duchesne told me last night that he thought such an event might possibly take place, but he made sure that if it occurred we should have ample warning. By what your old nurse said it must have been an arranged thing, to take place on the twenty-fifth, but something must have hurried it. I think, to begin with, we had better go half a mile farther into the forest. We can talk as we go."

"Had we not better make straight for the town?"

"I think not, though of course I will do whatever you believe to be best; but there are a score of plantations between us and the town, and I have no doubt that the slaves will have risen everywhere. Besides, if your own negroes fail to follow our track, they will make sure that we have gone in that direction, and will be on the look-out for us; therefore I think that for the present we had better remain in the forest."

"But how can we live here?" she asked.

"There will be no difficulty about that," he replied; "there are plenty of plantations of yams, and I can go down and dig them up at night. The young canes will quench your thirst if we fail to hit upon a spring, but we know that there are several of these among the hills, for we pass over five or six little streamlets on our way to the town."

"I am sure Nat will look well after us," Myra said confidently; "besides, mamma, I am certain that you could not walk down there. You know you never do walk, and I cannot recollect your walking so far as you have done to-day." [Pg 111]

This indeed had been the chief reason why Nat had decided that they had better stay in the forest at present, although he had not mentioned it. Like all Creoles—as whites born in the islands were called in the French West Indies—Madame Duchesne was altogether unaccustomed to exercise, and beyond a stroll in the garden when the heat of the day was over, had not walked since her childhood. The heat, indeed, rendered a journey of any kind next to impossible during the greater part of the day. They had slaves to do their bidding, to wait on them, fetch and carry, and consequently even in the house they had no occasion for the slightest personal exertion. Madame Duchesne, being of a naturally more energetic temperament than are Creoles in general, was less indolent than the majority of the ladies of the island, but was wholly incapable of taking a walk of which English ladies would have thought nothing. She was already greatly exhausted by the excitement and the fatigue of their hasty flight, and to Nat it seemed at once that it was hopeless for her to think of attempting the journey of fifteen miles across a rough country.

The forest grew thicker as they advanced, and after walking for half an hour Madame Duchesne declared that it was impossible for her to go farther. Nat was indeed surprised that she had held on for so long. She had been leaning on his arm, and he felt the weight becoming heavier and heavier every step. She was bathed in perspiration, her breath came in gasps, and he himself proposed a halt, feeling that she was at the end of her strength.

[Pg 112]

CHAPTER VII

IN HIDING

"The first thing to do," Nat said, after he had seen that Madame

Duchesne was as comfortably seated as possible, "is to find some sort of hiding-place. We may be sure that the negroes will search everywhere for you, and that, released from work and having nothing to do, they will wander about the woods, and one of them might come upon us at any moment. Therefore, unless we can find some sort of shelter, I dare not leave you for a minute."

"But why should you leave us?" Myra asked.

"We must eat and drink," he said. "I must endeavour to discover what is going on elsewhere; I must, if possible, obtain a disguise, and endeavour to find out what are the intentions of the blacks, and ascertain whether it will be possible to obtain help from the town; and I can begin to do nothing until I feel that you are at least comparatively safe. There is no doubt, Madame Duchesne, that our position is a very painful one, but we have a great deal to be thankful for. If the rising had taken place in the night, as no doubt it did at the plantations where the negroes began their work, we should all have been murdered without the chance of resistance. Now, we have escaped with our lives, and have the satisfaction of knowing that Monsieur Duchesne is safe in the town, and will assuredly do his best to rescue us; but that can hardly be yet. Cape François is no doubt in a state of wild panic, and will in the first place be thinking of how it can best defend itself."

"There are, of course, many other planters there in the same position as your husband. Each will be thinking of his own[Pg 113] people; nothing like a general effort will be possible. At any rate, it seems to me that it must be some time before any operations can take place to put down the insurrection. If one could but get hold of some messenger one could trust, and could let Monsieur Duchesne know that you are for the present safe, it would be an immense relief to him; but so far as we know at present that old nurse is the only one of your slaves who is faithful, and even if I could find her and get her to carry a note or a message, it is unlikely in the extreme that she would be permitted to pass on into the town. However, as I say, the first thing is to discover a hiding-place where you would be comparatively safe, and before I go to find a messenger I will look round for some clump of undergrowth where nothing but close search could find you. I think that those bushes we see across there would do for the moment. You cannot remain here, for you would be seen at once by anyone who came along within fifty yards of you. I will go and see at once whether it would do."

Without waiting for an answer he hurried away. On examination he found that the place was more suitable than he had expected. A great

tree had once stood there, and had been sawn off close to the ground. Round this a clump of bushes had sprung up, growing so thickly that it was impossible to see into the centre save by pushing aside the bushes and entering the little circle. He hastened back.

"It will do excellently for our hiding-place for the present," he said, "and the sooner we are inside the better."

He assisted Madame Duchesne to her feet, led her to the bushes, and then bent some of them very carefully aside. The ladies made their way in, and he followed them, seeing that each of the saplings fell back in its natural position.

"There, madame," he said, "unless anyone took it into his head to push in as we have done we are absolutely safe. But[Pg 114] it will be better that you should keep your dark cloaks on. I do not think that anyone could see through this thick screen of leaves, but it is as well to be on the safe side."

"You won't leave us at present?"

"Certainly not," he said. "After it gets dark I shall make my way down to the house. I must get a disguise of some sort; it does not matter much what it is, for I expect the slaves will be dressing up in the clothes they have stolen, no matter what they are. With some charred wood I can blacken my face and hands. No doubt anyone would see at once on looking at me closely that I was not a negro, but at a distance I should pass."

"You would make a better mulatto than you would a negro," Myra said.

"So I should; as they are all shades of colour, I should not have to be very particular."

"If we had Dinah here with us," Myra said, "she could make you some dye. She knows all about berries and roots, and generally doctors any of the women who may be ill; she would know for sure of some berries that would stain your skin."

"Well, I must see if I can find her, Myra. If not, I must use the charcoal, but certainly the other would be much the safer; and, you see, thanks to my long stay with you before, I have got to speak French very fairly now."

The day passed slowly. Occasionally they heard shouts lower down in the forest, but these did not come near them, and after a time died away.

"I thought they would hardly come up as far as this," Nat said; "negroes are not given to work unless they are obliged to, and they will find it so pleasant doing nothing that they are hardly likely to give themselves the trouble to search very far for us. Besides, doubtless they have other things to think about.[Pg 115] They will know that their work has only begun when they have burnt their masters' houses, and killed all the white people they can lay their hands upon, and that until they have taken possession of the towns they are not masters of the island. No doubt, too, they carried out the wine before they burnt the house."

"Besides," Myra said, "there is the rum store; there are at least a hundred barrels there."

"Yes, I did not think of that. Well, I expect that before this the greater part of them are drunk, and I don't suppose there will be a sober man left to-night. That will make it an easy business for me to find out what they are doing, and to get hold of the things that will be useful to you. I am more afraid of the mulattoes than of the negroes."

"Do you think that they would join the blacks?"

"I have no doubt at all about it—I feel sure they have done so. I saw three of them talking together yesterday; they were paying no attention to the slaves, and I thought then that it was rather peculiar. Besides, we know that these lower class of mulattoes are as hostile to the whites as the negroes are, if not more so, and I have no doubt they have had a good deal to do with exciting the slaves to revolt. And now, Madame Duchesne, I will go down through the woods and get you some sugar-cane, and look for a stream."

Madame Duchesne protested, but she was accustomed to have every want supplied as soon as expressed, and she was suffering much from thirst after the excitement and effort.

"You really require something," Nat went on. "You see, if I go down after dark I may be away for two or three hours, and were you to wait till then you would be in a fever with thirst. It is evident that the negroes have all left the wood, therefore there can be no risk in my going down and cutting a dozen of the young canes." [Pg 116]

"If you go," she said firmly, sitting up as she spoke, "you must leave me two of your pistols—they are double-barrelled, are they not?"

"Yes, madame."

"Well, leave two. If the negroes come and begin to search this

place I shall shoot Myra first and then myself, for death would be a thousand times preferable to falling into the hands of these wretches."

"I think you are right there," Nat said gravely, "and if I thought that there would be the slightest fear of their coming I would not leave you. I shall not be away a quarter of an hour. I will leave my jacket and cap here, and tie a handkerchief round my head, so that should I by any chance come across a searcher, he will not recognize me until I am close enough to silence him. I shall take the sword as well as the other brace of pistols; it will be useful for cutting down the canes."

Taking off his jacket and waistcoat, and tying his handkerchief round his head, he made his way through the bushes, and then started at a fast run down the hill, keeping, however, a sharp look-out as he went. As he expected, there were no signs of the blacks. As he reached the edge of the wood, and cut the canes, he could hear the sound of distant yells in the direction of the house.

"The brutes have got at the rum," he said. "If I had but half a dozen blue-jackets, I believe I could clear the lot out. I do hope," he went on, as he started on his way back, "I shall be able to lay my hand on something to eat, and get hold of a bottle or two of wine. Madame will never be able to get on on yams and sugar-canes, accustomed as she has been to every luxury. Myra will be all right, she is a regular young brick." As he neared the clump of bushes he cried out cheerily: "All right, madame, I have got the canes, and have[Pg 117] not caught sight of a negro." An exclamation of relief followed. Madame Duchesne and Myra were both standing as he entered, each with a pistol in her hand.

"I was not alarmed by your footstep," she said, "for anyone who was searching for us would come along slowly and stealthily; but I thought you might be pursued."

"If I had been," Nat laughed, "you may be very sure I should not have brought them this way, but would have given them a dance all over the place, and then slipped away and come back here."

"I know that," she said earnestly, "but I am nervous and shaken."

"Very naturally, too," Nat said: "you felt very much as I did when, after that explosion, I went on board the other pirate to drown the magazine. I believe that if anyone had given a shout close to me I should have tumbled headlong down on the deck. I think, now, we are perfectly safe till to-morrow. By the noises I heard down by the house I should say that most of the slaves are drunk already, and you may be

sure that they will not think of starting to look for us till to-morrow. Now, if you will take my advice, you will try to sleep a bit."

Accustomed to sleep for two or three hours during the heat of the day, Madame Duchesne was indeed feeling so drowsy that she could with difficulty keep her eyes open, and she now in the course of a few minutes was breathing quietly and regularly.

"Now, Myra, do you watch by your mother while I go and look for water. That tiny stream that crosses the road a quarter of a mile above your house must come down not far from here, and it is essential that we should be near it."

"But it is near water that they are most likely to look for us."

"I did not think of that, Myra; of course it is. Well, then,[Pg 118] we must move over this hill and hide up in the next little valley we come to. There is a road that turns off half a mile above your house. I never went far along it, but it seems to go right up into the heart of the hills."

"I never went up it either, Nat, but I have heard my father say there were a good many small clearings up among the hills, some with twenty slaves, some with only two or three."

"Then, when I come back from seeing how things are going on at the house, we had better make for that road, keeping along down at the end of the plantation until we come to it. It will be much better to keep straight along there till we pass some little valley where there is a stream, than to wander about in the wood; and we shall be farther away from those who may be looking after us. If your mother sleeps for two or three hours she will be able to go some little distance to-night."

Myra shook her head doubtfully.

"We must get her on," he added, "even if we have to carry her. It is all very well for us, because I am as hard as nails, and you do a lot of walking for a white girl here, but your mother is not strong. You saw how terribly exhausted she was when she got here, and it is quite likely that she may knock up altogether; therefore it is essential to get her into shelter. We are safe for to-day, but to-morrow we may have the negroes all over the hills, and it will have to be a wonderfully good hiding-place to escape their search."

"But do you feel sure that they have risen on all the other plantations?"

"I have not the least doubt that they have risen on every plantation

in this neighbourhood. Your slaves were wonderfully well treated, and would not have joined unless they had known that it was a general rising. You know the old nurse said that it was to have been on the twenty-fifth, which means,[Pg 119] of course, that it was a great plot all over the island. Of course in some places they may not have got the news yet, and may not rise for a day or two, but you may be sure that all around here it has been general."

"But why should they want to kill us?"

"Because they are really nothing but savages. Though they have in many cases been slaves for generations, still there are always fresh slaves arriving; and the others know that their fathers, like these, were captured and sold to the whites, that they had terrible times in the slave-ships, and are on some plantations treated like dogs, and are bought and sold just like cattle. I don't wonder at it that, now they have got a chance, as they think, they should take vengeance for all the ills they have suffered. When they are at war with each other in Africa they kill or enslave all who fall into their hands—men, women, or children—and you may be sure that they will show no mercy here. When I was down at the edge of the wood to cut those canes I could see smoke rising from a dozen points lower down. It is possible that some besides ourselves got warning in time, but I am afraid very few can have escaped; for you see, once beyond the line of wood, which does not go more than a mile or two further, there will be no hiding-places for them. There is only one comfort, and that is, the news must have got down to the town in a very short time, and there is no fear of your father driving out and being taken by surprise. My greatest hope lies in that old nurse of yours. She could do more in the way of helping us than we could do ourselves. She could go and get things, and hear what is going on. She is old, but she is a strong woman still, and could help to carry your mother, and attend to her if she is ill."

"Do you think she is going to be ill?" Myra asked anxiously, looking at her mother.

"I sincerely trust not, Myra, but I own that I am afraid of[Pg 120] it. She is breathing faster than she did, and she has moved restlessly several times while we have been talking, and has a patch of colour on each cheek, which looks like fever. However, we must hope for the best. anyhow, I shall bring Dinah up here if possible."

So they talked till the sun went down. Madame Duchesne still slept, but her breathing was perceptibly faster. She occasionally muttered to herself, and scarcely lay still for a moment.

"I will be going now," Nat said at last; "it will be pitch dark by the

time I get down to the house; it is dark already here. You have the pistols, Myra, but you may be quite sure that no one will be searching now. I may have some difficulty in finding these bushes when I come back, but I will whistle, and when I do, do you give a call. I hope I shall bring Dinah back with me."

"Oh, I do hope you will. She would be a comfort to us."

Nat heard a quaver in her voice, which showed that she was on the point of breaking down.

"You must not give way, Myra," he said. "You have been very plucky up to now, and for your mother's sake you must keep up a brave heart and hope always for the best. I rely upon you greatly. We may have many dangers to go through, but with God's help we may hope to rejoin your father. But we must be calm and patient. We have been marvellously fortunate so far, and shall, I hope, be so until the end. When I find out what the negroes intend to do we shall be able to decide upon our course. It may be that they will pour down from all the plantations within thirty or forty miles round and attack the town, or it may be that they will march away into the mountains in the interior of the island, in which case the road to the town will be open to us. Now, good-bye; I will be back as soon as I can." [Pg 121]

"Do not hurry," she said. "I will try to be brave, and I don't mind waiting, because I shall know that you are trying to get nurse, and of course it may be difficult for you to find her alone."

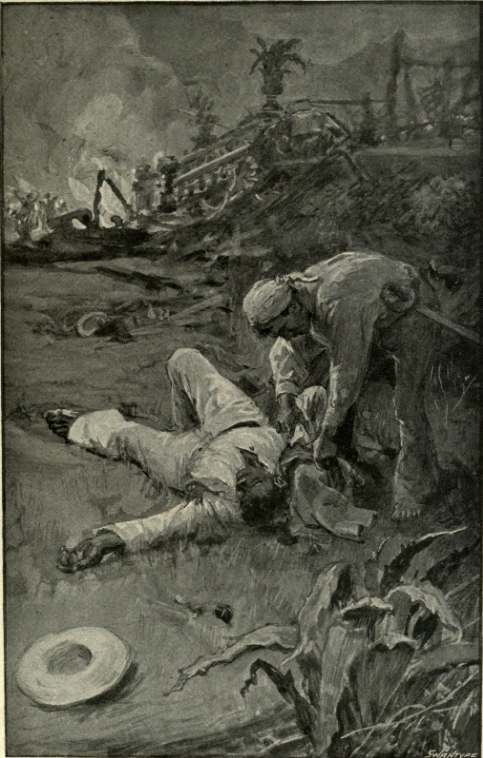
"Good-bye, then," he said cheerfully, and passing through the bushes he went rapidly down the hill.

On reaching the cane-field he again took off his shoes. He did not hurry now. It was a tremendous responsibility that he had upon his shoulders. He thought nothing of the danger to himself, but of how Madame Duchesne and her daughter were to be sheltered and cared for if, as he feared, the former was on the edge of an attack of fever, which might last for days, and so prostrate her that weeks might elapse before she would be fit to travel.

"I must get Dinah at all costs," he said to himself. "She knows what will be wanted, and will be a companion to Myra when I have to be away."

As he neared the place where the house had stood he heard sounds of shouting and singing coming from a spot near the storehouses, where a broad glow of light showed that a great bonfire was burning. He kept in the shrubbery until near the house, and then

stepped out on to the grass. The house was gone, and a pile of still glowing embers alone marked where it had stood. Nat approached this, found a piece of charred timber that had fallen a short distance from it, and proceeded to blacken his face and hands. Then he turned towards the fire. As he had expected, it was not long before he came across the figure of a prostrate man, who was snoring in a drunken sleep. The stars gave sufficient light for him to see as he bent over him that he was a negro. He had attired himself in what when he put them on were a clean nankeen jacket and trousers, a part of the spoil he had taken in the sack of the house. Without ceremony Nat turned him over,[Pg 122] and with some trouble removed the garments and put them on over his own. Then he took the red handkerchief that the negro had bound round his head and tied it on, putting his own bandana in his pocket.



**"IT WAS NOT LONG BEFORE HE CAME ACROSS THE FIGURE OF
A PROSTRATE MAN."**

"Now," he said to himself, "I shall do, provided I keep away from the light of that fire. The first point is to find where Dinah has gone. I know she has a daughter and some grandchildren down at the slaves' huts. I should think I have most chance of finding her there."

Turning off, he went to the huts, which lay two or three hundred yards away from the house. As he did so he passed near the houses in which the mulatto overseers lived. There were lights here, and he could hear the sound of voices through the open windows.

"I will come back to them later on," he said, "I may hear something of their plans; but Dinah is the most important at present."

He was soon among the slave huts. No one was about, the women being mostly up at the fire with the men. He looked in at the door of each hut he passed. As he was still without shoes his movements were noiseless. In a few of them women were cooking, or putting their children to bed. At the last hut of the first row which he visited an old negro woman was rocking herself in great grief, and two or three children were playing on the floor. Nat knew that he had come to the end of his search, by the blue cotton dress with large white spots that the woman wore. He went in and touched her.

"Dinah," he whispered, "come outside!"

She gave a little start of surprise, and then said to the children:

"Now, you stop here, like good childer, Aunt Dinah is agoing out. If you keep quiet she tell you story when she comes in."

[Pg 123]

Then she went out with Nat without any appearance of haste. By long connection with the family she spoke French fairly well, whereas the negro patois, although mostly composed of French words, was almost unintelligible to him.

"Tank de Lord dat you hab come back, Marse Glober. Dinah fret terrible all day. Am de ladies well? Whar you hide dem?"

"They are up in the wood, Dinah. I am greatly afraid that Madame Duchesne is going to have fever, and you are sorely wanted there. Myra said she was sure that you would come when you knew where they were."

"For suah me come, massa," she said. "What madame and Mam'selle Myra do widout Dinah? So you black your face?"

"Yes, but I want some juice to make my face yellow like a mulatto.

Anyone could see that I was not a negro in the daylight."

"Dat so. Me bring 'tuff wid me. What you want beside?"

"We shall want a bottle or two of wine if you can get them, and a jug of fresh water, and anything you can get in the way of eatables, and I should say a cooking pot. Those are the principal things."

"Dere am plenty ob boxes of wine up near house. Dis black trash like rum better, leave wine for de mulattoes; dey bery bad man dose. Where you go now, Marse Glober? Me take some time to get de tings."

"It would be a good thing, too, if you could get hold of enough cotton cloth to make dresses for them."

The old woman nodded.

"Plenty ob dat, sah. Storehouses all broke open, eberyone take what him like. Dis dreadful day, almost break Dinah's heart."

"It has been a terrible day, Dinah, and I am afraid that the same bad work is going on everywhere."[Pg 124]

"So dey say, marse, so dey say. Where you go now, sah?"

"I am going to the overseers' huts to hear what their plans are. Where shall I meet you, Dinah?"

"Me take tings to bush just where you and de ladies ran in. Me make two or tree journeys, but me be as quick as can."

"Do; it is anxious work for Myra there, and I want to get back as soon as I can. Her mother is asleep, and even if she wakes I do not think she will be able to talk much."

"Me hurry, sah, but can't get 'tuff to stain you skin to-night. Find berries up in de wood to-morrow."

"There is one other thing, Dinah. Can you tell me where to find a hand-barrow? I expect we shall have to carry your mistress."

"Me know de sort ob ting dat you want, sah, dey carry tobacco leaves on dem. Dere are a dozen ob dem lying outside de end store."

"All right, Dinah, I will take one as I go past. Now I will go."

So saying, he turned and made his way to the overseers' house. He crept softly along to a lighted window. When in a line with it he

stood up for a minute, knowing that those inside would not be able to see him, there being a screen of trees just behind him. The three mulattoes whom he had seen talking together in the field on the previous day were seated round a table. On it were placed two or three wine-glasses. All were smoking.

"To-morrow we must get those drunken black hogs to work," one said, "and have a regular search through the woods. Everything has gone well except the escape of madame and her gal. Someone must have warned them. The house niggers all agree that they were in the verandah behind just before we came up, talking with that English lad. Of course they will be found sooner or later, there is nowhere[Pg 125] for them to run to. The thing is, we want to find them ourselves. If anyone else came upon them they would kill them at once."

"Yes, and you will have some trouble if you find them, Monti," one of the other men said. "These blacks have been told that every white must be killed. It is easy enough to work these fellows up into a frenzy, but it is not so easy to calm them down afterwards."

"No, I am quite aware of that, Christophe, and that is why I did not press the search to-day, and why I was not sorry to find that they had got away."

"You see, we have arranged that when the whites are all killed I am to marry madame, that Paul is to take the young one, and that we are to divide the place equally between the three of us."

"If the negroes will let us," the one called Monti said. "I expect they will want to have a say in the business."

"Yes, of course, that is understood. No doubt there will be trouble with them, and there is no saying how things will turn out yet. At any rate we will make sure of the women. I have gone into this more for the sake of getting the girl than for anything else."

"We have made a good beginning everywhere, as far as we have heard, but you must remember that it is only a beginning. Even suppose the whites of the town do nothing, and I fancy we shall hear of them presently, they will send over troops from France."

"They can do nothing against us up in the mountains," Christophe said scornfully.

"That may be," the other said quietly; "but at any rate there are the blacks to deal with. They have risen against the whites, but when they have done with them we need not suppose for a moment that they are going to work for us.[Pg 126] Luckily, here it has been the order

that no slave is to be flogged without Duchesne's approving of it, and the result is that we are for the present masters of this plantation, but we have heard that at some of the other places the overseers as well as the whites have been killed. The order has gone through the island that all the whites, including women and children, are to be killed, and if we were to come across the women when we have forty or fifty of the blacks with us I don't think there would be a chance of our saving them. These negroes are demons when their blood is up. They know, too, that they have gone too far to be forgiven, and will believe that their safety depends upon carrying out the orders faithfully. It seems to me that we are in a rather awkward fix. If we don't take the blacks out to-morrow we sha'n't find them, if we do take them out they will be killed."

"We ourselves may find them," Paul said.

"Yes; and if you do, they will have that English lad with them."

"We can soon settle him," Christophe growled.

"Well, I don't say we couldn't; but you know how he fought that hound, and there was a report two days ago, from the town, that they have attacked the Red Pirate's stronghold, taken it, and destroyed his four ships. I grant that as we are three to one we shall kill him, but one or two of us may go down before we do so. Now, I tell you frankly that as I have no personal interest in finding those two women, I have no idea of running the risk of getting myself shot in what is your affair altogether. Any reasonable help I am willing to give you, but when it comes to risking my life in the matter I say, 'No, thank you.'"

The others broke into a torrent of savage oaths.

"Well," he went on calmly, "I am by no means certain that the English boy would not be a match for the three of us. We[Pg 127] should not know where he was, but he would see us, and he might shoot a couple of us down before we had time to draw our pistols. Then it will be man against man; and I know that girl has practised shooting, so that the odds would be the other way. Now, I ask you calmly, is it worth it?"

"What do you propose, then?" Paul asked sulkily, after a long silence.

"I say that we had better wait till we can get hold of some of these blacks; a little money and a little flattery will go a long way with them. We can tell them that we have private orders that, although most of the whites have to be put to death, a few are to be kept, among them

these two. We shall elect a president and generals, and it is right that they should have white women to wait on them, just as the whites have been having blacks. That is just the sort of thing that will take with these ignorant fools. Then with, say, ten men we might search the woods thoroughly, find the women, and hide them up somewhere under your charge; but we must go quietly to work. A few days will make no difference. We know that they can't get away. The men of the plantations lower down have undertaken to see that no whites make their way into the town. But it will not do to hurry the negroes, they are sure to be either sullen or arrogant to-morrow. Some of them, when they get over their drink, will begin to fear the consequences, others will be so triumphant that for a time our influence will be gone."

"That is the best plan," Christophe said. "You have the longest head of us three, Montfi. For a time it will be necessary to let the blacks have their own way."

Nat, while this conversation went on, had been fingering his pistol indecisively. His blood was so fired by the events of the day, and the certainty that hundreds of women and children must have been murdered, that he would have had no hesita[Pg 128]tion in shooting the three mulattoes down. Indeed he had quite intended to do so, in the case at any rate of Paul and Christophe, when he learned their plans; the advice, however, of the other, who was evidently the leading spirit, decided him against this course. It was unlikely that he would be able to shoot the three, for at the first shot they would doubtless knock the candle over; besides, it was better that they should live. Evidently they would in some way persuade the great mass of the negroes not to trouble themselves to search the wood, and some days must elapse before they could get a party together on whom they could rely to spare the women and take them as prisoners.

If they did so, and, as they proposed, put them in some hut in charge of Paul and Christophe, he would have a fair chance of rescuing them, if he succeeded in getting away at the time they were captured. At any rate, if they carried out their plans they would have some days' respite, and he could either take Madame Duchesne and Myra a good deal further into the hills, or might even be able to get them into the town.

The mulattoes now began to talk of other matters—how quickly the insurrection would spread, the towns that were to be attacked, and the steps to be taken—and he therefore quietly made off, and waited for Dinah at the place agreed on. It was not long before she arrived

with her first load.

"I am here," he said as she came up. "Now, what can I do? I had better come and help you back with the other things. We can carry them in the hand-barrow."

"Yes, sah. I'se got dem all together, de tings we talked of, and tree or four blankets, and a few tings for de ladies, and I'se taken two ob de best frocks I could find in de huts. I'se got de wine and de food in a big basket."

"All right, Dinah; let us start at once, I am anxious to be back again as soon as possible." [Pg 129]

In ten minutes they returned with all the things. The basket of wine and provisions was the heaviest item. The clothes and blankets had been made up into a bundle.

"Me will carry dat on my head," Dinah said, "and de barrow."

"No, I can take that, Dinah, that will balance the basket; besides, you have that great jug of water to take. Now let us be off."

After twenty minutes' walking they approached the spot where the ladies were in hiding, but it was so dark under the trees that Nat could not determine its exact position; he therefore whistled, at first softly and then more loudly. Then he heard a call some little distance away. He went on until he judged that he must be close, and then whistled again. The reply came at once some thirty yards away.

"Here we are, Myra," he said; "nurse is with me."

An exclamation of delight was heard, and a minute later he made his way through the bushes.

"Mamma is awake," the girl said, "but she does not always understand what I say; sometimes I cannot understand her, and her hands are as hot as fire. I am glad Dinah is here."

"You can't be gladder'n me, mam'selle. I hab brought some feber medicine wid me, and a lantern and some candles."

"Would it be safe to light the lantern?" Myra asked.

"Quite safe," Nat said; "there is no chance whatever of anyone coming along here; besides, we can put something round the lantern so as to prevent it from being seen from outside. You have brought steel and tinder, I hope, Dinah?"

"Of course, marse, lamp no good widout; and I hab got sulphur

matches, no fear me forget them."

"Give them to me, Dinah, I will strike a light while you attend to your mistress."[Pg 130]

Dinah poured some water into a cup and then knelt down by Madame Duchesne.

"Here, dearie," she said, "Dinah brought you water and wine and tings to eat. Here is a cup of water, I am sure you want it. Let me lift you up to drink it."

She lifted her and placed the cup in her hands, and she drank it off eagerly.

"Is that your voice, Dinah?" she said after a pause.

"Yes, madame; I've come up to help to take care ob you. Marse Glober come and tell me whar you were, so you may be suah that me lose no time, just wait to get a few tings dat you might want and den start up."

"I think I am not very well, Dinah."

"Jess a little poorly you be. Bery funny if you not poorly abter sich wicked doings. Now de best ting dat you can do is to go to sleep and not worry."

"Give me another drink, Dinah."

"Here it is, dis time a little wine wid de water and a little 'tuff to make you sleep quiet. Den me double up a blanket for you to lie on and put anober over you, and a bundle under your head, and den you go to sleep firm. No trouble to-night; to-morrow morning we go on."

Madame Duchesne drank off the contents of the cup. She was made as comfortable as circumstances would permit, and it was not long before her regular breathing showed that the medicine that Dinah had administered had had the desired effect.

"Now, Myra," Nat said, "we will investigate the contents of the basket. I am beginning to get as hungry as a hunter, and I am sure that you must be so too."

"I am thirsty," the girl said, "but I do not feel hungry."

"You will, directly you begin. Now, Dinah, what have you brought us?"[Pg 131]

"Dere am one roast chicken dar, Marse Glober. Dat was all I could

get cooked. Dere are six dead ones. I caught dem and wrung their necks jest before I started. Dey no good now. Dere is bread baked fresh dis morning before de troubles began, and dere is two pine-apples and a big melon."

"Bravo, Dinah! You have got knives?"

"Yes, sah, four knives and forks."

"We could manage without the forks, Dinah, but it is more comfortable having them. Now we will cut the chicken up into three. It looks a fine bird."

"Ise had my dinner, sah; no want more."

"That is all nonsense, Dinah," he said. "I am quite sure that you did not eat much dinner to-day, and you will want your strength to-morrow."

Dinah could not affirm that she had eaten much, and indeed she had scarcely been able to swallow a mouthful in the middle of the day. The meal was heartily enjoyed, and they made up with bread and fruit for the shortness of the meat ration.

"Now you two lie down," Nat said after they had chatted for an hour. "I am accustomed to night watches and can sleep with one ear open, but I am convinced that there is not the slightest need for any of us keeping awake. When the lantern is out, which it will be as soon as you lie down, if all the negroes came up into the woods to search for us I should have no fear of their finding us."

Dinah, however, insisted upon taking a share in watching, saying that she was constantly sitting up at night with sick people.

Finding that she was quite determined, Nat said: "Very well, Dinah. It is ten o'clock now. I will watch till one o'clock, and then you can watch till four. We shall be able to start then."

"It won't be like light till five. No good start troo wood[Pg 132] before that. Ise sure to wake at one o'clock. Ise accustomed to wake any hour so as to give medicines."

"Very well, Dinah; I suppose you must have your way."

Myra and the nurse therefore lay down, while Nat sat thinking over the events of the day and the prospects of the future. He had said nothing to the negress of the conversation that he had overheard, as on the way from the house they had walked one behind the other and there had been no opportunity for conversation, and he would not on

any account have Myra or her mother know the fate that these villains had proposed for them. He wondered now whether he had done rightly in abstaining from shooting one of them, but after thinking it over in every way he came to the conclusion that it was best to have acted as he did, for they clearly intended to do all in their power to save mother and daughter from being massacred at once by the negroes.

"Even if the worst comes to the worst," he said to himself, "they have pistols, and I know will, as a last resource, use them against themselves."

CHAPTER VIII

A TIME OF WAITING

Dinah woke two minutes before one o'clock, and Nat at once lay down and, resolutely refusing to allow himself to think any more of the situation, was soon fast asleep.

"It am jess beginning to get light, Marse Glober," the negress said when, as it seemed to him, he had not been five minutes asleep. However, he jumped up at once.

"It is very dark, still, Dinah." [Pg 133]

"It am dark, sah, but not so dark as it was. Bes' be off at once. Must get well away before dem black fellows wake up."

"How is Madame Duchesne?"

"She sleep, sah; she no wake for another tree or four hours. Dinah give pretty strong dose. Bes' dat she should know noting about it till we get to a safe place."

"But is there any safe place, Dinah?"

"Yes, massa; me take you where dey neber tink of searching, but good way off in hills."

Myra by this time was on her feet also.

"Have you slept well, Myra?"

"Yes, I have slept pretty well, but in spite of the two blankets under us it was awfully hard, and I feel stiff all over now."

"How shall we divide the things, Dinah?"

"Well, sah, do you tink you can take de head of de barrow? Dat pretty heaby weight."

"Oh, nonsense!" Nat said. "Madame Duchesne is a light weight, and if I could get her comfortably on my back I could carry her any distance."

"Dat bery well before starting, Marse Glober, you tell anoder story before we gone very far."

"Well, at any rate, I can carry a good deal more than one end of the barrow."

"Well, sah, we put all de blankets on de barrow before we put madame on it, and put de bundle of clothes under her head. Den by her feet we put de basket and oder tings. Dat divide de weight pretty fair."

"But what am I to carry, nurse, may I ask?"

"You just carry yourself, dearie; dat quite enough for you. It am a good long way we hab to go, and some part of it am bery rough. You do bery well if you walk dat distance."

"That is right, Myra," Nat agreed. "We don't want to[Pg 134] have to carry both you and your mother, and though you have walked a good deal more than most of the girls of your own class you have never done anything like this."

In a few minutes the preparations were completed. Madame Duchesne was laid on the barrow, and the basket and other things packed near her feet. Dinah took up the two front handles, Nat those behind, and, with Myra walking by the side, they started.

"Which way are we going, Dinah?"

"Me show you, sah. We go up for some way, den we come on path; two miles farder we cross a road, and den strike into forest again by a little valley wiv a tiny stream running down him. After walk for an hour we cross ober anoder hill all cohered wiv trees and find soon anoder stream, quite little dere; hab a mile we follow him, den we find a place where we 'top. We long way den from any plantation, dat quite wild country."

"Then how do you know the place, Dinah?"

"Me'se not been dere for thirty years, Marse Glober, me active wench den, twenty year old, me jest marry my husband, he dead and gone long ago. He hab a broder on anoder plantation; dere bery bad

oberseer, he beat de slaves very much. Jake he knock him down with hoe, and den take to de hills; my husband know de place where he hide, and took me to it one night, so dat I could find it again and carry food to him, cause he not able to get away, hab to work on plantation. Me had a little pickanniny and could 'teal away widout being noticed, and me went dere seberal times; den oberseer killed by anoder slave, and de master, who was good man, he come out to enquire about it. When he heard how de slave had been treated, he very angry and say it sarbe oberseer right. When I heard dat I spoke to de ole marse, de grandfather ob dis chile you know, he very good man, like his son, and he went to de plantation and got de marster to promise[Pg 135] dat if Jake came back to work again he should not be punished. And he kept his word. Dat is how me came to know ob dis place. Since dat time me know dat many slaves hab hidden dere. Now dat de slaves are masters, for suah dey not want to go near dat place, and neber dream dat Madame and Mam'selle Myra know of dat place and go and hide dere."

By the time that they reached the path daylight had fairly broken.

"We are not likely to meet anyone here, I hope, Dinah?"

"No, sah, de blacks in de plantations dey go down by the road we shall cross—suah to do dat to get quick the news ob what am going on in oder places. If one come along here, dey see you black, and tink you nigger like demselves. Mam'selle must slip into de bush, now she got dat gown on, no one s'pect her being white a little way off. Den if dere is only one or two, you shoot dem as soon as dey come up, if dar many of them—but dere no chance ob dat—must make up some story."

"I am afraid that no story would be any good, Dinah; if they came close they would see at once that I am not a negro. However, we must hope that we sha'n't meet anyone."

Nat felt his arms ache a good deal before they arrived at the road they had to cross, and he would have proposed a halt, but he was ashamed to do so while Dinah was going on so steadily and uncomplainingly, though he was sure that her share of the weight was at least as much as his. He was pleased when, as the path approached the road, she said:

"Put de barrow down now, Marse Glober. You go down on de road and see dat no one is in sight, but me not tink dere am any danger. I know dat dey rose at all dese little plantations up here yesterday; dere is suah to be rum at some ob dem, and dey will all drink like hogs, just as dey did at our place, and won't be stirring till de sun a

long way up."[Pg 136]

In a minute he returned.

"There is no one in sight, Dinah."

"Dat is all right, sah, now we hurry across; once into de wood on de ober side we safe, den we can sit down and rest for a bit."

"I sha'n't be sorry, Dinah. You were quite right, my arms have begun to ache pretty badly."

The negress laughed.

"Me begin to feel him too; dese arms not so young as dey were. De time was I could hab carried de weight twice as far widout feeling it."

When a few hundred yards in the wood they stopped for a quarter of an hour, had a drink of wine and water, and ate a slice of melon and a piece of bread.

"Now we manage better," Dinah said as they stood up to continue the journey. "We hab plenty of blankets," and taking one she tore off a strip some six inches wide and gave it to Nat, and then a similar strip for herself. "Now, sah, you lay dat flat across your shoulders, den take de ends and twist dem tree or four times round de handle, just de right length, so dat you can hold dem comfor'ble. I'se going to do de same. Den you not feel de weight on your arm, it all on your shoulders; you find it quite easy den."

Nat found, indeed, that the weight so disposed was as nothing to what it had been when it came entirely upon his arms. They soon descended into the little valley Dinah had spoken of, and she at once emptied the rest of the water out of the jug.

"No use carry dat," she said, "can get plenty now wheneber we want it."

"How are you feeling, Myra?" Nat asked presently.

"I am beginning to feel tired, but I can hold on for a bit. Don't mind about me, please, I shall do very well."[Pg 137]

She was, however, limping badly. After going to the end of the little dip they crossed the dividing spur, and presently struck the other depression of which Dinah had spoken.

"There is no water here, Dinah; I hope it has not dried up."

"No fear ob dat, sah. In de wet season water run here, but not now; we find him farder down."

The little valley deepened rapidly, the sides became rocky and broken, and to Nat's satisfaction they presently came to a spot where a little rill of water flowed out from a fissure in the rock.

"How much farther, Dinah?"

"A lillie quarter ob a mile."

The sides of the valley closed in rapidly, and in a few minutes they entered a ravine where the rocks rose perpendicularly on each side, the passage between being but seven or eight feet wide.

"We jest dere now, dearie," Dinah said to Myra, who was now so exhausted that she could scarce drag her feet along. Another three or four minutes and she stopped.

"Here we are," she said. Nat looked round in surprise; there was no sign of any opening in the rock. "It up dere," Dinah went on, pointing to a clump of bushes growing on a ledge.

"Up there, Dinah?"

"Yes, sah; easy for us to climb up. You see where dere are little steps made?"

A casual observer would not have noticed them. They were not cut but hammered out of the rock, and appeared like accidental indentations.

"I see that we can climb up," he said, "but how we are to get the litter up I have no idea."

"No, sah, dat difficult. I'se been tinkin it ober. Only[Pg 138] possible way is to take madame off de barrow and carry her up. You go up once or twice, and you see dat it am not so hard as it seems. Dese lower holes not deep, but dose higher up much deeper, can get foot well into dem."

"I had better go up and have a look, Dinah," and Nat started to ascend. He found that, as she had said, it was much easier than it looked. The first four or five steps, indeed, were so shallow that he could not get much foothold, but above there were holes for the feet some six or eight inches deep, and three or four feet apart, these being hidden from the sight of anyone passing below by a projecting ledge beneath. The holes were much wider than necessary, the corners had been filled with earth and tufts of coarse grass planted

there, and these completely hid the openings from sight. He soon reached the clump of bushes. Behind them was a fissure some three feet wide and four feet high. He crawled into this, and found that it widened into a cave. He was here able to stand up, remaining motionless for a minute or two until his eyes became accustomed to the dim light. Then he saw that it was of considerable height, some twelve feet wide and about twenty feet deep. This was indeed an admirable place of refuge, and he felt sure that no one, unless previously acquainted with its existence, would be likely to discover it. He went to the entrance and looked out. Myra was sitting down by the side of a little pool. She had taken her shoes and stockings off, and was bathing her blistered feet.

"This is a splendid place, Myra," he said; "certainly nobody is ever likely to find us here. The only difficulty is to get your mother up." He at once rejoined them below. "The difficulty, Dinah, is that the face of the rock is so steep that one cannot stoop forward enough to keep one's balance with the weight on one's back. The only possible way that I can conceive is to fasten Madame Duchesne firmly to the barrow[Pg 139] by these strips of blanket that we have been using. We can tear several more from the same blanket. It will want at least half a dozen lashings to keep her firmly down, then we must knot the other blankets to make a strong rope. I will go up with the end and pull when I get to the top. You can take the lower handles, and by holding them on a level with your shoulders you can steady the thing as it comes up. You won't want to lift, I can pull her weight up easily enough, all that you have to do is to steady it."

"Dat will do bery well, sah."

Six strips of blanket were wound round Madame Duchesne as she lay on the hand-barrow; one was across her forehead so as to prevent her head from dropping forward, one was under the arms, and two more round the body, the other two were over her legs. The baskets and other things had been taken from the barrow. It was now lifted on to one end to see if there was any sign of the body slipping. However, it remained firm in its upright position. The blankets had already been knotted by Nat, whose training enabled him to fasten them so securely that there was no risk of their slipping. Then he ascended to the top of the steps and took his place on the little platform on which the bushes were growing.

"Now," he said, "I will raise it a few inches to see that it is properly balanced." He had already seen that the proposal that Dinah should steady it from below was not feasible. Although the first step was immediately below the bushes, the others varied considerably, some

being almost in the same line as those next to them, so that two-thirds of the way up the holes were six feet to the right of the spot from which they had started, having evidently been so constructed that from below, had anyone noticed them, they appeared to go away from the bushes, to which, from the last hole that could be seen from below, there was no communication whatever. The [Pg 140] ledge, however, although scarce noticeable from the bottom of the ravine, was really some eight inches wide, and from this but one step was necessary to gain a footing on the platform. Dinah, standing below, steadied the barrow as high as she could reach the ends of the handles, and Nat then, leaning over, managed to raise it to his level without doing more than scraping the face of the rock as it rose. Dinah was on the ledge to receive it and pass it up to him, and Nat had soon the satisfaction of seeing it laid safely down in the cave. Myra was then got up without any difficulty. She clapped her hands as she entered the cave.

"This is splendid, Nat! I never dreamt that there could be such a safe hiding-place."

"It had to be, mam'selle," Dinah said, "for dey hunt runaway slaves with blood-hounds. Slaves dat escape here keep all de way in de water. De bit between de pools is all bare rock, not nice to walk on, but bery good for scent, dat pass off in very short time, den walk down here in dis water dat you see below us. Eben blood-hounds cannot smell track in water. If dey came down here might smell de steps, but neber come here."

"Could they come up the other way, Dinah?"

"You go and look for yourself, sah, but mind you be careful."

The wrappings had now been taken off Madame Duchesne, and the blankets replaced beneath her. She was still apparently sound asleep. Dinah took up the jug and went to the entrance, Nat followed her.

"You have not given her too strong a dose I hope, Dinah?"

"No, sah, no fear ob dat, she soon wake now. I shall sprinkle water in her face, and pour a lillie wine down her throat, you see she wake den."

"Will she be sensible, Dinah?" [Pg 141]

"Not at first, sah. She 'tupid for a bit, abter dat it depend on feber. If feber strong, she no sensible, talk to herself just as if dreaming; if feber not very strong she know us, but more likely not know us for

some time. Me got feber stime, neber fear. Feber come on too quick to be very strong. When feber come on slow, den it seem to poison all ober, take long time to get well; when it come on sudden like this, not like to be very bad."

"Well, we must have patience, Dinah, and hope for the best. Now I will go down with you and fetch all the things up."

As soon as these were all housed in the cave, Nat said to Myra, "I will explore down the stream and see what chance there is of anyone coming up that way. Dinah evidently thinks that there is no fear of it, but I should like to see for myself."

Fifty yards farther on there was a sharp widening of the ravine, and here some trees and thick undergrowth had taken root, and so overhung the little stream that Nat had difficulty in making his way through them. He remembered Dinah's warning, and advanced cautiously. Suddenly he stopped. The stream fell away abruptly in front of him, and, advancing cautiously to that point, he stood at the edge of an abrupt fall. A wall of almost perpendicular rock rose on each side, and the streamlet leaped sheer down fifty feet into a pool; as far as he could see the chasm remained unbroken.

"Splendid," he said to himself, "no one coming up here would be likely to try farther. The bushes regularly interlace over the water, and there seems no possible way of climbing up, at any rate, within a quarter of a mile of this place, and for aught I know this ravine may go on for another mile. Any party coming up would certainly conclude that no slave could approach this way, and they would have to make a tremendous detour over the hills and get to the point where[Pg 142] the valley comes down to the cave. It is certainly a grand hiding-place. I suppose when it was first discovered those bushes did not grow in front of it; likely enough they were planted on purpose to hide the entrance, and the place may have been used by escaped slaves ever since the Spaniards first landed on the island and began to persecute the unfortunate natives. Unless some of the negroes who know of it put the mulattoes up to the secret, they may search as much as they like but will never find us. I must ask Dinah whether there are many who know of it."

On returning to the cave he found that Madame Duchesne had wakened from her long sleep. She was, however, quite unconscious; her eyes were opened, and she was muttering rapidly to herself. Myra was sitting beside her with the tears streaming down her cheeks.

"You must not be alarmed," he said. "Dinah told me she would be

so when she woke up, but she thinks that though the attack of fever will be a sharp one, it will not last very long. It is not, as is the case with new-comers on the island, the result of malaria, or anything of that sort, but of agitation and fatigue."

"Hab you been down de stream, Marse Globber?" Dinah asked.

"Yes, and you were quite right. There is no fear whatever of any one coming to look for us from that direction. Are there many negroes who know the secret of this place?"

