

TAKEN FROM THE ENEMY

HENRY NEWBOLT





For
Uncle Richard
with love from his nieces
Anas. 1892.

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TAKEN FROM THE ENEMY

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BY
HENRY NEWBOLT



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CHAPTER I

It was a bright frosty night towards the middle of March. The moon had risen an hour ago, and hung like a round mirror of burnished silver close above the glittering stream of Thames, as he swept broadening down to Westminster Bridge. The Abbey towers rose sharply into the clear air, and caught the moonlight full upon their heads, but beneath them on the further side lay a wide region of silent and mysterious shadow. In the shadow paced the figure of a man. By the slow and monotonous regularity of his footfalls as he passed backwards and forwards, you might have taken him for a sentinel on guard. But to a closer look the long high-collared coat, the quaint and ample outline of his hat, and a certain balance in his step betrayed the seafaring man, and gave a hint of his rank. His figure and the easy swing of his movements proclaimed him strong, but the obscurity concealed all other characteristics.

Up and down, up and down he paced ; always the same measured step, always the same distance to

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a yard. Nothing about him spoke of impatience, and yet he was evidently expecting someone or something. For each time that his beat ended at the angle of the northern tower he stopped, and looked first to the right across the deserted square up to the entrance of Whitehall, and then to the left, where, on the edge of St. James's Park, the lights of Glamorgan House shone through a few gaunt and leafless trees.

For this was in 1821, and in 1821 Glamorgan House was still standing. And to-night it was especially in evidence, for the open gates and the unwonted illumination of the garden court showed plainly that some festivity was in preparation within.

Minute after minute passed, till suddenly from overhead came the deep sound of the clock striking the half hour. At the same instant a carriage rolled into the square. The watcher had just turned his back and was retreating for the fiftieth time towards the doorway of the Abbey, when the vibration of the chimes ceased, and the sound of the approaching hoofs and wheels fell upon his ear. In a moment he was back at the corner of the building, where he stood motionless, with his head thrown forward like a dog straining in the leash.

The carriage passed close before him, wheeled off to the right, and disappeared into the court of Glamorgan House. He made a quick step forward as if to follow, but checked himself, and stood for a moment irresolute. While he was hesitating, a party of ladies muffled in opera-cloaks and shawls and attended by several gentlemen, crossed the road from the entrance of Dean's Yard, and took the same

direction as the carriage. The figure in the shadow hesitated no longer, but followed in their wake with long and resolute strides. He came up with them as they reached the portico, and passed into the cloak-room with the gentlemen of the party. There coat and hat were laid aside, and he stood revealed as an officer of the king's navy, wearing a captain's epaulettes upon a very stalwart pair of shoulders.

His face was that of a quiet, self-reliant man of thirty-five; brown eyes set wide apart, lips somewhat full but firmly closed, a straight nose, and a chin slightly rounded upwards in front, combined to make up an expression of modesty and reserved force.

As a matter of fact he was this evening unusually excited, but he had merely the look of one who has made up his own mind and intends to keep it to himself for the present.

Other guests were now arriving, and he passed among the rest along a corridor and across a hall to the entrance of the ball-room, where the hostess and her husband were stationed to receive them.

As he entered, Lord Glamorgan—a tall old man with bushy eyebrows and a jovial red face—stepped in front and shook him warmly by the hand. Then putting a big hand upon his shoulder with a fatherly air, he wheeled him forward, and himself turned to face his wife. 'My dear,' he said, with a half bow, 'I present to you Captain Richard Estcourt of His Majesty's ship — Well, well, Dick, which shall it be, eh?'

His lordship had been a Lord of the Admiralty in the last Ministry, and though now for some time

out of office, he retained a perhaps exaggerated idea of his own influence in naval affairs.

Lady Glamorgan received the young man with all the graciousness for which she was deservedly popular. 'Captain Estcourt,' she said, 'is slower to follow an advantage on shore than at sea; his reputation has been here long before him.'

Estcourt flushed. 'I have been four years on the Indian stations,' he said, 'and three before that in America.'

'You have left out Algiers,' his hostess answered, with a smile, 'but we have better memories here, and shall not forget you.'

He murmured his thanks, and made way for others of the company who were beginning to enter the room in twos and threes. But he did not move far away; placing himself in the angle of a recess opposite the doorway, he began once more to watch patiently, scanning every group of guests as they came in.

Since he had been almost the first in the room, it seemed impossible that he should miss the person for whom he was waiting; but when the stream of incomers had apparently ceased, and Lady Glamorgan found time to leave the door and look at the dancing, her eye fell upon him at once, still on guard in his solitary corner. She came towards him immediately, bent on the hostess's congenial duty of introduction.

'Captain Estcourt,' she said, 'you are positively not dancing! a sailor too, and at a sea lord's ball!'

'Pray do not trouble about me, Lady Glamorgan,' he replied, 'I am in no hurry to begin.'

'No, no!' she said, 'I must find you some pretty

craft at once : I have good patronage to bestow just now, and you may choose between a strong ally or a rich convoy, both making their first voyage.'

His grave eyes lit up with a smile in answer to her playful tone. 'New ships,' he said, 'are never lucky : I'd rather have one taken from the enemy.'

There was an undertone of unexpressed meaning in the words : she caught it, and looked at him with kindly interest.

'If you are waiting for someone,' she said, 'of course I will not trouble you : good fortune to the brave !' and she left him glowing with mingled confusion and gratitude. She was far too great a lady to be curious, but all good women of her age are very naturally interested in a young romance : and it is not astonishing that she found time now and again to glance in Estcourt's direction.

For a long while he did not change his position, and she began to fear that he was doomed to disappointment. But at last there was a stir near the door, and she hurried forward to receive the new guests.

An elderly dowager in green satin, and a gouty old nobleman in a star and spectacles, hobbled in and paid a brace of homely compliments. As they passed on, Lady Glamorgan glanced back over her shoulder, and saw to her surprise that Estcourt was coming forward through the crowd with a look of relief upon his face.

'The Milbricks ?' she asked herself. 'What can the man be thinking of ?'

But as he drew nearer, she saw that his eyes ignored this absurd old couple, and were fixed intently

upon someone beyond. She turned to the door once more, just in time to welcome a very different pair. A gentleman with iron-grey hair and moustaches, wearing a red ribbon across his plain evening dress, was piloting a lady through the throng that blocked the entrance, with a courtesy and adroitness that conspicuously distinguished him from all around.

As for the lady, whoever looked upon her turned to look again. She was fully as tall as her companion, but scarcely more than half his age : her dark blue eyes flashed fearlessly upon all they met, her lips were red with life, and curved with the pride and laughter of youth : the slight flush of her marvellous complexion and the spring of her step roused the beholder's pulse in sympathy with her splendid vitality. Her dress was of white and gold, scarcely less brilliant than herself ; round her neck and on her brow were diamonds, and she wore them lightly, like a queen.

'Ah !' murmured the Countess to herself, as she came forward, 'it is Madame de Montaut : a prize taken from the enemy ! I understand, but it is a bold game for so quiet a man.'

She shook hands with her guests and retreated a little to watch their meeting with this audacious young captain. It was evident at once that he was already in favour with Colonel de Montaut at any rate : the lady too, after a few moments' talk between the three, accepted Estcourt's arm and continued her progress down the room.

A quadrille was just ending : in another moment the dancers would be dispersing two and two in all directions to the seats and more secluded corners.

Estcourt led his partner across to the further door : there she stopped him and turned to look at the dance. Her eyes sparkled, and her foot began to beat time upon the floor.

‘Splendid !’ she cried, ‘I long to be one of them myself !’

His brow contracted slightly. ‘Don’t you think,’ he suggested a little timidly, ‘that we had better choose our seats before the rush comes ?’

‘Oh ! no, thank you,’ she replied, laughing. ‘I shall not need a seat for a long time yet : we have only just arrived. But perhaps you have been here longer, and are tired of dancing already ?’

‘I have been here an hour or more,’ he replied, ‘but I have not been dancing.’

‘And pray, if I may ask, for what other purpose did you come so early ?’

This directness confused him. ‘I—I got here too soon,’ he said, ‘and had to wait outside by the Abbey.’

‘Where, of course, you could not dance ?’ she interrupted mischievously.

‘And even then I was almost the first here,’ he continued, ‘and—and—’

‘And so you resolved to dance only with the latest comer, by way, I suppose, of striking the balance right ?’

He pulled himself together, and made an effort to play his part in the game.

‘Balance or not,’ he said earnestly, ‘I resolved to dance only with the latest comer, if she should be Madame de Montaut.’

‘And so you shall !’ she answered merrily, as the dancers broke off from their last figure and made for

the door in pairs : ' that is, as soon as these poor things have rested : in the meantime let us walk in the empty room till they come back.'

She took his arm once more, and her touch seemed to send a tremor through him from head to foot : they stepped forward into the great ballroom, hung with mirrors and gaily coloured flags, and brilliant with a thousand lights that threw a dazzling sheen upon the broad expanse of polished floor. She talked with animation, and he answered almost mechanically : the intoxication of pride mounted to his head and numbed his senses, as he made his triumphal progress before the eyes of the elder ladies on the dais, the long lines of dancers sitting out against the walls, and the herd of solitary men standing, each with folded arms, at the bottom of the room. Their whispers reached him like faint incense, and he scarcely knew himself for a mortal like the rest.

But now the band struck up again ; the crowd returned, and he found himself floating with his radiant partner through the upper heaven of perfect rhythmic motion. Suddenly—as it seemed—the music stopped : he mastered the swimming sensation in his brain, and turned to look at her. Her eyes beamed back upon his with frank sympathy.

'Glorious !' she exclaimed. 'What a pity it must end so soon !'

'So soon ?' he stammered in a sudden panic ; 'so soon ?'

'We are leaving early to-night.'

'But it is only just eleven.'

'Then we have but half-an-hour more.'

They had left the ballroom, and were mounting

the stairs in advance of the throng. At the top a tiny boudoir offered two chairs, and no more.

‘Shall we hear the music so far away?’ she asked as they entered it.

He was pale and evidently ill at ease; he grasped at her question as at an un hoped-for opportunity.

‘I shall hear your voice,’ he said nervously, ‘and that is all the music I desire.’

‘What?’ she answered, laughing, ‘with my strong French accent, as your people choose to call it?’

She sat down in the higher and straighter of the two chairs, and opened her fan. Only a low lounging seat was left for him, and nothing could have been more uncomfortable under the circumstances. He fixed himself upon the extreme edge, and was about to speak, when she broke in before him.

‘You don’t look as much at rest as you deserve to be after that famous dance.’

He was beginning an answer destined no doubt to end sentimentally, when she again forestalled him.

‘You are not accustomed to the luxury of arm-chairs at sea?’

He saw that she did not mean to give him an opening, and tried determinedly to make one for himself.

‘Forgive me,’ he said, disregarding her question, ‘but I have something to say to you.’

‘And I to you,’ she answered readily. ‘I have found the pearl you were good enough to hunt for the other day. Where do you suppose it was?’

‘Madame de Montaut,’ he said with desperate irrelevancy, ‘I have admired you ever since I first saw you.’

'You can hardly expect a woman to go quite so far in return,' she replied with an affectation of cordial simplicity; 'but I may say truly that there is no one whose step I prefer to yours. Come, the next dance must be beginning, and I am eager not to lose a note of it.' And she rose lightly and shut her fan.

He, too, stood up but did not move towards the door.

'I am sorry,' he said; 'but what I have to offer you is more than a dance—if it be not much less.'

Her quick ear caught the sincerity of his tone and her look changed. 'You are right,' she said with a serious grace; 'I will hear you.' And she sank with a soft rustle into the low chair, which she filled with an air of easy royalty.

He remained standing; his hands as they grasped the back of the other chair were tense with nervous energy, but his throat was dry and his brain confused; for his life he could not break from this fatal dumbness and express himself.

A gleam of not unkindly merriment shone in her eyes as she came to his rescue.

'Captain Estcourt,' she said, 'you are a man whose words mean at the least all they say; since then you speak of admiration, I understand you to offer me—love.'

'Love? Devotion!' he exclaimed with husky fervour, but stopped again and began to stammer.

'And I suspect,' she continued, 'from your embarrassment, that you have had thoughts of asking me to marry you.'

‘Oh ! it is too great a thing I know,’ he broke in earnestly ; ‘it is out of all reason, but I do not ask it, I entreat it of you.’

She raised herself a little and looked him gravely in the face.

‘It is unreasonable,’ she said, ‘though not quite in the way you mean. You had I am sure no thought but to honour me, and I thank you in all sincerity for your homage. But you have acted in this without due consideration—’

He would have spoken but she raised her hand to check him.

‘—you did not reflect that we have not between us all that should go to the making of a marriage. You have a man’s strength and faith, an honourable name and a career of promise—it is much to bring ; I have beauty, wealth, and a high spirit ; these, too, perhaps are worth something ; you love me, and there is, I dare be sworn, no reason why I should not love you. But where in all this is the string that binds the posy together—where is the guarantee of our tranquil and continued friendship afterwards ? I sometimes think,’ she continued, ‘that an intimacy of a lifetime is scarcely enough to warrant such a risk ; and you and I have but a yesterday’s acquaintance on which to found such perilous hopes.’

He raised his head. ‘I have known you for three months,’ he said, ‘and all that time I have thought of nothing else on earth.’

‘All that time in truth,’ she answered, ‘but of what have you been thinking in the thirty years before ? I do not know ; I have ridden and danced with you, I have sung and laughed with you ; I

know your favourite actor and the minister in whom you believe ; but of yourself how little !’

‘I am afraid there is little more to know,’ he said. ‘I am like most other men ; but if you would set my great love against my deficiencies the scales might not weigh so uneven as with some.’

‘I believe sincerely,’ she replied, ‘that you love me—as you know me—but I fear I cannot say like you that I am of the common type of my sex ; my beliefs, my hopes, my work in life are all singular ; the very circumstances of my birth and nationality are unusual, though you hear it now for the first time. So, Captain Estcourt,’ she continued, rising to her feet, ‘you see that in your haste you have asked a woman to become your wife who for all that you know has nothing in common with you but the lighter feelings and more trivial interests of life.’

He bent his head and said nothing for a time. She looked at him a little remorsefully.

‘Is it good-bye, then ?’ he said slowly, like a man awaking from sleep.

She reflected, looking downward in her turn.

‘I will grant you this,’ she said, ‘and remember that it is no more and no less than I would do for any man of honour. I will make no change for what has happened to-night ; I will meet you, if chance so orders it, upon the old terms ; but you shall promise me one thing in return.’ She paused for his assent.

‘I promise blindfold,’ he said, ‘for the first time in my life.’

She nodded approval. ‘Then I have your word,’ she said, ‘that you too will make no change in your career ; that you will follow your fortune wherever

and whenever it calls you without allowing thoughts of me to hold you back.'

'It is hard,' he said, 'for I have to-night been promised an immediate command.'

'But you have given me your word.'

She held out her hand to him as she spoke; he stooped and kissed it in silence.

'Come,' she said, 'I hear the music beginning; this is my last dance.'

They passed down the staircase without another word, and entered the ballroom once more. To Estcourt the dance was even more of a dream than the first one had been. To the thrilling influence of her beauty and her touch there was added that regretful consciousness of the inevitable end which makes the peaceful melancholy of autumn and gives the last perfection of pathos to the deep eyes of passion.

If he had felt himself favoured of the gods before, he was now conscious, in his exalted state, of an even greater dignity—that given by the heroic endurance of a great misfortune. Among the phantoms that flitted around him, gibbering of their unreal joys, he moved in a kind of funereal triumph, as one with the grandeur of a tragic doom upon him. The whirling dance was the chaos of eternity, and the music filled it with exquisite sadness.

But now the measure rose sobbing to a final ecstasy, and lapsed again, and died slowly away upon a single note. He found himself standing by the door, with the colonel's bland figure in front of him.

'If you will pardon me,' the latter was saying, 'it is time for me to take my sister-in-law home;

unless,' he continued, with a courteous gesture, 'you are free to enjoy that privilege yourself.'

Estcourt turned to his partner.

'I could not think of it,' she said, 'but perhaps Captain Estcourt will attend me while you get your hat and cloak.'

He gave her his arm ; the colonel bowed and disappeared. In three minutes she was ready, muffled to the throat in furs and satin, like the moon among fleecy silver-lined clouds. Estcourt took her to her carriage, and they waited a moment for the colonel.

'You have never even told me your name,' she said.

'It is Richard,' he replied ; 'they call me Dick.'

The colonel appeared in the doorway.

'Thank you,' she said ; 'mine is Camilla. Good-night !'

CHAPTER II

Two days after the ball Estcourt paid an afternoon call at Glamorgan House. There he found a large and fashionable crowd of visitors upon the same errand as himself, and spent the greater part of a short stay in talking to strangers. But when he rose to go, Lord Glamorgan, who had been keeping him in view while hobnobbing with a couple of under-secretaries, crossed the room quickly and caught him as he turned away from taking leave of his hostess. Estcourt saw by the twinkle in his eye that the genial old nobleman was in his own opinion

the bearer of good news, and he shuddered inwardly at the sudden recollection of his promise so lately made.

‘Dick,’ said his lordship, taking him under the arm and leading him towards a corner of the room, ‘I’ve been doing what little I can for you, and I only wish it were more. Compton tells me that the “Favourite” is almost ready for sea; she’s only a thirty-two, but she’s the last ship to be commissioned for ever so long, and I thought you’d rather be walking the deck of a frigate than the pavement of Whitehall. You shall have a firstrate, Dick, my word upon it, when there’s one going; but meantime I’ve pitched it into their lordships pretty strong, and I think you may reckon on getting the “Favourite.”’

Dick forced himself to return thanks in terms of suitable fervour. ‘This is too kind of you, Lord Glamorgan,’ he said, with unintentional irony. ‘I could really wish that you had not taken so much trouble for me; I do not know what I have done to deserve it.’

‘Nonsense, my boy,’ said the old man kindly, ‘I owe your father’s son more than that, and I’ll pay it too if ever we get our turn again. But now,’ he continued, returning to a more matter of fact tone, ‘if I were you, as this is your last chance for the present, I’d go down to the Admiralty to-morrow—not too late, remember, it’s Saturday—and just make as it were a casual inquiry whether they’ve received your application all in due form, or something of that kind; jog them up at the right moment, d’ye see? That’s it, that’s it!’ he concluded, shaking Dick’s hand, ‘and if you hear any good news of our

friend Captain Estcourt, mind you come and tell us at once.'

Dick escaped at last, and hurried back to his lodging without any very clear idea of where he was going. What was it he had promised Madame de Montaut? He remembered but too well the very words: 'You will follow your fortune wherever and whenever it may call you.' The bargain was but two days old, and here already with grim mockery the call had come in the cheery tones of his well-meaning old patron's voice. And for what price had he thus sold his birthright of freewill? For permission to meet one from whom he would soon be separated by a thousand miles of ocean, and perhaps by the wider gulf of many years! for a concession which his own pledge had rendered valueless before he could reap the slightest advantage from it! If ever man entered into a one-sided bargain, surely this, he bitterly felt, was one.

And yet he never thought of crying off; his mind was not one given to the fine-drawn methods of casuistry, and the strong simplicity of his character saved him from even the temptation to limit or explain away plain words once spoken. A stunned sensation in the first shock, a sharp pang of regret that knew itself to be unavailing, and he was once more master of himself. His position, however, was none the less painful for that; immediate action would have given him some slight relief, but he had this additional strain to bear, that he must wait until to-morrow before he could complete the sacrifice with his own hands.

He reached his solitary rooms in Bloomsbury,

and sat down to dinner. It was maddening to think of her over there, close at hand in Bedford Square, knowing nothing, and perhaps caring nothing, about the trouble she had helped to bring upon him.

Should he give himself the vain consolation of seeing her? He felt instinctively that it would be better to deny himself until all had been done. But he could sit still no longer; he rose from table, leaving half his meal untouched, and set himself to think over his visit to the Admiralty next day.

He decided at once that he would not trust himself to make his inquiry by word of mouth; he might say too much or too little, or betray some noticeable sign of agitation—a thought from which he always shrank by nature, and never more than now. No, he would write a letter and present it in person.

He began one accordingly in his steadiest and most careful hand, but his frequent alterations and erasures soon turned it, as he proceeded, into a rough copy, for he was determined, with characteristic fairness, to make it express exactly as much urgency as he would have betrayed, under ordinary circumstances, in making such an application; more, he did not feel himself in justice bound to show, and there was here no call for anything beyond strict justice, since no interest of Camilla's was in question.

Her name, which he thus allowed himself as it were to whisper in his thoughts, brought with it a train of associations and drew him into a long reverie.

It was late when he at last roused himself to copy out the letter in its final form; that done, he threw himself upon his bed, and dreamed of dancing on the

deck of a frigate with a partner who had Camilla's eyes, but spoke with Lord Glamorgan's voice, and was named 'Favourite.'

Next morning he dressed himself carefully in uniform and started out shortly before noon with the letter in his pocket. He crossed Oxford Street and made for the straight line of St. Andrew's Street and St. Martin's Lane. But just before reaching the latter he found himself face to face with a crowd which blocked the entire width of the thoroughfare. It was composed of a wild and motley collection of men, women, and children, accompanied by uncouth music, and fantastically adorned with bunches of green ribbon, whose freshness threw into more hideous prominence the universal squalor of their clothing and appearance.

At the head of this strange procession marched, in a body rather more compact than the rest, a dozen or two of men, whose dress and features marked them even more clearly than their companions for thoroughbred Irishmen. They were apparently, in some sort, under the leadership of a tall ruffian with high cheekbones, a wide mouth, and large side whiskers of a flaming red colour, and as they came along they shouted and waved their sticks wildly above their heads with no apparent provocation.

The few occupants of the street fled into their houses or up the neighbouring bye-ways. Estcourt contented himself with drawing to one side with the intention of passing along under the wall or of waiting there until the densest part of the crowd should have gone by. But his uniform made it impossible for him to escape thus without notice, and the temper

of the mob being at the moment highly aggressive, they deliberately blocked his path.

At first he was rather amused than apprehensive, and addressed them in a tone of good-humoured remonstrance.

'Come, lads,' he said, 'let me pass; I'm on business, and have no time to spare,' and he pushed boldly forward. The crowd swayed about, yelling and hooting derisively, and with a rush of half-playful, half-ferocious violence, bore him back against the wall, where he stood at bay, uncertain whether to try persuasion or such force as he could bring into play.

'God save Oireland!' howled the leader, who stood directly in front of him, and seemed to be in a paroxysm of unexplained excitement; 'God save ould Oireland!'

'Certainly,' said Dick promptly, hoping that he saw here a chance of conciliating them; 'with all my heart,' he shouted, 'God save Ireland!'

The crowd cheered.

'An' bless the Pope!' yelled the ruffian in command.

Dick smiled with an air of good-natured tolerance.

'Oh yes! by all means,' he returned; 'bless the Pope and all his toes!'

The mob cheered insanely as before, but showed no disposition to tire of this game, which was beginning to wear out Dick's patience.

'Hurroo for the Imperor Napolyun!' shrieked his tormentor, striking the ground with his stick and capering like a maniac.

Dick shrugged his shoulders and assumed a passive attitude.

‘Hurroo for th’ Imperor !’ repeated the Irishman, screaming in his face. ‘Say ut, ye murdherin divvle of a king’s orficer, say ut, or I’ll tear thim goolden shtraps from yer dirrty shouldhers !’

Dick drew himself together, clenched his fists, threw back his head, and raised himself to look for the thinnest part of the crowd.

At that moment a carriage and pair was quickly making its way down the other side of the broad road which had been left bare in part by the concentration of the mob around their victim. He recognised his chance, and struck for it with all his force. He was not armed even with a stick, but in a flash his two nearest antagonists had gone down before his fists, and he was halfway to the carriage, fighting his way desperately through a storm of confused blows and shouts. Once he fell and rose again without his hat ; a second time he was beaten to his knees in the act of laying his hand upon the side of the carriage, which had now stopped, and in which he was dimly conscious that a lady was standing upright.

She opened the door and stepped quickly out ; the crowd fell back a little, and she began to speak.

Dick scrambled to his feet, still holding on to the side of the carriage, and stood looking at her in a half-stunned condition of dull astonishment. Her face and form were those of Camilla de Montaut, but her speech and manner were strange to him and produced upon his confused senses all the effect of an incongruous dream.

‘Whisht bhoys !’ she said ; ‘tell me now what is’t ye’re afther here ?’

There was silence for a moment. 'It's St. Patrick's Day,' said a voice at last.

'It is so,' said the lady readily, 'or why would I be wearing shamrock?' and she took a small bunch of green leaves from her dress and held them up.

'But that's no reason at all,' she went on vivaciously, 'why ye should be afther murdherin me frens, and me the daughther of Anthony Donoghue.

The crowd showed a tendency to shuffle back and get behind one another. A ragged youth, who found himself left without support in the front rank, took off his cap respectfully.

'Shure, 'twas none of us at all, me leddy,' he said; 'twas only Tim O'Halloran that ast would his honour be plazed to say hurroo for the Imperor, and he would not.'

'Would he not?' said the lady, with an irresistible air of drollery, 'thin it's meself that'll do ut for 'um. Hurroo for the Emperor!' she cried heartily, 'and whin he comes back to his own may I be there to give him the cead millia falta!'

She turned to Dick, pointed to the open door of the carriage, and jumped in behind him. The mob were cheering wildly all around; one or two of the nearest of them were taking the opportunity to beg a trifle of her ladyship.

'Drive on!' she cried to the coachman, and in a moment they were whirling southwards down St. Martin's Lane in safety.

Dick, without knowing quite why he did so, had placed himself on the back seat of the carriage, and now sat looking at his companion. Yes, beyond

doubt it was Camilla herself, and when she spoke to him it was this time in her own familiar tones.

‘I am afraid I was just too late,’ she said ; ‘you are hurt.’

‘It is nothing,’ he said slowly. He was holding his hat, which someone had thrust into his hand as they drove off ; he put it on his head and winced a little involuntarily. Camilla saw that he was hardly yet himself, and wondered what to do.

‘Where can I take you ?’ she asked quickly.

