

Literary Selections.

THE PIRATE.

On a beautiful Sunday evening, after prayers had been said on board the *Hector*, a merchant vessel bound for Jamaica, the crew and passengers continued to lounge upon deck, in order apparently to enjoy the tranquility if not the beauty of the scene, which harmonised remarkably well with the character of the day. We were now among the Lesser Antilles; and both for this reason, and the fact that slavers and pirates were then very numerous in the Caribbean Sea, we were obliged always to keep a sharp look-out more especially at sundown. To take a minute survey of the horizon was the regular practice of the captain before the expiration of the short twilight; but on this occasion not a speck of any description whatever was visible. With the daylight the wind also died completely away; but in case of sudden squalls during the night, our studding and a great part of the other sails were clewed up, and all "made snug aloft," to use the technical phrase. It might be about two hours after sunset, but the greater portion of the passengers were still on deck, amused by the efforts of some of the crew to catch a number of those heavy, sluggish birds, appropriately termed *boobies*, which had settled on different parts of the rigging, and were there snoozing without the slightest apprehension of danger. One of the men had for this purpose crawled forward almost to the extremity of the yard-arm, and was in the act of putting his hand upon a slumbering captive, when we saw him suddenly look up, shade his eyes with his hand for a moment, and then heard him exclaim in a loud voice—"A sail on the starboard quarter!"

"Impossible," responded the mate, whose watch it was

"It's true, howsoever, sir," said the man after another long and steady look, "though I can't guess what she is, unless the Flying Dutchman!" and he began to descend the rigging with evident symptoms of trepidation, leaving the booby in undisturbed enjoyment of his nap.

All now crowded to the side of the vessel: and true it was that in a few minutes we could perceive between us and the sky, the tall spar of a vessel, which by the night glass was made out to be a schooner. She was about half a mile's distance from us, and by the way in which her royals were set, appeared to be standing right across our fore foot. The circumstances seemed absolutely incredible.—Scarcely one puff of wind had lifted our sails since long before sunset, and by the log it was seen that we could not have been advancing above half a knot an hour; yet there lay the strange vessel, come whence or how she may. Not a whisper was heard amongst us. Our captain standing in the *winch*, in order to bring the strange vessel more clearly between him and the sky, remained silent, gazing anxiously through his night-glass. At last he observed—

"She is getting another course, and must only have now made us out. But it is well to be prepared—she looks suspicious. Let the guns be shotted, Mr. Clarke, and call up all hands to quarters. Bring her head up to the winch," (to the helmsman.) "We'll soon see whether they really want to speak to us or not."

These orders which were not a little appalling to most of us passengers, seemed to diffuse the most unqualified satisfaction amongst the crew. A cheerful and lively bustle prevailed fore and aft; for it must be remembered that merchantmen in those days were necessitated to be as well prepared for the battle as for the breeze. The ports were thrown open, and the caronades (then recently introduced) run out, and the men stood in expectation, or at least in evident hopes of an approaching conflict.—The suspicious-looking vessel, however, seemed to have no hostile purpose in view. She disappeared in the gloom of the night as mysteriously as she had approached us, and the respective fears and hopes of those on board the *Hector* were alike disappointed. But the captain appeared to be far from satisfied. He paced along the deck, silent and thoughtful; and although the men were ordered down to

their hammocks, he himself remained on deck, and with five or six of the most vigilant of the crew, kept a continual look-out towards all points of the compass.

