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BY JAMES GRANT.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Thunderbolt.

An emotion of mingled freedom and satisfaction possessed the whole crew on being rid of our tormentor, and Lambourne now took charge of the brig, which he was perfectly able to handle and work, though ignorant of navigation as a science, and having but a vague idea of the course to steer for the Cape of Good Hope.

She was now in the wind, while in the moonlight, about two hours after the exciting scene which closes the last chapter, we committed to the deep the body of Antonio's last victim, the poor apprentice, whom the sailmaker sewed up in his hammock, to which, being without shot or other suitable weights, we tied a sack of coals to sink the corpse.

The head-yards were filled again, and, as if anxious to leave that portion of the sea as far as possible astern, we hauled up for the cape. Tom Lambourne ordered every stitch of canvas that the spars would hold to be spread upon the Eugenie, that she might, as he said, "walk through the water in her own style."

All he could do at first was to keep her in the course we had been steering on the night these disasters began, for as yet we knew not to what degree of latitude, south or north, we might have been drifting; however, we calculated that Hislop, weak as he was, might be able to take a solar observation and prick off our place on the chart, in the course of six or seven days.

We had the usually snug little cabin cleansed and cleared from the debris created by the outrageous proceedings of Antonio, who must have gone to the bottom with all Weston's valuables and money about him, as we could find neither, and the sweet expression of the poor widow's face, as it seemed to smile on us from the miniature on the after-bulkhead, contrasted strangely with all the wild work that had so lately taken place on board.

Hislop and I were restored to our former berths, and then more than once in my dreams the pale olive-green visage and glaring eyes of the Cubano came before me, and again I seemed to see him clinging unpitied and in desperation to the slender boom which swung above the seething sea —for his death and all its concomitant horrors haunted me and made me unhappy.

The intensity of the heat in that season suggested the idea that we could not have drifted far south of the line.

So great was it that the upper spars of the Eugenie appeared to wriggle or vibrate like serpents aloft in the sunshine; while so hot, so clear and so rarefied was the atmosphere between decks that it was suffocated, especially in the lulling of the faint breeze. A white heat seemed to make sea and sky grow pale, and the former cast upward a reflection from its glassy surface and long smooth swells that was hot—hot beyond all description.

Though ever and anon the upper deck was drenched with salt water, it dried immediately, emitting a strong odor of wet wood, while the skids over the side failed to keep the paint, tar and rosin rising in large burnt blisters.

About the time when we hoped that Hislop would have been well enough to make an observation; even by being placed in a chair on deck, the weather became so rough that he was unable to leave his berth, and during all that day the brig drove before a heavy gale, with her courses hauled close up, the fore and main topsail yards lowered on the caps, and their canvas close reefed.

After the heat we had endured, the reader may imagine this gale would be refreshing and a relief. Not so. The atmosphere, as it became dark with gathering clouds, increased in density, closeness and heat, thus about the time we should have had clear twilight, the hour was gloomy as a northern midnight—so dark that the men in the tops, or those lying out along the foot-ropes at the yard-arms, when under close-reefed topsails, could not be seen from the deck, while the breeze that swept over the ocean was breathless—hot as the simoon of the desert; and our men knew not whether they were drenched by perspiration or the spoondrift torn from the warm wave tops by the increasing blast.

The peculiar appearance of this black gale alarmed and bewildered Tattooed Tom, who could make nothing of it, while poor Mare Hislop, whose skill would have been invaluable to us, when he heard the singing out on deck, the thunder of the bellying courses struggling with their brails, the roar of the wind through the half-dressed masts and rigging, the clatter of blocks and feet overhead, writhed in his bed, and mourned his own inactivity, or rather incapacity; but he sent me to tell Lambourne to cover up the anchors with wetted canvas, as it was not improbable, by the state of the atmosphere, that it was full of electricity and thus we might be in a dangerous way.

"Tell Tom," he whispered, "it is a trade-wind gale—I know it to be so."

"How?" I asked, "when you are lying here below?"

"By the barometer, which remains high, while the wind is steady," replied Hislop in a low voice, for he was still very weak; "if the barometer fall, be sure it will become a typhoon, and then, with a short-handed craft, heaven help us! But assure Tom it is only as yet a trade-wind gale—to take as much canvas off her as he can, and to make all snug aloft. We'll have a thunder directly, Dick—such thunder as you can only hear in the tropics."

He sank back, exhausted even by these few words, while I hurried on deck with his orders.

I had scarcely conveyed them to Lambourne, who was keeping a look-out forward, when, amid the dusky obscurity of sea and sky, there burst a sudden gleam of wondrous light.