"Bery few," she said. "It am tole only to men who are going to take to de hills, and who can't go farder, 'cause perhaps dey been flogged till dey too weak to travel many miles. Each man who is tole has to take a great oath dat he suah tell no one except anober slabe running away, or someone who hab to go to take food to him; dat is how I came to know. Jake had been tole when dey knew he going to run away. He tole[Pg 143] his broder, my husband, cause he had been flogged so bad he could not go to de mountains. Den my husband tole me, 'cause he could not get away wid de food. I neber tell anyone till now, cause dere no occasion for it; slabes treated too well at our plantation to want to run away. But dere am no doubt dat dere am slabes in oder plantations dat know of him, but me no tink dey tell. In de first place dey take big oath, and dey suah to die ef dey break dat; in de next place, because dey no tell dem mulattoes, because some day perhaps dese will be oberseers again, and den de secret of de cave be no longer ob use."

"That is good, Dinah; those scoundrels I overheard talking the other night will no doubt ask if any of the negroes know of any place where we should be likely to hide, and if no one knows it but yourself they would be able to get no information, and it is hardly likely that they would ask the negroes of another plantation. Now, what is the first thing to be done, Dinah?"

"De first ting, sah, is to gader sticks to make fire."

"All right. I will go up the ravine and bring down a bundle of dry sticks from the forest. I will get them as dry as possible, so as not to make a smoke."

"No fear of anyone see smoke, massa. We no want great fire, and smoke all scatter before it get to top of de trees up above."

"Well, I will get them at once," he said.

"I will pluck two of the fowls while you are away," Myra said. "I want to be doing something."

"When you come back, sah, I will go out and gader berries to make colour for your face. When you hab got dat done, not much fear of your being known."

"You will have to get something to colour my hair, too," Nat said. "I never could pass as a mulatto with this yellowish-brown hair." [Pg 144]

"Dat for true," Dinah assented. "I'se brought 'tuff to make dat, but had no time to look for berries for skin. When you come back we make fire first; me want boiling water for de med'cine me make for madame."

"Yes, of course, that is the first thing," Nat said. "And when you go anywhere to get provisions, Dinah, it would be a good thing if you could get us a few yards of cord; it would be very handy for tying up faggots, and would be useful in all sorts of ways."

"Me will see about dat, sah. Me forgot 'im altogeder when me came away, else would have brought a length; but you will find plenty ob creepers dat will do bery well to tie up faggots."

"So I shall, Dinah; I forgot that," and Nat started at once.

In an hour he was back again with a huge bundle of dry wood.

"Where would you light it?" he asked.

"Jest inside entrance, sah. Dis good wood dat you hab brought, make bery lillie smoke."

After a little water had been boiled and Dinah had stewed some herbs and chips of wood she had brought up with her, the two fowls were cut up and the joints spitted on the ramrod of a pistol and grilled over the fire, as in this way they would cook much more rapidly than if whole. As soon as they were ready the party made a hearty meal. The medicine was by this time cool, and Madame Duchesne was lifted up and the cup held to her lips. She drank the draught without difficulty. Her face was now flushed, and her hands burning hot.

"What will that do, Dinah?"

"Dat most de bark of a tree dat will get de feber down, sah. I'se going to gib her dat ebervy two hours; den when we see dat de feber abate, we give her oder stuff to trow her into great sweat; abter dat she get better. Now, while I am [Pg 145] away, mam'selle, you boil water, cut up half ob one of dem pine-apples, and when de water boil take 'im off de fire and put de pine-apple in; and let 'im cool, dat make bery nice drink for her. Now me go and find dem berries."

Dinah was away two hours, and returned with an apronful of brown berries; and with these, after Nat had washed all the black from his face and hands, he was again stained, as was Myra also. She had rather a darker tinge given to her than that which was considered sufficient for Nat.

"It make you too dark, sah; yo' light eyes show too much. Mam'selle hab brown eyes and dark hair, and me make her regular little mulatto girl. When get handkerchief round her head, and wid dat spot gown on, no one 'spect her ob being white."

"You have brought in a great supply of berries, Dinah?"

"Yes, sah; put on stain fresh ebery two or tree days."

When it became dusk the candle was taken out of the lantern, lighted, and stuck against the side of the cave. Dinah opened a bag and took out a handful of coffee berries, which she roasted over the fire in a small frying-pan which she had brought in addition to the pot. When they were pounded up between two stones, some sugar was produced, and had it not been for Madame Duchesne's state Myra and Nat would have really enjoyed their meal. Then Dinah took from the basket a bundle of dried tobacco leaves, rolled a cigar for Nat and one for herself.

"Dat is what me call comfort," she said, as she puffed the weed with intense enjoyment. "Bacca am de greatest pleasure dat de slabes hab after their work be done."

"It is a nasty habit, Dinah. I have told you so a great many times."

"Yes, mam'selle, you tink so. You got a great many oder nice tings a slabe not got, many nice tings; but when dey got[Pg 146] bacca dey got eberyting dey want. You no call it nasty, Marse Globber?"

"No; I like it. I never smoked till after I got that hurt from the dog, but not being able to do things like other fellows, I took to smoking. I like it, and the doctor told me that it was a capital preventive against fever."

"Do they allow smoking on board ship, Nat?"

"Well, of course it is not allowed on duty, and it is not allowed for midshipmen at all; but of an evening, if we go forward, the officers on watch never take any notice. And now about to-morrow, Dinah. Of course I am most anxious to know what the news is, and whether this rising has extended over the whole of the island, and if it is true that everywhere they have murdered the whites."

"Yes, sah, me understand dat."

"Then I want, if it is possible, to send a line down to Monsieur Duchesne to let him know that his wife and daughter have escaped and are in a place of safety. He must be in a terrible state. The question is, how would it be possible to send such a note?"

"Me tink dat me could manage it, sah. My grandson Pete bery sharp boy. Me tink he might manage to get down to de town, but de letter must be a bery lillie one, so dat he can hide it in him woolly head. He might be searched, and dey kill 'im for suah if dey find he take letter to white man. He sharp as a needle, and often take messages from one of our slabes to anoder on plantation eber so far away. Me quite suah dat he bery glad to carry letter for mam'selle—make him as proud as peacock. When dey in der senses all de slabes lobe her because she allus speaks kindly to dem. He go suah enough, and bring message back."

"It is lucky that I have a pencil with me," Nat said, and drawing out a pocket-book he tore out a leaf. "Now, if you[Pg 147] will tell me what to say, Myra, I will write in your name." He went over to the candle. "You must cut it very short, you know. I will write it as small as I can, but you must not send more than one leaf."

Dearest Papa, Myra dictated, we have got away. Dinah warned us in time, and mamma, Nat, and I ran up through the shrubbery and the cane-fields to the forest. When it got dark—"After dark" Nat put in, "you must not use more words than is necessary"—Nat went down, found Dinah, and brought her up, and they brought lots of things for us, and next morning carried mamma to this place, which is in the mountains and very safe. Mamma has got fever from the fright we had, but Dinah says she will not be ill long. We are both dressed up in Dinah's clothes, and Nat and I have been stained brown, and we look like mulattoes. Do not be anxious about us; the negroes may search everywhere without finding us. Nat has a brace of pistols, and mamma and I have one each, and he will take care of us and bring us down safe as soon as Dinah thinks it can be done. I hope to see you again soon.

Your most loving

MYRA.

"That just fills it," Nat said as he rolled it up into a little ball.

Dinah looked at it doubtfully.

"Ise feared dat too big to hide in him wool," she said; "it bery kinky."

"Never mind that. He must manage to straighten it out and sew it somewhere in his clothes. What time will you start, Dinah?"

"Me start so as to get down to de plantation before it get light. Me can find de way troo de wood easy 'nuff. It bery different ting to walk by oneself, instead ob having to[Pg 148] carry madame and to take 'tickle care dat she goes along smooove and dat de barrow doesn't knock against anything. Best for me to be back before anyone wake up. Me don't suppose anyone tink of me yesterday. Me told my darter Chloe dat she say noting about me. If anyone ask her, den she say: 'Mover bery sad at house being burnt down and madame and mam'selle run away. I tink she hab gone away to be alone and hab a cry to herself, cause as she nurse both ob dem she bery fond of dem, and no like to tink dat perhaps dey be caught and killed.' But me no 'spect dat anyone tink about me; dey hab oder tings to tink of. If I had run into wood when you run dere, dey know dat I give you warning and perhaps show you some place to hide, but abter you had gone I ran in again and met dem outside wid de oder house servants. I top dere and see dem burn de house, and den walk down to Chloe's house and talk to oder women; so no one tink dat I know more 'bout you dan anyone else."

"That was very wise, Dinah. Now mind, what we particularly want to know is not only what the negroes have done, but what they are going to do. Are they going to march away to the hills, or are they going to attack the town?"

Dinah nodded.

"Me see all about dat, sah. Now, mam'selle, don't you forget to gib your mamma de medicine ebervy two hours!"

"I sha'n't forget, Dinah."

Dinah took up the basket.

"Me bring up bread and more chicken, and more wine if dey hab not drunk it all. Now keep up your heart, dearie; ebervyting come right in de end," and with a cheerful nod she started on her errand.

"Your nurse is a trump, Myra," Nat said. "We should feel very helpless without her, though of course I should do what I could. When she comes back to-morrow I will go out myself.[Pg 149] I hate to sit

here doing nothing when all the island is in a blaze."

"I wish I knew what has become of the family of Madame Bayou. Her daughter Julie is my greatest friend. You know them well, Nat, for we drove over there several times when you were with us, and Madame Bayou and Julie often spent the day with us. Of course they were not quite of our class, as Monsieur Bayou is only superintendent to the Count de Noe, who has been in France for some years; but he is a gentleman by birth, and, I believe, a distant relation of the count's, and as they were our nearest neighbours and Julie is just my age we were very intimate."

"Yes, of course I remember them well, and that coachman of theirs. I generally had a talk with him when they were over at your place. He was a wonderfully intelligent fellow for a negro. He told me that he had been taught by another black, who had been educated by some missionaries. He could read and write well, and even knew a little Latin."

"Yes, I have heard papa say that he was the most intelligent negro he had ever met, and that he was very much respected by all the negroes round. I know M. Bayou had the greatest confidence in him, and I can't help thinking that even if all the others broke out he would have saved the lives of the family."

"If you like I will go down and see to-morrow evening. I agree with you that it is likely he would be faithful, but he may not have been able to be so. However much he may be respected by the other blacks, one man can do very little when a crowd of others half mad with excitement are against him; and I suppose after all that it would be only natural that his sympathies should be with men of his own colour, and being so exceptionally well educated and intelligent he would naturally be chosen as one of their leaders. However, he may have[Pg 150] warned the family, and possibly they may be hiding somewhere in the woods just as we are. I should hope that a great many families have been saved that way."

"Will it be necessary to keep watch to-night, Nat?"

"No, I do not think there is any risk. Even the negroes who know of this cave will not think of looking for us here, as they would not imagine we could be acquainted with its existence. I think we can safely take a good night's rest, and we shall be all the better for it."

It was not till nearly daylight on the second day after starting that Dinah returned.

"Me not able to get away before," she said. "In de first place me hab to wait till boy come back wid answer. Here 'tis," and she pulled a small pellet of paper from her hair.

Myra seized it and flattened it out.

Thank God for the good news. I have been nearly mad. At present can do nothing. We expect to be attacked every hour. God protect you both.

There was no signature. Monsieur Duchesne was evidently afraid that, were the note to fall into the hands of the revolting leaders, a fresh search would be instituted by them.

"Dat boy bery nearly killed," Dinah said. "He creep and crawl troo de blacks widout being seen, and get close to de white men out guarding de place. Dey seize him and say he spy, and bery near hang him; den he took out de paper just in time, and said it for Massa Duchesne; den dey march him to town, woke up massa, and den, ob course, it was all right. It too late to come back dat night, but he crawl out and lie close to where dose black rascals were watching. Directly it get dark he get up, he crawl troo dem, and run bery hard back, and directly he gib me paper I start back here." [Pg 151]

"That was very good of him," Myra said; "when these troubles are over, Dinah, you may be sure that my father will reward him handsomely."

"Me suah of dat, mam'selle. He offer him ten louis, but Jake say no, if he be searched and dat gold found on 'im dey hang 'm up for suah. Marse say bery good, do much more dan dat for him when dese troubles ober. And now, dearie, how is madame going on?" and she went to the side of Madame Duchesne, put her hand on her forehead, and listened to her breathing. She turned round with a satisfied nod. "Feber nearly gone," she said; "two or tree days she open eyes and know us."

"And how did you get on, Dinah?"

"Me hab no trouble, sah; most ob de black fellows drunk all de day long. Nobody noticed dat Dinah was not dere. Some of de women dey say, 'What you do all day yesterday, Dinah?' and me say, 'Me ill, me no like dese doings.' Dey talk and say, 'Grand ting eberyone be free, eberyone hab plenty ob land, no work any more.' I say, 'Dat so, but what de use ob land if no work? where dey get cloth for dress? where dey get meal and rice? Dey tink all dese things grow widout

work. What dey do when dey old, or when dey ill? Who look after dem?" Some ob dem want to quarrel; oders say, 'Dinah old woman, she hab plenty sense, what she say she say for true.' Me tell dem dat me not able to 'tand sight ob house burnt, no one at work in fields, madame and darter gone, no one know where—perhaps killed. Dinah go and live by herself in de wood, only come down sometimes when she want food. She say dat to 'splain why she go away and come back sometimes."

"A very good idea, very good," Nat said warmly; "the women were not wrong when they said you had plenty of good sense. And now, Dinah, what is the news from other parts of the island?"[Pg 152]

The old nurse was at the moment standing partly behind Myra, and she shook her head over the girl's shoulder to show that she did not wish to say anything before her, then she replied:

"Plenty ob talk, some say one ting some anoder; not worf listen to such foolishness."

CHAPTER IX

AN ATTACK ON THE CAVE

Dinah lay down for a short sleep. It was far too late for Nat to start for Count de Noe's plantation, and when it was broad daylight, he went down to the pool for a bathe. When he returned, Dinah was standing at the entrance. She held up her hand to signal to him to stay below. She came down the steps, and sat down with him on a stone twenty or thirty yards up the stream.

"Mam'selle hab gone to sleep again," she said; "now we can talk quiet."

"And what is your news, Dinah?" he asked.

"Marse Glober, it am jest awful. It seem to Dinah dat all de black folk in dis island am turned into debils—from eberywhar de same story—eberywhar de white massas and de ladies and de childer all killed. Dat not de worst, sah, dey not content wid killing dem, dey put dem to horrible tortures. Me can't tell you all de terrible tings dat I see heard; me jest tell you one, dat enough for you to guess what de oders are. Dey caught one white man, a carpenter, dey tied 'im between two planks and dey carry 'im to his saw-pit and dey saw 'im asunder. In one place de niggers march to attack town, and[Pg 153] what you tink dey take for dere flag? A lilly white baby wid a spear run

troo him. As to de ladies, me can no speak of de awful tings me hab heard. You quite right to gib pistol to madame and mam'selle, dey do well shoot demselves before dese yellow and black debils get hold of dem. Me neber tink dat me hab shame for my colour, now I hab shame; if me could lift my hands and ebery mulatto and black man in dis island all fall dead, me lift dem now, and me glad me fall dead wid de rest."

"This is awful, indeed, Dinah; as you say the negroes seem to have become fiends. I could understand it in plantations where they are badly treated, but it is certain that this was quite the exception, and that, on the whole, they were comfortable and happy before this trouble began. I know they were on Monsieur Duchesne's estate, and on all those I visited when I was here before. I do not say they might not have preferred to be free."

"What good dat do dem, sah? If free, not work; dey worse off dan when slaves. Where dey get close? where dey get food? what dey do when dey get old? Look at Dinah, she allus comfort'ble and happy. She could work now tho' she old, but she hab no work to do 'cept when she like to dust room; she get plenty ob good food, she know well dat howeber old she live, massa and madame make her comfort'ble. Suppose she like de oders, and stop down at de huts, what den? who gib de ole woman food? who gib her close? who gib her wine and medicine? No, sah, dis am bad business all troo—terrible bad for white men, terrible bad for black men, terrible bad for eberyone."

"Next you see come de turn of de white man. Dey come out from de towns, plenty guns and powder, dey attack de blacks, dey shoot dem down like dogs, dey hunt dem troo de hills; dey show dem no mercy, and dey don't deserve none, [Pg 154] massa. It would hab been better had big wave come swallow dis island up, better for eberyone; white man go to white man's heaben, good black man go to heaben, either de same heaben, or de black man's heaben. Now, suah enough, dere no heaben for dese black men who hab done dese tings, dey all shut out; dey no let dem in 'cause dey hab blood on dere hands, me heard priest say dat St. Peter he sit at de gate. Well, sah, you bery suah dat St. Peter him shake him head when black fellow from dis island come up and ask to go in. All dis dreadful, massa," and the tears ran plentifully down the old nurse's cheeks.

"It won't be as bad as that, Dinah," Nat said soothingly. "There must be a great many who have taken no part in this horrible affair, and who have only risen because they were afraid to hang back."

"Don't you whisper word to Mam'selle Myra 'bout dese tings, Marse Glober."

"You may be sure that I shall not do so, Dinah; but certainly I shall, whenever I leave her, tell her not to hesitate to use her pistol against herself."

"If de negroes find dis cave, you trust to me," the negress said firmly. "I'se heard dat it bery wicked ting to kill oneself. Bery well, sah, me won't let madame and mam'selle do wicked ting. Dinah got long knife hidden, if dey come Dinah kill bofe ob dem, den dey no do wicked deed. As to Dinah, she poor ole negro woman. Better dat St. Peter say to her, 'You no come in, dere blood on hands,' dan dat he should say dat to de two white ladies she hab nursed."

Nat's eyes were moist, and his voice shook at this proof of the old woman's devotion, and he said unsteadily:

"St. Peter would not blame you, Dinah. He would know why there was blood on your hands, and he would say, 'Come[Pg 155] in, you have rendered to your mistresses the last and greatest services possible.'"

After breakfast Dinah washed his shirt, his white nankeen trousers, and jacket, and, as he had not a red sash to wind round his waist, he took the ornaments and slings from his sword-belt and put this on.

"You pass bery well, sah, for mulatto man; de only ting am de hat. Dat red handkerchief bery well when you pretend to be negro, but not suit mulatto, and Dinah will go see what she find at dose plantation on de hills."

"No, Dinah, you must not run risks."

"No risk in dat, sah. Dinah known bery well at most of de plantations round. I'se got a name for hab good medicines for febers, and ointments for sores, and women dat hab childer ill bring dem down to me from all parts. Bery simple for me to go round and say dat now de house gone and de ladies and all, me not like to stay down dere and be trouble to my darters. Plenty for 'em to do to keep demselves and der childer. Me going to trabel round de country and nurse de sick and sell my medicines. Suah to meet some woman whose child me hab cured; ask her if she know anyone who hab got straw-hat—dere suah to be straw-hats in planters' houses—me say dat a mulatto hab lost his, and not able to go down to town to buy one, and told me would gib me dollar if I could get him good one. Me try to get someting for sash too."

"That would be almost as difficult as the hat, Dinah."

Dinah shook her head.

"Plenty ob women got red shawl, sah; most all got red handkerchief. Buy one shawl or six handkerchief, bring dem home, cut dem up, and sew dem together; dat make bery good sash. You no trouble, massa; you keep quiet here all day and look abter madame. I'se sure to be back before it time for you to start."[Pg 156]

Dinah indeed returned just as the sun was sinking. She carried a small bundle in one hand, and a broad-brimmed straw-hat in the other.

"Well done, Dinah!" Nat exclaimed as he returned after sitting for a couple of hours on the rocks near the fall, and found her in the cave. "How did you get the hat?"

"Jess as I said, sah; me found one woman who allus bery grateful to me-for sabin her chile. I tell her I want straw-hat. She said she could get me one, two, or tree hats in de house ob mulatto oberseer. She 'teal one for me. Most of de men down in de plain, so she take basket and go up to de house garden—ebery one take what dey want now. She get some green 'tuff, as if for her dinner; den she go round by mulatto man's house, she look in at window and see hats; she take one, put 'im in basket and cober 'im ober, den bring um back to me. She had red shawl; she gib it me, but I make her take dollar for it. Me hide de hat under my dress till me get away into de woods again, den me carry um. Now, sah, put um on. Dat suit you bery well, sah; you pass for young mulatto man when I got dis shawl cut up and sewn togeder. You please to know dat madame open her eyes lillie time ago, and know mam'selle and Dinah. Me gib her drink ob pine-apple juice wid water in which me boil poppy seeds; she drink and go off in quiet sleep; when she wake to-morrow I'spect she able to talk."

"I don't like your going, Nat," Myra said when, the shawl having been converted into a sash, he put his pistols into it. "We have heard, you see, that the Bayous were not killed in the first attack, and I do not see that you can learn more."

"I should not run the risk, such as it may be, merely to ask that question. But I think that their coachman, Toussaint, must have saved them. I want to see him; possibly he may have made some arrangements for getting them down to the[Pg 157] coast, and he might be willing to allow you and your mother to go down with them. Of course she would have to be carried, but that might not add much

to the difficulty."

Receiving general instructions from Dinah as to the shortest route, he started, without giving time for Myra to remonstrate further. After two hours' walking he approached the plantation of Count Noe. The house was, of course, gone. Seeing a negro girl, he went up to her.

"Which is the house of Toussaint?" he asked.

She pointed to a path.

"It am de first house you come to," she said; "he used to live at de stables, but now he hab de house ob one of de oberseers who was killed because he did not join us."

On reaching the house indicated he looked in at the window, and saw the person he was looking for sitting at a table reading. He was now a man of forty-eight years old, tall in stature, with a face unusually intelligent for one of his race. His manners were quiet and simple, and there was a certain dignity in his bearing that bespoke a feeling that he was superior to the race to which he belonged and the position he occupied. Nat went round to the door and knocked. Toussaint opened it.

"Have you a letter for me?" he asked quietly, supposing that his visitor had come with a message to him from one of the leaders of the rebellion.

Nat entered and closed the door behind him.

"Then you do not remember me, Toussaint?"

The negro recognized the voice, and the doubtful accent with which his visitor spoke French.

"You are the young English officer," he exclaimed, "though I should not have known you but for the voice. I heard that you were at Monsieur Duchesne's, and it was believed that you had fled to the woods with his wife and daughter. I am glad that they escaped." [Pg 158]

"I have come from them, Toussaint—at least from the daughter, for the mother has had an attack of fever. She heard that the family here had also escaped, and she said at once that she felt sure you had aided them."

"I did so," the negro said quietly; "they were the family I served, and it was my duty to save them; moreover, they had always been kind to me. They are safe—I saw them down to the coast last night. I risked

my life, for although the slaves round here respect me and look upon me as their leader, even that would not have saved me had they suspected that I had saved white people from death."

"But you are not with them, Toussaint, surely?"

The negro drew himself up.

"I am with my countrymen," he said; "I have always felt their position greatly. Why should we be treated as cattle because we differ in colour from others? I did my duty to my employers, and now that that is done I am free, and to-morrow I shall join the bands under François and Biassou. I regret most deeply that my people should have disgraced their cause by murders. Of the two thousand whites who have fallen fully one half are women and children, therefore there could have been but one thousand men who, if they had been allowed to go free down to the town, could have fought against us; and what are a thousand men, when we are half a million? It has been a mistake that may well ruin our cause; among the whites everywhere it will confirm their opinion of our race that we are but savages, brutal and bloodthirsty, when we have the opportunity. In France it will excite those against us who were before our friends, and French troops will pour into the islands, whereas, had the revolution been a peaceful one, it would have been approved by the friends of liberty there. It is terrible, nevertheless it makes it all the more necessary that those who have some influence should use it for good.[Pg 159] Now that the first fury has passed, better thoughts may prevail, and we may conduct the war without such horrors; but even of that I have no great hope. We may be sure that the whites will take a terrible vengeance, the blacks will retaliate; it will be blood for blood on both sides. However, in a case like this the lives of individuals are as nothing, the cause is everything. I have myself no animosity against the whites, but many of my countrymen have just cause for hatred against them, and were any to try to interfere to prevent them from taking the vengeance they consider their right, it would cause dissension and so prejudice our chances of success. You can understand, then, that I shall hold myself aloof altogether from any interference. I am sorry for the ladies, but now that I have done my duty to my late employers, I have a paramount duty to discharge to my countrymen, and decline to interfere in any way."

"Then all I can say is," Nat said sternly, "that I trust that some day, when you are in the power of your enemies, there will be none to give you the aid you now deny to women in distress."

So saying, he turned and went out through the door, and before

morning broke arrived again at the cave. Not wishing to disturb the others, he lay down outside until the sun was up, then he went along the stream for some distance and bathed. As he returned, Myra was standing on the ledge outside the entrance.

"Welcome back!" she called out. "What news have you brought?"

"Good news as far as your friends are concerned. Toussaint has got them down to the coast, and sent them to Cape François in a boat."

"That is good news indeed," she cried. "Oh, I am glad! Now, what is the bad news?"[Pg 160]

"The only bad news is that the negro declined to help you in the same way. He is starting this morning to join some bands of slaves up in the hills."

"That is hardly bad news," she said, "for I never supposed that he would help us. There was no reason why he should run any risks for our sake."

"I hoped that he would have done so, Myra; but at the same time, as he evidently regards the success of the blacks as certain, and expects to become one of their leaders, one can understand that he does not care to run any risk of compromising himself."

"Mamma is better this morning," Myra said; "she has asked after you, and remembers what happened before her fever began."

"That is good indeed. As soon as she gets strong enough to travel we will begin to think how we can best make our way down to the town."

Four days later, Dinah, on her return from a visit to the plantations, said that there had just been some fighting between the whites coming out from Cape François and the slaves. They said that a ship had arrived with some French troops, and that all the white men in the town were coming out, and that they were killing every negro they found. The women and children from the plantations in the plains were all flying into the woods.

"Then it strikes me, Dinah, that our position here is a very dangerous one. You may be sure that the slaves will not be able to stand against the whites and the soldiers, and that numbers of them will go into hiding, and it is very likely that some who know the secret of this place will come here."

"Yes, sah, I'se not thought ob dat; but, sure enough, it am bery likely dat some ob dem may do so. What you tink had best be done? If de slabs all running into de wood de[Pg 161] danger of passing troo would be much greater dan it hab been. And eben if madame could walk, it would be bery great risk to go down—great risk to 'top here too. What you tink?"

"I don't know what to think, Dinah; there is one thing, it is not likely that many of them would come here."

"No, sah; dose who know about de cave would know dat not more dan eight or ten could hide here—no use to bring a lot ob people wid dem."

"That is what I think, Dinah; they will keep the secret to themselves. Now against eight or ten of them, I am sure that I could hold this place, but some of them, when they found they could not get in, would go back again and might lead a strong party here, or might keep watch higher up, and starve us out. And even if the whites beat them out of all the plantations, they would not know where to look for us, and would have too much on their hands to scatter all over the hills. If we are to join them it must be by going down."

"Dinah might go and tell dem, sah."

Nat shook his head.

"I am afraid, Dinah, that their passions will be so much aroused at the wholesale murder of the whites that they will shoot every black they come across, man or woman, and you would be shot long before you could get close enough to explain why you had come. No, I think the only thing to be done, as far as I can see, is that you should go down from time to time to let us know how things are going. I do not think that the whites are likely to get very far along the road. You may be sure that when the troops started from the town news was sent at once to the leaders, and it is likely that they will move a great number of men down to oppose them, and will likely enough drive them back. However, the great thing for us is to know where they are and what they are doing. It is likely that now the whites have advanced there will no longer[Pg 162] be any watch kept to prevent people, in hiding like ourselves, from going down to the town; if you find out that that is so, we will put madame on her barrow again, and carry her down. Of course we should have to chance being met when going through the forest, but we must risk that."

"Yes, I tink dat de only plan, sah."

Accordingly, Dinah started again the next morning. Nat felt very anxious, and took up his place near the entrance to the cave. Myra was busy seeing to the cooking and in attending upon her mother. About four o'clock he thought he heard voices, and, crawling cautiously to the mouth of the cave, he looked out through the bushes. Eight men were coming along; six of them were negroes, and the other two were the mulatto overseers whose conversation he had overheard. He called softly to Myra:

"Don't be alarmed, Myra, we are going to have a fight, but I have no fear whatever of their taking us. Only one can attack at once, and he can only come slowly. There are eight of them; you may as well bring me the two other pistols. I would not take them if I thought there was the smallest chance of these fellows getting up here. Go and tell your mother not to be frightened, and then do you come and sit down behind me. I will hand the pistols to you to load. There are only eight of these fellows, and if there were eighty, we could hold the cave; even if they got up to the platform they could only enter, stooping, one at a time. Go at once to your mother, they will be here directly."

"How much farther is this place?" the mulatto Christophe asked.

"Right dar behind dat bush," the negro said; "you go up by dem steps."

"It is a splendid hiding-place, Paul."

"Yes. No one who did not know of it would have a chance[Pg 163] of finding it. There is someone there now; don't you see a light smoke rising behind the bush?"

"So there is! I should not be surprised if the woman Duchesne and her daughter are there. It is certain that someone must have helped them off, or we should have found them long ago."

"Well, it will be a rare piece of luck if they are there."

The negroes had already noticed the smoke, and were talking excitedly together. It had not occurred to them that any fugitives could have discovered the place, and they were only concerned at the thought that the cave might be already fully occupied.

"Hullo, dar!" one of them shouted. "How many ob you up dar?"

No answer was returned. He shouted again, but there was still silence.

"I s'pect dar only one man," he said to his comrades. "Most likely

him gone out to look for food. Bery foolish leab fire burning;" and he at once proceeded to climb the steps, followed by two others.

Nat grasped the handle of his pistol. He determined that in the first place he would make sure of the two mulattoes. They were by far the most dangerous of his foes, and if they escaped they would, he had no doubt, keep watch higher up, capture Dinah on her return, and cut off all retreat from the cave. It was time to act at once, and, taking a steady aim at Paul, he fired.

With a shriek the mulatto fell backwards. Before the others could recover from their surprise Nat fired again, and Christophe fell forward on his face in the water. He passed the pistol back to Myra, and grasped another. He had expected that the negroes would at once fly, and two of them had turned to do so, when the highest climber shouted down:[Pg 164]

"Come on, all ob you! what you want run away for? Perhaps only one man here, he want to keep de cave all to himself; we soon settle with him. Dis cave de only safe place."

Nat could easily have shot the man, but he determined to direct his fire against those below. If he shot those climbing the others would escape, and it was of the greatest importance that no one should do so. The negroes had snatched the pistols from the belts of the fallen mulattoes, and several shots were fired at the bush. Nat drew back for a moment as the negroes raised their arms, and then discharged the two barrels of his pistol with as deadly an effect as before, and seized the third weapon. The remaining negro below dropped behind a fallen rock. At the same moment the man who was evidently the leader of them sprang on to the ledge. Nat's pistol was ready, and as the negro bounded forward he fired. The ball struck him in the chest, and he fell like a log over the precipice.



"HE FELL LIKE A LOG OVER THE PRECIPICE."

In his fall he struck one of his comrades, and carried him down on

to the rocks below. The other seemed paralysed with fear, and uttered a shriek for mercy as Nat, who from his position could not see him, sprang to his feet; but the tales that he had heard from Dinah of the atrocities perpetrated had steeled his heart to all thoughts of mercy, and taking a deliberate aim Nat shot him through the head. He had still a pistol left charged. Myra had not yet loaded the first he had handed to her, for it was but some twenty seconds from the time that the first shot had been fired. Nat caught up the sword, and at once made his way down the steps. He ran towards the rock behind which the last of the negroes had thrown himself. As he did so the man leapt to his feet, and the two pistols cracked at the same moment. Nat felt a sharp pain in his side. His own shot had missed, and a moment later the negro was rushing at him with uplifted knife.

For the moment Nat forgot that he had another shot left, [Pg 165]and, dropping the pistol, shifted his sword to the right hand, and before the negro's knife could fall he ran him through the body. There was now but one foe left. He lay stunned below his fallen comrade, and Nat saw from the manner in which one of his legs was doubled under him that it was broken. He could do no harm, but he would assuredly die if left there alone. Nat pressed his lips together, and having picked up his pistol, he put it close to the man's head and fired. Looking up, he saw Myra run out with a pistol in her hand.

"It is all right, Myra. Thank God none of them have got away."

"Are you hurt?" she asked, breathlessly.

"I will come up," he said; "I am hit in the side, but I don't think that it is at all serious."

He found, however, as he ascended the steps, that it gave him acute pain every time he moved. The girl was white and trembling when he joined her.

"Don't be frightened, Myra," he said, "I am sure that it is nothing serious. It struck a rib and glanced off, I think, and at the worst it has only broken the bone. You go in and attend to your mother."

"I shall not do anything of the sort," she said. "You come in, and I will look at it; it must want bandaging, anyhow."

Nat felt that this was true, and, following her into the cave, he let her take off his jacket. The wound was a few inches below the arm.

"It is lucky that it was not a little more to the right," he said; "it would have done for me. Don't look so white, Myra, a miss is as good as a mile. It is as I thought, is it not?—just a glancing wound."

"Yes," the girl said.

He felt along the rib.[Pg 166]

"Yes," he said, "there is no doubt that it is broken; I can feel the ends grate, and it hurts me every time I breathe. This is where it is, just where the cut begins; the wound itself is nothing."

"What shall I do?" she asked quietly.

"Tear a strip or two off the bottom of your petticoat, then sew the ends together to make a long bandage, and roll a little piece, so as to make a wad about an inch wide. Is the wound bleeding?"

"Yes, very much."

"Fold a piece four or five thick, and lay over that the other wad so as to go up and down across the rib. Now, if you will give me a little warm water and a piece of rag, I will bathe the wound while you are making the bandage."

"I will bathe it," the girl said. "I am sure it would hurt you to get your hand round."

In ten minutes the operation was completed.

"I am so sorry that I cannot help," Madame Duchesne murmured, as Myra sat down to sew the strips together.

"There is nothing that you could do, thank you," Nat said cheerfully. "Myra is getting on capitally. I shall soon be all right again."

When everything was done, he said, "You are a trump, Myra, you have done it first-rate." Then the girl, who had gone on as quietly as if she had been accustomed to such work all her life, broke down, and, bursting into a fit of crying, threw herself down by the side of her mother. Nat would have attempted to soothe her, but her mother said, "Leave her to me, she will be all the better for a good cry." Nat went down again to the stream, picked up the four pistols the Creoles had carried and unwound their sashes, thinking that these would be better than the make-shift that he wore. As he did so two small bags dropped out. He opened them; both [Pg 167] contained jewels, some of which he had seen Madame Duchesne wearing.

"That is a bit of luck," he said to himself. "No doubt directly they entered the house these scoundrels made one of the women show them where madame's jewel-case was, and divided the contents between them. When Dinah comes we must get these bodies down

the stream. I could do it myself were it not for this rib, but it would not be safe to try experiments. What a plucky girl Myra is! Most girls would have been ready to faint at the sight of blood. I will wait a few minutes before I go up so as to give her time to pull herself together."

In ten minutes he went up again. "Madame," he said, "I have something that I am sure you will be very glad to get back again. I took off the sashes of those rascally mulattoes, and these two bags fell out of them. What do you think they contain? Some of your jewels."

Madame Duchesne and Myra both uttered exclamations of pleasure. "They are family jewels," Myra said, "and my father and mother both prize them very much. How strange they should have been on these men!"

"The two mulattoes were two of your overseers, and no doubt ran straight up and seized them directly they entered the house."

She saw that her mother wished to speak, and leaned down over her, for Madame Duchesne could not as yet raise her voice above a whisper.

"Turn them out," she said, "and see how many are missing."

Although Nat had seen Madame Duchesne in full evening dress two or three times when parties of friends had assembled at the house, and had noticed the beauty of her jewels, he was surprised at the number of bracelets, necklaces, brooches, and rings that poured out from the bags. Some of the larger[Pg 168] articles, which he supposed were ornaments for the hair, were bent and crumpled up so as to take up as little space as possible. Myra held them up one by one before her mother's eyes.

"They are all there, every one of them," the latter whispered. "Your father will be pleased."

"The greater part of these," Myra said to Nat, "were brought over when the Baron Duchesne, our ancestor, came over here first, but a great many have been bought since. I have heard mamma say that each successor of the name and estate has made it a point of honour to add to the collection, of which they were very proud, as it was certainly the finest in the island; and besides, it was thought that if at any time Hayti should be captured, either by the Spanish or your people, or if there should be trouble with the blacks, it would be a great thing to have valuables that could be so easily hidden or carried away."

"Then they have thought all along that there might be a rising here some day?"

"Yes. I have heard my father say that when he was a boy he has heard his grandfather talk the matter over with others, and they thought that the number of slaves in the island was so great that possibly there might some day be a revolt. They all agreed that it would be put down, but they believed that the negroes might do terrible damage before enough troops could be brought from France to suppress it."

"They thought rightly," Nat said, "though it has been a long time coming; and the worst of it is that even if it is put down it may break out again at any time. It is hardly reasonable that, when they are at least ten to one against the whites and mulattoes together, men should submit to be kept in slavery."

"But they were very well off," Myra said. "I am sure they were much better off than the poorer whites." [Pg 169]

"From what I have seen of them I think they were," Nat replied, "but you see people do not know when they are well off. I have no doubt that if the last white man left the island, and slavery were abolished for ever, the negroes would be very much worse off than they were before, and I should think they would most likely go back to the same idle, savage sort of life that they live in Africa. Still, of course, at present they have no idea of that. They think they will be no longer obliged to work, and suppose that somehow they will be fed and clothed and have everything they want without any trouble to themselves. You see it is just the same thing that is going on in France."

"Well, now, what are you going to do next, Nat?"

"I shall load the pistols. I have got four more now. Then I shall take my place at the mouth of the cave again. I hope that when Dinah comes she will bring us news that will enable us to move away. The fact that this party was coming here for refuge shows that the blacks are growing alarmed, and perhaps have already suffered a defeat, in which case the way will be clear for us. If not, I must get her to help me clear the place down below, it will not be difficult. What have you got on the fire?"

"There is a fowl that I have been stewing down to make the broth for mother. I have another cut up ready for grilling."

Two hours later Nat, to his surprise, saw Dinah hurrying down the

ravine, for he had not expected her until evening. He stood up at once. She paused when she caught sight of the bodies lying below the cave.

"It is all right, Dinah," he shouted. "We have had a bit of a fight, but it only lasted for a minute or two, and except that I got a graze from a pistol-ball, we are unhurt."

"De Lord be blest, sah!" she said as she came up. "Eight ob dem, and you kill dem all, sah?"[Pg 170]

"Yes; one could hardly miss them at that distance. I am glad to say that none of them got away. You are back earlier than I expected."

"Yes, sah; me found out all de news in good time, and den, as eberyone say hurricane come on, I hurry all de way to get here before he come."

"Well, come up, Dinah. Madame is going on very well. You know those two mulattoes?"

"Me know dem, sah; dey bery bad men, dey lead de black fellows to de attack."

"Well, it is well that they came up here, for they had, hidden in their sashes, all madame's jewels."

"Dat am good news, sah," the old woman said as she joined him, "dat powerful good news. Madame didn't say anyting about jewels, but Dinah tought of dem, and what a terrible ting it would be if she had lost dem! Dat good affair."

"So you think that we are going to have a storm, Dinah?"

"Sartin suah, sah; bery hot las' night, bery hot dis morning, and jest as me got to top of hill me saw de clouds coming up bery fast."

"I didn't notice the heat particularly. Of course it is very shady in this deep gorge, and one does not see much of the sky."

"Dis bery good place, sah—better dan house, much better dan forest. Me was despate frightened dat storm would come before me got here."

"I was wanting you to help me put the bodies into the stream, Dinah."

"No need for dat, sah; when storm come wash dem all down—no fear ob dat."

She went into the cave, and Nat followed her.

"Me hab good news for you, ma'am. De whites come out strong from de town wid regiment of troops and de sailors[Pg 171] from English ship; de blacks hab a fight down in de plain, but dey beat dem easy. Den yesterday de bands of François come down from de mountains, get to our plantation in de evening; dey bery strong, dey say dar am ten thousand ob dem. Dey s'pect de whites to come and attack to-morrow. To-day dey clearing out all de plantations on de plain. De black fellows say dey cut dem all to pieces."

"There is no fear of that," Nat broke in. "So you think that they will fight in the morning?"

"No, sah, me no tink dat; me suah dat as soon as de whites see de hurricane coming dey march back fast to de town; no can stand hurricane widout shelter. You had better light de lantern, it am getting as dark as night."

Nat went to the entrance. Looking up, he saw a canopy of black cloud passing overhead with extraordinary rapidity. Almost instantaneously there came a flash of lightning, nearly blinding him, accompanied by a tremendous clap of thunder. He turned hastily back into the cave.

"It is lucky that you arrived in time, Dinah; if you had been ten minutes longer you would have been caught."

He stopped speaking, for his voice was drowned in a tremendous roar. He was about to go to the mouth of the cave again, but Dinah caught hold of his jacket.

"No, sah, you mustn't go; if you show your head out beyond de cাবে, de wind catch you and whirl you away like leaf, nobody neber see you no more. We safe and comfor'ble in here. We just got to wait till it all over. Dat wind strong enough to trow down de strongest trees, blow down all de huts, take de roof off de strongest house. We not often hab hurricanes in dis island, but when dey come, dey come bery bad. Dose ten tousand black fellows down at de plantation dey hab a bery bad time ob it to-night, dey wish demselves dead afore morning."[Pg 172]

"It is very bad for the women and children too, Dinah."

"Yes, sah, me hab not forgotten dat; but most ob dem will hab gone, dey run away when dey hear dat de whites coming out of town. Dey know bery well dat de whites hab good cause to be bery angry, and dat dey shoot eberyone dey catch."

"But they will be just as badly off in the woods as they would be in their huts, Dinah. Have your daughter and her children got away?"

"No, sah, dey wur going jest as I started, but I told dem dat hurricane coming, and dat dey better stay in de clearing; and dey agreed to hide up in de little stone hut at end of garden where dey keep de tools and oder tings. De roof blow off, no doubt, but de walls am low and strong. Dey hab bad time dere, but dey safe."

With Dinah's assistance, Nat fixed a blanket at the point where the narrow entrance widened out, to keep out the swirls of wind which from time to time rushed in, propping it in its place by the hand-barrow on which Madame Duchesne had been brought up. Myra had finished cooking the fowls just as her nurse arrived, and they sat down to their meal heedless of the terrific tempest that was raging outside.

CHAPTER X

AFLOAT AGAIN

"There will be no occasion to keep watch to-night, Dinah."

"Not in de least, sah; de water six feet deep, no one could get in."

As talking was out of the question, the party lay down to sleep soon after they had finished their meal. It was some[Pg 173] time, however, before Nat closed his eyes. It seemed to him that as soon as the storm was over, and the water low enough for them to pass up the ravine, no time should be lost in attempting to make their way down into the town. The troops would no doubt set out again as soon as possible, and a battle might be fought before nightfall. That the negroes would be beaten he had no doubt, and in that case other parties of fugitives might make for the cave. It was likely that, until the battle was fought, there would be but few negroes in the forest; those who had remained there during the storm would go down into the full glare of the sun to dry and warm themselves.

Doubtless, too, François, the negro leader, would have sent messengers off as soon as he arrived, ordering all able-bodied men in the plantations for miles round to come in to take part in the battle, and their chances of meeting with any foes as they descended to the plain would be slight. It would undoubtedly be a serious matter to carry Madame Duchesne for so long a distance; for they had ever since leaving the plantation been going farther away from the town,

and he calculated that it must be at least twenty-five miles distant. He did not think that it would be possible to do the journey in a day; but once down on the plains they might find some building intact, in which they could obtain shelter for the night. At last he fell off to sleep.

When he awoke the din outside had ceased, and the silence seemed almost oppressive. He got up, pushed aside the blanket, and looked out. The stars were shining, and the wind had entirely lulled. The bottom of the ravine was still full of water, but he felt sure that this would speedily drop; for the depression above the gorge was not an extensive one, and the water that fell there would speedily find its way down. He lit a fresh candle and placed it in the lantern, as the last, which had been renewed by Dinah early in the night,[Pg 174] was burning low. He pulled down the blanket, for although the air was fresh and cool at the entrance, the cave was oppressively warm. It was two hours before day began to break; by this time the torrent had subsided and the stream ran in its former course, and it was clear that in another hour it would be possible to make their way along by the side. As he was turning to go in, Dinah joined him.

"I tink, Marse Glober, de sooner we go de better."

"That is just what I have been thinking. There are not likely to be many of the slaves about in the wood to-day; you see a number of trees have blown down from above, and just below, the ravine is almost choked with them."

"No, sah, many will be killed in the forest, and de rest frightened 'most out of der lives. If de whites come out and fight to-day, and de black fellows are beaten, all dose who know of dis place suah to come to hide here."

"That was just my idea."

"How your side, sah?"

"It seems rather stiff and sore, Dinah. However, that can't be helped. That sash you made me will come in very handy for carrying madame, and we sha'n't have the weight of the other things we brought up. I am afraid it will be impossible to do the journey in one day, but I dare say we shall light upon a shelter down on the plains."

"Yes, sah. Me put de pot on de fire at once, and as soon as we hab breakfast we make a start; but before we go me must stain you all again—got glenty ob berries left."

Madame Duchesne had already been consulted. She would much rather have remained until strong enough to walk, but on her old

nurse's showing her that it would be at least a fortnight before she could walk even a mile, and pointing out the danger there was in delay, she agreed to start whenever they thought fit. The jewels were placed in Dinah's capacious[Pg 175] pocket, as, if they fell in with any strong party of negroes, she would be less likely to be searched than the others. In an hour all the preparations were completed; one pistol was given to Madame Duchesne and another to her daughter. Dinah took charge of a brace, and Nat wore the other two brace in his sash. He still wore his uniform under his nankeen suit, and his naval cap was in the bundle that formed Madame Duchesne's pillow. She lay down on the hand-barrow, all the blankets being placed under her, with the exception of one which was thrown over her, and she was let down the precipice in the same way as she had been brought up.

