

THE SUNKEN ROCK

A Tale of the Mediterranean

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I.

THE Mediterranean Sea occupies that place in maritime life which it does in geography. Its associations are all of the earth and of worldly things: you enter and leave it as if by a gate, between those Pillars of Hercules, beyond which all were unknown waters to the ancients. It has none of that grave, mysterious earnestness which belongs to the great ocean, with its protracted solitudes, its nameless conflicts, its dangers unforeseen. To the present day, in truth, the open main and this miniature remain in strong contrast as two separate schools of experience: for from the sunny rock of Gibraltar to the black and roaring Euxine, the Mediterranean mariner is at best but a coast-er or ferryman, a child of luck or superstition, an animal at once simple and cunning—voluptuous like the Italian and Spaniard, or savage like the Greek, the Moor, and the Turk: in short, to use the graphic idiom of a nautical wit, “your *mariner* is always next door to a marine.” He still steers literally by the stars, without need of compass, quadrant, or chronometer, dodging from

point to point, sheltering behind the capes and islands, scudding when a gale arises with scarce a rag of sail before it, or hauling it down altogether, and governed by a sort of dumb instinct as to the weather of a region where all is sudden and changeable as in a mountain lake. National character and ideas all the time continue here little more modified by sea-faring habits than if each race of men had staid at home. The Italian or Spaniard in a storm ceases his exertions, wrings his hands, and vows taper after taper to the Virgin for assistance; the Greek rows desperately for the land, and in case of a safe issue, cuts off his hair to holy Nicholas; while the Turk cuts away top-sail and top-gallant-sail from aloft, instead of furling them, and then commits himself with sullen resignation to his destiny.

During the last great European war, the Mediterranean, of old mingled with human blood, became the battle-field where civilized nations decided their final struggles; and there is this to be said for war at sea, that while it leaves behind no wounded, and arrays hostility in somewhat of a sublimer guise, it at the same time tramples down no harvest fields, breaks in upon no busy city, and leaves simple cottagers to sleep securely. It was then that Nelson chased the fleet of Ville-neuve for months through the Atlantic in vain, to find him at length back near Trafalgar; and as the contest thickened toward the Mediterranean, it was reduced to the conditions of a drawn duel there, to leave the open ocean free for discovery

and commerce, when Napoleon had no more ships to spare. But if Cæsar's legionaries, long ago, were taken by surprise to find their galleys left high and dry at ebb of tide—a trick of Neptune which they knew nothing about before—in this land-girt sea, on the other hand, your sailor fresh from true-blue water has always some new lessons to learn, and perhaps a few of his bluff, thorough-going maxims to give up. From the complicated arrangement of its many peninsulas, promontories, and islands, as well as the very nature of its bottom, the hydrography or ground navigation of the Mediterranean has been at all times precarious, and the accuracy of charts there still more important than elsewhere; so that “a wet-hand lead and a bright look-out” come here almost to exclude those other chief appliances of seamanship which are in requisition as soon as the pilot is dropped and the anchors stowed. The merchant vessels of Britain and her allies, on their way from port to port, were obliged to sail close together, under protection of their armed convoy, keeping the mid-channel, and following one another in the well-known paths like sheep; the trader more anxious to detect his foe, the man-of-war more eager for his prey or his antagonist, than to notice any object less remarkable; and as for the communication of experience between nations, or from local acquaintance, such information was probably as little in request as it was to be looked for. If by chance an unlucky Smyrnanian or a Levant brig, a rich Barcelona bark or a Leghorn her-

maphrodite schooner, dropped off in some mysterious way out of the very middle of the convoy, it was attributed to the dark night, to some sly privateer, or to the gale acting upon an ill-formed craft. Even when a fine sloop of war or a frigate or two were lost, and supposed to have gone ashore, or to have foundered with all hands, the fatal spot proved to be one everybody had heard of, and no one mentioned: but they were used to it, and the affair was put down amongst the casualties.

Captain James Grove, of his Britannic Majesty's ship *Thetis*, was famous even amongst his sharp brother commanders as a keen cruiser, a daring "cutter-out," but at the same time a cool, prudent hand in carrying his purposes into execution, except that, rather than give in to a Frenchman of what size soever, he would see himself blown out of the water, or his enemy what the Jack Tars quaintly called "blowed." Added to which, he was a perfect gentleman, and of course a thorough sailor—Channel-bred, ocean-bred; in short, bred all over, by actual experience, while knowing the Mediterranean well. Grove was, in fact, one of those first-rate specimens of the British seaman that the time produced, with all his merits and all his defects, amongst which the present age might probably number the excess of that bulldog tenacity, and that contempt of abstract views, wherein lay much of our naval success. Most of the cruising ships on the station were now being recalled, as at this period there was but little left

for them to do ; and the gleanings of the harvest were reserved for a few men of interest, chiefly young scions of aristocracy, to whom the field was new. Many a gallant spirit that had greeted these bright waters with a smile was going home to rust ashore on half-pay, or amidst the North Sea blasts, the long gales which blow fiercely round the Southern capes, or the wearisome vicissitudes of the tropics, to remember their Mediterranean days with a sigh. The *Thetis* had long had her copper washed by its short, sharp waves, so that she daily expected her orders home, and was lying quietly at anchor off the harbor of Malta, when, after the arrival of a new sloop of war from England, the admiral's flag-ship one evening signaled dispatches, along with the familiar telegraphic numbers by which Captain Grove's presence was required on board the seventy-four. The thought of home, perhaps more easily forgotten than elsewhere in these regions, with their continual excitement and their varying temperatures—one gliding almost insensibly into the other—began to realize itself as the captain's gig pulled swiftly toward the line-of-battle ship, hugely looming at her anchors, between the frigate and the broad blue offing of the Eastern sea ; while the last red glimmer of the sun, dropping behind Malta, brought out its black mass of land from beyond, fringing its outline with crimson, which imperceptibly melted into the purple haze which floated above. The heavy yards of the ships looked whiter, and the buoy over the anchor of the

seventy-four was dipping ahead of her in the first pulses of the land-wind from Sicily. The fire of the admiral's evening gun flashed from one of her ports as the boat lay under her gangway; then were heard the bells from the many churches and convents in the town of Valetta, beginning to jangle musically after its deep sound had boomed away to leeward; the large, clear evening star was out above the dim lights on shore; and the British ensign, with its deep blue field, and the flag of St. George, with its white ground and red cross, could be seen lazily half unfolding as they caught the breeze. Then England, with her sober aspect and less brilliant climate, returned as it were mildly, even on such rude hearts as were gathered along the fore-bulwarks of the frigate; for hardy tars might have been seen looking out toward the flag-ship in anxious speculation as to what was passing there, or clustering together to talk of wives, sweethearts, and friends, and how they might soon be able to spend their prize-money in a good, honest English way. All were, for the first time for two or three years, stirred up by what looked like an actual turning homeward, not a few swearing, with true nautical caprice, that for their part, "next to your flat-topped houses, your white walls, and your infernal blue sky, they hated your weather that's neither too warm nor too cold." When the captain's gig had again reached the ship, however, and in little more than an hour her capstan was manned to heave up anchor, her crew were too much accustomed

to naval procedure to persist in their home speculations after a departure so sudden: and the forty-four was soon standing out under all sail to seaward, every one but the commander seemingly in complete ignorance as to her destination.

It was well past the end of summer, when the regular alternation of winds, so familiar to the seamen especially in that region of the Mediterranean, began to be affected by other influences; but for the first three or four days the *Thetis*, with her head turned northwestward, made good progress up the broad channel that intervenes between the Tunisian capes and the coast of Sicily, still receiving the strong southerly air each morning, the western zephyr in the afternoon, and the cool, fresh, northeastern night breezes from the distant shores of Italy, spent and weakened in their passage across the yet ampler waters of the Italian sea, with intervals of light calm, in which her sails would catch hot, fitful puffs, or transient squalls off the great African desert—memorials of the past sirocco. The frigate, however, was one distinguished for her sailing qualities, and she was already far up toward the wide reach between Sicily and Sardinia, as if bound for Naples, when she encountered a strong greggale, or northeaster, which, after she had continued to beat up close-hauled against for an hour or two, kept her during the next afternoon and night driving to leeward under her three reefed top-sails, and pitching on the short angry seas till morning, though happily too far from the land to be in any

danger. When the gale broke and fell, as it did amidst the quick and struggling light of dawn, the *Thetis* shook the reefs out of her top-sails, altering her course a point or two nearer to its previous inclination; and inspiring enough it was, certainly, to the sailor's heart in her officers of the watch, as the stately ship buffeted the waves in clouds of white spray from her weather bow, her long yards dotted with hardy seamen crowding in to descend the rigging, her tall broad sheets of canvas shaking into steadfastness before the force of the wind, and the female figure at her bows stretching its arm in antique grace over the turbulence below, as if the old sea-goddess from whom she took her name were once more seen controlling the froward monsters of the deep in all their Protean shapes—that brute strength of nature which yields ever to higher influences and to divine behests. While the sun lifted his glorious orb through the scattered mist to windward, brightening the high wet sides of the frigate, and glittering along the range of quarter-deck guns as she rolled, the wind shifted gradually round in her favor, as the usual morning breeze resumed power, and the Mediterranean surges, though still agitated, soon rose beautifully blue again, the *Thetis* leaning over as she anew began to urge her former course toward the Italian Channel. The well-known azure peaks of a cape somewhere near Algiers had been purposely brought visible before, as a point of “departure,” but with unusual care, as if it was desired that the utmost nautical pre-

cision might guide her ensuing progress : and the curiosity of all on board was again excited as to the particular object of the cruise.

The first cold tints of daybreak next morning watch found the frigate still out of sight of land, although, by the rate of her progress during the last twenty-four hours, far off, indeed, from where the sun had last risen upon her. The brisk south-westerly breeze continued to sweep across to her larboard quarter, raising the expanse of water into lively little surges, whose heads were scarce crisped with foam, while they swelled up from purple hollows to glitter in the level radiance, with edges of emerald-green ; on the ship's other side the whole sea came out, from her very bends to the sky, in one shining semicircle, hemmed by a keener rim of light, beyond which the sun shot up his dazzling orb with a blaze of splendor unspeakable. The frigate was now, notwithstanding the breeze, under what is called easy sail ; merely expanding her three broad top-sails, jib, and spanker, to its influence, her courses being hauled up in the brails, and the loftier sails furled on the yards : nor, as it brushed the whole wide surface into one rounded floor of sparkling and restless blue, was there any addition made to her spread of canvas ; so that the *Thetis* moved but gently ahead, with every point in her hull and lofty gear sending back the rays of sunlight as they glanced upon her, like one weakened by the arrows of Apollo of old. Her decks, however, were newly washed down ; and, as usual, before

their drying up, the officers and men of the watch alone occupied their respective positions aft and forward; the former, visible here and there about the quarter-deck, looking aloft or seaward with variously modified airs of occupation, ready for the visit of their superiors; the latter, clustered idly in the bows, gazing carelessly over the side, or walking backward and forward in the gangways. On this occasion, indeed, amongst that portion of the frigate's crew now on deck, a greater variety and excitement of feeling prevailed than was externally discernible through the usual repressed manner of British sailors, whose idea of manly indifference is so opposed to all *empressement* as to be sometimes ludicrous. The mixture of dissatisfaction and curiosity was chiefly brought out by off-hand remarks and quaintly speculative comments on the proceedings of those above them, with an originality which was far from displaying itself in the more restricted calculations of the quarter-deck.