And the result proved the prudence of his watchfulness. In less than an hour, the cry was heard—"A sail on the larboard bow!" and all eyes were immediately directed to that quarter. It was at once made out to be a schooner, and, from some peculiarity in her rigging, the captain pronounced her to be the same vessel we had seen before. Strange to tell she appeared to be bearing right down upon our quarter, although no alteration in the weather had occurred with us! Her royals, as before, seemed filled, and her course was altogether too direct and steady to allow us to suppose that she was worked by means of *sweeps*. But her hostile purpose could no longer be mistaken, and there was an immediate piping up amongst the crew. Several of the passengers also magnanimously prepared to assist in defence of the vessel, and a suitable supply of muskets, cutlasses, and ammunition was handed up from the hold. While this last operation was going on, the schooner had approached within a few cables-length of us, when she suddenly bore up. As she was within hailing distance, our captain bawled out to know her name, and where she was from. A confused and unintelligible jabbering, which from the sound seemed to be Portuguese idiom, was the only response. While this colloquy was going on, by the dexterous management of her sails, she (to use the nautical phrase) *walked* round our stern, although no increase of wind was perceptible by our own canvass. As she again came round on our starboard quarter, our captain ordered one of the stern-guns to be fired across her bows; but no notice was taken of the salute, and our mysterious visitant at length bore away from us and was speedily lost sight of. There was no doubt as to her being one of the noted pirates vessels which carried on this nefarious traffic between the Spanish main and those islands, chiefs Cuba and St. Domingo, where they had their haunts.—They were built expressly for the purpose, with low hulls and immensely long spars, fitted to catch whatever current of wind might be prevailing in the upper regions of the atmosphere and which the less elevated sails of other vessels might fail to reach. Some of their hulls, I was also told, were so constructed that by turning screws, the sea could be allowed to rush into their false keels or bottoms, by which their speed was accelerated in an amazing degree. All this to me appeared extraordinary at the time, but I afterwards had practical reasons for knowing the truth of the information.

As may be imagined, we continued on the alert during the night, but heard no more of the strange schooner. Dawn was approaching, when our attention was once more aroused by the flash, followed by the report of a gun right ahead of us. From the loudness of the explosion, as well as the rapidity with which it followed the flash, it was easy to perceive that the vessel could be at no great distance, as well as that she must be a large man-of-war. After a few minutes interval, another shot boomed along the deep, rapidly succeeded by others of the same formidable loudness. At length these were replied to by other guns evidently of a less calibre, and proceeding from a different quarter.

"They are at it!—they are at it!" now for the first time shouted our skipper, who had served his time, and held a lieutenant's commission in the navy. "I'll stake my life, some of our cruisers have taken the pirate in tow! Will she do nothing?"—(to the man at the wheel, for we were still completely becalmed.) "What would I not give were it but to have a view of them?"

"She minds her helm no more than if she were a brute beast!" responded the helmsman, in a tone and key in happy sympathy with our captain's impatient query, while he kept rocking from foot to foot with the rapidity of a stop-watch mainspring.

It is impossible to describe the excitement which prevailed amongst the crew, most of whom were old men-of-war's men. After some time, the sound of the large guns entirely ceased

while that of the smaller ones instantly continued—implying, as was natural to suppose, that the latter had silenced the others, and that the crew of the supposed pirate were following up their advantage. At this crisis, a deputation of about twenty of our crew came aft, and entreated the captain's permission to hoist out a couple of boats, and allow them to pull to the scene of action. But the skipper understood his duty too well to give way to the enthusiasm of his men, although evidently gratified at their disinterested courage.

Morning at length dawned, and the nature of the conflict became distinctly visible, as also that the island of St. Domingo was about two leagues to leeward of us. A British frigate lay about a mile ahead of us, with the national flag drooping from the mizen peak, and without any other rag upon her spars. At about two miles distance was the identical schooner that had alarmed us so much during the night, her long mainmast being entirely bare, excepting her royals, which, however, were entirely useless, as not a breath of air lifted them. But long sweeps had been put into requisition, and every moment increasing the distance betwixt her and her assailant. The latter, however, had got out the jolly-boat, which, with a couple of large swivels fixed on her bows, maintained a running fight with the enemy, who might have easily destroyed her, had not the necessity of escape been so imminent. The shot of the gallant little boat's crew, although obliged to maintain a cautious distance, was evidently telling, as appeared by the shattered rigging of the schooner, which was making desperate exertions to get within influence of the land-breeze.

There has seldom, if ever, been any situation so tantalizing as was that of all parties on this exciting occasion. The pursuers could gain nothing on the fugitives, the latter could but make the most inefficacious efforts to escape; and we, the on-lookers, were compelled to witness what passed in still more provoking inactivity. Fortune at last seemed to declare in favor of the cause of humanity and justice.—*Cat's-paws*, the forerunners of the trade-wind, began to creep in from the south-east, lifting the sails (which were now invitingly spread out) of the frigate and our own vessel, while the land-breeze proportionally retired; and shortly the former came on slowly and steadily, bearing us towards our prize, as we now regarded her. When this change of weather became perceptible to the crew of the schooner, a most extraordinary scene took place. In less time than I can take up to describe the act, about half-a-dozen canoes, each capable of carrying not more than three persons, were lowered down from the schooner, and all began to pull towards the shore, although in many different directions—the latter being an expedient to distract any attempts to pursue them.