Dinah this time followed Nat's example, and used one of the mulattoes' sashes as a yoke to take the weight off her arms. Madame Duchesne was placed as far forward on the barrow as possible, so as to divide the weight more equally between her bearers. On raising her, Nat found to his satisfaction that it hurt him but little. In the week that had elapsed since she was seized with the fever, Madame Duchesne had lost a good deal of weight, the store of provisions had, too, greatly diminished, and the sash took so much of the weight off his arms, that as he walked in a perfectly erect position there was little strain thrown upon the broken bone. It was only when he came to a rough place and had to step very carefully that he really felt his wounds. Myra looked anxiously at him from time to time.

"I am getting on capitally," he said. "Do not worry about me; at present I scarcely feel that unfortunate rib."

"Mind, if you do feel it, Nat, you must give up. Dinah will take your place, and I will take hers. I am sure that I can carry that end very well for a time."

"I will let you know when I want a change," Nat said. "Now, you go on ahead, and as soon as we get out of this hollow use your eyes sharply." [Pg 176]

They saw no one going up the valley or crossing the open ground. When, however, they entered the forest on the other slope, they saw for the first time how terrible had been the force of the hurricane. In some places over acres of ground every tree had fallen, in others the taller trees only had been levelled or snapped off, while others again had boughs wrenched off, and the ground was thickly strewn with fallen branches. All this added greatly to the fatigue of travelling. Detours had to be constantly made, and the journey down took them

double the time that had been occupied in the ascent. When approaching the road they had to cross, they sat down and rested for half an hour.

"You are looking very white, Nat," Myra said; "I am afraid that your side is hurting you terribly."

"It certainly hurts a bit, Myra, but it is of no consequence. It was going on very well until I stumbled over a fallen branch that gave it rather a twist."

"You let me bandage 'im again, Marse Glober. We will go off and set dis matter right."

When a short distance away Nat stripped to the waist. Myra had done her best, but the old nurse possessed considerable skill in such matters, and strength enough to draw the bandage much tighter than she had done.

"Better make it a bit longer," she said, and taking a pair of scissors from her pocket cut off a strip some fifteen inches wide from her ample petticoat, and wound this tightly round the other bandage. "Dere, sah, dat make you 'tiff and comfable."

"It does make me stiff," Nat said with a smile; "I almost feel as if I had got a band of iron round me. Thank you; I shall do very well now."

The old nurse dressed him carefully again, and they rejoined the others.

"That is ever so much better," Nat said to Myra; "the[Pg 177] bandage had shifted a little, and Dinah has put it on fresh again, and added a strip of her own petticoat."

The journey was then resumed, and, with an occasional halt, continued until late in the afternoon, by which time they were well down on the plain. During the latter part of the day they had heard at first scattered shots and then a roar of musketry about a couple of miles on their right. It continued for half an hour, and then the heavy firing ceased; but musket shots could be heard occasionally, and higher up on the hill than before.

"The negroes have been beaten," Nat said, "and our men are pursuing them. Perhaps they will make another stand at the point where the road runs between two steep banks."

This indeed seemed to be the case, for half an hour later a heavy fire broke out again. It was but for a short time—in ten minutes it died

away, and no further sound was heard. Darkness was now falling, and they presently arrived at some buildings that had been left standing. They were storehouses, and had not been fired at the time when the planter's house was burned, but had probably been used by the negroes as a barrack, until the advance of the troops on the previous day had compelled them to take a hasty flight. The litter was now laid on the ground. Madame Duchesne had dozed off many times during the day, and was now wide awake.

"Are you going to light a fire, Dinah?"

"No, madame; Marse Glober and me tink it too dangerous. Not likely any ob dese black fellows 'bout, but dere might be some hiding, best to be careful. We hab a cold chicken to eat, and dere is some chicken jelly in de lillie pot for you, and we hab bread, so no need for fire to cook, and sartin no need for him afterward, we all sleep first-rate. Madame not heaby, but road bery rough, and little weight tell up by end ob de day. Dinah getting ole woman, Marse Glober got rib[Pg 178] broken—both bery glad when journey done. Mamzelle she tired too; twelve mile ober rough ground a long journey for her."

"My feet ache a little," Myra said, "but otherwise I do not feel tired. I felt quite ashamed of myself walking along all day carrying nothing, instead of taking turns with you."



THE JOURNEY TO THE COAST.

There was but little talking as they ate their meal in the darkness.

Neither Nat nor the old nurse had said a word as to their feelings as they walked, but both felt completely exhausted, and it was not many minutes after they had finished their supper before they were sound asleep. At daybreak they were on their feet again, feeling better after the long night's rest, and happy at the thought that this day's walk would take them to home and safety. Nat now threw off his disguise, placed his cap upon his head, and appeared as a British officer, though certainly one of considerably darker complexion than was common; but he thought there was less danger now from slaves than from parties of maddened whites, who had been out to their former homes and might shoot any negroes they came upon without waiting to ask questions. Myra also discarded the negro gown.

"I think that I looked more respectable in that," she said with a laugh, "than in this draggled white frock."

"It has not been improved, certainly, by its week's wear, Myra; but just at the present moment no one will be thinking of dresses. Now let us be off. We shall be on the road soon, and in an hour or two will be in the town."

It seemed easy work after the toil of the previous day. They bore to the right until they fell into the main road, both because it would be safer, and because Nat hoped that he might meet someone who could inform Monsieur Duchesne—who he had no doubt would have gone out with the column—that his wife and daughter were in safety, and that he would [Pg 179]find them at his house in the town. They had, indeed, gone but a short distance along the road when four men on horseback galloped up. They drew rein suddenly as they met the little party, astonished to see, as they thought, a mulatto girl in front, a negro woman carrying a litter on which was another mulatto woman, and which was carried behind by a young mulatto in the uniform of a British naval officer. Had they met them out in the country they would probably not have troubled to ask questions, but, travelling as they were along the road towards the town, and from the direction where the column had been fighting, it was evident that there must be some mystery about it.

"Who are you?" one of them asked Nat in a rough tone.

"I am an officer of his Britannic Majesty's frigate *Orpheus*, at present, I believe, in the port; this lady on the stretcher is Madame Duchesne; this young lady is her daughter, Mademoiselle Myra Duchesne; this negress, the faithful nurse of the two ladies, has saved their lives at the risk of her own."

One of the horsemen leapt from his saddle.

"Pardon me for not recognizing you, mademoiselle," he said to Myra, lifting his straw-hat; "but the change that you have made in your complexion must be my excuse for my not having done so. I trust that madame, your mother, is not seriously ill."

"She has been very ill, Monsieur Ponson," she replied. "She has just recovered from an attack of fever, but is very weak indeed."

"I saw your father three days ago. He had then just received your message saying that you were in safe hiding. He was, of course, in a state of the greatest delight. He went out with the troops yesterday."

"If you see him, sir, will you be kind enough to tell him that you have met us, and that he will find us at his house in town?"[Pg 180]

"I will certainly find him out as soon as I reach the troops. Is there anything else that I can do?"

"Nothing, thank you, sir. Is there, Nat?"

"No, unless one of the gentlemen would ride back with us, so as to prevent us from being stopped by every party we meet and having to explain who we are."

"I will do so, sir," the youngest of the horsemen said. "I dare say I shall be able to join our friends at the front before there is any more fighting, for the messenger who came in yesterday evening brought the news that the blacks had been so completely defeated, that it was thought likely they would make straight off into the mountains in the interior."

"Thank you very much, sir; it will be a great comfort to us to go straight on. We are anxious to get Madame Duchesne into shelter before the sun gets to its full power. My name is Glover. May I ask yours?"

"It is Laurent."

The other three horsemen, after raising their hats in salute, had now ridden on.

"How did you get on through the hurricane, Monsieur Glover?"

"We scarce felt it. We were in a cave with a very small entrance, and after the first outburst slept through it in comfort."

"It is more than any of us did in the town," the other said with a laugh. "It was tremendous. I should say that half the houses were

unroofed, and in the poor quarters many of the huts were blown down, and upwards of twenty negroes were killed."

"Do you think, Monsieur Laurent," Myra said, moving across to him, "that we are likely to meet any people on foot whom we could hire?"

"No, I hardly think so, mademoiselle. All the gentlemen[Pg 181] in the town who could get away rode out with the troops, and the rest of the whites are patrolling the streets armed, lest the negroes employed in the work of the port should rise during the absence of the troops. Why do you ask, mademoiselle?"

"Because Monsieur Glover had a rib broken by a pistol-ball the day before yesterday, and I am sure it hurts him very much to carry my mother."

The young man leapt from his horse.

"Monsieur," he exclaimed, "pray take my horse. I will assist in carrying Madame Duchesne."

"I do not like"—Nat began, but his remonstrance was unheeded.

"But I insist, monsieur. Please take the reins. You can walk by the side of the horse or mount him, whichever you think will be the more easy for you."

So saying, he gently possessed himself of the handles of the litter, placed the sash over his shoulders, and started. It was indeed an immense relief to Nat. The rough work of the preceding day had caused the ends of the bone to grate, and had set up a great deal of inflammation. He had been suffering acutely since he started, in spite of the support of the bandage, and he had more than once thought that he would be obliged to ask Myra to take his place. He did not attempt to mount in the young Frenchman's saddle, for he thought that the motion of the horse would be worse for him than walking; he therefore took the reins in his hand, and walked at the horse's head behind the litter. The pain was less now that he was relieved of the load, but he still suffered a great deal, and he kept in the rear behind the others, while Myra chatted with Monsieur Laurent, learning from him what had happened in the town, and giving him a sketch of their adventures. As they passed the house of Madame Duchesne's sister, the invalid said that she would be taken in there, as she had heard[Pg 182] from Monsieur Laurent that their own house was partially unroofed. Myra ran in to see her aunt, who came out with her at once.

"Ah, my dear sister," she cried, "how we have suffered! We had no hope that you had escaped until your husband brought us the joyful news three days ago that you were still in safety. Come in, come in! I am more glad than ever that our house escaped without much damage from the storm."

Although the house was intact, the garden was a wreck. The drive up to the house was blocked by fallen trees, most of the plants seemed to have been torn up by the roots and blown away, the lawn was strewn with huge branches.

Two of the house servants had now come out and relieved those carrying the litter.

"Ah, Monsieur Glover," continued Madame Duchesne's sister, "once again you have saved my niece; my sister also this time! Of course you will come in too."

"Thanks, madame, but if you will allow me I will go straight on board my ship. I am wounded, though in no way seriously. Still, I shall require some medical care, for I have a rib broken, and the journey down has not improved it."

"In that case I will not press you, monsieur. Dr. Lepel has gone out with the column, and may not be back for some days."

"Good-bye, Madame Duchesne!" Nat said, shaking the thin hand she held out to him. "I will come and see you soon, and hope to find you up by that time. Now that your anxiety is at an end you ought to gain strength rapidly."

"May Heaven bless you," she said, "for your goodness to us!"

"That is all right," he said cheerfully. "You see, I was saving my own life as well as yours; and it is to you, Dinah," he said, turning and shaking her hand, "it is to you[Pg 183] that we really all owe our lives. First you warned us in time, then you took us to a place of safety, and have since got us food and news, and risked your own life in doing so."

"Good-bye, Myra; I hope that when I see you again you will have got that dye off your face, and that you will be none the worse for what you have gone through."

The girl's lip quivered.

"Good-bye, Nat. I do so hope your wound will soon heal."

"You are fortunate, indeed, in having escaped," Monsieur Laurent

said as they turned away. "From all we hear, I fear that very few of the whites, except in plantations quite near the towns, have escaped. It is strange that the house servants, who in most cases have been all their lives with their masters and mistresses, and who have almost always been treated as kindly as if they were members of the family, should not have warned them of what was coming."

"I should think that very few of them knew," Nat replied. "They were known to be attached to their masters and mistresses, and would hardly have been trusted by the others. I cannot think so badly of human nature as to believe that a people who have been so long in close connection with their masters should, in almost every case, have kept silent when they knew that there was a plot to massacre them."

"Well, I will say good-morning," Monsieur Laurent said. "I want to be back with the troops. I was detained yesterday, to my great disgust, to see to the getting-off of a freight, and I should not like to miss another chance of paying some of the scoundrels off."

Nat made his way slowly and carefully—for the slightest movement gave him great pain—to the wharf. One of the frigate's boats was ashore. The coxswain looked at him with surprise as he went down the steps to it.

"Well, I'm jiggered," the man muttered, "if it ain't Mr. [Pg 184] Glover!" Then he said aloud: "Glad to see you back, sir. The ship's crew were all glad when they heard the other day that the news had come as how you were safe, for we had all been afraid you had been murdered by them niggers. You are looking mighty queer, sir, if I may say so."

"My face is stained to make me look like a mulatto. Whom are you waiting for?"

"For Mr. Normandy."

"Well, how long do you expect he will be?"

"I can't say, sir. It is about a quarter of an hour since he landed, and he said he would be back in half an hour; but officers are generally longer than they expect."

"Well it won't take you above ten minutes to row off to the ship and back. I will take the blame if he comes down before that. I have been wounded, not badly, but it is very painful. I want to get it properly dressed."

"All right, sir, we will get you on board in no time."

"Give me your arm. I must get in carefully."

The men stretched to their oars, and in five minutes Nat was alongside the *Orpheus*. He had heard, as he expected, that Dr. Bemish had gone with the party that had been landed, but his assistant was on board. The first lieutenant was on deck. He saw by Nat's walk as he went up to report his return that something was the matter.

"Are you ill or wounded, Mr Glover?"

"I am wounded, sir. I had a rib broken by a pistol-ball, and I have had a long journey, which has inflamed it a good deal."

"Go down at once and have it seen to; you can tell me your story afterwards. Have the ladies who were with you got safely down also?"

"Yes, sir."

The lieutenant nodded, and Nat then went below and placed himself in the hands of the assistant surgeon.[Pg 185]

"My word, Glover, you have got your wound into a state!" the latter said after he had examined him. "What on earth have you been doing to it? It seems to have been a pretty clean break at first, and it wouldn't have bothered you above three weeks or so, but the ends have evidently been sawing away into the flesh. Why, man alive, what have you been doing?"

"I have been helping to carry a sick woman down from the hills," Nat said quietly. "If it had been level ground it would not have hurt so much, but on rough ground strewn with branches one could not avoid stumbling occasionally, and although it had been bandaged before I started the wad slipped and the thing got loose, and after that it was like walking with a red-hot needle sticking into me."

"So I should say. Well, I will put you into a berth in the sick-bay at once. Fortunately we have some ice on board and I will put some of it on the wound and try to get the inflammation down."

In a short time he returned with a basin of ice and a jugful of iced lime-juice. Nat took a long drink, and then turned so that the ice could be applied to the wound.

"You must keep yourself as still as you can. I sha'n't attempt to bandage you at present, there is really nothing to be done till we have

got the inflammation down."

"I will lie quiet as long as I am awake, but I cannot answer for myself if I go off to sleep, which will not be long, for I am as tired as a dog. To-day's walk would have been nothing if I had been all right, it was the pain that wore me out."

"I don't suppose you will move. You may be sure that that rib will act like an alarm, and give you warning at once if you stir in the slightest."

Having seen Nat comfortable, the young surgeon went up on deck.[Pg 186]

"How do you find Mr. Glover?" the first lieutenant asked. "He says that it is only a broken rib."

"Well, sir, it was only a broken rib at first, now it is a broken rib with acute inflammation round it. There is a flesh wound about four inches long where the bullet struck, broke the rib, ran along it, and went out behind. That would not have been anything if he had kept quiet; as it is, it is as angry as you could want to see a wound. But that is not the worst, the two ends of the bone have been rubbing against each other with enough movement to lacerate the flesh, with the natural result that a wonderful amount of inflammation has been set up round it."

"But how did he manage it?"

"It seems, sir, that he has been carrying, or helping to carry, a sick woman down from the mountains, and he says the ground was very rough and strewn with boughs, so that one can understand that he got some terrible shakes and jolts, which would quite account for the state of his wounds."

"I should think so. When Monsieur Duchesne came off with the news that his wife was safely hidden, and that Glover was with her, he said that his daughter, who had written the note, reported that her mother was ill. No wonder he has got his wound in such a state if he has, as you say, aided to carry her down all that distance. He must have had a brush with the negroes."

"That must have been before he started, sir; for he said that the bandage shifted, so his wound must have been bound up before he set out."

"It was a gallant thing for a lad to undertake—a most gallant action! Why, it must have been torture to him."

"It must indeed, sir."

"He is not in any danger, I hope?"

"Not unless fever intervenes, sir. No doubt with rest and [Pg 187] quiet and the use of ice we shall succeed in reducing the inflammation; but it is likely enough that fever may set in, and if so there is no saying how it may go. I shall be glad to have Doctor Bemish back again to take the responsibility off my hands."

Late that afternoon Monsieur Duchesne came on board to thank Nat. He was not allowed to see him, as the doctor said that absolute quiet was indispensable. He had had a full account from Myra of the adventures through which the little party had gone, and he retailed this to the lieutenant and doctor in the ward-room.

"A most gallant business altogether," the first lieutenant said when he had finished, "and certainly the most gallant part of it was undertaking to carry Madame Duchesne when practically disabled. But I can understand, as you say, that directly the negroes were defeated by the force that went out against them, some of them would have made for that cave, and it was therefore absolutely necessary to get away before they came. However, I hope that we need not be anxious about him; he has gone through three or four scrapes, any of which might have been fatal. There was that fight with the dog; then he was in the thick of that business with the pirates, and was blown up by the explosion, and half his crew killed. He has had some marvellous escapes, and I think we may feel very hopeful that he will get over this without serious trouble. It was lucky indeed his finding your family jewels on two of those scoundrels that he shot."

"It would have been a great loss, but it is such a little thing in comparison to the saving of my wife and daughter, that I have scarcely given it a thought. I shall do myself the pleasure of calling again to-morrow morning to know how he is."

"Do so, monsieur; you will probably find Captain Crosbie here. I had a note from him an hour ago, saying that he was [Pg 188] returning, and would be here by eight o'clock. The negroes having been defeated, and the safety of the town being ensured for a while, he does not consider that he would be justified in joining in the pursuit of the blacks among the hills."

Nat was not aware of the return of the landing-party until the next morning, when on opening his eyes he saw Dr. Bemish by his side.

"You young scamp," the latter said, shaking his finger at him, "you

seem determined to be a permanent patient. As soon as you recover from one injury you are laid up with another. So here you are again."

"It is only a trifle this time, doctor."

"Umph, I am not so sure about that. Macfarlane tells me that, not content with getting a rib broken, you go about carrying one end of a stretcher with a woman on it across ground where it was difficult, if not impossible, to move without ricking and hurting yourself. So that not only have you set up a tremendous amount of inflammation round the wound, but you have so worn the ends of the bone that they will take three times as long knitting together as they would have done had they been left alone."

"I am afraid that is all true, doctor," Nat replied with a smile; "but, you see, I thought it better to run the risk of inflammation, and even this terrible rubbing of the end of the bones you speak of, than of being caught by these fiendish negroes, and put to death by the hideous tortures with which they have in many cases slowly murdered those who fell into their hands."

"It must have hurt you badly," Dr. Bemish said, as, after removing the dressing that had, late the evening before, been substituted for the ice, he examined the wound.

"It did hurt a bit, doctor, but as four lives depended upon my being able to hold on, there was nothing for it but to[Pg 189] set one's teeth hard and keep at it. How does it look this morning?"

"What do you think, Macfarlane? you can form a better opinion than I can, as I have not seen it before."

"The inflammation seems to have abated a good deal."

"In any case we will syringe the wound thoroughly with warm water. There are doubtless some particles of bone in it, and until these are got rid of we can't hope that it will heal properly. I will get that large magnifying-glass from my cabin."

For half an hour the wound was fomented and washed.

"As far as I can see it is perfectly clean now," Dr. Bemish said, after carefully examining it with the glass. "We will put a compress on, with a wet cloth over it, which must be damped with iced water every half-hour. When we quite get the inflammation down, Glover, which will, I hope, be in two or three days, we will bandage it tightly, and I will buy you a pair of stays on shore, and lace you up so that there shall be no chance of your performing any more pranks with it, and then I

tancy you will be able to come up on deck, if you will promise to keep yourself quiet there."

"Well, that is better than I expected, doctor."

"Have you any message to send to your friends? because I am going ashore now to see them. Monsieur Duchesne was off yesterday afternoon, but Macfarlane very properly refused to let him see you."

"Tell him he can't see me for some days, doctor. I do so hate being made a fuss over."

"I will keep him away for a day or two anyhow," the doctor laughed. "He gave the ward-room a full history of your affair, so you won't have the trouble of going over it again."

"That is a comfort," Nat growled. "How long is the *Orpheus* likely to stop here, doctor?"[Pg 190]

"Ah, that is more than I can say! At any rate the captain will not leave until he gets orders from Jamaica. The *Æolus* has just come into port, and the captain will send her off at once with despatches to the admiral, saying what has taken place, and how he landed a force to protect the town, and went out with a party to attack the insurgent blacks. He will ask for instructions, as they have no French vessel of war here, and the land force is insufficient to defend the place if attacked in earnest, especially as there is a considerable negro population who would probably rise and join the insurgents if these made an assault upon the town. The general hope on board is that we shall get orders to stay here, or at least to cruise on the coast. Now that we have broken up that nest of pirates, things are likely to be dull here for some time, though I have little doubt that ere very long we shall be at war with the French. According to the last news, which arrived since you left us, that National Assembly of theirs is going farther and farther, and its proceedings are causing serious alarm throughout Europe, for they are altogether subversive of the existing state of things. It is to its measures that this terrible insurrection here is due, and the first consequence of what is really a revolution in France will be the loss of her most valuable colony. I suppose you have heard that something like two thousand whites have been murdered. I have no doubt that now they have recovered from the first shock, the French here will take a terrible vengeance; but though they may kill a great number of the negroes, I doubt if it will be possible to reduce half a million blacks to submission, especially in an island like this, with mountain ranges running through it where cannon would be

absolutely useless, and the negroes could shelter in the almost impenetrable forests that cover a large portion of it."

[Pg 191]

CHAPTER XI

A FIRST COMMAND

For another couple of days no one was permitted to see Nat, but at the end of that time the wound assumed a healthy aspect, and he was allowed to receive visits. Captain Crosbie himself was the first to come down.

"I am very glad to hear so good an account of you, Mr. Glover," he said cordially; "you have done us credit again, lad, and have rendered an inestimable service to Monsieur Duchesne and his family. Although it can hardly be considered as in your regular course of duty, I shall certainly forward a narrative of your adventures to the admiral. The next time we go to Port Royal you had better go in for your examination, and if you pass I have very little doubt that acting rank will be given to you at once. Your aiding to carry down that lady, when yourself wounded, was really a very fine action, for Doctor Bemish tells me that you must have suffered intensely. Monsieur Duchesne is most anxious to see you, but the doctor has told him that it will be better for him to wait until you are well enough to go ashore, when you can go and see them all together."

"Thank you, sir, I would much rather do that. But really the person to be thanked is the old negress who gave us warning in time to escape, went down and fetched food, despatched a message to Monsieur Duchesne, and got an answer back, and who did as much as I did in carrying her mistress down."

"Doubtless she behaved very well, Mr. Glover, but that does not alter the fact that you did so also. And, as even you[Pg 192] will admit, she had no hand in the fight in which you killed eight of these scoundrels."

"It was not much of a fight, sir. I had such an advantage in position that I really did not like shooting them, in spite of what I had heard of their doings; but it was our lives or theirs, and I knew that if one of them got away he would bring down a score of others, and they would speedily have starved us out."

"At the present time," the captain said sternly, "mercy to these

villains would be misapplied; the lesson must be a terrible one, or there will speedily be an end to white rule in the island. Another thing is, that were this revolution to succeed, we might expect similar outbreaks in our own islands. Now I will leave you. Your comrades will come in to see you, but their visits must, for the present, be short."

Nat progressed rapidly. In three days the water-dressings were given up and he was tightly bandaged, and over this, rather to his disgust, the doctor insisted upon his wearing a pair of stays.

"It is all very well, Glover," Doctor Bemish said in answer to his remonstrances, "but we know what you are. You are as active as a cat, and would be constantly forgetting yourself, and springing to do something; but these things laced tightly on will act as a reminder, and will also bind you so closely together that, while you will have the free use of your limbs, your ribs will be held as if in a vice. You will have to keep them on until the bone has fairly knit, and you have every reason to be thankful that this is the only inconvenience you have to suffer from an expedition which might have cost you your life."

Four days later Doctor Bemish said:

"I think you can go ashore to-day. Of course you must be careful, especially, getting in and out of the boat, but if you[Pg 193] do that and walk slowly, I do not think it will do you any harm. Madame Duchesne is up and going on nicely, and they are most anxiously expecting you, and indeed Duchesne said yesterday, that if I did not let you go on shore to-day, he would come on board to see you."

"But I feel like a hog in armour in these stays, doctor."

"Never mind that, lad, you would be almost as bad if you took them off, for I should have to put on twice as many bandages, and to pull them ever so much tighter. I have told the captain that I am letting you go ashore, and have also told Mr. Philpot, so that is all settled. I shall be going off myself in an hour, and will take you with me, and keep an eye over you until you get to their gate."

"One would think that I was a small boy going to be taken to school," Nat laughed, stopping, however, abruptly.

"There! you see," the doctor said, "that gave you a twinge, I know; you must be careful, lad, you must, indeed. There is no objection to your smiling as much as you like, but there is nothing that shakes one up more than a hearty laugh. That is why at other times laughing is a healthy exercise, but with a rib in the process of healing, it is better not to indulge in it."

"Well, I shall be ready when you are."

Nat accomplished the journey without pain.

"Won't you come in, doctor?" he asked when they arrived at the gate.

"No, Glover; this will be a sort of family party. I have warned Duchesne not to throw himself on your neck, and have told him that you are to be looked at and not touched."

With an uneasy smile Nat left him at the gate and walked up the drive. They were evidently on the watch for him, for the door opened almost immediately, and Monsieur Duchesne ran down. "Mon cher!" he exclaimed, "the doctor[Pg 194] has said that I must not touch you, but I can scarce refrain from embracing you. How can I thank you for all that you have done?"

"But, monsieur, I have done next to nothing. I shot some negroes who had not a chance of getting at me, and I helped Dinah to carry madame down. We owe our safety to Dinah, who was splendid in her devotion, making journeys backwards and forwards, to say nothing of giving us the warning that enabled us all to escape in time."

"Dinah was splendid!" Monsieur Duchesne admitted. "But I can do nothing for her. I have told her that she shall have a house and plenty to live on all her days, but she will not leave us. I have made out her papers of freedom, but she says, 'What use are these? I have been your servant all my life, and should be no different whether I was what you call a free woman or not.' What pleased her most was that I have given freedom to her grandson who brought the message down here, and am going to employ him in my stable, and that she has received a new black silk gown. She has got it on in honour of your visit, and if it had been a royal robe she could not be more proud of it."

They had by this time arrived at the door, and Monsieur Duchesne led Nat to the drawing-room, where his wife was lying on a sofa, and Myra standing beside her. The yellow dye had now nearly worn off their faces. Madame Duchesne was still pale, but she looked bright and happy. Nat went up to her and took her hand.

"I am truly glad to see you up again," he said.

"It has all ended well," she replied with tears in her eyes. "It seems like a bad dream to me, especially that journey. How good and kind you were! and I know now how terribly you must have suffered."

"It hurt a bit at the time, madame, but one gets accustomed[Pg 195]

to being hurt, and it all went on so well that it was not worth grumbling about."

"Ah, you look more yourself now, Myra!" and he held out his hand to her.

"Embrace him, my dear, for me and for yourself. Twice has he saved your life, and has been more than a brother to you."

Myra threw her arms round Nat's neck and kissed him heartily twice, while her eyes were full of tears. "I have not hurt you, I hope," she said as he drew back.

"Not a bit, and I should not have minded if you had," Nat said. Then he sat down, and they talked quietly for some time. "I am going out to-morrow again," Monsieur Duchesne said, "it is the duty of every white to join in punishing these ungrateful fiends. I hear that they have been beaten badly near Port-au-Prince. Some of the negroes are, we find, remaining quietly on the plantations, and these, unless they have murdered their masters, will be spared. No quarter will be given to those taken in arms. At any rate we shall clear all of them out of the plains near the bay, and drive them into the mountains, where we cannot hope to subdue them till a large number of troops arrive from home."

So vigorously, indeed, did the whites pursue the negroes, that in a fortnight after the outbreak it was calculated that no fewer than ten thousand blacks had fallen, many of them being put to death by methods almost as cruel and ferocious as those they had themselves adopted. They were still in such vast numbers that it was evident that it would be impossible to overpower them until troops arrived from France; and, indeed, the farther the French columns penetrated into the mountains, the more severe was the resistance they met with, and on several occasions the whites were repulsed with heavy loss. A truce was therefore agreed upon, it being arranged that neither party should attack the other until its expiration.[Pg 196] There being, therefore, no occasion for the *Orpheus* to remain longer at Cape François, she sailed for Jamaica.

Nat's wounds continued to go on well. He was still stiff, and felt the advantages of the encircling stays so much that he no longer objected to wear them. As it was likely that, until matters were finally settled, the *Orpheus* would be constantly cruising on the coast of Hayti, and that he would ere long see his French friends again, the parting was not a sad one; and, indeed, Nat was by no means sorry to get under way again to escape the expressions of gratitude of

Monsieur Duchenne and his wife. Two days after arriving at Port Royal, Nat received notice that a court, composed of three captains of vessels then in port, would, on the following day, sit to examine midshipmen who had either served their time or were within a year of completing it. He at once sent in his name. As he had read hard during the time he had been unfit for service, he had no fear of not passing the ordeal, and at the conclusion of his examination he was told by the president of the court that he had passed with great credit.

On returning to the frigate, he found a note from the admiral requesting him to call upon him on his return from the court, and he at once proceeded to the flag-ship. "I have heard a great deal of you, Mr. Glover," the admiral said when he was ushered into his cabin. "First of all I heard the story from your captain of the gallant manner in which you, at the risk of your own, saved a young lady's life at Cape François, when attacked by a savage hound, and were seriously injured thereby. Then I received Captain Crosbie's official report of the share you took in the attack upon that formidable nest of pirates, the report being supplemented by his subsequent relation to me of the whole facts of the affair. Your conduct there also did you very great credit, and, had you passed, I should at once have given you acting rank. Now[Pg 197] you have again distinguished yourself, though scarcely in a manner which comes under my official knowledge. I should be glad to hear from you a detailed account of the affair."

When Nat had finished his narration, he said, "You have scarcely done justice to yourself. Your captain and Dr. Bemish were dining with me last night, and the latter said that, wounded as you were, the work of carrying that French lady down to the coast must have been an intensely painful one, as was shown by the state of your wound when he examined it. In all these matters you have shown courage and conduct, and as I hear that you have now passed, I shall take the first opportunity of giving you acting rank. You speak French fluently?"

"I speak it quite fluently, sir, but as I have only picked it up by ear, I cannot say that I speak it well."

"However, the fact that you speak it well enough to converse freely may be useful. Hayti is likely to be in a very disturbed state for some time. There can be little doubt that the negroes in the other islands are all watching what takes place there with close attention, and that there is a possibility of the revolt spreading. At present there is no saying what the course of events may be. Already the governor here has received letters from several French residents expressing their desire that we should take the island, as they believe that the French

revolutionary government will make no serious effort to put down the rising. Of course, at present, as we are at peace with France, nothing whatever can be done. At the same time, it is important that we should obtain accurate information as to what is going on there, and what is the feeling of the negroes and of the mulatto population, and we shall probably have several small vessels cruising in those waters. The *Falcon*, under the command of Lieutenant Low, who also belonged to the *Orpheus*, has been for some[Pg 198] weeks on the southern coast of the island. I intend to have three or four other craft at the same work soon, and on the first opportunity I shall appoint you to one of them."

Nat expressed his warm thanks, and retired. Three or four days later he received an intimation that the prize *Arrow*, a schooner of a hundred and fifty tons, would at once be put into commission, and that the admiral had selected him for her command. This was far more than Nat had even hoped for. From the manner in which the admiral had spoken, he thought that he would be appointed to a craft of this description, but he had no expectation whatever of being given the command. With the intimation was an order for him to again call upon the admiral.

"It is a small command," the admiral said when Nat expressed his thanks for the appointment. "We cannot spare you more than twenty-five hands, a quarter-master, and two midshipmen. You will have Mr. Turnbull of the *Leander* as your first officer, and Mr. Lippincott of the *Pallas*. She has carried six guns hitherto, but you will only take four. These, however, will be twelve-pounders; before, she had only nines. Naturally, it is not intended that she shall do any fighting. Of course, if you are attacked you will defend yourself, but you are hardly a match for any of these piratical craft except quite the smaller class—native boats manned by bands of desperadoes. Your mission will be to cruise on the coast of Hayti, to take off white fugitives should any show themselves, and to communicate if possible with the negroes, find out the object they propose to themselves, and report on their forces, organization, and methods of fighting. In all this great care will be necessary, for they have shown themselves so faithless and treacherous that it is impossible to place any confidence in their promises of safe-conduct. In such matters it is impossible to give any advice as to your conduct, you must be guided by cir[Pg 199]cumstances; be prudent and careful, and at the same time enterprising. The schooner is a very fast one. She has been a slaver, and has more than once shown her heels to some of our fastest cruisers. Therefore, if you come across any piratical craft too big to fight, you will at least have a fair chance of outsailing her."

Greatly delighted, Nat returned to the *Orpheus*.

"So, you are going to leave us, Mr. Glover," the captain said when he came on board. "I congratulate you, but at the same time we shall be very sorry to lose you, and I hope that when there is a vacancy we shall have you back again. You fully deserve your promotion, and have been a credit to the ship."

The next day Nat moved his effects ashore. There was but little leave-taking between him and his comrades, for it was certain that they would often meet at Port Royal. He spent his time for the next fortnight in the dockyard seeing to the refitting of the schooner. The superintendent there had heard of the affair with the dog, and of the manner in which he had saved the lives of the French lady and her daughter, Dr. Bemish being an old friend of his. He was, therefore, much more complaisant than dockyard officials generally are to the demands made upon them by young lieutenants in command of small craft. Indeed, when the schooner was ready for sea Nat had every reason to be proud of her. She had been provided with a complete suit of new canvas, all her woodwork had been scraped and varnished, the running rigging was new, and the standing rigging had also been renewed wherever it showed signs of wear. Her ballast, which had before been almost entirely of iron ore, was now of pig-iron, and in view of the extra stability so given she had had new topmasts ten feet higher than those she had before carried.

"I should advise you to keep your weather eye lifting, Mr.[Pg 200] Glover," Captain Crosbie said when Nat paid his farewell visit to the frigate; "that craft of yours looks very much over-sparred. If you were caught in a squall with your topsails up the chances are you would turn turtle."

"I will be very careful, sir," Nat said; "although, now she has iron ballast, I think that even with the slight addition in the height of the spars she will be as stiff as she was before in moderate breezes, while she will certainly be faster in light winds."

"That is so," the captain agreed; "and of course it is in light winds that speed is of the most importance. There can be no doubt that in the hands of a careful commander a large spread of canvas is a great advantage, while in the hands of a rash one a craft can hardly be too much under-sparred."

Turnbull, Nat's first officer, was a quiet young fellow, a few months junior to Nat. He was square in build, with a resolute but good-humoured face, and Nat had no doubt that the admiral had selected

him as being likely to pull better with him than a more lively and vivacious young fellow would be. From the first day they met on board he was sure that he and Turnbull would get on extremely well together. The latter carried out his suggestions and orders as punctually as he would have done those of a post-captain, going about his work in as steady and business-like a way as if he had been accustomed for years to perform the duties of a first officer. One evening Nat had asked him and Lippincott to dine with him at an hotel, and ordered a private room.

"I think," he said when the meal was over and the waiter had placed the dessert and wine on the table and had retired, "that we are going to have a very pleasant cruise. I am afraid we sha'n't have much chance of distinguishing ourselves in the fighting way, though we may pick up some of those rascally little craft that prey on the native commerce and[Pg 201] capture a small European merchantman occasionally. With our small crew we certainly cannot regard ourselves as a match for any of the regular pirates, who would carry vastly heavier metal, and crews of at least four times our strength. The admiral expressly warned me that it was not intended that the *Arrow* should undertake that sort of business. Our mission is rather to gain news of what passes in the interior, pick up fugitives who may be hiding in the woods, and act in fact as a sort of floating observatory. Any fighting, therefore, that we may get will be if we are attacked. In that case, of course, we shall do our best. I am sure we shall be a pleasant party on board. Of course in a small craft like this we shall mess together. It is necessary, for the sake of discipline, that when we are on deck we should follow the usual observances, but when we are below together we shall be three mess-mates without any formality or nonsense."

The two juniors remained on their ships until the schooner was out of the hands of the dockyard men. According to custom, Nat did not join until they and the crew had gone on board and spent a day in scrubbing the decks and making everything tidy and ship-shape; then the gig went ashore to fetch him off. As he rowed alongside he could not help smiling at seeing the sentries at the gangway and the two young officers standing there to receive him. However, with an effort he recovered his gravity, mounted the short accommodation ladder, saluted the flag, and returned the salutes of his officers and men. On board the frigate he had been an inconsiderable member of the crowd, now he was monarch of all he surveyed. Then the crew were formed up, and according to custom he read his commission appointing him to the command, and the articles of war.

"Now, my men," he said when he had brought the meeting to an end, "I have, according to rule, read the articles of war,[Pg 202] a very necessary step when taking command of a vessel of war with hands collected from all parts, and many of them coming on board one of his majesty's ships for the first time; but it is a mere formality to a crew composed of men like yourselves, who will, I am perfectly sure, do your duty in storm and calm, and who will, should there be any occasion for fighting, show that, small as our number is, we are capable of taking our own part against a considerably larger force. I and my officers, will do all in our power to make the ship a comfortable and pleasant one, and I rely upon you to show your zeal and heartiness in the service."

The men replied with a hearty cheer. Most of them belonged to the *Orpheus*. These had already told the others of their captain's doings in Hayti and in the attack on the pirate island, and said how popular he was on board.

"I think we are going to have a good time," one of the others said as they went forward. "We ain't likely to capture anything very big in this cockle-shell, and I look upon it as a sort of pleasure ship."

"You will see, if he gets a chance he will take it," one of the men from the *Orpheus* said. "I was with him in that fight against the pirates, and I tell you I have never been in anything hotter. I was one of those who volunteered to go with him to drown the magazine of the brigantine next to us, and I tell you I never felt so scared in my life. He was just as cool as a cucumber, though he had been knocked silly by that explosion a quarter of an hour before. He is the right sort, he is; and though I expect he has got orders not to tackle anything too big for us—he is not the sort of chap to run away if he can find the smallest excuse for fighting."

In the meantime Nat had gone below with the two midshipmen. The accommodation for officers was excellent. There was a large cabin aft which had been handsomely fitted[Pg 203] up by the late captain. Off this on one side was his state-room, on the other those for the two officers; beyond these were the steward's cabin and pantry on one side, and a spare cabin which had been given to the quarter-master on the other. Nat had engaged a negro as cook, and his son, a lad of seventeen or eighteen, as cabin steward, and had sent on board a small stock of wines. He ordered the boy to open a bottle and to put glasses on the table, and they drank together to the success of the cruise. They had just finished when the quarter-master came down.

"The admiral is signalling for us to send a boat to him, sir."

"Lower the gig at once!" and he and the officers followed the quarter-master on deck. "Mr. Lippincott, you had better go with it."

In half an hour the midshipman returned with a despatch. Nat broke the seal. It had evidently been dictated by the admiral to his clerk, his signature being at the foot.

News has just arrived that the French Assembly has cancelled the act placing the mulattoes on the same footing as the whites, and the former have in consequence risen and have joined the blacks. The situation must be most precarious for whites in the island. Get up sail at once and make for Cape François. Cruise between that port and the south-eastern limit of Hayti. Do what you can to aid fugitives.

"We are to be off at once," he said to Mr. Turnbull. "Please get up the anchor and make sail. There is fresh trouble in Hayti; the mulattoes have joined the blacks."

The quarter-master's whistle sounded, and the crew sprang into activity. The capstan was manned, and the men ran to loosen the sails, and in ten minutes the *Falcon* was on her way.[Pg 204]

"Matters were bad enough before," Nat said when, having seen that the sails were all set and everything in good order, his two officers came aft. "A few mulattoes, overseers and that class, rose with the negroes, but the great bulk of them, having got what they wanted, joined the whites or stood neutral; but now that they have thrown in their lot with the blacks the prospect seems almost desperate. However it turns out, there is no doubt that the island is ruined, and the whites who were lucky enough to escape with their lives will find that instead of being rich men they are penniless. It is a horrible business altogether. I shall be glad when we get to Cape François and can get news of what is really going on."

Nat was delighted at the speed shown by the schooner. The breeze was light, and she felt the full advantage of her added spread of canvas. She was a very beamy craft of light draught, and scarcely showed a perceptible heel under the pressure of the wind, fully justifying his opinion as to the improvement to be effected by the substitution of iron ballast for that which she had before carried. Turnbull and Lippincott were no less pleased, and the whole crew felt proud of their little craft.

"She can go, sir, and no mistake!" Turnbull said, as they stood aft

looking upwards at the sails and down into the water glancing past her sides. "It would take a fast craft indeed to overhaul her; her sails are splendidly cut!"

"Yes, I tipped the man who is at the head of the sail-making gang a five-pound note to take special pains with them, and the money would have been well laid out if it had been fifty times as much; for it will make the difference of a point at least when she is close-hauled, and that means getting away from a fellow too big for us, instead of being overhauled by him."

"Yes," Turnbull said with a smile, "and might enable us [Pg 205] to keep out of reach of his bow-guns, while we hammered him with our stern-chaser."

"Yes, it might have that effect," Nat replied with an answering smile. "What is she going through the water now, quarter-master?"

"A good seven knots, sir."

"That is fast enough. The *Orpheus* would not be making more than six in such a light breeze as this."

Towards sunset the wind fell until it scarcely seemed that there was a breath on the water, but the schooner still crept along at two and a half knots an hour, although her sails scarcely lifted. The crew had already been divided in watches. Turnbull took the starboard, and Lippincott the larboard watch.

"I hardly know myself," Nat laughed, as they sat together in the cabin after dinner. "Except when I was on the sick list, this is my first experience of not having a night watch to keep. However, I expect I shall be up and down, and at any rate call me if there is the slightest change in the weather. We know what she can do in a light wind now, but we won't risk anything until we have seen how she carries her sails in a sharp blow."

Somewhat restless under the extent of his responsibility, Nat was on deck several times during the night. There was, however, no sign of change. The *Arrow* was still stealing through the water with the wind abeam. The two midshipmen, equally impressed with the responsibility of being in command of a watch, were on the alert, and the look-out was vigilant. The wind freshened again when the sun rose. At noon there were white-heads on the water, and the schooner, heeling over a bit now, was doing nearly nine knots. The three officers all took an observation, and to their satisfaction found that they were within half a mile of each other. At the present [Pg 206]

moment, however, there was no doubt as to their situation, for the high land near Cape Dame Marie lay clearly in sight over the bowsprit, while behind them the hills over Morant Point lay like a dim haze.

"If we had had this wind the whole way," Nat said regretfully, "we should have been well in the bay by this time. Still, we must not grumble; we have made a hundred knots. The mid-day gun fired just as we got under way, and, considering that for twelve hours we had no wind worth speaking of, I think we have done very well. Indeed, if the wind will hold like this, we shall be near port by noon to-morrow; but we can't reckon on that, it is sure to fall before sunset, and besides, the winds are generally baffling and shifty when we once get into the bay."

By three o'clock the wind had already begun to fall, and by five they were lying almost becalmed off the westerly point of the island. For the next two days the wind was very light, and it was late in the afternoon of the second when they dropped anchor off Cape François. Nat at once went ashore, and as usual received a warm welcome from the Duchesnes. Madame had now quite recovered from the effect of her adventure, as also had Myra.

"I did not know that the *Orpheus* was in port, or else we should have been expecting you."

"She is not in port, madame. I arrived in his majesty's schooner *Arrow*, which I have the honour to command."

"Then you are Captain Glover now? I must be very respectful," and Myra made a deep curtsy.

"It will be a good many years before I shall have the right to be addressed by that title. I have passed my examination as lieutenant, and have now acting rank, which will no doubt be confirmed by the authorities at home, and I may be addressed as lieutenant without any breach of etiquette. Still, of course,[Pg 207] it is a grand thing to get a command, and so much greater chance of distinguishing oneself. However, as she is but a small craft, and carries only twenty-five men, we are not in a position to do any great thing in the way of fighting, though of course we may overhaul and capture some of these native craft that are nominally traders, but are ready to capture any small vessel they may come across. My mission really is to obtain news of what is passing in the island. We have received word at Kingston that the mulattoes have risen and joined the blacks, and I have been sent off at once to learn the real state of things."

"Unhappily the news is true," Monsieur Duchesne said. "There have already been several fights, in some of which we have got the best of it, in others we have been driven back to the towns. It is impossible for the look-out to be darker than it is. It seems to us that our only hope is that England will consent to take over the sovereignty of the island, and send a force large enough to put down the insurrection. Some of the planters here have already lost heart, and have sailed for Jamaica, Bermuda, and other British ports. I have no intention of following their example at present. I am, as you know, a merchant as well as a planter, and although, of course, all trade is at an end now, it must spring up again in time. Fortunately, we feel confident that this town can resist any assault. The French man-of-war that came in after you sailed landed a dozen of her guns, and we have erected four batteries. There were, too, a good many old guns in the town, which have also been put into position; and as we have half a French regiment here, and fully five hundred whites who can be relied on, we have small fear of being overpowered. I am glad to say that before the man-of-war left, the great majority of the negroes were expelled from the town and their quarter burnt down, so that we have no fear of being attacked from[Pg 208] within as well as from without. That was really our greatest danger, and has been hanging over us night and day ever since the beginning of the rising."

"Are the mulattoes and negroes acting together?"

"In some cases, but as a rule they keep apart. There is no love lost between them, and the only bond of union is hatred of us. The blacks, curiously enough, have declared against the republic, and call themselves the royalist army. They consider, and very naturally, that the republic, while giving rights to the mulattoes, has done nothing for them, and therefore, as the republic has declared against the king, they have declared for him. Do you think that the English government will accept our offer to transfer ourselves to British rule?"