The men, who were spreading some old, wetted sails over the sheet and working anchors; the steersman at the wheel, the watch and all hands who were crouching to leeward, or holding on by ropes and belaying pins to windward, seemed for a moment to become white-visaged specters amid a sea of pale, blue flame—a sea whereon the flying brig, with her brailed courses and reefed topsails, her half-naked masts and black cordage, were all distinctly visible as at noonday, while the polished brass on funnel, binnacle and skylight all flashed and shone, as ship and crew, with all their details of form and feature,

"Were instant seen and instant lost."

For a broad and blinding sheet of electric flame burst upon the darkness of the night, and passed away as rapidly, when the livid brand burst in the welkin or in the wave, we knew not which.

Then came the roar of thunder—the stunning and appalling thunder of the tropics, every explosion of which seemed to rend earth, sea and sky, as they rolled like a palpable thing, or like the united salvo of a thousand echoes at the far horizon.

After a sound so mighty and bewildering, the bellowing of the wind through the rigging, the hiss and roar of the sea as wave broke against wave, the flapping of the brailed courses, the creaking and straining of the timbers, seemed as nothing—the very silence of death—while the Eugenie tore on, through mist and spray, through darkness and obscurity, with the foam flying white as winter draft over her bows and martingale.

Again there was a pale-green gleam overhead, right above the truck of the mainmast, where the chambers of the sky seemed to open. The clouds divided in the darkness of heaven, and out of that opening came the forked lightning, zigzag, green and ghastly.

There was a dreadful shock, which knocked every man down, except Carlton, who was at the wheel, and an exclamation of terror escaped us all.

A thunderbolt had struck the Eugenie!

With all its wondrous speed—instantaneous as electric light could be—it glided down the main top-gallant mast, rending the topmast-cap and the framed grating of the top to pieces; thence it ran down the mainmast, burst through the deck and spent its fury in the hold.

At that moment the main-topmast, with all its yards, gear and canvas, fell about the deck in burning brands, and the brig was blown right in the wind's eye, while the sea twitched the helm out of the hands of Ned Carlton, who became bewildered on finding the compasses lose all their polarity by the influence of the electric fluid, the north point of one heading southeast and of the other southwest.

Almost immediately after this there was a cry of "Fire!"—that cry so terrible, so appalling on board ship; and then thick white smoke was seen to issue from the crevices of the battened main-hatchway.

All hands rushed to this point. The long-boat was unshipped from its chocks and dragged aft; some stood by with buckets of water, while others struck off the padlocks and iron bars; the tarpaulin was torn away—the hatch lifted—and lo!

A column of fire ascended in a straight line from the body of the hold—lurid, red and scorching, as the cracks of molasses and bales of cotton burned and blazed together. A column that rose up between the masts, scorced through the mainstay, all the braces of the foreyards, and filled the whole vessel with light, announced that all was over.

"It is a doomed ship!" cried Tom Lambourne; "we must leave her at last. Clear away the longboat. Be cool, lads; be cool and steady! Your lives depend upon your conduct now, and your obedience to orders!"

CHAPTER XXV.

Cast Away.

Not a moment was lost in getting the longboat over the side, and with a heavy splash, by which it was nearly swamped, we got it afloat.

Ned Carlton and Probart, the carpenter, sprang in to fend off and keep it from being stove or dashed to pieces by the sea against the brig's side.

By the wild, weird glare that rose in frightful columns from the main and fore hatchways we had plenty of light, as it shone far over the huge billows of that dark and tempestuous sea, to which we were about to commit our fortunes, and now a pale and half-dressed figure approached us.

It was Mare Hislop, whom the terrible odor had roused from his berth in the cabin, and he now came forward, supporting his feeble steps by clutching the shrouds and belaying-pins.

I rushed below and brought up a blanket and great coat to wrap him in, and he was promptly swung over into the boat, where Carlton received and supported him.

Three bags of bread, with a tarpaulin to cover them, two kegs of rum, four casks of water, with oars, sails and blankets, were thrown pell-mell into the boat. A hatchet and a bundle of spun-yard completed our stores.

The compasses were considered now to be useless, or were omitted, I forget which.

The wind still amounted to a gale, though less violent, and it fanned the growing flames, so that the fated brig burned fast. The lightning still flashed, but at the horizon, and the thunder was heard to grumble above the hiss of the sea; yet we heeded them not, though they added to the terror and the grandeur of the scene; and, most providentially for us, the fury of the storm was past.

Tattooed Tom was the last man who left the brig, and the moment he was in the boat he exclaimed, with a loud voice, that rang above the roaring of the flames, which now gushed through every hatchway and aperture, above the howling of the wind and the breaking of the frothy sea—

"Shove off!—out oars, there, to starboard—pull round her stern—pull with a will to windward—keep the boat's bow to the break of the sea!"

We pulled silently and vigorously, and soon got clear of the brig, through the four stern windows of which four lines of light glared redly on the ocean.