"What are we a-losing this here good breeze for," said one; "an' in a couple of hours more it'll no doubt be dead calm?"

"Ay, mate," said a fine black-bearded topman; "but what's the skipper *after*? that's the main p'int, ye know, Tom."

"Well, to my thinking now," answered another, "I shouldn't wonder if the captain's got naught to do with this here short canvas we're under; an' it's all owin' to cautious Carey yonder, the second luff, as is al'ays feared for white

squalls of a mornin'. Why, what the blessed *can* we be arter but right up for Naples, Jack?"

"Phew!" said the topman again. "Catch slashing Jim Grove without a cue of his own, or the hooker under canvas *he* don't know about! I bet ye a week's grog, mates, he's got word o' some French merchantman, or mayhap a frigate, at sea hereabouts; an' afore long, take my word for it, ye'll see some'at smart. Why, bless ye! heels or broadside, the saucy *Thetis* 'll have her; or if it comes to a cut-out, our skipper's not the man for to say hold on, ye know."

Every eye was here instinctively turned to the horizon again, one head and another stooping or stretching to see past the complicated hamper of the ship, through which the blue line of distance shone so clear, however, with its superincumbent space of air, that the least speck could not have escaped the experienced glance of the sailors; and all faces were finally raised for a moment aloft to where the look-out, on the foretop-gallant-yard, with his arms folded on the white spar, leaned contemplatively over it, like some spectator from a purer sphere; one saw his keen eyes gleam, and his head turn against the blue atmosphere to survey the semicircle behind, from which his voice would have fallen like no earthly call.

"What does *you* think o' the consarn, old Ship?" said Tom, addressing the elder of two stout, salt-looking old tars, who had been rolling to and fro along the gangway in separate conver-

sation, while alternately leaving and approaching the group.

"As how, lad?" said the veteran, endeavoring not to appear too much softened by the complimentary appeal to his authority.

"Why," answered Tom, "here's Jack Brown an' a lot more will have it there's some'at more i' the wind than a trip to Naples this bout; 'cause why, ye see, jist by reason the craft's got a little less cloth airing nor or'nary. Now what d'ye make on it yerself, old Ship?"

"Well," replied the old sailor, turning one eye aloft, "it's hard to say, Tom, my lad; cruising canvas it be, ye know."

"In course," said Tom, glancing contemptuously at his companions—"in course: that's all."

"Any word of a Frenchman hereabouts?" asked several, eagerly.

"Lord love ye, mates," said Ben, "I don't fancy there's two French sticks together almost o' this side the Gut."

"So says I," interrupted Tom: "a blue look-out enough for more prizes!" And the eager attention of the circle gave way to a general expression of disappointment.

"You talks o' prizes, though, shipmates," resumed old Ben; "an' no wonder either, seein' a man tires o' ploughin' brine for nothing at all. But you young chaps don't think much o' them without a few hard knocks first, or a tough chase; whereas an ould hand like me, why, he's scen enough on that 'ere sort o' thing to turn sick

of it. Now as for the war, mates, I'm in doubt we've seen the last shares it 'll bring us; 'cause why—there was overmany a-haulin' at it. The sooner we've peace, to my notions, the better."

"That's neither here nor there, though, old Ship," remarked a sailor.

"Why, mates," continued the old seaman, more significantly than ever, "what ud ye think if so be there was more prizes to be got hereabouts nor would buy the whole o' France twenty times over, an' that without never a shot fired nor more canvas set than we has just now; and what's more, without pickin' other folks' pockets? for, d'ye see, I'm blessed if it ha'n't gone to my heart at times for to chuck about them shiners as some poor French devil's lost, an' him doin' no harm to no one, besides bein' clapped in jail ashore, with mayhap a wife and babies at home, mind ye!"

"Why, for that matter," said the foretop-man, although somewhat undecidedly, "mayhap you takes your turn: it's all a toss up, old Ship."

"But what's that you say about prizes, Ben?" exclaimed the rest, pressing closer.

"Why," continued he, looking round him, and pointing to the glittering expanse of sun-lit waters, "what d'ye fancy this here Middytarranean, as we're afloat upon, is?"—a question to which the puzzled faces of his hearers naturally returned no other answer than to glance around at it again, and back to the speaker. "It's not like the reg'lar oshun, as they calls blue water, look

ye, mates; 'cause why, I've sailed on it this four year come Christmas, an' never knowed the rights of the thing, till t'other week off Malta I chances for to overhaul a book that the captain's stoo'rd lends me one night, which it let me into the matter. D'ye see, in ould times the whole o' them coasts an' ileyands all round, they'd got as many kings an' empyrores as the whole world has nowadays; an' as thick of towns, steeples, an' natives as Lunnun's self, with more fleets nor they knowed what to do with in sich narrow waters. What's more, they didn't know how to handle 'em; an' as soon as a bit of a breeze or a white squall gets up, down they went; besides fightin' like so many cats whenever they'd meet. So in course, mates, in them days there was nothin' but wracks an' ill-luck went on; but bein' as rich as Jews, they didn't mind, an' they builds more; though through time the craft got smaller an' poor, like what ye sees now. Now if ye just could see under this here sea, or dry up the water, why, mates, it ud be nothin' more but a reg'lar sprinkle o' gould cups an' coins, jowels an' di'monds, an' what not. Now here is we right in the track for ould Room, where them auncient fleets used for to steer along shore, an' what I axes is—d'ye think Captain Grove's the man to waste wind, time, an' trouble for nothin'?" Here the grizzly-haired old tar squirted his tobacco juice into the scuppers, and looked round in triumph. "Hows'ever, mates," continued he, "all this an't neither here nor there; for I tell ye what, Ben Bryce an't the

lubber for to guess i' the dark that fashion: I knows some'at to clinch the matter pretty sartin."

"Ay, ay, old Ship!" eagerly exclaimed the crowd of seamen, at the pitch of interest, and turning their ears to listen more intently, while every eye was fixed sideways on the talkative veteran. "What's that, Ben?"

"Here's the p'int, lads," said he; "you want to know how ye're to get at them treasures below water. Why, it's easier nor you think: all you've got to do's just to heave to an' use the lead—the steadier we keeps the better. But in course there's *one* more thing ye need, an' that's how to man-handle them said treasures when ye know where they are. Now what d'ye think we've got aboard this very hooker, down in the main-hold there?"

"Blowed if I knows!" exclaimed one and another, opening his eyes.

"Well, mates," said Ben, "d'ye mind the night afore we left Malta we h'isted aboard a big lump of a consarn, all wrapped up in tarpaulins?"

"Ay, ay, bo," rejoined several; "few ud forget it as had a hand in the haulin' of it up."

"Well, blessed if I'd the least notion what it were, till next night Mr. White the bo'sun let me into the nater on it, 'sides some'at of its make; an' I'm blessed, shipmates, but it's neither more nor less than what they calls a divin'-bell!"

"*What?*—how's that? Divin'-bell, old Ship!"

were the exclamations of his audience. "What craft's that, Ben?—eh, old Salt!"

"Why," replied he, with an air of superior intelligence, "it's a rum consarn altogether, no doubt—bigger nor a battle-ship's poop lantern: more like the top taken off a small light-house. You h'ists it out with a tackle from the main-yard-arm, an' lets sink alongside right to the bottom, with two or three hands inside of it—pumps in air a one side, an' up comes their breath out on the other; an' there they stays, grabbing at what's below, an' overhauling the whole blessed bottom, till such time as they gives the signal to haul up. So ye see, mates, when I talks o' prizes to be got under water, I'm not so far out, after all."

On the quarter-deck the curiosity had been naturally heightened by the orders left at the end of the middle watch, and which confirmed the supposition of the *Thetis* having been dispatched on some particular service. The second lieutenant, who was in charge, leaned with his arms on the capstan, and one hand on the telescope, with which he had again and again surveyed the distant horizon on every side.

"Nothing in sight yet, at any rate, Neville," said he now to his next in rank, a lively young man in undress uniform, who had left his berth below earlier than necessary, from mere interest in the matter; "and little likelihood of anything on this track, I'm afraid."

"Can it be only some of Sergeant Slyturn's

affairs, after all, Carey?" suggested the other, using a backname for the first lieutenant which was occasional in the gun-room, and familiar in the midshipman's mess—"one of those scientific trips he talks about, eh?"

"Why, no," said the officer of the watch; "*that* can't well be, since, anxious as he evidently seems, I believe Mr. Sleighton knows little more of the affair than any of us; in fact, I have a notion the captain has held it so close just to keep the first lieutenant as long as possible out of it, which makes me think it must be some navigation concern certainly, so hanged inquisitive as he is, and always wanting to stick his finger in every pie of the kind."

"Yes, of the *kind*," said Neville, laughing; "though not, perhaps, if it happened to be some piece of hot boat-work off Toulon. By-the-bye, our reefers have a good joke about him they got from their friends in the *Majestic*, where he was before—"

"Hush! here he comes himself," said the second lieutenant, in a low tone, and next moment the gold-banded cap of the first lieutenant appeared above the combings of the after-hatchway. The sunlight sparkled on the epaulet of his left shoulder as he came up the companion ladder, gazing aloft while he did so, and round the horizon when he had reached the deck. He was a slender young man, younger looking, in fact, than either of his two subordinates; and instead of presenting any ground in his first appearance

for the sort of dislike with which he was regarded by his fellow-officers, his features were finely intellectual, though delicate for a sailor's, and an indistinct smile was always playing about his sharp upper lip, that was apt to curl into a kind of sneer when he spoke, at least to his shipmates. The truth was, Mr. Sleighton's father happened to have been in business ; and he owed his presence and position in the navy to two things—his having an uncle a member of Parliament, who could be inconvenient, if he chose, to the ministry, and his own acuteness and knowledge in all matters, especially theoretical, connected with his profession, derived from good preparatory education at school. This of itself, added to the fact of his having been pushed over their heads, would have tended to produce a misunderstanding between the other officers and him ; but Sleighton unfortunately had as little the frank, straightforward, and high-minded spirit, which to most of his companions was a thing of blood, as he possessed their off-hand, gentlemanly bearing, or, for instance, the manly dashing figure and handsome browned face of either of the two lieutenants beneath him. With these deficiencies, he could scarcely have been expected wholly to conceal his consciousness of intellectual superiority ; while the pettier vanity which made him, instead of standing upon this merit, talk of his "uncle, the member for So-and-so," and his "brother, the sergeant at law," not only exhibited the weak points of a new school of naval men, but brought

out the worst feature of the old—its supercilious self-reliance. Above all, that characteristic which a sailor, from his peculiar habits, dislikes most heartily, is that of what he calls a “sea-lawyer,” or one who, instead of ordering, obeying, or acting in his place, resorts to disputation and argument about the matter: and this chanced to be the tendency of the first lieutenant of the *Thetis*; while curiously enough, too, the sailors specially disliked him on the very ground that, in place of issuing peremptory commands like the rest, with perhaps an oath or two—in place of knocking them about, as they called it, and bringing a man “to the gratings when he deserved it”—it was his way, on the contrary, to speak them fair, to reason with them; and, when he could, to substitute milder punishments of an indirect kind for the cat. Still more fatal to his acceptance with the capricious mind of Jack was his sparing use of sea terms; so that, on the whole, Mr. Sleighton could not be said to have many friends on board.