"I do not see that they could do so, sir. At present we are nominally at peace with France, although everyone sees that war must come before long, but until it is declared we could scarcely take over a French possession; nor do I think there are anything like troops enough in our islands to undertake such a serious operation as this would be. Your people could not give us much help. The negroes, though calling themselves royalists, are fighting only for liberty, and would gain nothing by a mere change of masters, knowing as they do that the slaves are certainly no better treated in our islands than in those of France."

"That is what I thought," Monsieur Duchesne said. "Certainly

nothing short of an army of thirty thousand strong could hope for success, and I doubt, indeed, whether in so large and mountainous an island even that number could do much. Of course fully half of it is Spanish, which complicates matters a great deal; but we may be sure that if the negroes of this end are successful, those under the Spaniards will very soon follow their example. If the worst comes to the worst, I shall of course leave the island. Whether I should[Pg 209] settle in one of your islands or make England my residence I cannot say. Some of my countrymen have gone to America, but I should put that out of my mind. I think I should prefer England to remaining out here, for there might be similar risings in Jamaica and elsewhere; as to France, it is out of the question.

"France has gone mad. I know that many of our good families have sought refuge in England, and we should at least find society congenial to us. Happily, we are in a condition to choose for ourselves; my ancestors have been wise men, and have long foreseen that what has actually occurred might possibly take place. Each in succession has impressed his views upon his son, and it has become almost a family tradition among us, and one upon which we have often been rallied. For with few exceptions all here seem to have regarded the state of things as being as unchangeable as Scripture says were the laws of the Medes and Persians. If this had been only a tradition, and had not been acted upon, it would not have benefited us now, but for six generations each of my ancestors has regarded it as a sacred duty to set aside nearly a tenth of his revenues as a provision when the troubles should come. This money has been chiefly invested in England and Holland, and the interest on the accumulations of all these years has been reinvested. I believe that, although I regard such investments as were made in France as lost, we shall, when we reckon up matters, find that our income will be fully as large as that which I have drawn from my property and trade here."

"I am very glad to hear it, Monsieur Duchesne. I have indeed, while I have been away, thought very often of what would happen to you and your family if you were forced to finally abandon your estate and leave the island."

"I have reason to be grateful indeed, Nat, to the forethought of those who have gone before me; it is strange that[Pg 210] the same idea did not occur to others. One can see now that our people here have been living in a fool's paradise, totally oblivious of the fact that a volcano might at any moment open under their feet. Are you going to remain here?"

"Oh, no! I am only making this a starting-place. My orders are to cruise along the southern coast, to render any assistance I can to the refugees, and if possible, to open communications with some of the chiefs of the insurgents and endeavour to find out what their plans are, and, should it be decided to accept the cession of the island when war with France breaks out, what the attitude of the blacks and mulattoes would be."

"You will not be likely to pick up any refugees, for the whites are exterminated except in the towns; but should any of the smaller places be attacked you might render good service by receiving at least the women and children on board."

That evening Monsieur Duchesne asked his brother-in-law, the doctor, and several other leading inhabitants, to his house, in order that Nat might gather their views. He found that these in the main agreed with those of his host, except that they were hopeful that France would, as soon as the news arrived, despatch an army of sufficient force to put down the insurrection. After the last of the guests had departed, Monsieur Duchesne shook his head.

"France will ere long require every soldier to defend her own frontiers; the saturnalia of blood in which she is indulging will cause her to be regarded as the common enemy of Europe. I hear that already the emigrant nobles are pressing the various European courts to march armies into France to free the king and royal family from their imprisonment by the mob of Paris, and ere long there will assuredly be a coalition which France will need all her strength to resist. England is certain to join it; and even had France troops to spare, she would find a difficulty in sending them here.[Pg 211] So you will not change your mind and stay with us for the night?"

"It is already nearly eleven, and I ordered the gig to be alongside at that hour. I certainly should not like to sleep out of the ship, though I have no doubt that my two young officers would see that everything went on right."

On reaching the schooner, Nat found that both Turnbull and Lippincott were still up.

"It was such a lovely night that we have been smoking on deck until a few minutes ago; we were, of course, anxious to hear the news."

At Nat's order the steward brought hot water and glasses; three tumblers of grog were filled, and they sat for a couple of hours discussing the strange situation in the island.

CHAPTER XII

A RESCUE

The *Arrow* was one morning lying at anchor in a small bay on the south coast, when one of the sailors called Nat's attention to a boy who had run down and was wildly waving his arms. Nat caught up his telescope.

"It may be a white boy," he said. "Lower the gig! I will go myself in her. Quick! he may be pursued."

It took but a very short time to cross the quarter of a mile of water. The lad rushed in up to his chin to meet them, and was quickly hauled into the boat. His hands and face had been blackened, but this had so worn off that he merely presented the appearance of a sooty-faced white boy. He burst into a fit of convulsive sobbing as he found himself among friends. Nat saw that it was useless to question him at the [Pg 212] moment, so he told the men to row back at once to the schooner; then he half-carried him down to his own cabin, brought out a glass of wine, and gave it to him.

"Drink that up, lad," he said, "then you can tell me something about yourself." The boy put the glass with shaking hands to his lips and drank it down.

"That is right, lad; now tell me something about yourself. What is your name?"

"I am a girl, monsieur; my name is Louise Pickard. We have been hiding in the forest for six weeks—my father and mother, my sister, and ten Frenchmen, who worked for us. We lived on fruit and what provisions the men could obtain by going down to the plantations at night. Two days ago the negroes found us; they killed one of the men at once, and the rest of us they took. My sister and I were dressed as boys. They were going to kill us one by one; they burnt one of the men to death yesterday, and tied us to trees round and made us look on. This morning they killed another; they cut off his arms at the elbows and his legs at the knees, and then cut him about with knives till he died. Then they shut us up together again. There was a little window, and my father pushed me through it. He had heard the negroes say that there was a vessel in the bay with white men in it. The hole was in the back of the house, and there were trees there, so that I managed to get off without being seen by the negroes. My father tried to get Valerie through the same window, but she was too big. She is two years older than I am, and I could not have squeezed through had not

my father pushed me. He told me to come down to the shore and take refuge with you."



THE RESCUE OF LOUISE PICKARD.

"How many of these black scoundrels are there?" Nat asked.

"Two or three hundred. The negroes are going to attack you to-night—there are some fishermen's boats at a village a mile or two along the shore. Father told me to warn you. I [Pg 213] did not like coming away, I would have liked to have died with the others; but it was so awful to look on at the tortures. If they would but have killed us at once, I would not have minded; but oh, monsieur, it was too terrible! Can you not do something for them?" And she again burst into tears.

"I will see what can be done," Nat said, putting his hand kindly on her shoulder. "I am going up on deck now. This is my cabin," and he opened the door of his berth. "The steward will bring you some hot water, then you had better have a wash and get rid of that charcoal, for I suppose it is charcoal on your face. We can do nothing for you in the way of dress at present. But if you will take off your things and put them outside the door, I will get them washed at once, and you can lie down in my berth until they are dry. They won't take very long in this hot climate."

The steward by his orders brought in a can of hot water. The girl retired with it to the cabin, and Nat went on deck and told Turnbull and Lippincott what he had heard from her.

"It is awful," the latter said. "Can we do nothing, sir?"

"That is the point, Mr. Lippincott. I feel that it is impossible for us to remain quiet while such devilry is being carried on among those woods. But you see the matter is rendered all the more difficult by the fact that we ourselves are going to be attacked to-night. Our crew is weak enough already. If three or four boat-loads full of blacks were to fall upon us, we could not spare a man; while if we were to land, we should need every man for the job, and even then should be terribly weak. Something has to be done, that is evident, and we have to hit upon a plan. Now, let us all set our wits to work." At this moment the black steward came up from the cabin with a bundle.

"The boy am put dese things outside him door, sah. Wat am me to do wid dem?" [Pg 214]

"Bring them along to the galley, Sam. I must get your father to wash them. Pomp," he went on to the cook, "have you got plenty of hot water?"

"Yes, sah; allus hab hot water."

"Well, look here, I want you and Sam to set to work and wash these clothes at once. The boy I brought on board turns out to be a French

girl, the daughter of a planter who is in the hands of the negroes up there. We must see to-morrow what we can do in the way of rigging her out properly, but for to-day we must manage with these things. Get them as white as you can, and then hang them up to dry. I want her on deck again as soon as possible to give us information as to where her friends are confined."

"All right, sah, we soon gets dese clean."

"And you may as well heat up a basin of that turtle-soup we had yesterday. I expect she has had little enough to eat of late."

Then he went back to the quarter-deck.

"It seems to me, sir," Turnbull said, "that if the girl would go ashore with us as a guide, we might succeed. After it gets dark, put me and one of the hands on shore, with a saw and a bottle of oil to make it work noiselessly. Then we could crawl up to this little window by which she got out, and cut away the wood—for no doubt it is a wooden hut—till the hole is large enough for all of them to get out."

"That seems a good plan, Turnbull, certainly; the only drawback is that probably before it gets dark the negroes will have discovered that the boy, as they consider her, has escaped, and will keep a sharp look-out on the others. Then, too, although one or two might get out noiselessly and make their escape, the chances of ten people doing so would be much smaller, and if the attempt were detected you might only share their fate. If we had all the crew close at hand to cover their[Pg 215] retreat it might be managed, great as would be the odds against us, but you see there is this boat attack to be guarded against. I don't think that I could allow you to run such a risk, Turnbull."

"Still, something must be done, sir."

"Yes, we are agreed as to that," Nat said, and going to the rail he stood there gazing at the shore for some minutes.

"I have an idea," he said, suddenly turning round. "You see that point near the mouth of the bay, where the rock rises eight or ten feet straight out from the water's edge; there are trees behind it. It will be a dark night, and if we could get the schooner over there without their noticing it, as I think we could, we could probably lay her pretty close alongside, and when the boats came, the betting is that they would never find her. They would row about for a bit looking for us where we are anchored, and, not finding us, would come to the conclusion that we had got up sail and gone away after dark. In that way we could land our whole party."

"I think that would do first-rate, sir."

"Of course there is a certain amount of risk of their discovering her," Nat went on, "but we must chance that. We will send her topmasts down as soon as it is dark, so that they won't show against the sky-line, and boats might then row within twenty yards of her without noticing her, especially if we can get her in pretty close. It is just possible that we may be able to lay her right against the rock. The water is deep pretty close in, even opposite to us, for the girl was not more than four or five yards from the shore when she was up to her neck in water, and no doubt it is a good deal deeper than that, at the foot of those rocks. As soon as it is dark, Mr. Lippincott, you had better take the boat and sound along there. Of course you will muffle your oars. It would be a great thing if we could get alongside. In the first place, the[Pg 216] nearer she gets in the less likely that she would be to be seen, and in the next place it would be very important, if we are hotly pursued, to be able to get on board without having to use boats."

"Certainly," Turnbull agreed.

"When we have got her in her place," Nat went on, "we will take a light anchor out fifty fathom or so, and put the hawser round the windlass, so that the instant we are on board, four men, told off beforehand, can run forward and set to work. Once we are three yards out we should be safe from boarding, however strong their force may be. We will have the guns on that side loaded with a double charge of grape before we land, and once out we will give them a dose they will remember for a long time. Now, we may as well tell the crew; they will be delighted at the prospect of a fight."

The men were clustered together forward discussing whether anything was likely to take place, for the arrival of the boy, the fact that he had been taken down to the cabin aft and had not reappeared, and the evident anxiety of their officers, sufficed to show them that something unusual was on hand. When they came aft Nat said, "My men, we are about to undertake an enterprise that will, I am sure, be after your own heart. The apparent boy we brought on board is a young French lady. Her parents, sister, and seven white men are in the hands of the negroes, who each day murder one with horrible torture. Now we are going to rescue them."

A cheer broke from the men.

"The job will be a pretty tough one, men, but you won't like it any the worse for that. There are, I hear, two or three hundred of those

murderous brutes up there. Of course, if we can get the prisoners out without a fight we shall do so, but I hardly think we shall be able to manage that. The matter is somewhat complicated by the fact that I hear that a[Pg 217] boat attack is going to be made upon us to-night. Now, we are certainly not strong enough to carry off this party and at the same time to leave enough men on board to defend the schooner. After it is dark, therefore, I intend to take her across to that rock over there, moor her as close to it as I can, and strike the topmasts. In that way we may hope that on a moonless night, as this will be, the boats will not find her, but will suppose that we have sailed away. However, of that we must run the risk. I shall take every man with me. Of course, we shall batten the hatches down, and fasten them so that if they do find her it will give them as much trouble as possible, and we may possibly catch them at work as we return.

"You will, of course, take muskets and a brace of pistols each, and your cutlasses. I have no doubt that we are being watched from the shore, therefore go about your work as usual. Do not gather together talking, or give them any cause to suppose that we are intending to do anything. It is not likely that the escape of the girl has yet been discovered, for if they were watching among the trees up there they would hardly have noticed that the boat took an extra person from the shore. Grease the falls of the gig, so that she can be lowered noiselessly, and muffle the oars. As soon as it is quite dark Mr. Lippincott will take soundings, in order to see how close into the rock it will be safe to take her."

With another low but hearty cheer, expressing the satisfaction they felt at the prospect of a fight with the negroes, the crew went forward again. One of them set to work to grease the falls not only of the gig but of the other boats, in case these should also be required, two others cut up some old guernseys and lashed them round the gig's oars at the point where they would touch the thole-pins, others resumed their occupation of polishing the brass-work, while the rest sat down under the shelter of the bulwark and talked over the adventure on which[Pg 218] they were about to engage. In an hour the girl's clothes were washed and dried. One of the crew who had served as an assistant sail-maker had at once, under Nat's instructions, set to work to sew half a dozen flags together, and with these he had constructed a garment which, if primitive in design, was at least somewhat feminine in appearance.

Round the top was a deep hem through which was run a thin cord. By the aid of this it could be drawn together and gathered in at the neck. Six inches from the top, two of the seams between the flags

were left open, these were for the arm-holes. This primitive pinafore was to be drawn in at the waist by a belt. The man had chosen from among the signal flags those whose colours went best together, and though the result was extremely motley, it was yet a very fair substitute for a dress. The three officers could not help laughing as he brought it aft to show them.

"That is very well contrived, Jenkins," Nat said. "I have no doubt the young lady will greatly prefer it to going about dressed as a boy."

As the clothes were by this time dry, Nat told Sam to take them below with the new garment, to lay them down outside his state-room door, and then to knock and tell the young lady that they were there in readiness for her, and that as soon as she was dressed lunch would be ready. When he had done this he was to come up on deck again. A quarter of an hour later Nat himself went down. The clothes had disappeared, and the girl, who was about thirteen years of age, came out. She had, with the exception of the coat, donned her former garments, and over these had put the flag pinafore. Her arms were covered by those of the light flannel shirt, and the dress hung straight down all round.

"It is a queer-looking thing," he said with a smile, "but it is the best we can manage in the emergency. Here is a belt,[Pg 219] if you strap that round your waist it will make the thing look more comfortable."

The girl smiled wanly. Now that her face and hands were clean, Nat saw that she was a pretty little thing, and would have been prettier had not her hair been cut quite short.

"We are going this evening," Nat went on, "to try to rescue your parents and sister from those black fiends."

She clasped her hands before her.

"Oh, sir, that is good of you!"

"Not at all. You don't suppose that we are going to remain here quietly, knowing that close by there are white people in the hands of those scoundrels. We shall want you to act as our guide. We are going to take a saw with us and cut away the wood round that hole you escaped by, and hope to get your friends out without the negroes seeing us. If they do, so much the worse for them. Now, will you sit down while the steward lays the cloth for lunch?—it will be ready in two or three minutes; then I will bring the other two officers down to introduce them to you." He raised his voice: "Sam! luncheon as soon as possible."

The young negro was expecting the order, and ran in at once with a table-cloth and a plate-basket, and in two or three minutes the table was laid; then he went out and returned with the plates.

"Eberying ready, sah; me bring down de soup when you gib de word."

"Give my compliments to Mr. Turnbull and Mr. Lippincott, and ask them to come down to lunch."

The girl looked anxious and shy as she heard the footsteps coming down the companion, but an expression of relief came over her face as she saw that they were even younger than the officer she had already seen.

"These are my officers, mademoiselle—Mr. Turnbull and [Pg 220] Mr. Lippincott. Their French is not of the best, but you must make allowance for them."

The girl smiled and held out her hand to the two middies. The news that her parents and sister might yet be rescued had already greatly raised her spirits.

"I do look funny, do I not?" she said.

"I am sure you look very nice," Turnbull replied. "It is quite a novelty for us to have a lady on board."

"And are you both going to help bring my friends down?"

"Yes, we are all going. We will get them down, and I hope we shall have a chance of punishing some of the murderous niggers."

"You mean you hope that there will be a fight?" she asked in a tone of surprise, as she took her seat on Nat's right hand.

"That I do," Turnbull said heartily. "There is not a man on board who would not be sorry if we were to get down again without an opportunity of having a slap at the beggars."

"Mr. Turnbull is a very bloodthirsty character," Nat said gravely. "I don't know whether you have in French a history of Jack the Giant Killer?"

"I never saw such a book," she said, looking a little puzzled. "Did he really kill giants?"

"Yes, Jack did; he was wonderful that way. Mr. Turnbull has never been able to find any giants, but he means to take it out of the blacks."

"I am sorry to say, mademoiselle," Turnbull said, "that although when on the quarter-deck our captain's word may be received as gospel, he permits himself a very wide latitude of speech in his own cabin. The fact is, that whatever my disposition may be, I have never yet had any opportunity for performing any very desperate actions, whereas Lieutenant Glover has been killing his enemies by scores, fighting with[Pg 221] wild beasts, attacking pirates in their holds, has been blown up into the air, and rescued ladies from slaughter by the negroes."

The French girl turned her eyes wonderingly towards Nat.

"You need not believe more than you like, mademoiselle," he said with a laugh. "I am afraid that we are all given to exaggerate very much, but Mr. Turnbull is the champion fabricator."

"But is it quite true that you are going to try to get my father and mother and sister away from the negroes?"

"That is quite true," Nat said earnestly. "We are certainly going to try to get them, and I think that we have a good chance of doing so. Much will depend, of course, upon whether we can reach the hut where they are confined before being discovered. You see, we have only twenty-five men, or, counting us all, including the quarter-master, steward, and cook, thirty-one. It is a small force, and though we might bring all the prisoners off in safety if we once got them into our hands, it would be a serious thing if the negroes had time to rally round the hut before we got there. How does it stand, is it surrounded by trees?"

"No, it is at the edge of the forest. There is a large indigo field in front, and it is there most of the negroes are. There may be some in the forest, but I did not see any as I came down here."

"That is good. How many do you say there are?"

"Seven men, without counting my father."

"We will tell eight of the sailors to carry up boarding-pikes, Turnbull. Unfortunately we have no spare firearms. However, boarding-pikes are not bad weapons, and as no doubt only a small portion of the negroes have guns, it will add a good deal to our strength if it comes to a hand-to-hand fight."

"That it will," Turnbull agreed. "That will bring us up to thirty-nine, and thirty-nine whites ought to be able to fight[Pg 222] their way easily enough through this black mob, especially as we shall take them by

surprise, and they won't know how many of us there are."

As soon as it became dark, Lippincott went off in the gig, and returned in half an hour with the news that there were six feet of water at the foot of the rock, and twelve feet ten yards away.

"I think, sir," he said, "that we could get her in within three or four yards of the rock."

"That would do excellently," Nat said. "The carpenter had better set to work at once and nail three planks—we have got some down below fifteen feet long—side by side. Let two of the hands help him. Tell him, if he does not think that it will be stiff enough, to nail one of the spare oars on each plank."

He had learned from the girl that many of the negroes sat up by their fires nearly all night, and that therefore there was no advantage in delaying the landing, and he was anxious to move the schooner as soon as possible, as the boats might appear at any time. Everything was in readiness—the arms had been brought on deck, the muskets and pistols loaded, and as soon as the gangway was knocked together, which did not take many minutes, Lippincott went off in the gig with a long hawser. As soon as he returned and reported that he had fastened it to a tree above the rock, the crew tailed on, and the schooner was noiselessly towed to her place. Another hawser was taken on shore, and she was hauled broadside on until she lay, with only a few inches of water under her keel, within ten feet of the line of rock.

The hatchways had all been securely fastened down, and an old chain was taken round the trunk of a large tree, and its ends shackled round the mainmast. This could be loosed almost instantaneously by the crew when they returned, but[Pg 223] would much increase the difficulty that the negroes would encounter in getting the vessel away if they discovered her. The edge of the rock was but some three feet higher than the rail, and there was therefore no difficulty in ascending the gangway. When all had crossed, this was pulled up and pushed in among the bushes. They followed the shore till they reached the spot at which the girl had come down, as she would more easily find her way from there than from the place where they had landed. Telling the others to follow in single file, Nat took his place with the girl, at their head.

"How far is it?" he said to her in low tones.

"It is just at the top of the hill. We shall be there in less than a quarter of an hour." The sailors had been warned to walk with the

greatest caution, and especially to avoid striking any of their weapons against the trees.

They went slowly, for it was very dark in the forest. Beyond the fact that she had come straight down the hill when she escaped, she could give no information about the way.

"I did not look," she said; "I ran straight down. But I am sure that if we go as straight as we can up from the water, we shall come upon the plantation, and then I shall be able to tell you exactly where the hut is."

Keeping therefore upward, they went on until they reached level ground, and saw by the faint light ahead that they were nearing the edge of the forest. They stepped even more cautiously then until they arrived at the open ground. A dozen great fires blazed in various places in front of them, and they could hear the laughing and talking of the negroes.

"It is more to the right," the girl said. "It is nearly in the corner of the field where you see that fire; that is close to the hut. They always keep a big fire there, and the leaders sleep round it. There are always two negroes on guard in front of the hut." [Pg 224]

"I expect they have got one behind now. Of course they have found out by this time that you have escaped, and they must have known that it could only have been by that window."

Keeping well inside the line of trees, they crept along to the corner of the clearing. The two negroes had been instructed in the part they were to play, and as soon as they got well round behind the house the others halted, and knife in hand they crept through the trees, and then upon their hands and knees crawled forward. The others listened intently. The gabble of voices continued on the other side of the hut, and when a louder yell of laughter than usual broke out they saw a figure appear at one corner and look round, as if anxious to hear what was going on. Suddenly two arms appeared from the darkness behind him. He was grasped by the throat and disappeared suddenly from sight. Two minutes later Sam came through the trees.

"Dat chile no gib de alarm, sah. Can go on now and cut him window."

The carpenter and the man told off to assist him at once ran forward, accompanied by the girl and Nat, who went straight to the little window. He had told her that she must not speak, for her mother or sister might utter a sudden exclamation which would alarm the

sentries on the other side. Putting his face to the window, he said in a low voice, "I pray you be silent, the slightest sound might cost you your lives. We are here to rescue you; your daughter is safe and sound with us. Now we are going to enlarge the window." Low exclamations of delight told him that he was heard.

The carpenter at once set to work, the man with him oiling his saw very frequently; nevertheless it seemed to Nat to make even more noise than usual. Suddenly, however, one of the prisoners began to utter a prayer in a loud voice.[Pg 225]

"That is papa," the girl whispered; "he used to say prayers every night."

"It was a very good idea to begin now," Nat said. "What with the row by the fires, and his voice inside, the guard are not likely to hear the saw."

In ten minutes the window had been enlarged to a point sufficient for a full-sized person to get through.

"Now, madam, will you come first," Nat said. "We will pull you through all right."

One by one the captives were got out. There were still two men left when the door opened, and three or four negroes appeared with blazing brands.

"We have come to fetch one of you out to give us a lillie fun. Bake 'im some ober de fire."

Then he broke off with a shout of astonishment as he saw that the hut was almost untenanted, and he and the others were about to rush forward at the two men still there when Nat thrust his arm through the opening. Two shots cracked out, one after the other. The two leading negroes fell, and the others with a yell of terror rushed out of the hut.

"Quick, for your lives!" he said to the two men, one of whom was already half through the window. "We shall have them all on us in a few minutes."

In a few seconds the men were out, and Nat and the two seamen ran with them to the edge of the wood, to which the other captives had been passed on as soon as they were freed. By this time the air was ringing with yells and shouts.

"Now, men, move along a little farther so as to get a view of the fire, and then we will give them a volley."

The negroes were rushing forward, yelling and shouting, when twenty-five muskets rang out with deadly aim, for the blacks were not more than thirty yards away.

"Load again, lads! that will sicken them for a bit," he [Pg 226] shouted; and indeed the negroes with yells of astonishment and fear had run back, leaving some fourteen or fifteen of their number on the ground.

"Are you all loaded?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Then down the hill you go. Have the three ladies gone on?"

"Yes, sir; the two blacks went down with them."

"Have the Frenchmen got their pikes? That is good; now keep as close as you can together. They are coming up by scores, and will make a rush in a minute or so."

As fast as they could the sailors and the rescued men made their way down the hill, but owing to the thickness of the trees it was impossible to run. They had gone but a short distance when there was an outburst of yells round them, and, looking back, Nat saw a number of blazing brands.

"You had better have kept in the dark," he muttered. "You would not have come so fast, but more of you would go back alive. Don't hurry, men," he said; "take it coolly. Take care of the trees. They are sure to come up to us, for they can see their way; but they won't be in such a hurry when we open fire again."

They were half-way down the hill when he gave the order: "You four men next to me turn round and pick off some of those fellows with torches. The rest halt in case they make a rush."

The four shots were fired one after the other. As many negroes fell.



"FOUR SHOTS WERE FIRED AND AS MANY NEGROES FELL."

"Are you ready, lads? Four more fire!"

The shots had an equal success. Many of the negroes at once took refuge behind trees.

"That will do, men; on you go again! Don't make more noise than you can help. With all that yelling they won't be sure that we have moved."

[Pg 227]

It was not, indeed, until they were down on the shore that the negroes again came up with them. Then they burst out at several points from the trees, being uncertain of the exact course the retreating party had taken.

"Now, keep together in a body, men!" Nat shouted in English, and repeated the same order in French. "March steadily forward. We have got to fight our way through them."

Now that the negroes saw how comparatively small was the number of their foes, they rushed upon them.

"Don't throw away a shot!" Nat shouted. "Now, let them have it!"

The men who had already fired had loaded again, and as the negroes came up, a crackling fire broke out from the little party.

"Now, lads, at them with pistol, cutlass, and pike! We must get through these fellows ahead before others come up."

With a loud cheer the sailors rushed upon the blacks, cutting and thrusting, the men who had been released fighting with desperate fury with their pikes, mad with the thirst for revenge for the horrible atrocities that they witnessed and the thought of the fate they had escaped. Pistols cracked out continually, and it was not long before the negroes lost heart; and the sailors, at Nat's order, flung themselves upon them and cut a way through.

"Straight on now, men! Show them that you can run as well as fight. We shall have a hundred more of them down on us directly."

There was no doubt of this; the yells that rose from the forest and the light of many brands showed that the whole of the negroes were hastening to join their comrades. Nat had previously begged the two officers and the quarter-master not to use their pistols, and he, with them, ran in the rear line. A few only of the negroes pressed closely behind them; the rest,[Pg 228] dismayed by the slaughter that had taken place, awaited the arrival of their comrades.

"Now, turn and let them have both barrels!" Nat said; and the four men, facing round, levelled their pistols, and six of the leading negroes fell, while the others halted at once. "Keep your other pistols," Nat said; "we shall want them at the gangway."

There was a shout of satisfaction as the men in advance caught sight of the schooner. The two negroes had already placed the gangway in position, and had crossed it with the three ladies and Monsieur Pickard, who had accompanied them.

"Over you go, men!" Nat shouted; "they are close behind us."

Most of the men were across when a crowd of blacks came rushing along. Sam and Pomp had taken their station at the taffrail, and as the head of the mob came on their muskets flashed out, and the two leading men fell. Then they opened fire with their pistols, and at the same moment Nat and his three companions discharged their remaining pistols and then ran down the gangway, the sailors having by this time all passed over. The planks were at once pulled on board.

"Now, unshackle the chain and round with the capstan!" Nat shouted. "The rest of you lie down behind the bulwarks."

A moment later the chain was unshackled, and as the capstan rapidly revolved, the schooner's head receded from the shore. Yells of rage broke from the negroes, and a scattered fire of musketry was opened.

"Now, Turnbull, do you and Lippincott each go to a gun, and when we are far enough off for them to bear on those rascals let them have it."

A minute later the bow-gun was fired. It was too near for the shot to spread properly, but it cut a lane through the [Pg 229] crowd, and half a minute later the second gun crashed out. By this time the sailors had all loaded their muskets again.

"Now for a volley!" Nat shouted; "that will finish them; or I am mistaken."

It was indeed decisive, and with yells of rage and pain the negroes darted into the forest behind them. As fast as the guns could be loaded, round after round of grape was fired among the trees. By this time the schooner was close to the kedge; this was hauled up and sail set, but the breeze was so light that the vessel scarcely moved through the water. The guns were again loaded with grape, and a keen watch was kept, as it was possible that the boats might not yet

have arrived, having delayed putting off until it was thought that all on board would be asleep. In the meantime the wounds were examined. None of these was serious. Only a small proportion of the negroes were armed with muskets, and these being among the crowd had for the most part been unable to fire; consequently only one man had been hit in the arm by a ball, while six or eight had received gashes more or less deep from the knives and other weapons of the negroes.

"Even if the boats have not been here," Nat said to Lippincott, "I don't think we shall have any trouble with them; they will have heard our guns, and, I dare say, the musketry firing, and will know that, now we are awake and on our guard, we should probably sink them before they reached us."

Half an hour passed, and then, as they got beyond the shelter of the island, they caught a little breeze, and the schooner began to slip through the water.

Nat called the men from the guns. "I don't think that we shall have any more fighting to-night," he said. "You have all done very well. We have certainly killed three times our own number, and we have successfully carried out the main object of our adventure. I have ordered the steward to serve[Pg 230] out a good ration of rum all round, but I should advise you who have got wounds to keep your share for a few days."

"It won't hurt us, sir," one old sailor said, and three or four other voices were raised in assent.

"I did not suppose that my advice would be taken," Nat said with a laugh to Turnbull, "still, it was as well to give it; and I don't suppose that an extra allowance of grog will go far towards heating their blood."

"Not it," the middy replied; "rum is cheap out here, and I don't suppose that half a bottle would be considered by them as an excessive drink. How are you going to stow our passengers away? Of course we will give up our cabins to the ladies."

"I think the best plan will be for us to turn out altogether, Turnbull; there will be our three state-rooms for the ladies, and the father can sleep on the sofa of the main cabin. We will have a screen put up forward of the steward's cabin, and have cots slung for ourselves there. Of course we will take our meals with them aft. I don't think there are any spare hammocks, and the eight white men must make a shift to sleep on some old sails—it won't be for many days. Well,

Sam, what is it?"

"Supper am ready, sah."

Leaving the quarter-master to take charge of the watch, they went below. They had not expected to see the ladies up, but they were all there.

"Monsieur Pickard, I must introduce myself and my officers."

"It needs no introductions, sir," the Frenchman, a tall, thin man some fifty years of age, said in a broken voice; "my daughter Louise has told me your names, and how good you have been to her. Ah, monsieur, no words can express our obligations to you all! It was not death we feared, but such[Pg 231] a death. Even now we can scarce believe that this is all true, and that we have escaped from those fiends. In the name of my wife and my daughters and myself, I thank you with all my heart for what you have done for us. Little, indeed, did we think, when we helped Louise through that narrow window in order that she might warn you that you were going to be attacked, and with the hope that she might escape from the awful fate that awaited us there, that it would be the means of saving us all. We heard the negroes saying that the schooner was flying the British flag, but we had no idea that she was a vessel of war, thinking it was a small trader they were about to attack. But even had we known it, it would not have raised any hopes in our minds, for we should not have thought that, with so small a force as such a vessel could carry, her commander would think of attacking so great a number of men as, Louise would have told you, had us in their power."

"We are only too glad to have an opportunity of being of service to you and your family, Monsieur Pickard. Indeed, had there been only these two officers and myself on board, I am sure that we should have made an attempt to release you; and should, I have no doubt, have succeeded in doing so without being discovered, as would have been the case to-night, had not they taken it into their heads to come into the hut just at that moment. And now, monsieur, for the sleeping arrangements. My cabin is at the service of madame, those of Mr. Turnbull and Mr. Lippincott, of the young ladies. We shall have cots slung for ourselves elsewhere; that sofa must serve for you, Monsieur Pickard. To-morrow, madame, we will place at your disposal whatever there is on board the ship for fabricating dresses for your daughters that will be less striking than that now worn by Mademoiselle Louise. We have a roll of white duck, from which, I have no doubt, they will be able to contrive a couple of white dresses." For the eldest girl, as well as[Pg 232] Louise, was in boy's

clothes, as the Pickards had fortunately had warning before the outbreak took place on their plantation, one of the men with them having overheard what was said at a meeting of the negroes, and in consequence they, the overseers, two white superintendents of the indigo works, a carpenter and mechanic, had during the night taken to the woods, Madame Pickard dressing her daughters in some clothes that they had in store, and which were cut down to fit them.

"And now, ladies," Nat went on, "I know that you will above all things be longing for bed, but I hope that you will each take a basin of soup and a glass of wine before you turn in, you must need them sorely. The steward will get your cabins ready for you. I am sure that Mademoiselle Louise will set you a good example; she recovered her appetite as soon as she learned that we intended to get you out."

CHAPTER XIII

TWO CAPTURES

The meal was a very short one, but the ladies, to please their rescuers, took a few spoonfuls of soup and a glass of wine. Madame Pickard and her elder daughter were too much worn out by anxiety and emotion to talk, Monsieur Pickard was no less moved, and the conversation was supported entirely by the three officers and Louise. The young men hurried through their meal, and then, saying good-night to the others, went up on deck.

"Well, never did a thing turn out better," Nat said as he lit his pipe; "it is a tremendous satisfaction that we have not lost a single man in the affair." [Pg 233]

"And it is no less a satisfaction," Turnbull said, "that we have given a good many of those black brutes their deserts. It was a good fight for a bit."

As they were smoking, the seven white men came up in a body.

"We could not lie down, monsieur," one of them said, "till we had come to thank you for saving us from the most frightful deaths. We had given up all hopes even of obtaining a weapon and putting an end to ourselves, which we should certainly have done could we have got hold of a knife, after having been obliged to witness the tortures of two of our comrades. Had you been but ten minutes later another of us would have been their victim. Ah, monsieur! your voice, when you spoke at the window, seemed like that of an angel who had come to our relief."

"How long had you been in the woods?" Nat asked.

"Six weeks, monsieur, before the negroes found us. We had carried off some provisions with us, but these were all consumed, and we were obliged to go down to the plantation to search for food. We suppose that we were seen and followed, and the next night we were surrounded by the band you saw."

"Well, we are all very glad to have got you out of their hands, and you rendered good service when the blacks came down on us."

"We had our revenge to take," the man said, "and not one of us but would have fought until he was killed."

"You have had something to eat, I hope?"

"Yes, thank you, sir."

"You had better turn in now. I don't suppose you have had much sleep of late."

"Poor beggars," Turnbull said as the men walked away, "I wonder myself that they did not strangle each other, or hang themselves, or something. I am sure I should have done so[Pg 234] rather than wait day after day till my turn came to be burnt alive, or to be cut to pieces gradually, or put to death by any other means of slow torture."

"Yes, Turnbull, if one were quite sure that there was no possible hope of rescue or escape; but I suppose a man never does quite give up hope. This was an example, you see, of the unlikely happening."

"What are you going to do next, Glover?"

"I don't know, I have hardly thought it out yet. You see, we can manage with this lot we have on board without much difficulty, and I don't know that I should be justified in going round to Cape François on purpose to land them. So far we have not been able to bring any news of value, and at any rate I think we might as well cruise about here a little longer. There is one thing, if we should fall in with anyone bigger than ourselves and have to fight for it, those fellows who have just gone below will be a valuable addition to our strength. When it comes to a hand-to-hand fight seven stout fellows might turn the scale."

"Yes, there is something in that, and I am glad you mean to keep them on board for a bit. I think the girls will be very good fun when they have a little got over what they have gone through. The young

one is a jolly little thing and her sister is very pretty, in spite of her short hair and boy's dress, though one had not much opportunity of forming an idea as to whether she had any fun in her."

"I fancy it will be some time before she will feel inclined for a flirtation, Turnbull," Nat laughed. "What she has gone through, and what she has seen in the way of horrors, is enough to damp a girl's spirits for a very long time."

In the morning the ladies did not appear at breakfast.

"My wife is completely prostrated," Monsieur Pickard said, "and the two girls are shy and do not like showing themselves[Pg 235] until they have made up a couple of dresses. Your steward gave them the roll of white cotton early this morning and needles and thread, and both are very hard at work. I hope you will excuse them, they will come out and have breakfast here after we have done. May I ask where we are sailing now?"

"We are sailing east, monsieur. I hope that it will not inconvenience you to be a few days on board. My orders are to cruise up and down the coast, and I wish therefore to go east as far as the boundary between the French and Spanish portions of the island; after that I can go round into the bay of Hayti and land you at Port-au-Prince or Cape François, whichever you would prefer."

"It will make no difference whatever to us, and indeed I am sure that a cruise on your beautiful little ship will be the very best thing for my wife and daughters. They will have perfect rest and sea air, and it will not be necessary for them to tell over and over again the stories of their sufferings; but I lament that we should be putting you to such personal inconvenience."

"I can assure you, monsieur, that you are putting us to no inconvenience whatever. We sleep just as well in our cots as in our berths, and the society of the ladies and yourself will be a very great pleasure to us, for as a rule we have very small opportunity in that way."

"You speak our language very fluently, Monsieur Glover."

"I am afraid that I speak it more fluently than grammatically. I had the opportunity of picking it up by ear last year, when I was staying for six weeks at the house of Monsieur Duchesne at Cape François."

"We know him well, and his charming wife and daughter," Monsieur Pickard said, "for we have a house there, and generally go there for three months every winter. Can it be that[Pg 236] you are the

officer who saved their daughter's life, when she was attacked by a fierce hound?"

"Yes, I had that good fortune."

"I fear that they have fallen in this terrible insurrection. We have had no direct news from Cape François, but we heard that in their district all the plantations have been destroyed and the owners murdered."

"I am happy to be able to tell you that they were saved. I was staying there at the time when the revolt broke out. We were warned just in time by an old nurse, Dinah."

"I remember her," Monsieur Pickard broke in, "a tall old woman."

"Yes, Monsieur Duchesne himself was in town, and madame, Myra, and I had just time to gain the forest. There we were joined by Dinah, who did everything for us. Madame was attacked by fever, but fortunately Dinah knew of a very safe place of refuge. She did everything for us, fetched up provisions, concocted medicine, and after being ten days in hiding, we were able to get them down to the town."

Both the midshipmen had a fair knowledge of French, though they were not able to speak it with Nat's ease and fluency. When the latter had finished, Turnbull broke in:

"Mr. Glover does not tell you, monsieur, that the cave they were in was attacked by six negroes, led by two mulattoes, and he shot them all, nor that he and the nurse carried Madame Duchesne down in a litter some twenty miles to the town, although he had one of his ribs broken by a pistol shot."

"What is the use of talking about that?" Nat said angrily. "The thing was done and there was an end of it. There has been a lot too much said about it as it is."

Monsieur Pickard smiled. "Monsieur Glover is like my daughters at present, he is shy. He should not be so. It is [Pg 237] right that we, his friends,—for we are his friends, now and for the rest of our lives,—should know what he is. Ah, my wife and the girls will be pleased indeed to hear that their friends have escaped! They have often said how sorry they were that they had not seen the young officer who rescued their friend Myra from the dog. It is strange indeed that he should afterwards have saved her and her mother from the negroes, and should now have so rescued us."

That evening the girls appeared on deck in snowy-white dresses,

simply made, but fitting admirably. "We have always been accustomed to cut out our own dresses," Valerie said, laughing, when Nat complimented her on the work. "The slaves did the sewing, but we fitted each other. Of course at Cape François we had our dresses made for us, but on the plantation we were obliged to trust to ourselves."

One morning, three days later, as they were at breakfast, Nat stopped as he was raising a cup to his lips. "That is a gun!" he exclaimed. "There is another!" and with the two middies he ran up on deck. "There is a fight going on somewhere," he said as the sound of firing was again heard. "It must be six or seven miles away, somewhere beyond that headland. At any rate we will hold on and have a look at them. With this light wind it will take us from an hour and a half to two hours before we are up with them, so we may as well finish our breakfast in comfort."

"What is it, Monsieur Glover! Are those noises really the sound of guns?"

"There is no doubt about it. There is a fight going on seven or eight miles away. We should hear the sound more plainly were it not that there is a headland between us and the vessels engaged."

"Who can they be?" Madame Pickard said.

"A pirate and a merchantman, no doubt. None of the [Pg 238] European nations are at war, but the seas swarm with piratical craft of one kind or another. The small ones content themselves with plundering native coasting vessels, the larger ones attack ships from or to Europe. The *Orpheus*, to which I belonged at that time, last year rooted out one of their worst nests. They had no fewer than four ships. We were lucky enough to catch one of them, and learned where the rendezvous was, and fortunately found the other three at home, and destroyed them and their storehouses."

"Are you going on in that direction now?" Valerie asked.

"Yes, we are going to have a look at them. If the trader is making a good fight of it, our arrival may turn the scale; if we arrive too late and find the enemy too big for us, we can run away; in a light wind like this there are very few vessels that could catch us. It is probable that we should not interfere were it not for the possibility that we may be in time to save some of the passengers and crew of the merchantman. She must be a vessel of some size, judging from the sound of her guns. Even if she has surrendered before we get there, and we find that we are in any way a match for the pirate, we might, after

defeating her, save at least some of the captives. As a rule, these scoundrels, when all opposition has ceased, confine the prisoners in the hold, and after emptying the prize of everything valuable, scuttle her, and of course drown all on board. In that way all traces of their crime are lost, whereas if they killed them some of the bodies might float inshore, or if they burnt the ship the smoke might bring down any cruiser that happened to be in the neighborhood.

"I am sorry that you are on board, ladies."

"Oh, do not think of us!" Madame Pickard exclaimed. "After the wonderful deliverance that we have had, I am sure that none of us would mind any risk if there is a chance of saving others in as dire peril as we were."[Pg 239]

The two girls and Monsieur Pickard warmly agreed. "Please put us altogether out of consideration," the latter said. "Even if we knew that it was probable we should all lose our lives we should not hesitate. We are not, I hope, any of us, afraid of death. It was the kind of death that we were terrified at."

"I thank you all," Nat said gravely. "I shall not fight unless I think that there is at any rate a fair chance of victory."

On going on deck when breakfast was finished, Nat ordered the magazine to be opened and ammunition brought up. The wind had freshened a little, and the schooner was going faster through the water; and in three quarters of an hour after hearing the first gun they neared the promontory.

"I am afraid it is all over," Nat said to the ladies, who had also come on deck; "there has not been a gun fired for the past two or three minutes. However, we shall soon see."

On rounding the point they saw two vessels lying side by side, a mile and a half distant, and about a mile from shore. One was a barque, evidently a large merchantman; the other a brigantine. There was no question that the latter was a pirate, and the other her prize. The sailors, after a glance at them, turned their eyes anxiously towards Nat for orders. The latter stood quietly examining the ships through his glass.

"She mounts five guns a side, and I should say that they are about the same weight as our own," he said to Turnbull; "and from the men swarming on her deck and that of her prize she must have nearly, if not quite, three times our strength, even counting the Frenchmen in."

"She is too big to fight squarely, sir," Turnbull reluctantly agreed. "I

am afraid she is altogether too tough a customer for us; and yet one hates the thought of leaving them to complete their devil's work on their prize." [Pg 240]

"Yes, we can't think of doing that, Mr. Turnbull. The first thing to do will be to draw them off from her."

"But they would be sure to leave some of their men in possession of her."

"Well, if they do, there will be so many the fewer for us to fight. We are within a mile now, I should say?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then train the two forward guns on them, and let them see that we mean fighting."

A cheer broke from the sailors clustered round the guns as Turnbull gave the order.

"Now, ladies," Nat said, "you can stop to see the effect of our first shot, and then I must ask you to go down on to the lower deck. Sam will show you the way and take some cushions down for you; you will be out of danger there."

As he spoke, the two guns which were already loaded were fired, and the men gave a cheer as two white patches appeared on the side of the brigantine.

"Please hurry down, ladies," Nat said, checking the entreaty which he saw they were going to make. "It won't be long before they answer us."

"Give them another round, lads!" he said, as they reluctantly obeyed his orders. "Get them in if you can before he is ready."

Busy as they were, the pirates had not observed the schooner until her guns were fired. With shouts of alarm they ran back to their own ship, but these were succeeded by exclamations of anger and surprise when they saw how small was the craft that had thus intruded into the affair. By the captain's orders twenty of the crew, under his first mate, returned to the deck of the prize; a portion of the men ran to the guns, others threw off the grapnels fastening them to the prize. Before they were ready to fire, two more shots from the schooner crashed into [Pg 241] the brigantine, one passing through the bulwarks, killing three men and wounding several others with the splinters. The other struck her within a few inches of the water-line.

The schooner came at once bore up, discharging the guns on the starboard side as she came round, and laying her course as close to the wind as she could be jammed, showed her stern to the pirate. Two of his guns forward were fired, others could not be brought to bear. The Arrow was now almost retracing her course, for the wind was west-nor-west, and she could just follow the line of coast.

"Here they come after us!" Turnbull said, rubbing his hands, "as savage as bees whose hive has been disturbed."

"Now, Mr. Turnbull, get the two guns right aft, so as to fire over the taffrail. We must see if we cannot knock some of her spars away. As soon as you have moved the guns let all hands, except those serving them, go forward and lie down there. The weight of the guns will put her rather by the stern, and I don't want to let that fellow come any nearer to us. She is in her best trim now."

