

LITERATURE.

CAPTAIN ROBERT HORTON.

A Tale of the Slave Squadron.

When I again reported myself on board the *Curlew*, after the accident related in the last paper, the sloop was lying at Sierra Leone; and the respective posts of captain and first lieutenant, vacant by the retirement from the service of Commander Penshurst, and the death of lieutenant Armstrong, had been filled up by two officers, who, for sundry peremptory reasons, I shall re-name Horton and King. They were, I soon found, the very antipodes of each other in almost all respects, save that both were excellent sailors, well-intentioned, honorable men, and about the same age—three or four and thirty—Captain Robert Horton a little the fonder, perhaps. It was in their mental and moral build that their lines so entirely diverged. Captain Horton was what—at the period I speak of, and I dare say now—was, and is, a *rara avis* in the royal navy—namely, a serious officer. I do not, of course, mean to say that naval officers have not, generally speaking, as deep a sense of the reverential awe with which the Creator of all things should be recognised and worshipped, as the most lackadaisical landsman in existence. It would be strange if they had not, constant witnesses as they are of the wonders of the great deep, and of manifestations of infinite and varied power, splendour, and beneficence, which the contracted horizon of the pent-up dwellers in towns affords comparatively faint examples of; but what I do mean is, that ninety-nine out of a hundred of them have an aversion to any other preaching or praying on board ship, than that furnished by the regular chaplain. And in this, so far as I have seen, the prejudice of the fore-castle entirely coincides with that of the quarter-deck; a sea-parson, in vulgar parlance, being quite as much an object of contemptuous dislike amongst genuine blue-jackets as a sea-lawyer. Captain Horton was of a different stamp, and carried, or endeavored to carry, the strong religious feelings—the enthusiastic spiritualism by which his mind was swayed—into the every-day business of sea-life. Profane swearing was strictly forbidden, which was well enough if the order could have been enforced; profane singing came within the same category; playing at cards or dominoes, even though the stake were trifling or nominal, was also rigorously interdicted, and scripture reading on the sabbath strongly inculcated both by precept and example. Other proceedings of the same kind, excellent in themselves, but in my opinion quite out of place on board a war-ship, were, as far as might be, enforced; and the natural consequence followed, that a lot of the vilest vagabonds in the ship affected to be religiously impressed in order to curry favor with the captain, and avoid the penalties incurred by their skulking neglect of duty. This state of things was viewed with intense disgust by Lieutenant King, and as far as the discipline of the service permitted, he very freely expressed his opinion thereon. The first luff, in fact, was a rollicking, fun-loving, danger-court-ting, dashing officer, whom even marriage,—he had a wife and family at Dawlish, in Devonshire, of which pleasant village he was, I believe, a native,—had failed to, in the slightest degree, tame or subdue. One, too, that could put a bottle of wine comfortably out of sight; two, upon an emergency, and if duty did not stand in the way—liked a game of billiards, and a ball next perhaps to a battle. This gentleman had got it into his head that Captain Horton was better suited to preaching than fighting, and often predicted amongst his own set, that the first serious brush we happened to be engaged in, would bring out the Captain's white feather in unmistakable prominence. Nothing can be more absurd, as experience has abundantly shown, than to infer that because a man is pious, he is likely to be a poltroon; but such persons as Lieutenant King are not to be reasoned with; and, unfortunately, it was not long before a lamentable occurrence gave a color to the accusation.

There was a French corvette, *Le Reynard*, in the harbor at the same time as ourselves, com-

manded by Le Capitaine E'Ermonville, a very gentlemanly person, and his officers generally were of the same standard of character and conduct. This was fortunate; several quarrels having taken place between a portion of the crews of the two vessels when ashore on leave, arising I fear, from the inherent contempt with which the true English sea-dog ever regards foreign sailors,—the American and Scandinavian races, of course, excepted. This feeling, grounded, in my opinion, upon a real superiority, is very frequently carried to a ridiculous excess, especially when the grog's on board, and the Rule Britannia notion, always floating in Jack's noddle, has been heightened and inflamed by copious libations to the sea-ruling goddess, under whose auspices, as he was at all times ready to sing or swear,—even just after receiving a round dozen at the caprice of his commanding officer,—that Britons never shall be slaves. It was so in these instances; and but for the good sense of the French officers in overlooking or accepting our apologies for such unruly behaviour, the consequences might have been exceedingly unpleasant, particularly as both the *Curlew* and *Le Reynard* were undergoing repairs, and could not leave the harbor for some time, however desirous of doing so. Even as it was, a coldness gradually arose between the officers, who could not help feeling in some degree as partisans of their respective crews, although Captain Horton, I must say, did warmly and untiringly admonish the English sailors of the duty of loving all mankind,—Frenchmen included; of the sin and folly of drinking to excess, even when on leave; and the wickedness of false pride and vain glory at all times.