‘Whitehall,’ he replied with an effort ; his head dropped back against the cushion, and his eyes closed.

She hesitated a moment ; her glance fell upon the corner of a letter projecting from the pocket of his torn and dusty uniform ; that might give her his address ; she leaned forward and took it gently out. The address was, ‘William Cavendish, Esquire, The Admiralty, Whitehall ;’ the seal was unbroken.

The truth broke in upon her instantly ; she called to the coachman, and the carriage stopped.

‘Home !’ she cried imperatively ; the horses were wheeled round. ‘Drive fast !’ she added, and they quickened their pace.

In a few minutes they stopped in front of number twenty-three, Bedford Square ; Dick opened his eyes.

‘Are we there ?’ he asked ; ‘I have a letter——’

‘Yes,’ she said gently, ‘I know ; it shall be delivered at once, but now you must come in with me.’

He obeyed, moving slowly and with pain ; she did not offer him help from herself or her servants, for which he was dimly grateful. In the hall stood

the colonel, bland as ever, and looking as if he saw nothing unusual in Dick's appearance or costume. Camilla hastily explained the case, Dick standing by silently the while, giving his whole attention to controlling any expression of the pain in his head, which was becoming more and more severe.

'Perhaps,' said the colonel, 'Captain Estcourt will do me the honour of making use of my room in which to rest from the fatigue of his gallant struggle against superior numbers?'

Dick followed him upstairs, but stopped short at the top of the first flight.

'I have a letter to deliver,' he repeated in a tone of helpless obstinacy; 'it will be too late.'

'If you will entrust it to me,' replied the colonel, 'I will send it directly; the carriage is still at the door.'

They reached a room upon the floor above, where M. de Montaut left his guest in charge of a valet and returned downstairs with the letter in his hand. At the drawing-room door he found Camilla waiting for him.

'You would be doing me a favour,' she said, 'by taking that letter yourself to its address.'

He looked at her as if he were about to ask a question, but apparently changed his mind, and bowed instead.

'Your wish is in itself a reason more than sufficient,' he said, as though half in answer to his own thought; and he went on down to the front door, and stepped into the carriage with something like a crafty smile upon his handsome face.

A quarter of an hour after his departure Dick

made his appearance in the drawing-room, where he found Camilla alone. At first she was surprised and pleased to see him looking so little the worse for his injuries; but she soon perceived by the nervous excitement of his manner and the brightness of his eyes that he was by no means out of the wood yet. He expressed his gratitude for her timely rescue, and his admiration of the skill and courage with which she had brought under control so excited and disorderly a crowd. She laughed and put the matter lightly on one side.

He was curious to question her about the opportunity and most bewildering knowledge she had shown of Irish methods of speech and argument, but it was a personal topic upon which he hesitated to enter without more encouragement than she had hitherto given him. Still, he was manœuvring to introduce it when the sound of the returning carriage wheels was heard outside.

Camilla rose and went to the window. Dick's heart began to thump, and he clenched his hands upon the velvet arms of the chair in which he was sitting.

'It is my brother-in-law come back,' she said in a tone of perfectly counterfeited unconcern.

Dick looked fixedly at her; in his eyes were dumb reproach and the sadness of an unspoken farewell; about his mouth gathered the lines of resolution, and, for a moment, the curve of bitterness.

She flushed, and all her manner changed in an instant. 'Don't misunderstand me,' she cried impulsively. 'I know what you have done, and loyalty can never fail of sympathy from me!'

The colonel's step was heard ascending the stairs; she saw Dick stiffen himself to bear the news of his unwelcome fortune, and felt, with a quick sense of surprise at her own weakness, that she was too much interested to stay and see him face the ordeal. She made some incoherent excuse, and as the door opened she passed the colonel hurriedly and ran towards her own room breathless and confused. But she was stayed in mid-course by a cry from M. de Montaut and the sound of a bell ringing violently downstairs. She turned half round; the colonel came out on to the stairs.

'I regret to say,' he began with exasperating politeness and deliberation, 'that disappointment at the news of which I was the unwilling bearer has prostrated our gallant friend with an attack of fever. What professional enthusiasm!' he continued with a half smile. 'One may doubt whether my lords have this time favoured the better man.'

She looked as if two might doubt that, but answered nothing, and the colonel returned to his patient.

CHAPTER III

THE surgeon who was called in without delay to attend to Dick's injuries pronounced them to be slight in themselves, but for the feverish condition to which they had given rise he prescribed immediate rest and quiet. He looked a little doubtfully at each of his listeners in turn as he said this.

'You mean,' inquired Camilla, 'that he must not be moved for the present?'

‘Well,’ was the reply, ‘of course it might be managed, but it is a risk, and if you could, without too much inconvenience, keep him for a couple of nights at any rate——’

‘Oh!’ cried the colonel interrupting, ‘do not think twice about it; convenience is nothing in a case of urgency, and Captain Estcourt is a valued friend of ours.’

The surgeon looked relieved, and went away promising to return the same evening.

Camilla for herself approved the arrangement made by her brother-in-law, but she was at the same time surprised at it. He had not only spoken of Dick, with whom he was in no way intimate, as ‘a valued friend’—that was, perhaps, only a piece of his habitual politeness—but he had also readily entered into a plan which did in fact involve a considerable inconvenience, and this was by no means so usual a thing with him. At least, he always had a personal motive for such acts, and she was at a loss to see an adequate one here. For the difficulty which he had thus brought upon himself was no slight one. The patient had been taken from the drawing-room into a spare room adjoining it on the same floor, and separated from it only by a partition wall of slight construction, through which the sound of conversation was by no means inaudible. Now, it happened by ill-fortune that on this very evening matters were to be spoken of in that drawing-room which must not be overheard by any living ear. The meeting was one which could not be postponed, and no other room in the house was suitable for it, for it was to be in appearance a merely social

gathering. And all this the colonel knew as well as she did.

As they sat at dinner she alluded to the question while the servants were absent from the room.

‘Yes,’ replied M. de Montaut, ‘it is unfortunate, but it would be inhuman to move our poor friend; his safety may depend on his remaining quiet.’

‘On his remaining quiet!’ said Camilla. ‘*Our* safety will certainly depend on that if he does overhear us.’

‘Eh bien, then we will remain quiet.’

‘It will be his duty to inform against us,’ she replied.

‘As an officer, true,’ said her companion coolly, ‘but on this occasion the gallant captain will not fulfil that duty, for he has another more imperative.’

She looked at him in doubt.

‘The duty, I mean, of a loyal chevalier.’

‘I know him better!’ was the exclamation on her lips, but she checked it, and hesitated for an answer.

The colonel saw by her evident trouble that she believed sufficiently in the strength of Dick’s feeling for her to be sure that the struggle in his mind between duty and affection—if it ever occurred—would be a severe one. This was all he wished to know for the present, and he made haste accordingly to reassure her.

‘In reality,’ he said, ‘we need fear no such complication. I have just recollected that the doctor said he intended to give his patient a composing draught at an early hour this evening, so that he will hear no treason after all.’

‘You are sure?’ she asked; ‘sure, I mean, that he will give it, and that it will be effectual?’

‘I will see to it myself if you wish,’ he replied, ‘but I am surprised to find you so apprehensive for our security. You used to think no risk too great to run for the good cause.’

‘In that,’ she said hotly, ‘I shall never change; it is not I that am lukewarm, as you will see to-night!’

He bowed and rose from the table to open the door for her. Before they had been in the drawing-room half an hour the surgeon returned. He brought with him the sleeping draught.

‘That is a good idea of yours,’ said Camilla as he produced it.

‘To Colonel de Montaut belongs the credit of suggesting it,’ was the reply.

‘Really?’ she said; ‘I should not have suspected that.’

The colonel looked a little confused. Camilla had recognised by this time that he had entrapped her before; his object in so doing was not clear to her; but, at any rate, she had now given him a reminder that she, too, could play at the game of conversational ambush.

The two men went into Dick’s room to administer the potion. That done, the colonel got rid of the surgeon immediately under pretence of anxiety not to get the patient into a wakeful condition. Of this there was no fear in reality, for Dick was already inclined for sleep, and showed every disposition to spend a long and undisturbed night; but M. de Montaut doubtless had other equally good reasons for wishing to clear the house of a stranger’s presence.

Within five minutes of the doctor's departure the bell rang twice in rapid succession, and three gentlemen were ushered into the drawing-room, where Madame de Montaut was waiting to receive them. A conversation on the most general subjects at once began, but there was an air of expectation in the manner of all, and when the colonel entered everyone turned to him as though with an unspoken inquiry.

He greeted the two new comers, and turned to Madame de Montaut. 'I think we may begin now,' he said.

She looked at him and raised her eyebrows interrogatively. He nodded to signify that Dick was fast asleep, and sat down at a small table, laying a bundle of papers upon it.

'My friends,' he said, 'I have summoned you to-night to propose a fresh attempt.'

He looked at the faces around him, and observed that Camilla was similarly occupied. His hearers showed by their looks that they perfectly understood his meaning, but were either reserved or unenthusiastic in the matter.

'M. Carnac,' he continued, with grave politeness, bowing to the elderly gentleman who sat nearest to him, 'it is from you that we have learned to expect a critical judgment. Are you not of opinion that the time has come for renewed activity?'

'It has come again and again,' replied the person addressed, 'but always without result.'

'No doubt,' said the colonel, 'but that has been solely due to a want of forethought and energy which must not occur again.'

‘Yes, indeed!’ exclaimed a short gentleman with a beard, who was evidently an Englishman; ‘there have been good enough plans laid, but no one fit to be trusted with their execution.’

The third of the visitors turned upon the speaker.

‘You will pardon me,’ he said with some acrimony, ‘if I differ entirely; it is, in my opinion, the stay-at-homes who are to blame, in devising impossible methods of which they take the credit and others the danger!’

‘Gentlemen,’ said the colonel in a soothing tone, ‘you are both right, but you both speak only according to your own experience. You, Mr. Holmes, deserved success, but your subordinates failed you. You, M. le Comte, followed your instructions with a courage and loyalty which would have secured a triumph if your directors had not made a cruel mistake in their calculations. These two fatal forms of error must be avoided; we must think and act with equal certainty, and all will be well.’

Mr. Holmes shook his head in sulky silence. The Comte de Rabodanges exclaimed fiercely, ‘It is too much to expect; the cat does not offer her paw a second time!’

During this altercation Camilla had sat silent, but with growing impatience; her eyes flashed, and her cheeks were fiery red. The colonel, always ready to turn the force of others to account for his own purpose, hastened to give the final impulse to her pent-up indignation. He looked at her, and raised his shoulders and eyebrows in a gesture of resignation.

‘You!’ she cried; ‘you, too, despair at the

eleventh hour? What do these doubts and recriminations mean? Do none of you any more remember the greatness of the cause you serve? Have you begun to forget the Emperor?’

As the lightning of this word flashed upon them her hearers started violently.

‘Ah!’ she went on with quickening breath, ‘there is magic in the name! It is perhaps because you whisper it so seldom that it has ceased of late to stir you: let us be bolder in speech and braver in action!’

‘Madame,’ replied M. Carnac deprecatingly, and with a bow of genuine admiration, ‘your enthusiasm is heroic, but it is not prudent: the boldness that you preach is likely to bring discomfiture upon us all.’

‘Discomfiture!’ she cried with ringing scorn. ‘What, then, does the timidity you practise bring upon the Emperor? Are we to preserve our own freedom at the price of his captivity, and amid the luxury of a great capital to shut our eyes to the misery of his exile on a lonely rock unfit for human habitation?’ There was an awkward silence: after a moment’s pause she went on again in a more pleading tone.

‘Let us for an instant look back,’ she said earnestly, ‘upon the splendour of his past career, and then consider to what the rancour of his enemies has brought him. The man of action, for whose deeds Europe was not wide enough, confined within a circuit of a dozen miles! The man of genius refused even the companionship of his best-loved books! The commander of armies with but a

pair of lackeys at his call ; the maker and dethroner of kings denied his royal title ! Do you not know,' she cried, and her voice rang deep again with anger, 'do you not know that his house is but a mouldering gaol, and his allowance a prisoner's pittance ? Himself the most magnificently generous of men, he has been driven by sordid necessity to melt his plate : he suffers in health, he is in danger : he—just Heaven !—from the inspiration of whose life we drew the spirit that animates our own !'

'Well spoken !' cried the colonel, skilfully following up the advantage she had gained for him. 'Well spoken ! and all that we then had shall soon be ours again : is it not worth one more effort, my friends ?'

'It is indeed,' murmured M. Carnac with a sigh : the Comte de Rabodanges grumbled, 'If only it were the last' : Mr. Holmes settled himself in his chair. 'Well,' he said bluntly, 'let's hear your plan, if you've got one.'

The colonel untied his bundle of papers and spread them out upon the table in front of him.

'You will not have failed to observe,' he began, 'that our past attempts—now five in number—have all practically owed their failure to one and the same cause. We have not hitherto recognised which is the stronger and which the weaker of the two barriers that confine the object of our devotion. Because there are but two cruisers guarding the seaboard of St. Helena, while a continuous cordon of armed sentinels is posted around Longwood House, another at the confines of the domain, and yet a third along the coast, we have made the mistake of

supposing that our chief difficulties would meet us on land. But experience has shown that by relying on the corruption of servants and the stupidity of sentries the path to the shore can always be made smooth. The really insurmountable obstacle has hitherto been the vigilance of the English men-of-war. They are, as you know, warned of the approach of a vessel by signal from the look-out on the peak, which has a prospect of over twenty leagues. Cruising one to windward, one to leeward, they allow no ship to enter the roads without being searched, no one to land without permission from the admiral : and even after dark their guard-boats, pulling round the island all night, prevent any communication with the shore.

‘A prisoner, then, who has gained the landing-stage, is none the less a prisoner still, for he can by no possibility succeed in passing over the half league of water which separates him from the vessel waiting to bear him away to freedom.’

M. Carnac sighed again. ‘It’s quite true,’ said Mr. Holmes ; ‘I found that out myself.’

‘Say rather that you sent others to risk their necks in finding it out for you,’ growled the count.

The colonel hastened to divert their attention from each other. ‘Fortunately,’ he continued, ‘an inspiration came to me.’

Camilla glanced quickly up in astonishment : and he went on more rapidly, as if to retrieve a false step. ‘An inspiration from a source not unknown to you. Madame de Montaut, who has spoken with so much eloquence to-night, was in fact the first to sug-

gest that it might be possible to pass under that which we could not pass over.'

The three visitors stared and were dumb : Camilla looked anxiously at their faces to gather their probable opinion.

'Yes,' said the colonel, 'a submarine boat is what is needed, and if the idea was another's, I may at least claim that the execution of it has been mine.'

'Execution?' asked Holmes with transparent jealousy. 'What do you mean? The thing's impracticable!'

'Oh! it is a poor machine' said the colonel with great deference, 'and not in any way one such as you, Mr. Holmes, would have been able to design, but I think it will serve its purpose, and that is enough.'

M. Carnac shook his head. 'I hope it may,' he said despondently.

'This,' said the colonel, unfolding a drawing and holding it up, 'is a sketch of the boat. It is eight feet wide, seven deep, and sixty-five long, and is made in a number of separate parts, each capable of being concealed in a hogshead cask. The whole can be put together in two hours.'

'Good!' cried the count, with a side glance at Holmes. 'Most ingenious! And how do you propose to use it?'

'Only as an auxiliary of course,' replied M. de Montaut, 'for its effective range is very limited. It is sunk by admitting water into tanks at the two ends, and raised by pumping it out again. The propelling power consists of two broad paddles worked from inside by hand, and moving much like the fins

of a fish. The shape of the boat, as you see, is not unlike that of an ordinary canal barge, with watertight ends, and with the central space covered in by an oblong erection, having panes of glass in the front and sides for purposes of steering, and at the top a hatch or trap-door for ingress and egress.'

'It will be very laborious to work,' said the count.

'Precisely,' replied the colonel, 'and I propose therefore to use it only as far as it is absolutely necessary. My idea is this. A merchant vessel will arrive off Jamestown, St. Helena, on a day already appointed, and will obtain permission to anchor in the roads, but of course outside the circle patrolled by the guard boats. As soon as it is dark the submarine boat will be fitted together and launched under the charge of a skilled and resolute seaman. He will make the passage to and from the shore under water, and when once he has brought the Emperor on board our vessel, the submarine boat may be sunk and abandoned, and we can make sail for Europe without a moment's delay.'

His hearers were gazing at the drawing in silence: the colonel's plan sounded well reasoned enough and more feasible than some of those which had been actually tried in practice, but they could scarcely bring themselves to believe that it was put forward in all seriousness. The idea of a submarine vessel, which has since gained such universal attention, was at this date, if not absolutely unthought of, at any rate confined to one or two minds, and Camilla and her brother-in-law deserved credit for the originality and courage of their proposal. But their associates

declined, each from a different feeling, to commit themselves to more than an intellectual approval.

M. Carnac was an old man, and constitutionally timid : the novelty of the idea was alone sufficient to startle him.

Mr. Holmes was the Emperor's accredited agent in England, and could not brook that another should take the lead in so important a matter.

The count was the boldest and most energetic of the three, and the one most attracted by the scheme, but he knew little or nothing of the sea, and was besides already under suspicion on account of a previous abortive attempt. In the event of another failure he would undoubtedly suffer the extreme penalty at the hands of his enemies.

The colonel, who knew them all, had no difficulty in reading their intentions—or at any rate their inclinations—upon their faces, but he was not without hope of gaining from them what measure of support was absolutely necessary to his plan.

‘I am both flattered and strengthened,’ he said, addressing them all, ‘by your kind approval, the more so as our share in originating this scheme is but small compared with the assistance which I hope to receive from you, who will thus earn the larger part of the glory and rewards which attend success.’

‘From Mr. Holmes, to whose honour and judgment have been committed the vast funds of the Imperial House, I shall hope to receive a grant of a sum of money to defray the expense of the expedition, which, however large, will be inconsiderable when weighed against the magnitude of the result.’

‘M. le Comte, who has been endowed by nature

with the strength and courage of a hero, will, I trust, think those qualities worthily employed in the service of one who appreciates them so highly. I look to him to work the submarine boat, which will be famous in history, and in which he will receive the first greeting from the Emperor in freedom.

‘From you, monsieur,’ he continued, turning to M. Carnac, who was awaiting his turn in visible trepidation, ‘I shall ask a less dangerous but not less difficult service. Our pretended merchant vessel must be commanded by a captain of first-rate ability in seamanship, and of tact and resource sufficient to enable him to satisfy the inquisitions of the British officer who will board the ship in the usual course on her arrival. You alone of us have still free access to France: you will, I am sure, find us such an officer among the neglected marine of the empire.’

He had hoped to lessen the risk of refusal by asking them in this way for a simultaneous assent to his requests, but an embarrassing silence followed his appeal.

Camilla flushed angrily, and he hastened to anticipate her.

‘Well, Mr. Holmes,’ he said, ‘may I rely on you then for my little million?’

‘No, you may not,’ returned Holmes rudely. ‘It’s out of the question.’

M. de Montaut persevered with patient suavity. ‘I understand,’ he said, ‘you have many calls upon you: we can perhaps supply a part from other sources. How much then is the most you can give us?’

‘Nothing for the present,’ was the reply; ‘pos-

sibly next year I may have some small sum to spare.'

'Next year!' cried Camilla, rising to her feet and looking superbly down upon the little agent. 'Before next year you will have lost your place: the Emperor leaves St. Helena on the fifth of May!' and she turned her back upon him.

The colonel looked at the other two: he saw that the count was wavering, and to give him time he turned to M. Carnac next.

'My dear friend,' said the latter, 'you have altogether mistaken my position. I dare not return to France upon such an errand. I know none of the Imperial Marine, and your scheme, however ingenious, appears to my mind too unreasonably audacious for me to recommend anyone to embark upon it.'

'I am of the same opinion as M. Carnac,' added the count, hesitating no longer. 'I would dare anything in reason, but this is a forlorn hope.'

'Then, gentlemen,' broke in Camilla with a commanding gesture of dismissal, 'we have but to thank you for your attendance this evening, and to absolve you for the future. As for this paltry million,' she added, turning to her brother-in-law, 'I will see to that. You shall find our captain, and the active service we will take upon ourselves if all the world turn craven!'

So saying, she crossed the room and went out with a sweep of fine disdain.

The colonel, who recognised more clearly that his enterprise and all concerned in it were at the mercy of those to whom he had committed his secret,

remained behind to soothe the trampled feelings of the three discomfited gentlemen.

This he succeeded in doing, and they parted from him with a show of mutual goodwill.

Outside the street door they stood for a moment in conversation before separating.

‘I fear,’ said M. Carnac, shaking his head tremulously, ‘that this attempt will end in ruin.’

‘Pooh!’ said Holmes, turning to go. ‘It’s wild; a woman’s scheme all over!’

‘At any rate,’ replied the count emphatically, ‘it’s not a coward’s!’ and he departed in the opposite direction.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Dick awoke next morning the febrifuge had done its work and he was himself again, little the worse for a pair of stiff shoulders and a few cuts upon the head.

The surgeon—a wiry, sharp-eyed little man, of half his stalwart patient’s weight—rallied him upon his sensitiveness to pain in a tone of irony which brought the blood hotly back into his cheeks, and gave them once more the bronzed glow of health. Dick would have given much to be able to explain the true cause of his agitated condition on the previous afternoon, but even his business at the Admiralty and its result seemed a futile reason to offer for such weakness, especially to an inquisitor whose eyes were already twinkling with a suspicion of the truth behind.

So he turned the conversation by asking whether he might go to his own rooms to-day.

‘Oh, yes, I daresay you might,’ was the reply; ‘but why hurry? You’re comfortable here, aren’t you?’

‘Hm—m, pretty well,’ said Dick with transparent affectation.

‘Well, well,’ said the little man, ‘poor Madame de Montaut did her best, you know. But you may go,’ he continued, making for the door with a humorous pretence of bodily fear; ‘you may go to-day, but don’t get overheated, and don’t be out after sunset. Good-bye!’ and he fled chuckling.

Dick was left laughing and swearing to himself. ‘Confound it! Why am I so simple? Every casual stranger can sail round and round me and stare into my galley windows!’ But he was only half displeased; this little bout had warmed him after all, and he felt the sanguine current of hope and active thought running through his brain like a mill race in the spring sunlight. He had escaped the dreaded good fortune that had threatened him with immediate banishment, and he had begun to find his bargain with Camilla even more profitable than he could have ventured to expect when he made it.

He had caught a glimpse of her in a new and mysterious light, and his conduct had won her approval. During the few hours that remained to him it would be hard if he did not contrive to learn more of her past history, and thus add another strand to that bond of intimacy in which alone she had declared herself willing to trust. This was a comparatively hopeful prospect, and he hummed cheerily as

he moved about the room in dressing. That operation was rendered somewhat slow by his bruised and stiff condition. Before he had finished it a servant appeared with a tray and a message. The former contained an appetising but not very substantial meal; the latter was to the effect that Madame and M. de Montaut had gone out, but would be back early in the afternoon, and hoped to have the pleasure of his company at dinner.

Dick found both meal and message tantalising; the one was supplemented at his request, but as to the other he could do nothing but wait with what patience he had, and he soon found his stock of that entirely insufficient.

It was not until close upon three o'clock that Camilla returned. However, when she did come, she came alone, and that was a consolation worth waiting for. She joined Dick in the morning-room downstairs, and settled herself by the fire with perfect ease of manner. He felt that his confidence might forsake him if he waited, and after he had replied to her inquiries he took a plunge at once.

'Are you really Irish, and not French at all?' he asked.

'Irish by birth,' she replied; 'French by breeding and adoption. Oh, it is no secret,' she went on with a smile, as Dick hesitated to press his inquiry, 'and I would gladly tell you all about it if I thought it could interest you, but your sympathies lie, as I told you, in another direction altogether.'

'Everything interests me that concerns you!' burst out Dick. 'I am longing to hear more.'

'It is true that the more I tell you the more com-

pletely you will acknowledge me to be in the right,' she replied, 'and that consideration would tempt a woman to even greater imprudences than this.'

She laughed and looked him frankly in the face. He felt that this was not an opportunity for sentiment, and caught gratefully at the camaraderie she offered him instead.

'Good!' he said, smiling back at her, 'then I will abandon my sympathies, and own you to be right; and it shall be simply a story that you tell me—if you will.'

'Yes, but I shall claim one from you in return. And now listen.—I was born,' she began, 'in the year 1796, in the county of Tipperary. My mother died when I was but a few weeks old. My father, Anthony Donoghue, of Castle Carrol, was wrongfully suspected of being concerned in Wolfe Tone's conspiracy, and when the Rebellion broke out in '97 the Orangemen were upon him like tigers. He took me—a child of less than a year—upon the saddle in front of him, and rode for his life.

'He succeeded, after many narrow escapes, in reaching Bantry Bay, where a number of patriots under Fitzgerald and O'Connor were met to receive General Hoche and the French troops which he was bringing over at their invitation. My father, who had previously held aloof, was now tempted to join them for the sake of revenge.

'He sent me over to France in charge of a deserter's wife, to whom he was also obliged to entrust the realised part of his fortune, and the jewels which you have sometimes seen me wearing. She proved worthy of his confidence, and when he came to Paris

after the final collapse of the rebellion, he found both his daughter and his diamonds safe in the house of General Bonaparte himself, to whose protection I had been commended by a letter from Hoche.

“Ah!” said Napoleon, when my father went to thank him, “here comes Metabus in search of his little Camilla.” It appears that there is a story in Virgil of a warrior pursued by his enemies, and encumbered by the burden of an infant daughter named Camilla. Stopped in his flight by a rapid stream, he binds the child to his spear, and with a prayer to Diana, hurls her across, and himself swims the flood, to find her safe and sound upon the further side. In gratitude he vows her to the lifelong service of the goddess who has answered his prayer. It was to this adventure then—which our own so much resembled—that Napoleon was referring.

‘My father, who had all the wit of his race, took up the allusion at once. “From this moment,” he said, “she shall be called Camilla, and I dedicate her to the great protector who has saved us.”

