

## LITERATURE.

## THE REVENGE.

## A Tale of the Slave Squadron.

Lieutenant Armstrong was commander (acting) of the *Curlew*, for some months after the occurrence of the incidents related in a former paper; and a more zealous or successful officer has never, in my belief, illustrated the reputation of the British navy, for efficiency and daring, in the hazardous and difficult service on the slave coast. In four months we had made three captures—irrespective of the *Fair Rosamond*—the name of one of which, *El Reyna*, a clipper-brig that had long eluded the vigilance and outstripped the speed of our cruisers, as well as the ingenious mode by which she was finally made prize of, must have attracted the notice of many newspaper-readers of those days. But although a first-rate seaman, and dashing commander, there was a defect—perhaps I should say an exaggeration of character—in Lieutenant Armstrong, which, in a considerable degree, marred his high qualities, and gave a tone of harshness to his demeanor, under certain circumstances, quite foreign, I am sure, to his real disposition. He was, in a word—as I believe I have previously hinted,—an iron disciplinarian, and this only from a conviction that only by the stern, relentless application of the maritime code of punishment, could the supremacy of the British navy be permanently maintained. Peremptory, irresponsible power, such as then existed in the service, is pretty sure, at one time or other, to lead an officer who indulges in it, to the commission of serious wrong and injustice. This, at all events, was once the case, during his professional life, with Lieutenant Armstrong, and the consequences of that great error were, by a remarkable fatality, visited upon him and others, at a time and in a manner equally unexpected and terrible. This omitted, but instructive passage in our naval history I am now about to place before the reader.

We took *El Reyna* into Sierra Leone, and whilst there, news was brought that *Le Requin* (*The Shark*), a fitly named, notorious and successful slaver, was on the coast. This vessel, the property of a French Brazillian Creole, was commanded by a skilful and active desperado of the English name of Harrison, and once a petty officer of the royal navy. His assumed designation, however, was borrowed from the fine craft he commanded,—Captain *Le Requin*—and he was reported to have under his command a motley crew of some of the most reckless ruffians that could be picked out of the refuse of half a dozen civilized nations. It was, moreover, well known that *Le Requin*, when the "Black" market was slack, overstocked, or more than usually hazardous, did a little in the way of ordinary admitted piracy; and stringent orders had consequently been issued to the officers of the squadron to use their utmost efforts to capture or sink so daring and unscrupulous a rover.

It was manifest that Lieutenant Armstrong listened to the many rumors afloat relative to the probable whereabouts of *Le Requin* with a far deeper than merely professional interest.—His inquiries as to the appearance of the vessel, and the haunts she chiefly frequented, were earnest and incessant; and it was whispered amongst us that Harrison had served in the same ship with the commander of the *Curlew*, and that circumstances of an unusual character had occurred in connection with them both.—However this might be, there was evidently some strong private motive at the bottom of the lieutenant's desperate anxiety to get away in search of the piratical slaver, and so quickly did he despatch his official business relative to the *Curlew*'s last important capture, that we were at sea again in less than half the time we had reckoned upon remaining at Sierra Leone. Our course was to be south and east, and as the winds proved favorable, the *Curlew* rapidly swept the African sea-board from Sierra Leone to the Bight of Biafra, looking as we passed into every inlet that might afford shelter or concealment to the object of our search. A sharp, weary look-out was at length rewarded by a passing gleam of success. We were within