At length, however, the repairs of both vessels approached completion, and it was suggested, I believe by Captain Horton, that a farewell dinner, to which the officers of the two nations should be invited, might be the means of dispelling any feelings of acerbity which these affrays apparently excited in the breasts of Captain D'Ermonville and his companions.

The then governor of Sierra Leone, a very warm hearted gentleman, instantly acceded to the proposition; the invitations were forwarded, courteously accepted, and everybody anticipated a convivial and pleasant meeting. It so proved till about eight o'clock in the evening; after the wine had been a long time on the table, and been very freely discussed—the weather being sultry, the guests hilariously disposed, and the olives excellent. The Lilies of France (this was in the time of Charles X.) the Rose of England, the Gallic Cock, and the British Lion, had all been duly honored and hiccupped till about the hour I have named, when, under the influence of the vinous fumes they had imbibed, the varnish began to peel off the tongues and aspects of the complimenters, and the conversation to take an unpleasant and boisterous turn. Captain Horton and D'Ermonville, who had drank very sparingly, were evidently anxious to break up the momentarily more and more disorderly party; but their suggestions were of no avail, and the exertion of authority at such a time, would, no doubt, they considered, appear harsh and uncourteous. Two of the guests, especially, seemed to be bent upon thwarting their efforts; these were Lieutenant King and Enseigne de Corvette, Le Page. They sat opposite each other, and had got amongst the breakers of politics, and those, too, of the most dangerous kind—the character of Napoleon, the justice of the war against him waged by England, and so on. Captain D'Ermonville, who faced Captain Horton, watched the pair of disputants very anxiously, and adroitly seized the opportunity of Le Page's leaving the room for a few moments, to leave his own and take his, Le Page's chair. Le Page, who was absent hardly a minute, finding his seat occupied, took that vacated by D'Ermonville, which was, as I have just stated, opposite to Captain Horton's. Both Captains had been, it afterwards appeared, conversing on pretty nearly the same topics as King and Le Page, but in quite a different tone and spirit. D'Ermonville was a Bourbon Royalist, *par excellence*, and agreed generally with the English estimate of the French emperor. Captain Horton was, I must also mention, somewhat near-sighted, and the air of the room, moreover, by

this time, was thick with cigar-smoke. Captain Horton, who had sunk into a reverie, for a minutes did not notice, for these various reasons, that D'Ermonville had left his place, much less that it was occupied by another, and leaning sideways over the table, so as to be heard only by the person addressed, he quietly said, "Yes, yes, Monsieur; as you say, no sensible man can deny that Napoleon was a most unprincipled usurper, an unscrupulous—"

He got no further. Le Page, believing himself to be purposely insulted, sprung up with a fierce oath, and dashed the goblet of *eau sucre* which D'Ermonville had been drinking, at the speaker's head, thereby inflicting a severe and stunning blow upon that gentleman's forehead. The terrific uproar that ensued could hardly be described in words; bottles flew across the room and through the windows, swords were drawn, whilst high above the din thundered the defiant voice of Lieutenant King, as he forced his way through the *melee* to the almost insensible captain, seized him in his arms, and bore him from the apartment. This action, as the lieutenant afterwards admitted, was not purely the result of a generous feeling. The honor of the English name was, he believed, at stake, and it had instantly occurred to him that Captain Horton, if left to himself, would not vindicate that honor in the only way in which he, Lieutenant King, held that it could be vindicated.

The exertions of D'Ermonville and the governor gradually stilled the tumult; and as soon as calm was comparatively restored, the French officers left the house, with the understanding, as *Le Reynard* sailed in the morning, that they should remain at a retired place, agreed upon, for any communication the English party might have to make. The affair had in some degree sobered us all, and it was soon plain that strange misgivings were creeping over the minds of Burbage and others of our set, as the time flew by, and no message came from the captain and lieutenant, nor the governor, who had gone to join them. At last voices in loud and angry dispute were heard approaching, and presently the door flew open, and in burst Lieutenant King, white with excitement, and closely followed by his now perfectly recovered commanding officer.

"Do you hear, gentlemen?" shouted the lieutenant, who was really frenzied with rage, "this captain of ours refuses to chastise the insolent Frenchman, or permit either of us to do so. He has a conscientious objection, forsooth, to duelling! Heavens! to think that the honor of the British name should be in the keeping of a coward!"

"Lieutenant King," replied Captain Horton, in calm and measured tones, "I order you to go on board the *Curlew* instantly."