‘Napoleon was pleased with the readiness of the reply, and took him into high favour: he afterwards gave him a high command in the Irish Brigade, and heaped him with rewards. He remembered me too, and after my father’s death he married me to M. de Montaut, a gentleman of an ancient and wealthy house, and entirely devoted to the Emperor, in whose service he met an honourable death in 1814. I was but eighteen then, and I have been an exile ever since, for neither my brother-in-law nor I have stooped to make our peace with the Bourbons.

‘I have never cared to revisit Ireland, for I am in

habit and feeling a Frenchwoman : but there were many of my countrymen in Paris, and I picked up from them the trick of the tongue which astonished you so much yesterday.'

'No, no,' said Dick, 'that's not at all what it was : it was your wit and presence of mind——'

'That took you by surprise, you mean?' she said quickly ; and then, after laughing at his confusion, 'but now it's your turn to give me something to wonder at.'

'Oh !' he said, 'there's nothing in my life to make a story of. Why, I went to sea when I was twelve.'

'But that's a romance in itself,' she said.

Dick blushed, perhaps from embarrassment, perhaps also with pleasure, for he was anxious to be less of a stranger to her, and flattered at her appearance of interest. So of course he became foolish, and procrastinated.

'I'm sure there's nothing you'd care to hear,' he said, hoping for the encouragement of a contradiction.

'Why that's how I began,' she replied. 'If you steal my forms of speech I shall take yours and answer, as you did just now, that it is not a matter of personal interest at all, but a mere story of adventure that's in question.'

'I'm certain I did not say that,' he answered. 'I mean, I beg your pardon, but I couldn't have said anything so rude.'

'So [rude as what I have just said to you?]' she asked, with a mischievous pretence of innocence.

'Oh !' he groaned, 'I'm no good with words. I

can't handle them !' and he made a sudden gesture as if to grasp a more downright kind of weapon.

The action, and the flush which accompanied it, became him well, and she glanced up at him with secret approval. He had, in fact, gained, not lost ground, but in his confusion he did not suspect the fact, and was more troubled than ever when the door opened at this moment and the colonel came in.

'I hope,' he said, bowing, 'that I do not interrupt?'

Camilla was grave again in an instant, and Dick saw with quick gratitude that however much she might have been playing with him before, she had no intention of putting him to shame before a third person.

'Captain Estcourt has been telling me something of his life at sea,' she replied to her brother-in-law's inquiry, 'and was about to give me his opinion of the relative merits of the English, French, and Spanish sailors. You see there is nothing that you may not hear.'

'In that case,' answered the colonel, 'I shall have the pleasure of joining in the conversation. Dinner is ready, and we will, if you please, Captain Estcourt, hear your observations at the table.'

Madame de Montaut took Dick's arm, and they passed into the dining-room.

'That was kindly done,' he murmured, as they went.

'Follow it up then,' she answered, and they took their seats.

'And what in effect is your opinion,' asked the colonel, 'upon this question?'

He had seen, but not heard, their bit of by-play, and was in hopes of catching his guest tripping.

But Dick was now inspired to do his best, and showed presence of mind against a merely male antagonist.

‘Well, to tell the truth,’ he replied coolly, ‘on second thoughts, I’m not entitled to criticise the French or Spaniards, for I have never met either of them in a general engagement.’

‘You have had the misfortune then to miss the greater number of such events?’ said the colonel.

‘I was at Copenhagen and Algiers,’ said Dick, ‘but that’s all.’

‘Oh!’ exclaimed Camilla, anxious to defeat her brother-in-law’s inquisitiveness, ‘tell us about Copenhagen: that is much better than hearing of our own misfortunes.’

‘And it really is rather interesting in itself,’ he replied. ‘At any rate that day produced upon me a more vivid impression than any that I ever spent;—at sea—’ he added, rather disjointedly.

Camilla enjoyed an inward smile. ‘Please go on,’ she begged.

‘I was a boy of fifteen then,’ he said, ‘a midddy on the 74-gun ship “Edgar.” I lay awake a good time the night before, thinking about home and that kind of thing. When we turned out at daybreak, I fell to shivering, though it was not particularly cold. We all laughed and joked more than usual, we middies, but I remember that our teeth were chattering most of the time. Some of the men seemed to take it all quite naturally, but some were a bit solemn, and some rather excited, like us. The senior officers

were very cool, and spoke cheerfully ; one of the lieutenants, named Bradnock, had been at the Nile, and the captain said something about it as he came up on deck, and asked him about taking the soundings. He answered quite easily, and we all thought him a very great man to have seen such service. Then at seven o'clock the signal was made for all captains and masters to go on board the "Elephant," Lord Nelson's flagship. They were away more than an hour and a half, and we couldn't think what was happening. The wind was fair, and the current running pretty strong down the King's Channel. The signal for action had been flying for some time, and all our decks were cleared ; but we heard afterwards that not one of the pilots could be found willing to take the leading ships into such a dangerous passage.

'At last the boats came off again ; Captain Murray and the master of the "Edgar" had another man with them when they came on board. I never saw him before or since, but I shall not forget his face while I live.

'He was short, and stood very square and sturdy upon his feet ; he had jet-black hair and eyebrows, and a swarthy red colour in his cheeks ; his lips were pushed forward, and his eyes very fierce ; he was like a man always on the point of speaking angrily, and following with a blow. When we saw him looking so bold and full of force, we guessed in a moment what he was there for. He had volunteered when all the regular pilots hung back to take the first ship down.

'I remember the captain called out, "Now, gen-

tleman, the 'Edgar' leads!" and we cheered. The dark man went to the wheel, the master himself took the lead, and went forward; we weighed and stood right out for the entrance of the King's Channel.

'The two lieutenants, who had to stand in the chains and see to the heaving of the lead, began to dispute for places; they were each claiming the larboard side, which was the one exposed to the enemy's fire. The captain gave it in favour of Bradnock, and he went forward, laughing.

'We soon came within shot of the first Danish ship, and she began firing single guns at us. I was not tall enough to see over the hammock nettings, so I held on to them and pulled myself up on my toes. The enemy were nearly all hulks and batteries, and looked very ugly.

'Every time a gun went "boom!" I felt a kind of warm shock, as if I had been struck amidships, but my hands were still cold and numbed. I longed desperately to hear the sound of our own guns, and felt quite angry that we went on without firing a shot.

'Then I was going towards the forecastle when I heard a sudden roar and a crashing sound. It was the first broadside from the "Provestein," and a good many shot struck the ship all at once.

'Bradnock spun over and fell dead in a heap across the chains; the splinters flew all round him, and several men came running up. I heard Wilson, the starboard lieutenant, cry out, "My turn!" in a sharp voice, and scramble on to the deck and across into the other's place.

'I felt horribly sick and dazed, and hurried away blindly, without any idea where I was going. I had

got nearly to the quarter-deck, when a man ran into me, and I reeled violently off into the captain himself, who had just come down the ladder. I hadn't time to get my breath to apologise; he picked me up, and clapped my cap down on my head.

“Well, young gentleman,” he said, “I thought you were a round shot at the least!”

‘I was warmer for the tumble, and his kind jolly voice did me no end of good. He sent me with a message to the lower gun deck, and I ran off feeling quite a man again.

‘As I was on the way down a tremendous explosion seemed to rock the whole ship; we had let go our anchor and opened with the larboard broadside. I felt suddenly mad with joy, my throat swelled and the tears came into my eyes. When I reached the lower deck the guns were being run out for the second time, and I stood still to watch. The roar was awful, and the smoke filled the whole place so that I could scarcely see at first. The men were cheering and working like demons in the dim lantern light, but as only one broadside was in action, a lot of them had nothing to do except now and then to pick up the wounded and take their places. Some of them might have been safe enough behind the bits, but there was only room there for a few, and no one would take an advantage over the rest.

‘It was dreadful to see them standing quietly there to be killed in cold blood as it were. Half a dozen dead and dying men were propped up against the starboard guns; some were being carried below to the surgeons.

‘I couldn't bear the sight much longer, so I slipped

quickly down the other side to speak to the captain of the deck. Before I got to him a chain shot cut him in two, and killed all the men at the gun next him.

‘The heat and smoke and the smell of blood made me dizzy again, so I gave my orders to the second in command, and hurried back to the captain.

‘I found him telling the pilot that he might go below, but the man refused, and stayed on deck staring fiercely through the smoke at the enemy. I saw him still there when the firing ceased, and he seemed actually sorry that the action was over. I wish I could give you an idea of how his look worked upon me; I could hardly take my eyes off him, and though I’ve really very little to judge by, as you see, I feel sure I’ve never met his equal for desperate courage.’

‘What was his name?’ asked Camilla, who had been listening breathless.

‘Johnstone.’

‘He was English then?’ said the colonel.

‘No, he was half Scotch, half Spanish; his full name was Hernan Johnstone, and he was said to be a well-known smuggler.’

‘Did you ever hear of him again?’

‘Yes,’ replied Dick, ‘I did, more than once; for instance I heard that he tried to kidnap Bonaparte when he was at Flushing, by running down his barge in a fast rowing-boat.’

‘Ah!’ said the colonel, with an involuntary start, ‘that is a very singular story! But what more, Captain Estcourt, what more of this heroic ruffian?’

‘Oh, nothing more of that kind,’ said Dick laughing, ‘only I was told lately by a brother officer that Johnstone was now in England, and apparently living somewhere down at Limehouse ; and he’s not likely to have mistaken his man.’

The colonel leaned forward to hear this answer with an eagerness which Dick did not perceive. But Camilla saw it and guessed the cause. This Johnstone was no doubt the very man they needed for the more active part of their enterprise.

But she was at the same time conscious of a certain feeling of reluctance ; it was not altogether pleasing that this assistance should have come to them through Dick, whose honour, if he had known of their object, would have been concerned in keeping such information from them. She frowned, and the colonel instantly left the subject.

‘You were not at Trafalgar then ?’ he asked.

‘No,’ said Dick, ‘to my lasting sorrow ; I was then with Malcolm in the “Donegal,” which had gone into the Mole three days before, and only returned in time to help destroy the prizes the day after the battle.’

He looked rather grim as he spoke, and the colonel saw that the subject was a sore one.

‘Malcolm ?’ he asked. ‘What Malcolm was that ?’

‘He is now Sir Pulteney Malcolm, and commands at St. Helena.’

The colonel rose abruptly from the table.

‘I beg your pardon,’ said Dick ; ‘have I touched on anything painful ?’

‘Not in the least,’ replied the colonel, recovering himself ; ‘on the contrary, I have listened to you

with the liveliest pleasure ; but now, as you are taking no wine, we will, if you please, all go to the drawing-room together.'

CHAPTER V

As they went upstairs Dick noticed with dismay that both his companions were silent, and that an awkward feeling of constraint seemed to have fallen upon the party. He feared that he himself must be the cause of this, and could not help thinking it connected, in spite of the colonel's assurance to the contrary, with the latter part of the conversation just ended.

He resolved accordingly, if he had the chance, to say something polite, and soothe if possible the patriotic feelings of his friends.

As a matter of fact, he was both right and wrong in his suppositions ; he was the cause, but not the offending cause, of this embarrassing silence. The colonel was pondering deeply upon the line he must immediately adopt, in order to utilise the advantages which chance had so unexpectedly offered him ; Camilla had divined the thoughts that were passing through her brother-in-law's mind, and instinctively resented them. It was no doubt unreasonable of her, but she was keenly troubled at the idea of Dick being tempted to take any part or interest in the enterprise to which she had devoted herself. Of course he would refuse, and treat such overtures as an insult ; or—if white could after all be black—if he could be led by blind devotion into the slightest

acquiescence, she would hate herself and despise him ; and for some unexplained reason he was the one man of all others whom she least wished to despise just now.

She resolved to show the colonel the futility of his design at once, and stop him at the outset. So she waited until they were all three face to face again in the drawing-room, and then began her manœuvres with cool directness.

‘ Captain Estcourt,’ she said, ‘ how you, as an English officer, must hate the Emperor ! ’

‘ Ah ! ’ thought Dick, ‘ that’s it ! I was afraid I’d been too strong.’

So he said aloud, ‘ Hate is a hard word to use ; you would scarcely say that a gunner hates his target, would you ? ’

This from his point of view was skilful, but it was not what Camilla wanted.

‘ You mean,’ she said, ‘ that it is your duty to hate him ? ’

‘ Duty does not necessarily imply inclination,’ he replied.

Camilla was in despair. The colonel smiled, and came gliding into the conversation.

‘ My dear Camilla,’ he said, ‘ you misjudge our friend in thinking him so rancorous ; he has fought, as he told us, chiefly against Danes and Americans, and has no cause to bear malice to the French.’

‘ I was not thinking of the French,’ she returned, ‘ but of the Emperor, who incited both Denmark and America to war, and thereby made himself the enemy of all true Englishmen.’

‘ Surely not quite all,’ said the colonel ; ‘ the Oppo-

sition have often, both in Parliament and out of it, pleaded with the Government for his release. Lord Glamorgan,' he continued, looking at Estcourt, 'Lord Glamorgan, for instance, is a member of that party, and yet in every way a true Englishman.'

Dick, over whose half-conscious head this sword-play was flickering, saw only that an argument was going on ; which side was which, and why, he could not understand, and so resolved to speak with caution if he had to speak at all.

Camilla felt that the colonel was pressing her closely, and tried to disable him by a straighter thrust.

'I don't suppose you are a blind follower even of Lord Glamorgan,' she said to Dick ; 'you probably do not wish the Emperor released ?'

'It would not benefit him if I did,' he replied ; 'but I am sorry for him if he suffers as they say.'

This was worse than ever of Dick, and the colonel was prompt to seize the opportunity.

'He does indeed suffer,' he said. 'It is our greatest grief, for Madame de Montaut is entirely devoted to him.'

'My devotion,' retorted Camilla, almost indignantly, 'is natural enough, but the loyalty that binds me can have no hold upon an Englishman.'

'There are more kinds of loyalty than one,' returned her imperturbable antagonist. 'I, for instance, am loyal to the Emperor, not only as a Frenchman, but even more strongly from my loyalty to you, who have made his cause your own, and this, or something like it, may conceivably be the case with others.'

Camilla looked unutterable scorn. 'Captain Estcourt,' she said, turning to him with a bow full of graceful mockery at her own question, 'will you, as a kindness to me, carry the Emperor off from St. Helena?'

Dick was relieved at her apparent return to a lighter mood. 'I can hardly undertake to go so far myself,' he replied laughing; 'you had better commission my friend Johnstone, the smuggler, to do it for you.'

'Good!' exclaimed the colonel, joining in the laugh with the loud tone of one who wishes to emphasise a jest. 'Capital advice, Camilla, and you can't do better than follow it.'

She did not for the moment grasp his intention in saying this, and made no reply beyond a distrustful glance.

Dick meantime had been looking at his watch, and now held out his hand. 'I am afraid,' he said, 'that I must be going home; I have trespassed too long upon your kindness, and the doctor said I must be in by sunset.'

'One moment,' said Camilla, hoping to gain an instant's privacy in which to give him some kind of warning. 'Stay a moment, Colonel de Montaut will order the carriage for you.'

'It is at the door,' replied the colonel, and he bowed Dick out before him, and followed him downstairs.

Camilla heard the front door close and the carriage drive away. A long silence followed. The colonel had evidently gone to the length of accompanying Dick to his own lodging. The mischief

might be done by this time, and here she sat, powerless to prevent it. She fretted under the thought at first, and her indignation chafed her in the absence of an object upon which to spend itself, but at last it seemed to have worn itself out for the time, and she fell into a quieter mood.

The effect of this reaction and the fatigue which accompanied it was to make her feel a sudden sense of loneliness, and her treacherous imagination took the opportunity, whilst her will was slumbering in pure weariness, to suggest how different her case might have been if only Dick Estcourt had been able to share her hopes and labours. She brooded over the idea for some time, smiling now and then dreamily to herself, but it was far from amounting to a definite temptation, and she knew that she could and would put it from her by a moment's effort.

All the same she started guiltily when the door opened almost without a sound. There stood the colonel, like some wily emissary of evil, following up his calculated opportunity at the most deadly moment of weakness.

He appeared to have entirely forgotten his late struggle with her; in his hand was an open letter, which he held up to her view.

'I have just heard,' he said, 'from Carnac, who has received a letter from St. Helena.'

She held out her hand for it.

'You are tired,' he said; 'I will read it to you. Be prepared, for it is far from pleasant hearing,' and he began at once. The letter—or, at any rate, his reading of it—ran as follows:—

“My dear M. de Montaut,—A packet despatched from St. Helena at the end of January contains the following melancholy intelligence in the cipher of General Bertrand. The Emperor, having suffered severely in health from want of active occupation, on January 22 resumed his riding exercise, after an intermission of two years. The effect of this violent change of habit was unhappily the reverse of beneficial, and he has been more or less prostrate for a week past.”

The colonel looked at Camilla, and went on more slowly :

“His Majesty has become subject to fits of profound depression, which are the despair of all his physicians. He bitterly declares himself deserted and betrayed, and his reproaches are terrible to hear. He talks openly of committing his last wishes to paper.”

In her agitation at this news Camilla forgot everything else. ‘Oh, no!’ she cried, clasping her hands as though to entreat the cruel Fates. ‘We shall be in time ; we must, we must !’

‘We must !’ he echoed gloomily ; ‘they expect us on the fifth of May.’

‘And when do we start ?’

‘Before the beginning of April ; we have hardly more than a week left in which to gather our forces for this final attempt.’

She was silent, and seemed unwilling to venture further into the region of detail.

‘The vessel is all but ready,’ continued the colonel ; ‘a mixed crew can be collected in a day or two at Deal or Ramsgate.’

He paused, as if expecting a question from her, but she was still silent, and he went on again.

‘For the money I am relying on you.’

She nodded.

‘As to the rest,’ he said, eyeing her cautiously, ‘our friends have failed us, as you know.’

She looked straight at him, and her face took a passive expression, as if in expectation of a blow.

‘This is our last chance,’ he said ; ‘the Emperor’s supreme and only hope. No consideration must weigh with us against his life and liberty.’

She drew her breath quickly ; he saw that he must give her more time yet.

‘This man Johnstone,’ he said, ‘will, I hope, consent to work the submarine boat for us. I will search him out to-morrow, and make terms with him myself if possible.’

She was relieved to find that so far this was all, and assented reluctantly, hoping against hope to find her further suspicions unfounded.

But the colonel went on relentlessly.

‘There remains only between us and success—between the Emperor and safety—this one difficulty of discovering a suitable captain for our ship.’

‘You have time to go to France for that yourself,’ she said in desperation. ‘Everything must be dared, as you said only just now.’

He shook his head.

‘Daring of that kind is useless here,’ he said. ‘No Frenchman can serve our purpose.’

She feigned astonishment at this.

‘No,’ he continued, ‘I have considered this part of the question long and thoroughly, for it is that

upon which all the rest depends. These are the two necessary qualifications for our captain. First, he must not only be a good ally, in the sense of being a bold and competent seaman, but he must be bound to us by a tie stronger than that of mere pecuniary interest.'

'Yes,' she interrupted quickly, 'he must act from patriotism too ; and, therefore, he can be no other than a Frenchman.'

He shook his head again with the same gentle regretfulness.

'Where will you find such a self-immolating patriotism at a moment's notice, and among those to whom our ideas are strange?' he asked. 'Do you forget that even the inner circle of our confederates has failed us?'

She trembled in silence.

'No,' resumed the colonel, 'he must be an Englishman, and one upon whom we can exert an irresistible moral force. But that is not enough,' he added quickly, and she almost breathed again. 'The second qualification is this ; he must be a man known favourably to the authorities here in England, or at the least to those at St. Helena. Otherwise he would be unable to obtain leave to anchor, and he could not face those naval police without fear of suspicion. We should be searched,' and here his voice fell to a low clear tone, 'searched, and seized or driven from the coast, and the Emperor must die a broken-hearted exile.'

Camilla buried her face in her hands ; the colonel looked down upon her with a faint smile of self-congratulation. 'Very well, then,' he said, 'for the

present we will discuss the question no further. I will do my best to secure Johnstone, and I leave you to think the other matter over by yourself ; it is quite possible that you may be able to discover among your English friends, some one—an officer perhaps—who will at your persuasion, if for no other reason, help us to save the Emperor and France.'

She did not move or speak ; when at last she looked up he was gone. But every word that he had spoken, and every tone of his subtly modulated voice, passed through her brain over and over again with paralysing clearness, and she sat on, as if under some horrible spell.

At the end of half-an-hour she was still there, her mind wearied out with vainly beating against the constraint of this hateful necessity, like a bird buffeting itself to death against the bars of a trap.

She was roused by the crackling of paper beneath her hand, and looking down found that she had been clenching a letter in her unconscious grasp. A start of surprise followed as she recognised the appearance of the paper. It was Dick's application to the Admiralty. The official to whom the colonel had presented it had glanced at its contents and handed it back with an off-hand statement that it was too late, another man having been already appointed to the 'Favourite.' The colonel had accordingly brought it back to Dick, and in the confusion which followed the latter's sudden attack of illness, it had fallen unperceived behind a cushion of the sofa upon which Camilla was now sitting.

The sight of it produced no instantaneous effect upon her, but it led her thoughts gradually away

from her brother-in-law and his cunningly presented view of the situation, and brought Dick and his strong simplicity before her mind instead. She unconsciously ceased to think of his co-operation as within her power to gain, and awoke at last from her numbed despair to see that with the keen weapon of an absolute trust in him she could cut through at a blow the net of subtle argument which the colonel had so skilfully wound about her.

Braced by this new confidence, and anxious to free herself from the toils without a moment's delay, she rose and went down to look for her brother-in-law.

She found him in the study, busy among his papers; he looked up to greet her with an indulgent smile, as if to assure her that he felt for her past struggle, and was ready to receive her submission graciously.

She saw it, and anger choked the words in her throat.

'Well,' he asked, 'and upon whom has your choice fallen?'

'There is no choice,' she answered; 'I have no friend capable of an act of treason.'

He saw that he had been over-confident, and was ready on the instant to meet her with fresh patience.

'Treason?' he said quietly; 'it is no treason to undo the work of treachery.'

'What do you mean?'

'The English nation—or rather their Government—betrayed the Emperor's voluntary trust in them, and as I have heard you maintain with truth a hundred times, faithlessly made a prisoner of

him, after he had accepted their protection as a guest.'

She laughed scornfully to see him using still the methods of an hour ago. He little suspected how trenchant a weapon chance had put into her hand since then.

'It is true,' she cried, 'and their treachery must be undone; but it cannot be by Captain Estcourt's hand.'

He raised his eyebrows: 'I did not mention Captain Estcourt.'

'No, but you thought of him and of him only. It is a proof of how little you know or understand his character.'

He saw the change of her position, and was yet once more ready for her upon her own ground.

'Oh, as for that,' he said, 'men are all alike in one respect. When they are in love they are deaf to every other call: a woman may lead them where she will.'

'Not friends like mine,' she answered proudly; 'not a man like this!'

'Captain Estcourt is as honourable a man as most,' he replied, 'but I will undertake to say that his devotion to you, coupled with a clear explanation of the case from me, would ensure his adherence to our cause.'

'Never!' she cried; 'your cunning fallacies may blind weak women, or men whose intellect is keener than their sense of honour, but you could not even tempt him for a moment!'

'Will you wager on it?' asked the colonel with a mocking smile of security.

‘My life is not my own,’ she cried, ‘but I would stake my fortune on his answer.’

‘Done!’ said the colonel; ‘I accept!’

She saw the trap now, but scorned retreat.

‘Try it!’ she cried, with passionate defiance in her voice; ‘try it, and learn with shame what duty means to a strong heart!’

CHAPTER VI

COLONEL DE MONTAUT saw no more of his sister-in-law that evening.

On the following day he was up early and breakfasted alone in his own room, occupying himself at the same time with the details of a toilette which was intended to make him unrecognisable to those who ordinarily knew him, and acceptable to those with whom he had to deal.

The simplicity and effectiveness of the means he took to gain these ends were characteristic of his fine artistic sense. He began by dressing himself in a loose rough suit of blue serge, which brought out all the latent strength of his chest and shoulders, and gave him, instead of the harmonious outlines of a figure full of distinction, a commonplace rough-and-ready shapelessness, that in England at any rate could attract no one’s attention. He was less than five minutes at his dressing table, but when he turned away the iron-grey colour and soldierly neatness of his hair had disappeared; his eyebrows, too, were dark and ruffled, his moustache unwaxed and of an unfamiliar shape; the aristocratic keenness

and refinement were gone from his face, and he looked ten years younger.

His identity was thus concealed without any loss of personal dignity such as is usually involved in a disguise, and yet could be resumed without difficulty and almost at a moment's notice. He gave a final glance at the general effect, completed it by the addition of a low peaked cap of weatherbeaten appearance, and turned from the glass well satisfied.

He took with him a small sum of money and no arms: what difficulties he might meet he hardly knew yet, but at any rate they would not be of a kind to yield to force.

The closed carriage in which he left the house set him down at the entrance of the narrow streets beyond the Houses of Parliament, and immediately disappeared in the direction in which it had come. He quickly made his way to the riverside and hailed a waterman to take him over to the other bank.

When the boat was rather more than half-way across however, he appeared to change his mind, and asked whether he could be taken as far as the Tower.

The waterman assented readily, gave a single stroke with the left hand, and in a moment the current was sweeping them rapidly down towards the bridge.

It was a bright keen morning, and the boatman was in cheerful mood and inclined to be talkative, as is the custom in his trade, but he got little response or attention from his fare, who was pondering his next move, and had not yet come to the stage when conversation could be of use to him.

At the Tower Wharf he landed, paid his passage

and something over, and walked away from the river, taking several turns without hesitation or inquiry, and finally making due east for some distance. Another turn to the right brought him, as he had calculated, straight down upon the river again at Wapping. In the not very probable case of anyone having attempted to follow him from the neighbourhood of his own house, his rapid voyage down the river and his devious course through these thickly populated streets must have completely baffled the pursuit.

He stepped down to the waterside and looked at the half-dozen boats lying there. In a moment he was surrounded by their owners, each vociferously claiming the passenger for his own craft, warranted to be at once the safest and the speediest on the river.