about thirty leagues of Cape Lopez, which bore about S. S. W., and we were steering close hauled upon the larboard tack, as nearly as possible S. W., in order to give the Cape as wide a berth as might be in passing, when the look-out at the mast-head announced first one, and then two sail on the weather-bow. They rose quickly out of the water, and no wonder, for they had half a gale of wind on the quarter, and it was not long before we could guess pretty accurately at the character of both. The headmost was a square-rigged ship of about four hundred tons burthen, pursued by an armed schooner of half that tonnage, coming up with her hand over hand. Commander Armstrong immediately pronounced the schooner to be the *Le Requin*, an opinion confirmed by several old salts who had obtained a passing glimpse of the celebrated craft upon one or two occasions. As the *Curlew*, in anticipation of a dirty night, had been made very snug, and did not show much top-hammer, it was hoped she might not be seen till the *Le Requin* was within reach of her guns. For upwards of an hour this appeared likely enough; but at last the anxious men, whose eyes swept the horizon in all directions from the merchantman's deck, caught sight of us, and unable to restrain their exultation at the glad vision of a British man-of-war creeping up to the rescue, instantly let off a piece of pop gun artillery, ran up the union-jack, and set up a tiny shout in derision of the pursuer, which the direction of the wind just enabled us to hear and echo, with sundry very hearty maledictions on their stupid throats. The *Le Requin* quickly hauled her wind, and at once recognizing the character of her new customer got with all possible speed upon the same tack as ourselves, and being a remarkably fine weathery vessel, went off full half a point closer to the wind than the *Curlew*, thus showing from the first moment the well nigh hopeless aspect of the chase. Night fell—black as the inside of a tar barrel—with a gale of wind that by midnight had increased to a tempest, accompanied by flashes of lightning and peals of thunder which those only acquainted with the electrical phenomena of temperate regions, can form but a faint conception of. Frequently, during the night, a more than usually coruscation showed us the *Le Requin* upon the white crest of a huge wave, far away to windward; but when the cold grey morning dawned, the schooner had utterly disappeared, leaving us miserably cold, wet, disappointed, and savage. One thing, at all events, our night's chase had taught us,—that the *Curlew* was no match for *Le Requin* in point of speed, and that if we ever should succeed in putting salt upon his tail, it must be by some cleverer expedient than that of running after him at the rate of five feet to his six.—Captain Armstrong looked considerably bluer than the bluest of us, and did not reappear on deck till five or six hours after the ascertained disappearance of the schooner. He then ordered the *Curlew*'s course to be changed to the north-west till further orders. Those further orders were not issued till about noon on the morrow, when the sloop's head was pointed nearly due south; and whilst cracking on under a stiff breeze in that direction, the commander's new "dodge" for entrapping the coveted prey developed itself. The broad white ribbon along the gun line, was painted black; our No. 1 man-of-war canvas was exchanged for some worn, and here and there patched, merchant-sails, fished up from the hold; the shiny brass fittings of the deck, and the glittering figure-head, were smudged brown; the brass swivel gun amidships was unshipped and sent below; the carpenter and his crew manufactured a lot of wooden gun-muzzles (Quakers) and these, when painted, were portruded from the portholes in place of the real barkers, which were carefully concealed beneath tarpaulin, sails, hencoops, gratings, and other lumber, and so ostentatiously warlike were the "Quakers" fashioned, that their harmless character could be detected by half an eye, at half a league's distance. Many other minor changes and disguises were effected, and the *Curlew*'s transfiguration was complete. We now gradually edged away to the eastward, and as soon as we reached about nine degrees south latitude, and five degrees east longitude, the *Curlew*'s bows once more pointed northward, and we crept slowly enough along in the day, whilst during

the night we generally lay to, in order not to get along too rapidly. By the commander's orders, all the officers—himself included—replaced their epaulettes and laced uniforms and cocked hats, by round jackets and hats, and not more than twenty men were allowed to be on deck during daylight. All these twigs being carefully lined, we made way at an average rate of not more than three or four knots an hour, and in as lubberly a fashion—considering the but recent practice of the crew in that line—as could be expected. Time crept on as lazily as we did, and doubts whether our captain's clever contrivance would not end in smoke, were beginning to be entertained, when we spoke a brig bound for the Cape, a little north of the equator, which gave us the pleasant information that a large barque she had fallen in with, laden with ivory, palm-oil, and gold-dust, had been plundered the previous evening by a piratical schooner supposed to be *Le Requin*. The crew, it was further stated, had not been personally maltreated, and the barque had proceeded on her course. This was great news, and so well did it sharpen the optics of many of us, that an almost simultaneous hail from half-a-dozen voices, at day-break the next morning, announced a strange sail, hull-down, astern, and steering westward. Every glass in the sloop was quickly directed towards the stranger, whose white sails—unmistakeably those of a schooner—glanced brilliantly in the newly risen unclouded sun. Everybody felt or affected to be sure it was *Le Requin*; and when the schooner—which did not for some time appear to see us—turned her bowsprit towards the *Curlew* and crowded sail (the wind was southerly—right aft,) evidently in pursuit, the last lingering doubt vanished.—And we of course, zealously busied ourselves with ostentatious efforts to effect our escape from the suspicious looking craft. But spite of all we could do, so miserably was our ship handled and steered—terror-stricken men do nothing well—that we could hardly get five knots out of her; and the ferocious schooner would, it was quite certain, be up with us in less than no time. The commander's face was deathly pale from over-excitement, I supposed; and as for the crew, they were in an ecstasy of uncontrollable mirth. The notion of a British sloop-of-war running away from, and being chased by a slaver or pirate, was a joke so exquisite as to defy all ordinary modes of expression; and the astounding capers the men cut—the grimly comical squints and winks, and quiet grins, (silence being strictly enforced) they exchanged with each other and the advancing schooner, were irresistibly droll. Once it was feared that a misgiving as to who it was he was so eagerly pursuing had seized our friend, for when not more than half a league astern he suddenly luffed, and stood across our wake, apparently in keen scrutinizing observation. His hesitation was but momentary—the fierce aspect of the "Quakers" I think reassured him—and the chase was resumed. In about half an hour he ranged fiercely upon our weather-beam, and as the red flash and white smoke which heralded a shot across the *Curlew*'s bows, broke out of the schooner's side, a hoarse, powerful voice roared through a trumpet, from the after part of the deck, "Heave too, or I'll sink you!"