“There is nothing visible yet, I think, Mr. Carey?” said the first lieutenant, as he approached, after having taken one long look through the glass.

“Not a speck in sight, Sir,” replied the other, briefly, and touching his cap, while both he and his companion quietly observed the ill-concealed air of dissatisfaction and restlessness which their superior attempted to cover by appearing quite at ease as well as secretly intelligent.

“Ah, well!” said he, stooping to glance into

the compass-boxes, "northeast-by-east—that is well, Mr. Carey—so! Half a point more east, my man, as nearly as you can. I see you've got both courses pulled up, Mr. Carey; quite correct, Sir."

"Exactly as I had the orders, Sir," answered the second lieutenant.

"We are somewhere about longitude ten and a half," said the first lieutenant, as if to himself, "latitude thirty-eight and a half, say—off the Sardinian coast."

"Indeed, Sir?" inquired Carey, trying a random hit: "then we are pretty near the right quarter, I suppose?"

"Right quarter!" repeated the first lieutenant, with a sudden stare—"for what?"

"Why, for what you are expecting, Sir, you know," replied Carey, with the utmost outward respect, but exchanging looks with Neville on the other side. The lieutenant caught the expression; his keen eyes flashed as he turned away for a moment as if to examine the horizon; but the next instant he gave both the officers a cold, clear glance of indifference, the usual sneer playing about his mouth, as he said, formally, to the one in charge, "The captain will be on deck directly: you will see the men summoned to divisions, Sir."

"Ay, ay, Sir," replied Carey, walking a few steps forward, and calling out, "Boatswain's mates, pipe to divisions there!"

The bells struck to mark half past seven; the

whole crew were next minute crowding up and shuffling together in awkwardly ordered masses along both gangways: a double column of clean white trousers, blue jackets, and bearded faces, with the ship's name repeated brightly in front of every black-ribboned tarpaulin, while the cross-belted marines drew across before the quarter-deck. In five minutes more the tall, strong form of the captain emerged from the hatchway, the drums tapped and rolled, the arms of the marines clashed as they were presented, every sailor's hat was off, and the commander stood running his quick, bold eye forward along the crew, aloft to the ship's lofty spars and canvas, out to the blue waters and their horizon, then over the throng of men again.

"Pipe down, Mr. Sleighton," said he, "and let the men get breakfast over this morning as quickly as possible;" upon which he turned and walked back to the capstan.

The broad white awnings had been spread above the frigate's quarter-deck, and a knot or two of her various officers about the taffrail and the larboard or subordinate side seemed disposed to lounge a little till eight o'clock, but a hint from their commander's manner was sufficient to send all below to their respective breakfast-places, except a small party composed of the first, second, and third lieutenants, who stood on the opposite side of the capstan, waiting deferentially for orders, while the stout, gray-headed old sailing-master, with some rolled-up charts under his

arm, remained close by. The decks were quiet, and otherwise deserted, save by the man at the wheel, a veteran quartermaster near him, a single sailor at the distant bows, and the two lookout men far aloft; the ship still forging slowly ahead through the water, and little else audible but the sound of its light surges plashing before the keel, melting liquidly away from it, and running back along her outer timbers, with the gently sweeping rustle of the festooned courses about the two lower mast-heads. Captain Grove held a paper in his hand, which he began to unfold as he leaned his elbows on the capstan, signing to the group of officers to close in, where the broad round surface of that nautical machine, like a miniature of the larger natural circumference beyond, extended its brass-rimmed area within the circle.

“Well, gentlemen,” said he, pleasantly, though with all the easy superiority of authoritative position, “I have a matter before us here which you will join me in managing—for in fact the sooner we get done with it the better, and the earlier we go home. The truth is, gentlemen, privately speaking”—and he slightly lowered his voice to a somewhat confidential tone, with a smiling nod—“why, I think the whole affair in itself— Ah! no matter; at any rate, *settled* it must be, though we should box about here till doomsday, like the *Flying Dutchman*. Now we have a long day before us, gentlemen; fine weather, just the sort required, and— Why, I think, if

we set about it, all hands, with a will, and in a seaman-like manner, we may put it at rest by to-morrow at farthest, one way or other. The thing is this: there is some report, or rumor, or whatever you like to call it, of a rock, or a shoal, or a bank, or something of the kind, not laid down in the charts, and the Admiralty, of course, want to know the truth of it. Now what we've got to do is just to find out whether there *is* such a thing or not; and if so, *where* it is: in one sense a sort of compliment, no doubt, to the *Thetis*; in another, perhaps rather more fit for some ten-gun brig or other, that can't do better; but the fact is, I always like to do what's expected of me, and do it I will. The affair, in short, is what any seaman can do—it only needs a little care; so let's all be active, gentlemen, look sharp, and what we don't like let's finish as quick as possible, and ship-shape to boot. I'll read you what mainly concerns the point in hand." Whereupon the commander proceeded to read aloud part of his dispatch from the secretary of the Naval Board, his usually distinct, manly notes involuntarily falling to a sort of drawling rote as he went on. "'To Post-Captain James Grove, of his Majesty's frigate *Thetis*, their lordships of the Honorable the Board of Admiralty'—and so on—'desiring you to search out and thoroughly investigate,' et cetera. Ah! 'Extract from ship's log of the trading brig *Jane Ann*, of Greenock, Alexander Macnellan, master, kept by Thomas Roger, mate, during voyage home from Leghorn.'

Why did the man take round by Sardinia, I wonder?"

"Probably to avoid the French privateers, Sir," suggested the first lieutenant.

"Ah, I dare say, Sleighton," continued the captain. "Why didn't he wait for convoy, then? But these Scotchmen must always be taking advantage, and poking their long noses where they oughtn't; yet they're too cautious to do more, as you'll see here: '*April the 26th, 1813.*—Off the island of Sardinia, out of sight of land—weather looked dirty to windward. In first dog-watch stood in till made Cape Carboneray, about three leagues on the starboard bow, when gave the land a good offing agen by night-fall. *27th.*—Out of sight of land. Took the sun, to shape a course round, and made the latitude 38 degrees 50 minutes;* longitude, by reckoning, about 10½ degrees, as nere as may be. At 4 bells afternoon watch came on strong gale from northeast and by east—Which refed tops'ls, and put the brig before it, being like to turn out a heavy gale at north. About three-quarters of an hour thereafter saw breakers right under our lee bow, and went about in good time. Being not come on to blow hard yet, and reesonabli clear to leeward, saw the breakers plain about 1 mile and a ½ off.

* In the Mediterranean latitude is, of course, always north, and the Greenwich meridian almost everywhere to westward. The theory and instruments of navigation are here also generally less important than experimental pilotage.

Calculated to have run near nine notts and a $\frac{1}{2}$ sinse we took the sun and rekoned longitude. Signed, Thomas Roger, mate; and Alexander Macnellan, master.' Now," said Captain Grove, "all this is pretty particular, certainly."

"He seems rather a correct person, the mate, Sir," observed the first lieutenant.

"*Correct, my good Sir,*" rejoined the captain, smiling; "why, yes, if you don't suppose most of this correctness hatched up to excuse their cursed laziness, or caution, or whatever it might be, in not going about again to see closer; for you'll notice, by their own confession, the gale hadn't come on yet, and they might have sent out a boat, if they had one to swim. Quite an extraordinary correctness, indeed, for Mediterranean merchantmen, unless they wished to give their owners a notion of their merits, or their friends a yarn about the dangers of the seas—which the good folks send forthwith to the Admiralty, forsooth! Why, either it might have been the first of the gale breaking in the mist, or, for aught I see, instead of Cape Carbonara, they might have made Cape Teulada, on the other side, and afterward one of those reefs about the islands there." Here the sailing-master unrolled a chart on the capstan drum-head, and pointed them out, with a respectful nod of assent. "But the truth is," continued the commander, "the matter becomes just as important whether or no; for unless such a thing is shown *not* to exist, why, with the best charts made, people won't be able to sleep in their ham-

mocks at night ; and we need to have a few of these tales regularly exposed. At any rate, we have our orders to execute ; so, Mr. Jones, be so good as show exactly, if you please, where you have the ship's place pricked off on the chart."

"Here it is, Sir," said the master, putting his horny forefinger on the spot, and peering closely into it.

"What latitude and longitude do you make it, then ?" asked Captain Grove, looking at the mark.

"Well, Sir," replied the old seaman, "as near as I can say since last noon, about thirty-eight forty north, by ten and three-quarters east, according to what we found her longitude last mid-watch, Sir."

"Rather more nearly ten and a half, I think, Mr. Jones," remarked the first lieutenant.

"I reckon her to've made that much easting since we shortened sail, Mr. Sleighton, Sir," rejoined the master.

"Well, well," said the captain, "Mr. Jones is more likely to be right, as he keeps the log, Mr. Sleighton. Then here's Cape Carbonara, Mr. Jones, exactly northwest of us."

"Nigh fifty miles off, Sir, Cape Carbonnyraw may be," returned Mr. Jones ; "but you'll make it out half that distance off from the mast-head, Sir, in this here clear sort of a climate."

"No doubt, no doubt," said his superior ; "then *that's* our first landmark. 'Twill take us almost three full hours to get over as much ground close-hauled, under all the canvas we can

set, and fast as the *Thetis* is: however, the more time for looking out. By noon at farthest we shall be up with it, after which we shall probably have a slant of wind off shore, and can brace round again so as to make a sort of sharp angle on our late track. In which case, gentlemen, we can finish with a cut through it, like slicing through a wisp of hay for a needle! Mr. Sleighton, be so good as see the yards braced up sharp at once, Sir, if you please."

"Certainly, Sir," answered the young officer, turning, though hesitating for a moment. "Might I be allowed to make one suggestion, Sir?" said he.

"Why, you see, Mr. Sleighton," said Captain Grove, smiling rather coldly, "the whole matter is so simple, so much of a clear coil to any seaman, that— Why, Sir, in short, I mean to take the *management* to myself, and leave my officers to handle the ship; the more cleverly the better, of course."

The first lieutenant turned on his heel, followed by his companions, and next moment the necessary orders were being given; the ship came gradually nearer to the wind as her heavy yards swung round, the confined sheets of canvas aloft fell spreading to the breeze, and she was soon rushing swiftly through the water at more than double her previous rate.

"By-the-way, Mr. Jones," resumed Captain Grove to the old master, "did *you* ever see or hear of anything of the kind hereabouts?"

"Well, Captain Grove, Sir," replied he, rubbing his chin thoughtfully with one hand, "for my part I can't say I ever did, Sir; and one time with another, man and boy, Sir, I've sailed in this here Mediterranean a good dozen and a half year. I make bold to say I know this same channel we're in, Sir, as well as most; but you'll be kind enough to observe, Captain Grove, that it weren't common for craft to keep so far into the land, in my day at any rate. And, after all, Sir, I'd never take upon me to go against what a man *sees*, so he *do* see it, seeing it's always hard for to prove a thing's *not*, Sir, whatever you may have seen yourself, you know, Sir."