He smiled and chose the one who made the most noise. This was a bright open-looking young fellow who gave every promise of being as communicative as could be wished. Before they had gone half a mile he had justified the colonel's choice of him by replying at great length to four or five tentative remarks ; but though his companion was keeping a sharp look-out, nothing seemed to give him the opportunity or information he desired.

As the corner at the lower end of the Pool came in sight the colonel made another attempt.

'You must have some interesting characters,' he said, 'down here among the shipping and the sailors.'

'You may say that, sir,' was the reply ; 'there's all sorts in Lime'us, from a spanking lass like Susie

Gayford down to old Nan with her black teeth and her fathom o' foul tongue behind 'em.'

The colonel smiled : this might be amusing, but it was not business, and he put it by.

'Ah, women,' he said, 'no doubt they are always interesting, but I was thinking of men, and stories of adventure at sea.'

'Ay, ay, sir,' said the young man, 'there may be a tale or two about, but there's not much in men, to my mind ; they're every one as like the other as a row of bottles ; but the girls now, young and old, glib and glum, sluts and smart 'uns—why they're all different, and ye' can't but like to hear about 'em all.'

The colonel smiled again, but he was inwardly dissatisfied ; he felt that he was far from caring to hear about all the fair ones in Limehouse ; the boat, under the combined force of two strong arms and an ebbing tide, was swiftly nearing its destination, and his opportunity would soon have passed unused.

It was clear that some means must be found of prolonging the conversation, for it would be difficult to open another with so willing and so expansive a talker.

'It's a sharp morning,' he said, 'and it seems a long time since breakfast ; is there a house near, where we could find anything fit for a thirsty man to drink ?'

The boatman laughed knowingly, and with an air of pride in the locality.

'There's the Outward Bound,' he said, 'where ye'll get better rum than ever passed the Customs up yonder,' and he drew the boat in to the landing-steps.

‘That will do,’ said the colonel, ‘we’ll take a glass then for good luck, for I don’t mind telling you that I’m in that line just now myself.’

‘Are ye’ though?’ asked his companion, looking at him with more sympathetic interest; ‘why, I took ye’ for a Frenchy.’

The colonel swallowed his national pride and grinned sweetly.

‘I am a Frenchman,’ he said, ‘but I’m running a free cargo for all that; I’m down here now to look for a smart man who knows the trade.’

They had left the boat and were now walking in the direction of a tavern facing the river. On the signboard appeared a ship with all sail set, and at the masthead a large triangular patch of brilliant ultramarine, intended, no doubt, to represent the Blue-peter, the signal of outward-bound vessels.

The interior of the house proved unsavoury, so the famous rum was ordered out of doors into a rude verandah, which they had entirely to themselves at this early hour of the morning.

‘Yes,’ said the colonel, smacking his lips critically over the liquor, ‘I want a man to help me with a heavy cargo, and I’m told that I shall find down in these parts a certain Hernan Johnstone, who’ll do it as well as another.’

‘Black Johnny, eh?’ said his companion; ‘well, ye’ may find him and ye’ may not; but I’ll tell ye’ this: there’s no man like him if ye’ do.’

‘Why should I not find him? Is he in hiding?’

‘The Revenue coppers have had an eye on him since that “Esmeralda” business, ye’ know, and they say the Admiralty beaks ’d like to ask him some

questions, too, about the Jamaica trade. Mind ye', I say nothing beyond what I'm told myself, but I've heard that the "Jolly Roger" and him have been fairly well acquainted time and again.'

'Ah,' said the colonel, 'that's an old tale; but what's this about the "Esmeralda?" I've not heard that,' and he called for a fresh supply of rum for his companion, who indeed required no such persuasion to start him spinning his yarn.

'Well, sir,' he began, 'it was this way: the "Esmeralda" was off the south coast at a convenient place none so far from Portsmouth, and there she was for a week dodging about, and couldn't run in, seeing that the Revenue men had word of her, and were out and about every night. So this Johnstone o' yours hits upon a plan, and just like himself it was too. He goes to the coastguard, and gives information that the "Esmeralda" 's to be run in on such a night, and volunteers to take the officers to the place himself. So they go, near a dozen of them, and watch round a corner till all the cargo's ashore, and then they jump out of a sudden and collar the men, they not being more than six or seven, and taken by surprise as they seemed. So the coppers made them fast and began to load up the cargo on a couple o' carts. Only, while they were full-handed, down comes half a score more of the other side, and the prisoners they got loose somehow wonderful quick, and there was a bit of a fight, but no firing, ye' see, the officers not expecting anything, no more than the others had made believe to; and the long and the short of it was that the cargo went up the north road posthaste as they say, and the coastguard

with it in their own carts, to keep 'em quiet for a bit.'

'Bravo!' said the colonel, 'that's the man for me! And all I've got to do now is to find him; do you know where he lives?'

The young man hesitated.

'No,' he said, 'leastways not exactly, but Mrs. Briggs within there'll tell ye.'

This, however, Mrs. Briggs in her turn was equally unwilling to do, though the colonel stated frankly the nature of his assumed errand. She offered, however, to send for Johnstone if the gentleman would be good enough to wait and see him at the Outward Bound.

To this the colonel agreed, and Mrs. Briggs disappeared in search of a trusty messenger.

The waterman, who had by this time finished his second glass and had been liberally paid both in coin and thanks, showed no disposition to hurry his departure; he was evidently hanging about in hope of being a party to the interview between two such interesting personages.

The colonel saw this, and recognised that the open verandah in which they had been sitting was too public a place for a discussion of the kind he anticipated, for even if he could succeed in dismissing his present companion it was free to any passer-by to step in, or indeed to overhear a conversation from the street.

So he rose and looked idly about him for a few minutes, and ended by drifting round into the bar. Mrs. Briggs was there, and understood what he wanted before he spoke.

‘You’ll like to be alone, sir,’ she said ; ‘there’s an empty room upstairs, two pair back ; I’ll send him up to you as soon as he comes ; ’twon’t be long now.’

The colonel stumbled up a narrow rickety staircase, filled with dusty twilight and the smell of stale tobacco smoke. At the top he found the room, a low-roofed den, evidently used by the more intimate customers of the house for secret potations after lawful hours. Its sole furniture consisted of a narrow deal table and a couple of benches ; the floor was bare and splashed with dark blotches. They might have been caused by nothing worse than London porter, but they had a ghastly resemblance to old bloodstains.

The single window was in the side of the house, facing eastward, and commanding a wide and dreary prospect over the Isle of Dogs. The colonel might have obtained a more inspiring view down Limehouse Reach if he could have put his head out of the window to the right, but it was so closely barred as to make this an impossibility.

He had just perceived this fact when he heard a heavy step outside, and turning round, saw a man in sailor’s dress enter the room.

There was not a moment’s doubt as to his identity. There he stood, stout, swarthy, fierce, and resolute, as Estcourt had described him. His face was in all probability more weather-beaten and furrowed with deeper lines than when Dick saw him twenty years ago at Copenhagen, but the force and choleric expression were there, and his hair was jet black still.

He stood for a moment with his legs a little apart, looking at the colonel, and growled out some-

thing in answer to his salutation ; then he turned suddenly, slammed the door, locked it, and put the key in his pocket, tossed his cap on to the table, and sat down.

‘You’ve sent for me,’ he said. ‘What is it? let’s be short.’

His herculean strength, the violence of his speech and manner, the strange and disreputable atmosphere of the place, and the impossibility of escape from it, might well have alarmed even a brave man ; but the colonel seemed to be serenely unaware of being in any way at a disadvantage, and took his own time and method of answering.

‘My name,’ he said, in slow, precise tones, ‘is Villeroy, and I live for the present at No. 12, Canterbury Square, Southwark. I am from time to time engaged in importing goods without the assistance of the Custom House officials. I have just now an unusually difficult venture in hand, and I have come to London to engage a first-rate skipper.’

Johnstone’s face relaxed a little ; he was pleased with the compliment implied, to say nothing of the prospect of active employment of the kind he loved.

‘Where do you want her landed?’ he asked.

‘The landing,’ replied the colonel, ‘is not the chief difficulty ; it is in taking the cargo on board that the danger lies.’

‘And where would that be done?’ asked the other.

‘That,’ said the colonel, ‘I shall not tell you yet, but it’s a good long voyage from here, and I shall want to engage you for three months certain.’

Johnstone reflected a moment, going over in his

mind the various ports from which smugglers came to Europe.

‘Well,’ he said at last, ‘never mind, what’s the work?’

‘It is work of an unusual kind,’ replied his companion, ‘needing skill, strength, and courage; but I’m told you don’t shirk danger when it comes in the way of business.’

‘Danger?’ said the other, with rude contempt. ‘Go on!’

The colonel continued in the same measured voice.

‘The coast,’ he said, ‘is so well kept by guard-boats that it will be necessary for us in loading the ship to make use of a boat of entirely new design, propelled under water, and rising and sinking at the will of the occupant—that is to say, of yourself.’

Johnstone looked incredulous.

‘You shall see the plans and judge for yourself,’ said the colonel; ‘it is in reality simple enough.’

‘If it can be worked,’ said the other with an oath, ‘then I’ll do it; but what a queer start of the coastguard to keep the sea and not patrol the shore at all.’

‘Oh, as to that, they do, but the watch on shore can be squared.’

Johnstone nodded. ‘What’s your cargo?’ he asked abruptly.

The colonel smiled, and took a gold napoleon from his pocket.

‘It’s got that head upon it,’ he said, holding up the coin between his finger and thumb.

‘Something strongish, eh?’ said his companion.

‘Very strong,’ said the colonel with dry humour.

‘And plenty of it?’ asked the other.

‘Enough,’ replied the colonel, ‘to liven up every friend I’ve got for some time to come.’

Johnstone brought his fist down on the table.

‘I’m your man,’ he said, ‘if you’re my money!’

‘I am prepared to give you ten thousand francs, that is to say, four hundred pounds, for the three months.’

‘Double it!’

‘Certainly not,’ said the colonel with quiet decision.

‘By God, you shall though!’ growled the other with a hardly suppressed threat in his gesture.

‘Four hundred is my offer,’ said the colonel indifferently. ‘You may take it or leave it, as you please.’

‘No!’ roared Johnstone. ‘I’ve got you! I know your name, and where you live, and what you’re up to, and you’ll give me a thousand or I’ll blow the game for you!’

The colonel put his hands in his pockets and leaned his head back against the wall.

‘I gave you a false name and address,’ he said, ‘and I did not tell you my real business. I do not trust a man until I know him.’

‘I don’t care!’ shouted the other. ‘I’ve got you for all that; here you are, and here you stay until you sign for a thousand!’

‘Alas!’ said the colonel, shaking his head, ‘the bold are so apt to be short-sighted! Friend Johnstone,’ he continued, ‘I came here by way of the Custom House; I left a letter there, to be opened if

I did not return for it in two hours. The time is nearly up now. What do you suppose they will find when they open it ?'

The man looked daggers at him, but shifted uneasily and said nothing.

'They will find,' said the colonel, 'your address and that of this house, with a request to look for us at once in both those places.'

'Well ?' growled Johnstone, 'what then ?'

'You are in request just now,' continued the colonel politely. 'First, I want you ; secondly, the Revenue Officers wish to hear more of that little joke about the "Esmeralda ;" and thirdly, the Admiralty desire your opinion on the dangers of the West Indian trade-routes.'

The man looked thunderstruck.

'Naturally,' the colonel went on, 'I wish to secure the preference myself ; and, indeed, if you refuse my terms, I don't suppose you will get such easy ones from either of the other two parties.'

There was a short pause.

'I'll go,' said Johnstone, with a kind of sullen admiration in his look. 'I'll go for four hundred.'

'It shall be five,' said the colonel, 'and now unlock the door.'

They went downstairs and out of the house. At the riverside the colonel made an appointment with his companion to meet at Southampton on a certain day, and stepped into a boat.

'Westminster steps,' he said to the waterman as they pushed off.

'You'll not forget to call at the Custom House, sir,' Johnstone called anxiously after him.

‘Oh, there’s no need for that,’ replied the colonel, ‘I left nothing there.’

And the boat shot swiftly up stream on the incoming tide.

CHAPTER VII

THE colonel informed his sister-in-law the same evening of the success of his expedition to Limehouse. He described his interview with Johnstone at some length, and with a good deal of dramatic skill; not from any desire to magnify his own cleverness, but partly from genuine enjoyment of the humour of the scene, and partly from anxiety to amuse and distract Camilla. In the latter object, however, he was unsuccessful. She smiled indeed, but with a palpable effort; her thoughts seemed to be fully occupied with other and less pleasant things. When he had finished his narrative she looked up gravely.

‘Then you entrapped the man rather than persuaded him?’ she asked.

‘I certainly did not entrust him with our secret,’ he replied. ‘That can be easily explained at any time before we reach St. Helena.’

‘And you have no fear that he will draw back when he finds out the real nature of the service required from him?’

‘He’s not that kind of man. Besides, whatever he may be, let me once get him on board, and I’ll answer for his going through with the affair.’

Camilla looked as if this remark was less unexpected than unwelcome.

‘With—with anyone else,’ she said, ‘whom you might wish to engage in a higher capacity, you would of course proceed openly?’

The colonel saw the point of this question at once, and felt himself in a difficulty. He had as yet come to no definite idea of how Dick was to be gained; his feelings for Camilla must, of course, be the principal lever to move him, but certainly up to this moment it had been no part of the colonel’s general method or present intention to work without the aid of stratagem.

He glanced at his sister-in-law and saw an indignant resolve foreshadowed on her face. If he hesitated he was lost; she would resume her right of interference, and warn Estcourt.

All this flashed through his mind in an instant.

‘Let us be quite candid with one another,’ he said. ‘If you will promise to leave me a free hand, I will undertake to write a plain straightforward letter to Captain Estcourt, simply setting out our design, and asking him to join us.’

‘Very well,’ she said coldly.

‘You promise then?’ he asked.

‘Of course,’ she said; ‘but in any case he needs no warning against an open attempt.’

The colonel was inclined to think so too, but he said nothing, and retired to consider the matter more attentively in the diplomatic atmosphere of his own room.

During the next few days nothing more was heard of the subject. Dick called several times, and

the colonel noted with satisfaction his growing intimacy with Camilla.

She was often sombre and depressed now, but the presence of this friend in whom she had come to trust so entirely seemed to strengthen and revive her, and there were times when she succeeded in putting away all thought of the future, and fairly astonished her brother-in-law by her brilliant gaiety.

As for Dick, he had never known such wit or such light-hearted grace ; he forgot everything else, and his existence became one simple and prolonged act of adoration. He loved the rustle of her gown better than the crackling wind among the sails, and thought the accent for which she laughed at herself fit only for the lips of sea-nymphs. For your sailor, too, is a poet in his way, and has a mythology of his own like all the rest.

The end of the week—the last before the start—was now drawing near. The time had come for the colonel to spread his net, and he was ready in his place, waiting only for the favourable moment.

It was not long delayed. On the Friday afternoon Camilla asked him whether he expected to be much occupied on the following day.

‘No,’ he replied, ‘I have no engagement whatever.’

‘I am told,’ she said, ‘that there are some fine Claudes and Watteaus at No. 9, Great Russell Street. The house is to be let furnished, and they allow one to walk in and see the pictures.’

He bowed, to hide the catlike eagerness of his eyes.

‘I thought,’ she continued, ‘that it would be an

agreeable way of passing the morning, and if you can come too we might invite Captain Estcourt to accompany us. He said something about calling, and there's nothing to amuse him here. Then will you invite him?' she asked, after a pause.

'With pleasure,' said the colonel in his most formal and indifferent tone, and the subject dropped.

After dinner the same evening he appeared in the drawing-room with a sheet of paper in his hand.

'This,' he said, holding it out to Camilla, 'is a rough draft of the letter I propose writing to Estcourt, in accordance with our agreement of a few days ago.'

She took it and read as follows :—

'My dear Captain Estcourt,—My sister-in-law and I have more than once hinted to you how deeply we are devoted to the service of the Emperor Napoleon, and how cruelly we have felt his exile. A favourable opportunity has now presented itself for attempting his liberation, and we are to start almost immediately for our base of operations. From what you have already told us of your views on his Majesty's imprisonment, and from the cordial and intimate friendship with which you have honoured us, I am induced to hope that you will give us your loyal assistance in this expedition. If we may rely on you for this important service, will you be good enough to meet us at the time and place mentioned below, when I shall have the pleasure of introducing to you M. Carnac and M. le Comte de Rabodanges, two of our most trusted confederates. In case, however, you should unhappily feel unable to join us, may I ask you to destroy this letter at once, and

not refer to it again? We shall understand your silence as a refusal.'

She weighed every phrase and every word with painful care, then tossed the paper back to him without comment.

'That meets with your approval then?' he asked.

'On the contrary,' she replied, 'the whole idea is a folly, and meets with my disapproval; but if a letter must go, by all means let that be the form of it.'

'You think it well calculated to achieve its object?' asked the colonel, with a pretence of anxiety.

She laughed sarcastically. He put on a look of dismay and disappointment.

'If you think it will fail,' he said, 'perhaps it would be better not to do it by writing at all.'

Camilla smiled, but made no answer beyond a shrug of indifference.

'I might put it to him in words of the same plain fashion,' he suggested; 'I have made an appointment with him for eleven o'clock to-morrow morning at Great Russell Street; at least, I left a verbal message asking him to meet us, and I've no doubt that he'll be there.'

She looked up as though she did not quite follow him.

'I could ask Carnac and Rabodanges to come too,' he explained, 'and then take the opportunity to bring the scheme before him while we are all together.'

She was upon the point of vehemently rejecting this proposal, but two considerations made her pause. She could not but long to witness such a scene as the

confused rout of her brother-in-law and his allies, and she foresaw in the second place that she might be able, if present at the interview, to show Dick afterwards that so shameful a proposal had not been made to him by any wish of hers. So she assented, but in a tone which showed how much the whole affair irritated her ; and the colonel, having gained his end, spent the remainder of the evening in paying her the most delicate and soothing attentions. Next morning, when breakfast was over, he retired to his own room, after arranging to start out with Camilla at ten minutes to eleven.

Directly afterwards he slipped from the house unobserved, and by half-past ten he was posted at the northern end of the street in which Dick was lodging ; his eyes were fixed on the door of the latter's house, but he kept himself completely out of sight.

He had not been watching three minutes when the door opened, Dick came out, and turned down the street in the opposite direction.

'I thought he'd be early,' murmured the colonel to himself, 'and I don't think there's much fear of his coming back !'

He waited until his unconscious quarry had disappeared round the southern corner, and then hastened to the house. He rang the bell and a servant appeared.

'Is Captain Estcourt in ?'

'No, sir, he's just gone out.'

'Do you suppose he'll be long ?'

'I shouldn't think so, sir, but he didn't say.'

The colonel looked troubled.

‘Will you leave your name, sir?’ inquired the maid.

‘I think,’ replied the visitor, ‘that I had better go to Captain Estcourt’s room and write a note for him. My business is rather important, and I can’t very well call again.’

The girl opened the door wider, and showed him upstairs; placed paper and ink before him, and waited by the door. The colonel wrote an exact copy of the letter he had shown to Camilla, only adding as the place of rendezvous ‘No. 9 Great Russell Street,’ and ‘eleven o’clock on Saturday morning, March 24,’ as the time. Then he asked for sealing-wax and a taper, fastened up the letter with elaborate care, and handed it to the attendant maid. She placed it on the mantelpiece and went towards the door to show him down the stairs and out of the house. He followed her down a few steps, and then stopped with an exclamation: ‘I have left my gloves behind!’ and he ran back before she could offer to go for him. He returned in an instant, but in that instant he had broken the newly-made seal, opened the letter, folded it simply without fastening, and tossed it carelessly down again upon the mantelpiece.

The girl was still in the same place, and even in the same attitude when he came back; he was putting on his gloves, and had tucked his walking-cane under one arm for the purpose.

‘Be sure,’ he said as he passed out, ‘that Captain Estcourt reads my note directly he comes home. I think you said that would not be long?’

‘No, sir, not long, I expect,’ and she closed the door behind him.

He hurried to his own house, to find Camilla waiting for him and the carriage at the door.

‘We are late,’ she said ; ‘it is just upon eleven now.’

‘I am sorry,’ he replied, ‘I have been round to Estcourt’s rooms ; he might as well have driven down with us ; but he was not in, and I could not wait any longer.’

She made no further remark, and they started at once. On arriving at the house they found Dick upon the doorstep. Camilla, who was dreading the decisive moment more and more, took comfort at the sight of his open smile and frank eyes, and unconsciously put more warmth than usual into her welcome. The colonel, too, greeted him with effusive cordiality, and seemed to take his presence as a personal favour.

‘We are so very glad,’ he said, as they entered the house together, ‘that you have been able to join us. I thought you would myself, and indeed I said so to Madame de Montaut, but she seemed uncertain about it.’

‘How could you doubt it ?’ said Dick, turning to Camilla with tender reproach, and he added, lowering his voice, ‘surely you know that I would give up anything to go with you anywhere ?’

The colonel laughed softly to himself, and examined a picture with great attention. The other two passed into the dining-room ; he did not follow them, but stayed behind to receive MM. Carnac and Rabodanges, whom he was momentarily expecting.

Dick was in his happiest mood, and if he did not care much about the pictures, at any rate he

thoroughly enjoyed the privilege of looking at them. He noted, with a lover's keenness, that Camilla's manner to him was changed, and seemed to imply a new kind of relationship between them. What it meant he could not even guess, but certainly she was now quite a different being from the imperious beauty whose wit had stricken him dumb on the night of the ball so long ago. She had a wistful look in her eyes, as though she would have asked something of him if she dared, and her air was almost that of one who clings to someone stronger for protection or support.

He was raised out of his natural diffidence by this delicate unspoken flattery, and set high on a pinnacle of exalted hope, from which he now and again shot swift glances far into a gleaming future.

And all the time, in the room beneath, the colonel was relentlessly planning his downfall.

For no sooner had Dick and Camilla passed upstairs into the drawing-room, which contained the more valuable paintings, than M. Carnac and the count arrived almost together.

The colonel took them into the dining-room and closed the door.

'You will remember,' he said, 'our last meeting, and the resolutions then arrived at.'

They bowed.

'I am happy,' he continued, 'to be able to report that my efforts have been crowned with complete success. I have engaged a daring and competent seaman to work my submarine boat, and I have secured an officer to command our vessel, who is

personally known to, and esteemed by, the admiral commanding at St. Helena.'

M. Carnac looked flustered ; this news had quite taken away the poor old gentleman's breath ; but the count was enthusiastic, and warmly congratulated the colonel, plying him with strings of eager questions. M. de Montaut stopped him with a smile.

'Not so fast, my friend,' he said, 'the gentleman is in the house at this moment, and I shall have the pleasure of presenting him to you immediately. Of one thing, however,' he continued, 'I must warn you beforehand : he has given, so far, no more than a tacit assent to my invitation to join us, and it will therefore be as well to make no reference to the matter at present, beyond, of course, giving a cordial greeting to so invaluable an accomplice.'

M. Carnac started ; the word 'accomplice' appeared to disagree with him unpleasantly ; but both he and the count acquiesced, and M. de Montaut led them upstairs. Their voices, as they approached, startled Dick and Camilla in their seclusion, and the faces of both clouded at once.

'This is too bad !' he exclaimed impatiently.

She looked troubled, and said in an anxious and deprecating tone : 'It is only some friends whom we asked to meet us here.'

'Oh !' he replied, 'that's all right ; your friends are mine,' and the three gentlemen entered.

The formal introduction took place, and Camilla, seeing the dreaded ordeal close at hand, felt as though she must flee or fall where she stood.

Her evident nervousness touched Dick, who naturally enough thought himself the cause of it. 'She's

afraid I resent their interruption,' he said to himself 'I'll soon put that straight !'

So he replied to the compliments of the two strangers with a cordiality even more marked than their own. 'I look forward,' he said, 'to our becoming the best of friends. I hope you will always command me for any service in my power.'

Camilla's heart failed her ; the words seemed like an evil omen.

A sound like a chuckle was heard from the colonel.

'What are you laughing at ?' Dick asked.

'Nothing,' he replied ; 'but I am vastly pleased with this Claude ; "the embarkation of St. Helena" I believe it is called.'

Camilla turned deadly white.

'I am unwell ; my head aches,' she said. 'Let us go home.'

She took Dick's arm, and he led her from the room.

CHAPTER VIII

M. CARNAC and the count, after attending Madame de Montaut to her carriage with polite inquiries and condolence, went each his own way, and the other three drove back to Bedford Square.

Dick was relieved to see how quickly the open air restored the colour to Camilla's cheeks ; she was herself again by the time they reached home, and seemed to have recovered even the gaiety which had been conspicuously absent from her manner all the morning.

He stayed an hour or two, and was induced to tell many stories of the sea. The colonel listened for some time, and then excused himself on the plea of having letters to write. 'But I hope you will dine with us,' he added.

'Thank you,' said Dick ruefully, 'I wish I could ; but my lawyer is coming to see me on business at four o'clock ; he is an old family friend, and I asked him to stay to dinner.' And, in fact, he tore himself away soon afterwards. When he had seen him out of the house, the colonel came back to the drawing-room smiling and rubbing his hands together with an appearance of great good-humour.

'Well, Camilla,' he said, 'and when will it be convenient to you to pay me ?'

'Pay you what ?'

'Have you forgotten ? You wagered your fortune that Esteourt would not help us.'

She started to her feet ; terror, incredulity, anger, and terror again, flashed in her glance and shook her voice.

'Well ?' she cried, 'what then, what then ?'

'Why, then, of course, you have lost.'

'You are lying !' she cried fiercely.

'That would be useless here,' he said ; 'one cannot deceive oneself. But surely,' he expostulated, 'you can't pretend to have misunderstood him all this time ?'

'What time ?' she asked in faint despair.