As soon as the guns were ready they opened fire. The brigantine answered with her bow-chaser, but, as she was obliged to yaw each time she brought it to bear, she presently ceased firing.

"We are gaining on her, sir," Lippincott said, as he watched the pirate through his glass.

"Yes, and sailing fully a point nearer to the wind than she does. Get a stay-sail fastened to a rope, and drop it over close to the bow. I don't want to run away from her. If she found that we were too fast for her she would give up the chase, and go back to the prize. I want her to gain just enough to encourage her to keep on. She is a fast craft, but we are faster. We shall be able to manage her, providing she does not knock away any of our spars." [Pg 242]

The start the schooner had made had at first widened the distance between them, and there was now a mile and a quarter of water separating them. The brigantine was hulled several times and her sails pierced, but her spars were still intact. She was permitted to gain until she was little more than half a mile astern, but the schooner had weathered on her, and was now nearly half a mile to windward.

"If we had an open sea on this side instead of the land," Turnbull said, "and were to cut away that sail, they would not see us again."

"No; they must have come to the same conclusion. As it is, they no doubt think that our clawing out to windward is of no advantage to us. Now, get another gun over to the larboard side. It is lucky that there is a spare port there. We must make an effort to knock one of his spars out, or he may cripple us." For by this time the brigantine had again

opened fire. "Let the three best shots we have got lay the guns on her mainmast. Tell them to train them rather high, so that if they miss the mark they may cut one of the halyards, which will give us all the start we want."

The guns were run into their position on the broadside. "Don't hurry over it," Nat said; "let each fire as his gun comes to bear." There was a crash and a cry as he spoke; a ball had gone through the Arrow from side to side, tearing jagged holes through her bulwarks, one of the sailors being struck to the deck by a splinter. No one spoke, every eye being fixed on the guns. These were fired almost together. There was a pause for a second or two, and then a burst of cheering as the gaff of the great mainsail of the brigantine was seen to collapse.

"It is hit close to the jaws," Turnbull, whose glass was levelled on the pirates, exclaimed.

"Cut away that sail in the water!" Nat shouted. "Up[Pg 243] with your helm, men, and bring her round. That is right," he went on as the schooner came up into the wind and payed off on the other tack. "Now, slack away her sheets!"

Three guns were vengefully fired by the pirate, but the sudden change in the schooner's position disconcerted their aim, and the shot flew wide. Without waiting for orders, the seamen at two of the guns ran them over to the starboard side, and, all working at the highest pressure, poured shot after shot into the brigantine, which answered but slowly, as numbers of the men had run aloft to get the sail down to repair damages. Before she was under way again the schooner had left her a mile behind. She was now on her best point of sailing, while the brigantine was to some extent crippled by the mainsail setting badly, and by the time the headland was again passed the schooner was fully two miles ahead. Her crew had for some time been puzzled at the action being so abruptly concluded, and Turnbull had even ventured to say:

"I should think, sir, we should have a fair chance with her now."

"Not a very good chance. We have been lucky, but with ten guns to our four, and her strong crew of desperate men, she would be a very awkward customer. We can think of her later on. My plan is to retake the prize before she can come up. It is not likely that they have killed the crew yet, and I expect the captain told those left behind to leave things as they were until he returned. We may scarcely be a match for the brigantine, but the prize and we together should be able to give a good account of ourselves."

"Splendid, sir!" Turnbull exclaimed joyously; "that is a grand idea."

"Have the guns loaded with grape," Nat said quietly, "and run two of them over to the other side. We will go outside the prize, bring our craft up into the wind, and shoot her up[Pg 244] inside her, and give them one broadside and then board. Tell the men to have their pistols and cutlasses ready, and distribute the boarding-pikes among the Frenchmen."

As soon as they rounded the point they could see by their glasses that there was a sudden commotion on the deck of the merchantman.

"They did not expect to see us back first," Lippincott laughed.

"Even now, I should think, they are expecting to see the brigantine close behind us in chase, and don't suspect what we are up to. Don't head straight for her," he said to the helmsman, "take us a couple of lengths outside her."

The pirates, indeed, were completely deceived, but when at last they saw that the brigantine did not appear, they ran over to the guns. It was, however, too late. Two or three of these were discharged as the schooner passed, but beyond making holes in her sails no damage was done, and one of the schooner's guns poured in a volley of grape. When she was two or three lengths ahead her helm was put hard down. She flew round and just caught the wind on the other tack, gliding up alongside the merchantman, the three guns being discharged in succession as the two vessels touched.

The grapnels were thrown, and the sailors and Frenchmen leapt on to her deck headed by the three officers. Nearly half the pirates had been killed or wounded by the four discharges of grape. The remainder made but a poor fight of it, and were cut down to a man.

"Off with the hatches, men!" Nat shouted. "Run down and release the crew."

He himself ran aft into the saloon. Here six gentlemen and eight or ten ladies were lying bound hand and foot. Several of the men were wounded. Nat at once cut the cords.

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"You are safe," he said. "The ship has been retaken by his majesty's schooner *Arrow*, but we have not done with the brigantine yet, and any of you who have weapons and can use them may lend a hand."

Without waiting to listen to the chorus of cries of gratitude, he ran out again. A minute later a number of seamen poured up on deck. Many of them were wounded.

"How many are there of you?" he asked an officer among them.

"There are thirty of us," he said; "we had lost nearly half our crew before they boarded us. The captain was killed early in the fight, as was the first officer."

"Well, sir, set your men to load the guns at once. There is the brigantine just coming round the point. Monsieur Pickard, will you remain here with your party and help the sailors? Get your sails sheeted home, sir!" he went on to the ship's officer. "Is your vessel a fast one?"

"Yes, but she is not so fast as that brigantine."

"That is of no consequence," Nat said. "Get every sail you can on her. Now get twenty of our men on board again, Mr. Lippincott, and on second thoughts I will take five of the Frenchmen. Mr. Turnbull, you will remain on board in command of this ship with the other five of our men. My endeavour will be to knock away one of her masts. Do you keep as close as you can to us, and we will board her together, one on each side. If she knocks away one of our spars, I shall as far as possible come back to meet you, and if she follows us we will fight her together."

"I understand, sir."

"The moment we push off, get your head sails aback and put her on the wind so as to get out of our way. I shall fill her off on the other tack and then come round and join you. We will keep together until we see whether she means[Pg 246] to fight or run. Remember, the great thing is to knock a spar out of her."

So saying, he leapt on to the deck of the schooner, and Turnbull's voice was at once heard shouting the order, "Haul aft the weather sheets of the jibs;" and in a minute the two vessels were gliding away from each other on opposite tacks. Then the *Arrow* was brought round and followed the *Thames*, which was the name of the merchantman. The brigantine was now three quarters of a mile away. Suddenly she was seen to change her course. As she wore round she presented her broadside to the two vessels, and her five guns puffed out together. The reply, both from the merchantman and the *Arrow*, followed almost simultaneously, and a cheer rang out from both ships as the pirate's bowsprit was seen to snap off.

"Place yourself two or three cables' length from his larboard quarter," Nat shouted.

Turnbull, who had leapt on to the rail to see the result of the broadside, waved his hand.

"Down topsails!" Nat shouted, "she will be handier without them."

In a moment the two great sails came fluttering down. Turnbull followed the example, and the men ran up the ratlines and furled some of the upper sails. Deprived of her head sails, the pirate was unmanageable, and the two vessels speedily ran up and laid themselves a couple of hundred yards from his quarters and opened a steady fire. The pirates endeavoured to drag two of their guns right aft, but the volleys of grape poured into them were too much for them, and although their captain was seen to shoot two of the men, the rest ran forward. The helmsman deserted his now useless post.

"Give her one more broadside," Nat shouted to Turnbull, "and then run in and board."



"THE CAPTAIN OF THE PIRATES SHOOK HIS FIST IN DEFIANCE."

The captain of the pirates, mad with rage, leapt on to the[Pg 247]

taffrail and shook his fist in defiance. At that moment two rifles cracked out from the merchantman, and he fell forward into the sea. The effect of the storm of grape from the three guns of the schooner, and the four from the trader, among the men huddled up in the bow of the pirate was terrible, but knowing that their lives were forfeited if they were taken prisoners, none made a movement aft to haul down the black flag that still floated from the peak. In two or three minutes their antagonists were alongside; a volley of musketry was poured in, and then the crews of both ships leapt on to the deck. The pirates, who were now reduced to about thirty men, rushed to meet them, determining to sell their lives dearly. But the odds were against them; they missed the voice of their captain to encourage them, and when twenty of their number had fallen, the remainder threw down their arms.

"Let no man stir a foot to go below," Nat shouted, remembering the explosion in the pirate's hold, and fearing that one of them might make straight for the magazine. He had not used his pistols in the fight, and now stood with one in each hand pointing threateningly to enforce the order.

"Mr. Lippincott, take four men below and close and securely fasten the magazine."

The middy ran down, and returned in two or three minutes to report that he had executed the order.

"Tie those fellows' feet and hands," Nat said, "and carry them down into the hold."

When this was done he was able to look round. The deck was a perfect shambles. The brigantine, as he afterwards heard, carried originally eighty hands. Ten of these had been either killed or seriously wounded in the fight with the *Thames*, and twenty had been killed on board that barque when she was retaken. Forty lay dead or dying on the deck. One of the Frenchmen had fallen, six of the sailors and three Frenchmen had [Pg 248] been severely wounded, Turnbull somewhat seriously wounded, and Lippincott slightly. Monsieur Pickard, and the male passengers on board the *Thames*, had all joined the boarders.

Two of them had previously done good service with their rifles. Had not the pirate leader been killed, the fight would have been even more desperate. One of the passengers was, fortunately, a surgeon. He at once set to work attending to the sailors' wounds, and after he had bandaged them he examined those of the pirates. These had for

the most part been killed outright, and of the wounded there were but four or five with any prospect of recovery. These he first attended to, while the other passengers carried water to the dying men.

"Now, my lads," Nat said, "clear the decks of the dead, and get up an awning and carry those who are alive into the shade."

All the dead pirates were thrown over without ceremony, the body of the Frenchman being laid down by his compatriots by one of the guns for proper burial in the evening. As soon as the fight was over, Monsieur Pickard—who, after the capture of the *Thames*, had gone below to assure his wife and daughters that all was going on well, and that they had saved nine ladies and six gentlemen from the hands of the pirates—hurried down with the welcome news that the fight was over and the brigantine captured.

"You can go up to the cabin," he said, "but don't come on deck till I come down and tell you that everything has been made clean and tidy. You will be glad to hear that, although we have several wounded, François Amond is the only man that has been killed."

One of the passengers of the *Thames* had carried similar news to the ladies there. The crews of both were at once set to work to wash decks, and in an hour the holy-stones had obliterated the worst signs of the conflict, though it would require many more scrubblings before the stains of blood entirely disappeared. All this time the vessels had remained side by side, and the ladies now ventured on to the decks of the *Thames* and *Arrow*.

"What do you intend to do, sir?" one of the passengers asked Nat.

"I shall sail at once for Jamaica," he said. "We shall want some more hands, and I must at present borrow a few from you, for my own men are not sufficiently strong to navigate my own craft and the prize. The wind is favourable, and if it holds as it is we shall be at Kingston in forty-eight hours, so there will be no great loss of time."

He then crossed to the *Arrow*.

"I must congratulate you most heartily on your success," Madame Pickard said. "It is wonderful indeed that you should have taken both these vessels. The pirate ship is, I should think, three times as big as you are, and the other looks a giant by her side."

"Yes, she is six hundred tons, and the brigantine is about three hundred. However, it has all gone very fortunately. In the first place, we have rescued some fifteen gentlemen and ladies, and twice as

many seamen, from the death that they would certainly have met with; and in the next place, we have thrashed this pirate; we shall get both credit and prize-money, and a good sum for the recapture of the *Thames*, which the chief officer has just told me carries a very valuable cargo. Lastly, I am happy to say that, although several of the crew are injured, I have not lost a single life among them. I am sorry that one of your men fell in the fight."

"But they have sadly spoiled the appearance of your ship," Valerie Pickard said. "There are three or four great holes along the side, and a ball has gone through your cabin, and the sails, which were so white and pretty, have lots of holes in them." [Pg 250]

"Yes, we shall want a good many new cloths," he said; "but that is a very minor matter."

"Monsieur Turnbull is hurt, I hear!"

"Yes, madame; happily it is not very serious—a blow which he only partly parried struck him on the shoulder. It looks a very serious wound, but the doctor says there is no need for any great uneasiness about him; and being seriously wounded in action has its advantages, as it always counts towards promotion. Mr. Lippincott has had one of his ears nearly slashed off, and is not pretty to look at at present, with his head done up in bandages, but the surgeon thinks that, as it was attended to so soon, it is likely that it will heal up."

"And you have escaped altogether, Monsieur Glover?" Louise said.

"Yes, for once I have had good luck. Hitherto I have always come out of a fight more or less damaged; this time I have escaped without a scratch."

"I should feel very proud if I were you," the girl said, "at having done so much with such a small ship—and you so young, too! Why, you do not look more than a year or two older than Valerie, and you have rescued us and all the people on the other ship, and taken a pirate and the vessel they had captured. It seems almost impossible. And you look so quiet and nice, too."

"Louise, you should not talk like that," her mother corrected.

Nat said gravely:

"Mademoiselle, do you know that you are talking to the commander of one of his majesty's ships on his own quarter-deck, where he is, as it were, the monarch of all he surveys, and might inflict

all sorts of terrible punishments upon you for your want of respect?"

The girl laughed merrily.

"I am not afraid," she said, "not one little bit, and I don't[Pg 251] see why you should mind being told that you are young and quiet-looking and nice, when you are."

"I do not mind in the least," he said, "and certainly I am young; but I can assure you that my former captain would not tell you that I was quiet, for I had the reputation of being the most troublesome middy on board his frigate. But, you see, responsibility has sobered me, and I can assure you that there is a great deal of responsibility in commanding a small craft like this, which has nothing but her speed and her luck to rely on if she happens to fall in with a strongly-armed vessel."

"How can you say that, monsieur," Valerie said indignantly, "when you have taken this pirate, which is ever so much stronger than you are?"

"There may be a little good management in it, but more luck, mademoiselle. If one of his shot had damaged me instead of one of mine damaging him, we should all have had our throats cut two hours ago."

"I don't believe it," she said. "I believe that you would have beaten him anyhow."

"Ladies very often think what they wish," he said with a laugh, "and no doubt we should have fought to the last; but I can assure you that we should have had no chance with them, and the best I could have done for you would have been to have fired the last shot of my pistol into the magazine."

"Please don't talk about it," Madame Pickard said with a shudder. "And now I suppose that you have had fighting enough, and are going to carry us quietly into port?"

"Yes, madame, to Jamaica; but if you would prefer to be landed at Cape François or Port-au-Prince I shall be happy to give you a passage back again."

"We do not want to go there at all, but my husband will go to wind up his affairs, and sell his house there. We have been talking it over, and agree that we should never like to[Pg 252] go back to the estate again. Even if things did quiet down the memories are too terrible; and, besides, having once broken out, the blacks might do so again

at any time."

"I think you are perfectly right, madame; but I am afraid you will not get much for your estate."

"My husband thinks that, although no white man would buy it, there are plenty of mulattoes who would give, not its real value, but a certain amount, for it. Many of them are rich men who have already large plantations. Ours was one of the most valuable on the island, and with the title from us a purchaser would not be afraid of being disturbed when the soldiers arrive and put down the insurrection; while, even if this should never be done, the negroes, with whom the mulattoes are now friends, would not interfere with him. My husband thinks that perhaps he will get a third of its value, which would be sufficient to keep us all comfortably in France, or wherever we may settle; but our best resource is that we have the whole of last season's produce stored in our magazines at Port-au-Prince."

It was not until the next afternoon that the absolutely necessary repairs to the three vessels were completed, the holes near the water-line covered by planks over which pitched canvas was nailed, the ropes shot away replaced by new ones, and the brigantine's gaff repaired. Then sail was hoisted again, and the three vessels set sail for Kingston, where they arrived on the evening of the third day after starting. No little excitement was caused in the harbour when the *Arrow*, with her sails and sides bearing marks of the engagement, sailed in, followed by the brigantine flying the British ensign over the black flag, and the *Thames* with the same flags, but with the addition of the merchant ensign under the black flag, following her. There were two or three ships of war in the port, and the crews saluted the *Arrow* with hearty cheers.[Pg 253] The flag-ship at once ran up the signal for her commander to come on board, and, leaving Lippincott to see to the operation of anchoring, Nat ordered the gig to be lowered, and, taking his place in it, was rowed to the flag-ship.

CHAPTER XIV

THE ATTACK ON PORT-AU-PRINCE

On mounting to the deck Nat was at once taken to the admiral's cabin.

"So you have been disobeying orders, Lieutenant Glover," he said gravely.

"I hope not, sir. I am not conscious of disobeying orders."

"I fancy you were directed not to engage more heavily-armed craft than your own."

"I was, sir, but the circumstances were peculiar."

"I never knew a midshipman or a young lieutenant, Mr. Glover, who did not find the circumstances peculiar when he wanted to disobey orders. However," he added with a smile, "let me hear the peculiar circumstances, then I shall be able to judge how far you were justified. Give them in full. Have you a written report?"

"Yes, sir, I have brought it with me," Nat said, producing the document.

"Well, lay it down on the table. I don't suppose it is very full, and I am somewhat curious to hear how you brought in a pirate brigantine and a recaptured merchantman—so I understood your flags."

Nat related how he had heard the sound of guns on rounding a headland, and had seen the brigantine lying by the side of the barque she had evidently just captured; how he drew (Pg 254) her off in pursuit of the schooner, partially crippled her, returned and retook the *Thames*, released her crew, placed Mr. Turnbull in command, and how, between them, they had captured the brigantine.

"A very smart action," the admiral said cordially when he had brought the narrative to a conclusion. "It does you very great credit, and fully justifies my appointing you to an independent command. What metal does the brigantine carry?"

"Five guns each side, all twelve-pounders like my own."

"And you have only four?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good indeed, very good! By the way, do you know any of the passengers on board the *Thames* personally? I observed three ladies on the deck as you came in. I should have thought that they would have had very much better accommodation on the trader than on board your little craft."

"Yes, sir; but they were on board the *Arrow* before our fight with the brigantine, and although the first mate of the *Thames* offered them a state cabin they preferred to stay on board, as it was such a short run here."

"Who are they, then?"

"They are refugees, sir. I got them out of the hands of the negroes—three ladies, the husband of the elder one, and seven other white men."

"Is there any story attached to it, Mr. Glover? Let me see, what do you say about it in your report?" and he opened it and read aloud:

I have the honour, sir, to report that, learning there was a white family in the hands of the negroes, I landed with a party and brought them off. They consisted of Monsieur and Madame Pickard and their two daughters, and seven of their white employees. Casualties—eight seamen wounded, none of them seriously.

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"Then comes the account of the other affair. Now, please give me the details of this rescue business as minutely as possible."

This Nat did.

"A very risky business, Mr. Glover, though I don't see how you could have acted in any other way. No British officer, I hope, could have been deaf to such an appeal; but if those boats had found the schooner when you all were away, your position would have been well-nigh desperate."

"It would, sir, I quite felt that, but it seemed to me the only possible thing to do. Of course, if I had known that the boats would have come early in the evening, I should have remained on board and beat them off before making a landing, although our chances of success would then have been much smaller. The party who were to attack in the boats were to have been composed of men from the plantation. Their comrades would doubtless have come down to the shore to see us captured, and when they saw their friends beaten off they would have been on the watch, and not improbably, in their fury and disappointment, have massacred all the captives in their hands at once. But I thought it likely that the boats would not put off before they believed us to be asleep, and that I should therefore have time to go up to the plantation and fetch the captives down before they arrived. At any rate, by moving the schooner close inshore I hoped that the boats might not find her. There was no moon, and under the shadow of the rock it was next to impossible to see her, unless a boat happened to pass within a few paces. Having struck the topmasts, the forest behind on steep ground prevented the masts from showing

above the sky-line. It was, of course, the choice of two evils, and I took the one that seemed to me to give the greater promise of success."

"You did excellently, the oldest officer in the service could [Pg 256] not have done better. I shall be obliged if you will write as full and detailed an account of both affairs as you have given me. I shall send it home with your official report, and with my own remarks upon them. And now about the merchantman; she looks a fine barque. What is her tonnage?"

"Six hundred tons, sir. She is a nearly new vessel, and sails fast for a ship of that kind. Her first mate told me that she has a very valuable cargo on board, principally, I think, tobacco, sugar, coffee, wax, copper, mahogany, and cedar from Cuba. Her passengers are all Spanish."

"She seems to be a valuable prize, and as recaptured from the pirates there will be a handsome sum to be divided, and it is fortunate for you and your officers that the little craft was commissioned independently, not as a tender to one of the frigates. As it is, except the flag's share, it will all fall to yourselves and your crew. How many men have you lost?"

"None at all, sir; though, as you will see by my report, in the two affairs the greater part of them received more or less severe wounds. Mr. Turnbull was somewhat severely wounded, Mr. Lippincott nearly lost an ear, and I escaped altogether."

"Well, it was your turn, Lieutenant Glover. You have come back three times more or less severely hurt already. You say that the brigantine is fast?"

"Yes, sir. She is not so fast as the schooner in a light wind, nor so weatherly, but in anything like strong winds I have no doubt that she would overhaul us."

"Was there anything in her hold?"

"There are a good many bales and cases, sir. I have not opened them, but by their marks they come from three different ships, which she had no doubt captured and sunk before we fell in with her. I questioned one of the prisoners, and he told me that it was only a month since she came out, and he declared that they had not yet chosen any place as their head[Pg 257]-quarters. As others questioned separately told the same story, I imagine that it was true."

"Where did she hail from?"

"She came from Bordeaux. They said that she had taken out letters of marque to act as a privateer in case of war breaking out with us, but I fancy that she was from the first intended for a pirate, for it seems that she had only forty hands when she started, and picked up the others at various French ports at which she touched before sailing west. I should say, from the appearance of her crew, that they are composed of the sweepings of the ports, for a more villainous set of rascals I never saw."

"Well, it is fortunate that you should have stopped their career so soon. She might have given us a great deal of trouble before we laid hands on her. We have had comparatively quiet times since the *Orpheus* destroyed that nest of them, and if she had confined her work to homeward-bound ships it might have been months before we had complaints from home, and found that there was another of these scourges among the islands. I shall row around presently, Mr. Glover, and have a look at your two prizes. When you see my gig coming I shall be obliged if you will meet me on the deck of the brigantine."

At four o'clock in the afternoon the watch on deck reported that the admiral's gig was being lowered, and Nat immediately got into his own boat and was rowed to the brigantine, whose name was the *Agile*. When the admiral approached, instead of making straight for the accommodation ladder, he rowed slowly round the vessel, making a very careful examination of the hull. When he came on deck, he said:

"Except for a few shot that hit her low down, and the general destruction of her bulwarks, no damage has been done to her." [Pg 258]

"No, sir, we aimed high, our great object being to knock away some of her spars. I don't think that her square sails will be of any use in the future, they are riddled with balls from our stern-chasers."

"A new gaff and bowsprit, a new suit of sails, new bulwarks, and a few patches, and she would be as good as ever. What damage have you suffered?"

"The schooner has half a dozen holes in her bow, sir, and a dozen or so in her sails, nothing that the dockyard could not set right in a fortnight."

He then went below. "Excellent accommodation," he said, after going round, "that is for a fair crew, but she must have been crowded indeed with eighty men. What should you consider to be a fair crew

for her, Mr. Glover?"

"Twenty men, sir, if she were a simple trader; I should say from thirty-five to forty would be none too much if she were going to fight her guns."

"Now we will have a look at your craft. You may as well take a seat in my gig. Yes," he went on, as he rowed round her as he had done with the brigantine, "now that the sails are furled she does not seem any the worse for it, except in the bow and those two holes in the bulwarks."

Monsieur Pickard and the ladies were seated on the deck, and rose as the admiral came on board.

"Please introduce me to your friends, Mr. Glover."

Nat did so, and the admiral shook hands with them all.

"I think I may congratulate you on your escape from a very terrible position."

"Yes, indeed," Madame Pickard said. "No words can express the gratitude we feel to Monsieur Glover, his two officers, and the crew. Our position seemed hopeless, the most terrible of deaths and the worst of atrocities stared us in the face."[Pg 259]

"I have heard all about it, madame, and consider that Lieutenant Glover managed the whole business with great discretion as well as bravery. He has a bad habit of getting into scrapes, but an equally good one of getting out of them with credit to himself. This is the third time he has rendered signal services to ladies in distress, and I suppose I should add that he has in addition saved the lives of the ladies on board the barque lying astern. If there were a medal for that sort of thing he would assuredly deserve it. He ought to have been born six or seven hundred years ago, he would have made a delightful knight-errant.

"What are the ladies like in the other ship, Mr. Glover?"

"I have no idea, sir. I only saw them for a moment when I ran into the cabin and cut their bonds. I have only seen the gentlemen for a minute or two when they joined the boarders from the *Thames* under Mr. Turnbull, and I was much too busy to notice them."

"Have you not gone on board since?"

"No, sir, I had nothing to go on board for, and I don't speak any Spanish."

"We tried to persuade him, Monsieur l'Amiral," Valerie said, "but monsieur is modest, he has never let us thank him yet; and although he pretended that he only kept ahead of the other two because his ship was a faster sailer, it was really because he did not wish to be thanked."

"But other people are modest too," the admiral said with a smile. "I have heard of two young ladies who came on board, and who would not stir out of their cabins until they had made themselves new dresses."

The two girls both coloured up at the allusion, and Monsieur Pickard laughed. "Now I will go below, Mr. Glover. She is very small by the side of the brigantine," he said, as he completed his visit of inspection. "I am not surprised[Pg 260] that the pirates chased you after your impudence in firing at them, and that they thought they could eat you at a mouthful. Now, we will pay a visit to the barque."

To Nat's great relief, he found that the passengers had all gone ashore. It was certain that they would be detained for some little time, as there would be legal formalities to be gone through, and repairs to be executed, and additional hands to be obtained; and, all feeling terribly shaken by the events that had taken place on board, and the loss in some cases of near relations, they had been glad to land until the ship was again ready for sea. The mate in charge handed to the admiral the ship's manifest and papers.

"You have no seriously wounded on board?" the latter asked him. "Because if so, I should advise you to send them ashore to the hospital at once."

"No, sir. All who fell on the deck were thrown overboard by the pirates as soon as they obtained possession of the ship. I believe that they fastened shot to their feet to make them sink at once."

The admiral nodded. "That is likely enough. Dead bodies drifting ashore might cause inquiries to be made; their intention no doubt was to take all the most valuable part of the cargo out of the ship, and then to scuttle her with all on board."

"Are we likely to be detained here long, sir?"

"Not as far as we are concerned. We shall require you to sign in the presence of a magistrate here a formal document acknowledging that the vessel was absolutely captured, and in possession of the pirates, and that she was recaptured by his majesty's schooner the *Arrow*, and to sign a bond on behalf of the owners to pay the legal

proportion of the value of the ship and cargo to the admiralty prize court in London. You will, of course, take her home yourself, but I shall send a naval[Pg 261] officer with you, as the ship and its contents remain the property of government until the charges upon her are acquitted. If we were at war with France we should retain her here until she could sail under convoy of a vessel of war homeward-bound, but there is no occasion for doing that now. I do not suppose that you will find much difficulty in obtaining mates and enough sailors to make up your complement here. Scarcely a ship sails from the port without some of her men being left behind, either as deserters or through having been too drunk to rejoin. At any rate you had better be careful whom you pick, and if you should find a difficulty in obtaining men whose discharge-books show that they have hitherto borne a good character, I should advise you to ship eight or ten stout negroes. They are good hands at managing their own craft, and although they might not be of much use aloft, they are as a rule thoroughly trustworthy fellows, and quite as good for work on deck as our own men. I will give you an order on the dockyard for any repairs that you cannot get executed elsewhere. They will of course be charged for, but need not be paid for here, as they will go down in the account against the ship."

Fortunately the dockyard was not busy, and the *Agile* and the *Arrow* were the next morning taken into dock, and a strong gang of men at once set to work upon them. Three days later a signal was made for Nat to go on board the flagship.

"I have received the report from the dockyard people, Mr. Glover," the admiral said. "They confirm our opinion that the *Agile* has not suffered any serious damage; that she is a new and well-built vessel, and well fitted for our service, and she will therefore be retained at the valuation they set upon her. Here is your commission as her commander. Having done so well in the little *Arrow*, I have no doubt as to your ability and fitness for the post. She will carry forty[Pg 262] hands. I shall give you two petty officers, a boatswain's mate and a gunner's mate. I had thought of giving you another midshipman, but I think it would be better that you should take a surgeon. Three or four assistant surgeons came out last week, and I can very well spare you one.

"I shall not give you one of the new arrivals, for it is better that these for a time should serve on larger ships, get accustomed to naval work, and learn the ordinary routine of duty on board. I shall, therefore, send you one from either the *Theseus* or the *Limerick*, and fill up his place with a new-comer. Your duties will be precisely the

same as those assigned to you in the *Arrow*, except that I shall not impress upon you the necessity for giving a wide berth to suspicious vessels. You will cruise on the coast of Hayti, take off refugees, communicate, if possible, with chiefs of the insurgents, and see if there is any strong feeling among them in favour of annexation to England. You will be authorized, in case it is absolutely necessary in order to save the inhabitants of any coast town from slaughter from the blacks, either to help the garrison with your guns or to land a portion not exceeding half your crew to aid in the defence."

"I am indeed greatly obliged to you, admiral, and assure you that I will do my best to merit your kindness and confidence."

"It is to yourself rather than to me that you are indebted for what is virtually a step towards promotion. Just at present I do not think that you are likely to have any opportunity of taking advantage of your increased force, as we have heard no complaints of pirates of late. We may hope that these scoundrels, finding that the islands are growing too hot for them, have moved away to safer quarters. At any rate, if there are any of them in these waters, they are likely to be among the northern Cays, and are probably confining their [Pg 263] depredations for a time to ships trading between Europe and Florida, or to vessels from here which have passed beyond the general limit of the seas we patrol."

On Nat's return to the dockyard, he delighted Lippincott with the news of the exchange that they were to make. Turnbull was in hospital, but the surgeons had reported that his wound was not so serious as it seemed at first, and that a fortnight's rest and quiet would go far to render him convalescent. The sailors, too, were glad to hear that they were going to be transferred to a craft in which they would be able to meet an enemy with confidence. They were also pleased to hear that there was to be no change in their officers, for they had unbounded trust in their young commander, and had from the first agreed that they had never sailed in a more comfortable ship. After seeing Turnbull and acquainting him with the news, Nat paid a visit to the Pickards. They had landed on the evening of their arrival, and, after stopping a day in an hotel, had established themselves in a pretty house outside the town, which Monsieur Pickard had hired from a merchant who was on the point of sailing for England, and would be absent several months.

Monsieur Pickard had, on arriving, gone to a merchant with whom he had business connections, and to whom he had frequently consigned produce for shipment to England or France when there happened to be no vessel in Port-au-Prince sailing for Europe. He

had obtained from a loan on the security of the season's produce, which had, fortunately, been sent down to be warehoused at Port-au-Prince two or three weeks before the insurrection broke out.

Nat's friends, too, heartily congratulated him on obtaining the command of a larger vessel.

"After the troubles and anxiety we have of late gone through, Monsieur Glover, we feel the comfort of being under[Pg 264] the protection of the British flag, and shall enjoy it all the more now that we know that you are not going to sea again in that pretty little vessel, for if you fell in with another large corsair you might not be so fortunate as you were last time. As you have said, if an unlucky shot had struck one of your spars, you would have been at her mercy, and we know what that mercy would mean. I intend to stay here for a short time, till madame and the girls get quite accustomed to their new home, before sailing for Port-au-Prince; but whether I am at home or away you know how welcome you will be here whenever you happen to be in port. How long do you think it is likely to be before you are off?"

"I was speaking to the superintendent of the dockyard before I came out, and he says that he will get the *Agile* ready for sea in three weeks' time. He cannot possibly manage it before; the hull could be ready in a week, but the suit of sails will require three times as long, though he has promised to take on some extra hands if he can get them. Orders have, however, been given by the *Thames* to the chief native sail-maker of the place to patch some of the sails and to make several new ones, and he has taken up some of the best hands in the town. Then, no doubt, whoever gets the command of the *Arrow* will be wanting her sails pushed forward, though that is not certain, for it is not unlikely that, now the *Agile* has been bought into the service, the *Arrow* will be sold. Indeed, one of the principal merchants here would be glad to buy her as a private yacht if he had the chance, as he often has business at the other islands, and she is just the craft that would suit him. He said that by putting up shorter topmasts twelve men would be enough to sail her, and that he would exchange the guns for eight-pounders, as from what he had heard she could outsail almost any craft she was likely to meet with, and small guns would be quite sufficient to prevent[Pg 265] any of these little native piratical craft from meddling with her. However, I think the superintendent will keep his word, and that in three weeks' time I shall be off."

"I may possibly be at Port-au-Prince before you, then," Monsieur Pickard said. "I am thinking of chartering a small brig and going in her to Port-au-Prince, and bringing my goods back from there. Now

that the mulattoes are up in arms, the place cannot be considered as absolutely safe; and as I calculate they are worth from eight to ten thousand pounds, I think it will be well to get them over as soon as possible."

"I quite agree with you, Monsieur Pickard, and should certainly advise you to lose no time. Unless I get instructions to the contrary, I shall, in the first place, cruise round the shore of the bay of Hayti."

Ten days later, indeed, Monsieur Pickard sailed in the brig that he had chartered. Nat had called to say good-bye the evening before, and, to his embarrassment, was presented by him with a very handsome gold watch and chain, the former bearing the inscription that it was a small token of the deepest gratitude of Eugene Pickard, his wife and daughters, for having saved them from the most terrible fate.

"It is only a little thing, Monsieur Glover," the planter said—"a feeble token of our gratitude, but something which many years hence will recall to your memory the inestimable service that you have rendered us."

The superintendent of the dockyard kept his word, and in three weeks the *Agile* was afloat again, and the next morning twenty men drafted from the war-ships in the port were transferred to her. Those of the *Arrow*, with the exception of five still in the hospital, had shifted their quarters to her a fortnight previously. Turnbull had rejoined the evening before. His arm was still in a sling, but otherwise he was quite convalescent. Lippincott had that morning given up the bandage[Pg 266] round his head, which had kept him almost a prisoner until now, for he had refused to go into the town until after nightfall with his head bound up, although Nat had many times assured him that an honourable wound would not be regarded as any disadvantage by the young ladies at Kingston. The assistant surgeon, James Doyle, a cheery young Irishman, also joined that morning.

"It is glad I am to be out of all the ceremony and botheration on board the frigate," he said as he shook hands with Nat, "and to be afloat on my own account, as it were. Saunders, the surgeon, was enough to wear one out with his preciseness and his regulations; faith, he was a man who would rather take off a man's leg than listen to a joke, and it put me on thorns to hear him speak to the men as if they were every one of them shamming—as if anyone would pretend to be ill when he had to take the bastely medicines Saunders used to make up for them."

"I don't think you will find much shamming here, doctor, especially if the new hands are as good as the others; and I hope that your services will not often be required except in the matter of wounds."

"No fighting means no wounds, and I am afraid that there is no hope of fighting," the surgeon said, shaking his head mournfully; "you and the *Orpheus* have pretty well cleared out the pirates, and it was a case of pure luck that you came across this craft the other day. But there is no doubt that the *Orpheus'* men have had all the luck, and the big ships' turn won't come till we have war with France. However, it may be that the luck will stick to you for a bit yet, for, by my faith, I shall before long have forgotten how to take off a limb or to tie up an artery for want of practice. We all envied you when you came in the other day with the two prizes behind you, both big enough to have eaten you up, and though we cheered,[Pg 267] there was many a man who grumbled, 'Bad cess to them, the *Orpheus'* men have got all the luck.'"

"But the *Orpheus* had nothing to do with it," Nat laughed.

"No, I know that; but you had been one of their men, and had, as I have heard, more than your share already of adventures."

Nat had received no further orders, and sailed that afternoon; two days later he was off the entrance of the great bay. He coasted along the shore as near as he could venture, always keeping a man on watch for signals made by anyone anxious to be taken off. When it became dark the anchor was dropped, so that no part of the shore could be passed without the ship being observed. It was on the seventh day after sailing that he arrived at Port-au-Prince. Half an hour after he had anchored, Monsieur Pickard came off in a boat.

"It is lucky that I lost no time," he said after the first greetings were over; "I got my last bale of goods on board the brig an hour ago, and we are going to warp her out at once so as to be under shelter of your guns."

"Why, what is the matter?"

"There is news that a large force of mulattoes and negroes are coming down from the hills and will be here probably to-morrow morning. Luckily a great part of the negroes were turned out of the town a fortnight ago. There are only two hundred soldiers here, and about as many white volunteers—little enough to defend the place if they attack us. No doubt they chose the moment because there is not a French war-ship of any kind in port. However, I think that all the

white women and children are on board the ships. They are all crowded. I have about twenty on board the brig, and have rigged up a sail as an awning, and on such a warm night as this they will sleep better there than they would in a cabin. I can assure you that there was the greatest satisfaction when[Pg 268] you were seen coming in. Several of the captains had talked of towing their vessels out three or four miles into the bay, but as soon as it was certain that you were an armed ship, the idea was given up, as many of them were only half-laden; and it was felt that, of whatever nationality you were, you would prevent the negroes from coming off in boats to murder the women and children. Of course I did not know that it was you until I made out your figure from the shore, but as soon as I did so, I told all I knew that they need not trouble about the safety of those on board ship, for I could answer for it that you would not hesitate to turn your guns on any boats that went out to attack them."

"Well, Monsieur Pickard, I cannot believe that the town will be taken, but at any rate I congratulate you on having got all your produce on board."

"Yes, it is a very important matter to us; we cannot calculate upon finding a purchaser for our house at Cape François at anything approaching its value at ordinary times. I have a couple of thousand pounds lying at my banker's, and although six months ago I would not have taken forty thousand for the estate and the slaves upon it, I suppose I may consider myself fortunate if I get half that sum, or even less, now. Anyhow, if I get my crop here safe to Jamaica, I need not worry myself as to the future."

"If the place is attacked in the morning, monsieur, I have the admiral's authority to land half my men to aid in the defence; and though twenty men is but a small number, they may render some assistance. I intend to hold them in reserve, and to take them to any spot at which the insurgents may be pressing back the defenders. I shall be obliged if you will inform the officer in command of the troops and the civil authorities that they can count on my assistance to that extent. Will you give them my advice to get all the avail[Pg 269]able boats ranged along by the quay opposite to us, so that in case of the worst all can retreat there. I will cover their embarkation with my guns. Lastly, I should advise the captains of all the ships in port to tow their vessels out and range them behind us, so that there may be nothing to interfere with our line of fire."

"I will inform the committee of defence directly I go ashore, and they will doubtless send off at once to order the various ships to anchor at the spot you indicate. It will be a relief, indeed, to them all to

know that you have undertaken their protection."

"I will go ashore with you," Nat said; "though I have landed here more than once I do not know the place well enough to be able to act quickly. I should like to see exactly where your batteries are placed, and where it is most likely that the negroes will make their chief attack."

They went ashore and landed together, and walked to the house where the principal men of the town were assembled.

"Will you come in with me?" Monsieur Pickard asked.

"No, I will leave you to explain what I propose to do and what I recommend that they should do. There is sure to be a lot of talk and discussion, and I do not wish to lose time. The sun will be setting in another hour, so I will make my round at once."

Passing through the town, Nat visited the various batteries that had been erected, and decided that if the blacks were well led they would work round and attack the remains of the native town. The batteries had principally been erected round the European quarter, as if any enemy coming from the hills would be certain to make a direct attack, while the native quarter was almost entirely undefended, although with this once in the possession of the enemy the whole town would lie open to them.[Pg 270]

"It is clear that this is the real point of danger," he muttered. "Fortunately, from where we are lying our guns can sweep the widest street that runs down through this quarter. I shall mention my ideas to Pickard. No doubt he is still talking away at the meeting."

He went back to the house. M. Pickard and half a dozen other gentlemen were standing at the door. M. Pickard at once introduced them to him.

"My object in coming round here, gentlemen, is to tell you that in my opinion your defences, which are quite strong enough to protect the town against any body of negroes coming down on the easterly side, are wholly insufficient to repel an attack if made on the native town. I trust, therefore, that when the troops man the defences a considerable number of them at least will be so placed as to be ready to meet an attack from that side. There is practically nothing to prevent the negroes from entering there, and, as many of the mulattoes with them must be perfectly aware of the position of the batteries, they are scarcely likely to propose to make an attack upon them, knowing that the negroes would not be able to face an artillery

fire, but would lead them round to attack the almost defenceless native portion of the town."

"We have always reckoned upon their coming upon us by one of the main roads from the hills," one of the gentlemen said.

"So I see, monsieur; but some of the mulattoes with them are men of considerable intelligence, and would be hardly foolish enough to try to break down the door that you have closed against them when they know that there is an open entrance at the back. If there is a man with the smallest spark of military genius about him he will commence the attack by a feint in considerable force against the batteries, and then, under cover of the smoke of your guns and his own—for [Pg 271] hear from Monsieur Pickard that they are said to have fifteen or twenty guns which they have taken at small places on the coast—will send round the main body of his force to fall on the native town. That is my opinion, gentlemen. I know very little of military matters, but it seems to me that is the course that any man of moderate intelligence would pursue, and I therefore should strongly advise that at least half your volunteer force should take post to defend the native town, and so give time to the remainder to come up and assist in the defence. I shall post my sailors in a position where they can best aid in the defence in this direction, and shall have the guns of my ship in readiness to open fire on the native town if you are driven back."

"Thank you, sir. We shall have another meeting late this evening, and I shall do my best to urge the committee to act as you suggest."

Nat returned on board the *Agile*. Already most of the ships in the port had anchored a short distance outside the brigantine, and a few that had kept on until the last moment taking their cargo on board were being towed by their boats in the same direction. Tumbull and Lippincott were anxiously awaiting Nat's return. Retiring into the cabin, he told them the result of his investigation of the defences and the position on shore.

"I think we shall have hot work to-morrow," he went on. "If the negroes are not absolute fools they will not knock their heads against the batteries. There are twenty cannon in position, for the most part ships' guns, and as I hear that they have plenty of ammunition, and especially grape, they would simply mow the niggers down if they attacked them. There is only one battery with three guns covering the native town, and the blacks ought to have no difficulty in carrying this with a rush. We have learnt by experience that, whatever their [Pg 272] faults, they can fight furiously, and are ready enough to risk their lives. Thus, this battery may be taken in a few minutes. If a hundred of the

volunteers held the huts behind it they might check them for a time, but as the negroes are several thousands strong the resistance cannot be long. The best point of defence will be that street facing us here. Our guns will come into play, and it is there that I shall join the French as they fall back.

"I shall get you, Mr. Lippincott, to row round this evening to all these craft near us, and to request the captains, in my name, to send all the men provided with muskets they may have, on board us, as soon as firing is heard. You will remain on board in charge, Turnbull; with your arm in a sling, you are not fit for fighting on shore. With your twenty men you ought to be able to work the guns pretty fast. Between their shots the men with muskets would aid. Of course you would use grape. If their attack lulls in the least send a few round-shot among the houses on their side. Pomp and Sam had better go ashore with us and act as boat-keepers. I will take the boat higher up than those of the townspeople, for if a panic seizes them there would be a mad rush to get on board. We will go a couple of hundred yards farther, and the boat will lie a short distance out, and not come in close till they see us running towards it. In that way we can make sure of being able to get on board."

"I should certainly have liked to land," Turnbull said, "but I know that I am not fit yet for hard fighting."

"I suppose you will be taking me along with you?" Doyle said.

"By all means come if you like, but I was not thinking of doing so."

"It is not often that we get a chance of taking a share in the fun. As a rule, as soon as the guns are loaded and ready for[Pg 273] action we have to go below, and to stop there bandaging and dressing wounds, with not a chance of seeing what is going on. This is just one chance in a hundred. I should be no good here, for there is no one to look after. I will take with me two or three tourniquets and some bandages, and perchance I may be the means of saving some poor boy's life; and while not so engaged I may have a slap at these murdering blacks. I am a pretty good shot, and when a man can bring down ten snipe out of every dozen, as I have done time after time in the ould country, he ought to be able to put a bullet into a black man's carcass."

"If you are bent upon going, by all means do so. As you say, a tourniquet clapped on directly a man is wounded may save his life, and every additional musket will be a valuable addition to our strength."

CHAPTER XV

THE ATTACK ON PORT-AU-PRINCE

It was just getting light on the following morning when the sound of a cannon was heard, and it was followed by several other shots, mingled with the rattle of distant musketry. The town woke up with a start. Drums beat in the streets, and in a minute or two men armed with rifles and muskets poured out from their houses, and hurried to the rendezvous settled upon the night before. The firing came from the eastern side of the town, and the three batteries in that direction were all engaged. Mingled with the report of the guns came the sound of a more distant cannonade, showing that the insurgents' artillery was also at work. Among the shipping there was as great an excitement as in the town. On board[Pg 274] every ship men were running up the ratlines to see if a view of the scene of action could be obtained from aloft. On the decks numbers of women, who had hastily thrown on their upper clothing, or wrapped themselves in shawls, listened anxiously to the sound of firing. Scarce one but had a husband, brother, or son among the defenders of the place.

There were ten vessels lying outside the *Agile*, and from each of these boats presently put off to the brigantine, some with three or four men, others with as many as ten, all armed with muskets.

"You will soon see how matters go, Turnbull, and whether this is a real or only a feigned attack."

The landing-party were in a few minutes ready to embark. Each man carried fifty rounds of ammunition for his musket, and a dozen additional cartridges for his pistols. Their water-bottles were slung over their shoulders, and each had a hunch of bread and of cold meat that had been boiled in the galley the night before in readiness. They took their places in the cutter and gig, and were soon rowed ashore to the point which Nat had fixed on the previous evening. The various boats and lighters used in loading the ships had all been gathered at the quay facing the *Agile*, and Nat was pleased to see that his advice in this respect had been followed.