"Unless you show that it isn't where he said it was, Jones," said the captain, familiarly, to the old seaman; "that you'll allow, eh?"

"Ay, ay, Sir," responded the master, with a cautious style of agreement; "of course, Sir, that's the matter, I don't deny."

"Now, Mr. Sleighton," said Captain Grove to his first lieutenant, when the latter had come on deck again from dispatching his breakfast, "you will hold straight on this course, clapping on everything you can, till you make out the land from aloft, and no longer. That being the chief point at present, I shall leave it to you; however, send a couple of leadsmen into the chains, and keep them heaving. See that there is a bright look-out aloft too, Sir, if you please."

The frigate accordingly, under a pyramid-like cloud of white sail, continued to rise buoyantly

over the bright blue surges that leaped and sparkled as she cleft sharply through them, while the shower of snowy spray scattered back upon her was at times prised by the radiance into fragments of rainbows. The breeze seemed to freshen from southwest, driving softly away up into the deep blue ample hollow of heaven overhead the shape of one long gauzy vapor, which the ancients might have fancied as Aurora rising from the pursuit of the fervent sun: it was absorbed in the approach of noon, and the central concave of the pure Italian sky above grew more lucidly transparent in its profundity, till it had all the tint of intense violet. The men high on the frigate's top-gallant cross-trees meanwhile were repeatedly hailed to keep on the watch, both toward horizon and sea: from every point of the ship looked out some curious eye, accustomed to scan the confusing and transient objects presented by water in motion; while in truth the minds of her crew naturally persisted in blending with the immediate purpose of their proceedings somewhat of the treasure-finding ideas recently set before them, and which in no small degree enhanced their attention. The shadow of hull and canvas, too, was as yet thrown long to westward of the vessel, substituting there a light green tinge for that bright blue which the waves of the Mediterranean, unlike the deeper ocean indigo, wear only in view of the sky and sunlight; and lest some hidden danger or actual change of color might be thus passed by under a veil, the leads-

men leaning out of her chains cast their hand-
leads at short intervals far forward toward the
bows; the sharp plunge of the weights, settling
till they dipped right below the seamen's feet, the
knotted line vibrating to its full stretch through
their hardy fingers, was followed only now and
then by the long-drawn cry of "No grou—nd!"
The transient shade left the waters blue as ever
astern, and still their broad expanse offered noth-
ing more unusual than the foam-tipped crest of
a larger surge, or some sea-bird's wing glancing
along the gentle hollows at a distance.

Noon was not far off, and the breeze began to
fall away in capricious puffs and sighs, letting
the ruffled surface pass into smoother ripples
that reflected the blaze of light from above, when,
although from the frigate's decks the clear sap-
phire-like outline of the horizon was alone visi-
ble, the sudden hail of "Land—O!" came falling
hoarsely down from more than one point high
amongst her towering spread of canvas.

"Hallo!" shouted the shrill voice of the first
lieutenant; "where-away?"

"Right ahead, Sir," was the reply; and the old
master, spy-glass in hand, slowly ascended the
rigging to verify his expectations.

"Quite right, Sir," said he to the commander,
who awaited him on his descent; "it's Cape Car-
bonnyraw to a certainty."

"Then, Mr. Sleighton," said the captain, "you
may go about at once: we are pretty near where
the Scotchman must have been, according to his

own account, before he stood out to sea the second time, and shall just try, after that, to be as like going before a northeaster as we can with westerly winds."

Such as the breeze was, it was shifting toward a west wind, or zephyr, by the time the *Thetis* had tacked, so that she now edged off gradually from her former track, the recent watchfulness being, if possible, redoubled, with the addition of slight changes occasionally in her course, which placed a wider reach of surface under immediate examination. The sun's altitude as it reached the meridian was now taken, and the calculations from it agreed accurately enough with the reckonings of the master. The charts indicating the depth of water hereabouts and the nature of the bottom, the ship was accordingly hove to, soundings taken with the deep-sea lead, and found to be such as stated by the authority, while at the distance of a mile or two southwest a shoal or bank was mentioned where the water shallowed considerably, passing from hard rock to gray sand and shells. Here too the usual process confirmed the correctness of the topography, even to the minutest circumstance, as the hollow at the end of the lead, filled with white lard, brought up its sample of the gray sand and shells which were so precisely specified. Having thus much at least found the valuable guidance of the charts in all points confirmed, Captain Grove was the less disposed, so far as his own convictions went, to mistrust them in aught else. The *Thetis*, neverthe-

less, still made way in the direction of her new course, till the light air which had more and more unsteadily played around her at length deserted the highest of her sails, and she lay finally becalmed on the hot expanse, where the glittering Mediterranean scarcely undulated beneath a flood of light. Even then, however, the activity of her commander's investigation was far from being intermitted. No sooner had the ship's company dined than several boats were sent off toward as many different points, with orders to pull about and notice the slightest peculiarity of the surface within view—a piece of service on which the midshipmen and sailors entered with all the glee excited by variety in nautical routine.

The afternoon was far advanced toward evening, and the blue ethereal glow of the sky already began to extend its span above the idle canvas of the frigate from eastward to the intenser west, as if it let down the sun with all his glories from its embrace, and ampler room went silently up in it; colors and streaks of cloud gathered low over against the frigate's starboard bow in the transparent distance, when the land-wind came stealing from northwest, imparting a faint tint of emerald to the blue of the waters as it ruffled them, and she was soon gliding off again with her head turned away from it. The breeze had by degrees freshened; the stately *Thetis* began to fly along like a racer, with the white sea-dust rising from before her, till, as the more easterly wind from Italy and the Apennines joined the local one, her

progress increased to the swiftness of an arrow ; the lively waves rushed briskly on her weather quarter, sending the sprays now and then sprinkled across her bows. The whole series of precautionary measures was again in full play, and she was fast running down the required line of investigation, so as to make the most of what daylight remained, when shortly afterward a sail was descried to leeward, at the distance of two of three miles outside the course of the *Thetis*. The looks of the officers on the quarter-deck were naturally directed toward it with interest ; but as to speak the vessel closely would seriously divert them from their present aim, no change was at first made in the movements of the frigate.

“It’s nothing more but one of their small Sardinian coasting craft, Sir,” remarked the master, as he laid down the glass, in reply to the question of his commander.

The captain paused, looked at the sky, brightening with sunset, and appeared doubtful. “We have little more than an hour of the light to count upon, though, Mr. Jones,” he observed.

“These coasters, Sir,” said the first lieutenant, quietly, “are generally pretty well acquainted with the localities, although people seldom think of taking advantage of their knowledge, Sir.”

“Yes,” said Captain Grove, “we might get a hint or two, Mr. Sleighton, that might do us good as soon as the moon rises ; so I think you may—Yes, Sir, put up her helm, and stand down to that coaster.”

As the frigate's yards swung fuller to the wind, and she bore swiftly down toward the Sardinian vessel, the two striped triangular sails of the latter seemed scarcely larger than the wings of a sea-gull, which they greatly resembled, with one sharp corner of each slanting far out above the short masts; more especially so when she altered her course a little, apparently at sight of the ship in chase of her, and began to scud off before the wind, shifting over one sail so as to point opposite to the other. The *Thetis*, however, with the whole force of the breeze on her lofty canvas, drove through the surges like some stately creation of the deep in pursuit of some stray adventurer from the land. The foam seethed up around her massive sides, and sank again, as if the element acknowledged her, while the little felucca's tiny hull was at times half hidden by the bright blue waves on which it dipped and danced along. All at once, on the ship's suddenly firing a blank shot across her wake, the coaster let go her sails by the run; and when the smoke had cleared away, she was seen lightly rising and falling, without a rag spread, at little more than half a mile's distance. The *Thetis* stood on for a few minutes longer, and hove to, close by the felucca, after which she sent out a boat to bring the Sardinian master on board. The poor padrone, or captain, in his red-tasselled cap, dingy velvet jacket, and open-kneed breeches, had no sooner contrived to scramble up the side and reach the quarter-deck, followed by a

grinning midshipman, than he gave vent to all sorts of gesticulations and protestations explanatory of his having unfortunately mistaken the British ship for a French one.

"Mr. Sleighton," said Captain Grove to his first lieutenant, "I believe you are the only one of us that knows the poor man's confounded lingo: pray try to stop his jabber, and ask him whence he comes and where he's bound. For my part, I know even less of it than I do of French, which, Heaven be thanked! is very little."

It was characteristic of Sleighton that he had given his attention, wherever he had been on shore, to acquiring the language of the country, and as descriptive of his fellow-officers at the time, that it was one of the things they disliked him for, or despised in him. He accordingly put the desired question to the Sardinian, who appeared much relieved.

"Eccellenza, to Spartivento," said he, answering only the latter part of the inquiry.

"Where *from*?" repeated the lieutenant, in Italian.

The Mediterranean mariner hesitated, glanced about uneasily, and at last named "Marsala, in Sicily."

"The very tract we want, I think," said the captain. "Does he cross the channel often?"

"Securo, signor, securo" (certainly), was the answer.

"And knows the coast well?" suggested Captain Grove again.

“Si, eccellenza ; motto bene,” replied the Sardinian, smiling modestly.

“Does he know of any small rock or shoal, where the sea breaks, or otherwise, anywhere on the tract betwixt Sicily and Sardinia?” was the next inquiry.

“Rock—or shoal?” repeated the man, in his own language, seeming to muse for a moment, and then shaking his head as he looked up at the lieutenant who put the query: “Questo non so, signor ; scuso” (“I do not know, signor ; excuse me”).

“Has he heard of any vessels being lost thereabouts lately, or at any particular time?” asked the commander, once more.

At this last question the padrone of the felucca appeared uneasy, and his eye caught the first lieutenant's. “I have not, signor,” said he, turning round ; “Santa Maria, non!o ! After the greggale comes, however, signor, there is sad work sometimes ;” and he crossed himself devoutly.

“The greggale blew here a day or two ago, did it not?” inquired the first lieutenant, carelessly, and he cast another look over the bulwarks toward the little vessel, where a couple of brown-faced Italian mariners were sitting with their bare legs over the sails which had been hauled down upon the lumber below, as they gazed up curiously at the lofty sides and upper gear of the frigate.

“Si, signor,” said the padrone, briefly, in reply to his question.

“And since then,” continued the lieutenant, “you have been *fishing*, I suppose?”

The Sardinian looked about him, and gave no further response; while the old master of the *Thetis* observed to Captain Grove that “them fellows commonly knew less about the matter than a seaman; for,” said he, “a deep keel draws more water than a shallow one; and where *you* strike, Sir, why, *they* go clean over, and know nothing at all about it.”

The keen eye of Sleighton, notwithstanding, while attention was paid to the padrone himself, had for a moment remarked the number of casks and other articles apparently concealed by the felucca's sails; and connecting the circumstance with his manner, he suspected the Sardinian of knowing more on the subject than he was willing to avow. However, Captain Grove presented the man with some silver for his trouble; the boat once more put him on board his own craft; and the *Thetis*, hauling round her mainyard again, was shortly afterward cleaving the waters as before, although now with the shades of night beginning to close fast in around her, so that ere long her canvas was reduced to nearly the same proportions it had shown at daybreak, in order to await the advantage of moonlight for her future researches.