'This morning,' he replied, 'I changed my mind again, and decided in favour of writing. At 10.30 I sent him the letter you saw and approved, telling him that if he kept our appointment for eleven o'clock at

Great Russell Street I should understand him to have accepted our proposal. He kept the appointment, as you know ; you saw the friendliness with which he met his new confederates, Carnac and Rabodanges ; and I am surprised,' he continued, 'that he did not hint to you his acceptance of your cause and your guidance.'

The subtle suggestion did its work : in one moment of agony she reviewed the day : she saw again Dick greeting the conspirators with offers of service, and heard him vowing that he could leave all to follow her : acts, words, gestures—all fitted but too well, and the colonel's hideous satisfaction clenched the proof. Faith fled in bitterest despair, and miserable scorn possessed her. She turned upon the colonel a face hard and white with the anger of the betrayed.

'You have ruined a man's honour,' she cried, 'and a woman's happiness ; but you shall not have your way with both of us : if he goes with you I stay behind !' And she left the room before he could find an answer.

Dick in the meantime stepped with a swinging pace along the streets, looking exultantly back upon the brightest day in his memory, and forward to a yet brighter one to-morrow. He sprang up the stairs to his room, and burst gaily in. His glance travelled to the mantelpiece, where his letters were usually placed ; to-day there were two, and he hummed a tune as he took them in his hand. They were both from known correspondents, and quite uninteresting ; but a third lying near them was directed in a handwriting that he had never seen before.

He was surprised to find, on turning it over, that this last one had been already opened, but he immediately forgot this in his astonishment at the contents.

The letter was not signed, but there was no mistaking the source from which it came; the words 'my sister-in-law and I' brought a flush to his face; he was amazed, bewildered, overwhelmed.

Before he could collect his scattered senses the door opened and 'Mr. Wickerby' was announced. On the threshold stood the lawyer he had been expecting, a grey-haired, sharp-eyed, precise-looking man of fifty-five or more, with his hat in one hand and a bag in the other.

'Good-day, sir,' he said; and then with a quick glance from Dick's troubled face to the paper in his hand, he added, 'anything wrong? No bad news, I hope?'

Dick jumped to his feet, took the hat and bag from his visitor, and drew a chair up to the fire for him.

'You must excuse me, Mr. Wickerby,' he said, 'I'm in a regular maze over this extraordinary note.'

'Let me see,' said the lawyer.

Dick mechanically handed it over to him, and tried to put his own ideas in order while the other read in silence.

'Dear me!' said Mr. Wickerby, looking up at last, 'this is a cool fellow, upon my word! He pretends to be a friend of yours; do you recognise the writing?'

'No,' replied Dick, 'I never saw it in my life, but——'

‘But you can guess the author, eh? Hm—m, so much the worse! If you will excuse my freedom, Captain Estcourt——’

‘Stop!’ cried Dick, ‘I must warn you that these are intimate friends of mine,’ and he blushed crimson.

Mr. Wickerby looked at him curiously. ‘They must be,’ he said, ‘very intimate, I should say, to venture upon such a proposal as this.’

‘Hang it!’ cried Dick, ‘you don’t suppose he meant it seriously? It’s a joke, of course.’

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders. ‘Not in very good taste as a joke,’ he said, ‘but, after all, it doesn’t matter; the letter contains its own answer, and there’s an end of it.’

‘What do you mean?’ asked Dick. ‘How does it contain its own answer?’

‘Silence, in this case, was to give refusal; consent was only to be inferred from a particular act.’

Dick was thunderstruck at this, and lost his head.

‘But I went,’ he stammered.

‘Went where?’ asked the other sharply.

‘To Great Russell Street.’

‘You went to Great Russell Street? And what, in the name of goodness, did you do that for? Do you know, Captain Estcourt,’ he continued severely, ‘what we lawyers call this kind of thing? “Adhering to the Sovereign’s enemies;” “Levying war against our Lord the King”—that’s what we call it, sir; an overt act of treason, and you and your friends make a joke of it!’

‘But that was not why I went,’ said Dick in confusion; ‘I hadn’t had the note then; the man

himself had already asked me to go for quite a different purpose.'

Here the maid entered to lay the cloth, and both were silent.

'I'll explain it all to you after dinner,' said Dick ; 'in the meantime, let us settle the business you came about.'

This was done, and occupied them for somewhat less than half an hour, at the end of which time they sat down to table.

Dick was preoccupied, and the conversation dragged ; his guest eyed him doubtfully from time to time, and he was uneasily conscious of the fact. Presently he got up and went to the bell.

'I quite forgot,' he said as he pulled the cord ; 'I never asked about that note being open.'

'I don't understand,' said Mr. Wickerby.

'The seal was broken when I found it.'

The lawyer looked puzzled. 'Sure ?' he asked.

'Certain,' Dick replied ; 'the letter had been opened, beyond a doubt.'

'That's awkward ; I'm afraid anyone who may have read it would think you kept queer company.'

The maid appeared in answer to the bell.

'Jane,' said Dick, holding up the letter, 'who brought this ?'

'The gentleman wrote it here, sir.'

'Excuse me,' said Mr. Wickerby, interrupting, 'but I should like to ask her a question or two ; I'm used to this kind of thing, you know.'

'All right,' said Dick, 'you'll do it better than I should.'

The lawyer turned to cross-examine Jane, who was beginning to be alarmed.

‘What gentleman?’ he asked.

‘I don’t know his name, sir.’

‘Did you know him by sight?’

‘Yes, sir, he came here once, a week ago, with Captain Estcourt.’

‘What time was it when he wrote the letter?’

‘About half-past ten in the morning, sir, as near’s I could say.’

‘Did you see him fasten it up?’

‘Yes, sir, I brought him the wax and held the taper myself.’

‘What did he do with it then?’

‘He gave it to me, sir, and I put it on the chimneypiece.’

‘You are sure the seal was unbroken then?’

‘Yes, sir, quite sure.’

‘And who has been in here during the day?’

‘No one, sir, but me and Captain Estcourt.’

‘Then,’ said the lawyer with severity, ‘it was you who broke the seal; come now, tell the truth.’

‘No, sir, indeed it was not,’ said the girl in great distress.

‘Who was it then?’

‘Captain Estcourt, I suppose, sir,’ she replied, almost in tears.

‘But he was out.’

‘I thought he must have come back, sir, and gone out again. I remember noticing that the letter had been opened when I came in to see to the fire, and I said to myself, “Then he must have been home again.”’

‘What time was that?’

‘That would be about eleven, sir.’

‘You’re certain no one else came in?’

‘They couldn’t have done, sir, without ringing. Captain Estcourt, he has a latchkey, but others must ring.’

Mr. Wickerby saw that she was not likely to be shaken from this theory. Whether it were true or not, it was her only possible method of clearing herself from the charge of having opened the letter.

‘Thank you,’ he said, ‘I daresay you are right. Captain Estcourt must have forgotten. That will do, Jane, and you needn’t trouble yourself about it.’

The girl fled with alacrity, and Mr. Wickerby turned to Dick, who was fuming with impatience.

‘Well?’ he asked; ‘what do you say to that?’

‘What confounded nonsense all this is!’ cried Dick, ‘as if I didn’t know that I never set eyes on the thing till this afternoon, just two minutes before you came in! I shall think no more of it.’

‘That is all very well,’ replied his companion, ‘but the question is, will all these other people think no more of it too?’

‘What other people?’

‘Well, there is first the gentleman who sent the invitation, and no doubt supposes you to have accepted it with your eyes open; secondly, these Frenchmen he mentions—did you meet them too?’

‘Oh, hang them, yes!’ groaned Dick.

‘Thirdly, the person or persons unknown who opened and read this letter; and fourthly—let me see—oh yes—the lady spoken of as “my sister-in-law.”’

Dick turned crimson, and his companion fixed a penetrating glance upon him.

‘Do you know,’ he said, ‘I think, my dear Estcourt, it might be better for you if you made a clean breast of it. I’m an old confidential friend of your people, and you know I will keep your counsel.’

‘I give you my word,’ cried Dick, ‘there’s nothing more to tell than this : I know Colonel de Montaut—the man who wrote this letter, you know—pretty well, and as for Madame de Montaut——’

‘Yes?’ inquired Mr. Wickerby, ‘and as for Madame——?’

‘Oh, you understand,’ said Dick, with desperate embarrassment, ‘she’s the only woman in the world ; but no one could ever think me capable of disloyalty, and she least of all.’

‘Hm—m,’ said the lawyer, ‘I couldn’t, perhaps ; but women have a high estimate of their own power, and some of them love to exercise it too.’

‘Some of them!’ Dick burst out indignantly ; ‘she’s not “some of them ;” she wouldn’t accept the help of a traitor, much less ask for it.’

He was becoming irritated beyond his self-control, and Mr. Wickerby hastened to leave this part of the subject.

‘The question now is,’ he remarked, ‘what you are to do.’

‘Do!’ cried Dick. ‘I shall write to Colonel de Montaut at once, and call to-morrow morning to explain the mistake.’

‘Stop a moment,’ said the lawyer, ‘I’m not quite sure that that’s your wisest plan, though, of course, it is the natural one to think of first. Let me just put

the case before you as it looks to an outsider—not to me, mind you, but to an impartial stranger—to a judge or jury, for instance.’

Dick looked nervous and sulky, but said nothing, and Mr. Wickerby went on in a clear, precise tone, marking off the points on the fingers of his left hand as he proceeded :—

‘An English officer,’ he began, ‘makes friends with a Frenchman—a strong Bonapartist—and falls in love with a relative of this gentleman, much attached to the same cause. He goes often to their house, and is frequently seen in their society.

‘On Saturday, March 24, 1821, he leaves home at 10.30 in the morning. Immediately afterwards a letter from his Imperialist friend arrives, referring to previous conversations, and asking him to join in a treasonable plot. A refusal is to be easily implied by mere silence, but the consent, which is plainly expected, is to be evidenced by attendance at eleven o’clock at a certain place for the purpose of meeting two fellow-conspirators.

‘By eleven o’clock this letter has been opened and read. No one has entered the house since our friend left it, unless, indeed, he returned himself. The maid who received the note, with seal intact, is positive on this point, and, to save herself, would probably, under pressure, swear that she heard him come in again.

‘At eleven o’clock he is at the place named—for quite a different purpose, he says, but admittedly at the invitation of these same Bonapartists. The other conspirators are there too, and a cordial introduction takes place. His conduct does not appear

to have aroused any doubt in their minds as to his acceptance of their overtures.

‘Confronted with this array of facts, our friend proposes to put himself right by explaining matters to the Bonapartists, and even to commit the imprudence of expressing his regrets on paper. “*Littera scripta manet.*” My dear Estcourt, no prudent man ever writes a letter when he can avoid it. Your disappointed friends would have you in a trap here ; you’d much better run away quietly, and take a holiday somewhere without leaving your address. When they’ve come to grief, and got hanged for their pains——’

‘What the devil do you mean?’ shouted Dick in exasperation.

‘Then you can come back in safety,’ continued Mr. Wickerby ; ‘but if you write they’ll have undeniable evidence that you received their proposal, and you’ll have to choose between keeping the secret, which is a felony known by the unpleasant name of “*misprision of treason,*” and giving them up to justice, which, I take it, you are even less likely to prefer.’

His ironical tone and incontrovertible logic infuriated Dick.

‘Damnation !’ he roared ; ‘why can’t you let me go my own way ? I know my friends better than you do, I should hope !’

‘I hope so too,’ replied the lawyer, offended in his turn. ‘I will leave you to your own way, as you desire, and hope to hear no more of this business. I beg you to notice that I do not know where your friends live ; I did not even catch their names ; and

I understand that the whole affair is a practical joke. I wish you may live long to laugh at it.'

He took up his hat and bag and left the room ; Dick heard the front door bang heavily behind him, then made a quick gesture of defiance, and sat down at his desk to write to Colonel de Montaut.

CHAPTER IX

DICK'S letter to the colonel was soon written. It was not very coherent, but it was unmistakably honest, and its meaning was clear as the day ; moreover, it ended with a promise to call on the following morning and complete the explanation by word of mouth. It only remained for Dick to make sure that it was received and read that evening, and then his mind would be at ease.

He put it accordingly in his pocket, and walked to Bedford Square. It was growing rapidly dark, but lights were only just beginning to appear in most of the houses. In No. 23 the shutters of the dining-room windows were not yet fastened, but the blinds had been already drawn down.

The bright lights inside threw upon one of them the shadow of a man who was evidently sitting at the near end of the room ; his left arm was thrown over the back of his chair, and its image was partly merged in the darkness which represented the latter ; his head was in full profile, and bent downwards in an attitude of deep thought. He was probably at some little distance from the table, upon which the

lights behind him were placed, for the shadow thrown upon the blind was sharp in outline and scarcely more than life-size.

The figure was in fact recognisable beyond a doubt as that of Colonel de Montaut himself, and Dick, as he stood upon the doorstep, was almost startled at seeing him apparently so close.

At the same time he saw that he had here a good chance of ascertaining at once that his letter was safely delivered. He dropped it into the box and rang the bell, intending to retreat a few steps across the road so as to be out of sight himself while still keeping the window in view.

A sudden movement of the shadow stopped him. The colonel had caught the sound of the bell and had disappeared from the room with astonishing rapidity ; one might almost have thought he had been waiting for the signal.

Dick heard a quick stealthy tread approach the door on the inside ; the letter was snatched from the box in an instant, and when he looked at the window again there was the shadow once more in its former position, but with both hands raised, as if in the act of holding up a paper to read.

And now another step was heard coming towards the door ; it was, no doubt, that of a servant answering the bell. The shadow figure hastily lowered its hands, and the letter disappeared ; the servant at the same moment stopped suddenly and went into the dining-room, to which, no doubt, his master's voice had summoned him.

The conversation which followed was inaudible to Dick. Had it been otherwise, the colonel's labour

would have been worse than lost, and of this story there might have been little or nothing left to tell. Between understanding and misunderstanding, between the light within and the darkness without, there was but a pane of glass ; but it was enough, and Dick remained in the outer darkness.

He was for the present satisfied ; the colonel had read his note, and to-morrow would set all to rights.

Alas for Dick ! this hope was but a shadow too. The truth, which in this deceptive light cast so false an image of itself, may be guessed from what was actually passing inside the house as he turned away to go home.

‘It was I who rang,’ the colonel was saying to his servant.

The man apologised for mistaking between the two bells.

‘Go up to Madame de Montaut,’ continued his master, ‘and tell her that Captain Estcourt is coming here in about half-an-hour. Ask whether she wishes us to come to the drawing-room, or would rather not be disturbed.’

The man took the message at once. When she heard it, Camilla’s heart hardened. She was angered at the idea of Dick’s callousness in coming so soon to discuss the details of his treason, and what she had said to her brother-in-law she still meant very decidedly. She would not work in league with a traitor such as she supposed Estcourt to be.

‘Tell M. de Montaut,’ she replied to the servant in her iciest tones, ‘that I prefer to be alone this

evening. And remember yourself that from this moment until we leave London, I am not at home to anyone.'

'Very well, madame,' said the man, and added hesitatingly, 'but if Captain Estcourt should ask for madame——?'

'I am not at home to anyone,' she repeated with deliberate emphasis. 'And particularly not to Captain Estcourt.'

He bowed, and returned to report to the colonel, who seemed neither surprised nor dissatisfied at hearing what Camilla's answer had been.

'Very well,' he said, 'then I too am not at home to Captain Estcourt.'

Dick, in the meantime, was on his homeward way. The further he went the more impatient he became for the night to be over and the present uncomfortable state of things ended. He had no doubt that everything would be right to-morrow; he would explain to the colonel that the whole affair was a mistake, for which M. de Montaut himself was chiefly to blame; and as to Camilla—well, he hoped and believed that she knew nothing of the matter, but if she had thoughtlessly been led into expecting help from him, it must have been from not fully understanding his duty and position as an English officer. A moment's talk would show her that his honour was involved, and he would certainly win her approval of the line he had taken.

He went over this ground again and again, and longed for the explanation to be done with, that he might be free to forget himself once more in the enjoyment of her society. How long it seemed

since they parted ! What an age since their delightful meeting this morning ! That absurd but annoying interview with old Wickerby had come between, and all this worry about the colonel's preposterous invitation.

However, by this time the colonel, at any rate, was undeceived. Probably he had accepted the rejection of his proposals in good part, and in spite of all would welcome Dick again as a friend to-morrow morning.

To-morrow. Why not to-night ? It was now some time, some considerable time, since he had received and read the letter. Surely by this he had got over his disappointment—if he had really had any such feeling. Now was the opportune moment for a visit ; in the morning there would be the chance of going too early to see Camilla, or too late to find her in. To-night she was certain to be at home.

This last reflection decided Dick. He left his rooms again, and walked quickly to Bedford Square. He reached the doorstep flushed and breathless, and rang the bell. It was exactly half-an-hour, to the minute, since he had turned away to go home after seeing the shadow on the blind.

The servant appeared.

'Is Madame de Montaut at home ?' asked Dick, stepping forward to enter as he spoke.

'Not at home, sir.'

'Colonel de Montaut then ?' said Dick.

'Not at home, sir,' repeated the man in the same formal tone.

'Thank you. I'll call to-morrow,' stammered

Dick in utter astonishment, and he turned mechanically away.

The footman nodded after him, and grinned maliciously. Then he closed the door and went to report to his master. M. de Montaut took out his watch.

'Very good,' he said; 'don't forget again to-morrow,' and then as the man left the room, the colonel too smiled with secret satisfaction.

'My poor friend,' he murmured gently, 'my poor young friend, does not know Captain Estcourt as well as I do. He says, "to-morrow," I say "in half-an-hour," and here he is again in twenty-nine minutes!'

He rose and went to the table, took up his half-empty glass, and raised it to the light.

'As for a rebuff or two at the door,' he continued, with the same noiseless laugh, 'my poor young friend must not mind that. We shall all meet again before long! Au revoir donc!' and he tossed off the wine and went upstairs.

That night Dick slept uneasily, and it was late in the morning when he awoke. However, by half-past ten he was again in Bedford Square, and rang the bell with an outward appearance of calmness, though his heart was beating fast within.

The same footman came to the door.

'Is Madame de Montaut in?' Dick asked.

'Not at home, sir.'

'Has she gone out this morning already?'

'Madame de Montaut is not at home, sir,' repeated the man in the same invariable formula.

Dick thought he detected impertinence in his voice, and flushed indignantly.

‘What do you mean?’ he said.

‘Those are my orders, sir.’

‘Did you tell Madame de Montaut that I was intending to call upon her?’ Dick asked this in a still more peremptory tone.

‘Certainly, sir.’

‘Well, and what did she say?’

‘She said that she was not at home.’

‘Not at home to me?’ said Dick, choking with rage at the man’s growing insolence of manner.

‘Particularly not at home to you,’ replied the footman, calmly closing the door in his face.

Dick stood for a moment petrified with anger and dismay; then with an effort he roused himself, and walked steadily away, but with a terrible pain gripping at his heart the while. Not that he could yet believe any serious harm to have been done; his reason told him that Camilla was merely mistaken, and that it still needed but a few words from him to change her disappointment into sympathy, but his feelings were sharply hurt, and would not let him hear the voice of reason without interruption. It was so cruel to inflict upon him, even under a mistake or a natural sense of disappointment, a humiliation such as he had just suffered at the hands of a servant.

He reached his rooms again, and stayed there some time, brooding miserably over the tangle in which he had become involved, without, so far as he could see, any definite fault on his own part. But his natural modesty and frankness of character soon took away this grievance; he thought he must have been in some way to blame himself, and he was hap-

pier for so thinking. He accused himself of culpable blindness ; in his absorbing study of Camilla and his own position in her thoughts, he had allowed to pass without comment hints that for all he knew might have been of the broadest and most compromising. He had by his carelessness or stupidity raised hopes in her mind which he must now appear to be dishonourably betraying. Her whole heart was in this cause, and she must feel his defection more keenly than an ingratitude personal only to herself.

To the colonel, as distinguished from her, he did not give a thought : if he had done so, he would hardly have treated him with the same leniency, for he had been unable from the first moment to think it possible for him to be genuinely mistaken as to the duty of an English officer. A woman might be excused for not thinking of such considerations, but to a man, and especially to a soldier, they should have appealed at once and with unanswerable force.

While he was occupied with these reflections a friend chanced to come in. He stayed some time, and when he left, Dick had to begin all over again from the beginning. His train of thought was nearly the same as before, and led him to the same conclusion.

He decided that he must see Camilla at once : he would write a note begging for an interview, insist on its being delivered to her while he waited, and if absolutely necessary, make his way to her presence in defiance of this insolent servant.

In twenty minutes after coming to this resolution, he appeared for the third time upon the doorstep of the house in Bedford Square, with the note

in his hand, and a look of determination upon his face.

This time the door was open, and some men were carrying out heavy packages to a waggon that stood before the house; the cook was standing by with arms akimbo, superintending the work. She was a stout person with a red good-humoured face, and she looked upon Dick with an eye of kindly commiseration, for she had heard in the servants' hall of his present turn of ill-fortune, and thought her mistress unaccountably hard upon so handsome and pleasant-spoken a gentleman.

So she came out to the door, and bade him good-afternoon with an affable smile.

'If you're looking for madame or the colonel, sir,' she said, 'I'm afraid you've come too late.'

Dick's heart stood still. 'Too late?' he said in a faltering voice.

'Yes, sir, I'm afraid so: they've been gone more than an hour.'

'Gone?' he echoed, 'where have they gone?'

'Ah, sir, that's more than I know myself, and we've all had strict orders not to say if we do happen to know.'

Dick's face fell so hopelessly at this that she was moved to pity him afresh.

'I'm sure I'm sorry, sir; and I don't know what some folks mean by the way they go off of a sudden and never a word to their best friends. There's Albert now.' . . . But seeing Dick frown impatiently, she left the history of Albert's delinquency and returned to the subject in hand. 'I may be doing wrong, sir,' she said, 'because I've my orders the

same as the rest, but if I was you I'd turn over some o' them packages in the cart, and see where they're going to.'

Dick turned quickly round to the waggon, which was already half loaded. He examined package after package, but all were unlabelled; the men were coming out again with a fresh load, but that, too, had no direction upon it. In fact, as all the luggage was bound, no doubt, for one and the same destination, it was unnecessary that it should be addressed.

Still there was one person—the driver of the waggon—to whom the secret must have been confided, and Dick determined to get it from him by bribery or force. He thought it best, however, to wait until he was out of the town and alone upon the road for this purpose. So he waited about the square until the baggage started on its way, and then set off to follow it on foot. It was not difficult to keep up at first, for the pace at which it went was slow. But out of this another disadvantage arose. It would evidently take a long time before a part of the road was reached sufficiently lonely to put the driver completely in Dick's power in case he should refuse to be bribed; vehicles of all kinds were passing in both directions, and precious time was being lost.

He resolved to make an attempt at once, risking all on persuasion and the power of gold. He overtook the waggon and asked the driver to give him a lift for a mile or two.

The man readily assented, and Dick was no sooner up beside him than the horses doubled their pace. He was a little surprised at this, but he would have

been much more so if he could have known that the waggoner had been holding in his team all this time, with the express object of taking him up, and would, in a few minutes more, have been driven to make the offer himself if Dick had not come forward.

The colonel had foreseen that this man, who could alone give any clue to the direction of the de Montauts' flight, must sooner or later be run down and questioned by Dick, and he therefore used him as the surest agent for decoying the latter along the way he wished him to take.

The man followed his instructions well, and Dick found it impossible to get more out of him than an admission that he was going that day as far as Guildford. It was at any rate something to know this, and Dick resolved to go to Guildford too.

With this object he patiently endured some time the joltings of the waggon, but when the coach passed he was glad to stop it and secure a more comfortable seat and a quicker journey for the remainder of the way. He intended to lie in wait for the waggoner on his arrival in Guildford, and, if necessary, to travel with him again on the following day.

The coach stopped in front of the White Lion in Guildford High Street. Dick dismounted, and began to question the ostler to find out if the de Montauts had passed through or were staying in the town. He was unsuccessful in his inquiries, and was about to turn away disappointed, when he heard someone asking for him by name.

He looked round and saw a man on horseback with a small valise in front of him upon the saddle.

‘ Did I hear you inquire for me ? ’ he asked.

‘ Captain Estcourt, sir ? ’ said the man, touching his cap.

‘ That’s right, ’ said Dick ; ‘ what is it ? ’

The man dismounted from his horse, which was covered with foam and dust. He lifted the valise down, and took a letter from the saddle-bag.

‘ That is for you, sir, ’ he said, and handed it to Dick, who opened it in as leisurely a fashion as if he knew its contents already, and betrayed not a sign of the tempest of wonder and excitement that was raging within him.

The letter was written in a formal clerk’s hand, dated from the Admiralty, and signed with a hieroglyph which was no doubt the autograph of some high official. It ran as follows :—

‘ Dear Sir,—The “ Volunteer ” has brought intelligence that His Majesty’s ship “ Niobe,” 74, has put into the Cape of Good Hope to refit. She has lost her captain and first lieutenant overboard in a gale, and is reported severely damaged and short of all stores. The brig “ Speedwell ” has been loaded with the necessary material, and will take out an officer to bring the “ Niobe ” home. Captain Truscott, to whom this commission was offered, is at the last moment unable to sail. If you are in a position to take his place, you will be good enough to start immediately for Mount’s Bay, where the “ Speedwell ” was to put in on Thursday next. You will be carried as a free passenger to the Cape, where you will take over command of the “ Niobe ; ” and for this purpose the present letter shall be a good and suffi-

cient authority to the officer now in charge to hand her over to you.

‘In the event of your being unavoidably prevented from accepting, you will be good enough to re-address and forward this letter to Captain Anderson at Portsmouth without delay.’

Dick read without understanding anything beyond the general purport of the letter, but he grasped clearly enough that Camilla was lost to him for many months at least.

For this was a commission not to be refused. Not only had he given his word to her, as we have seen before; but duty too called upon him now with a claim no less binding than that of loyalty to his promise. If he had been ready last time to accept an offer of promotion, how much more was he bound to step forward now when the service really needed him in an emergency.

He might well have reflected also that to hang back from this work would be to ruin his career irretrievably. For in those days of keen rivalry for employment on active service, a much smaller cause was often a welcome excuse for striking one more name off the list of competitors.