The orders to Sam and Pomp, who were to remain one in each boat, were that they should push the boats out as far as the head-ropes—which had been lengthened for the occasion—would allow them, drop a small grapnel over the stern, and should then keep a sharp look-out. The moment the party were seen returning they were to pull up the grapnels, and haul on the head-ropes till the boats were

alongside. Both were armed, and the orders were that they were to shoot anyone who should try to force himself into either boat before the sailors came up.

Nat led his party to an empty house close to the street com[Pg 275]manded by the *Agile's* guns. Six of the sailors were placed as sentinels at the ends of streets running into this, the rest piled arms.

"Now, Mr. Lippincott, I shall be obliged if you will go and ascertain how the affair is proceeding, and whether the batteries are keeping the insurgents well in check. I am about to start for the battery on this side, where I shall get a fair view of the country round, and see how matters stand.

"You will remain here, Mr. Thompson," he went on to the boatswain, "in charge of the party. I shall take Newman with me in case I have any orders to send to you. Will you come with me also, Doyle?"

The two officers, followed by an active young seaman, started. On arriving near the end of the native town, Nat was glad to see a group of the volunteers in front of him. They saluted as he came up.

"What force have you here, gentlemen?" he asked.

"Fifty men, captain."

"It would have been better if it had been a hundred and fifty. If they come here in force you will not be able to keep them at bay long. Where is your main body?"

"They are gathered in front of the municipal offices in readiness to move wherever their services may be most required."

"That is quite satisfactory. I was afraid that most of them might be at the batteries at the other side of the town, where the troops ought to be quite able to hold their own against the blacks."

At this moment another gentleman, with a red sash over his shoulder, came up. He was the commander of the company stationed there.

"I am afraid that we are rather out of it, monsieur," he said, after exchanging salutes with Nat.

"I am still more afraid, sir, that you are by no means out[Pg 276] of it. I think that you will find that before many minutes are over you will be hotly engaged. I have come forward to tell you that my men are placed just on the other side of Royal Street, and to beg that if you

are not able to maintain yourselves here—and if you are attacked, I am convinced that it will be in such force that you will be unable to do so—you will not endanger your force by holding on here too long, but will retreat to Royal Street, and there make a stand, occupying the houses on the other side of the street. The guns of my vessel are loaded and in readiness to sweep the street with grape as the negroes try to cross it; and we shall have in addition some forty or fifty men from the merchantmen outside her, who will aid in keeping them in check. If I might advise you, I should say that it would be well for you to write a note, now that you have time to do so, saying that you are attacked in overwhelming force, and are about to fall back to Royal Street, which you will, aided by my sailors and guns, hold to the last, and begging your commander to send his whole force up to support you. This you will, of course, keep until the attack comes, and will send off as soon as you perceive that your position here is untenable."

"I think that is a very good suggestion," the officer said, "and shall carry it out at once."

"I will go on to the battery," Nat said; "from there I shall get a better idea of the situation."

They had scarcely gone beyond the line of houses when a French soldier came running in.

"What is your news?" Nat asked him.

"A great crowd of the enemy are coming, sir. The captain has sent me to beg the commander of the volunteers here to bring up his force to support him."

"You will find him a hundred yards farther on. Now, doctor, you will go forward and have a look."[Pg 277]

Arriving at the battery, which was manned by twenty French soldiers under a young lieutenant, Nat and the doctor mounted the parapet. The enemy were still half a mile away. They were in no sort of order, but were coming on in a confused mass.

"There must be three or four thousand of them, lieutenant," Nat said quietly. "You may check them a little, but you will never keep them out of the town if they come on with a rush. I suppose you are loaded with grape?"

"Yes, monsieur," the young Frenchman said.

He felt relieved at the arrival of the commander of the British ship

of war, for he was feeling the responsibility of his position greatly.

"I should let them get within four or five hundred yards," Nat said quietly, "then fire your guns singly, loading as rapidly as possible. Here come the volunteers; place five-and-twenty of them on each side of your battery. Let them lie down, and open fire when the enemy are within two hundred and fifty yards. If they come on in spite of the fire, I should say that you had best all retire at the double. It will be of no use trying to hold the houses; they would only outflank you and cut you off. I have already arranged with the volunteers that they shall make a stand at Royal Street. I have a party of my sailors there in readiness to help them, and as the guns of my ship will sweep the street we should certainly be able to hold it until help arrives."

"Thank you, monsieur, I will do as you suggest."

At this moment the volunteers came up at a run.

"Where do you wish me to place my men?" the captain said to the French lieutenant.

"I shall be obliged if you will put half of them on each side of the battery. Let them lie down there, and open fire when the enemy are within two hundred and fifty yards. If [Pg 278] when they get within a hundred yards, your fire and ours does not stop them, we will then retreat together at the double. If we were once surrounded we should have no chance whatever. Give your guns an elevation of five hundred yards," he said to his men.

When this was done he looked inquiringly at Nat. The other nodded.

"Yes, I think it is about five hundred yards." Then he turned to the seaman: "Go back as quickly as you can, Newman, and tell Mr. Thompson that the blacks are coming, and that we shall probably be with him five minutes after you arrive. Tell him also to send a man down as we had arranged to the wharf, to signal to the ship to be in readiness."

As he spoke the first of the guns boomed out. A few seconds later the second was fired, and this was followed by the third at a similar interval. The cannon were old ship guns, and had been heavily charged with grape, and the destruction wrought upon the crowded mass of negroes was so great that they stopped suddenly. Several of their leaders were seen to rush to the front waving and gesticulating, and with a wild yell the negroes again advanced. They had gone but fifty yards when the gun that was first fired spoke out again, followed

quickly by the others. This time there was no pause in the advance. Yelling furiously the negroes, who were armed with guns, discharged them at random. Two more rounds were fired, and then the crackle of the rifles and muskets of the volunteers broke out. The centre of the negro line paused indecisively, but the flanks continued on their way without a check.

"It is just as I thought," Nat said to the doctor, who was loading and firing his piece rapidly. "Do you see how their flanks are extending? One more round, lieutenant, and then we had best be going, or we shall be cut off from the town." [Pg 279]

Again the three guns were discharged. The execution was terrible in the centre of the black line, but the flanks still kept on.

"Now, captain, get your men together," Nat said to the civilian officer who was standing beside him; "if you go to the right I will go to the left. They won't hear our voices in this din."

Another half-minute and the soldiers and volunteers were running at the top of their speed, but keeping well together, towards the town. They had a hundred and fifty yards' start, and also the advantage that the blacks had been coming forward at a run for over half a mile. Therefore, although the latter came on with yells of triumph and exultation, they did not gain on the little party. Indeed, when they once entered the native town the French considerably increased their distance, for the negroes, fearing that they might fall into an ambush, came along more carefully.

"Post your men at the windows of the houses opposite to you," Nat said to the French lieutenant.

"Did you send your messenger on?" he asked, as he ran up to the volunteer officer.

The latter gave an exclamation of horror.

"No, I forgot all about it."

"So did I, or I should have reminded you of it. Give it to one of the men now, and tell him to take it as hard as he can run. Tell your men off in threes and fours to the houses opposite. I have no doubt we can keep them in check till help comes."

Thompson was waiting in the street as the party ran up.

"Where have you posted your men?" Nat asked him.

"I thought most likely that they would come down this street, so I put

four men in each of the two houses facing it, seven are in the two houses facing the next street coming down, the rest are here." [Pg 280]

Nat hurried up to the French officer.

"My men are in the two houses facing this and the next street, will you occupy the houses next them, and tell the officer of the volunteers to scatter his men in twos and threes in the other houses. Doctor, you had better join the party in the house facing the next street; and do you, Mr. Thompson, place yourself with five men in the house facing the street beyond. We shall have the brunt of it, for they are more likely to come by these streets than by those near the harbour, knowing, as they do, that our ship is lying anchored off there."

It was three or four minutes before Nat, from the window at which he had posted himself, saw a great body of negroes and mulattoes coming along the street facing him.

"Open fire at once, lads," he said. "Take good aim; every shot ought to tell in that crowd, and our fire will let them know on board that the blacks are close at hand."

Yelling, shouting, and brandishing their weapons, the insurgents poured down. The fire from the next two parties had showed that the negroes were also advancing by the streets above.

A minute later three black columns poured into Royal Street, and as they did so a fire broke out from every window facing them. Then came a deep roar, and a storm of grape swept along the street; another and another followed, and with yells of surprise and fear the rioters rushed back into shelter, leaving the streets strewn with dead and dying. It was some minutes before they could rally, and in the meantime three of the guns of the *Agile* sent ball after ball among the houses to the west of the street. Three times did the negroes attempt to cross the fatal road, but each time they fell back with heavy loss, which was specially severe in their last attempt, as the main body of the volunteers had now come up, entered by the backs of the houses and joined the [Pg 281] defenders, and the fire of two hundred and fifty muskets played terrible havoc among the assailants. There was a pause in the fight now, and the ship's broadside continued to sweep the native town with balls while an occasional spurt of musketry fire broke out when the blacks showed themselves in any of the streets. Suddenly from a score of houses in the native town smoke, followed speedily by flames, mounted up.

"The scoundrels have fired the town," exclaimed Doyle, who had now joined Nat. "They see they have no chance of crossing here, and

as they cannot plunder the place they have made up their mind to destroy it."

"Yes, and they are likely to succeed, doctor, the wind is blowing this way. Half the native houses are roofed with palm leaves, and will burn like tinder. Our only chance now is to drive the blacks out altogether and then fight the fire."

He at once sent a sailor down with a flag to signal to the ship to stop firing, then he went out into the street. As soon as he was seen he was joined by the French lieutenant and the commander, with several officers of the volunteers, together with Monsieur Pickard.

"I think, gentlemen," Nat said, "that unless we take the offensive and drive the blacks out of the town there will be little hope of extinguishing the fire. The wind is blowing strongly in this direction, and there is not a moment to be lost if we are to save the town. The negroes must be thoroughly demoralized, they must have lost over a thousand men here and three or four hundred before they entered the town. It is quite likely that they have retreated already, but in any case I do not anticipate any serious resistance."

The others at once agreed. The drums were beaten, and the volunteers, soldiers, and sailors poured out from the houses, and then, dividing into three columns, advanced down the streets through which the blacks had retired. They met with [Pg 282] no resistance. A few negroes who had entered houses to gather plunder were shot down as they issued out, but with these exceptions none of the enemy were seen until the columns issued from the town, when the negroes could be seen retreating at a run across the plain. The French officer at once ran forward with his men to the little battery, and sent shot after shot among them, for they were still less than half a mile away. The sailors and volunteers slung their muskets behind them, and, running back, endeavoured to check the course of the flames. This, however, was impossible. The fire spread from house to house with extraordinary rapidity. The wind hurled the burning flakes on ahead, dropping many upon the inflammable roofs, and in twenty minutes the whole quarter west of Royal Street was in flames. Nat was now joined by Turnbull and all the crew, the two negroes, who had been sent off to the ship with the boats, alone remaining in charge of the vessel.

"We have beaten the negroes, Turnbull, but the fire will beat us. If this wind continues it will sweep the whole town away. It is useless to try and save any of these native houses. Look at the burning flakes flying over our heads!"

After a short consultation with the French officers they agreed that the only chance was to arrest the fire at the edge of the European quarter, and that the whole force should at once set to work to pull down the native houses adjoining them. The sound of cannon on the other side of the town had continued until now, but it gradually ceased, as the news reached the negroes there that the main attack, of whose success they had felt sure, had hopelessly failed, and it was not long before the troops from the batteries came up to assist the workers. Their labours, however, were in vain. A shout of dismay called the attention of the men who, half-blinded with the dust and smoke, were working their utmost. Looking round,[Pg 283] they saw that the flames were mounting up from several of the houses behind them. The wood-work was everywhere as dry as tinder, and the burning flakes, which were falling thickly upon them, had set the houses on fire in a dozen places.

"We can do nothing more, sir," the officer in command of the troops said. "The business part of the town is doomed. All that we could even hope to save are the detached houses standing in gardens and shrubberies."

So it turned out. The flames swept onward until the business quarter, as well as the native town, was completely burnt out, and it needed all the efforts of the soldiers and inhabitants to prevent the private residences of the merchants and planters from being ignited by the burning fragments scattered far and wide by the wind. It was noon when the officers and crew of the *Agile*, accompanied by M. Pickard—who was, like all the rest blackened by the dust and smoke—returned on board.

"Well, that has been as hot a morning's work as I ever went through," Turnbull said. "It is hard to believe that a battle has been fought and a town destroyed in the course of about five hours."

"Yes; I think on the whole we may be very well satisfied, Turnbull, though I suppose the people who have lost their houses and stores will hardly see it in the same light. Still, they saved their lives, and at any rate, Monsieur Pickard, you can be congratulated on having got all your goods on board just in time."

"I am thankful indeed that it is so," the planter said. "I hope, of course, to get something for my estate. As to the house, after what we have seen here I cannot set much value on it. What has happened this morning may happen at Cape François to-morrow. They might not be able to take it, but a dozen negroes choosing their time when a strong wind is[Pg 284] blowing, and starting the fires in as many

places, might level the town to the ground. At any rate, I shall direct the captain of the brig to sail at once for Kingston, and to deliver the cargo to my agent there, and shall proceed myself to Cape François. I wish to learn whether the bank there has sent off its funds and securities to some safer place, or is retaining them. In the latter case I shall withdraw them at once, and shall put up my estates for sale."

"I will give you a passage, Monsieur Pickard. I have nothing more to stay here for, and shall sail up the coast to-morrow morning."

"Thank you very much; I accept your offer with gladness. I am anxious to close all my connection with this unfortunate island as soon as possible."

In the afternoon the governor of the town, with the officer commanding the troops, the maire, and a deputation of the leading citizens, came off to thank Nat for the assistance that his crew and guns had rendered. They brought with them an official document rehearsing these services, and saying that had it not been for the assistance they had rendered, the town would undoubtedly have been captured by the blacks, and probably all the whites on shore massacred, together with their wives and families, who had taken refuge on board the shipping. The commandant stated that this document would be sent to the British admiral at Kingston. Nat replied very modestly, saying that both the officers and men on board had rejoiced at being able to render a service in the cause of humanity, and that he was only acting in accordance with the orders he had received from the admiral to afford every aid in his power to the white population of the island.

After this official visit many of the merchants, planters, and military officers came off individually to thank him for having saved their wives and families by the protection that he had[Pg 285] afforded to the shipping, and by the aid given by his guns and the landing-party, which had alone saved the town from capture. At daybreak next morning the *Agile* got up her anchor and started for the north. The brig containing Monsieur Pickard's property had sailed the previous afternoon, and the rest of the shipping were preparing to start at the time the *Agile* got up anchor. All of them were crowded with fugitives, the women and children being now joined by many of their male relatives, who had lost almost all they possessed by the destruction of their homes and warehouses.

The next morning the brigantine arrived at Cape François. The news she brought of the destruction of Port-au-Prince caused great excitement, as it was felt that the fate that had befallen one town

might well happen to another. Monsieur Pickard at once went to the bank, where he found that the greater portion of the specie and all valuable documents had already been sent for safety to Jamaica, and he received an order upon the bank there for the payment to him of the money he had placed on deposit in the bank, and of the various securities and documents that had been held in safe-keeping for him. He then went to pay a visit to Monsieur Duchesne, to whose house Nat, who had landed with him, had gone direct. The family were delighted to see him.

"You may expect another visitor shortly," he said. "Monsieur Pickard has come on shore with me; he has gone to the bank now, but said that he would come on here later."

"Then he has escaped," Madame Duchesne exclaimed. "We had hardly even hoped that he and his family had done so, for we knew that the blacks had risen everywhere in that part of the island."

"Yes, I am happy to say that he, Madame Pickard, and his two daughters, all got safely away; in fact, they all came off to my craft—not the *Agile*, you know, but to the *Arrow*; and[Pg 286] I had the pleasure of taking them as passengers to Jamaica, where the ladies still are."

"That is good news indeed," Myra said. "Valerie is a great friend of mine. Of course Louise is younger, but I was very fond of her too. The year before last I spent a couple of months with them at their plantation; and, as I daresay they told you, they are always here for three or four months in the winter season."

Nat then told them what had taken place at Port-au-Prince, and how he and his men had taken part in the fight.

"It is terrible news indeed," said M. Duchesne; "and one can scarcely feel safe here. Port-au-Prince is the largest town in Hayti, with the exception only of this, which is quite as open to the danger of fire. I think this will decide us on leaving. Matters seem going from bad to worse. I don't know whether you know that three commissioners have arrived from France. So far from improving the state of things, they are making them worse every day. As far as can be seen, they are occupied solely in filling their own pockets; they have enormously increased the taxation, and that at a time when everyone is on the verge of ruin. No account is given of the sums they collect, and certainly the money has not been spent in taking any measures either for the safety of the town or for the suppression of the insurrection. I have wound up all my affairs here, and have disposed of our plantations. There are many who still believe that in

time everything will come right again; I have myself no hope. Even if we got peaceful possession of our estates, there would be no hands to work them. The freedom of all the blacks has been voted by that mad assembly in Paris; and if there is one thing more certain than another, it is that the negroes will not work until they are obliged to, so the estates will be practically worthless. Therefore I have accepted an offer for a sum which is about a[Pg 287] quarter of what the estate was worth before, and consider that it is so much saved out of the fire."

"Monsieur Pickard is of exactly the same opinion as you are," Nat said, "and has come here principally for the purpose of disposing of his estate on any terms that he can obtain."

"Well, I do not think he will find any difficulty in getting about the same proportion of value as we have done. The rich mulattoes are buying freely, and, as I say, some of the whites are doing the same. Ah, here he is!

"Ah, my dear Pickard, we are glad indeed to see you, and to learn from our friend here that your wife and daughters are safe in Jamaica."

"We have been very anxious about you," Madame Duchesne said; "and Myra has been constantly talking of your family."

"It was the same with us, I can assure you, madame; and it is strange that we should first have obtained tidings of your safety from Monsieur Glover, and that you should also have obtained news of ours from him. Still more so that while he has, as he said to us, been of some little service to you—but which, we learnt from one of his officers, seems to have been considerable—it is to him that we also owe our lives."

"Little service!" Madame Duchesne repeated indignantly. "However, we know Monsieur Glover of old. First of all he saved Myra's life from that dog, and certainly he saved both our lives from the negroes. And did he save yours? He has just told us that you came on board with him, and that he took you to Jamaica. Still, that is not like what he did for us."

"That is one way of putting it, madame," Monsieur Pickard said with a smile; "but as you say you know him of old, you will not be surprised at the little story that I have to tell you."

"Not now, Monsieur Pickard," Nat said hastily, "or if you[Pg 288] do I shall say good-bye to Madame Duchesne at once, and go straight on board."

"You must not do that," Madame Duchesne said as he rose to his feet; "you have only just arrived, and we are not going to let you off so easily."

"We will compromise," her husband said. "Now, Monsieur Glover, you know that my wife and daughter will be dying of curiosity until they hear this story. Suppose you take a turn down the town with me. I will go and enquire whether there is any ship likely to sail in the course of a few days or so for Jamaica. Then Monsieur Pickard can tell his story, and my wife can retail it to me later on. You see, Monsieur Pickard's wife and daughters are great friends of ours, and madame and Myra naturally wish to hear what has happened to them during this terrible time."

"Very well," Nat said with a laugh, "I don't mind accepting that compromise; but really I do hate hearing things talked over which were just ordinary affairs. But remember that Monsieur Pickard naturally will make a great deal more of them than they are worth, since, no doubt, the outcome of them was that he and his family did get out of the hands of the blacks in consequence. Now, Monsieur Duchesne, I will start with you at once, so that madame and Myra's curiosity may be satisfied as soon as possible."

Monsieur Duchesne took Nat first to call upon the three commissioners, who happened to be gathered in council. The commandant at Port-au-Prince had asked him to convey the report he had hastily drawn up of the attack on the town. This he had sent ashore as soon as he anchored; and the commissioners were discussing the news when Nat and Monsieur Duchesne were shown in.

"I thought, gentlemen," Nat said, "that you might perhaps like to ask me questions upon any point that was not explained[Pg 289] in the commandant's report, which was, as he told me, drawn up in great haste; for with four-fifths of the town laid in ashes, and the population homeless and unprovided with food, his hands were full indeed."

"Thank you, Lieutenant Glover. The report does full justice to your interposition in our favour, and indeed states that had it not been for the assistance rendered by yourself and the ship of war you command, the town would unquestionably have been carried by the insurgents, and that the whole of the whites, including the troops, would probably have been massacred. Had this been done, it would undoubtedly have so greatly encouraged the rioters that we could hardly have hoped to maintain our hold even of this city."

"I was only carrying out the orders that I received in landing to protect the white inhabitants from massacre, gentlemen."

"In your opinion, is anyone to blame for the course events took?"

"Even had I that opinion," Nat said, "I should certainly not consider myself justified in criticising the action of the officers and authorities of a foreign power. However, the circle of the town was too large to be defended by the force available, of whom half were volunteers, ready to fight most gallantly, as I can testify, but not possessing the discipline of trained troops. I do not think, however, that even had batteries been erected all round the town, the insurgents could have been prevented from effecting an entrance at some points, and setting fire to the houses. They advanced with great determination, in spite of the destructive grape fire maintained by the three guns of the battery. Undoubtedly had the batteries been placed together on that side, as on the one at which it was thought probable that the attack would be made, the insurgents might have been repulsed, but it would[Pg 290] have needed a much larger force than that in the town to man all those batteries. And I think it is by no means improbable that even in that case the town might have been burnt; for there were still a large number of negroes employed on the wharves and in the warehouses, and you may take it as certain that some of these were in close communication with the insurgents, and probably agreed to fire the town should their friends fail to effect an entrance. I can only say, sir, that the citizens enrolled for defence fought most gallantly, as did the small party of soldiers manning the battery on that side, and that when the fighting was over all laboured nobly to check the progress of the flames."

Several questions were put to him concerning the details of the fighting, and the measures that had been taken for the safety of the women and children, the part his own men played, and the manner in which the insurgents, after gaining a footing in the town, had been prevented from obtaining entire possession of it. At the conclusion of the interview, which had lasted for upwards of two hours, the commissioners thanked Nat very cordially.

"You see," Monsieur Duchesne said, when they left the governor's house, "they asked no single question as to whether you thought there was any danger of a similar catastrophe taking place here."

"Yes, I noticed they did not. If they had, I could have told them very plainly that, although the negroes suffered very heavily, yet the news that the second town in Hayti had been almost destroyed would be sure to raise their hopes, and that I consider it extremely probable

that some day or other this town will also be attacked, and no time should be lost in putting it into a state of thorough defence. I can't say that they impressed me at all favourably."

"Short as is the time that they have been here, they have[Pg 291] managed to excite all parties against them. They have issued an amnesty, pardoning even those who have committed the most frightful atrocities upon us. They have infuriated a portion of the mulattoes by announcing the repeal of the decree in their favour. Without a shadow of legal authority they have extorted large sums of money from those mulattoes who have remained quiet and are resident here, and seem bent upon extracting all that remains of their late fortune from the whites. One of them is frequently drunk and leads a scandalous life; another appears bent solely upon enriching himself; the third seems to be a well-meaning man, but he is wholly under the control of his drunken companion. If this is the sort of aid we are to receive from France, our future is hopeless indeed. And, indeed, no small portion of my friends begin to see that unless England takes possession of the island the future is altogether hopeless. The general opinion here is that it is impossible that peace can much longer be maintained between England and France, and they hope that one of the first steps England will take after war is declared will be to land an army here."

"If the English government were persuaded that the mulattoes and negroes as well as the whites were favourable, I should think that the island might be annexed without difficulty; but unless all parties are agreed I cannot think that a force could be spared that could even hope for success. It would have been an easy task before the mulattoes and the slaves learned their own strength, but it is a very different thing now; and I should say that it would need at least five-and-twenty thousand men, and perhaps even twice that number, to reduce the island to submission and to restore peace and order. I cannot think that, engaged in a war with France, England would be able to spare anything like that force for a difficult and almost certainly a long series of operations here."[Pg 292]

By this time they had arrived at Monsieur Duchesne's house.

"Our friend has only just finished his story," Madame Duchesne said, as he entered. "What a story! what frightful sufferings! what horrors! and," she added with a smile, though her eyes were full of tears—"what 'little' service rendered by you and your brave crew! He has told it all, and of your fight afterwards with that terrible pirate, and how you have added to the list of those you have saved from terrible deaths some eighteen or twenty Spanish gentlemen and ladies, and

twice as many sailors."

"Yes, I have had wonderful luck," Nat said; "and you see I have been well rewarded. I am only just out of my time as a midshipman, and I am in command of a fine ship, which, in the ordinary course of things, I could not have hoped for for another eight or ten years. I have gained a considerable amount of prize-money, and best of all, the friendship of yourselves and the family of Monsieur Pickard. And the real author of all this is Mademoiselle Myra, who was good enough to have that little quarrel with her aunt's dog just at the time that I happened to be passing."

This raised a laugh, which in Myra's case became almost hysterical, and her mother had to take her out of the room.

"Now, Monsieur Duchesne, I will take this opportunity of returning on board. I promised you that I would come ashore and dine with you this evening, but I must really make its fulfilment conditional upon your assuring me that there shall be no allusion to any of my adventures."

"At any rate, I will impress upon my wife and daughter that the subject must be tabooed, and I have no doubt that they will do their best to avoid it, if they can keep away from the topic that cannot but be present in their minds. After hearing Monsieur Pickard's story—of which, as you must remember, I am at present wholly ignorant—you see that, [Pg 293]intimate as the two families have been, it is not surprising that they should have been greatly affected by it, especially as for the last month they have been mourning for them as dead."

CHAPTER XVI

TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE

The *Agile* only remained for two days at Cape François, but in that time Nat had learned enough of the doings of the French commissioners to see that the position was becoming hourly more and more hopeless, and nought short of the arrival of a powerful army from France under a capable commander, without political bias and with supreme authority, or the taking over of the island by the English, could bring back peace and prosperity. He was, however, rejoiced to know that Monsieur Duchesne had already taken passages for himself, his wife and daughter, and the old nurse, to Jamaica, and would leave in a few days; and that Monsieur Pickard had received and accepted an offer for his estate, which was at least as good as he had hoped for, and would also return to Kingston as soon as the

necessary documents could be prepared and signed.

For some weeks the *Agile* cruised backwards and forwards along the coast of Hayti without adventure. Nat had endeavoured, but unsuccessfully, to open communication with the blacks under Biassou and François, the two chief negro leaders. It was seldom, indeed, that he caught sight of a human being except when cruising in the bay. The mountains along both the north and the south coast were thinly populated. The white planters and employees had perished to a man, and all the smaller villages had been deserted. St. Louis, Jacmel, Fesle,[Pg 294] and Sale Trou were occupied by small bodies of French troops, but most of the settlers had left; and the whole of the negroes had from the first taken to the mountains. The same was the case at Port Dauphin, Port de Paix, Le Cap, and St. Nicholas on the north. It was at St. Nicholas that he was for the first time able to open communication with the negroes. He had anchored in the bay, and, among the native boats that came off to sell fruit and fresh meat, was one in which a mulatto of shabby appearance was seated in the stern. As the boat came alongside he stood up, and said to Turnbull, who was leaning on the rail watching the sailors bargaining with the negroes:

"Can I speak with the captain, sir? I have a message for him."

"Yes, I have no doubt that he will see you. Come on deck."



A MESSAGE FROM TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE.

The man climbed up the side, and followed Turnbull aft to where

Nat was sitting.

"This man wants to speak to you, sir."

"I am the bearer of a letter," he said, "to the English officer commanding this ship," and he handed him a very small note. It was as follows:—

Sir,—As there are rumours that some of the people of this island have opened negotiations with the governor of Jamaica, we, who represent the coloured people of this country, will be glad to have a conversation with you, and to learn from you what would probably be the conditions on which your country would be likely to accept the sovereignty of this island. What would be the condition of the coloured people here if they did so? Should we be guaranteed our freedom and rights as men, or would it mean merely a change of masters? If you are willing to accede to this invitation, I will personally guarantee your safety, and that, whatever the result of our conversation might be, you shall be escorted in safety back to your ship. We are willing that you should be accompanied by not more than six of your sailors, for whose safety I would be equally responsible. The bearer of this will arrange with you as to the point and hour at which you would land.

This was signed "Toussaint."

Nat remembered the name.

"Is the writer of this the man who was the coachman of Monsieur Bayou, the agent of the Count de Noé?"

"The same, sir. He is now next in command to Biassou and François. He is greatly respected among the negroes, and is their chief doctor."

"I have met him, and know that he is worthy of confidence. This is just what we have been wanting, Turnbull," he said, handing the letter to him.

"Then you know this man?" Turnbull said, after he had read it, and stepped a few paces away from the messenger, so as to be able to converse unheard by him.

"Yes, he is one of the few who remained faithful at the rising, concealed his master and family in the woods, and got them safely off. I had an interview with him, and endeavoured to get him to do as

much for Madame Duchesne, but he refused, saying that he had done his duty to his master and must now do it to his countrymen. I had frequently spoken with him before. He bore a very high character, and was much respected by all the negroes in the plantations round. As you see, he writes and expresses himself well, and has, indeed, received a very fair education, and is as intelligent as an ordinary white man. I am quite sure that I can place confidence in him."

"Perhaps so, but the question is not whether he would be willing, but whether he would have the power, to ensure your[Pg 296] safety. Biassou is, by all accounts, a perfect monster of cruelty."

"Yes, they say he is the most fiendish of all these savage brutes. Of course I must risk that. My instructions, as you know, are to open communication with the negroes, if possible, and ascertain their intentions. This is the first opportunity that has offered, and I can hardly expect a more favourable one."

"You will take one of us with you, I hope."

"No; if anything happens to me the *Agile* must have a captain, and you would want at least one officer."

He returned to the mulatto.

"Shall I give you a message in writing, or will you take it by word of mouth?"

"I do not want writing, sir; if I were searched, and it were found that I was an agent of Toussaint, I should be hung at once. You give me a message, and I will repeat it."

"Tell Toussaint that the commander of this ship is Mr. Glover, whom he will remember to have seen at Monsieur Duchesne's plantation and elsewhere, and who knows him to be an honourable man, and will therefore trust himself in the mountains relying upon his promise of protection. You understand that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Please repeat my words."

The man did so.

"How far is Toussaint from here?"

"Six hours' journey among the hills."

"Then tell him that I will land to-morrow night, or rather the next

morning, an hour before daybreak—that is to say, at about half-past four. That time will be best, because the boat will return to the ship before it is light enough for it to be seen. Where do you propose that I shall go?"[Pg 297]

"You see that rock near the end of the point to the south?—it is about three miles from there. To the left of that rock is a sandy beach, which is a good place for landing. Your escort will be there waiting for you."

The mulatto bowed, and at once went over the side and got into his boat, while the two men who had rowed him out were still busy selling fruit to the crew. Nat told Sambo to go and buy some fruit, not because they really wanted it, for a supply had already been bought, but in order that, should any of the negroes in the other boats have noticed the mulatto coming on board, it would be supposed that he had done so in order to persuade the steward to deal with him. The next day four picked men were chosen to accompany Nat. They were to take no muskets with them, but each was to carry, in addition to his cutlass, a pistol in his belt, and another concealed in the bosom of his shirt. The absence of muskets was intended to show the negroes that the party had no fear as to their safety. Nat himself intended to carry only his sword, and a double-barrelled pistol in his belt. At four o'clock on the following morning, he and the four men took their places in the gig, and were rowed ashore to the point agreed on. As they landed a negro came down to meet them.

"Toussaint charged me to tell you, sir, that he has sent twelve men down, and that he has done so lest you should meet other parties of our people who might not know of this safe-conduct that he has given you."

And he handed a document to Nat.

"He has done well," Nat said. "I know that I can rely upon Toussaint, but I myself have thought it possible that we might fall in with men of other bands, and I have therefore brought four of my sailors with me. I am ready to start with you whenever you choose."

"We will go on at once. The hills are very close here, but[Pg 298] it is best that we should be well among them before it is daylight, or we might be noticed by someone in the town. They would not concern themselves much with us, but your dress and that of the sailors would be sure to cause talk and excite suspicion among the soldiers."

He went up to some negroes standing a short distance away and gave them an order. They at once started. He himself took his place

by Nat, and the sailors followed close behind.

"You talk French very well," Nat said.

"Yes, sir, thanks to Toussaint. You do not remember me, though I should know you were it daylight, for I have seen you several times when you have been over at our plantation with Mademoiselle Duchesne. I was chief helper in Monsieur Bayou's stables. Of an evening Toussaint had a sort of school, and four or five of us always went to him, and I learned to read and write, and to talk French as the whites talk it and not as we do. He is a good man, and we all love him. There are many who think he will one day be king of the island; he knows much more than any of the others. But it may be that he will be killed before that, for Biassou hates him because he does not like his cruel ways and speaks boldly against them, which no one else dare do, not even François, whom we all regard as equal in rank to him.

"There have been many quarrels, but Biassou knows well enough that if he were to hurt Toussaint there would be a general outcry, and that he and the men who carried out his orders would assuredly be killed. For all that no one doubts that he would get Toussaint removed quietly if there was a chance of doing so, but we do not mean to give him the chance. There are twenty of us who keep guard over him. As for Toussaint, he is not like the others, who, when there is nothing else to be done, spend their time in feasting and drinking. He is always busy attending to the wounded who[Pg 299] are brought up to him, or the sick, of whom there are many, for the cold air in the mountains has brought down great numbers with the fever, especially those whose plantations lay on the plain, and who were accustomed to sleep in huts. Very many have died, but Toussaint has saved many, and were it needed he could have two hundred for his guard instead of twenty.

"But indeed he thinks not of danger, his whole thoughts are taken up with his work; and he is often without regular sleep for nights together, so great is the need for his services."

The ground at once began to rise rapidly, and before the day fairly broke they were high among the hills. When it became light Nat examined the document Toussaint had sent to him. It ran as follows:

I, Toussaint, do give notice to all that I have given this safe-conduct and my solemn promise for his safety to Monsieur Glover, a British officer, with whom I desire to converse on matters of

importance.

Then followed his signature and a great seal in red wax.

"It was the one Monsieur Bayou used," the negro said. "Toussaint brought it and the wax from his office, and uses it often, so that we may all recognize it when we see it—for, as you know, sir, there are scarcely any of our people who can read."

After three hours' walking the man pointed out a wood near the crest of a high hill a mile distant.

"Toussaint is there," he said. "He accompanied us to that point in order that you should have less distance to travel."

Nat was by no means sorry at the news. The way had been very steep and difficult, and the sun had now gained great power. As they neared the edge of the wood, Toussaint came out to meet him. [Pg 300]

"I am glad to see you, Monsieur Glover," he said quietly. "I learned from our people at Cape François that you had returned there with Madame Duchesne and her daughter, and I rejoiced indeed at your escape, which seemed to me marvellous, for how you avoided the search made for you I could not tell. They told me that Madame Duchesne was carried down on a litter, which must have greatly added to your difficulties. I hardly thought, monsieur, when I saw you last that we should thus meet again, I as one of the leaders of my people, you as commander of an English ship."

"No; things change quickly, Toussaint."

The negro led the way to a rough hut constructed of boughs and trees in the centre of the clump.

"You must need breakfast, and, as you see, it is ready for you. Your men will be cared for."

The breakfast was rough, but Nat enjoyed it greatly. Toussaint remarked that he himself had breakfasted an hour before, and he talked while his guest ate.

"It is as well," he said, "that you should be down near the spot where you landed before it is dark, for the track is far too rough to travel after dark. I suppose you have ordered your boat to come to fetch you?"

"Yes, I ordered it to be there as soon as it could leave the ship

without being seen from the shore; but I hardly thought that I should be able to return this evening, as your messenger told me that your camp was six hours' journey among the hills."

"Yes, my camp is there, and I too would like to return before nightfall. There are many who need my care, and I have already been too long away. Now, Monsieur Glover, as to the subject on which I asked you to come to converse with me. We have heard that some of the planters have sent a deputation to Jamaica asking the governor to send troops to[Pg 301] take this island for England. We, as you doubtless know, are not for the republic. We call ourselves the royal army, seeing that the National Assembly of France refuse to do anything for us. It is true that their commissioners at Cape François have issued a proclamation offering a free pardon to all who have been concerned in the insurrection, and freedom and equal rights to men of all colour. We do not believe them. The Assembly care nothing for us. They passed a decree giving rights to the mulattoes, but in no way affecting us; and then, directly they found that the mulattoes were exercising their rights, they passed another decree reversing the first. One cannot expect good faith in men like these; they would wait till we had laid down our arms and returned to our plantations, and then they would shoot us down like dogs, just as they are murdering all the best men of their own country and keeping their king a prisoner. Therefore we do not recognize the republic, but are for the king."

"I fear there will soon be no king for you to recognize," Nat said; "everything points to the fact that they are determined to murder him, as they have murdered every noble and every good man in the country."

"I see that," Toussaint said gravely, "but the number of those who know what is passing in France is small. However, we who do know, and are responsible for the mass who trust in us, must consider what is the best thing to do. Do you think there will be a war between France and England?"

"I think that if the king is murdered the indignation in England, which is already intense, will be so great that war is certain."

"So much the better for us," Toussaint said. "The more they fight against each other, the less will they be able to pay attention to Hayti; but on the other hand the more likely will it be that the English will endeavour to obtain possession of[Pg 302] this island. Now, between the French and the English we have no great choice. We regard ourselves as French; we speak the French language, and have, ever

since the colony was first formed, lived under the French flag. Then, on the other hand, the French have been our masters, and we are determined that they shall never again be so. Now as to your people. In their own islands they have slaves just as the French have here, and we have no intention of changing slavery under one set of masters for slavery under another. Now, sir, do you think that if the English were to come here they would guarantee that slavery should never exist again in the island?"

"That I cannot say," Nat said. "I cannot answer for what the British parliament would do in that matter. The feeling against slavery is growing very fast in England, and I feel convinced that before long a law will be passed putting a stop altogether to the transportation of negroes from Africa; but whether that feeling will, at any rate for a long time, so gain in strength as to cause parliament to pass a law abolishing slavery altogether in British dominions, is more than I can say. It would be a tremendous step to take. It would mean absolute ruin to our islands; for you know as well as I do that your people are not disposed for work, and would never make steady labourers if allowed to live in their own way. Then you see, were slavery abolished altogether in this island, it would be difficult in the extreme to continue it in others."

"But they would not find us as slaves here," Toussaint said. "They would find us a free people, without masters, unattached to any plantation or to any regular toil; we should be like the Caribs in Jamaica. It would be as if they came to a land which foreigners had never visited. They would find a people with arms in their hands, and perfectly capable of defending themselves, but ready to accept the sovereignty of England[Pg 303] on the condition that our personal liberty was in no way interfered with."

"There is a great deal in what you say, Toussaint, and to-morrow I shall sail for Jamaica and explain exactly the line you take to the admiral. I may say that in coming to see you I do so in accordance with the orders that I received, to ascertain if possible the views of the leaders of this movement."

"If these terms are refused," Toussaint went on, "and your people invade the island, we shall leave you and the French to fight it out until we perceive which is the stronger, and as soon as we do so, shall aid the weaker. I do not say that we shall stand aloof up to that time, we shall fight against both, they would be equally our enemies; but if one were so far getting the better of it as to be likely to drive the other out, then in self-defence we should unite our forces against it. I may say that although we and the mulattoes are both fighting against the

French, the alliance is not likely to be a long one. We all know that if they got the upper hand they would be far more cruel and more tyrannous than the whites have been. They have ever looked down upon us, and have treated us with far greater contempt than have the whites, who, to do them justice, were kindly masters, and especially treated their house servants well. There will therefore be four parties here all hostile to each other. You and the French will be striving for mastery, we for liberty, the mulattoes for the domination of the island and for their personal interest. The way I have pointed out is, in my opinion, the only one that can bring about peace. If your government and people will give us a solemn undertaking that in no case shall slavery ever be re-established, and that all men shall have equal rights, we will join you heart and soul. When I say equal rights I do not mean that they shall have votes.[Pg 304] We are at present absolutely unfit to have votes or to exercise political power. I only mean that the law shall be the same for us as for the whites, that we shall be taxed on the same scale in proportion to our means, that the assembly shall have no power to make separate laws concerning us, and that, should they attempt to make such laws, they should be at once dissolved by the white authorities of the island."

"I think your proposal a perfectly fair one, Toussaint, and I have no doubt that any one who has, as I have, a knowledge of the situation here, would not hesitate to accept it. But I doubt whether public opinion at home is ripe for a change that would be denounced by all having an interest in the West Indian Islands, and declared by them to be absolutely destructive to their prosperity. However, you may be assured that I shall represent your offer in the most favourable light. I must ask, however, are you empowered by the other leaders to make it?"

"I have talked the matter with François, who is wholly of my opinion," Toussaint said. "It is useless to talk to Biassou; when he is not murdering someone he is drinking; but his opposition would go for little, except among the very worst of our people. He is already regarded with horror and disgust, and you may be assured that his career will ere long come to an end, in which case François and I will share the power between us. At the same time I do not blind myself to the possibility that other leaders may arise. The men of one district know but little of the others, and may elect their own chiefs. Still, I think that if I had the authority to say that the proposal I have made to you had been accepted, I could count on the support of the great majority of the men of my colour, for already they are beginning to find that a life of lawless liberty has its drawbacks. Already we have been obliged to order that a certain amount of work shall be done[Pg 305]

by every man among the plantations beyond the reach of the towns, in order to ensure a supply of food.

"The order has been obeyed, but not very willingly, for there can be no doubt that a portion of the men believed that when they had once got rid of the masters there would be no occasion whatever for any further work, but that they would somehow be supplied with an abundance of all that they required. The sickness that has prevailed has also had its effect. There are few, indeed, here who have any knowledge of medicine, and the poor people have suffered accordingly. When in the plantations they were always well tended in sickness, while here they have had neither shelter nor care. It is all very well to tell them that liberty cannot be obtained without sacrifices, and that it must be a long time before things settle down and each man finds work to do, but the poor people, ignorant as they are, are like children, and think very little of the future. The effect of centuries of slavery will take many years to remedy. For myself, although I believe that we shall finally obtain what we desire, and shall become undisputed masters of the island, I foresee that our troubles are only beginning. We have had no training for self-government. We shall have destroyed the civilization that reigned here, and shall have nothing to take its place, and I dread that instead of progressing we may retrograde until we sink back into the condition in which we lived in Africa."

At this moment a negro ran up.

"Doctor," he said, "there are a large number of our people close at hand, and I think I can make out Biassou among them."

"I fear that we may have some trouble, Monsieur Glover," Toussaint said quietly, "but be assured that I and those with me will maintain my safe-conduct with our lives. Biassou[Pg 306] must have arrived at my camp after I left, and he must have heard there that I was going to meet an English officer, and has followed me. He was present when François and I arranged to send a messenger to propose a meeting to you, and he then assented, but as often as not he forgets in the morning what he has agreed to overnight."

He went apart and spoke to his men. Twenty of them had accompanied him from his camp, and with the twelve who had formed the escort, and Nat and the sailors, there were in all thirty-eight, and from the quiet way in which they took up their arms Nat had little doubt that they would, if necessary, make a stout fight against Biassou's savages.

These arrived in two or three minutes. They had evidently travelled

at the top of their speed, for their breath came fast, and they were bathed in sweat. Their aspect was savage in the extreme. Most of them wore some garment or other the spoil of murdered victims, some of them broad Panama-hats, others had women's shawls wrapped round their waists as sashes, some had jackets that were once white, others were naked to the waist. A few had guns, the rest either axes or pikes, and all carried long knives. Conspicuous among them was Biassou himself, a negro of almost gigantic stature and immense strength, to which he owed no small part of his supremacy among his friends. He came on shouting "Treachery! treachery!" words that were re-echoed in a hoarse chorus by his followers, who numbered about a hundred and fifty.

At the threatening aspect of the new-comers, Toussaint's men closed up round him, but he signed them to stand back, and quietly awaited the coming of Biassou. The calmness of Toussaint had its effect on Biassou. Instead of rushing at him with his axe, as it had seemed was his intention, he paused and again shouted "Treachery!"

"What nonsense are you talking, Biassou?" Toussaint said. [Pg 307]
"I am carrying out the arrangement to which you and François agreed the other night, and am having an interview with this British officer."

"When did I agree to such a thing?" the great negro roared.

"Last Friday night we agreed that it was well that we should learn the intentions of the English, and that we should ascertain the position in which we should stand were they to come here."

"I remember nothing about it, Toussaint."

"That is possible enough," the latter replied. "You know that it is no uncommon thing for you to forget in the morning what was arranged overnight. This officer has come here on my invitation and under my safe-conduct, and no man shall touch him while I live."

"It is agreed," Biassou said, "and all have sworn to it, that no white who falls into our hands shall be spared. Such is the case, is it not?" he said to his followers; and they answered with a loud shout and began to press forward.

"These men have not fallen into our hands," Toussaint said, "they have come here on our invitation, and, as I have told you, with our safeguard."

"It is all very well for you to talk, Toussaint; I know you. You pretend to be with us, but your heart is with the whites, and you are here to

conspire with them against us," and he raised his axe as if about to rush forward.

"This is madness, Biassou," Toussaint said sternly. "Have we not enough enemies now that we should quarrel among ourselves? You have done enough harm to our cause already by your horrible cruelties, for which every coloured man who falls into the hands of the whites has to suffer severely. Beware how you commence a conflict; you may be more numerous than we are, but we are better armed, and even if you[Pg 308] overpowered us in the end, you would suffer heavily before you did so."

"I wish you no harm, Toussaint, but for the last time I demand that these white men shall be given up to me."

"And for the last time I refuse," Toussaint said; and his men without orders moved up close to him.

Biassou stood for a moment irresolute, and then, with a shout to his men to follow him, sprang forward. In an instant Nat threw himself before Toussaint, and when Biassou was within a couple of yards of him threw up his arm and levelled his pistol between the negro's eyes.

"Drop that axe," he shouted, "or you are a dead man!"

The negro stood like a black statue for an instant. The pistol was but a foot from his face, and he knew that before his uplifted axe could fall he would be a dead man.



"DROP IT!" NAT REPEATED.