"I will not return to the ship till this insult, which affects us all, has been avenged," rejoined the lieutenant with unabated wrath; "no, not if dismissal from the service be the consequence!"

Captain Horton glanced towards us, but finding probably, from our looks, too, that we, too, in the excitement of the moment, might refuse to obey his commands, and thereby incur—for no one could deny that he was a kind-hearted, considerate man—the ruinous penalties of a court-martial for disobedience of orders, merely said, again addressing Lieutenant King, "If that be your determination, sir, I must have recourse to other measures to enforce obedience and fortunately they are not far from hand."—He then left the room, we supposed, to summon a guard of marines.

"Now, gentlemen," exclaimed Lieutenant King, "now to meet these Frenchmen, before this accursed Captain of ours can prevent us. Yet stay," he added, "it would be better, perhaps, that I should go alone." This suggestion was indignantly spurned; in truth, we were all pretty nearly crazed with wine and passion, and off we set to the appointed rendezvous,—one only idea whirling in our brains, namely, that if some Frenchmen or other was not shot, or otherwise slain, the honor and glory of Old England were gone forever!

King and Burbage were ahead together, walking very fast, and conversing earnestly, no doubt as to the most plausible excuse to be offered for the absence of the captain, and the

best mode of insisting that a substitute should be accepted. The moon, a cloudless one, was at its full, and very soon the glitter of the impatient Frenchmen's epaulettes and sword hilts indicated the exact spot appointed for the meeting. We were quickly there, and D'Ermonville, who received us, adroitly availed himself of Captain Horton's absence to bring about a rational and conciliatory settlement.

"Captain Horton is the only person who has a right to demand satisfaction of any one here," he said, in reply to Lieutenant King's menacing *aboard*, "and he, very rightly, in my opinion, prefers, I perceive, some better mode of abatement than the senseless one of duelling."

"I repeat to you," replied Lieutenant King, with reckless equivocation, "that Captain Horton is indisposed, and has devolved upon me the duty of chastising the puppy who assaulted him." It is well to state that both gentlemen spoke in their own language, but perfectly comprehended each other.

"And it is, of course, for the reasons you have stated," rejoined M. D'Ermonville, with a slight accent of sarcasm "that Captain Horton is bringing up yonder bayonets to your assistance!" We glanced round, and sure enough there was a *shore* guard advancing in the distance at a run, and led by the Captain of the *Curlew*. The governor had stood his friend, and not a moment was to be lost. This was also Lieutenant King's impression, and, with the quickness of thought, he exclaimed, "You insinuate that I lie, do you?—then take that, sir, for the compliment," striking D'Ermonville with his open hand on the face, as he spoke.—In an instant the swords of both flashed in the brilliant moonlight, and quick and deadly passes were fiercely, yet silently, interchanged; the spectators, both English and French, gathering in a circle round the eager combatants, as if for the purpose of hiding the furious struggle from the near and rapidly approaching soldiers. D'Ermonville was, I fancy, the best swordsman, and, but for the accident of his foot slipping, after a but partially successful lunge, by which a flesh wound only, slightly grazing his opponent's ribs, was inflicted, the issue might have been different. As it was, King's unparried counter-thrust sent his weapon clear through D'Ermonville's shoulder, who fell helplessly to the ground, at the very moment Captain Horton and the guard came up.

(Conclusion in our next.)

SOUTH-WESTERN LIFE.

We make the following extract from a sketch of Colonel Archibald Yell, of Arkansas. The Judge had taken his seat for the first time.

The first case on the docket was called, and the plaintiff stood ready. It was a case that had been in litigation for five years. General Smoot arose for the defendant, and remarked in an overbearing tone:—

"Our witnesses are absent, and therefore I demand that the case be continued until the next term, in course."

"Let the affidavit be filed, for not till then can I entertain a motion for continuance," was the mild reply of the Judge.

"Do you doubt my word as to the facts?" General Smoot exclaimed sharply, and involuntarily raised his huge sword-cane.

"Not at all," replied the Judge, with his blandest smile; "but the law requires that the facts justifying a continuance must appear on record, and the court has no power to annul the law, nor any will to see it annulled."

The Judge's calm and business-like tone and manner only served to irritate the bully, and he retorted, shaking his sword cane in the direction of the bench:—

"Whatever may be the law, I, for one, will not learn it from the lips of an upstart demagogue and coward!"

Judge Yell's blue eyes shot like lightning; but he only turned to the clerk and said:—

"Clerk, you will enter a fine of fifty dollars against General Smoot, as I see him named on my docket, for gross contempt of court, and be sure you issue an immediate execution."

He had hardly communicated the order, when General Smoot was seen rushing towards him, brandishing his sword cane, all his features writhing murderous wrath, and pallid as a corpse.