But the idea really never entered his head. He wanted, and he must go.

He roused himself to consider ways and means at once, and his eye fell upon the valise, which the messenger was still holding in his hand.

To his surprise he recognised it as his own.

‘Where did you get this?’ he asked.

‘From your house, sir,’ replied the man; ‘there’s

a uniform and a few things in it his lordship thought you might want, as you wouldn't have time to go back to town.'

'His lordship? whom do you mean?'

'It was Lord Glamorgan, sir, that gave me the letter.'

'Ah! that explains it!' exclaimed Dick, 'but how did Lord Glamorgan or you know where I had gone?'

'His lordship sent me to your house, sir, and they sent me on to Number 23, Bedford Square.'

'And they told you there?'

'Yes, sir; they said you'd gone off after a waggon on the road to Guildford.'

'Very well,' said Dick, 'now you had better go and bait your horse. Come to me in the parlour when you're ready to go back, and I'll give you an answer for Lord Glamorgan.'

Half-an-hour afterwards the man knocked at the door of the room where Dick was writing his acceptance to the Admiralty, and his thanks to his patron for this second piece of cruel kindness. He handed them to the messenger with a liberal *pour-boire*, and rang the bell to make arrangements for continuing his own journey.

While he was talking to the host a clatter of hoofs was heard outside the window.

'There goes my man,' thought Dick; 'he's a hot rider it seems. I wish to heaven he had broken his neck on the way here!'

He did not notice that the clatter died away down the street instead of up it; and he was therefore far from suspecting that the messenger was

galloping hard to deliver his letters, not to the Admiralty or to Lord Glamorgan, but to the colonel, at Southampton dock.

CHAPTER X

DICK had a long and hurried journey before him, and he made preparations accordingly for starting in good time on the following morning. He also tried once more to find out from the driver of the waggon where the de Montauts' baggage was to be delivered ; but the man, though assured that Dick himself had no longer the time to follow him, stoutly refused to give any further answer, and by daybreak next morning he had disappeared, waggon and all, without giving anyone a clue to his destination.

When he discovered this, Dick's heart sank ; he had lost his last link with Camilla, his last chance of hearing of her again before he left England ; and though to learn where she was would have been of little use to him, since he could not possibly go to her, still the knowledge would have saved him at any rate from the cold, blank feeling of darkness and solitude which now enveloped him.

The three days of travelling passed drearily by ; with every mile the happy past was left more irrecoverably behind, and still the future was formless and impenetrable. When the third day came he realised finally that his old life was dead ; buried it with uncomplaining sadness, and turned away to wonder what was coming.

The sun was setting as he left Helston for the

last stage of his journey ; when he came in sight of Mount's Bay there was but one golden bar left in the western sky. Gradually this too faded, and a grey misty twilight began to creep over the bay. St. Michael's Mount loomed in sight, weird as the enchanted castles of fairyland ; in the highest turret glimmered a single light, making the mist more drear and the silence yet more desolate.

The opposite shore was wrapped in darkness, but on the broad water between twinkled here and there tiny restless sparks that Dick knew for the lanterns of the ships at anchor. One of them doubtless was the fate that he must follow ; will-o'-the-wisp or guiding-star, there it gleamed among the rest, with the dim shivering night around and the fathomless sea beneath.

A mile or two more, and they came rattling into the streets of Penzance, and Dick awoke from his reverie. He inquired for the 'Speedwell,' and found that she was lying out towards Newlyn, and was to sail at daybreak.

Her captain had been ashore that afternoon, looking out for a passenger who had been expected by the coach an hour before.

Dick engaged a boat and ordered supper at once ; by ten o'clock he was alongside the brig, and half an hour later fast asleep in his berth, forgetting for the present all journeys whether by land or sea.

He awoke next morning to find the ship already on her way. The captain was waiting for him on deck ; a grey, wrinkled man with a short grizzled beard and a somewhat slouching air about him, Dick thought. He was disappointed, for he had hoped

to find a more congenial companion for the two months or more that lay before him. But he must make the best of the man, whatever he was, and so came up to greet him with goodwill.

‘I’m your passenger,’ he said, ‘and I ought to have reported myself last night, but they told me you were busy, and I was too tired to wait. My name is Estcourt, captain of His Majesty’s ship “Niobe,” when you bring me to her.’

‘Ay, ay,’ replied the other, ‘I was in the service myself once, but I wasn’t called Worsley then.’

‘Indeed!’ said Dick, and stopped embarrassed.

The captain was apparently troubled by no such feeling, and went on.

‘I was broke for a trifle,’ he said; ‘a young man’s folly. But I don’t know that I’ve been much the worse. It’s a hard service—the king’s—you make no money in it, and glory’s a thing I never took much account of.’

Dick had nothing to say to this; the words seemed to him contemptible, but the easy indifference with which this disreputable old man uttered them, inclined him rather to amused tolerance than indignation.

So he changed the subject.

‘Where shall I breakfast?’ he asked.

‘With me,’ said the captain. ‘You’ll find me pretty snug below, and that’s the main thing in this world, eh? I don’t care how many trips I make in the “Speedwell,” if I’m always as comfortable and as well paid.’

Dick could hardly say that he hoped never to make another voyage in the brig, or that he already

wished this one over ; but both thoughts came distinctly into his mind.

‘It was a stroke o’ luck,’ continued his garrulous companion, ‘just a stroke o’ luck. I’d had nothing to do for long enough, and was getting a bit down ; and then suddenly my lords find themselves short of a hand, and come running to me, cap off, and money down on the nail.’

‘That’s pretty much what happened to me,’ said Dick ; ‘they were in a hurry, and the man before me failed them at the last moment.’

‘Ay, ay,’ replied the captain, ‘they must have been in a hurry too, or they’d never have come down to an old dog like me and such a ramshackle crew, to carry His Majesty’s stores, let alone His Majesty’s officers,’ he added with an affable grin.

‘Oh !’ said Dick, ‘what sort of fellows have you got on board then ?’

‘All sorts,’ answered the captain, ‘and more than that. There’s English Jacks and French Johnnies, and a couple o’ Spaniards and a nigger ; I never saw such a first-to-hand lot in my life. They’re willing enough, you know, but it’s the rummest crew to be working a navy ship.’

‘The brig herself looks to be fast and well found,’ said Dick, with an approving eye on the white canvas bellying aloft.

‘Oh, she’s well enough,’ replied the captain carelessly ; ‘there’s better and there’s worse, no doubt. Let’s go down to breakfast ;’ and he led the way below.

Dick followed in silence ; this time he was not amused, but wholly disgusted. A man may think

poorly of himself, but he has no business—if he is a sailor—to think poorly of his ship. Whatever she may be, from a three-decker to a sloop, from a cock-boat to a full-rigged ship, every vessel is to every right-minded man aboard her, the tautest and the prettiest craft afloat. But to her unworthy captain, the ‘Speedwell,’ with her curved sides and slender masts, with the rainbow flashing from her cut-water, and her canvas towering like mounds of white summer cloud into the sky, was nothing more than a means of making easy gains and living ‘snug’ the while in contented degradation.

This view, openly expressed, and continually repeated by chance words and gestures, was a source of annoyance and irritation to Dick as long as it was novel to him. After he had got used to his quarters and his company, he was more and more able to dismiss both the one and the other from his mind, and to spend his time alone with his own thoughts.

These were by no means as gloomy as might have been expected ; the sun-light and sea-air, the familiar motion of the ship, and the work on board, in which he now and then took an active part, all combined to produce in him a keen sense of health and energy that no trouble of the mind could entirely blunt. Moreover, his conscience was as clear as his eye was bright, and he was strong enough to feel that to have missed happiness did not make honour less worth winning.

So the days went by, for the most part in cheerful content ; only now and then his brow clouded when they spoke a passing ship, and answered the cheers

and waving signals of English men and women homeward-bound.

Sometimes he was even happy for an hour, for the water he sailed was no obscure or unknown sea. From Corunna to Cadiz there are names and memories upon its shores that might have stirred the very ship herself, as she swept past them with the flag of empire rippling at her masthead.

On the ninth day they passed St. Vincent ; the sun was setting, and the crags of the Cape were sharply relieved against the opposite horizon, all aglow with answering fire. Far beyond them, lost in the vast glimmering distance towards the east, lay a yet more famous headland, and Dick, as he leaned over the bulwarks and vainly strained his eyes towards Trafalgar, felt his breath quicken with a great inspiration and his hands clench with the fighting instinct of his race.

But now the 'Speedwell' left the coasts of Europe and passed on southwards into the region of the islands. The ordinary route to the Cape lies outside these groups, the Azores being the only stopping point on the voyage for most English vessels. Estcourt, seeing that the brig stood into the east and took a more direct line, concluded at once that she was to touch at Madeira or the Canary Isles.

'No,' said the captain when he hazarded this conjecture ; 'I wish we could put into Funchal or Santa Cruz. They're both pleasant places when you've a day or two to spare, but my orders are to sail straight for Boavista in the Cape Verd Islands ; there's some passengers to come aboard there.'

'Passengers ?' cried Dick in astonishment.

‘Oh, they won’t trouble us long,’ said the captain; ‘they go off again at Ascension. I suppose they’re going about looking after the Government colonies in these parts. When we’re rid of them, we shall have a clear run to the Cape.’

Dick felt by no means so anxious about their departure; he was pleased to think that he would for some days, at any rate, have the monotony of his voyage enlivened by new companions, and he began to look forward eagerly to the moment when he would no longer be alone at every meal with old Worsley and his flow of demoralised conversation.

A few days more, and Madeira was left on the starboard quarter; they passed through the Canaries between Teneriffe and Grand Canary, and on April 15th came at last in sight of Boavista, and dropped anchor towards evening in the roads on the north-west of the island.

Within a quarter of a mile of them lay a large merchant vessel with English colours at the top, and Dick was not long in getting a boat lowered and rowing off to visit her. She turned out to be the ‘Hamilton,’ from Southampton to Bahia; her captain greeted Dick cordially, but he was almost alone on board, all the passengers having gone ashore for the day, and half the crew being away in search of water. ‘I hear,’ said Dick, ‘that you’ve some passengers for us. Who are they?’

‘Madame Schultz and M. Frochard,’ replied the captain; ‘they’re Swiss colonists for Ascension—brother and sister—and there’s a Spanish seaman named Gildez who’s working out his passage to the Cape.’

‘I’m disappointed to hear that,’ said Dick. ‘I had hoped for one or two fellow-countrymen to talk to ; we’re deadly dull on the brig.’

‘Oh !’ said the captain of the ‘Hamilton,’ laughing, ‘you’ll be lively enough now. Frochard is a first-rate fellow for stories, and speaks English capitally ; and his sister’s a real beauty, if only she wouldn’t keep to herself so much.’

The boats were now seen putting off from the shore. When they came near to the ships one of them left the rest and steered for the ‘Speedwell.’

‘There go your passengers,’ said the captain to Dick ; ‘they said good-bye to me before leaving this morning, and now all that remains is for you to take their baggage over in your boat, if you’ll be so good.’

‘Certainly,’ replied Dick, ‘I’m ready as soon as it is loaded.’

‘Avast there !’ said the captain ; ‘we’re not so inhospitable as that. You must stay and meet the rest of our company at supper.’

The remainder of the passengers were just coming on board. Estcourt was introduced to them all in turn, and they sat down to supper soon afterwards. They were a very uninteresting lot ; chiefly Portuguese and English men of business, voyaging for mercantile houses with a South American connection. But the crowded table, the hum of conversation, and the continual laughter were a welcome change to Dick, and he delayed his departure till the last moment.

When he returned to his own ship he found that his new companions had already gone to their cabins ;

their baggage was carried down to them, and finding that they were not likely to appear again that night, Dick soon afterwards turned in himself.

He was already drowsy, when he became slowly conscious that he was listening to a noise which seemed to have been going on for an indefinite length of time.

It was the sound of two voices ; whether far off or near he could not tell, but as his half-awake sense took in the monotonous alternation of the tones, he was dimly aware of a strange familiarity with both.

It dawned upon him at last that one was Captain Worsley's voice ; but the other seemed still like a voice in a dream, utterly remote from the real world, and yet in a way even more real to him than that which preceded and followed it.

Over and over again he thought himself upon the point of remembrance, but he never quite reached it, and in a short time the bland soothing tones overcame him like a spell, and he fell into a dreamless sleep.

Whether it was long afterwards or not he could not tell, but he awoke again while it was still dark, and heard this time a more certain sound. A boat was clearly being lowered, and he recognised the splash of the oars as it left the ship's side. He must have slept again after that, for he knew nothing more until he heard the boat on its return strike the brig amidships with a dull jar. The smothered sound of an angry exclamation followed ; the men climbed on deck and drew up the boat. Dick was vaguely wondering whether he were awake or in a dream,

when all noise ceased, and once more deep oblivion fell upon him.

When he awoke next morning the mysterious noises of the night had passed entirely from his recollection. He hastened on deck, and found that he was the first to arrive there. It was a fresh breezy morning, and the brig was cutting the waves gallantly as she went southward in long tacks. Four or five miles away to starboard the 'Hamilton' was winging her way to the westward, the courses of the two vessels diverging more and with every minute. The islands lay like tiny clouds upon the horizon behind them, and the long, low coastline of Africa was visible to larboard under a rainy sky.

Dick took a careful survey, and began to prophesy to himself about the weather.

'Those who are expecting to-day to be the same as yesterday,' he murmured sententiously, 'will be probably a good deal——'

As he spoke, the words died away upon his lips and the torpor of helpless astonishment seized upon him. He could not turn his head, he could not move: but he heard behind him a voice that shook the inmost fibres of his soul. Whether it came from the sky or the sea, if he were mad or sane, living or dead, he knew not, but these were the lovely tones in which Camilla spoke, in the old times before he had to begin life anew.

The voice came nearer, and still he could not or dared not move. Then, suddenly, another voice answered—the strange familiar voice of the night before—he remembered it in a flash, and knew it for Colonel de Montaut's.

He turned swiftly and was face to face with them.

The colonel came towards him at once with outstretched hand, and with a cordial smile upon his face ; but Dick passed him and went forward to Camilla.

She stood still for a moment while he advanced, her cheeks flushing with sudden amazement and indignation ; then as he spoke her name and held out his hand, she turned to the colonel, with anger blazing in her eyes and trembling in her voice. 'I am going below,' she said, 'and I leave you, sir, to explain to this gentleman that I have not the honour of his acquaintance.'

CHAPTER XI

DICK set his teeth and turned without a word to the colonel for the explanation.

The colonel was not for a moment at a loss ; he had long been preparing for the present difficult situation, and now that he had the opportunity of dealing with Dick and Camilla separately, he was no longer doubtful of the result ; his last anxiety vanished with the haughty figure now disappearing beneath the companion hatch.

He linked his arm in Dick's with a friendly smile, and began to walk with him slowly up and down the deck in silence.

'My friend,' he said presently, 'my sister-in-law and you misunderstand each other ; you are both young, and youth is so intolerant of difference ! I

am older, and I understand you both ; I am less prejudiced, and can sympathise with each in turn. I am happy to be here, for I have no doubt,' he continued, 'that I shall be able to effect a speedy reconciliation.'

'But what is the matter ?' cried Dick ; 'I don't understand !'

'Precisely,' replied the colonel, 'nor does Madame de Montaut. You do not see why your very natural refusal to join our little plot should cause anyone surprise or pain. She, on the other hand, has never thought of the difficulty of it from your point of view. She supposed you to have accepted, and was therefore sharply disappointed at finding that we must do without you after all.'

'Yes, yes !' cried Dick, 'I know all about that mistake. Of course you all thought I had accepted when I came to Russell Street that unlucky morning ; but how could you, how could she, think me for a moment capable of doing such a thing ? That's what hurts.'

'My dear Estcourt,' answered the colonel with a deprecatory smile, 'you mustn't be too hard on us. I confess I ought to have known better, but I was hard put to it ; as for Madame de Montaut, she never understood the question. I fear the line I took may have been the cause, for she trusts me perhaps more implicitly than she ought to do,' and the colonel shook his grey head with a very becoming modesty. 'And then you must remember,' he continued, 'that she knew you were friendly with Lord Glamorgan and other members of the Opposition, who profess to desire nothing so much as the Em-

peror's liberation. I suppose their speeches are but counsels of perfection, and not intended to be taken literally, but that is one of the things we in France can never understand about you English. We are the slaves of logic, and cannot comprehend how a man can preach gravely what he would think it wrong for himself or anyone else to put into practice.'

Dick was vanquished ; and indeed he wished no better fate. His heart warmed gratefully as he listened to this ingenious defence of Camilla for a crime she had never committed ; he forgave her freely for the humiliations she had heaped upon him ; he inwardly did penance for so unworthily misjudging her, and he would have embraced the colonel on the spot if he had been of a less restrained and undemonstrative habit, for he was strongly moved beneath the surface.

His companion was still talking at his side in the same smooth strain, but he did not listen ; he was lost in a foretaste of the delightful days to come, and was only brought to himself by the sudden recollection that they would be fewer than he had been allowing himself to reckon. He turned round upon the colonel.

'Why must you leave us so soon ?' he asked abruptly.

The colonel was staggered for a moment.

'So soon ?' he said ; 'so soon as what ?'

'The captain said you were only going as far as Ascension.'

'Ah, yes,' said the colonel, recovering himself, 'Ascension ; yes, that's all.'

‘You can’t be meaning to stay on such a desert island,’ said Dick, a-tremble with hope. ‘I suppose we can wait while you do your business there and take you on to the Cape afterwards?’

‘Thank you,’ replied the colonel, giving him a meaning look; ‘but we cannot afford to go quite so far as the Cape, though I confess to you in confidence that we do not intend to stay longer than we can help at Ascension.’

Dick reflected, and in a moment or two he had comprehended the meaning of this remark. About half-way in a direct line between Ascension and the Cape lies the island of St. Helena: that of course was the de Montauts’ real destination. He understood now why they had sailed in the ‘Hamilton’ under false names. He saw, too, that he must abandon all hope of prolonging the time of their companionship with him, for the ‘Speedwell’ could not land the conspirators at St. Helena without becoming in some degree their accomplice. As for himself, he already knew more than he wished to know. Clearly the colonel was in the right, and on all accounts he must carefully avoid any reference to this dangerous subject.

M. de Montaut was watching him all this time, and read his face like an open book.

‘Now then,’ he said at last, ‘I am going down to speak to my sister-in-law. I think you had better wait for me up here, if you don’t mind.’

Dick willingly assented, and the colonel left him to pace the deck alone, while he went off to attempt the second and more difficult part of his mediation.

‘Ah!’ he murmured to himself as he made his

way below, 'it is easy enough to persuade a man of anything, more especially if it's not the truth; but Camilla is unfortunately not a man. Never mind,' he added, as he knocked at her door, 'she must persuade herself, that's all,' and he entered the cabin with as meek and helpless an expression as he could manage to put on.

Camilla was in a state of feverish agitation; she attacked him at once.

'Well,' she cried, 'and what does this mean, sir?'

The colonel hung his head.

'Did I not tell you,' she continued, 'that if Captain Estcourt went with you I should stay behind?'

'I thought perhaps you might think better of it.'

'Do I generally threaten what I do not mean to carry out?' she retorted. To this he made no answer, and his silence suggested, as it was intended to do, that it was now rather late in the day for the fulfilment of this particular threat.

'Do you not see,' she went on, 'into what a position your foolish obstinacy has entrapped me?'

'I am very sorry,' murmured the colonel.

'It is infamous of you,' she cried. 'Here we are, with our enterprise already launched; for me to turn back now would be to forfeit my share in the glory of success: to send him away would be to ruin all.'

'I'm afraid it would,' said the colonel in a tone of discouragement; and he looked about him frowning, as if perplexed at the difficulty of the dilemma.

Camilla's indignation was by this time beginning to exhaust itself: to hammer so abject an opponent

was merely beating the air, and of that the strongest fighter soon wearies.

‘What am I to do?’ she cried in despair.

‘Couldn’t you go on as you are doing?’ he suggested.

‘What? live for a fortnight cooped up here with a man whom I’ve insulted to his face?’

‘It’s not your fault,’ he replied; ‘he brought it on himself.’

‘No, no! he did not!’ she answered hotly. ‘It was your doing from the beginning.’

‘I asked him to come, I admit,’ said the colonel, ‘but he shouldn’t have accepted.’

‘How can you?’ she exclaimed, ‘how dare you compare his share in it with your own? You were the tempter, you were the suggester of evil: his conduct in yielding may seem strange to us, but we cannot tell what good reasons he may have had for taking a less severe view of his duty in this instance. He belongs to a party which has long favoured the Emperor’s release; he was no longer actually employed by the English Government, which has treated him with ingratitude; he was chivalrously devoted to us, his friends, and there may have been other reasons. I could wish that he had acted differently, but I will not hear you blame him.’

The colonel hugged himself in secret: it was an exquisite pleasure to hear his own sophistries arrayed against him and to see them working out his own purpose after all. Some gleam of satisfaction must have twinkled from a crevice in his assumed stolidity, for Camilla stopped, as if partly conscious of something inconsistent in her argument.

‘Don’t misunderstand me,’ she cried ; ‘I do not take back anything of what I said.’ He interrupted her.

‘Of course not,’ he said ; ‘I was waiting to remind you that as we are to touch at Ascension you have still a free choice ; we could easily land you there for a fortnight and take you off again on our return from St. Helena. You would lose none of the credit of the undertaking, and you would still share the Emperor’s triumphal return to Europe.’

‘I will consider that,’ she replied, ‘before we reach Ascension, but it was not what I was thinking of. What I meant to tell you was that in any case I refuse to have Captain Estcourt forced upon me as a colleague. I decline to recognise him in that position, and you may tell him that if he and I are to meet, it must be on other ground, and expressly on condition that the object of this voyage is never mentioned.’

The colonel sighed, not, as she supposed, with resignation, but with relief and perfect satisfaction.

‘I will go to him at once,’ he said, and left the cabin, still dejected and submissive in appearance.

As he climbed the companion ladder, however, his demeanour underwent a complete change, and it was with a beaming face that he emerged upon the deck, where Estcourt was anxiously awaiting his return.

‘It is all right,’ he said cordially ; ‘I knew it would be. She has quite got the better of her disappointment, and is sorry for having hurt your feelings just now. Her indignation, it appears, was not directed at you but at me, whom she blames severely

for having been the original cause of all this trouble. I confess it, but I assure you I was far from intending to estrange you from us.'

'Don't say another word!' cried Dick, seizing his hand and shaking it in a fervour of gratitude. 'I'm your debtor for the rest of my life; but now let me go to her at once.'

'Stay a moment,' said the colonel holding him by the sleeve; 'let me give you one last hint before you go. No wise man expects an apology from a woman under any circumstances.'

'Apology?' Dick broke in impatiently. 'Of course not!'

'Very well then,' continued his companion, 'that being so, it will prevent any possible awkwardness if you ignore the late regrettable incident altogether. And I may add that I know you would be consulting her own wishes if you refrained from mentioning the object of our voyage at all; the subject is not one with pleasant associations as between herself and you.'

Dick thought the colonel a model of judgment and kindness; he thanked him again hastily, and went below with a beating heart.

Camilla was in the saloon by herself; she flushed when he entered, but greeted him naturally, and without any reference to what had passed. While her hand lay in his she looked at him a little sadly, he fancied, as though a tinge of her first disappointment still remained: but that surely was natural enough, and needed only time to efface it from her memory. Meanwhile he had a fortnight—a whole age—of happiness before him.

The colonel, who had calculated with nicety the time he ought to allow them, now came discreetly in and suggested breakfast.

‘Certainly,’ said Dick ; ‘it is long past the time, but where’s Captain Worsley ?’

‘Oh,’ replied the colonel, ‘haven’t they told you ? He’s got a fever, and can’t leave his berth to-day.’

‘That’s rather sharp work,’ said Dick ; ‘he seemed all right when I left the ship yesterday.’

‘Yes,’ said the colonel, ‘there is a sudden kind of feverish attack which is not uncommon, I am told, in these latitudes. It took him quite suddenly, just as we came on board ; he was very queer, and kept me up late into the night talking in the most random manner. I thought you must have heard us,’ he added, with a quick searching glance at Dick.

‘I did hear you !’ replied the latter, ‘and that reminds me that I also heard, or fancied I heard, a boat put off in the middle of the night, and come aboard again some time later.’

‘Just so,’ said the colonel ; ‘that was what he and I were arguing about. I wanted some things I had forgotten fetched from the “Hamilton,” and Captain Worsley refused me a boat, but I got my own way at last with some difficulty.’ And having fired off this explanation, which he had had ready loaded and primed for some time past, he turned the conversation adroitly back to the ‘Hamilton,’ and the incidents of their voyage from England. When the meal was over, Dick remembered the captain again.

‘I can’t say I regret old Worsley’s temporary absence,’ he remarked, ‘for I prefer very much our

present party of three ; but I think I must go and see him, for the sake of civility.'

'I don't think I would if I were you,' said the colonel lightly ; 'he's still rather over-excitabile this morning, and he has apparently, for some absurd reason, taken a special dislike to you.'

Dick laughed. 'I'm not afraid of his tongue,' he said ; 'I'm shot-proof against marine gunnery,' and he went towards the door.

The colonel turned away and bit his moustache. He dared not insist further, for fear of arousing suspicion ; for, upon the face of it, what could it matter to him whether Dick went or not ? But in reality a good deal was at stake, and Dick's sudden resolve had taken him for once unprepared. So he sat still, and listened with desperate anxiety to hear what would follow.

The 'Speedwell's' construction between decks was not quite that of an ordinary brig. She was large, but, as was only reasonable in a ship carrying Government stores, she had no provision for a number of passengers, but was instead fitted with unusually ample quarters for the captain and three or four others. Thus, while the saloon was small, there were on each side of it three good cabins, or rather state-rooms, instead of the ordinary berths. On the starboard side Madame de Montaut, the colonel, and Dick were quartered ; on the opposite side were the captain's two rooms and the mate's cabin. A narrow passage was left on each side between these state-rooms and the saloon. The colonel, with his head against the wooden wall of the latter, could hear perfectly all that passed on the other side, and, in

fact, when Dick stood at the captain's door he was within a yard of him.