"Drop it!" Nat repeated. "If you don't before I count three, I fire. One

—two—" and the negro's axe fell to the ground. "Stand where you are!" Nat exclaimed, "the slightest movement and I fire! Come up here, men!"

The four sailors came up, cutlass in one hand and pistol in the other.

"This man is your prisoner," he said. "Keep him between you, one on each side and the other two behind. If he makes the slightest movement to escape, or if the blacks behind approach any nearer, send your four bullets into his brain."

The men took up their stations as directed.

"Now, Biassou," he went on, lowering his own pistol, "you can continue your conference with Toussaint."

"You see, Biassou," Toussaint said, "you have only rendered yourself ridiculous. I repeat what I said before, this officer is here in answer to my invitation sent to him after François and you had agreed that it was advantageous to learn what the objects of the English were. If you [Pg 309]question him you will find that it is as I say. We have had our conference, have expressed our views, and he will repeat what I have said to the British governor of Jamaica; and I think that, whatever the result may be, it is well that the English should understand that we have resolved that, whether they or the French are the possessors of this island, slavery is abolished for ever here. He will return at once to the coast, and will then sail direct for Jamaica. Now, if you have any observation to make, I shall be glad to hear it."

"I do not doubt what you say," Biassou replied sullenly, "but it must be settled by what François says when we rejoin him."

"So be it," Toussaint said. "And now, I pray you, let there be no quarrel between us. I have been forced to withstand you, because I was bound by a sacred promise. Any divisions will be fatal to our cause. For the moment you may be in superior force, but another time those who love and follow me might be the more numerous. You well know that I am as faithful to the cause as you are, and we must both set an example to our followers, that while we may differ as to the methods by which success is to be gained, we are at one in our main object."

"I admit that I was wrong," the great negro said frankly. "I drank more than was good for me before I started, and my blood has been heated by the speed with which we followed you. I am sober now, for which I have to thank," he added with a grim smile, "this young officer;

though I own that I do not like his method. Let us think no more of it;" and he held out his hand to Toussaint, which the latter took.

A shout of satisfaction rose from the negroes on both sides. The determined attitude of Toussaint's men, the fact that they had four whites among them, and that almost all of them had muskets, had cooled the courage of Biassou's followers, who, as[Pg 310] soon as their leader was captured, saw that even if they gained the victory, it would be at the cost of at least half their number. There was no prospect of plunder or of any advantage, and they knew that, beloved and respected as Toussaint was, it was very possible that those who did survive the fight would fall victims to the indignation that would be aroused at the news of an attack being made upon him.

"Now that it is all settled we may as well be starting for the coast, Toussaint," Nat said. "There is nothing more for us to arrange, and as our presence here might possibly lead to further trouble, the sooner we are off the better."

"I will not ask you to stay," the negro said. "I do not think that we shall have any more trouble, but there is no saying. Several of Biassou's men have wine-skins with them, and a quarrel might arise when they had drunk more. I will send you down under the same escort as before."

"I do not think that we shall need so many. I should not like to weaken you so far."

"There is no fear for me," Toussaint said decidedly. "Arriving in hot blood they might have attacked me, but I am sure they will not do so now. They know well enough that I should be terribly avenged were they to do so. It is quite necessary that you should take as many men as before, for it is possible that some of Biassou's men might steal away and follow you."

A few minutes afterwards Nat set out with his men and his guard of twelve blacks. It was still some hours before the time at which he was to be met by the boat. They therefore halted when within a mile of the shore, and there waited until it was dark. Then he went on alone with the four sailors to the beach, and in a few minutes after they arrived there they heard the sound of the oars of the gig.

"I am heartily glad to see you back again," Turnbull said as Nat stepped on to the deck. "Lippincott and I have been[Pg 311] horribly uneasy about you all day. Did everything go off quietly?"

"Yes, except for two or three minutes, when that bloodthirsty

scoundrel Biassou came upon the scene with a hundred and fifty of his followers. There was very nearly a shindy then, but it passed off; for he did not like looking down the muzzle of my pistol at a few inches from his head, and my four men made him a prisoner until affairs had taken a friendly turn, which was not long after. For when the leader of a party is a prisoner, and his guards have orders to shoot him instantly if there is any trouble, it is astonishing how quick people are in coming to an understanding."

"Yes, I should say so," Turnbull laughed. "However, as it has turned out well, and you have fulfilled your mission, it doesn't matter to us; and I hope that we have now done with this creeping alongshore work."

CHAPTER XVII

A FRENCH FRIGATE

On arriving at Kingston Nat went on board the flag-ship, and reported to the admiral the particulars of his visit to Toussaint.

"He is evidently a long-headed fellow," the admiral said, "and from his point of view his proposal is a fair one; but I am afraid our people at home would never give such an undertaking. It would be impossible for us to have one island where the blacks were free, while in all others they would remain slaves. It would be as much as saying to them, 'If you want freedom you must fight for it;' and even if the people at home[Pg 312] could bring themselves to pay the immense amount of money that would be required to emancipate the slaves by indemnifying their owners, it would nevertheless be the ruin of the islands, and all connected with them. However, I will take you ashore to the governor, after my clerk has made a copy of your report."

"I have made two copies, sir."

"All the better. Then we will go at once."

The governor heard Nat's story, and received his report.

"It is at least satisfactory," he said, "to have learnt from one of themselves what the views of the principal leaders are, and I consider that you have performed your commission exceedingly well, Lieutenant Glover, and, undoubtedly, at a great deal of risk to yourself. As to the matter of the communication, it will of course receive serious attention. It is far too important a business for anyone

to give off-hand an opinion upon it. I fancy, sir, that you are likely to have more active work before long, for I think there is no doubt that war will very shortly be declared with France, and her privateers will be swarming about these seas."

It was nearly six months before any special incident took place. No vessel had been missing since the capture of the *Agile*, and it was evident that any pirates there might have been among the islands had moved to waters where they could carry on their trade with less interruption. The *Agile* cruised about among the islands, and although she had a pleasant time, officers and men alike grew impatient at the uneventful nature of their work. Things were but little changed in Hayti. Biassou had been deprived of his command, and it was surmised that he had been murdered, but at any rate he was never heard of again. François and Toussaint commanded, but the former came to be so jealous of Toussaint's popularity that the latter was obliged to retire, and to cross the frontier into the [Pg 313] Spanish part of the island. There he was well received, and showed great ability in various actions against the French, with whom Spain was then at war. He and many other negroes had declared for Spain, upon the singular ground that they had always been governed by a king, and preferred to be ruled by the king of Spain rather than by a republic.

With only six hundred men Toussaint drove fifteen hundred French out of a strong post which they occupied in the Spanish town of Raphaelita, and afterwards took several other posts and villages. It was for these successes that he gained the name of L'Ouverture, or opener, and the Marquis D'Hermona gave him the rank of lieutenant-general. The three French commissioners had returned to France, and had been succeeded by two others, Santhonax and Poveren, the former a ruffian of the same type as those who were deluging the soil of France with its best blood, and who made themselves odious to both parties by their brutality and greed. At last, at the end of February, 1793, came the news of the execution of the king of France, and the certainty that war was imminent.

"Now we shall have more lively times," Turnbull said. "It has been dull enough of late."

"There has been nothing to grumble at," the surgeon said. "What would you have? Haven't we been sailing about like gentlemen, with nothing to do but to drink and sleep, and look at the islands, and take things easy altogether?"

"Don't you talk, Doyle," Turnbull said, laughing. "There is no one

who has grumbled more than yourself."

"That is in the cause of science," the Irishman retorted. "How can I ever become a distinguished man, and show what is in me, and make all sorts of discoveries, if there is never a chance that comes in my way? There are my instruments all ready for use, they might as well be at the bottom of the sea. I hone them once a week, and well-nigh shed tears be[Pg 314]cause of the good work they ought to be doing. It is all very well for you, Turnbull, you won't forget how to kill a man when the time comes; but let me tell you that any fellow who doesn't know his A B C can kill a man, whereas it takes a man of science to cure him."

"There is a good deal in that, Doyle," Nat said, when the laugh had subsided, "though I don't know that I considered it in that light before; but that, perhaps, is because I have tried one and never tried the other."

"It's a fine thing," Doyle said, "to be a surgeon. There you see a man with his legs shot off. If it was not for you he would die. You take him in hand, you amputate a bit higher up, you make him tidy and comfortable, and there he is walking about almost as well as if he had two legs; and although he is not fit for ship service again, he would be as good a man in a fight with a cudgel as ever he was. Now I ask you fairly, what is there that you can do to compare with that?"

"Nothing in that way, I must admit," Nat laughed, "Well, you may be having an opportunity of showing your superiority before long. This is just the ground the French privateers are likely to choose. There are plenty of French ports for them to put into, hundreds of bays where they could lie hidden, and lots of shipping to plunder. No doubt they will be thick in the channel and down the straits, but our merchantmen will not think of going there unless in large fleets or under convoy of ships of war; while here, though they might be guarded on their way across the Atlantic, they would have to scatter as soon as they were among the islands. Well, we must look out that we are not caught napping. Of course, until we get news that war is declared we can't fire upon a Frenchman; while if one arrived with the news before we got it, he might sail up close by us and pour in a broadside." [Pg 315]

"At any rate we are likely to take some prizes," Lippincott said, "for the instant we get the news we can pounce upon any French merchantman."

"Yes; those homeward-bound could hardly hear the news as soon as we do, while of those coming out many slow sailers will have left before war is declared, and may not be here for weeks after we hear

of it. The great thing will be for us to put ourselves on the main line of traffic. As we have received no special orders we can cruise where we like. I should say that coming from France, they would be likely to keep down the coast of Spain and on to Madeira before they strike across, as in that way they would be altogether out of the line of the Gulf Stream. Then, if they were making for Hayti, they would probably be coming along west on or about the 20th parallel north; while, if making for Guadeloupe or Martinique, they would be some three or four degrees farther south. Probably privateers would follow the same lines, as before commencing operations they would want to take in provisions and water, to learn where our cruisers are likely to be, to pick up pilots, and so on. So I should say that we can cruise about these waters for another fortnight safely, and then go through the Caribbean Islands and cruise some seventy or eighty miles beyond them, carefully avoiding putting into any of our own islands as we pass."

"Why should you do that?" Turnbull asked.

"Because the chances are that we should find, either at Barbados or St. Lucia or Dominica—or, in fact, at any of the other islands, one of our frigates, or at any rate, some officer senior to me; and in that case, as we have no fixed orders from the admiral, we might be detained or sent off in some direction that might not suit us at all."

"Good!" Doyle said. "It is always a safe rule to keep out of the way of a bigger man than yourself. I have always[Pg 316] observed that a captain of a man-of-war or of a frigate is sure to be down on small craft, if he gets a chance. It is like a big boy at school fagging a little one; he could do quite as well without him, but it is just a matter of devilment and to show his authority. Heaven protect us against falling in with a frigate. If she were a Frenchman she would sink us; if she were a Britisher she would bully us."

They reached the ground on which Nat had decided to cruise. Three days later the look-out at the mast-head shouted "Sail ho!" the words acting like an electric shock to those on deck.

"How does it bear?"

"About east by north, sir. There are three vessels; I can only see their topsails at present. Two of them are a bit bigger than the third. They look to me to be merchantmen. I should say the other, by the cut of his sails, is a Frenchman."

A low cheer broke from the men. "Now, if that fellow brings news that war is declared, we are in luck," Nat said. "Either he is conveying

two French merchantmen he has overtaken, or he has two British prizes he has picked up. If they are English, we shall not get so much prize-money; but then we shall have less difficulty with the privateer, if privateer she is, because she must have put a good many of her hands on board the prizes. So we can in either case count upon doing well. At any rate they are not likely to suspect that we are English, being French-built and French-rigged. Even if they have a doubt, they will be satisfied as soon as they see the name on our bows. We will not get up any more sail."

"I will go up and have a look at her," Turnbull said; and slinging his glass over his shoulder he went aloft.

"I think," he called down, after a long look at them, "that the middle ship is a good deal larger than she looks; and the[Pg 317] others are carrying every stitch of canvas, but she has neither royals nor topgallant-sails. Her yards have a wide spread, and I am inclined to think that she is a frigate or a large corvette—certainly a French one. As to the others, I cannot say with certainty, but I rather fancy they are English; in which case she has captured them on the way, and, being much faster than they are, has to go under easy sail to keep with them."

"Well, I hope she is not too big for us," Nat said, as Turnbull rejoined him.

"What should you call too big, sir?" Turnbull asked with a smile.

"Well, I should say that a fifty was too big."

"I should think so indeed. A twenty-gun sloop would be a pretty formidable opponent."

"Yes, a twenty would about suit us, especially as she may have fifty of her men on board the other craft—that is, if they are her prizes. It is the men that I am more afraid of than the guns. Two to one are no great odds in guns, especially as we generally work ours faster than the French do; but when it comes to a hundred and fifty men or so against forty, it may be very unpleasant if we get a spar knocked away and they come alongside of us. We may as well get the French flag up at once. With a good glass they could make it out a long way off. Let the men have their breakfast, it is a bad thing to fight fasting."

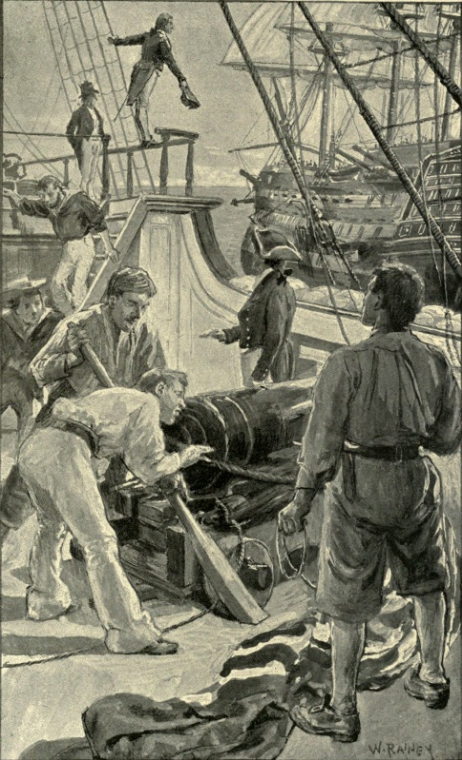
The men were not long over their meal; by the time they came on deck again the strangers were within five or six miles. The wind was in the north-east, and the *Agile* was almost close-hauled, while the others had the wind broad on their quarters. There was now no longer

any doubt that the outside vessels were two large British West Indiamen, and the fact that they were in company with what was undoubtedly a French frigate[Pg 318] was regarded as absolute proof that war had been declared, and that the French ship of war on her way out to the colonies with the news had overtaken and captured the two British ships, which were probably sailing in company. As they approached, the *Agile* was luffed up more into the wind in order to pass between the Frenchman and the prize within a few cables' length to starboard of him.

"How many guns do you make her out to be, Mr. Lippincott?"

"I think that she has eighteen guns on a broadside."

"The odds are pretty strongly against us," Nat said; "but we shall have the weather-gauge, that counts for a good deal. Anyhow, we shall be able to annoy her, and possibly, if we hang on to her, the sound of firing will bring up one of our cruisers from Barbuda or Antigua."



NAT SPRANG ON TO THE RAIL.

An awning which was stretched over the quarter-deck had not

been taken down, and as the brigantine approached the French frigate, there was no sign that her intentions were not of a peaceable nature. The French ensign floated from the peak, the sailors on deck were lounging about, some with their jackets on, others in their shirts, and only a few with hats on seemed to be watching with idle curiosity the approaching vessels. Nat and the officers retained their uniforms, for as only their heads and shoulders showed over the rail, there was nothing to distinguish them from those of a fine French privateer, for these generally adopted a regular naval dress. The two vessels were but fifty yards apart as they met. Nat sprang on to the rail, and in reply to the hail from the Frenchman, "What ship is that?" raised his cap in salute and shouted:

"The *Agile* of Bordeaux. Have you any news from France, sir?"

"Yes, war has been declared with England."

[Pg 319]

"Thank you, that is good news indeed," and he leapt down on to the deck.

The vessels were both travelling at a speed of about eight knots an hour, and were already passing one another fast, when, as Nat waved his hand, the French flag was run down, an English ensign already fastened to the halyards was simultaneously run up, and a moment later the five guns, which had previously been trained to bear aft and double-shotted, poured their broadside into the quarters of the French frigate. Shouts of surprise and fury rose from her; no thought that the little craft so fearlessly approaching her was an enemy had crossed the mind of any on board, still less that if British she would venture to fire upon so vastly superior a foe.

"About ship!" Nat said, the instant the guns had been fired. The sail-trimmers were at their places, the *Agile* shot up into the wind, her head paid off, and she swept round on the other tack, crossing the stern of the Frenchman, her guns on the starboard side sending their shot in through his stern windows, and raking his whole length as they were brought to bear; then she wore round on her heel, the guns on the larboard side were reloaded, and she again raked the Frenchman. So far not a single shot had been fired in return. The din on board the frigate was prodigious, as the guns had to be cast loose, magazines opened, powder and shot carried up, and the sails trimmed to enable her to bear up so as to show her broadside to her puny foe.

Before she could do so the *Agile*, true to her name, was again

round. The Frenchmen, confused by the variety of orders issued, were slow at their work, and as their opponent came up into the wind the brigantine was again astern of them, and raked them this time with heavy charges of grape. A chorus of shrieks and cries from the frigate told how terrible was the effect.[Pg 320]

"By St. Patrick," the surgeon exclaimed to Lippincott, "it is grand! But it looks as if the captain wasn't going to give me a chance, and all me instruments laid out ready for action."

"Never mind, doctor, you will be able to practise on the Frenchmen," Lippincott laughed.

But the French captain knew his business, and putting his helm over again, ran off the wind, so that the two vessels were now on the same tack, with the *Agile* on her opponent's quarter. Several of the French guns were now brought to bear, but their discharge was too hurried, and owing to the brigantine lying so much lower in the water, the shot flew between her masts or made holes in her mainsail. In a moment she was round again, and crossed her opponent's stern at a distance of some thirty yards, the word being passed along that the gunners were to aim at the rudder-post and to double-shot the guns. A loud cheer rose as two of the shots struck the mark. The Frenchman replied with a volley of musketry from the marines gathered on her poop. Three of the sailors fell, and several others were hit.

The Frenchman was, when the *Agile* delivered her last broadside, running nearly before the wind, and it was speedily evident that the injury to her rudder had been fatal, for although she attempted by trimming her sails again to bear up, each time she fell off, though not before some of her shot had hulled her active opponent. Seeing, however, that he must now be easily outmanœuvred, the Frenchman made no further effort to change his course, but continued doggedly on his way, the topmen swarming aloft and shaking out more canvas. The *Agile* followed the frigate's example, and placing herself on her stern quarter, kept up a steady fire, yawing when necessary to bring all her guns to bear, the French replying occasionally with one of their stern guns. Owing to the accelerated speed at which both vessels were now going,[Pg 321] the Indiamen had been left behind. Half an hour later the frigate's mizzen-mast, which had been severely wounded by the first broadside, went over her side. Cheer after cheer rose from the *Agile*; her opponent was now at her mercy. She had but to repeat the tactics with which she had begun the fight. Just as Nat gave the order to do so, musket shots were heard in the distance. The crew of one of the merchantmen had been allowed to remain on

deck, as, being under the guns of the frigate, there was no possibility of their attempting to overpower their captors. As soon, however, as it became evident that the frigate was getting the worst of it, they had been hurried below, and the hatches dropped over them. From the port-holes, however, they could obtain a view of what was going on ahead of them, and as soon as they saw the frigate's mast go by the board, they armed themselves with anything that would serve as weapons, managed to push up the after-hatch, and rushed on deck. The prize crew were all clustered forward watching the fight; a shout from the helmsman apprised them of their danger, and they rushed aft. They were, however, less numerous than the British sailors, and no better armed, for, believing that the frigate would easily crush her tiny assailant, they were unprepared to take any part in the fight.

The contest was a very short one. Knowing that the frigate was crippled, and that the brigantine would soon be free to return to them, the Frenchmen saw that they must eventually be taken, and the officer in command being knocked senseless with a belaying-pin, they threw down their knives and surrendered. The other Indiaman at once put down her helm on seeing that the British flag was being run up on her consort.

"We must not let that fellow get away," Nat said; "we can leave the frigate alone for half an hour. We will give him[Pg 322] two more broadsides with grape through his stern windows, and then bear up after that lumbering merchantman. We shall be alongside in half an hour."

In less than that time they were within pistol-shot of the West Indiaman, and the prize crew at once hauled down their flag. The *Agile* went alongside, released the prisoners, who had been securely fastened in the hold, and replaced them by the French crew. The Indiaman's officers had been allowed to remain on deck.

"Now, captain," Nat said to the English master, "please keep every sail full and follow us. It will not be long before we settle with the frigate, and we shall then run down to Barbados."

The master, who was greatly surprised at the youth of the officer who had so ably handled his ship against an immensely superior foe, said:

"Allow me to congratulate you on the splendid way in which you have handled your vessel. I could scarcely believe my eyes when you opened fire on the frigate. It seemed impossible that you should have thought of really engaging such an opponent."

"You see, we had the weather gauge of her, captain, and the brigantine is both fast and handy. But I must be off now before they have time to get into fighting trim again."

In another half-hour he was in his old position under the frigate's quarter, and was preparing to resume his former tactics, when the French flag fluttered down amid the cheers of the *Agile's* crew, which were faintly repeated by the two merchantmen a mile astern.

"I am heartily glad that they have surrendered," Nat said to Turnbull; "it would have been a mere massacre if they had been obstinate. Now, will you go on board and see what state she is in. Do not accept the officers' swords. They have[Pg 323] done all that they could, but they really never had a chance after we had once got in the right position. Order all unwounded men below. As soon as you return with your report as to the state of things, I will send you off again with twenty men to take command. You had better bring the officers back with you. Mr. Lippincott, hoist a signal to the merchantmen to lie to as soon as they get abreast of us."

Mr. Turnbull returned in twenty minutes.

"It is an awful sight," he said. "The captain and the two senior lieutenants are killed, and it was the third lieutenant who ordered the flag to be lowered. Her name is the *Spartane*. She carried a crew of three hundred men, of whom fifty were on board her prizes. She has lost ninety killed, and there are nearly as many more wounded, of whom at least half are hit with grape, and I fancy few of them will recover; the others are splinter wounds, some of them very bad. There are two surgeons at work. I told them that ours would come to their assistance as soon as he had done with our own wounded."

The third lieutenant and three midshipmen, who were the sole survivors of the officers of the *Spartane*, soon came on board.

"Gentlemen," Nat said, "I am sorry for your misfortune, but assuredly you have nothing to reproach yourselves with. You did all that brave men could do, and did not lower your flag until further resistance would have been a crime against humanity."

The officers bowed; they were too much depressed to reply. Their mortification was great at being overpowered by a vessel so much inferior in strength to their own, and the feeling was increased now by seeing that their conqueror was a lad no older than the senior of the midshipmen. Turnbull's cabin was at once allotted to the lieutenant, and a large spare cabin to the midshipmen. Leaving Lippincott in charge, with[Pg 324] ten men, Nat went with Turnbull and the doctor on

board the frigate, and the boat went back to fetch the rest of the crew. The merchantmen had been signalled to send as many men as they could spare on board the frigate, and not until these arrived did Nat feel comfortable. Of his own crew three had been killed and ten wounded; three of these were fit for duty, and formed part of Lippincott's party, and the twenty he had with him seemed lost on board the frigate. Although Turnbull had had hawsers coiled over the hatches, the thought that there were nearly a hundred prisoners there, and that there were enough comparatively slightly wounded to overpower the two men placed as sentries over each hatchway, was a very unpleasant one. The arrival, however, of thirty of the merchant sailors, armed to the teeth, altered the position of affairs.

The first duty was to clear the decks of the dead. These were hastily sewn up in their own hammocks, with a couple of round shot at their feet, and then launched overboard. Those of the wounded able to walk were then mustered, and one of the French surgeons bandaged all the less serious wounds. After being supplied with a drink of wine and water, they were taken below, and placed with their companions in the hold. Then the wreck of the mizzen was cut away, and the frigate was taken in tow by the *Agile*, her own sails being left standing to relieve the strain on the hawsers. The two merchantmen were signalled to reduce sail, and to follow, and on no account to lose sight of the stern light of the frigate after it became dusk. Nat returned, with four of his crew, to the *Agile*, and four days later towed the *Spartane* into the anchorage off Bridgetown, the chief port of Barbados, the two West Indiamen following. The *Isis*, a fine fifty-gun frigate, was lying there. She had arrived on the previous day, having been despatched with the news of the outbreak of war. As her [Pg 325] captain was evidently the senior officer on the station, Nat was rowed on board.

"Are you the officer in command of that brigantine?" the captain asked in surprise.

"Yes, sir; my name is Glover."

"Well, Lieutenant Glover, what part did your ship bear in the fight with that Frenchman? I see by her sails that she was engaged. Whom had you with you?"

"We were alone, sir."

"What!" the captain said, incredulously, "do you mean to say that, with that little ten-gun craft, you captured a thirty-six-gun frigate single-handed?"

"That is so, sir."

"Well, I congratulate you on it heartily," the captain exclaimed, shaking Nat by the hand with great cordiality. "You must tell me all about it. It is an extraordinary feat. How many men do you carry?"

"We have forty seamen, sir, and two petty officers."

"And what are your casualties?"

"Three killed and ten wounded."

"What were the casualties of the Frenchmen?"

"Ninety killed, including the captain and the first and second lieutenants and five midshipmen, and eighty-three wounded."

"And how many prisoners?"

"In all, a hundred and thirty, sir, of whom five-and-twenty are on board each of those merchantmen, which had been captured by the frigate. The crew of one rose and mastered their captors as soon as they saw the frigate's mizzen-mast fall, and knew that we must take her. The prize crew in the other struck their flag as soon as we came within pistol-shot of her. I shall be glad to receive orders from you as to the disposal of the prisoners. I have had thirty men from the mer[Pg 326]chantmen on board the *Spartane*, for I could spare so few men that the prisoners might, without their assistance, have retaken her."

"I will go ashore with you presently and see the governor, and ask whether he can take charge of them. If he cannot, you can hand over the greater part of them to me. I shall sail for Jamaica this evening. As to the prize, I should advise you to see if you cannot get some spars and rig a jury-mast; there are sure to be some in the dockyard. While that is being done you can go through the formalities of inspecting the Indiamen, for whose salvage you will get a very handsome sum. At any rate, if I were you I should keep them here until I was ready to sail, and then go with them and your prize to Kingston. I should go in in procession, as you did here. It is a thing that you have a right to be proud of."

"We need lose no time about the mast, sir. We stripped the gear off and got it on board the *Spartane*, and towed her mast behind her, thinking that perhaps we might not get a suitable spar here. Of course the lower mast will be short, but that will matter comparatively little. What is more serious is that her rudder is smashed."

"I doubt whether you can get that remedied here. I should advise

you to rig out a temporary rudder. I'll tell you what I will do—I will send a couple of hundred men on board at once under my second officer. That will make short work of it, and I am sure that there is not a man on board who would not be glad to lend a hand in fitting up a prize that has been so gallantly won."

He called his officers, who had been standing apart during this conversation, and introduced Nat to them, saying:

"Gentlemen, I never heard Lieutenant Glover's name until a few minutes ago, but I can with confidence tell you that no more gallant officer is to be found in the service; and when I[Pg 327] say that, with that little ten-gun brigantine and a crew of forty men, he engaged the French frigate that you see behind her and forced her to strike, after a fight in which she had a hundred and seventy men killed or wounded, that he took a hundred and thirty prisoners, and recaptured those two West Indiamen which were her prizes, I think you will all agree that I am not exaggerating. He is naturally very anxious to be off. The frigate's mizzen-mast is lying astern of her, and will make an excellent jury-mast, as all the gear is on board, and only requires shortening. Her rudder is smashed, and a temporary one must be rigged up; and, knowing that all on board will be ready and glad to help when they hear what I have told you, I am going to send two hundred men off at once to lend a hand. Will you take command, Mr. Lowcock? You will take with you, of course, the boatswain and his mates and the carpenters."

"I should be glad to go too, sir," the first lieutenant said.

"You and I will go together, Mr. Ferguson, after we have had a glass of wine and heard from Mr. Glover the details of this singular action."

The order was at once given to lower the boats. The story that the French frigate and her two prizes had been captured single-handed by the brigantine speedily circulated, and the men hastened into the boats with alacrity. With them went the surgeon and his assistant to see if they could be of any help on board, while the captain, his first lieutenant, and Nat went into the cabin, and the latter related the details of the action.

"Skilfully managed indeed, Mr. Glover!" the captain said when he had finished; "no one could have done better. It was fortunate indeed that your little craft was so fast and handy, for if that frigate had brought her guns to bear fully upon her she ought to have been able to fairly blow you out of[Pg 328] the water with a single broadside. May I ask if this is your first action?"

"No, sir; I was in a tender of the *Orpheus* frigate when she captured a very strong pirate's hold near the port of Barcela in Caracas, destroying the place and capturing or blowing up three of their ships."

"I remember the affair," the captain said, "and a very gallant one it was; for, if I am right, the frigate could not get into the entrance, but landed her men, captured two of the pirates' batteries, and turned the guns on their ships, while a schooner she had captured a few days before sailed right in and engaged them, and was nearly destroyed when one of the pirates blew up. The officer in command of her was killed, and a midshipman was very highly spoken of, for he succeeded to the command, and gallantly went on board another pirate and drowned their magazine."

"Much more was said about it than necessary," Nat said.

The captain looked surprised.

"By the way," the lieutenant broke in, "I remember the name now. Are you the Mr. Glover mentioned in the despatches?"

"Yes, sir; but, as I said, the captain was good enough to make more of the affair than it deserved."

"I expect that he was the best judge of that," the captain said. "Well, after that?"

"After that, sir, I had the command of a little four-gun schooner which was cruising along the coast of Hayti to pick up fugitives, when I came across the brigantine I now command in the act of plundering a merchantman she had just captured. She left her prize and followed me. I was faster and more weatherly than she was, and having had the luck to smash the jaws of her gaff after a running fight of seven or eight miles, was able to get back to the prize and recapture her before the pirate came up. The crew of the prize came[Pg 329] up and manned their guns, and between us we engaged the brigantine and carried her by boarding. On taking her into Kingston the admiral gave me the command, and raised my crew from twenty to forty. We have now been cruising for four or five months, but not until we sighted the frigate and her prizes have we had the luck to fall in with an enemy."

"Well, sir," the captain said, "even admitting that you have had some luck, there is no question that you have utilized your opportunities and have an extraordinary record, and if you don't get shot I prophesy that you will be an admiral before many officers old enough to be your father. Now, I am sure you must be anxious to get

on board your prize as soon as possible, so we will take you to her at once."

In a few minutes they were on the deck of the *Spartane*. It was a scene of extraordinary activity. The lower mast had already been parbuckled on to the deck, where sheer-legs had been erected by another party. The mast was soon in its place, and the wedges driven in, the shrouds had been shortened, and men were engaged in tightening the lanyards. The topmast was on deck ready to be hoisted. The carpenters were busy constructing a temporary rudder with a long spar, to one end of which planks were being fixed, so that it looked like a gigantic paddle. As soon as this was completed, the other end of the spar was lashed to the taffrail. Strong hawsers were then to be fastened to the paddle, and brought in one on each quarter and attached to the drum of the wheel.

"Now, Mr. Glover," the captain said, after watching the work for some little time, "I will go ashore with you to the governor; you ought to pay your respects to him. Fortunately you will not require any assistance from him, for unless I am greatly mistaken these jobs will be finished this evening; the masts and rigging will certainly be fixed before dusk, and the carpenters must stick to their job till it is done. Like all[Pg 330] make-shifts, it will not be so good as the original, but I think it will serve your turn, for there is little likelihood of bad weather at this time of year. I suppose you intend to keep the merchant seamen on board? If not, I will spare you some hands."

"I am much obliged, sir, but I think we shall do very well. It is a fine reaching wind, and we shall scarcely have to handle a sail between this and Jamaica."

"Very well, I understand your feeling, you would like to finish your business without help. That is very natural; I should do the same in your place."

"How about the merchantman's papers, sir?"

"I shall tell the governor that I have ordered them to be taken to Kingston, where there is a regular prize court, and therefore it will not be necessary to trouble with their manifests here."

"Then, if I have your permission, captain, I will row off to them at once and tell them to get under sail now; we shall overhaul them long before they get to Jamaica. They mount between them six-and-twenty guns, and, keeping together, no French privateer, if any have arrived, would venture to attack them, especially as they cannot have received news yet that war is declared."

"I think that would be a very good plan," the captain said, "for if you were to start with them it is clear that you would only be able to go under half sail. It is evident by your account that you are faster than the frigate, but with a reaching wind I suppose there is not more than a knot between you, and if the wind freshens you would find it hard to keep up with her."

The visit was paid. The governor agreed that it would be better that the Indiamen should sail at once. Indeed, they had already started, and were two or three miles away before[Pg 331] Nat and the captain arrived at the governor's house. When on shore Nat ordered two or three barrels of rum to be sent off in another boat to the frigate, and on its arrival an allowance was served out to all the workers. Before nightfall, save that the mizzen-mast was some twenty feet lower than usual, and that her stern and quarters were patched in numerous places with tarred canvas, the *Spartane* presented her former appearance. When the majority of the crew had finished their work, the prisoners were transferred to the *Isis*. Two hours later the carpenters and boatswain's party had securely fixed the temporary rudder, and at daybreak the next morning the two frigates and the brigantine started on their westward voyage.

CHAPTER XVIII

ANOTHER ENGAGEMENT

The three vessels kept company until, on the third day after sailing, they overtook the two merchantmen. Nat, supposing that the *Isis* would now leave them, went on board to thank the captain for the great assistance that he had given him.

"I shall stay with you now, Mr. Glover. The news of the outbreak of war will be known at Jamaica by this time, for the despatches were sent off on the day before we sailed from home, by the *Fleetwing*, which is the fastest corvette in the service. She was to touch at Antigua and then go straight on to Port Royal. I was to carry the news to Barbados, so that it does not make any difference whether I reach Kingston two hours earlier or later. There is a possibility that the French may have sent ships off even before they declared war[Pg 332] with us, and as it is certain that there are several war-ships of theirs out here, one of these might fall in with you before you reach Jamaica. Therefore as my orders are simply to report myself to the admiral at Kingston, I think it is quite in accordance with my duty that I should continue to sail in company with you."

"Thank you, sir. There certainly is at least one French frigate in the bay of Hayti, and if she has received the news she is quite likely to endeavour to pick up some prizes before it is generally known, just as the *Spartane* picked up those merchantmen, and though possibly we might beat her off, I should very much prefer to be let alone."

"Yes, you have done enough for one trip, and I should much regret were you to be deprived of any of your captures."

The *Agile* was signalled to prepare to pick up her boat, and Nat was soon on board his own craft again. He ran up to within speaking distance of the *Spartane*, and shouted to Turnbull that the *Isis* was going to remain in company with them. Turnbull waved his hand, for although he had not entertained any fear of their being attacked, he felt nervous at his responsibility if a sudden gale should spring up and the temporary rudder be carried away. It was a comfort to him to know that, should this happen, the *Isis* would doubtless take him in tow, for in anything like a wind the *Agile* would be of little use. However, the weather continued fine, and in five days after leaving Barbados they entered Kingston harbour. Three hours before, the *Isis* had spread all sail, and entered, dropping anchor half an hour before the *Agile* sailed in in charge of the three large ships. The brigantine was heartily cheered by the crews of all the vessels in port, but it was naturally supposed that it was the *Isis* that had done the principal work in capturing the *Spartane*. Her captain, however, had rowed to the flag-ship directly they came in port,[Pg 333] leaving Mr. Ferguson to see to the *Spartane* being anchored, and had given him a brief account of the nature of the procession that was approaching three or four miles away.

"He is a most extraordinary young officer," the admiral said. "He first distinguished himself nearly three years ago by rescuing the daughter of a planter in Hayti, who was attacked by a fierce hound, and who would have been killed had he not run up. He was very seriously hurt, but managed to despatch the animal with his dirk. Since that time he has been constantly engaged in different adventures. He was in that desperate fight when the *Orpheus* broke up a notorious horde of pirates on the mainland, and distinguished himself greatly. He was up country in Hayti when the negroes rose, and he there saved from the blacks a lady and her daughter, the same girl that he had rescued from the dog, and shot eight of the villains, but had one of his ribs broken by a ball. In spite of that, he carried the lady, who was ill with fever, some thirty miles across a rough country down to Cape François in a litter.

"Then I gave him the command of a little cockle-shell of a schooner mounting four guns, carrying only twenty men. Hearing of a planter and his family in the hands of the blacks, he landed the whole of his crew, while expecting himself to be attacked by boats, and rescued the planter, three ladies, and six white men, and got them down on board, although opposed by three hundred negroes. Then he captured the brigantine he now commands, and a valuable prize that she had taken, and you say he has now captured a French thirty-six-gun frigate, after a fight in which she lost in killed and wounded half her crew, and recovered two Indiamen she had picked up on her way out."

They went out on the quarter-deck, where the admiral repeated to his officers the story that he had just heard, and[Pg 334] from them it soon circulated round the ship. Some of the crew had just cleaned the guns with which they had returned the salute fired by the *Isis* as she entered the port on arriving for the first time on the station, but they were scarcely surprised when, as the brigantine approached, the first lieutenant gave the order for ten more blank cartridges to be brought up, and for the crew to prepare to man the yards. But the surprise of those on board the other ships of war and the merchantmen was great when they saw the sailors swarming up the ratlines and running out on the yards.

"It is an unusual thing," the admiral remarked to the captains of the *Isis* and his own ship, "and possibly contrary to the rules of the service, but I think the occasion excuses it."

The brigantine did not salute as she came into the port, as she was considered to be on the station.

"What can they be doing on board the flag-ship?" Nat said to Lippincott.

"I think they are going to man the yards. It is not the king's birthday, or anything of that sort, that I know of; but as it is just eight bells it must be something of the kind."

As they came nearly abreast of the flag-ship, the signal, "Well done, *Agile!*" was run up, and at the same moment there was a burst of white smoke, and a thundering report, and a tremendous cheer rose from the seamen on the yards.

"They are saluting us, sir," Lippincott exclaimed.

The ensign had been dipped in salute to the flag, and the salute had been acknowledged by the admiral five minutes before.

Lippincott now sprang to the stern, and again lowered the ensign. The admiral and all his officers were on their quarter-deck, and as he raised his cocked hat the others stood bareheaded. Nat uncovered. He was so moved that he had difficulty in keeping back his tears, and he felt a deep relief when the last gun had fired, and the cheers given by his own[Pg 335] handful of men and by those on board the prizes had ceased. For the next quarter of an hour he was occupied in seeing that the four vessels were anchored in safe berths. Then, as the signal for him to go on board the flag-ship was hoisted, he reluctantly took his place in the gig, and went to make his report. The admiral saw by his pale face that he was completely unnerved, and at once took him into his cabin.

"I see, Mr. Glover," he began kindly, "that you would much rather that I did not say anything to you at present. The welcome that has been given to you speaks more than any words could do of our appreciation of your gallant feat. I do not say that you have taken the first prize since war was declared, for it is probable that other captures have been made nearer home, but at any rate, it is the first that has been made in these waters. I was surprised indeed when Captain Talbot told me that he had a hundred French prisoners on board, and some fifty wounded. As he had not the mark of a shot either in his sails or in his hull, I could not understand, until he gave me an outline of what had taken place—of how he had become possessed of them. Is your prize much injured?"

"She has a good many shot-holes on each quarter, sir, and the stern lights and fittings are all knocked away. She suffered no very serious damage. She requires a new mizzen-mast; but there is not a hole in her canvas, which is all new, for we fired only at the stern, and it was just below the deck that her mast was damaged."

"You have, I hope, written a full report of the engagement?"

Nat handed in his report. It was very short, merely stating that, having fallen in with the thirty-six-gun French frigate the *Spartane*, convoying two prizes, he had engaged her, and after placing himself on her quarter, had raked her until her mizzen-mast fell, and her rudder was smashed; that, seeing[Pg 336] that she could not get away, he had then returned to the prizes, which turned out to be the *Jane* of Liverpool, of eight hundred tons burden, and the *Flora* of London, of nine hundred and thirty. The crew of the latter, on seeing that the *Spartane* was crippled, had risen and overpowered the prize crew. The other struck her colours when he came up to her. He then returned to the *Spartane*, which struck her flag without further resistance.

"I desire to bring to your notice the great assistance I received from Lieutenant Turnbull, whom I afterwards placed in charge of the prize, and from Mr. Lippincott. It is also my duty to mention that assistant-surgeon Doyle has been indefatigable in his attentions to my own wounded and those of the *Spartane*."

Then followed the list of his own casualties, and those of the *Spartane*.

"A very official report, Mr. Glover," the admiral said with a smile, when he had glanced through it. "However, the admiralty will wish to know the details of an action of so exceptional a character, and I must therefore ask you to send me in as complete an account of the affair as possible, both for my own information and theirs. Now, I think you had better take a glass of wine. I can see that you really need one, and you will have to receive the congratulations of my officers. By the way, do you know anything of the cargoes of the two ships you retook?"

"No, sir, I have really not had time to enquire. Till we left Barbados I was constantly employed, and on my way out I have kept close to the *Spartane* in order to be able to assist at once if anything went wrong with the steering-gear. I should wish to say, sir, that I feel under the deepest obligations to Captain Talbot for the great assistance that he and his crew have rendered me in getting up the jury-mast, and fitting[Pg 337] up the temporary rudder. Had it not been for that I might have been detained for some time at Barbados."

Having drunk a glass of wine, Nat went out with the admiral on to the quarter-deck. The officers pressed round, shook hands, and congratulated him. It did not last long, for the admiral said kindly:

"The sound of our cannon, gentlemen, has had a much greater effect upon Mr. Glover's nerves than had those of his prize, and I think we must let him off without any further congratulations for to-day. Besides, he has a long report to write for me, and a good many other things to see to."

Nat was glad indeed to take his place in the gig, and to return to the *Agile*. He spent two hours in writing his report in duplicate. When he had done this he went ashore to the prize agent to enquire what formalities were needed with regard to the recaptured merchantmen; and having signed some official papers, he went up to Monsieur Duchesne's. Monsieur Pickard and his family had sailed months before for England, but the Duchesnes were still in possession of the house they had hired. They enjoyed, they said, so much the feeling of

rest and security that they were by no means anxious for a sea voyage; and indeed Madame Duchesne was still far from well, and her husband was reluctant to take her to the cold climate of England until summer had well set in.

"Ah, my dear Nat," Madame Duchesne said, "we were hoping that you would be able to spare time to call to-day. My husband would have gone off to see you, but he knew that you had a great deal to do. All the town is talking of your capture of the French frigate, and the recapture of the two prizes that she had taken. Several of our friends have come in to tell us about it; but of course we were not surprised, for your capturing the frigate with the *Agile* was no more wonderful than your taking the *Agile* with the *Arrow*." [Pg 338]

"It was a lucky affair altogether, Madame Duchesne."

"I knew that you would say so," Myra said indignantly. "Whatever you do you always say it is luck, as if luck could do everything. I have no patience with you."

"I will endeavour not to use the word again in your presence, Myra," Nat laughed. "But I have no time for an argument to-day, I have only just run in for a flying visit to see how you are. I have no end of things to see to, and I suppose it will be some days before all the business of the prizes is finished, the frigate formally handed over, and the value of the Indiamen and their cargo estimated. However, as soon as I am at all free I will come in for a long talk. You know that there is nowhere that I feel so happy and at home as I do here."

It was indeed three days before he had time to pay another visit.

"It is too bad of you, not coming to dinner," Myra said as he entered. "We really did expect you."

"I hoped that I should be able to get here in time, but ever since I saw you I have been going backwards and forwards between the ships and the shore, calling at the dockyard and prize court. To-day there has been a regular survey of the *Spartane*. They were so long over it that I began to think I should not be able to get away at all."

"You will be becoming quite a millionaire," Monsieur Duchesne said, "if you go on like this."

"Well, you see, we were lucky—I beg your pardon, Myra—I mean we were fortunate. We had a very small crew on board the *Arrow*, and as it was an independent command, the whole of the prize-money for the capture of the *Agile* and her prize was divided among us, with the

exception of the flag share; and I found, to my surprise, that my share came to £2500. Without knowing anything of the cargoes of the[Pg 339] prizes that I have recaptured now, and what will be paid for the *Spartane*, I should think that my share would come to twice as much this time, so that I shall be able before long to retire into private life—that is, if I have any inclination to do so."

"But I suppose," Madame Duchesne said, "that if you marry you will want to settle down."

"I am too young to think of such a matter, madame," Nat laughed. "Why, I am only just nineteen, and it will be quite soon enough to think of that in another eight or ten years. But there is no doubt that when the time comes I shall give up the sea. I don't think it is fair to a wife to leave her at home while you are running the risk of being shot. It is bad enough for her in time of peace, but in war-time it must be terrible for her, and it strikes me that this war is likely to be a long one. It seems to me that it is a question for a man to ask himself, whether he loves his profession or a woman better. If he cares more for the sea, he should remain single; if he thinks more of the woman, let him settle down with her."

"That sounds very wise," Monsieur Duchesne said with a smile, "but when the time comes for the choice I fancy that most men do not accept either alternative, but marry and still go to sea."

"That is all right when they have only their profession to depend upon," Nat said. "Then, if a woman, with her eyes open to the fact that he must be away from her for months, is ready to take a man for better or for worse, I suppose the temptation is too strong to be withstood. Happily it won't be put in my way, for even if I never take another ship I shall have enough to live on quietly ashore."

"Now, you must tell us the story of the fight," Myra said.

"The story is told in twenty words," he replied. "She did not suspect that we were an enemy until we had passed her,[Pg 340] and our broadside told her what we were. As the *Agile* is faster and much more handy than the frigate, we managed to keep astern of her, and, sailing backwards and forwards, poured our broadsides in her stern, while she could scarce get a gun to bear on us. We managed to cripple her rudder, and after this the fight was virtually over. However, she kept her flag flying till we shot away her mizzen, after which, seeing that she was at our mercy, and that her captain, two lieutenants, and more than half her crew were killed or wounded, she lowered her colours. Now, really that is the whole account of the fight.

if I were telling a sailor, who would understand the nautical terms, I could explain the matter more clearly, but if I were to talk for an hour you would understand no more about it than you do now."