Night, in that pure climate of the Mediterranean, and at that season, seems to steal up from earth and down and out of the sky not in vapors and defined shadows, but with a new atmosphere,

almost as if it were the more normal state of things, containing a truer revelation. The round compass of the sea drew itself sharply about the horizon, its blueness seeming to exhale into the air above it, while all within was one liquidly rising depth of flowing silence, made more intense by the light splash of the water alongside and the ripple at the bows; a floating hush, as it were, pervaded the obscure, and a sort of airy glimmer which took away the sense of darkness. Scarcely, indeed, had the dark closed upon the rear of twilight, when a transparency from beyond seemed about to break forth anew; and all the while an amplitude of space far vaster than before was being cleared away, around as well as above, until the dark blue firmament spread itself immensely over all, shining with starry points and clusters, amongst which came out many a figure as well known to sailors as those upon their mothers' printed gowns when they were boys. The breeze still blew freely, and every man on deck inhaled its coolness over the bulwarks, balmy as it was after the heat of the day, and faintly smelling of land; while the light through the bull's-eyes of the quarter-deck and the side scuttles aft showed that the officers were dispatching their evening meal, in order to resume the late process with the first moonlight. Shortly after, the streaks of hazy gray cloud low in the east began to show, as it were, a pool of amber light diffusing from behind; the azure of the sky looked over them, and the large yellow

circle of the full moon floated at length slowly out, like some pale, rescued face of the Nereids, or fair ancient Diana restored to belief. In five minutes more the sharp order of the officer of the watch was heard and passed along, when breadth after breadth of canvas fell from aloft against the sky, and rose tightening to the breeze, as the frigate again went ploughing swiftly to the southeast.

She continued thus, as before, to slip easily through and over the lengthened surges that now rose glittering past her shadow out of their pale blue hollows, while eastward ran a floor of silver moonshine, till it was past midnight, and the ship must have been sixty or seventy miles aslant from the land seen during day. She was then put about, so as to bring the wind before her beam, and beat up, with sails sloped to meet it, into the base of the long triangle formed by her entire cruise since daybreak: the moon, high in heaven, and filling its upper sphere with light which far surpassed that of Northern regions, whitened the whole lee side of the frigate and the full bosoms of her sails, while the foam came sweeping to her outer timbers along that side, out of clear-edged circles and silver eddies. Nothing as yet varied the surrounding expanse far or near but such scarcely heeded incidents; and the men of the watch, beginning by this time to weary of their fruitless labor, turned their eyes involuntarily ever and anon from their occupations toward the sky aloft, where a pointed streak

or two of cloud hung delicately white amidst the suffusion of the upper air, and motionless, in spite of the brisk breeze by which the *Thetis* rushed ahead. One starry sign above another, too, spread up beyond the moon: the larger and lesser plough, the great triangle, trembling in keen points, with separate stars sparkling out awfully between; while one cluster, like a diamond lyre, high up, and as it were distant since sunset, appeared to twinkle, ere it vanished, in the very purest pinnacle of vacancy; others melting back into the light which flowed over them as from a spring. The captain and chief officers, indeed, had collected on the ship's lee quarter, sextants or other instruments in hand, to fix the present longitude by lunar observation, choosing to measure the planet's distance from one bright, well-known star, which had been fancifully preferred throughout many a former voyage. Castor, it might have been, whom, with his twin brother Pollux, the old mariners were wont to recognize as tutelary. The calculation had no sooner been accomplished than the commander of the *Thetis* remarked, with an air of satisfaction, on their being now in pretty near the same parallel as that indicated by the account of the merchantman. "And yet," continued he, chiefly addressing the first lieutenant, "not the slightest sign have we seen or felt of anything like what the fellow pretends."

"Allow me to observe, however, Sir," replied Sleighton, gravely, "what I wished to say before,

that instead of getting the latitude at one time and the longitude at another, which only tends to confuse us, we ought in a matter of this kind to—”

“How, Sir!” said Captain Grove, a little sharply; “do you suppose one of his Majesty’s ships mayn’t find her place at least as correctly as a red-haired Scotchman with his grandmother’s watch?”

“But, Sir,” persisted the first lieutenant, “the more incorrect *they* were, the more need—excuse me, Captain Grove—for care in our own astronomical observations, Sir, I presume.”

“Astronomy be hanged!” said the commander; “the thing doesn’t depend on astronomy, Mr. Sleighton.”

“At any rate, we should have taken a *variety* of deep-sea soundings, Sir,” replied Mr. Sleighton, “leaving buoys to mark where we had been before. I think the best way in such cases, Sir, is to take the report for granted, till it is *proved* undeniably false.”

“Take it for granted, Mr. Sleighton!” rejoined his superior; “I shall do nothing of the sort, I assure you, Sir. The fact is, Mr. Sleighton, you are a little too fond of contrariety, for the mere sake of it; but the best thing you can do, Sir, is, get a ship of your own, and come out to look for this shoal fly-away you are so convinced of, I suppose, when other people begin to scout it; *then*, of course, you can make astronomical observations as long and often as you please.”

The first lieutenant bit his lip, but nothing else betrayed his feelings save that he leaned over the side and looked steadily into the water sliding past. "However, gentlemen," continued Captain Grove, in his usual tone, "we shall soon have run through the whole ground, with the next stretch to windward at least; and if *that* don't bring the matter out, why, I have a good mind to be fairly off by morning."

"We shall be delighted to hear it, Sir," answered the second lieutenant, smiling respectfully. The frigate was soon tacked again, and catching the wind on her opposite side, she ran up the space she had hitherto chiefly inclosed; while the moon, setting slowly past her lee quarter, began to lengthen its broad reflection into a dancing path of light across the waters on the ship's beam.

Nothing was now heard but the liquid ripple alongside, and at intervals the plash of the leads cast from the frigate's weather chains into her passing shadow, with the slow, listless tramp of men lingering out their vigil on the forecastle; the captain paced the weather-side of the quarter-deck alone, and the patient old master rested his night-glass on the ratlines of the mizzen rigging, when a sudden call from aloft, quick and startling, roused all beneath into eagerness, not un-mixed with alarm.

"On deck there! Breakers to leeward!"

"Where-away?" hailed the captain himself, on the instant, springing upon a carronade, and

looking up clear of the sails to the look-out aloft.

“Two points on the lee bow, Sir,” answered the man; and the yards were braced up sharper to the wind, which now blew with increased briskness, so as to insure her weathering the spot in safety. One officer and another ascended the shrouds in order to catch sight of the scarcely expected peril, while the commander remained standing on the bulwarks, with eyes directed impatiently to the horizon; the countenance of the first lieutenant, as he watched the proceedings with affected indifference, nevertheless betraying mingled emotions, amongst which it would have been hard to say whether triumph or some secret feeling of disappointment had the better. Half an hour intervened, during which the ship, in her present state, and with her characteristic sailing qualities, must have made five or six knots headway; but at length an almost simultaneous murmur along the decks betokened that the danger in question was now visible. Over a broad space before the frigate’s course a silvery haze was hung around the brightly setting moon, while she shed her light intensely on the surface underneath; an azure band severed that stretch of water from the horizon, and the nearer waves ran into it, dark by contrast, yet all along within it they rose shining and glittering in white radiance; but toward the further edge of this was seen but the more instantaneously some low black object, over which the breeze sent the snowy spray in

wreaths and showers that lent an additional air of hazy indistinctness as they scattered across it, and as the moonshiny reflection trembled with its fairy web-work of lines and its threads of lustre from one smooth wave to another. All eyes were naturally bent upon it from the throngs of excited seamen, amongst whom this most dreaded of nautical terrors gained no small increase by the whole circumstances foregoing, as well as the somewhat perplexing and fantastic character of mystery attendant on its sudden appearance, just placed like a fragment of jet in the crisped silver setting of the moonlight: small as it seemed, indeed, yet the more perilous on that account would it have been had the night been dark, with the breeze blowing right down upon it, and the vigilance of the crew well-nigh at an end. The commander only signed with his hand to the man at the wheel to luff still more, and the officers stood grouped silently together with mutual exchange of looks, as the *Thetis* continued to edge rapidly in the direction of the rock, till at length her mainyard was backed, and she hove to at about three-quarters of a mile distant, rising and falling on the surges as the reversed canvas on her mainmast counteracted the breeze in her other sails.

A boat was then lowered from the ship's lee quarter, and its crew, under charge of the third lieutenant and master, pulled cautiously away for the spot, which was now conspicuous enough, although the very dazzle of the light, the showering of the spray, and the motion of the vessel

when thus held in check, combined to render it still at that distance quite incapable of proper survey. The movements of the boat's crew were, however, sufficiently distinguishable; and as they neared the place where the water broke, making a half round to go to leeward of it, the frigate's bulwarks were topped by one continuous row of eager heads, the watch below having come on deck half dressed to witness the discovery now being accomplished. All at once the men in the cutter were seen to rise and wave their hats, with a loud cheer, which struggled up against the breeze to the ears of their shipmates; and directly after, the boat pulled straight in upon the supposed rock, becoming almost blended with the light spray to leeward of it. The eye of Captain Grove sparkled for a moment with sudden intelligence, but he merely beckoned with his hand to the men by the braces and the wheel. Five minutes more sufficed to bring the frigate rushing down upon the place, when she again sheered round to the wind, and became stationary, almost grinding her bows against the edge of the mass in question. By that time all were aware of its real nature, after noticing that it floated, instead of being fixed in the water, composed as it was of a couple of large hogsheads, nearly full, and connected into a sort of unwieldy raft by the top-frame of a ship's mast, with its attendant cordage and other hamper; while it drifted deep and slowly enough to offer considerable resistance to the sharp surges of the breeze, which

dashed and sprinkled over its weather-side as upon the crown of some small reef. At this curious *dénouement* a general hurra burst from the assembled crew of the *Thetis*, which the commander repressed with a sign of his hand, although all severity in it was belied by the smile on his face. On the quarter-deck, indeed, he gave vent to his amusement and satisfaction in unrestrained laughter, to which all but the first lieutenant fully responded, even he professing to smile.

“Well, gentlemen,” exclaimed Captain Grove, “it seems we might have added another bugbear to that fellow’s hobgoblin; for as to its being in the same place—ha! ha!—or near it, that is out of the question. So I think, if nothing turns up by to-morrow at farthest, why, we may be contented with the charts, at least till some volcano or other shoves a new reef above water—eh, gentlemen?”

“Oh, after this,” the first lieutenant responded, smoothly, and with unusual openness of manner, “certainly, Sir; you could not do less.”

“I’m glad to see you can be convinced, Sleighton, in spite of your theories,” returned Captain Grove, good-humoredly. “Now get these casks overhauled, as there’s evidently something in ’em; and set the lumber adrift, that it mayn’t frighten any one else. Why, such a concern as that would give a pretty thump to one’s bows of a dark night, after all. I shall go and turn in now,” continued he; “and let the ship be kept off and on hereabouts, if you please, till daybreak.”