First he heard him knock—once, and again louder.

There was no answer. The colonel was rigid, but his eyes betrayed intense anxiety. Camilla had fortunately gone to her own cabin, and there was no one to observe his unconcealable agitation.

Dick knocked a third time. The colonel ground his teeth and drew in his breath.

A rattling noise followed. Instantly the tension of his limbs relaxed, and a look of relief spread over his face. Dick had tried the door and found it locked.

The colonel got up and wiped his brow. His secret was safe now, and he must get ready for another little scene in the comedy, which could not be long delayed.

Dick meanwhile was knocking again, and calling Captain Worsley by name.

Still there was no reply, and he began to fear that the unfortunate man had fainted, with no one at hand to look after him.

He turned to the mate's room. It was empty. He knocked more loudly yet upon the captain's door. Finally, he was about to rush away to find the mate on deck, when he caught the sound of someone moving about inside the room.

'Open, open!' he cried; 'why don't you open?'

The door swung inwards as he spoke. A strange man stepped quickly out. Then, as Dick drew back, he stooped and coolly locked the door behind him.

As he raised his head again, Dick stared at him

in amazement. It was not Captain Worsley, but Hernan Johnstone, the pilot of the 'Edgar' at Copenhagen!

CHAPTER XII

'JOHNSTONE!' cried Dick at last, 'what does this mean? How do you come to be here?'

'From the "Hamilton,"' replied the man; 'I'm working out to the Cape.'

'But they told me your name was Gildez.'

'So it was on the barque yonder. You see, my own's a bit too famous for general use. But here I'm among friends, and can fly what flag I please.'

'Among friends?' said Dick; 'what do you mean by that?'

'It seems I've an old acquaintance with you to begin with,' said Johnstone impudently, 'and then I've come a good way with Madame and the colonel.'

'Answer me,' said Dick, angrily, 'and remember your place!'

'So I do,' retorted the other; 'I'm captain of this ship for the time being.'

Estcourt was more astounded than ever, and indignant at the brazen face of the fellow. 'Come, my man,' he said sternly, 'your tongue's too loose; you'd best tell me the plain truth at once.'

'You've got it already,' replied Johnstone. 'I'm to sail the brig for Captain Worsley until he's on his legs again.'

‘By whose authority?’

‘His own; he’s an old friend o’ mine. We’ve made many a lucky voyage in company before now, and he knows there’s no crew afloat that I couldn’t handle.’

Dick looked at the herculean frame and fierce domineering face before him: he remembered how the boldness and force of the man had indelibly impressed him years ago at Copenhagen, and he felt that Worsley was amply justified in his opinion. And he reflected, too, that it mattered little to him who sailed the ‘Speedwell,’ so long as she was safely carried into port; in fact, of the two men he preferred Johnstone, for, though he was less respectful than Worsley, he was at any rate beyond comparison more active and courageous.

‘Well,’ he said at last in a mollified tone, ‘I dare-say you’ll make as good a captain as we need have; if you don’t, you’ll have me to reckon with, you know.’ And he was about to turn away, when he remembered that he had had no explanation yet of the locked cabin.

‘If you’ll be good enough to unlock that door,’ he said, ‘I’ll go in and pay Captain Worsley a visit.’

At this moment the colonel appeared in the passage.

‘And how is Captain Worsley getting on now?’ he asked as he came towards the other two.

‘That’s just what I want to find out for myself,’ replied Dick, and he held out his hand for the key.

Johnstone drew back a step, but seemed uncertain

whether to comply or not. The colonel, standing a little behind, frowned and shook his head over Dick's shoulder. Johnstone put the key back in his pocket.

'Excuse me, sir,' he said to Esteourt with more respect than he had yet shown, 'but I have strict orders to the contrary, and I daren't go against them.'

Before Dick could speak the colonel intervened.

'I think you told me,' he said to Johnstone, 'that Captain Worsley showed an unreasonable prejudice against Captain Esteourt in particular?'

'Yes, sir, he's very violent,' replied the man, 'and if he's thwarted while he's in this state I won't be answerable for the consequences. And just now he's sleeping heavily after his dose.'

Dick saw that it was of no use to press the matter further; there was something odd about the whole affair, but he was really very little interested in the patient or his case, and, having done enough for civility, was quite ready to turn away to the more attractive society of Camilla and her brother-in-law. But he had scarcely yet recovered from his surprise at meeting Johnstone again so unexpectedly after twenty years, and made a remark to that effect as he went up on deck with the colonel.

'Johnstone?' said M. de Montaut; 'what Johnstone?'

'Do you remember my talking to you of a man of that name—a famous smuggler—who volunteered to steer the ship on which I served at the battle of Copenhagen?'

'Ah, yes,' replied the colonel. 'I remember the

incident perfectly, but I had forgotten the man's name. But what do you mean,' he continued, 'by saying that you have met him again?'

'He is our new captain, the man we have just been speaking to.'

'Impossible!' exclaimed M. de Montaut; 'that was the Spanish sailor Gildez, who was in the "Hamilton" with us.'

'That's the man for all that,' replied Dick. 'I knew him at once, and he answered to his right name without question; the other was only assumed, for reasons best known to himself.'

'Really,' said the colonel, 'you cannot imagine how you interest me! I must have a good look at this romantic figure next time I see him.'

'And, perhaps,' said Dick, 'Madame de Montaut may also be interested to know that she is sailing under the auspices of so celebrated a captain.'

The colonel was here again in a difficulty which he had not foreseen. Camilla had, of course, known all about Johnstone for weeks past, and would not in the least understand Dick's surprise at finding him on board. Any conversation between them on this topic might lead to an explanation, and all explanations must be rigorously postponed until the moment arrived for the mine to be sprung once for all. Risks of this kind must be perpetually occurring; it was the colonel's business to keep eyes and ears incessantly open, and be ready, since he could not possibly foresee them all, to meet each one as the emergency arose. He was ready now.

'My dear Estcourt,' he said confidentially to Dick, 'if I were you I shouldn't enlighten her as to the

identity of this Johnstone with the hero of your story.'

'Why?' asked Dick in astonishment.

'Well, you may think me absurdly cautious, but it is only for your own sake if I am. You know how anxious I am for your success with Camilla.'

Dick grew hot with mingled embarrassment and gratitude.

'This man,' the colonel continued, 'once tried—as I think you yourself told us—to capture the Emperor by a desperate stratagem; my sister-in-law has had a particular horror of him ever since she heard this, for she thinks he must have been actuated by motives of personal malice: you know how her enthusiasm runs away with her. If she is not told, she probably will not think of connecting this man with that incident merely because of the name. In any case, if she is to learn of the identity, let it be through me, and not through you, from whom she might think the information in bad taste.'

'I don't quite see it,' said Dick, 'but, no doubt, you're right. I'd rather bite my tongue out than hurt her feelings, and I'm very grateful to you for the hint.'

'You see,' said the colonel in a paternal tone, 'I'm a good deal older than you, and perhaps I have a somewhat finer eye for these little difficulties.'

'Of course,' replied Dick humbly, 'I know I'm desperately clumsy; it is the best of good luck that you are at my elbow so often to put me straight.'

The colonel echoed this remark in the depths of his heart, and added a fervent hope that the best of good luck might continue for a few days longer.

Rain now began to fall heavily, and they were obliged to go below. The wind rose in gusty starts, sail after sail was reefed, and by the middle of the afternoon the brig was scudding along before the gale with her masts almost bare. She was at all times unusually fast, but she was now flying along at nearly half again her ordinary rate, and for six whole days she never relaxed her speed.

In spite of the rain and the spray which from time to time swept over her, Dick and Camilla spent a good part of every day on deck, keenly sympathising with each other in delight at the swift exhilarating motion of the vessel and the unchanging restlessness and grandeur of the waves over which she passed so lightly.

The colonel, being not so good a sailor, was seldom able to join them in their enjoyment of this storm-carnival. In spite, however, of their freedom from the restraint of his presence, they did not talk much to one another, but, in the midst of the vast and desolate loneliness around them, they crept, as it were, closer and closer together, and the steady rush of the salt wind swept away from their minds all perplexity about the past and all anxiety for the future. For a time—for a time at least, they were once more thoughtlessly happy, and the ship beneath them seemed to share their reckless joy as she alternately poised herself upon the ridgy crests, and shot from slope to slope of the green hills of the sea.

Of the rest of the company on board they took but little heed. The mate never came their way; the captain was reported still unable to stir outside his

cabin, where Dick, after one or two more ineffectual requests for admittance, was quite content to leave him. The colonel had struck up a considerable intimacy with Johnstone, whom he pronounced to be not nearly such a ruffian as he looked. When the ship's motion was not too violent he went on tours of inspection with the new captain, and was even found by Dick one morning alone in the hold, examining the cargo with incomprehensible energy and interest.

‘I can't think,’ said Estcourt, laughing, ‘what on earth you can find to amuse you in the sight of all these casks and cases.’

‘It is the thought of what they contain that fascinates me,’ replied the colonel, who was in a humorous mood.

‘What?’ cried Dick, ‘stores and fittings fascinate you? That's a dry taste!’

‘Ah!’ said M. de Montaut, ‘but I have the poet's vision; I look beyond the mere articles themselves to the results they may effect. These packing-cases, you say, are but necessaries for the refitting of your ship. I see more than that; from the parts I reconstruct the whole in imagination. I see, rising from these fragments, an entire vessel, with a fate of her own, and fraught with many destinies. Nay, who knows,’ he added with mock sententiousness, ‘but the ship that lies hidden in this despised cargo of yours may change the course of history!’

Dick laughed again. ‘My dear colonel,’ he said, ‘you see a good deal more than I do; I find it uncomfortably dark down here.’

‘Ah, that’s because I’m standing between you and the light,’ replied the colonel, taking up the lantern. ‘Come, let’s go upstairs again,’ and he led the way back to the middle deck.

During the night of the 22nd the wind fell to a steady breeze, and on the following morning they saw the sun again at last, standing over a headland that lay on the larboard quarter.

The colonel appeared at breakfast with a chart, and Dick, borrowing it from him, explained the position of the ‘Speedwell’ to Camilla.

‘Here,’ he said, putting his finger upon the map, ‘is the stretch of coast along which the wind and the Guinea current have been hurrying us so fast. Here is Cape Palmas, which we have just passed, and now we shall see no more of the shores of Africa. You see, we have been carried a little too far to the east already, and Ascension lies right below us in mid-ocean there.’

‘And how far is it?’ asked Camilla.

‘Twelve or thirteen hundred miles,’ said the colonel, who was also looking on with interest.

‘Hardly so much as that; I wish it were,’ said Dick, ‘but I am afraid eight or nine days at the outside will take us there.’

‘And from there,’ asked Camilla, still poring over the chart, ‘how far is it to St. Helena?’

‘I can’t say exactly; to the Cape it is about two thousand five hundred miles, but that is the straight course, by which you go some way outside St. Helena, and don’t even pass near enough to see the famous pigeons.’

‘What are they?’

‘Oh, they’re only a kind of pigeon peculiar to that island ; but they’re rather well known for their beauty and because they’re found nowhere else. They often come circling round a ship at an immense distance from the land, and the sailors catch them to take home to their friends, but they mostly die before the voyage is over.’

‘Have you ever seen them ?’ asked the colonel. ‘What are they like ?’

‘They’re small grey birds, very graceful and light on the wing, with bright pink legs, and a curious band of white under the eye.’

‘I suppose we shall see some of them at Ascension,’ said the colonel.

‘No,’ replied Camilla ; ‘didn’t you hear Captain Estcourt say that they are peculiar to St. Helena ?’

‘But surely they must have made their way across at some time or other ; the two islands are not so very far apart.’

‘It is curious,’ said Dick, ‘but I assure you that there are none to be found anywhere else. If I saw one of them, I should know to a certainty that I was off St. Helena, though the moment before I had been thinking myself in the Pacific or the North Sea.’

He rolled up the chart and returned it to the colonel, who went off with it to his own cabin, and did not reappear for some time.

Dick and Camilla went on deck, and enjoyed the sun and blue sky after so many dark days.

‘Do you know,’ she said, ‘that I did not always enjoy that perpetual rush of wind and rain ; and if I hadn’t seen that you were quite cheerful about it, I should have really been quite alarmed at times.’

Dick smiled. 'I was more timid than you, I expect ; I was by no means as cheerful as I looked.'

'Then there was danger ?' she asked.

'There was a lee shore, and there were nights in which we could see nothing.'

'Then how could the ship be steered ?'

'She couldn't ; she drove before the wind, which happily was in the right direction ; all the steersman could do was to stand to his helm and be always ready for a sudden danger.'

'What work !' she cried. 'Then it was really one man who saved us all ?'

'Oh no,' he answered, 'that's too much to say ; let's hope he would have saved us if he had had the chance.'

'How can you speak so lightly of him !' she exclaimed warmly. 'He is a hero, and I shall thank him myself !'

Dick was silent, and looked away.

Johnstone was passing near, and Camilla called to him.

'What is your steersman's name ?' she asked as he approached.

Dick had made some hasty excuse, and was gone in a moment.

'We've been taking the wheel in turns of late,' said Johnstone ; 'but on the worst nights Captain Estcourt wouldn't let her out of his own hands.'

She nodded and turned away ; Johnstone passed on with an approving shake of the head.

'My word !' he muttered, 'he would be a fool to stick at scruples now ; he'll be better paid than me by a long sight.'

As for Camilla, this episode brought to a decisive end the struggle which had been going on at intervals in her mind since she came on board the 'Speedwell.'

She was convinced, and glad to be convinced, that Dick was indeed the man she had thought him of old ; whatever had been his reasons for joining in this expedition, they were not, she felt certain, either weak fondness for herself or disloyalty to the colours under which he served.

With this conclusion, which was rather due to instinct than reasoning, and was but half consciously present to her mind, her old feelings towards him resumed their place, and the restraint which she had hitherto endeavoured to put upon them broke down completely ; she allowed herself to delight once more in his strong simplicity, the hearty abruptness of his speech and manner, and the sailorlike skill and patient courage of which his modesty took so small account.

Eight days passed in great content. The colonel troubled them with his society less than ever ; when he was not alone in his own cabin, he was generally in that of Captain Worsley, of whom he gave reports to the others twice a day.

It appeared that the medicines on board were insufficient ; the 'Speedwell' carried no surgeon, in spite of the twelve weeks' regulation, which expressly includes the Cape ; and the patient's condition was, therefore, unsatisfactory, and at times even critical.

Hearing this, Dick foresaw that the remainder of his voyage would probably be spent in the sole company of Johnstone, and he began to realise how quickly and how pleasantly the last two weeks had

flown. To-morrow, Camilla would leave the 'Speedwell,' and with her would go for the present all the sunshine of life. Happily, he had discovered that she had no intention of hiding herself again from him; she was evidently anticipating a meeting in the near future, though under what circumstances he had no means of guessing. To his great surprise, the next day passed without any sign of the island of Ascension coming in sight. He supposed that the brig had not been kept straight to her course, and in his heart thanked Johnstone for the bad navigation which had given him another day's happiness.

But when the 2nd and 3rd of May had come and gone, and still not a speck was visible upon the vast expanse of ocean around them, he took a more serious view of the matter, and thought it his duty to speak about it.

'Johnstone,' he said, when the others had retired for the night, 'have you taken your bearings to-day? Do you know where we are?'

'Yes, sir, within an easy day's sail of the island.'

'Then we shall have been twelve days coming a thousand miles; how's that?'

The other was silent.

'I told you,' Dick continued, 'that I should hold you answerable; now I give you warning that I'm not satisfied so far.'

'I'll warrant you'll be satisfied enough by this time to-morrow,' grumbled Johnstone in a low voice.

Estcourt turned away, pretending not to hear this remark, which, however, in the sense in which he took it, struck him as being a just enough retort.

That night the wind rose again, and the sky next morning was once more completely overcast ; about noon wet squalls began to strike the ship.

When the rain ceased for a time towards sunset, Johnstone came down to the saloon to tell them that the island was in sight.

Dick and Camilla went up together on deck.

‘There !’ he cried, as he stepped from the main-hatch, ‘she’s on the larboard bow ; I knew the fellow had gone wide of his course !’

And, in fact, the island, which should have lain before them to the right, was visible just upon the left-hand side of the line of the bowsprit.

Camilla scarcely heard his exclamation ; she was standing motionless, with one hand on the capstan to support herself, gazing aloft at a small flock of birds that were wheeling swiftly round and round the topmasts.

Dick turned to speak to her, and started to see the look of bewilderment upon her face ; he followed her glance upwards, and was even more amazed.

‘St. Helena !’ he murmured. ‘Great Heaven ! what can this mean ?’ And he ran downstairs to find Johnstone, shouting for him by his name.

The voice of M. de Montaut answered him from the captain’s cabin ; the door was ajar, and he stepped hastily in.

On one side stood Johnstone and the colonel ; on the other lay the captain’s berth ; it was empty.

‘Where is Worsley ?’ he cried in fresh astonishment.

Johnstone laughed ; the colonel held up his hand to rebuke him.

‘What does all this mean?’ Dick exclaimed. ‘We are at St. Helena!’

‘My dear Estcourt,’ said the colonel, ‘I have long owed you an explanation; if you will come into the saloon I shall be happy to give it you.’

CHAPTER XIII

DICK entered the saloon with an ominous foreboding that a struggle was at hand; he had but a dim and confused idea of the nature of the contest, but he felt instinctively that, since the colonel was to be his antagonist, he was likely to need all his courage and more than all his wits.

M. de Montaut followed close behind him, and after entering locked the door and put the key in his pocket. Dick took no heed of this action; it could not have been aimed at him, for in strength of body he was easily the other’s superior.

They sat down at the table opposite to one another. The colonel looked fixedly into his companion’s face; it was essential that he should realise exactly the mood with which he had to deal.

Dick fronted him with an uncompromising frown.

‘Well!’ he said, ‘your explanation, sir!’

The colonel took his gravest air of courtesy.

‘Some time ago,’ he began, ‘my sister-in-law and I found ourselves in need of a loyal friend. Chance threw you in our way. I esteemed, and she enthusiastically believed in you. After careful consideration I invited you to help us.’

‘And you had your answer,’ replied Dick shortly.

‘For the moment, yes ; and a great disappointment it was ; but fortune has now given us another opportunity, and we hope to be more successful this time in persuading you.’

‘Never !’ said Dick. ‘Is that all ?’ and he rose from his seat as if to close the conversation.

A noise was heard at the door ; Camilla was trying the handle.

‘Is M. de Montaut there ?’ she cried. ‘I must speak to him at once.’

‘Certainly,’ replied the colonel from within, ‘in five minutes’ time, if you will excuse us for so long ; we have matters of importance to discuss.’

She turned away towards her own cabin, and he began again, inviting Dick with a polite gesture to resume his seat at the table.

‘You may perhaps have overlooked the fact,’ he said, ‘but the situation is entirely changed since your letter of refusal was written. We were in safety there in London ; here, at St. Helena, we are in peril of our lives ; our train is fired, we must abide by the result ; if you fail us now we are ruined.’

Dick made an impatient gesture, but he sat on, and his face changed.

The colonel pressed his point.

‘For myself,’ he said, ‘I trust I may say that I am not afraid ; I have escaped from prison more than once, and at the worst I can face death. But the thought of Camilla’s fate is more than I can bear.’

He paused, and then went on in a low agitated voice :

‘My friend,’ he said, ‘have you ever seen a French convict-ship? I have; it is many years ago, but the recollection of those stifling cages, and the mass of scarcely human misery huddled behind the bars, is a nightmare with me to this day.’

Dick’s breath hissed inwards through his teeth.

‘Silence!’ he said sternly. ‘Not another word, or I strike!’

The colonel did not flinch.

‘Strike, and welcome,’ he replied, ‘if you think that will save her.’

‘No,’ said Dick, ‘nothing that I can do will save her; it would take the sacrifice of my honour, and that I cannot offer nor she accept.’

‘Your honour?’ said the colonel. ‘Surely it is too late to speak of that now?’

‘Why so? Why late?’

‘Because it has long been compromised beyond retrieving.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘My dear Estcourt,’ said the colonel in his most serious and reasonable tone, ‘I see that you don’t yet understand the gravity of your position. Let me put it briefly before you. You will remember that one day in March last I wrote a letter asking you to join in this expedition of ours, and naming a place of rendezvous in case of your assenting to my proposal. You kept that appointment, and were then and there introduced to your fellow-conspirators.’

‘Nonsense!’ interrupted Dick. ‘You know I wrote the same evening to explain that mistake.’

‘Indeed?’ replied the colonel coldly. ‘It is odd that my servant never brought the note to me.’

‘No!’ cried Dick, remembering the shadow on the blind in Bedford Square. ‘No, but I saw you take it from the letter-box yourself.’

‘Unfortunately,’ said the colonel. ‘I have no recollection whatever of doing so. If I ever did it, I feel sure that nothing will recall it to my mind, and as no one else seems to have known of the existence of the letter, I fear that this part of your argument breaks down for want of corroboration.’

‘No matter,’ retorted Dick triumphantly, ‘I can prove, for all that, that I never thought of accepting, for I didn’t get your letter until after I came back from Russell Street.’

‘Excuse me,’ said the colonel, ‘but your own servant has sworn that you opened it before eleven o’clock that morning.’

‘Sworn? My own servant? To whom?’

‘To me. She mentioned the matter when I called for you one day before leaving town, and told me that you had scolded her and quarrelled with your lawyer, Mr. Wickerby, about the seal of the letter, which she is certain you broke yourself.’

Dick was silent, and turned in his chair with an angry and impatient movement. He remembered too well the overwhelming manner in which Mr. Wickerby had marshalled the evidence against him that afternoon, and was staggered to find how fatal had been his contemptuous disregard of that worthy gentleman’s advice. Clearly the battle was going against him here, and he fell back upon his third line of defence.

‘What is the use,’ he cried, ‘of arguing about that? If the truth were known, I believe you broke

the seal yourself ; but what does it matter now ? The best proof that I scorned your treasonable offers is that I came away directly afterwards on business of another kind.'

'I see no evidence of that,' replied the colonel ; 'you sailed without us, it is true, but you rejoined us at Cape Verd, and have come with us to St. Helena.'

'Not of my own knowledge or free will. I sailed for the Cape, as every clerk in the Admiralty knows, and as this letter will show beyond dispute ;' and he took from his pocket the paper containing the instructions for his voyage, and held it up.

The colonel did not offer to read it. 'I am very much afraid,' he said, 'that that letter never saw the inside of the Admiralty ; and as for His Majesty's ship "Niobe," I know that she is in the Madras roads, sound from stem to stern, and with her full complement of officers and men.'

For a moment the room reeled round Dick's head. He clutched the table with both hands, and looked at his enemy without seeing him.

'You see,' continued the colonel, 'it must have been for our sakes after all that you came. You have no other reason to give.'

But Dick had now recovered himself. The whole force of his character was roused by his indignation at this monstrous series of frauds, and though the ground had three times slipped away beneath him, he was doggedly determined to defend his position while there was an inch of foothold left.

'Look here,' he said with ominous calmness, 'let me tell you this. I came here innocent, and I am going back innocent. You have, by shameful deceits

and devilish cunning, brought me with you so far, but nothing you say or do or threaten can move me a hair's-breadth further. Without my help your plot will fail, as you yourself know well; and when you are in Malcolm's hands we'll see whether he'll believe you or me first.'

The colonel did not betray it by so much as the trembling of an eyelid; but this last stroke of Dick's was a downright blow, and might, if not parried, mean the ruin of his whole fabric of ingenious policy.

His manner accordingly became lighter and more indifferent.

'Come, come, my dear Esteourt,' he said, 'you are taking the matter too seriously. I don't think you realise what it is I am asking of you. I don't, of course, expect you to take any responsibility for our plan, or to do anything which could be censured as a breach of duty or the rules of your service. I only ask you, in the absence of Captain Worsley, to take command of the "Speedwell" for twenty-four hours, and bring her to anchor off the island here until to-morrow night. On Sunday morning we shall be ready to sail again. What we do in the meantime cannot be laid to your charge—if, indeed, it were ever discovered—for you know nothing of our designs, as we would all bear you witness in case of need.'

Dick rose. 'Colonel de Montaut,' he said in a stern incisive tone, 'I have borne with you so far, and I am ashamed of my own patience. Every word you utter is a fresh insult,' he exclaimed with sudden fury in his eyes, 'and if you do not leave me instantly, before God I will avenge myself!'

The colonel unlocked the door without a word. With great alacrity he slipped out and locked it again on the other side.

As he did so he heard a light footstep hastily retreating. He followed immediately, and was in time to see the door of Camilla's cabin softly closed.

He approached noiselessly, and listened outside in his turn. She was sobbing, and if the colonel had not been somewhat flustered by his late unceremonious dismissal, so keen an observer would have noted that her sobs were the quick half-laughing utterance of intense relief.

But he was not now concerned with Camilla's feelings. He had Estcourt yet to conquer, and he went off in search of Johnstone to help him in the struggle.

He found him on deck, taking a last look at the sky, which threatened wind, and was now rapidly darkening with the sudden approach of the Southern night.

The colonel explained the position to him from beginning to end. 'Now,' he said in conclusion, 'you see the one thing absolutely necessary. So long as he hopes to clear himself with Malcolm, he will defy us. Once let him commit himself too far for that, and he is ours body and soul.'

'What do you want him to do?' asked Johnstone; 'you give it a name, and I warrant I'll make him do it.'

'Yes,' replied the colonel, 'I think it is time that you tried your hand now. The game of skill is up, and we must see what force can do for us. I want him to write a letter to Admiral Malcolm, asking for

permission to anchor the brig off Jamestown for twenty-four hours. He needn't write the whole letter even. I can do it for him, provided he signs it. He can't draw back after that.'

'That'll do,' said Johnstone; 'I'll see to it, never fear!'

'I'll have the letter ready after supper then,' said the colonel as he went below; 'and remember that, if he refuses to sign when I ask him, I shall leave him to you at once; but, of course, you will avoid taking any irretrievable step until the last possible moment.'

