

LITERATURE.

"THE FAIR ROSAMOND."

A Tale of the Slave Squadron.

(Concluded.)

These words decided my destiny, and three days afterwards I stepped, handsomely rigged out, upon the *Curlew's* deck. I was kindly received by Lieut. Armstrong, a strict disciplinarian, but a kind-hearted gentlemanly man, though he did, in sailor-phrase, come in at the hawse-holes. The *Curlew* was a powerful vessel of her class, carrying eighteen guns, four of which were carronades, upon a flush deck, besides a long nine-pounder brass swivel gun about midships, and had a prime crew of one hundred and seventy-five men and boys. The required repairs were nearly completed, and but a few days would elapse, I was informed, before we again steered for the south-west of Africa. The *Fair Rosamond* was still at her moorings, at no great distance from the *Curlew*, but quite ready for a sudden start, having cleared at the Custom House some days previously for the Cape Verde Islands, and thence to the Gambia and Rio Grande, in quest of palm-oil, —a common dodge of slavers in those days, because affording them an excuse for taking on board a large number of empty casks destined to hold the water necessary for the crowd of human beings they expected to bring off. Keen eyes on board the sloop were frequently bent upon the *Fair Rosamond*; and it was the opinion of most of the old hands that they had seen the brigantine before, though not within such easy speaking distance, and when not painted in quite such fal-the-ral style as at present. We saw very little of Captain Penshurst —business or pleasure kept him almost constantly ashore; but the service of the ship was carried on with order and dispatch by the lieutenant in command, and the *Curlew* was reported ready for sea some time before it was expected she would be. I obtained leave to go on shore for the purpose of bidding my friends good by, and on reaching home I was not a little surprised to find my father, togged smartly, off for a grand dinner-party at the Tollemaches, and that I was to accompany him. He almost laughed out, as I, on hearing this, frizzed up my hair with my fingers, and glanced complacently at my new uniform, in a mirror opposite. "You silly jackanapes," he pleasantly broke out, "what chance, think you, can a beardless stripling like you" (this was a libel as regards beard) "have against a man wearing two gold epaulettes?" I made no reply to this courteous speech, one reason being that I did not comprehend it—but a short time after, setting foot in Vale Lodge it was perfectly intelligible. Captain Penshurst was there; and it was plain as daylight that he and the enchanting Virginie were acknowledged contracted lovers—so rapid is the growth of sentiment and passion in those hot tropical climes. Mr. and Madame Tollemache were also evidently aware of, and gratified with, their daughter's important conquest—the captain of the *Curlew* had wealth as well as social rank to bestow. Whilst I, for more reasons than one, was exceedingly ill at ease. How about the moonlight meeting with the skipper of the brigantine beneath the palm-trees? Ought I not to inform Captain Penshurst of that significant circumstance? "Virginie," I bitterly cogitated, "Virginie is a vain, heartless coquette, and it is my duty, therefore, to —" "Don't make a fool of yourself, Tom," broke in upon my reverie, from my father's voice, carefully pitched in an under tone. I was standing, that moment, in a window-recess, apart from the company. "Don't make a fool of yourself, Tom: I know what you are muttering about quite well—a mere girlish caprice, depend upon it, that could not for a moment be expected to survive the addresses of a *bona fide* captain of the royal navy. Be silent, therefore, upon matters that concern you not."

I deferred to this parental counsel, and as quickly as possible took my leave of the very agreeable party. This was on a Sunday. On the Tuesday we were to sail; and, late on the previous evening we were surprised by the captain's hail from a shore-boat nearly along-

side—he not being expected on board till the next morning. There was a brilliant moon; and the instant Captain Penshurst reached the deck, I saw that he was in a state of extreme excitement. His face was white as stone; and so were his firmly-compressed, yet quivering lips; and a volcano of passionate rage gleamed in his burning eyes. He walked sharply aft, and spoke briefly with Lieutenant Armstrong: the subject was, I could hear, the *Fair Rosamond* and her captain. Presently he came forward and abruptly addressed me:—"Sutcliffe, you know something of this Captain Charles Hubert, as he calls himself—so, at least, your father hints. Is this so?"

"I know very little of him, sir—and that—"

"Do you know where he is likely to be met with just now?" interrupted Captain Penshurst impatiently.

"Very probably at the Royal Hotel."

"Show me: I know the fellow by sight, myself, but you had better come with me."

