

LITERATURE.

CAPTAIN ROBERT HORTON.

A Tale of the Slave Squadron.

(Concluded.)

The dangerously-wounded gentlemen—dangerously in that climate, I mean—was gently raised, and, at his own faintly-spoken request, left to the care of his own people. All of us English were then silently marched off to the harbour, where a boat was waiting to convey us to the *Curlew*, Captain Horton merely opening his lips, the while, to give such orders as were necessary. Nobody was placed under actual arrest, but it was thoroughly understood, the next day, that Captain Horton would report the whole affair to the admiral, at the first opportunity; and that Lieutenant King, to a certainty,—perhaps one or two others,—would have to answer before a court-martial for their conduct. Just a week after the duel Captain D'Ermonville was pronounced, to everybody's great joy, out of danger, and at the very next day the *Curlew* sailed from Sierra Leone on a cruise southward.

Not precisely a cruise either, for after touching at Cape Coast Castle, we made a direct stretch, the wind favoring, right across the Gulf of Guinea, to a part of the coast not very far northward of *San Felipe de Benguela*, and at about 11 degrees of south latitude, and the same of east longitude. Thereabout, we lay off and on for more than a fortnight, and like *Sister Ann*, for a time, the more eagerly we looked the less likelihood there seemed of anything coming—except indeed, an extra allowance of fever and ophthalmia, from so closely hugging the shore. It was rumored amongst us that a great slave hunt had taken place in the vicinity, by one of the chiefs of Negro banditti, who have the ludicrous impudence to parody the style and titles of 'kings,' and that a well-known Portuguese trader in black live stock, of the name of Jose Pasco, had a temporary barracoon somewhere thereabout, crammed with the wretched victims of the said hunt, in readiness for embarkation; and that for the purpose of entrapping some of his ventures, we should have to watch, and back, and fill about the mouths of the two rivers, between which we were generally to be found for an indefinite period. Meanwhile the kind of moral quarantine that had existed between Captain Horton and his chief officers since the evening of the duel,—words only of business and necessity passing between them,—continued with unabated passive virulence on the part of the latter, notwithstanding that the commander showed many indications that he would be glad to let bygones be bygones, from no mean or unworthy motive, I was even then of opinion, of purchasing forbearance towards a defect of character, which, in a naval officer, he must have well known, no other virtues under the sun, however numerous or angelic, could excuse or cause for one moment to be tolerated, but simple on the principle of forgiveness of injuries. One chance of avoiding the scandal of an official inquiry still remained. The service we were upon would very probably terminate in a desperate boat affair—victorious, of course, but affording plenty of opportunity for the vindication of Captain Horton's damaged reputation for personal bravery in the eyes of his officers and crew; and very heartily did I hope he might successfully avail himself of it when it came. It was not long before all doubt on the matter was set at rest. A king's troop-ship, bound for the Cape, which had touched for some purpose at Cape Coast Castle, spoke and communicated with us one afternoon, and a packet 'on service' was delivered to Captain Horton. Orders were immediately afterwards issued to sail in the direction of the most southerly of the two rivers, to hug the shore still closer, and that everything should in the mean time be prepared for a boat attack. This was done with a will.—Sharp cutlasses were re-sharpened to a keener edge, clean pistols re-cleaned, and doubtful flints replaced by more reliable ones, and finally Lieutenant King reported that everything was in readiness. Night was by this time

drawing on, and not a very clear one; we had shoaled our water quite as much as prudence permitted, and were close by the mouth of the most southerly of the rivers. Captain Horton ordered that the sloop should lie to, and that his gig, manned and armed, should be got immediately ready. He had frequently—I have omitted to state—gone on shore at about the same hour to reconnoitre, we supposed,—hitherto without success,—and we rightly concluded that his present purpose was the same. He came on deck a few minutes after the last order had been given, and addressing the first lieutenant, said "I am about to leave you, sir, in command of the sloop. You will keep her as nearly as may be where she is till I return. It will probably be necessary to act with all the boats, and you had better, therefore, get them alongside, ready manned and armed, so that when the decisive moment comes, there may be no delay." He then went over the side, was rowed ashore, and there was light enough to see he proceeded inland, accompanied by his coxswain only, according to his previous custom. I rather fancy that a doubt whether he might not have mistaken his man, had already crossed even Lieutenant King's bitterly-prejudiced mind.