'I understand,' answered Johnstone with a grin; 'obstinate as ever he likes, he shan't meet with a fatal accident not till the guardboat men set foot on board; after that I can't answer for what may happen. It's a long fall into the hold, and some folks are so careless of themselves.'

The brutality of this jest displeased the colonel, who was above all things a man of taste, but he could not afford just now to be critical of his tools, so he let it pass without rebuke, and went to order supper.

The meal was served to Dick in the saloon, with Johnstone on guard at the door; to the colonel alone in the captain's room; Camilla, locked in her own, refused all persuasion to eat or drink.

A long time passed, and silence reigned unbroken between the decks of the 'Speedwell.'

The evening wore on, and still the colonel delayed to play the final stroke; he hoped that Dick, if given time to think over the position in cool blood, might be shaken by one or other of the arguments which

had been placed before him only to be rejected while the fit of indignant surprise was still upon him.

It was nearly midnight when Camilla at last heard her brother-in-law leave his cabin and call Johnstone ; the two men spoke together for a moment in a low voice and then entered the saloon.

Dick started up as they came in ; he looked tired and grim ; his cheeks were sunk and furrowed with lines that told of anger and determination.

‘Perhaps,’ said the colonel, ‘you have now thought matters over, and are prepared to reconsider your decision. I do not wish to be unreasonable, and I am ready to meet you half way ; all I now ask is that you should demand permission to anchor from your old friend Sir Pulteney Malcolm. It is a most natural request to make and, in fact, no more than is really necessary for the safety of the vessel in such weather as this.’

Dick kept a scornful silence.

The colonel drew out a paper and placed it on the table before him.

‘To save you all trouble,’ he said, ‘I have myself written out the letter, which now only requires your signature.’

Dick brushed the paper contemptuously aside, and half wheeled his chair round away from them.

‘I am prepared to give you time,’ continued the colonel, ‘but only in reason ; and I would advise you not to run it too fine, for I do not conceal from you that by a continued refusal you will force us to extremes.’

‘To put it short,’ said Johnstone, ‘you’ll sign that paper in an hour or die for it.’

At this moment the door was suddenly opened ; Johnstone was pushed aside, and a white figure passed swiftly round the table to Dick's right hand.

Dick sprang to his feet ; for a moment the three men were silent, all staring expectantly at Camilla, as she stood holding out both her hands to Dick.

Then the colonel was heard to curse between his set teeth. Dick turned upon him triumphantly ; in each hand gleamed a pistol, loaded, cocked, and primed ; at his side stood Camilla, with pale face and flashing eyes.

'Have no mercy !' she cried, in the ringing voice of an angel of vengeance. 'No mercy ! they had none on you !'

He raised his hands ; Johnstone glared at him like a tiger brought to bay ; the colonel shrank back into the corner of the room, and the cold sweat came out in great beads upon his forehead.

Camilla would have spoken again, but her voice broke in an uncontrollable sound between a sob and a laugh.

Dick turned to her.

'I give them back to you,' he said ; 'one is of your kin, and the other nothing but a tool.'

She flung out her hand towards them in their corner.

'Do you hear ?' she said ; 'take back your shameful lives ! And now,' she cried, taking a pistol from Dick's hand, 'now, my soul's captain, come away with me !'

She would have raised the pistol, but he took her by the wrist.

'No, no, dear heart,' he said gently, 'surely that

too would be surrender ; let's fight the ship until she sinks.'

He laid both pistols upon the table, and pushed them across to the colonel.

'And now,' he said, 'get you gone ; I wish to speak with this lady undisturbed.'

The colonel hesitated, but in a flash Johnstone caught him with a grip of iron, and whirled him, helpless, through the door.

CHAPTER XIV

DICK and Camilla were alone together, and face to face at last. There was no hesitation, no shadow of reserve between them ; this one hour was theirs, though the rest were the very darkness of despair.

She came towards him joyfully, and with a proud smile threw her arms about his neck ; then drew her head a little back and looked long into his eyes, where the light of love shone steadily, undimmed by any sadness of farewell.

'How could I,' she murmured, 'how could I think you less than greatest ?'

'Nay,' he said, 'how could I think you wished me to be so ?'

And they forgave each other in a long silence of possession.

At last Camilla started painfully ; the colonel's voice was heard outside ; he passed without entering, but with the hateful sound her mood was changed ; peace fled, and a great terror and perplexity took hold upon her. Dick saw it and took

her in his arms again ; she clung to him desperately.

‘What am I to do ?’ she cried ; ‘what can I do ?’

‘That which you came to do,’ he answered quietly ; ‘but first you must rest ; the strain of all this has worn you out.’

‘Rest !’ she said. ‘I cannot—until——’ And her voice failed.

‘I know what you would say,’ he replied. ‘You are troubled by uncertainty about me, but you must try to dismiss that from your mind ; whatever comes to me, you have your work to do, and you must do it.’

She looked at him reproachfully, but could not speak.

He understood her again, and answered her unspoken thought.

‘No,’ he said, ‘I am not forgetting, but you yourself once made me promise that I would put aside love for duty. I have no need, I know, to make the same request of you.’

As he spoke, the scene of that promise came back before her eyes ; she saw the ballroom at Glamorgan House, his trembling hope, and her own pride and self-sufficiency. She saw the little room itself, vividly clear in every detail ; the very chair in which she sat enthroned, the low seat in which he stammered and was silent, while she spoke for both. How she despised that old superb and arrogant self ! To have exulted in a trivial superiority of quick speech and ready wit, and here, when called to action, and in face of the spiritual abysses of life, to stand shuddering and dumb, leaning for support upon

the very will that she had thought to bend so easily to her caprice !

She bowed her head in an agony of self-reproach ; it seemed to her that no Emperor ever lived whose liberty was worth the price of such a life, and for a moment she longed to forswear her allegiance, if she could have found words to utter her revolt.

But now Dick was speaking again, and it seemed as though he had divined her thought in part at least.

‘That old promise,’ he said, ‘has bound me twice already; I found it hard, but I obeyed ; this third time I could not do so, but that the promise is enforced by a yet stronger law. It is a bitter, cruel necessity, but I must fight against you and your cause ; I can but warn you that I shall do my best.’

Her heart beat fast. ‘And I?’ she said faintly.

‘I know,’ he answered, as if to spare her the words. ‘I know, you cannot sacrifice your loyalty to the Emperor, even for me.’

In utter simplicity he had misunderstood her ; her weakness was doubly rebuked, and she felt him tower above her higher than ever.

‘It is a strange game,’ he said more lightly, ‘in which you and I are found on opposite sides ; but since we’re in it, let no one say we didn’t play it out.’

‘But either way you lose !’ she cried, with despair in her voice and eyes.

‘Not so,’ he answered tenderly ; ‘I have won already, and received my prize beforehand.’

He drew her to him as he spoke, and again for a

space the chains of their iron destiny fell away from them, and they fled together across shoreless seas under an infinite radiance of sunlight.

She tore herself away at last, but only at his urgent entreaty that she would rest. She promised with a sad smile, knowing sleep to be impossible.

Outside stood Johnstone. As he was about to lock the door again the colonel came up and stopped him.

‘Wait a moment,’ he said, ‘I want to speak to Captain Estcourt.’

He turned to Camilla, and added, before he went in, ‘I am sorry to trouble him again, but I must make it plain to him that his fate is none the less inevitable for any help you may have promised him. I warn you, you are powerless in my hands; if you wish to save him it must be by bringing him over to our side, and not by deserting to his.’

‘You may spare him your hateful presence then,’ retorted Camilla, ‘for I have made no promises.’

The colonel looked incredulous.

‘Oh!’ she cried, ‘how should you understand? I would have given up all, and gladly too; but he compels me to my duty in spite of myself.’

The colonel looked a little uncomfortable, but his face cleared. ‘Then I may count on you to help me?’ he asked.

She turned upon him, her eyes blazing with unspeakable hatred and contempt.

‘Yes!’ she cried, ‘you may count on me to help you and despise you; to curse you in success and to triumph in your downfall!’

The colonel turned away; he felt that he was not

appearing at his best before Johnstone ; and it was against his principles to let himself be seen at a disadvantage by a subordinate.

Camilla went to her own cabin and threw herself into her berth : she was worn out, but far too overstrung to sleep. The wind was rising outside ; the ship moved violently with sounds of straining timbers and of heavy masses thrown from side to side.

Hour after hour passed in this turmoil, which seemed to match the helpless tossing of her thoughts. Sometimes the shouting of rough voices came to her ; sometimes the shrieking of the wind was like the despairing cry of human agony. Her nerves quivered, restless terror overpowered her reason, and the most horrible fantasies possessed her. At last she could bear it no longer ; hardly knowing what she did, she rose and went to the saloon.

Johnstone, wearied out by a long watch on deck, was sleeping on the ground beside the door.

She took the key from his pocket, turned it in the lock, and passed softly in. He woke as she stepped over him, but seeing who it was, sat still and eyed her watchfully.

She steadied herself in the doorway and looked down the room. A hammock had been slung across it near the middle ; there lay Dick, sleeping quietly as a child ; a single lamp was hanging near, and the unsteady light threw strange distorted shadows across his face without troubling his rest.

She stood gazing for some minutes ; a deep sense of peace came over her ; she sighed and turned away, soothed and strengthened.

Johnstone, without rising, held out his hand for

the key. As she went back to her cabin, he muttered behind her :

‘Ay, ay, my beauty, but if ye don’t give him better advice he’ll be sleeping sounder yet to-morrow night !’

Happily she did not hear him, but went to her berth comforted, and slept for some hours in spite of the noise of the hurricane, which raged with increasing violence.

During the night the brig, after vainly attempting to anchor, had been driven past the island to the south, and when Camilla came on deck in the morning she thought at first that an unhopcd-for deliverance had thus been brought about, for St. Helena was far away on the horizon, and the wind, though it had moderated in force, was still blowing almost dead against them.

She soon saw, however, that the ship’s head was towards the island, and that by repeated tacking they were already making some way against the wind.

The colonel himself came up to her and pointed out this fact. ‘By sunset,’ he said, ‘we shall have comfortably worked back to the north side of the island, and our new guest will be on board the “Speedwell” soon after midnight.’

She looked at him with cold hatred, and made no answer.

‘I cannot help seeing,’ he remarked, ‘that I have had the misfortune to incur your displeasure ; but I hope the Emperor, when he comes, will reconcile us all.’

She turned her back upon him and went below. When she reached the door of the saloon she found

Johnstone posted there again. This time he refused to let her in.

‘No, no,’ he said, ‘your turn last night, mine this morning! I’ve particular business with Captain Estcourt to-day, and from his looks I should say it would take us some time yet.’

She went to her cabin, and the long day began to drag wearily on.

Dick in the meantime was racking his head to find some sure way of upsetting the colonel’s plans even at the last moment, and at any cost to himself. It was horrible to think that if he succeeded he would involve Camilla in the ruin of the conspiracy; but he put the recollection of this sternly from his mind, or clenched his teeth still more doggedly when the thought forced itself upon him. He saw clearly enough that the colonel would go on hoping for his surrender until the last possible moment—that would be until the time came when they must either get leave to take the ‘Speedwell’ into the roads off Jamestown for the night, or be boarded by the search-party from one of the cruisers. If he could manage to be on deck at the decisive moment when the guardboat came alongside, he might give them some kind of warning before his enemies could silence him.

The colonel had come in twice during the morning to see if he had signed the letter yet; on the second occasion Dick had snatched the paper from his hands and torn it into fragments. He now appeared for the third time, bringing a freshly written copy with him, which he handed to Johnstone.

‘This is my last visit,’ he said. ‘I shall leave

Captain Esteourt to you henceforward. It seems that my presence makes him unreasonable.'

'It is you,' said Dick, with an attempt at diplomacy, 'who are unreasonable, to keep me shut up below here. Are you afraid that I shall swim ashore?'

'I am afraid that you might try,' replied the colonel; 'but I'll let you go on deck after dinner if you will excuse my taking my own precautions.'

'What precautions?'

'Putting some little constraint upon your power of movement.'

'Call it irons at once!' interjected Johnstone.

Dick flushed indignantly, but a glance at the colonel's face told him that the interpretation was correct. Insulting as the suggestion was, he could not afford to refuse, for it was his one chance.

'I accept,' he said shortly, and the colonel went out.

After dinner Dick was taken on deck, and the irons were brought. He sat down while they were locked upon him. The colonel stood a short distance off, watching.

When he saw that Dick was helpless he came up.

'Now,' he said to Johnstone, 'take him down again, if you please.'

Dick turned white with anger and despair.

'You don't mean that!' he cried. 'You cannot!'

'I promised you should come on deck,' replied the colonel; 'but I think I am right in saying that no time was mentioned. In my judgment you have been long enough here already, and—you will pardon me for speaking plainly—but—the sooner you learn

submission to my judgment the more trouble you will spare us all.'

He made a sign to Johnstone, who took Dick in his arms and swung him lightly down the companion-hatch like a bundle of hammocks.

In two minutes he was in his old seat at the end of the table in the saloon, with his ankles fast to the chair, which in its turn was screwed into the floor.

For a long time he did not move; he had little hope left now, but he steeled himself to wait with patience, if any unforeseen chance might yet give him his opportunity. The sunset gun was heard from the shore: it grew rapidly dark.

Johnstone entered to light the lamp; in his hand was a heavy iron capstan bar.

He laid it down upon the table, with the letter beside it.

'There's your choice,' he said.

'All right!' said Dick stoutly, 'I'm ready; but you'll all go, too, my man; you're lost without me.'

Johnstone laughed brutally.

'Don't you flatter yourself!' he said; 'dead or alive, you'll do our business for us.'

Dick was silent.

'Look you here,' said the other, 'this is the way of it, and if you don't understand it now, you'll never have the chance again. The brig's standing in straight for Jamestown: she's not three miles off at this moment; and the flagship's lying ready for her just outside the harbour. If you put your name to that bit o' paper you're a free man this minute; you'll stand in with the rest of us for prize-money, and the lass, that's worth it all, she's yours into the

bargain. But if you're fool enough to be obstinate—there's the colonel upon deck there watching; when the guard-boat comes, he gives me a last signal—one—two—and before three's out your neck's broke, and you lying quiet in the hold. "Sad accident, gentlemen! an old friend of Sir Pulteney's, too; and just had a letter written to him asking leave to anchor; on his way to sign it when he fell. P'raps the admiral would let us bury him ashore to-morrow?" So either way we stand to win easy, d'ye see?'

He did indeed see, and that with a supreme anguish of bitterness. Not even by death was he to thwart them, or clear his own name from dishonour. But his conscience was without reproach, and Camilla knew the truth: on these two thoughts he anchored himself to meet the fury of his last storm.

The moments fled. The colonel called down the hatchway that the boat had left the flagship. Camilla heard him shout, and fell upon her knees beside a porthole, gasping for air.

A second time that inexorable calm voice came down to the deck below. Johnstone took the iron bar in his hand.

The boat came alongside, and an officer's voice shouted close to Camilla's fainting head: 'Brig ahoy! Throw us a rope there!'

Dimly, as one in a dream of horror, she heard the colonel's answer.

'You needn't trouble to come on board,' he called down in his smoothest tones. 'This is the "Speedwell," Captain Estcourt. He is an old friend of Admiral Malcolm, and is just writing to him for

leave to anchor. Johnstone !' he shouted louder still, 'ask the captain if his letter's ready.'

'Do you hear ?' said Johnstone, balancing the bar in both his hands, 'there's the last signal. Now then—one !——'

The clear voice of the officer outside rang through the ship and drowned his words.

'Estcourt !' it cried, 'pass in ! pass in ! the Emperor's dead !'

CHAPTER XV

A SILENCE followed the words that seemed as if it would last for ever ; it was as though that cry had stunned at one blow all on board the brig.

At last the iron bar fell clanging from Johnstone's hands upon the floor of the saloon, and Dick sprang up, struggling fiercely in his fetters.

'Camilla ! Camilla !' he shouted. She heard his voice and awoke to life again, trembling in every limb.

'Off with these things !' he thundered ; and Johnstone unlocked the irons without a word.

Dick took them in his hand and ran up the ladder ; the lieutenant from the flagship was in the act of springing on board. 'Where is Captain Estcourt ?' he cried. 'Are you all asleep here ?'

The colonel glided before him, and lowered his voice to speak to Dick.

'We are all in your hands,' he said hastily ; 'Camilla, too, remember, among the rest.'

‘No!’ returned Dick triumphantly, ‘you haven’t a jot of evidence against her. My mind’s made up, and you’ll obey me now, or swing at the yardarm within the hour. Stand by the bulwark there!’ And he pushed him back from the hatchway.

The lieutenant came up as he spoke. ‘Estcourt,’ he asked, ‘have you forgotten me?’

‘Not I, Wilmore!’ cried Dick; ‘and I never shall, though I live to be a thousand!’

‘Well said!’ laughed the other. ‘But why am I so desperately in demand?’

‘Why, you’re in the nick of time. I was short-handed till you came, and I’ve a pair of mutineers on board.’

‘Right!’ said Wilmore, and he called over the side, ‘Send three men aboard there with cutlasses.’

The colonel made a rush for the main hatch, calling to Johnstone for help. Dick caught him in time, and handed him over to the men from the flagship, giving them the irons at the same time.

‘Are they for this fellow?’ asked Wilmore.

‘Oh!’ said Dick contemptuously, ‘as far as fighting goes no one need be afraid of him; but he’s a wretch without a rag of honour, and his tongue would twist anything less stiff than steel.’

The irons were on in a moment; the colonel seemed to find them cold, for he shivered pitifully.

‘Now for the other one!’ said the lieutenant.

As he spoke, Johnstone came on deck by the forward ladder, and stood there at a little distance from the group, peering about him in the lantern light to see the position of affairs.

Dick went up to him. 'Here he is!' he cried. 'Johnstone, you're my prisoner!'

Johnstone's right hand went swiftly to his pocket, but before he could grasp his pistol Dick's fist shot home between his eyes, and he fell like a log, disappearing backwards down the open hatchway.

Two of the men-of-war's men ran down, and found him lying motionless at the bottom of the ladder; they brought him on deck, and got a rope to secure him when he should come round.

But he never moved again: the fall had broken his neck.

'Well,' said Dick, when they told him, 'that seems only just; he was the better of two bad men, and his punishment's the soonest over. As for the other,' he continued, turning to Wilmore, 'a quick death's too good for him, and no prison would hold him long.'

He reflected a moment, and then turned to the captive and his guards. 'Bring him below,' he said, and led the way to the saloon.

In Dick's own seat they placed the colonel, with Dick's own irons upon him, and in his hand they made him take the pen with which he had commanded Dick to sign away his honour.

'Now, if you will leave us alone together,' said Dick to the others, 'I daresay I shall soon have done with him.'

They went out wondering and he turned to the prisoner.

'Write the date,' he said shortly, 'and now go on as I dictate to you:

"I hereby acknowledge and confess that I con-

spired with one Hernan Johnstone, since deceased, to effect the escape of the Emperor Napoleon from the island of St. Helena on the 5th of May, 1821, and to levy war against the King of France and the peace of Europe ; that for this purpose I bribed the said Hernan Johnstone and the crew of the brig 'Speedwell,' four of whom I knew to be French subjects ; and by fraud and forgery induced my sister-in-law, Madame de Montaut, and Captain Richard Estcourt, to accompany me, in complete ignorance of the object of our voyage.'"

The colonel stopped. 'But that is not the truth,' he objected.

'Truth !' said Dick scornfully, 'what is truth to you ? Write as I tell you, every word ! And wait before you sign,' he added ; 'we want a witness whom your slanders cannot touch. Wilmore !' he called, and the lieutenant entered.

The signing and witnessing done, Dick folded the paper and laid it again before the colonel.

'Address it,' he said, 'to the Minister of Justice at Paris.'

The colonel started and drew back.

'Deal gently with me,' he said, in a low voice ; 'courage and mercy should go together.'

'Courage and mercy,' replied Dick, 'are no concern of yours ; your province is obedience, and, if you can manage it, a little decent shame.'

The address was written.

'And now,' said Dick, 'after writing that letter, you will, I think, see that it would never suit your health to live in England or France again. To keep you, however, from all temptation of such risks for

the present, I propose to ask Lieutenant Wilmore here if he will be so good as to put you ashore at Jamestown ; you have, I believe, some friends on the island who will condole with you on the failure of your enterprise.'

'Shall I take him at once ?' asked Wilmore.

The colonel was in despair.

'An exile and a beggar ! Death would be preferable !' he exclaimed, with a gesture which was a really fine piece of acting, and went to Wilmore's heart.

But Dick knew his man better.

'All right,' he said gravely ; 'you have your choice.'

And he took the iron bar from the floor where Johnstone had left it, and raised it above the colonel's head.

The actor's collapse was swift and lamentable.

'Hold him !' he cried to Wilmore, 'for God's sake hold him ! he is capable of anything.'

'I begin to think so,' said Dick, lowering his weapon, 'since I have learned to outwit you.'

'Well, then,' said Wilmore, holding out his hand to Dick, 'good-bye until to-morrow.'

'Yes,' said Dick, 'I'll thank you then ; good-bye.'

The colonel was taken on deck again, and lowered into the boat.

As they left the ship's side, he saw, or thought he saw, a white figure leaning over the bulwarks.

'Camilla !' he cried. 'Is that you, Camilla ?'

But there was no reply ; the boat shot forward, and the 'Speedwell' vanished from him into the darkness.

Dick turned to look for Camilla ; she was gone and he would not follow her now, for he remembered what the Emperor's death must mean to her.

The brig was moving slowly in towards the harbour, guided by the lights aboard the flagship ; an hour afterwards she dropped her anchor for the night and swung round to the wind.

Dick turned in early, but he could not sleep ; there was still thunder in the air, a remnant of last night's storm ; and his mind went whirling incessantly through the tangled history of the last few months.

A little before dawn he went on deck ; it was less stifling in the open air, and stars were shining here and there between drifting clouds.

He sat down against the bulwark, and looked up at them, listening to the faint lapping of the water under the ship's sides.

Little by little the night lifted, and daylight began to broaden over the sky. The stars grew pale, and died out one by one ; a marvellous colour mingled of faintest blue and delicate red opal flushed in the height of heaven and burned slowly into deep crimson on the horizon to the east.

A light wind blew cool upon his face ; his eyelids dropped, and slumber took him unawares.

When he opened his eyes again, Camilla was kneeling on one knee before him, transfigured by a golden light that shone from behind her through and through the glory of her hair.

A strange sense of new life filled him with bewildering prescience of joy.

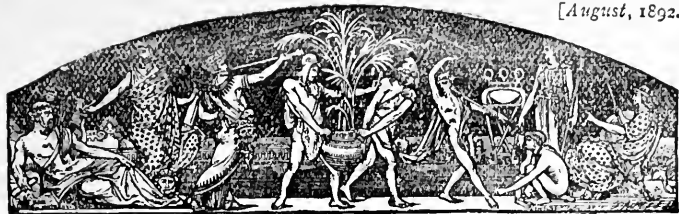
‘Where are we?’ he asked, not venturing to move, lest he should break the spell.

She bent yet lower over him.

‘We are in harbour,’ she said; ‘and look! the sun has risen!’

THE END.





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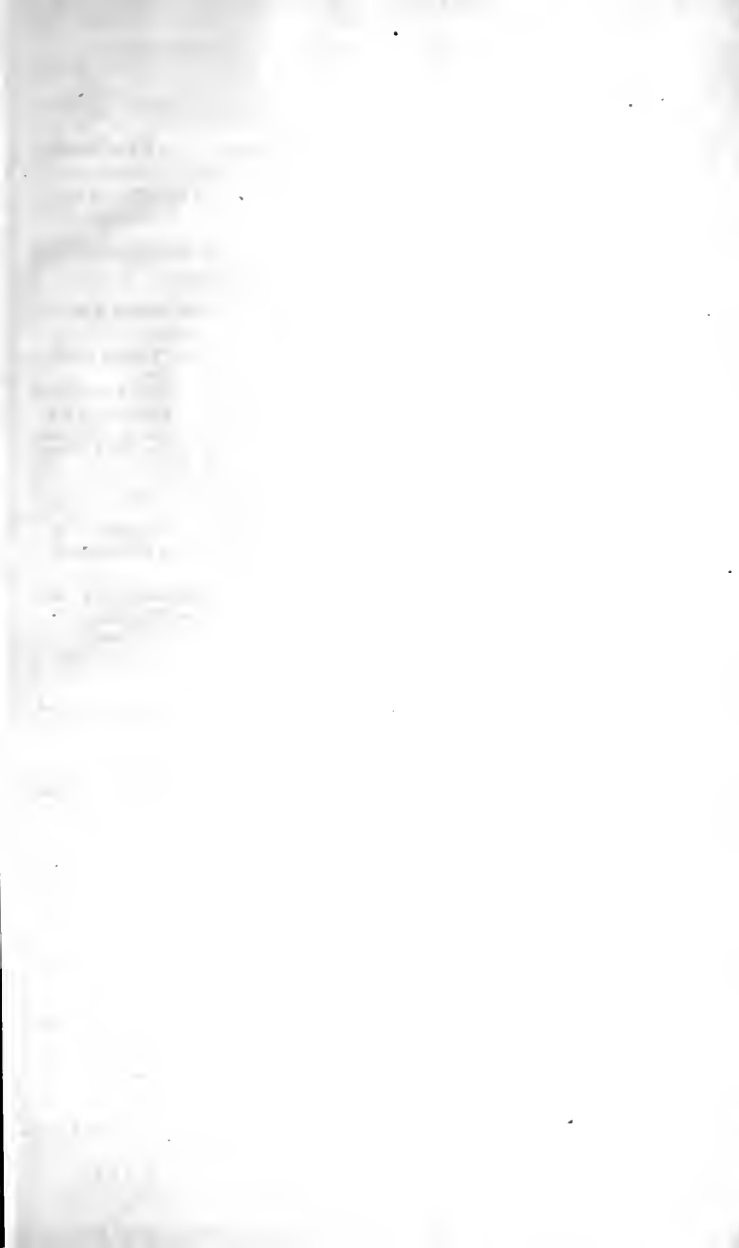
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