The shore-boat was still alongside, and in ten minutes we were landed. The Royal Hotel was soon reached, but we passed through several crowded rooms without meeting the object of our search. At length we found him in a billiard room with three or four companions. He was playing for a large stake, and did not notice our entrance. At last his eye caught the fixed angry stare with which Capt. Penshurst regarded him. It shook him somewhat; but quickly rallying, he returned it with one equally fierce and menacing. His self-possession and steadiness of hand were however gone: he missed the easiest of strokes, and finally threw down his cue with a curse. He had lost a considerable sum. Captain Penshurst's fiery glance was now, it seemed to me, riveted upon a curiously-twisted guard-chain round Hubert's neck, to which, I supposed, a watch was attached. "Will you play with me?" exclaimed the commander of the *Curlew*, with starting abruptness, as he seized a cue, and approached close to Hubert: "you and I are, I am sure, old, though I think, never before such near acquaintances as just now." A deep flush crimsoned the slave-captain's features, but he said nothing, and was moving away when Captain Penshurst, who was fairly beside himself with passion, suddenly raised open Hubert's waistcoat with the butt-end, thereby revealing a locket suspended by the curiously twisted gold neck-chain. To seize it, glare at it with dilated eyes, and cast it wildly from him, was, with Captain Penshurst the work of an instant. "Rascal," he shouted, "from whom did you steal that portrait?" Hubert instantly saw his advantage; a mocking, triumphant light shot athwart his countenance, and his lips curled derisively, as he slowly rejoined, "Where did I steal this portrait of *la belle Virginie*, you ask? A pleasant question, truly. It strikes me now that you have chanced to see mine, similarly chained and mounted, in that charming person's possession, eh? most valorous captain! But here is something you have not yet seen. Look! Read! 'To my good friend, Charles Hubert:—Virginie T.' And, see, the date is June 9, 1824: an old friendship, you perceive; and, I believe, your companion there can satisfy you that it is a very intimate affectionate one."

A terrible blow on the face of the taunting rascal was Captain Penshurst's answer. Hubert reeled, lost his balance, and fell heavily on the floor; but regained his feet in an instant, and sprang towards his assailant with the leap and yell of a tiger. A bowie knife glittered for a moment in his hand; the next, an agonizing cry, and sudden jet of blood, proclaimed how fatally he had avenged himself. The terror and confusion of such a scene may be imagined. Hubert and his companions rushed out of the room, and I was left alone with the apparently dying captain. But a few moments, however, passed before the landlord and others made their appearance: the sufferer, who had fainted, was carried to bed, and medical assistance was instantly obtained. This done, I started off to inform the shore authorities of what had happened, and next made for the *Curlew* in all haste. Lieut. Armstrong, after listening to the account I gave, with much emotion, instantly determined on boarding the

Fair Rosamond, and seizing her captain, if on board, by the sole warranty of force; and hastily left the cabin for that purpose. He was too late; the *Fair Rosamond* had given us the slip; and all we could discern of her was the faint gleam of her white sails already far away to the eastward. The lieutenant resolved upon instant pursuit: the necessary orders were given, and in less than no time we were cracking on in the wake of the brigantine under a ten knot breeze from the northwest. But the Atlantic is a wide place; and the morning light revealed to us nothing but a vast expanse of air and ocean, untenanted by a ship or human being, save ourselves. Our friend had, for the present at least, escaped. We, however, kept on; reached in due time the Cape Verde islands, looked in there, and subsequently ran down the African coast to about ten degrees of south latitude, without falling in with either the *Fair Rosamond* or any other prizeable craft. We did not, however, despair of overhauling the brigantine, for we heard of her repeatedly, and at length our hopes were realized. The sloop had just rounded a headland at no great distance from the mouth of the Coanza river, when the look-out aloft sung out "Sail ho! and right ahead." Every glass was instantly directed towards the stranger—distinctly visible, at the distance of about half-a-league, though evening was fast closing in. There was no mistaking her: it was the *Fair Rosamond*, plain enough, under crowded canvas, and slipping away to the westward at the rate of six knots at least, light as the wind was. She was well down in the water, and had, it was nothing doubted, a closely-packed living cargo on board. Every possible inch of canvas was instantly spread in pursuit; and, as it was evident we were seen, a gun was cast loose, and a shot sent across the slaver's bows; and at the same moment St. George's glorious ensign flew aloft, immediately greeted—as I have hundreds of times exulted to hear—by the increase of the man-stealer's maledictions. The impudent rascals returned the shot, hoisted Spanish colors, and, changing her course a point or two, ran off at a spanking rate. The *Curlew's* guns would have reached her, but, sending round shot after a vessel whose hold was crowded with human beings, was not to be thought of, except in the last extremity, and all our efforts were consequently directed to run alongside and capture her by boarding. This was more easily proposed than brought to pass. A stern-chase is proverbially a long chase; and our dance across the Atlantic after the *Fair Rosamond* proved no exception to the rule. The nights were, however, fine and clear, so that we fortunately contrived not to lose sight of her. Cuba, or possibly Porto Rico seemed to be her destination; but the wind and the *Curlew* baffled her efforts to reach either of the desired havens, and so far was she driven out of her course that the blue mountains of Jamaica had been for some time visible from the deck, when the fitful varying breeze fell suddenly to a dead calm. This occurred in the night; and, as a thick mist, which came on at the same time, rose, like a curtain in the dawning light, the *Fair Rosamond* was descried, as motionless as ourselves, at about two leagues distance on the starboard bow. Unless the devil could help his own, at such a pinch, with a speedy breeze, we were now sure of her. Three of the *Curlew's* boats fell quickly from the davits into the water, and were off in a crack, fully manned and armed, to take possession of the, at last, luckless brigantine. Two hours' lusty pulling brought us alongside, and though a foolish attempt at resistance was made, the contest was brief as it was sharp, and the *Fair Rosamond*, with 175 likely negroes on board, was the lawful prize of the *Curlew*. We had scarcely breathed after the struggle, when the second lieutenant, Mr. Burbage, called my attention to the brigantine's launch, already at a considerable distance from the vessel. "Captain Penshurst's murderer," said he, "is escaping in that boat; do you follow, as you know his person, and be sure that no effort is spared to effect his capture." A small barrel of water, a bag of biscuit, and a compass, were tumbled into the sloop's pinnae, and away we started in chase. I need not dwell on the details of this boat-race: suffice it to say that, by about eleven at night, we