Hour after hour passed; the boats lay heaving upon the water; and impatience was fast changing into anxiety when the quick, regular, man-of-war's jerk of oars was heard, and in a few moments the gig was alongside without the captain and coxswain. "A letter from Captain Horton for the first lieutenant," said the stroke oarsman, "brought us by a mulatta chap, with orders to deliver it immediately."—Lieutenant King snatched the letter, tore it open, and stepped to the binnacle lamp to peruse it. But it is necessary that I should, before giving its contents, relate what had previously occurred to the writer, as it came subsequently to our knowledge:—

Captain Horton and his coxswain had proceeded cautiously inland along the margin of the river for about a mile, when they were suddenly pounced upon by a large party,—coarsely abused, bound, and hurried away in separate directions. The commander's captors halted with him at last at a kind of hut, in which he found the before-named Jose Pasco, with a number of other ruffians as desperate and savage as himself, engaged, it seemed, in council. Near the hut—for no concealment was affected—he observed an immense wooden frame covered with tarred canvas,—a monster tent, in fact, filled with captured negroes; and in the river, just opposite, was an armed clipper-brig, also full as it could cram of the same living cargo. A shout of ferocious delight greeted the captain's entrance into the hut, and then Pasco commanded that he should be unbound. What next occurred, I abbreviate from the evidence afterwards given before the mixed commission by the mulatto who delivered the captain's letter to the men in the gig, and that of Juan Paloz, an admitted witness for the captors:—

"It's lucky we've caught you, Captain Horton!" said Pasco, "instead of you us. That accursed vessel of yours has been brought, we find, off the mouth of the river. She must remove further away for we intend that the brig you have seen shall sail to-night."

Captain Horton, who was very pale, the witnesses deposed, but calm and firm, did not answer, and Pasco continued:—

"We intend that you shall immediately write an order to the officer left in command of the *Curlew*, directing him—a plausible reason can be easily given—to instantly weigh, and proceed to a point about a league northward, where you can meet him, you know."

"And what is the penalty if I refuse?"

"Death!" was the savage response from half a dozen voices. "Death!" echoed Pasco, "as certain as that you are now a living man, and—I was at Sierra Leone a short time since—that you wish to remain one."

Captain Horton was silent for a brief space, and then said, "Give me pen and paper, since it must needs be so." This was done; the captain took the pen in his hand, sat down, made one or two stokes, and said, with an expression of pain, "Your cords have so hurt my wrists and fingers that I can hardly hold

the pen; let some one of you write as I shall dictate. My seal will be sufficient authentication; besides, the officer will imagine my coxswain wrote it."

"You must write yourself," said Pasco; "no one here knows English."

"Ha! well, then, I suppose I must try and manage it myself." The letter written, folded, sealed, and directed.

A muttered conference next took place between the slave-dealing ruffians, at the end of which Pasco said, "Let us well understand each other, Captain Horton. You no doubt have heard that whatever else I may be I always keep my promise, whether for good or evil?"

"That is, I know your character."

"Then listen to me. Should the *Curlew* not remove northward, in obedience to this letter, you shall be shot, as certainly as that there are niggers worth ten thousand dollars in yonder brig; and should—yet no, you are not a man to play us such a trick as that—still, should we be attacked in consequence of this letter, you shall be lashed to the top of yonder barracoon, and burnt alive in the very presence of your infernal countrymen. This I swear, by all the saints in heaven and devils in hell!"

The mulatto said the English captain looked paler than before, but answered quietly, "I quite understand."

The letter written under the foregoing circumstances, which I left Lieutenant King reading by the binnacle light, ran thus:—"Captain Horton directs Lieutenant King to take the command of the *Curlew's* boats immediately on the receipt of this note, and ascend the river in his front for, Captain Horton calculates, about six miles, where he will find a slave-brig, which he will carry by boarding. There are, also, a large number of negroes in an immense barracoon on the shore, whom Lieutenant King will prevent being driven away inland. The resistance will be, no doubt, desperate, but Captain Horton feels quite satisfied that under Lieutenant King the attack will be prompt, daring, and, with the blessing of God, crowned with success." Instantly that he had finished the hasty perusal of this note, Lieutenant King seized and belted his pistols, jumped into the pinnace, and we were off—about a hundred men in all—in a jiffy.—The oars were muffled, and the profoundest silence was enforced, in the hope of at least nearing the enemy unobserved. For something more than a league this appeared likely to be the case, but when about that far on our way, a confused tumult of voices began to spring up along the left bank of the river, followed by a dropping fire of musketry, obliging us to keep the centre of the channel, as it would have been folly to have wasted time in returning it. The tumult of discordant noises, shouting, shrieking, musket and pistol firing, roars of brutal merriment and deadly defiance, grew louder and louder as we near the goal.—Presently flame, at first flickering and uncertain, threw a lurid glare over the scene, and as we swept round a bend of the river, burst into a volume of fire, rendering every object within the circuit of a mile, I should say, distinctly visible. But we had no time to note those objects minutely; a well-armed brig, with boarding-nettings triced up, opened fire upon us, though without much effect. She was boarded and carried with one pealing hurrah! and leaving Burbage and a sufficient number of men in charge, Lieutenant King jumped into the boats again with the others, and made for the left shore, which was lined with a crowd of variously-accounted rascals. The flames I have mentioned proceeded from a huge canvas-covered building, which was blazing furiously; and although happening to be in the hindmost boat, I discerned the figure of a man, erect and motionless, upon its summit,—how or why there I could not imagine. The next moment the wind whirled flame and smoke hid him from my view, and I heard Lieutenant King's stentorian voice exclaiming, "Give way, men! give way, for God's sake! the devils have entrapped the captain, and are burning him alive. With a will, now hurrah!" The boats quickly grounded, and we sprang on shore, headed by the first lieutenant. The resistance, desperate it was, was broken through