One of the casks was found to contain nothing but salt-water, its bung-hole having been open; the other was more than half full of common Italian wine, which was freely served out to the men as soon as it had been got on board; the former, with the timber accompanying it, fell to the share of the mess cooks for fire-wood, so that the sailors jocosely remarked there was something to be got by shoal-hunting, after all.

The first lieutenant stood musing silently by himself near the taffrail ere retiring to rest, when he was accosted by the old master of the frigate. "Well, Mr. Sleighton," said the latter, "I'm glad it's nothing in the shoal way, Sir, though here's some poor fellows gone to the bottom again, it's likely: but I'm not so sure it's a sign all's clear hereabouts."

"Pooh, pooh, Mr. Jones," answered the lieutenant; "the captain is right. This is just the kind of thing that gives rise to such reports."

"Ay, Mr. Sleighton," said the master, "but what's them things owing to, Sir, I ask?"

"Why, they've foundered, or something, in that greggale the day before yesterday," replied Sleighton—"such clumsy fellows as they were, no doubt."

"Well," said the master, "that might be, more especially as there's a strong current down this channel here sometimes—mostly about the full o' the moon, Sir; and *that* would bring 'em from no'theast a good way since the gale."

"And how much way would an affair of this

kind make, do you suppose, Mr. Jones," continued Sleighton, carelessly, "in a couple of days, now?"

"Why," said the master, calculating, "with the northeaster in their favor at first off-go—then this same current, we'll say, Sir—and different winds a-baffling about of 'em after'ards—why, you couldn't give them casks much more than about twoscore knots in that time, Mr. Sleighton."

"Ah," said Sleighton, "and we're in ten longitude, or so, I think; latitude?"

"Thirty-eight four, or pretty nigh that, I make it," replied the accurate master, after reckoning on his fingers; "but it's hard to say how long they might drift, you know, Sir."

"True, true, Jones," said the lieutenant.

"Well, Mr. Sleighton," said the old seaman, shaking his head, "it's a bad part to be in, of a strong nor'easter, is this *Italian* channel. The Gulf of Lyons for a roaring gale, no doubt; but it's thought by some there's a sort of a whirlpool somewhere here; others, again, say it's only at certain times, more particularly when one of them greggales comes on; and, according to them, it shifts its place more or less."

"Ah, I dare say, Mr. Jones," said Sleighton, with an air of deferring to the old man's experience, "and no better authority for such facts than yourself."

"I never heard of it so far south as this, though, Mr. Sleighton," ran on the master, fond of having a listener to his old sea-lore, "nor so near Sardinia, either; but I mind well enough, about

seven year ago, being in a convoy, home'ard bound, round these same islands, when a gale came on thick from east'ard, out o' sight of land—we had a fine French Indiyaman, a prize which was taken up the Gulf of Genoa. Well, Sir, how it was nobody ever knew, but next morning, when it cleared, not a stick of her was to be seen : she'd clear vanished out o' the very midst of us, two or three frigates, and twenty brigs or more, scattered on every hand. There we cruised round and round, looking for a sign of her ; but nothing was ever found, till, about a month afterward, I heard her wheel was got by some fisherman or other, with the ship's name on it."

"Strange, indeed," responded the first lieutenant. "And where was this, now, Mr. Jones?"

"Must have been a good bit up from here, Sir, I think," said the master, "though not far out o' the same course for Naples. Howsoever, I must go below, and turn in for a spell ; so good-night t'ye, Mr. Sleighton."

As soon as the lieutenant was alone he took out his pocket-book and carefully noted down a series of memoranda by the light of the binnacle, for the moon had already set. He then slowly followed his late companion down the after-hatchway. "Fools!" exclaimed he to himself, as he hastily threw off his uniform in the little state-room ; "not one capable of putting a few simple inductions together. But we shall see."

When next morning dawned on the *Thetis*, she was slowly forging ahead under still less sail

than at the previous daybreak : a low gray bank of haze lay on the horizon to west and northward, against which her hull and spars, nearly bare, would have been scarcely discernible from the opposite direction, where the sun was about to strike his first rays through a lighter vapor in the east. The breeze came freshening along from southwest again, in the cool exhilarating morning air, till the frigate, whose few extended sails were so slanted to it as to neutralize most of its influence, rose curveting on the lively greenish surges like a creature impatient of restraint. The men of the watch looked out on all sides wistfully, as if to the full as tired of the whole matter as she was, while the officers on deck walked restlessly about, with evident anxiety for the appearance of the captain, and the change of procedure which might soon ensue. The objects on deck were as yet but coldly visible, and the gray sky above the eastern board had merely begun to show a few pearly streaks—the thin white mist seeming to creep nearer from the horizon as the breeze swept under it—when all at once a faint flash of light was seen to gleam, as it were, within the veil it presented, and the distant report of a gun came rolling along the water from southward. It was shortly followed by another, and the mist in that quarter began to scatter gradually apart, leaving a break of the horizon clear and coldly drawn against the sky, already becoming transparent with the approach of the sun. Every eye was of course directed at once to the

open prospect, where, almost immediately, could be made out the figure of a large brig under all sail, studding-sails out aloft, and bending over as she squared off more fully to the wind, when the telescope could distinguish her British ensign flying at the main-peak. Next minute or two sufficed to detect the cause of her recent firing (previously concealed from the frigate by the brig's intervening hull and canvas) in the appearance of another craft, a couple of miles farther off, whose two immense lateen-sails loomed dark to windward, like the wings of a vampire, in chase.

The lofty spars of the *Thetis* still scarcely rose above the background of northern vapor, lazily curling off to the breeze, and which would for a time completely hide her presence from both the distant vessels coming across her weather-bow; but her decks were in five minutes crowded with men and officers, not a soul on board excepted from the resistless impulse, and all instinctively seeking the stations necessary for instant action, while yet gazing with breathless anxiety, and speaking in whispers, as if louder sounds might betray the frigate in her ambush earlier than the sunlight which now began to brighten the distant edge of the horizon, making the mist as transparent as gauze, and striking purple along the ruffled waters. Now and then an eye glanced stealthily toward the captain, who, with one hand raised to hold on his cocked hat, stood up on a carronade, watching the chase with intense interest, the brig again firing from her stern at her

pursuer, which was apparently a swift xebec, or galley, and seemed to gain on her fast. The matter was one of no small nicety, indeed, to manage; since, on the one hand, if too soon made aware of the proximity of the frigate, the stranger would get too favorable a start, and that well to windward; whereas, on the other hand, the merchantman might be overtaken and her crew treated in pirate style were the delay too long protracted. The seamen of the *Thetis*, however, were heard to express their earnest wish that the enemy should have "plenty of law" given him, that he might lead them a good tight chase, "after this here hanged long spell of treasure-fishing and shoal-hunting." A dozen hands were laid ready on the shrouds of each mast, waiting for the order to lay aloft and loose sail, which of itself would probably discover the frigate to the vessels in sight; her sharp bows meanwhile slowly parting the waves ahead, and helping somewhat to improve her position for bearing down, when they were nearly abreast the beam. At length the captain stepped down from the gun, looked once more to windward, and made a sign to the man at the wheel. "Away aloft, my lads!" said he, quickly, to the ready sailors, who had already begun to ascend the rigging; the tall folds of canvas fell off the yards, which were hoisted by those on deck with the men still upon them. The frigate was next minute in stays, going about on the other tack, almost as the sun tipped the radiant horizon with

his dazzling crest. She rose, dipping to the vast increase of force, and then, like a greyhound released from the leash, shot out of the haze under a cloud of white sail, on which the light struck yellow, as upon a brazen giant suddenly risen out of the deep. The flash and the roar of a gun at the same time broke from one of her open ports, sending a heavy shot spinning far across toward the pirate craft, now about four or five miles off: he had already taken the alarm, however, and his two huge three-cornered sails jibed sharply round, their long, slant yards bending like whips as he bore up almost dead before the wind. The breeze freshened as usual in the morning at that late season, with a sweep that curled every bright blue surge into vivid hollows and snowy crests, and the Tunisian galley was at times seen to dive into them amidst a cloud of spray, then to rise, ducking and rolling like a tub, swift as she was; while the frigate, scarcely leaning to it, drove steadily through the waves after her, with sails broad against the sunrise. The brig, safely pursuing her course, took in her studding and top-gallant sails from the growing force of the wind, which brought the *Thetis* every few minutes a new advantage over her chase. The latter hauled closer up to it again, as if to try a better method for escape, and edge nearer to her own coast; upon which the frigate also was seen to brace on the same tack, and on a wind her own people knew well she found her favorite sailing-point. They could ere long distinguish the moist

gleam of the very brine dripping from the Tunisian's bottom as she rose, with the Moorish skull-caps of her crew; but by that time, to the deck of the merchant brig, both vessels had dwindled to specks on the blue horizon.

II.

The *Thetis* had gone home to England, and been nearly a year paid off, when Captain Grove happened one day to enter the Naval Club room at Plymouth, where he found an old professional friend seated at his newspaper. The usual courtesies and greetings were exchanged, followed by various topics of conversation; after which the other captain suddenly asked: "By-the-bye, Grove, I think you had a young blade named Sleighton for your first luff last time I saw you in the old Mediterranean?"

"Yes," said Captain Grove; "what of that?"

"Why, perhaps it's not the same. What sort of chap was he?" continued his friend.

"Oh, why, an exceedingly good officer," replied Captain Grove; "only, by-the-bye, a little disputatious sometimes, and one of your scientific men."

"First name Frederick?" inquired the other.

"Yes," said Captain Grove.

"Haven't you heard of the fellow's good luck, then, Grove?" was the next question. "Why, he's made a commander."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed the captain of the *Thetis*, in surprise. "I'm glad to hear it, though, by Jove! I believe he was poor. But how the deuce has that sly old uncle of his contrived to get him promoted so soon?"

"'Tis rather a queer story," said the other: "as I heard it, he had been some time or other in a ship sent out to discover a new reef, or something of the sort, about the coast of Sicily, and his captain couldn't find it; so what does Sleighton do, a few months ago, but go and tell the Admiralty he was pretty sure he could ferret out this said rock of theirs if they'd only give him a schooner with a few hands. He got the schooner, and off to the Mediterranean, where, sure enough, he found the rock, and his commander's gilt swab too—which, in our day, Grove, you know, we should have thought you couldn't buy so quickly, except by taking a French frigate at the least."

"Well," said Captain Grove, with forced calmness, "do you suppose this story to be *true*, Captain Fanshaw?"

"*True*, my dear Sir!" was the reply; "why, I believe you'll find it laid down in the chart at any rate;" and the other captain turned to the last Admiralty chart, which lay on a bookstand in the room. He pointed to the spot in question, and Captain Grove slowly and distinctly read off the words: "Twilks Rock, latitude 38 degrees 50 minutes 11 seconds north; longitude 10 degrees 37 minutes 12 seconds east; lying southeast and

northwest; depth over the crown of the reef, one fathom at low water; sea breaks on it during a northeaster; fifty miles east by south from Cape Carbonara."

"Ah," said he, in accents of ironical self-constraint, "very particular, *indeed!* Do you know, now, the *Thetis* happened to be the ship sent on the duty you allude to, and *I* was the captain who couldn't find the rock wanted?"