were so close upon our quarry, that the fugitives had no resource but to run their boat ashore near Yallah Point, Jamaica, and make for the interior of the Island. One of them—the captain I was pretty sure—was carried off in the arms of the men, having been, I presumed, wounded in resisting the *Curlew's* boats. Unacquainted as I was with the locality about Yallah Point, a night pursuit of the runaways would have been hopeless—absurd. The only thing to be done was to secure the captured launch, and get on myself towards Kingston, as fast as possible, across the country, leaving the men to follow, more at leisure, with the boats, coastwise. After several hours' delay, I succeeded in procuring a horse, though a sorry one, and was thus enabled to reach the Vale of Bath at about noon the succeeding day. I had a strong suspicion as to where the wounded fox would run to earth, and I was not, it proved, mistaken. My father, after attentively listening to my story, informed me that he happened to be at Vale Lodge early in the morning, when a cry, taken up by a score of voices, suddenly rang through the house to the effect that Capt. Charles Hubert was at the gate mortally wounded—dying. The panic which instantly ensued was terrible. Madame Tollemaches fainted—her husband, usually so imperturbable, was greatly agitated; and as to Virginie, her wild demeanor and passionate exclamations of sorrow, love, terror, and remorse, were vehement—overwhelming.

"This is strange news," I remarked. "Did he appear much hurt?"

"Past all surgery, I should say, judging from his death-like aspect. That which especially astounds me," added my father, in a peevish tone, "in this strange business, is, that I understood from the Tollemaches themselves, that every vestige of a causeless jealousy had been removed from Captain Penshurst's mind (he is quite recovered, I should tell you, though still weak, and not permitted to leave his room), and that the preparations for his union with this precious Mademoiselle Virginie have been resumed. You must see him, Tom, without delay. So frank and honorable a man ought not to be so scandalously trifled with—deceived—bamboozled."

I assented, and was speedily on the road to Kingston. Captain Penshurst expressed much pleasure at seeing me, and, although still pale and weak from loss of blood, appeared in jocund spirits. I minutely related all that had occurred up to the time of landing at Yallah Point, and the narrative manifestly increased his good humor. I am glad the fellow has escaped," he said, "I have chiefly my own rash folly to blame for what occurred. And I may mention to you," he added, "that the affair of the portraits and other matters you wot of, are, Mr. Tollemache has solemnly assured me, capable of the most satisfactory solution. It was merely by accident Mademoiselle Tollemache met Captain Hubert—and—but the particulars of the explanation, Virginie insists, I shall first hear from her own lips." The lover's eye lightened, and his pale countenance flushed pleasantly as he thus spoke, as if he already felt Virginie's sweet breath upon his cheek, dissipating with its silvery tones the foolish suspicions he had entertained.

It was cruel, though necessary to destroy this illusion. "It is also, I suppose, then," I began, "by pure accident that Captain Hubert is at this very moment sheltered at Vale Lodge—that—"

"How!—what is that?" exclaimed Captain Penshurst, startling fiercely to his feet. "What do you say?"

I repeated the account my father had given me, *verbatim*. As I spoke, a stern, almost frightful expression gathered upon Captain Penshurst's countenance—the same that I had seen him wear on the evening of the quarrel with Hubert.

"Can this be?" he muttered, with clenched teeth. "It seems impossible; but I will at least be satisfied, and at once. Do you, young sir," he added, "have a vehicle capable of containing two persons brought to the door immediately." I was about to remonstrate, but a peremptory commanding-officer sort of gesture, cut me short, and I hastened off to perform his bidding. In less than a quarter of an hour we