"Saw ever mortal eyes any thing to match that!" cried our captain, after a long pause of astonishment. "The covarely villains, that would not stand one broadside from that trim piece of craft! But I am cheated if they have left her worth the trouble of boarding. Bear off from her—bear off from her!"—he continued, to the helmsman; "there's mischief in her yet, I tell you." And his words were fearfully verified almost as soon as spoken. First a thin blue smoke shot upwards from the hold of the schooner; next moment a fierce blood-red fire blazed through between every seam of her hull; the tall mast seemed absolutely to shoot up into the air like an arrow, and an explosion followed so tremendous—so more terribly loud than any thing I had ever listened to, that it seemed as if the ribs of nature herself were rending asunder. Our ship reeled with the shock, and was for a few seconds obstructed in her course, in a manner which I can liken only to what takes place in getting over a coral reef. When the smoke cleared away, not a vestige of the late schooner was to be seen, except a few shattered and blackened planks.

But the destruction, fortunately, did not stop here. It was evident that the explosion had taken place sooner than the pirates themselves had expected. Three of the canoes were swamped by the concussion; and the same thing, if not far worse, had happened to the boat which carried the gallant little band of

pursuers, who had incautiously pulled hard for the schooner as soon as she had been abandoned, instigated at once by the love of prize money. Boats were instantly lowered, both from our own ship and the war-frigate, in order to save, if possible, the lives of the brave fellows; but the whole had, probably, been stunned, if not killed, by the explosion, and only two corpses out of the eight were found floating about. At this spectacle as well as at the destruction of the prize, which was looked upon as a most unfair and unwarrantable proceeding, the fury of the men knew no bounds; and although few of them had arms, either offensive or defensive, the whole fleet of boats began to pull after the fugitives with a speed that threatened more accidents than had yet befallen them. But the surviving canoes, which skimmed along the ocean like flying-fish, were too speedy for their pursuers; the latter succeeded in picking up three captives belonging to the canoes which had sunk, including, as luck would have it, the commander of the late piratical vessel. It was with difficulty that the men were restrained from taking immediate vengeance on the persons of the captive wretches, but they were at length securely lodged on board the frigate, which, as well as ourselves, (who were very glad of such a consort,) stood away for Port Royal with all sails set, where, on the second day thereafter, we arrived about noon, the frigate there coming to anchor, while we beat up to Kingston. We afterwards learned that we had escaped the menaced attack of the pirates by their perceiving through their night-glasses the quantity of muskets and other small-arms handed up from our hold, as they bore down on us the second time, as before mentioned. In a few days after our arrival, the wretched captives were brought to trial, and hung at the yard-arm.

Why Labourers do not get ahead.

Nothing can be truer than Mrs. Swisshelm's assertion in the *Pittsburgh Saturday Visitor*, that it is extravagance and improvidence, and nothing else, which keep the laboring classes in the power of capital. The way to become independent, continues Mrs. Swisshelm, is "for every man to live on half his wages, or less, if possible, until he buys and pays for an acre of ground, fences it, builds on it a house large enough to shelter himself and family from a winter storm. This is his fort. Then let him take all the time he now spends in taverns and other lounging places, to lay in stores of ammunition and provisions, in the shape of useful knowledge gleaned from books and papers, and grape-vines, trees, potatoes and cabbages growing in his enclosure. If he plants every foot of it with something pleasant to the eye and good for food, no tyrannical employer can starve him into any degrading submission."—Mrs. Swisshelm's article on this subject ought to be posted up on the walls of every workshop in the country.

AMERICAN LIFE.—An American is as capable of strong muscular effort, and is as enduring as an European, but he does not get half the *pleasure* from his vigour. Indigestion and nervous diseases sour the life of half our people. The evil increases, too; and the probability is, the health of the nation is degenerating. These facts are notorious in Europe, and our sharp, worn American faces are known everywhere. There is much disease, and bodily weakness among the poorer classes of the Old World; but in classes enjoying equal comforts, it will be found that the Americans are confessedly inferior in robust health. The dyspepsia, which so curses our whole population, is comparatively unknown among the older nations.—*Brace's Home Life in Germany*.

ALAS, POOR BACHELOR!—The following it is said, was found among the posthumous papers of an elderly single gentleman supposed to have died of ossification of the heart. The world is apt to mistake the true character of bachelors, as physicians are the diseases of their patients:—

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