"Is it possible, Grove?" exclaimed Captain Fanshaw.

"Yes, Sir, by Jove! I spent twenty-four hours using every possible means to turn over the ground, and turn it over I did. Why, Sir, we went through that very spot again and again; and, by Heaven! Captain Fanshaw, the whole story from beginning to end is a cursed lie!"

"Oh," put in Fanshaw, with the view of soothing the passion which now inflamed his companion's features—"oh, I dare say Sleighton spent a week or two on the matter instead of twenty-four hours. He could better afford it, you know; and, besides, he wanted his new commission."

"The whole thing is a falsehood," repeated Captain Grove, giving way to his irritation; "trumped up, don't you see, most plausibly, and safe enough, too; for who is ever to disprove it? A schooner and a few hands, forsooth! Why, the scoundrel might cheat or bribe a dozen ignorant foremast-men and a couple of master's-mates, perhaps, into anything of the kind he chose, and everybody in future steers clear of

the place! And *he*, the sneaking hound, was among the first to seem convinced there was nothing of the sort."

"Contemptible swab!" said the other captain; "but of course that was his cue."

"Is this infernal shoal, or whatever they call it, to haunt me right and left?" continued the commander of the *Thetis*, much excited. "I tell you, Sir, I am as sure it doesn't exist, where they put it at least, as I am that I stand here, and so I reported to the Admiralty. Why, the fellow has given me the direct lie—to the very first day I have been afloat, the direct lie!—and that, I'm convinced, with the full knowledge he was telling a falsehood himself. The least I could do, were he not a cowardly rascal, as I've reason to think, would be to cane him in the public street. But, Fanshaw, I will *prove* him a liar, as I did the Scotch skipper a fool before him. I tell you I'll sail over that very spot again the first opportunity, else I shouldn't die easy. If I ever have the keel of the *Thetis* under me in those waters again, and if I don't carry her clear over where your chart marks a rock, call James Grove a liar, and no seaman to boot!"

To this outbreak, so natural for a man of Captain Grove's temper in the circumstances, his friend made no reply, except an accommodating one, and parted from him, somewhat dubious as to the exact state of the case, and soon to forget the matter altogether.

III.

More than two years had elapsed, during which peace on land and sea had left the ships of Europe free to deal as they best could with old Queen Nature, far as her homeless water-realm extended, when, late one autumn, the *Thetis* was in the Mediterranean, bound for Naples, with the British ambassador and his suite on board. The frigate, repaired and painted anew, seemed to rise on the bright blue surges, sparkling to the sun, with all the easy grace of former days; and every liquid plash of her coppered bows into their foam was like the renewing of an acquaintance; while they, too, ran and leaped along her high sides as if, to a seaman's fancy, they were trying to keep pace with her in token of welcome. None on board or amongst her crew, however, except Captain Grove himself and the old master, were of those she used to bear about there in the war. "Cautious Carey" was somewhere in the West Indies, the lively Neville off the west coast of Africa, and a hundred other craft had some of her hearts of oak on as many different points of the watery globe. Bright skies, gentle airs, or favorable breezes for the most part carried the *Thetis* eastward for Italy; the white awnings spread daily over her broad quarter-deck, the royal standard of St. George at her main-sky-sail-mast-head, the music of the band floating far across to leeward from her at meal-times: military uniforms, civil-

ian figures, even ladies' dresses, being seen at intervals to mingle with the active motions of her officers on deck, or with the sturdy blue-jackets of her crew, as they thronged hither and thither during her progress. When sextant and quadrant began to show her approach to the scene of those last proceedings of hers in this quarter, to southward of Sardinia, the variety of preoccupation from so unusual a company of guests was likely to make her commander not particularly apt at the time to recall the minutiae of an incident which never, except accidentally, had been much impressed upon his mind, nor did he seem to have even remembered it at all.

The *Thetis* found herself one afternoon, however, standing up to northeastward, with a wind nearly fair, into the wide channel which leads to Italy, out of sight of land: the waves came briskly from the southwest, and over the frigate's stern and larboard quarter hung the pale keen azure of the autumn sky. In the east, nevertheless, a gray covering of vapor seemed, as it were, to thicken from it, sending out feathery flakes and shreds of scud that drifted high aloft, contrary to the wave crests far below. Now and then a little strip of cloud was seen to flicker and stream out over the very top of the haze, then again to disappear—a "gray mare's-tail," as it was called by the men on the forecastle. The southwesterly wind grew chillier, singing and sighing sharply through the frigate's cordage, and past the edges of her huge sails; passing fits of rain accompanied it,

as it shifted round to northwest and north, requiring constant alterations in the trim of the yards, till all at once it finally chopped into the northeast; the rain ceased, a vivid fragment of rainbow came and vanished on a cloud to windward, while the darkening waves rose shorter and more numerous against the sudden check to their course. The gay train of aides-de-camp, secretaries, and diplomatic officials had retired to their cabins in proportion as the nautical activity augmented, and as the spirits of the frigate's crew seemed to be awakened up by this change of weather; and when the last red streaks of sunset glimmered low behind the black ridges of water astern, as if it were dabbled in beyond the openings of their troughs, the *Thetis* was beating up nearly close-hauled, though most of her canvas remained still set, against the beginnings of a gale which threatened ere long to blow with no small violence.

The sole anxiety of her captain, however, was to get her well off the land before the full strength of it came on; since, when afterward unable to show more than storm canvas with safety, and a lee shore only about fifty miles off, especially if the gale drew farther to eastward, none could say in what imminent danger the ship might be placed as she drifted to its force. The three top-sails had already been double reefed, the frigate buffeting stoutly with wind and sea, and driving her massive bows gallantly into the spray that showered over her weather cat-head, while the thick-

ness of the mist had come closing down on her, and the gray scud careered aloft so as to hide her uppermost spars. Captain Grove paced the higher side of the quarter-deck with the accustomed rapid turns and steady footing of a seaman, looking sharply to windward and overhead, and evincing satisfaction at the way in which the old *Thetis* behaved, as he phrased it. The lieutenant of the watch, his glazed hat shining and his rough pilot-coat glistening with moisture, peered every now and then into the binnacle light to observe the compass; the old master was carefully running over his charts and reckoning beside a lantern on the capstan head: it was eight o'clock, and the ambassador's late dinner in the state cabin had been more than usually deferred by the first movements incident to rough weather, commonly more inconvenient than when it has risen toward its height, and the ship has been, as it is called, "made snug." The captain merely waited to assure himself that he might go below, and do the honors to his distinguished passenger.

"Keep a good weather-helm, my lad," said he to the sailor on the upper side of the wheel; "a point higher, if you can, quartermaster." He then stepped toward the veteran master, who had immediate care of the navigation. "Well, Mr. Jones," said Captain Grove, cheerfully, "we shall do yet, I think, if we only keep our own for an hour longer at this rate. We *must* get to windward a little more, though, for a devil of a sneezer this gale looks to turn out before midnight. Ill-

tempered while they last, these greggales are hereabouts, Mr. Jones, but not long of blowing over."

"No doubt, Sir," said the master; "it 'll break before morn, I shouldn't wonder, Sir."

"How far off the land do you make her now, Mr. Jones?" asked the commander, pointing to the chart.

"Why," replied the master, holding it toward the lantern, although it flapped and struggled as he did so, "by dead-reckoning since noon, Sir, about fifty miles east-by-south of Cape Sparty-vento, which 'll set us somewhere nigh hand eight-and-thirty miles southeast-and-by-south of Cape Carbonnyraw, Sir."

"That won't do, with this stiff gale," said the captain; "and with what we *may* have before long. We must certainly weather the cape a good deal clearer than that, Jones. Mr. Abbott," continued he, addressing the bluff-like first lieutenant, who had just appeared on deck, "you will see the yards braced sharper up, if you please, Sir, immediately; and make her course for the next two hours as exactly east-by-north as you can."

"Just so, Sir," replied the first lieutenant, with respectful alacrity; and as soon as the change had been effected, Captain Grove prepared to go below, his mind now in a great measure at rest. The old master looked again at his chart, fidgeted, and then approached his superior by the after-hatchway, wearing an expression of considerable

uneasiness. "But, Captain Grove," said he, hesitating, "there's one thing, Sir, in that case—why—"

"Well, what is it, Mr. Jones?" said the captain, turning ere he should descend. "Pray make haste, though."

"Why, Sir, if I'm right in my reckoning at all," continued Mr. Jones, "that very same course 'll bring us pretty near right upon— Look here, if you please, Sir;" and he held the lantern toward the chart again.

"What do you mean, Jones?" said Captain Grove, hastily. "I really can scarce see the chart at all. Out with it, man!"

"It's laid down plain in *one o'* the charts, at any rate, Sir," replied the master, still faltering, as if afraid of giving some offense; and the captain glanced curiously for a moment at the old man.

"What? which? Go on, Mr. Jones," said he, sharply.

"What they call the—the Twilks Rock, Sir; and at this rate we're going, why, Sir, it's just the very course to bring the ship fair upon some part of it in about two hours' time," was the hurried answer. "The only thing to keep her safe, Sir, so as to be sure," continued the master, "would be to keep her off a point; for you know, Sir, the *Thetis* always comes pretty nigh where she looks."

Captain Grove had started at the first words, as if some unseen hand struck him in the face,

and he turned fully round again to the master. "What!" exclaimed he, roused by the suddenness of the thing and its circumstances to the height of passion, "is this cursed invention of an infernal, cunning, lying scoundrel to meet me slap in the teeth *again*? No, Sir! I swore I would sail over *that* spot the very first chance, but I had forgot the thing; and, after all, not on a night when the God that made us shows His power am I going to trouble myself with braving down even a *lie*! But by that God I will *not* flinch—no, not one quarter of a point—from carrying this ship as close to windward as she will go! Because, forsooth, one cowardly lubber has come home and frightened his neighbors with a tale of a flying shoal, and another sneaking rascal goes out and takes advantage of it to better his own affairs, by keeping everybody after in dread on the high seas, *I* am to endanger his Majesty's frigate, and a British envoy, by falling to leeward in a gale near land, for the sake of what I have found myself doesn't exist!" and he dashed his clinched fist on the head of the capstan, to which he had walked. "Mr. Abbott," resumed he, firmly, "you will keep her close up to windward, Sir, till you have occasion to send for me—with a nice helm, too, if you please—and hold on everything aloft. She makes easy enough weather of it at present, and the worst of the gale will probably be near midnight." So saying, the commander hastened below to the state cabin.