An hour later, Nat went out with Monsieur Duchesne to smoke a cigar on the verandah, Myra remaining indoors with her mother, who was afraid of sitting out in the cool evening breeze.

"Going back to our conversation about marriage, Nat," Monsieur Duchesne said, "it is a question which my wife and I feel some little interest in. You see, it is now more than three years since you saved Myra's life, after which you rendered her and my wife inestimable service. Now, I know that in your country marriages are for the most part arranged between the young people themselves. With us such an arrangement would be considered indecent. If your father and mother were out here, the usual course would be for your mother to approach my wife and talk the matter over with her. My wife would consult with me, and finally, when we old people had quite come to an understanding, your father would speak to you on the subject. All this is impossible here. Now, it seems to my wife and myself that, having rendered such inestimable services to us, and having been thrown with my daughter a good[Pg 341] deal—who, I may say, without any undue vanity, is a very attractive young lady—you could scarcely be indifferent to her.

"As you said, according to your British notions you are too young to think of marrying; and, at any rate, my wife has sounded Myra, and the girl has assured her that you have never said a word to her that would lead her to believe you entertained other than what I may call a brotherly affection for her. Now, I can tell you frankly, that one of our reasons for remaining here for the past six months has been that we desired that the matter should be arranged one way or the other. It has struck us that it was not your youth only that prevented you from coming to me and asking for Myra's hand, but a foolish idea that she is, as is undoubtedly the case, a very rich heiress. Before I go farther, may I ask if that is the case, and if you really entertain such an affection for my daughter as would, putting aside all question of money and of your youth, lead you to ask her hand?"

"That I can answer at once, sir. Ever since I first met her, and especially since I saw how bravely she supported that terrible time when she might fall into the hands of the blacks, I have thought of your daughter as the most charming girl that I have ever met. Of course, I was but a lad and she a young girl—no thought of marriage at that time even entered my mind. During the past three years that feeling has grown, until I have found that my happiness depends entirely

upon her. I felt, monsieur, that my lips were sealed, not only by the fact that she was an heiress and I only a penniless lieutenant, but because it would be most unfair and ungenerous were I, on the strength of any services I may have rendered, to ask you for her hand."

"It is not on account of those services, much as we recognize them, that I offer you her hand, but because both her[Pg 342] mother and herself feel that her happiness, which is the great object of our lives, is involved in the matter. In most cases, a young lady well brought up does not give her heart until her father presents to her an eligible suitor. This is an exceptional case. I do think that any girl whose life had been saved, as hers was, at the risk of that of her rescuer, and who, during a most terrible time, came to look up to him as the protector of herself and her mother, and who, moreover, was constantly hearing of his daring actions, and to whom her dearest friends also owed their lives, could not but make him her hero. I need not say that the subject has not been mooted to her, and it was because I desired the matter to be settled before we left for Europe that we have lingered here. I am glad indeed that I now know your feeling in the matter. I am conscious that in giving her to you we are securing her happiness. I have, of course, ever since the day when you saved her from that dog, watched your character very closely, and the result has been in all respects satisfactory. Now, I will go in and tell her that I will take her place by her mother's side, and that she may as well come out here and keep you company."

In a minute Myra stepped out on to the verandah.

"It is cool and nice here, Nat. I think it would do mother more good out here than keeping in the house, where in the first place it is hot, while in the second place it gives me the horrors to see the way the moths and things fly into the lights and burn themselves to death."

"No doubt it is pleasanter here," Nat said, wondering how he ought to begin.

"That was very soberly said, Nat," Myra laughed. "One would think that it was a proposition that required a good deal of consideration."

"It was a proposition that received no consideration. In[Pg 343] point of fact, just at present, dear, my head is a little turned with a conversation that I have just had with your father."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean that I see before me a great and unlooked-for happiness, a

happiness that I had hardly ventured even to hope for, but at present it is incomplete; it is for you to crown it if you can do so. Your father has given his consent to my telling you that I love you. I do love you truly and earnestly, Myra, but I should not be content with anything less than your love. I don't want it to be gratitude. I don't want any thought of that business with the dog, or of the other business with the blacks, to have anything to do with it."

"They must have something to do with it," she said softly, "for it was owing to these that I first began to love you. It was at first, no doubt, a girl's love for one who had done so much for her, but since then it has become a woman's love for the one man that she should choose out of all. I love you, Nat, I love you with all my heart."

Ten minutes later they went hand in hand into the house. Monsieur Duchesne had told his wife what had occurred in the verandah, and as they came in she rose and threw her arms round Myra's neck and kissed her tenderly.

"You have chosen wisely, my child, and have made us both very happy. We can give her to you, Monsieur Glover, without one misgiving; we know that in your hands her life will be a happy one. And now," she went on with a smile, "you will have to face that terrible problem you were discussing an hour since. You will have to choose between a wife and the sea."

"The problem may be settled at once, madame," Nat said with a smile.

"At any rate, there is no occasion to choose at present," Madame Duchesne went on. "Myra is but just past sixteen,[Pg 344] and her father and I both think that it is as well that you should wait at least a couple of years before there is any talk of marriage, both for her sake and yours. After your brilliant services, especially in capturing the frigate, you are sure of rapid promotion, and it would be a pity indeed for you to give up your profession until you have obtained the rank of captain, when you could honourably retire. We shall leave for England very shortly, France is out of the question. As you said, you and my daughter are both young, and can well afford to wait."

"That is so, madame, we quite acquiesce in your decision. As to your going to England, it is likely that I may be going there myself very shortly. The admiral hinted to-day that, as the dockyard people say that the *Spartane* can be ready for sea in ten days or so, he will probably send me home in her. He very kindly kept back my report of the action, and merely stated that the French frigate *Spartane* had

been brought in in tow by his majesty's brigantine *Agile*, together with two merchantmen she had captured on her way out, which had also been retaken by the *Agile*, and said that he thought it was only fair that I should carry back my own report and his full despatch on the subject. Of course I may be sent out again, or I may be employed on other service. At any rate I shall be able to get a short leave before I go to sea again. I have been out here now six years, and feel entitled to a little rest. I would certainly rather be employed in the Mediterranean than here, for there is more chance of seeing real service."

The next day Nat received an order from the admiral to hand over the command of the *Agile* to Lieutenant Turnbull. Lippincott, who would pass his examination and receive his step, was to act as first lieutenant, and a midshipman from one of the ships on the station was to be second officer. Nat himself[Pg 345] was ordered to superintend the repairs and fitting out for sea of the *Spartane*.

"I am awfully sorry that you are going, Glover," Turnbull said. "Of course it is a great pull for me being appointed to the command, but I was very jolly and happy as I was. I don't think there ever was a pleasanter party on board one of his majesty's ships. However, of course it is a great lift for me. I shall try to keep things going as comfortably as you did."

"I have no doubt that you will do that, Turnbull, and you have an able ally in Doyle."

"Doyle was inconsolable when I came on board yesterday and told him that you were going home in the *Spartane*, and that I was to have the command."

"It is the worst news that I have heard for many a day," Doyle had said. "You are very well, Turnbull, and I have no sort of complaint to make of you, but I am afraid that the luck will go with Glover. It is his luck and not the ship's; whatever he has put his hand to has turned out well. I don't say that he has not done his work as well as it could be done, but there is no doubt that luck is everything. If one of the *Agile's* guns had knocked away a mast or spar from the *Arrow* it would have been all up with you; and again, had a shot from the frigate crippled us, she would have been after taking the *Agile* into a French port instead of our bringing her in here."

"Yes, but then you see that upon both occasions Glover put his craft where it was difficult to get their guns to bear on her."

"Yes, yes, I know that; but that does not alter it a bit. If there had

been only one shot fired, and had we been an unlucky boat, it would, sure enough, have brought one of the spars about our ears." [Pg 346]

"Well, Doyle, it may be that it was my luck, and not Glover's, that pulled us through. You see, I should have been shot or had my throat cut by the pirates if we had been taken by them, so possibly I am the good genius of the boat; or it may be Lippincott."

"Botheration to you!" the Irishman said, as he saw by a twinkle in Turnbull's eye that he was really chaffing him; "there is one thing certain, if you get wounded and fall into my hands, you will not regard that as a matter of luck."

"Well, at any rate, doctor, Glover told me half an hour ago of a piece of luck in which none of us here can share. He is engaged to that very pretty French girl whom he is always calling on when we are in port."

"I thought that was what would come of it, Turnbull," Lippincott said; "it would be rum if she hadn't fallen in love with him after all that he did for her."

"I was greatly taken with her myself," the doctor said, "the first time she came on board, but I saw with half an eye that the race was lost before I had time to enter. Besides, I could not afford to marry without money, and one of these poor devils of planters, who have had to run away from Hayti with, for the most part, just the clothes they stood up in, would hardly make the father-in-law yours faithfully would desire. I wonder myself how they manage to keep up such a fine establishment here, but I suppose they had a little put away in an old stocking, and are just running through it. They are shiftless people, are these planters, and, having been always used to luxuries, don't know the value of money."

Turnbull burst into a fit of laughter in which Lippincott joined, for in the early days of the cruise on the *Arrow* they had heard from Nat how his friends had for generations laid by a portion of their revenues, and allowed the interest to accumulate, so that, now that the time had come for utilizing [Pg 347] the reserve, they were really much richer people than they had been when living on their fine plantation. Doyle looked astonished at their laughter.

"My dear Doyle," Turnbull went on, "it is too comical to hear you talking of a shiftless planter—you, belonging as you do to the most happy-go-lucky race on the face of the earth. Now, I will ask you, did you ever hear of a family of Irish squires who for generations put aside a tenth part of their income, and allowed the interest to

accumulate without touching it, so that, when bad times came, they found that they were twice as well off as they were before?"

"Begorra, you are right, Turnbull; never did I hear of such a thing, and I don't believe it ever happened since the first Irish crossed the seas from somewhere in the east."

"Well, at any rate, Doyle, that is what the Duchesnes have done, and I should think, from what Glover says—though he did not mention any precise sum, for he did not know himself—but I should say that it must come to at least a hundred thousand pounds."

"Mother of Moses!" the doctor exclaimed; "it is a mighty bad turn you have done me, Turnbull, that you never gave me as much as a hint of this before. I should have been sorry for Glover, who is in all ways a good fellow; still I should have deemed it my duty to my family, who once—as you know, is the case of almost every other family in the ould country—were Kings of Ireland. I should have restored the ancient grandeur of my family, built a grand castle, and kept open house to all comers—and to think that I never knew it!"

"Then you think, doctor," Lippincott said, with a laugh, "that you only had to enter the lists to cut Glover out?"

"I don't go quite so far as that; but, of course, now the thing is settled for good, it would be of no use trying to disturb it, and it would hardly be fair on Glover. But, you see, as long as [Pg 348] it was an open matter, I might have well tried my luck. I should have had great advantages. You see, I am a grown man, whereas Glover is still but a lad. Then, though I say it myself, I could talk his head off, and am as good as those who have kissed the Blarney stone at bewildering the dear creatures."

"Those are great advantages, no doubt, Doyle; but, you see, Glover had one advantage which, I have no doubt, counted with the lady more than all those you have enumerated. He had saved her life at the risk of his own, he had carried her, and her mother, through terrible dangers."

"Yes, yes, there is something in that," Doyle said, shaking his head; "if the poor young fellow is satisfied with gratitude I have nothing more to say. At any rate, I have lost my chance. Now, perhaps, as you know all about this, you might put me up to some other lady in similar circumstances, but with a heart free to bestow upon a deserving man."

"I should not be justified in doing so, Doyle. After what you have

been saying about building a baronial castle, and keeping open house, it is clear that you would soon bring a fortune to an end, however great it might be; and, therefore, I should not feel justified in aiding you in any way in your matrimonial adventures."

"It's a poor heart that never rejoices," the doctor said. "The tumblers are empty. Sam, you rascal, bring us another bottle of that old Jamaica, fresh limes, and cold water. It is one of the drawbacks of this bastely climate that there is no pleasure in taking your punch hot."

One of the negroes brought in the materials.

"Now, doctor," Turnbull said, "I know that in spite of this terrible disappointment you will drink heartily the toast, 'Nat Glover and Mademoiselle Duchesne, and may they live long and happily together!'"[Pg 349]

"That is good," Doyle said as he emptied his tumbler at a draught; "nothing short of a bumper would do justice to it. Hand me the bottle again, Lippincott, and cut me a couple of slices off that lime. Yes, I will take two pieces of sugar, please, Turnbull. Now I am going to propose a toast, 'The new commander of the *Agile*, and may she, in his hands, do as well as she did in those of Nat Glover.'"

Three days later the *Agile* started on another cruise. Nat spent his time in the dockyard, where he was so well known to all the officials that they did everything in their power to aid him to push matters forward, and a week after the brigantine had left the *Spartane* was ready for sea. Nat had seen the admiral several times, but had heard nothing from him as to who were the officers who were to take the *Spartane* home, nor whether he was to sail as a passenger bearing despatches or as one of the officers. When he went on board the flag-ship to report that all was ready for sea, the admiral said:

"Mr. Winton, first lieutenant of the *Onyx*, is invalided home. He is a good officer, but the climate has never agreed with him, and, as his father has lately died and he has come into some property, he will, I have no doubt, go on half-pay for a time until he is thoroughly set up again. I shall therefore appoint him as first lieutenant of the *Spartane*; Mr. Plumber, second lieutenant of the *Tiger*, will go second.

"I have decided, Mr. Glover, to give you the rank of acting commander. You captured the ship, and it is fair that you should take her to England. Mind, I think it probable enough that the authorities at home may not be willing to confirm your rank, as it is but little over two years since you obtained your present grade. I feel that I am incurring

a certain responsibility in giving you the command of a thirty-six-gun frigate, but you have had opportunities of showing that you are a thorough seaman, and can fight as well as sail your ship." [Pg 350]

"I am immensely obliged, sir," Nat said hesitatingly, "but I have never for a moment thought of this, and it does seem a tremendous responsibility. Besides, I shall be over two officers both many years senior to myself."

"I have spoken to both of them," the admiral said, "and pointed out to them that, after you had captured the frigate with the little brigantine you commanded, I considered it almost your right to take her home. I put it frankly to them that, if they had any objection to serving under one so much their junior, I should by no means press the point, but that at the same time I should naturally prefer having two experienced officers with you instead of officering her entirely with young lieutenants junior to yourself. I am glad to say that both of them agreed heartily, and admitted the very great claim that you have to the command. Mr. Winton is anxious to get home, and knows that he might have to wait some time before a ship of war was going. Mr. Plumber is equally anxious for a short run home, for, as he frankly stated to me, he has for three years past been engaged to be married, and he has some ground for hope that he may get appointed to a ship on the home station. So as these gentlemen are perfectly willing to serve under you there need be no difficulty on your part in the matter. We will therefore consider it as settled.

"I have made out your appointment as acting commander. I sincerely hope that you will be confirmed in the rank. At any rate, it will count for you a good deal that you should have acted in that capacity. Here are your instructions. You will be short-handed; I cannot spare enough men from the ships on this station to make up a full complement. A hundred and fifty are all that I can possibly let you have, but I have told the masters of these two Indiamen that they will have to furnish a contingent. I have been on board both the ships to-day. I addressed the crews, and said that you were going [Pg 351] to take home the *Spartane* and were short of hands. I said that I did not wish to press any men against their will, but that I hoped that five-and-twenty from each ship would come forward voluntarily; that number had aided to bring the *Spartane* in here; they knew you, and might be sure that the ship would be a comfortable one; and I told them that I would give them passes, saying that they had voluntarily shipped for the voyage home on my guaranteeing that they should, if they chose, be discharged from the service on their arrival. More than the number required volunteered at once, but I asked the captain to pick out for

me the men who had before been on board the *Spartane*, and of whose conduct you had spoken highly. Three merchantmen will sail under your convoy."

Nat went ashore after leaving the admiral, and naturally went straight to the Duchesnes.

"Who do you suppose is going to command the *Spartane*?" he asked as he went in.

"I know who ought to command her. You took her, and you ought to command her."

"Well, it seems absurd, but that is just what I am going to do."

Myra clapped her hands in delight.

"Have they made you a real captain, then?"

"No," he said with a laugh, "I shall be acting commander. That gives one the honorary rank of captain, but it may be a long time before I get appointed to that rank. The admiral has been awfully kind, but the people at home are not likely to regard my age and appearance as in any way suitable for such a position."

"I am happy to say, Nat, that we shall sail under your convoy. I have been settling all my affairs and making my arrangements for leaving, and have this morning definitely[Pg 352] taken cabins in the *Myrtle*. As the furniture is not ours, and we have not accumulated many belongings, knowing that we might be sailing at any moment, we can get everything packed by to-night and go on board to-morrow morning. The captain could not tell me at what hour we should sail. He said that it would depend upon the frigate."

"I should like to start at eight if I could, but I cannot say whether everything will be quite ready. However, you had better be on board at that hour. It will be jolly indeed having you all so close to me."

"Shall we be able to see each other sometimes?" Myra asked.

"Many times, I hope; but of course it must depend partly on the weather. If we are becalmed at any time you might come on board and spend a whole day, but if we are bowling along rapidly it would scarcely be the thing to stop two ships in order that the passengers might go visiting."

It was twelve o'clock on the following day when the *Spartane* fired a gun, and at the signal the anchors, which had all been hove short, were run up, the sails shaken out, and the *Spartane* and the three

vessels under her charge started on their voyage.

CHAPTER XIX

HOME

The voyage home was a pleasant but not an exciting one. No suspicious sails were sighted until they neared the mouth of the Channel. Then two or three craft, which bore the appearance of French privateers, had at different times approached them, but only to draw off as soon as they made[Pg 353] out the line of ports of the *Spartane*. There had been sufficient days of calm and light winds to enable the Duchesnes to frequently spend a few hours on board the frigate. Nat had felt a little uncomfortable at first, but it was not long before he became accustomed to the position. Of course he could not be on the same familiar terms with his officers as he had been on board the *Agile*, but he insisted upon the first and second lieutenants dining with him regularly.

"It will really be kind of you if you will," he said, "for I shall feel like a fish out of water sitting here in solitary state." And as he had drawn something on account of his prize-money and kept an excellent table, the two officers willingly agreed to the suggestion.

"I have always thought, Mr. Winton," he said, "that there is a good deal more stiffness than is at all necessary or even desirable on board a ship of war. It is not so in the army. I dined several times at regimental messes at Kingston, and although the colonel was, of course, treated with a certain respect, the conversation was as general and as unrestrained as if all had been private gentlemen; yet, of course, on the parade ground, the colonel was as supreme as a captain on his quarter-deck. At sea, the captain really never gets to know anything about his officers, except with regard to their duties on board a ship, and I don't think it is good, either for him or the officers in general, that he should be cut off from them as much as if he were an emperor of China."

"I agree with you so far," Mr. Winton said. "I do think the reins of discipline are held too tautly, and that where the captain is a really good fellow, life on board might be much more pleasant than it now is; but with a bad-tempered, overbearing sort of man your suggestion would act just the other way."

"Well, we could easily put a stop to that," Nat said, "if[Pg 354] the admiralty would refuse to appoint bad-tempered and overbearing

men to any command."

The other laughed. "That would help us out of the difficulty, certainly; but I think that any change had better be deferred until they perceive, as every junior officer in the service perceives, that such men are a curse to themselves and everyone else, that they are hated by the whole crew, from the ship's boys to the first lieutenant, and that a ship with a contented and cheerful crew can be trusted at all times to do her duty against any odds."

Sailing south of the Isle of Wight, the *Spartane* came in through the Nab Channel. There she left her convoy, who anchored on the Mother Bank, while she sailed into Portsmouth harbour, with the white ensign flying over the tricolour. As she entered she was greeted with loud cheers by the crews of the ships of war. As soon as she had picked up moorings Nat landed at the dockyard, and, proceeding to the admiral's, reported himself there.

"The admiral is away inspecting the forts in the Needles passage," a young officer said. "Captain Painton might be able to give you any information that you require."

"I only want formally to report myself before taking post-chaise to London."

"Perhaps you had better see him," the other said, a little puzzled as to who this young officer could be who was in charge of despatches.

"I think I had."

"What name shall I say?"

"Glover."

The flag-captain was a short, square-built man, with keen eyes, and a not unpleasant expression, but bluff and hasty in manner.

"Now, Mr. Glover, what can I do for you?" he asked shortly.[Pg 355]

"Well, sir, I hardly know the course of procedure, but as I want to start with despatches for London in a quarter of an hour I shall be glad to be able to hand over the ship I command, or, if it cannot be taken over in that summary way, to know whether my first officer is to retain charge of her until I can return from town."

"And what is the vessel that you have the honour to command, sir?" Captain Painton said with a slight smile.

"The *Spartane* frigate, a prize mounting thirty-six guns, that entered

the harbour a quarter of an hour ago."

The captain had an idea that this was an ill-timed joke on the part of the young lieutenant.

"Do you wish me to understand, sir," he said sternly, "that you are in command of that prize?"

"That certainly, sir, is what I wish you to understand. I have brought her home from Jamaica, and have the honour to hold the appointment of acting commander. There, you see, are the official despatches of which I am the bearer, addressed to the Admiralty, and with the words 'In charge of Acting Commander Glover.'"

"And your officers, sir?" suppressing with difficulty an explosion of wrath at what he considered a fresh sign that the service was going to the dogs.

"The first officer is Lieutenant Winton, the second Lieutenant Plumber."

"Very well, sir, I will go off myself at once. I will detain you no longer."

Nat at once hurried off, while Captain Painton went into the office of another of the officials of the dockyard.

"The service is going to the dogs," he said. "Here is a young lieutenant, who from his appearance can't have passed more than a year, pitchforked over the head of heaven knows how many seniors, and placed as acting commander of a thirty[Pg 356]six-gun frigate, French prize, sir. Just look up the records of the lieutenants under him."

"One is a lieutenant of fifteen years' service, the other of twelve."

"It is monstrous, scandalous. This sort of thing is destructive of all discipline, and proves that everything is to go by favouritism. Just at the outbreak of the war it is enough to throw cold water on the spirits of all who are hoping to distinguish themselves."

Ignorant of the storm that had been excited in the mind of the flag-captain, Nat was already on his way, having as soon as he landed sent his coxswain to order a post-chaise to be got ready for starting in a quarter of an hour. It was eight o'clock when he dropped anchor, by nine he was on the road, and by handsomely tipping the post-boys he drew up at the Admiralty at half-past four.

"What name shall I say, sir?" the doorkeeper asked.

"Acting Commander Glover, with despatches from Jamaica."

The admiral looked up with amazement as Nat was announced. The latter had not mounted the second epaulette to which as commander he was entitled, and the admiral on his first glance thought that the attendant must have made a mistake.

"Did I understand, sir, that you are a commander?"

"An acting one only, sir. I have come home in command of the *Spartane*, a prize mounting thirty-six guns. The admiral was good enough to appoint me to the acting rank in order that I might bring her home with despatches, and the report respecting her capture by the brigantine *Agile*, of ten guns, which I had the honour to command."

"Yes, I saw a very brief notice of her capture in the *Gazette* ten days ago, but no particulars were given. I suppose the mail was just coming out when she arrived." [Pg 357]

"That was partly the reason, no doubt, sir; but I think the admiral could have written more, had he not in his kindness of heart left it to me to hand in a full report. I may say that I had the good fortune to recapture two valuable West Indiamen that the *Spartane* had picked up on her way out."

The admiral rose from the table and took down a thick volume from the book-case. At the back were the words, "Records of Service." It was partly printed, a wide space being left under each name for further records to be written in.

"Glover, Nathaniel. Is that your Christian name, Captain Glover?"

Nat bowed.

"An exceptionally good record. 'Distinguished himself greatly in the attack by the frigate *Orpheus* on three piratical craft protected by strong batteries. Passed as lieutenant shortly afterwards. Appointed to the command of the schooner *Arrow*, four guns, charged to rescue white inhabitants off Hayti, and if possible to enter into communications with negro leaders and learn their views. In the course of the performance of this duty he landed with all his crew of twenty men, took off a French planter and family and eight other whites in the hands of a force estimated at three hundred and fifty blacks, and fought his way on board his ship again. Later on engaged a pirate brigantine, the *Agile*, of ten guns, which had just captured a Spanish merchantman. After a sharp fight, took possession of the prize, and with the aid of her crew capture the

Agile.' And now with the *Agile* you have taken the *Spartane*, a thirty-six gun frigate, to say nothing of recapturing two valuable West Indiamen, prizes of hers. And I suppose, Commander Glover, if we confirm you in your rank and command, you will go forth and appear next time with a French three-decker in tow. From a tiny schooner to a [Pg 358] frigate is a greater distance than from a frigate to a line-of-battle ship."

"Yes, sir," Nat said with a smile; "but the advantage of quick manœuvring that one gets in a small craft, and which gives one a chance against a larger adversary, becomes lost when it is a frigate against a line-of-battle ship. The *Spartane* is fairly handy, but she could not hope to gain much advantage that way over a bigger vessel."

"I wonder the admiral had men enough to spare to send her home."

"He could hardly have done so, sir, but fifty of the merchant sailors belonging to the recaptured prizes volunteered for the voyage, and were furnished by the admiral with discharges on arrival at Portsmouth."

"A very good plan, for it is hard work to get men now that we are fitting out every ship at all the naval ports. Now, Commander Glover, I will detain you no longer. I shall carefully read through these despatches this evening, and shall discuss them with my colleagues to-morrow. I shall be glad if you will dine with me to-morrow evening at half-past six; here is my card and address."

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I am altogether ignorant of such matters—should I come in uniform or plain clothes?"

"Whichever would suit you best," the admiral replied with a smile. "As you have only just arrived to-day from the West Indies, and doubtless have had little time for preparations before you sailed, it is more than likely that you may not have had time to provide yourself with a full-dress uniform."

"I have not, sir; and indeed, had I had time I should not have thought of buying one of my acting rank, which would naturally terminate as soon as the object for which it was granted was attained."

"Very well, then, come in plain dress. I may tell you [Pg 359] for your information, that when invited by an admiral to his official residence you would be expected to appear in uniform, but when asked to dine at his private residence it would not be considered as a naval function, and although I do not at all say that it would be wrong to

appear in uniform, there would be no necessity for doing so."

As everyone dressed for dinner in the West Indies for the sake of coolness and comfort, Nat was well provided in this way. After his dinner at the Golden Cross he went to a playhouse. He had posted a letter to his father, which was written before he landed, directly he reached town, saying that he was home; that of course he could not say how long it would be before he would be able to leave his ship, but as soon as he did so he would run down into Somersetshire and stay there until he received orders either to join another vessel or to return to the West Indies. The next afternoon the papers came out with the official news, and news-boys were shouting themselves hoarse:

"Capture of a French frigate by a ten-gun British brig! Thirty-six guns against ten! Three hundred and fifty Frenchmen against fifty Englishmen! Nearly half the monsieurs killed or wounded, the rest taken prisoners! Glorious victory!" And Nat was greatly amused as he looked out of the window of the hotel at the eager hustling that was going on to obtain one of the broadsheets.

"It sounds a big thing," he said to himself, "but there was nothing in it, and the whole thing was over in less time than it takes to talk about it. Well, I hope I shall either get off to Portsmouth again to-morrow or go down to the dear old pater. I wish this dinner was over. No doubt there will be some more of these old admirals there, and they will be wanting to learn all the ins and outs, just as if twenty words would not tell them how it was we thrashed them so easily.[Pg 360] They know well enough that if you have a quick handy craft, and get her under the weather quarter of a slow-moving frigate the latter hasn't a shadow of a chance."

Although not an official dinner, all the twelve gentlemen who sat down were, with the exception of Nat, connected with the admiralty. The first lord and several other admirals were there, the others were heads of departments and post-captains.

"Before we begin dinner," the first lord said, "I have pleasure in handing this to you, Commander Glover. There is but one opinion among my colleagues and myself, which is that as you have captured the *Spartane* and have come home as her commander, we cannot do less than confirm you in that rank and leave her in your charge. You are certainly unusually young for such promotion, but your career has been for the past four years so exceptional that we seem to have scarcely any option in the matter. Such promotion is not only a reward you have gallantly won, but that you should receive it will, we feel,

animate other young officers to whosoever emulation that will be advantageous both to themselves and to the service in general."

Nat could scarcely credit his ears. That he might be appointed second lieutenant of the *Spartane* or some other ship of war was, he thought, probable; but the acme of his hopes was that a first lieutenancy in a smart sloop might possibly be offered to him. His two officers on the way home had talked the matter over with him, and they had been a little amused at seeing that he never appeared to think it within the bounds of possibility that his rank would be confirmed, although, as the admiral before sailing told them, he had most strongly recommended that this should be done, and he thought it certain that the authorities at home would see the matter in the same light. He had asked them not to give the slightest hint to Nat that such promotion might be awarded to him. "You never can tell," the admiral said, "what the Admiralty will do, but here is a chance that they don't often get of making a really popular promotion, without a suspicion of favouritism being entertained. Beyond the fact that he has been mentioned in despatches, I doubt if anyone at Whitehall as much as knows the young fellow's name, and the service generally will see that for once merit has been recognized on the part of one who, so far as patronage goes, is friendless."

Nat returned to Portsmouth the following morning, and spent some hours in signing papers and going through other formalities.

"The *Spartane* will be paid off to-morrow, Captain Glover," the port admiral said; "she will be recommissioned immediately. I hope you will be able to get some of the men to re-enter, for there is a good deal of difficulty about crews. So great a number of ships have been fitted out during the past four or five months that we have pretty well exhausted the seafaring population here, and even the press-gangs fail to bring many in."

Going on board, Nat sent for the boatswain and gunners, and informed them that as he was to recommission the *Spartane* he was anxious to get as many of the hands to reship as possible.

"I have no doubt that some of them will join, sir," the quarter-master said. "I heard them talking among themselves, and saying that she has been as pleasant a ship as they had ever sailed in, and if you was to hoist your pennant a good many of them would sign on."

"I would not mind giving a couple of pounds a head."

"I don't think that it would be of any use, sir. If the men will join they will join, if they won't they won't. Besides, they have all got some pay,

and most of them some prize-[Pg 362]money coming to them, and it would be only so much more to chuck away if they had it. And another thing, sir, I think when men like an officer they like to show him that it is so, and they would rather reship without any bounty, to show that they liked him, than have it supposed that it was for the sake of the money."

After the men had been paid off the next morning, he told them in a short speech that he had been appointed to recommission the *Spartane*, and said that he would be glad to have a good many of them with him again. He was much gratified when fully two-thirds of the men, including the greater part of the merchantmen, stepped forward and entered their names.

"That speaks well indeed for our young commander," the port admiral, who had been present, said to his flag-captain. "It is seldom indeed that you find anything like so large a proportion of men ready to reship at once. It proves that they have confidence in his skill as well as in his courage, and that they feel that the ship will be a comfortable one."

It was expected that the *Spartane* would be at least a month in the hands of the shipwrights, and the men on signing were given leave of absence for that time. As soon as all this was arranged, Nat took a post-chaise and drove to Southampton. There he found the Duchesnes at an hotel. Their ship had gone into the port two days previously, but all their belongings were not yet out of the hold, and indeed it had been arranged that they would not go up to town till they saw him. They were delighted to hear that his appointment had been confirmed, and that he was to have the command of the *Spartane*.

"Now, I suppose you will be running down to see your people at once?" Myra said with a little pout.

"I think that is only fair," he said, "considering that I have not seen them for six years. I don't think that even you could grudge me a few days." [Pg 363]

"Yeovil is a large place, isn't it?" she asked.

"Yes; why do you ask?"

She looked at her mother, who smiled.

"The fact is, Nat, Myra has been endeavouring to persuade her father and me that it would be a nice plan for us to go down there with you and to form the acquaintance of your parents. Of course we should stay at an hotel. We are in no particular hurry to go up to

London; and as while you are away we shall naturally wish to see as much as we can of your people, this would make a very good beginning. And perhaps some of them will come back to London with us when you join your ship."

"I think it would be a first-rate plan, madame, the best thing possible. Of course I want my father and mother and the girls to see Myra."

"When will you start?"

"To-morrow morning. Of course we shall go by post. It will be a very cross-country journey by coach, and many of these country roads are desperately bad. It is only about the same distance that it is to London, but the roads are not so good, so I propose that we make a short journey to-morrow to Salisbury, and then, starting early, go through to Yeovil. We shall be there in good time in the afternoon. I shall only be taking a very small amount of kit, so that we ought to be able to stow three large trunks, which will, I suppose, be enough for you. Of course we could send some on by a waggon, but there is no saying when they would get there, and as likely as not they would not arrive until just as we are leaving there; of course Dinah will go on the box."

At four o'clock, two days later, the post-chaise drove up to the principal hotel at Yeovil. Rooms were at once obtained for the Duchesnes, and Nat hired a light trap to drive him out to his father's rectory, some three miles out of the town. As[Pg 364] he drove up to the house, three girls, from sixteen to two-and three-and-twenty, ran out, followed a moment later by his father and mother. For a few minutes there was but little coherent talk. His sisters could scarcely believe that this tall young officer was the lad they had last seen, and even his father and mother agreed that they would scarce have recognized him.

"I don't think the girls quite recognize me now," he laughed. "They kissed me in a very feeble sort of way, as if they were not at all sure that it was quite right. Indeed, I was not quite sure myself that it was the proper thing for me to salute three strange young ladies."

"What nonsense you talk, Nat," his eldest sister Mary said. "I thought by this time, now you are a lieutenant, you would have become quite stiff, and would expect a good deal of deference to be paid to you."

"I can't say that you have been a good correspondent, Nat," his mother said. "You wrote very seldom, and then said very little of what

you had been doing."

"Well, mother, there are not many post-offices in Hayti, and I should not have cared to trust any letters to them if there had been. There is the advantage, you see, that there is much more to tell you now than if I had written to you before. You don't get papers very regularly here, I think?"

"No, we seldom see a London paper, and the Bath papers don't tell much about anything except the fashionable doings there."

"Then I have several pieces of news to tell you. Here is a *Gazette*, in which you will see that a certain Nathaniel Glover brought into Portsmouth last week a French thirty-six-gun frigate which he had captured, and in another part of the *Gazette* you will observe that the same officer has been con[Pg 365]firmed in the acting rank of commander, and has been appointed to the *Spartane*, which is to be recommissioned at once. Therefore you see, sisters, you will in future address me as captain."

There was a general exclamation of surprise and delight.

"That is what it was," the rector said, "that Dr. Miles was talking to me about yesterday in Yeovil. He said that the London papers were full of the news that a French frigate had been captured by a little ten-gun brigantine, and had been brought home by the officer who had taken her, who was, he said, of the same name as mine. He said that it was considered an extraordinarily gallant action."

"We shall be as proud as peacocks," Lucy, the youngest girl, said.

"Now as to my news," he went on. "Doubtless that was important, but not so important as that which I am now going to tell you. At the present moment there is at Yeovil a gentleman and lady, together with their daughter, the said daughter being, at the end of a reasonable time, about to become my wife, and your sister, girls."

The news was received with speechless surprise.

"Really, Nat?" his mother said in a tone of doubt; "do you actually mean that you have become engaged to a young lady who is now at Yeovil?"

"That is the case, mother," he said cheerfully. "There is nothing very surprising that a young lady should fall in love with me, is there? and I think the announcement will look well in the papers—on such and such a date, Myra, daughter of Monsieur Duchesne, late of the island of Hayti, to Nathaniel, son of the Rev. Charles Glover of Arkton

Rector, commander in his majesty's navy."

"Duchesne!" Ada, the second girl, said, clapping her hands, "that is the name of the young lady you rescued from a dog. I remember at the time Mary and I quite agreed that the[Pg 366] proper thing for you to do would be to marry her some day. Yes, and you were staying at her father's place when the blacks broke out; and you had all to hide in the woods for some time."

"Quite right, Ada. Well, she and her father and mother have posted down with me from Southampton in order to make your acquaintance, and to-morrow you will have to go over in a body."

"Does she speak English?" Mrs. Glover asked.

"Oh, yes, she speaks a good deal of English; her people have for the past two years intended to settle in England, and have all been studying the language to a certain extent. Besides that, they have had the inestimable advantage of my conversation, and have read a great many English books on their voyage home."

"Is Miss Duchesne very dark?" Lucy asked in a tone of anxiety.

Nat looked at her for a moment in surprise, and then burst into a fit of laughter.

"What, Lucy, do you think because Myra was born in Hayti that she is a little negress with crinkley wool?"

"No, no," the girl protested almost tearfully. "Of course I did not think that, but I thought that she might be dark. I am sure when I was at Bath last season and saw several old gentlemen, who, they said, were rich West Indians, they were all as yellow as guineas."

"Well, she won't be quite so dark as that, anyhow," Nat said; "in fact I can tell you, you three will all have to look your best to make a good show by the side of her."

"But this talk is all nonsense, Nat," the rector said gravely. "Your engagement is a very serious matter. Of course, now you have been so wonderfully fortunate, and are commander of a ship, you will, I have no doubt, have an income quite sufficient[Pg 367] to marry upon, and, of course, you are in a position to please yourself."

"We are not going to be married just at present, father. She is three years younger than I am, and I am not far advanced in years; so it has been quite settled that we shall wait for some time yet. By then, if I am lucky, my prize-money will have swelled to a handsome

amount, and indeed, although I don't know the exact particulars, I believe I am entitled to from eight to ten thousand pounds. Moreover as the young lady herself is an only child, and her father is a very wealthy man, I fancy that we are not likely to have to send round the hat to make ends meet."

The visit was duly paid the next day, and was most satisfactory to all parties, and, as the rectory was a large building, Mr. and Mrs. Glover insisted upon the Duchesnes removing there at once.

"We want to see as much of Nat as we can," his mother urged, "and if he is to divide his time between Yeovil and the rectory, I am afraid we should get but a very small share of him."

"I suppose your brother has told you all his adventures," Myra said the next morning, as she and all the party, with the exception of Mr. Glover and Nat, were seated in the parlour after breakfast was over.

"No, he is a very poor correspondent. He just told us what he had been doing, but said very little about his adventures. I suppose he thought that girls would not care to hear about midshipmen's doings. He did tell us, though, that he had had a fight with a dog that had bitten you."

Myra's eyes opened wider and wider as the eldest, Mary Glover, spoke. Her face flushed, and she would have risen to her feet in her indignation had not her mother laid her hand upon her arm.[Pg 368]

"I do not think, Miss Glover," Monsieur Duchesne said gravely, "that you can at all understand the obligation that we are under to your brother. The bite of a dog seems but a little thing. A huge hound had thrown Myra down, and had rescue been delayed but half a minute her death was certain. Your brother, riding past, heard her cries, and rushed in, and, armed only with his dirk, attacked the hound. He saved my daughter's life, but it was well-nigh at the cost of his own, for although he killed it, it was not until it had inflicted terrible injuries upon him—injuries so serious that for a time it was doubtful whether he would live. This was the first service to us. On the next occasion he was staying with us when the blacks rose. Thanks to our old nurse, there was time for them to run out into the shrubbery before the negroes came up, and then take refuge in the wood. My wife was seized with fever, and was for days unconscious.

"The woods were everywhere scoured for fugitives. Six blacks, led by two mulattoes, discovered their hiding-place. Your son shot the whole of them, but had one of his ribs broken by a pistol-ball. In spite of that, he and Dinah carried my wife some thirty miles down to the

town across rough ground, where every step must have been torture to him, and brought her and Myra safely to me. Equal services he performed another time to a family, intimate friends of ours, composed of a gentleman and his wife and two daughters, who, with six white men, were prisoners in the hands of the blacks, and would assuredly have suffered deaths of agonizing torture. Though he had but twenty men with him, he landed them all, marched them up to the place, rescued the whole party, and made his way down to his boat again through three hundred and fifty maddened blacks. No less great was the service he rendered when he rescued some fifteen ladies and gentlemen who had been captured by a pirate, and whose fate, had he not[Pg 369] arrived, would have been too horrible to think of. As to his services at sea, the official reports have testified, and his unheard-of promotion shows the appreciation of the authorities. Never were more gallant deeds done by the most valiant naval captains who have ever lived."

Myra had held her father's hand while he was speaking; her breath had come fast, and her eyes were full of tears.

"Thank you, Monsieur Duchesne," Mrs. Glover said, gently; "please remember that all this is quite new to us. Now that we know something of the truth, we shall feel as proud of our boy as your daughter has a right to be."

"Excuse me, Mrs. Glover," Myra said, walking across to her, and kissing her, "but when it seemed to me that these glorious deeds Nat has achieved were regarded as the mere adventures of a midshipman, I felt that I must speak."

"It is quite natural that you should do so," Mrs. Glover said; "for, if fault there is, it rests with Nat, who always spoke of his own adventures in a jesting sort of way, and gave us no idea that they were anything out of the common."

"They were out of the common, madame," Myra said; "why, when he came into Port Royal, with the great frigate in tow of his little brigantine, and two huge merchantmen he had recaptured from her, the admiral's ship and all the vessels of war in the harbour saluted him. I almost cried my eyes out with pride and happiness."

"Myra does not exaggerate," her mother said; "your son's exploits were the talk of Jamaica, and even the capture of the French frigate was less extraordinary than the way in which, with a little craft of four guns, he captured a pirate which carried ten, and a crew four times as numerous as his own."

"I hope you will tell us in full about all these things, Madame Duchesne," Mrs. Glover said, "for I fear that we shall never get a full account from Nat himself." [Pg 370]

Myra went across to Mary.

"You are not angry with me, I hope," she said; "we are hot-tempered, we West Indians. When it seemed that you were speaking slightly of the action to which I owe my life, I don't know what I should have said if my father had not stopped me."

"I am not in the slightest degree angry," Mary said; "or, rather, if I am angry at all it is with Nat. It is too bad of him keeping all this to himself. You see, he was quite a boy when he left us, and he used to tell us funny stories about the pranks that the midshipmen played. Although we felt very proud of him when he told us that he had gained the rank of commander, we did not really know anything about sea matters, and could not appreciate the fact that he must have done something altogether out of the way to obtain that rank. But, of course, we like you all the better for standing up for him. I am sure that in future we girls shall be just as angry as you were if anyone says anything that sounds like running him down."

The time passed rapidly, and, as the girls were never tired of listening to the tales of Nat's exploits, and Myra was never tired of relating them, Nat would have come in for any amount of hero-worship had he not promptly suppressed the slightest exhibition in that direction.

It was but a few days after his arrival in England that Monsieur Duchesne learned by a letter from a friend, who was one of the few who escaped from the terrible scene, that their fears had been justified, and that Cape François, the beautiful capital of Hayti, had ceased to exist. Santhonax and Poveren had established a reign of terror, plunder, and oppression, until the white inhabitants were reduced to the most terrible state of suffering. The misery caused by these white monsters was as great as that which prevailed in France. At last [Pg 371] General Galbaud arrived, having been sent out to prepare for the defence of the colony against an attack by the British. The two commissioners, however, refused to recognize his authority. Not only this, but they imperatively ordered him to re-embark, and return to France. Each party then prepared for fighting. The commissioners had with them the regular troops, and a large body of blacks. The governor had twelve hundred sailors, and the white inhabitants of the city, who had formed themselves into a body of volunteers.

The fighting was hard; the volunteers showed the greatest bravery, and, had they been well supported by the sailors, would have gained the day. The seamen, however, speedily broke into the warehouses, intoxicated themselves with rum, and it was with difficulty that their officers could bring them back into the arsenal. The commissioners had, the night before, sent to a negro chief, offering pardon for all past offences, perfect freedom, and the plunder of the city. He arrived at noon on the 21st of June, and at once began the butchery of the white inhabitants. This continued till the evening of the 23rd, by which time the whole of the whites had been murdered, the city sacked, and then burned to the ground.

Before Nat sailed in the *Spartane*, the Duchesnes had taken a house at Torquay. Here the climate would be better suited to madame, the summer temperature being less exhausting and the winter so free from extremes that she might reasonably hope not to feel the change.

For five years Nat commanded the *Spartane*. If he did not meet with the exceptional good fortune that he had found in the West Indies, he had, at least, nothing to complain of. He picked up many prizes, took part in several gallant cutting-out adventures, and captured the French frigate *Euterpe*, of forty-six guns. For full details of these and other actions a search[Pg 372] must be made in the official records of the British navy, where they are fully set forth. After a long and hard-fought battle, for which action he received post rank, he retired from the service, and settled down with Myra near Plymouth, where he was within easy reach of his own relations.

As soon as he was established there, her father and mother took a house within a few minutes' walk of his home. He congratulated himself that he had not remained in the West Indies, for had he done so he would, like all the naval and military forces in the islands, have taken part in the disastrous attempt to obtain possession of the island of San Domingo. The Spaniards had ceded their portion to the French, and although the whites, mulattoes, and blacks were at war with each other, they were all ready to join forces against the British. The attempt to conquer an island so populous and strongly defended, and abounding with mountains in which the enemy could maintain themselves, was, if undertaken by a force of anything less than a hundred thousand men, foredoomed to failure. The force at first sent was ridiculously inadequate, and although it received reinforcements from time to time, these were not more than sufficient to fill the gaps caused by fever. Consequently, after four or five years' fighting, and the loss of fully thirty thousand men, by fatigue, hardship, and fever,

the effort was abandoned, after having cost some thirty millions of money.

At the end of the war, Toussaint was virtually Dictator of Hayti. He governed strongly and well, but as he was determined to admit no interference on the part of the French, he was finally treacherously seized by them, carried to France, and there died, it is said by starvation, in prison. His forebodings as to the unfitness of the blacks for self-government have been fulfilled to the letter. Civil wars, insurrections, and massacres have been the rule rather than the exception; the[Pg 373] island has been gradually going down in the scale of civilization, and the majority of the blacks are as savage, ignorant, and superstitious as their forefathers in Africa. Fetish worship and human sacrifices are carried on in secret, and the fairest island in the western seas lies sunk in the lowest degradation—a proof of the utter incapacity of the negro race to evolve, or even maintain, civilization, without the example and the curb of a white population among them.

[Pg 374]

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