The commander of the *Curlew* leaped upon a gun-carriage, lifted his round glazed hat and rejoined in as loud and fierce, but mocking tone, "That will we, Captain *Le Requin*, and in a hurry, too." At the same instant, the seamen concealed about the deck sprang to their feet, the rest of the crew tumbled, with loud shouts, up the hatchways, the "Quakers" were shoved overboard, and before the astounded captors well comprehended what had happened they were confronted by the frowning double-shotted battery of the *Curlew*, and flight or resistance was alike out of the question. As soon, however, as the wild confused yell of rage and terror which arose from the motley crew that crowded to the slave-pirate's deck had sufficiently subsided to permit of her captain's voice being heard, a desperate but of course futile effort to escape was made. We were in no trim or humor for another chase, and at a wave from Captain Armstrong's hand, gun after gun belched forth its iron shower

upon the ill-starred schooner, and with such a terrible havoc to her spars and rigging that in a few minutes she was a helpless log upon the water. The pirate carried no colors but in this strait some of the crew ran up a Brazillian flag, and instantly hauled it down again in token of surrender. The firing at once ceased, and the schooner was hailed to send her captain on board the *Curlew* immediately. In a minute or so it was replied that the captain had been carried below, mortally wounded, was rapidly bleeding to death, and could not therefore be removed. I was standing close by commander Armstrong at the moment, and noticed that a hot, swarthy flush passed over his pale, excited features. After a moment's thought he said, hastily, "Sutcliffe, have a boat alongside, manned and armed, as quickly as you can; I must see this fellow myself, and without delay it seems." So saying he left the deck. By the time the boat was ready, he reappeared in full uniform, and was swiftly rowed on board the prize.

After briefly directing the men to disarm and secure the crew, he hurried below, motioning as he did so, that I should accompany him. The captain of *Le Requin*—a tall, gaunt, but not, I should think, originally ill-looking man—was unquestionably dying. His right leg had been carried away above the knee by a round shot, and although a rude tourniquet had been applied, the loss of blood had previously been so great that life, as we entered, fluttered but feebly in his veins, and there was scant breath left, it struck me, in the mutilated panting frame, to answer much questioning, if that were, as I supposed, Lieut. Armstrong's purpose there.—This was my first impression; but the ferociously triumphantly scowl that broke from his darkening eyes, at the sound of his visitor's voice (he had not seemed to recognize him by sight), testified to the still untamed energy of will, which could thus force back retreating life to the citadel it had all but finally abandoned. He partially raised himself, and glared at the lieutenant, as if in fearful doubt, that his failing eyesight and hearing had deceived him. "You here—Lieutenant Armstrong here," he hoarsely gasped as he fell back,—"then is death welcome as a bride!"

"I am sorry to see you thus, Harrison," said the lieutenant, in a compassionate tone. "I would much rather have met you alive and well."

"You could never have captured me alive," retorted Harrison. "That I am always provided against. And sorry, are you?" he went on relapsing into feebleness. "The time is past when that might have availed. You have been my rock ahead through life—always. *El Reyna* and her dusky cargo were partly mine—and now *Le Requin*'s gone. Yes—ever, my triumphant foe—oppressor! But," he added, again with kindling ferocity, "the last stake is the crowning one, and that, that—Lieutenant Armstrong—I win."

"I once did you grievous wrong, Harrison," replied the lieutenant, heedless of this idle menace—"unintentionally so. It was a mistake—a blunder, which I regret—although—"

"It was a murder!" screamed the dying seaman—"murder of soul and body. For another's fault—not mine—you lacerated my flesh and brutified my spirit. I was a lost man from that hour! I gently-born to be—but no matter. Well, I ran—was caught—again flayed by your order—yet I escaped at last, and now—now!"

The savagely-exultant tone of these words not only startled me, but also for a moment the steel-nerved commander of the *Curlew*. It seemed a vain alarm. There was no other person in the cabin save a colored lad about nine years of age. Harrison himself was lying helplessly upon a locker in front of his open sleeping-berth, in which hung a short bell-pull, the tassel of which his right-hand fingers clutched convulsively; but what help could he summon? The crew, we knew from the quiet overhead, had been secured. He was no doubt, I concluded, partially delirious, and fancied himself still in command of *Le Requin*. The lad, whose bright glistening eyes had been intently fixed on us (he was Harrison's son), handed his father a cordial of some sort. It greatly revived him, and the expiring lamp of