All our strength was required to achieve this, for the brig, being the largest body, attracted the boat toward her. However we got safely to windward, which was absolutely necessary, for to leeward there fell hissing into the sea a torrent of sparks and burning brands from the rigging, which was all in flames now.

Resting upon our oars, or only using them to keep the boat's head to the break of the sea, and to prevent her being swamped—an operation during which they were as often flourished in the air as in the ocean, when we rose on the crest of one vast, heaving wave, or sank into the dark vale of water between two—resting thus, we gazed in silence and with aching hearts at the destruction of our home upon the sea.

We could feel the heat of the conflagration even to windward. In a quarter of an hour she was enveloped from stem to stern in a sheet of fire that rose skyward in the form of a pyramid. By this time every vestige of her spars, sails and rigging had disappeared.

The entire deck had been consumed; the bulwarks and molded plank-sheer rapidly followed, and through the flames that roared fiercely from the hollow of her hull we could see the black timberheads standing upward like a row of fangs.

Rents appeared next in her sides as the flames burst through the inner and outer sheathing, and with a hissing sound as they met the waves of the briny sea. Then a salt steam rose, and its strange odor, with that of the burning wood, was wafted at times toward us.

At last she gave a sudden heel to starboard, and with a sound unlike anything I ever heard before—a deluge of water extinguishing a mighty fire—the waves rushed tumultuously in on all sides. She vanished from our sight in mist and obscurity, and a heavy darkness suddenly replaced the glare that for a time had lit up the heaving sea, dazzling our eyes and sickening our hearts.

(To be continued.)

WESTERN NOMENCLATURE.

Movement to Change the Curious, Quaint Names of Oregon Towns.

It is difficult to shake off the names attached to streams and mountains by the pioneers of a new country. With few exceptions Washington state has fared well in nomenclature. In a majority of instances Indian names have been retained, and usually they are easy and poetical. But in some cases the individuality of the first settlers prompted them to an effort to improve on the native names of streams and sections, and in some instances they were not happy in their originality. The word Hangman has clung to the little stream which skirts Spokane on its western border, and repeated spasmodic efforts to center the public mind on the more melodious name Latah have failed of their purpose. Now Senator Plummer of this county has introduced a bill at Olympia to make this change, and as no objection can attach to the measure it will probably pass, and may exert sufficient force to bring about the desired change. A few years ago an esthetic movement swept through the Oregon legislature, and a number of pioneer names were turned down for more polite ones. The good people of Alkali, in eastern Oregon, imagined that the name was not one to conjure eastern capital, and dropped it for Arlington. A new name was devised for Bully creek, and Yaller Dog and Bake Oven were tabooed as primitive and unpoetic. Bake Oven has adhered, and is still the name of a post-office. Indeed, much room remains for improvement of the nomenclature of Oregon, which includes in its list of postoffices the towns of Burnt Ranch, Gooseberry, Haystack, Lobster, Long Tom, Mule, Shake, Shirk, Starveout, and Sucker. A few names in Idaho could be dropped for the better, among them Bayhorse, Corral, Gimlet, Gentle Valley, Sawtooth, and Yellow Jacket.—Spokane Spokesman-Review

STRATFORD-ON-AVON.

Important Improvements Since the Time of William Shakespeare.

The clerical staff, postmen, rural messengers, and others connected with the Stratford postoffice, and the subpostmasters of the district, were entertained at supper at the Unicorn hotel on Tuesday night, this being the twenty-seventh annual gathering. The mayor (W. Pearce) presided, and was supported by a number of the leading tradesmen, the vice chair being occupied by E. B. Wynn. Responding for "Our Postmistress" (proposed by G. Boyden), Mr. Donovan, (chief clerk) spoke of the great increase of work at the Stratford postoffice. Within the last few years the clerical staff has been doubled and the number of telegrams was increased at the rate of 10,000 a year. The year 1897 showed an increase of 10,000 over those of 1896, and now, from the returns just made up, it appeared that there was a further increase of 10,000 over those of 1897. (Applause.) The telephone was about to be added, the clerical staff was to be further increased, the duplex system of telegraphy had been authorized in order to cope with the increased work and, notwithstanding that the postoffice had been built only a few years, some important structural alterations and enlargements had become imperative and were about to be carried out. (Applause.) All this showed that they were progressing at a most satisfactory rate, and he looked forward to further important developments.—Birmingham Post.

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That others may know the means of cure we give the name of the medicine used—Dr. Williams' Pink Pills for Pale People. These pills contain all the elements necessary to give new life and richness to the blood and restore shattered nerves.

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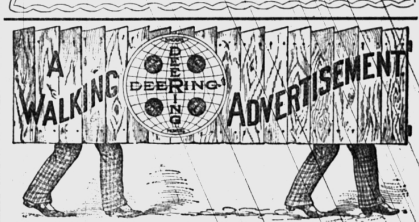

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