The lieutenants continued to walk the weather-quarter-deck, one attending carefully to the binnacle, the other watching how the canvas bore it aloft, both ignorant, except from what they had caught of their superior's words, as to the entire matter concerned. The gray-headed master alone remained leaning over the bulwarks, his hair driven about his temples as he gazed uneasily out, now and then peering under his hand upon the obscure and troubled waste of waters; while the heavy waves struck the frigate's side, and the gale moaned through her bare lower rigging when she rose higher than usual, before plunging sternly down again through the ridge that swelled across her bows. Sometimes a sort of wild, uncertain light would seem to come clearing out, amidst the confused elements, on the gleaming face of the water weltering up into crests of spray; and the mud-colored loose scud was seen flying overhead from below one black cloud to another, but again it blew together, and all was dark. At intervals, however, the master could perceive far to leeward, over the waving, tumultuous outline which formed the horizon, where a glimmering streak of white sky showed the figure of another vessel slanting across it, her close-reefed top-sails alone spread on her three naked masts, like a mere black rag, as if she were some merchantman struggling less boldly with the gale. The frigate, on the contrary, strong and stately as ever, made good way to windward, extending an ample breadth of stout canvas below

as well as high on her tall spars; and she still drove ahead, in the utmost apparent security, even the more proudly, too, that her bow at times received the seas over it in a deluge of spray, while her masts quivered in the gleaming fits of the wind like feathered arrows that had entered her newly from the dark above, and every bulk-head below-decks creaked now and then as if her frame were parting.

The envoy's dinner table below was not the most favorable to social gayety, heaving as it seemed to do under the swinging lamps; but the presence of Captain Grove, with his manly and sailor-like character, greatly contributed to do away with all sense of danger in the mind of his distinguished passenger and those of his suite. The naval officers who were privileged to attend—their services not being required on deck—were, as usual, in high spirits, devoting themselves to softening off the discomforts incidental to a gale at sea, and eagerly re-assuring the one or two fair guests by a variety of nautical remarks, which had all the weight of experience to render them consolatory. A frigate in a gale, well off the land, and under charge of British seamen, was soon understood to be greatly safer than a house, or, for instance, a church with crowded galleries; and, in fact, the motion of the *Thetis*, underneath them or aloft, had, after all, a stately ease of swing in it, which required only a little custom to make it even add a feeling of agreeably high excitement to the entire party, rid as

they had been of seasickness in the Bay of Biscay. The ladies, however, had retired at length, and the gentlemen sat over their wine, when Captain Grove proceeded to relate to the envoy, as a curious and amusing instance of Admiralty innocence and Admiralty promotions, the whole story of his search for the rock, and his lieutenant's pretending to find it.

"The fellow deserves some credit for his cunning, though," said he, laughing; "for I haven't the least doubt he calculated on what is generally the case in such matters—no one ever venturing there again at all. However, that is not the worst of it," continued he, "for sometimes one may actually be in real danger from the fear of a false one, as we might have been to-night, Sir Henry, had *I* not happened to know the thing thoroughly beforehand. Why, I was so angry at the time I first heard of this so-called discovery, that I'd have given anything to sail over the spot in the darkest night going, not to try it over again, of course, but to show my utter contempt of the thing by never giving it a thought."

"Ah, though, my dear Sir," said Sir Henry, "that would have been rather fool-hardy, would it not?"

"Certainly, in any other than myself, who have examined the ground through and through, Sir Henry," replied Captain Grove. "However, the most curious part of it is that, without my intending it at all—merely as necessary to the ship's perfect safety—why, I believe, Sir Henry,

in five minutes' time or little more"—and he took out his watch—"she will pass over the very place in question."

At this the envoy turned pale, as did most of the faces in the cabin; Captain Grove, on the contrary—with all that unflinching firmness of nerve, and that obstinacy which would have made him rather sink than yield to a French line-of-battle ship—remaining cool, both in reference to the possible danger and to the alarm of the ambassador.

"Gracious heavens, Sir!" exclaimed the latter, anxiously, "are you in earnest, Captain Grove?"

"Certainly, Sir Henry," replied he; "but had I not the most undoubted grounds for my conviction, you can not suppose I should have ventured to say what I have, at least till afterward. At any rate, Sir Henry," resumed he, taking up his watch again after a long and awkward pause, "the time is past; I assure you we have gone over this wonderful reef. The thing was a mere trifle, otherwise I shouldn't have mentioned it."

The former conversation was then renewed, with the more vivacity from this relief to such a disagreeable announcement: all were laughing and talking, while the very splash and stroke of the waves on the ship's side, and her deep, weltering pitches, were a source of unconscious satisfaction to hear, as the sign at least of plenty of water underneath.

Captain Grove was in the act of passing the decanters from one compartment of the firm-

lashed cabin table to another, when all at once a slight grating touch as it were was felt to run along from the ship's keel through her whole vast frame; a wild, hoarse scream seemed next moment to be blown over the after-hatchway; there was a sudden sensation, as if the succeeding wave were too light to bear the frigate, and she were going down, when a mighty shock, like that of the earth receiving a mistaken footstep in the dark, threw every one from his seat; the deck fell all at once steeply over, the timbers quivered, and a fierce burst of water on the side was succeeded apparently by whole seas, with the tumultuous cry of human voices heard even above the gale. The captain had started up, and stood instinctively keeping his feet in the attitude of one still expectant: his white, rigid face, seen by the swinging lamps, would at that instant have quelled any reproaches, had such been likely—incredulity, defiance, and terrible conviction of a reality, seeming to flit across it as quickly as the shadows it caught. Next moment he rushed toward the cabin door, and found his way on deck.

The old master had redoubled his anxieties, till they began at length to yield before the protracted and regular motion of the ship, however violent and deafening the monotonous roar of the blast, when, without further warning, the sharp yell of the look-out men ahead was transmitted aft, to “port the helm!” “Breakers close under the lee bow; port, for God's sake,

port!" was the common shout. But it was too late, and the frigate drove fiercely with the next surge upon the white chaos of broken water, then struck nearly amidships, as if she had tried to leap across. Another wave half lifted her, and she came crashing down upon the hard rock, her tall spars vibrating with the force, till the foremast yielded, toppling over, and the upper part of her mainmast shortly followed, when they beat up on her lee side to the back swell of the sea.

The fearful sight appeared to restore nerve and coolness to her commander, and his voice was now heard, clear and trumpet-like, to windward, endeavoring to renew order amongst the disorganized crew, then directing their activity. The wreck of the mast was cut away, the remaining canvas hauled down, and the boats cleared; while, as the vessel formerly distinguished was thought to be still not many miles distant to leeward, blue-lights were burned, and a heavy gun fired at short intervals, so that, if possible, she might be led at least to lie to, and pick up the boats whenever a lull in the gale should render it at all practicable for them to venture off. In half an hour the moon would have risen high enough to shed some light through the scud; and for the last emergency a raft was constructed close alongside in the frigate's lee, by means of spars lashed together upon empty casks, with a stage amidst it for the passengers and ladies, which floated ere long in comparative security on the less tur-

bulent surface now preserved there under the stationary mass of the frigate's hull. Not a single spar now rose above her bare, shelterless decks, the ship groaning and cracking as she heaved to the force of the sea, the spray driven over her tilted weather-bulwarks, while the gale burst upon her bodily in all its bleak, unmerciful strength, wild sounds fluctuating far away to leeward, with now and then seething flashes from the breakers, and fits of misty light eddying through the darkness as the moonlight began to struggle in. Long and anxiously did those clinging to the wreck peer forth, every minute expecting to feel it give way under them, or at best to commit them to the chances of the raft and boats at random. However, the fury of the gale seemed at length for a time to be subsiding; and the light faintly diffused from the moon, although she herself was completely hidden, afforded a view to leeward, where it was with joy, impossible of course to be expressed, that the crew of the *Thetis* could make out the form of the merchant vessel, seen indistinctly now and then between sky and sea. She was seemingly, from her present position, aware of some disaster having happened; and signals of distress having been again made, the officers carefully prepared to embark the envoy and his suite upon the raft, to be followed by the boats.

The former had at last been safely freighted with its living cargo, and when furnished with a lantern on a spar, as well as a small sail to as-

sist its motion to leeward, was slacked off from the side of the wreck. As soon as it was free of the turmoil created by the reef, its own buoyancy enabled it to drift down comparatively secure toward the distant merchantman, dimly visible by the lights she had hung aloft, when the raft was borne up on the waves. Two or three of the boats, managed by the oars of their crews, were already imitating the example, and profited by the temporary lull to make progress after the raft; while the remainder were in course of lowering away and receiving the groups of men who swung themselves down out of the lee chains, or jumped right in from the bulwarks. The captain stood by the gangway, overseeing the process, and sternly refusing to leave his post until all should be provided for, the respect yielded him before being now accorded by every one perhaps more truly than when full discipline could be carried out, even although a whisper of the truth had begun to circulate during the last hour or two amongst those who retained presence of mind enough to converse at all. A considerable proportion of the seamen, in fact, with the desperation so frequent to the class in such extremities, had contrived to break into the spirit-room previously to the hope of rescue: their mad shouts and yells of frantic laughter could be ever and anon heard ascending from below-decks, as they quelled in liquor that strange horror of drowning, which made some who would have faced a loaded carronade, or have passed an ear-

ring aloft in the wildest hurricane, yet wish to "die drunk." Again and again the attempt had been made to rouse them; and not only had they given no help, but had retarded the efforts of the rest, till their shipmates swore that not one of them should enter the boats if he wished.

The frigate's launch, which had been with the utmost difficulty hoisted out by various contrivances, now floated alongside, filled with the last crowd of men and officers, and held on to the ship's hull merely by a couple of lines, while every minute increased the necessity for letting go, and she was kept off the side by continual thrusts of the oars. The men shouted loudly for the captain, who seemed still to be detained by anxiety for the insane revellers below, notwithstanding that the hull beneath him shook and groaned to the foaming rush of the breakers on her weather-side, and at intervals its bottom came grinding down from a longer heave that threatened to force the wreck over the reef altogether, when it would no doubt sink at once: the gale, too, was about to come again with renewed fury. Suddenly a half-intoxicated seaman rushed wildly up through the fore-hatch, as if somehow or other restored to a sense of his danger: the wind and spray appeared to sober him on the instant, and he gazed around in utter despair at the seemingly deserted decks. The men in the long-boat were again calling to their commander to descend, when he returned an answer of assent, and sprung hastily toward the

sailor in the gangway. "Here, Jackson, my lad," exclaimed he, taking off his uniform coat, "on with this, and jump into the boat! As for me, it shall never be said that James Grove deserted the ship he lost by his own folly." The man instinctively did as he was told: next minute he was safe amongst the boat's crew, and the captain himself let go the ropes which held her to the frigate. One long sweep, and the launch drifted off to leeward, rising on a surge clear of the breakers, while the sailors kept her stern to the coming seas. For one half minute, as they pulled off, the uncertain light showed them the white figure of their captain, bareheaded and in his shirt, as he stood gazing toward them from the dark hull of the *Thetis*—the spray driven across it, and the foam bursting round her bows and astern; then the wind and sea seemed to blot it out. When the seamen found they had thus left their commander to perish, they could scarcely be restrained from visiting their indignation on the poor fellow mistaken for him; but to return and compel him to leave the wreck was then impossible.

No vestige of the old *Thetis*, of course, was ever more seen so as to be recognized; she most probably drove over the edge of the rock soon after the gale was renewed, taking with her the unfortunate captain only and the drunken remnant of her crew—the latter as unconscious of what befell them as the former must have bitterly realized it, and its cause. For as often as he

had confronted, without flinching, the anger of his fellow-men and that of the elements, he did not dare to face the shame that falls on one whose self-confidence has turned out supreme folly. A true story this, and one which the old sailor, spinning yarns to his mates, has often shaken his head over at sea.

THE END.