and [dispersed with a leap and a rush; and then a sight,—the sublimest, the most terrible I ever witnessed, clearly presented itself—Captain Horton, pale, ay, and calm as death, was standing bound, erect, and bare-headed, upon the flaming slave-house, with a book in his hand, what one I could easily guess.—Frantic were the efforts made to save his life,—gratefully acknowledged by repeated wavings of his hand,—and vain as frantic; the devouring flames could not be arrested, the building collapsed, fell in, and Captain Robert Horton was buried beneath the fiery ruin!

It is needless to say how amply he was avenged, or dwell further upon the savage and terrific contest,—not long a contest, properly so called, although the ringing pistol-shot, the death-shriek, or the wild appeal for mercy undeserved continued far into the night; enough to say, in the words of the official report "that the attack was entirely successful, the number of negroes released from bondage eight hundred and seventy-six, and the breaking up of the slave settlement complete." This was quite true, but like another paragraph of the same report, not all the truth:—"Captain Horton died as a brave man should during the attack upon the armed slaver-gangs on shore."—Why the exact cause and manner of his heroic death were not officially set forth I never rightly understood.

He was quite dead when dragged, as speedily as it could be done, from under the burning embers of the monster slave-tent, and much scorched, yet his countenance had a remarkably composed expression. His bible was also found, not much injured, and is, I believe, now in the possession of the family of Lieutenant King, who with swimming eyes pointed out to us, a few days afterwards, in the cabin of *Curlew*, the following passage, written with a pencil in the inside of the leaves:—"Tuesday, half-past 1 p. m. The *Curlew's* boats are approaching; thank God I shall die in my duty, and not in vain. Should this ever meet the eye of her officers, they will by that time know, that a man who is afraid of offending God may not fear Death!"—*Eliza Cook's Journal*.

THE RIFLE.

We find in "The Yankee," the following, in reference to the principle of construction in the rifle, which is so peculiarly the American weapon, that all should comprehend its principle of action.

Many persons who are very expert in the use of the rifle, know nothing of the principle on which it operates, and would be at a loss, if asked, why a grooved barrel throws a ball truer than a smooth bore. The reasons are these:

In the first place, no bullet is or can be cast perfectly spherical. One side is always heavier than the other, and the ball, therefore, swerves from the right line of projection. However hard it may be to prove this, theoretically, practice demonstrates it. The same smooth bore, immovably fixed, twice loaded, with the same charge of the same powder, and with balls cast in the same mould, will not plant them in the same spot, at the same distance.

The rifle barrel is a female screw, which gives the tightly driven ball a rotary motion, so that if the bullet, or rather the slug, swerves with one twist of the screw, another revolution corrects the error. There are three motions in a rifle ball, the straightforward, the spiral, and the downward, caused by the power of gravity. A rifle of thirty to the lb. drops its ball about a foot in the hundred yards. Rifles are sighted, therefore, to meet this deviation. On leaving the barrel, the ball moves on above the line of sight, continually falling in a parabolic curve, till it intersects it. The point of intersection is called the *point blank*.

Who invented the rifle is unknown. Its principle was known to the North American Indians before the discovery of the continent. Their arrows are feathered spirally, and move precisely in the manner of a rifle-ball.

ON MISS ANNA BREAD.

While belles their lovely graces spread,
And fops around them flutter,
I'll be content with *Anna Bread*,
And won't have any but her.