

LITERATURE, &c.

THE BURNING SHIP.

Concluded.

SEVERAL of the sufferers, restored to fresh air, speedily recovered; but it was only to lament some one whom they supposed had perished. In the bows of the boat an elderly man raised his white head, and with incoherent language, inquired where he was. The bowman soothed him, and tried to explain his situation. 'But my son! my daughter!' he exclaimed, 'where are they?' Then turning to the burning ship—'Wretched, wretched man, they are lost!—lost for ever, and I yet live!' He struggled to throw himself into the sea, but, overcome with weakness, fell backward. At this moment another voice faintly uttered, 'My father! my father!' A cry of ecstasy burst from the old man's lips—it was his son! The youth lay near me, and the exclamation drew my attention towards him. He started up like one awaking from a frightful dream, and glared wildly around. But, O God! in what language can I portray the various feelings which alternately took possession of my soul, when, fixing his look on me, I saw the countenance of Sir Edward's son. A sick shuddering came across me. The old man had called upon his daughter. In an instant the inanimate body of the young female was raised in my arms. I parted the dark tresses that obscured her face, and as the red glare shone upon it, recognised my Agnes! Yes, it was she! my arm had encircled her neck, my hand had been pressed upon her heart—but then I knew her not: and now to find her thus! Sobs of anguish, and tumultuous bursts of joy, followed in rapid succession. The men rested on their oars; the coxswain guessed the cause, but knew not the whole truth; and it was some minutes before I was sufficiently tranquil to give directions. 'You have saved her, Sir,' said the coxswain, and a glow of pleasure filled my heart. Sir Edward and his son had relapsed into stupor, and shortly afterwards we reached the frigate. I sprang upon the deck, to inform the captain whom I had brought, and then returned again to the boat, to see my richest, my only treasure, safely conducted up the side. In my arms I carried the dear girl to the captain's cabin; stole one kiss from those lips, on which I had hung with such delight in early infancy—pressed her to my heart—and then hastened back to my duty. Again I reached the ship; but all approach was now impossible, and we could only pick up those who were enabled to swim; and occasionally, by great hazard, run so close as to receive some poor sufferer from the wreck. Yet there were many who still remained: and dreading to trust themselves to the sea, hung tremblingly between two deaths. My boat was once more filled, as also were all the rest, and we made for the frigate, which had arrived within a short distance. Suddenly, an awful explosion shook the whole atmosphere, the glare of light was for a moment increased—the next a shower of blazing timbers fell in every direction around; and the pale moon alone shed her silvery effulgence on the transparent wave. No shouts, no shrieks were to be heard: the bitterness of death was passed, and all was as tranquil as the grave. Happily the burning ruin had struck none of the boats and we soon afterwards put the sufferers on board. The boats then again repaired to the place: but except the shattered remains of the wrecks, no trace was left: the swelling billow rolled smoothly on—and that gallant ship, with many a stout heart, was buried beneath its deceitful surface. Still we passed across and across, in every direction; and long after the sun had kindled up the day our search was continued; but nothing met our view, except mutilated fragments of human bodies, and pieces of blackened timber. All hands repaired on board, the boats were hoisted in, and the frigate pursued her way to England.

On getting aboard, I hastened to the surgeon, and inquired the state of Agnes and her friends. They had all recovered, and were composed to slumber. Etiquette forbade my entering the precincts of the cabin uninvited: yet I lingered near the door, and the steward gave me all the information I could obtain. Duty compelled me to attend in another part of the ship: after which I hastened to my berth, and equipped myself in uniform, for the forenoon watch. Never was I more studious in adjusting my dress; and a feeling of pride animated me, under the reflection that I had endeavored to earn my present distinction solely by my own efforts. We had saved ninety-seven people (including passengers), out of one hundred and forty-three. The ship was an East Indiaman, on her passage out; and Sir Edward was going in her to Calcutta, to fill a high official station. No one could tell how the fire originated, but it was supposed to have been occasioned by the communication of some combustible fodder, stowed in the orlop deck, for the live stock; but so amazingly rapid had been its spread, that the boats were rendered useless before they could be got out, excepting one small jolly boat, which sunk soon after

it was lowered. Notwithstanding my attention to dress, it would be impossible to describe the tumult of agitation under which I labored. Parents—home—Agnes—all rushed upon my heart; and the cruel blow which had occasioned my departure, mingled with the rest. When relieving watch, I found my friend the lieutenant upon deck, and to him I briefly related my situation. He had heard parts of my story before; but when I told him, he advised he to suffer things to take their course; to manifest a becoming spirit, and by no means to shew resentment. He said, the captain had spoken very highly of me, for my exertions and humanity, and was greatly pleased with my conduct. Praise is sweet from those who despise unmeaning flattery, and this came like a cordial to my drooping soul.

Soon after ten o'clock Sir Edward awoke, considerably refreshed, and walked about the cabin. He talked much of his deliverer; and on being soon after joined by his children, he returned thanks to heaven for their safety. While rising from the attitude of thanksgiving, his eye was suddenly caught by a view of his own castle, and several neighbouring prospects, which I had delineated from memory. He stood still; it revived recollections at once both pleasing and painful. Agnes joined him, with an exclamation of surprise, for she, too, had discovered the cottage of my parents. Her brother had left them for the deck. The moment I saw him ascending, a feeling of indignation filled my breast, but it was momentary: I gave him the usual salute, and walked forward, to issue directions to the men. Shortly afterwards Sir Edward and Agnes appeared, and my agitation appeared almost insupportable, particularly when I heard the captain's voice hailing me, and guessed the purport of his call. Mustering all my resolution, I approached them; but who can paint the different looks of father, son, and daughter? The countenance of the first was suffused with shame; the second betrayed a humbled pride; while Agnes, her eyes filled with tears, viewed me with tenderness mingled with reproach. Sir Edward expressed his acknowledgments in broken accents; sometimes it was stiff formality, and then it sunk to condescending kindness. There was a conflict of passions in his breast. He took my hand with coldness, and then pressed it ardently. The son had walked away, but Agnes spoke volumes to my soul. I had been treasured in her memory with fond affection. The interview was distressing to each. I would have inquired for my parents: but while the question hung upon my lips, a well-remembered face displayed itself—it was the old butler of the family. As soon as it was possible, I took the old man aside, and learned that the kind beings to whom I owed existence had been dismissed from the estate, but had since obtained a competency through the death of a relation, and were now comfortably settled. They had mourned my loss as one who would never return, and he believed they were totally unacquainted with my being alive. I briefly ran over my history to him, and only on one subject was I silent; but this was unnecessary, as he told me many circumstances which gladdened my heart. Being officer of the forenoon watch, it was my turn to dine with the captain. This I would gladly have declined; but it was impossible, without a breach of regulations. At the appointed hour, after putting on my full dress, I entered the cabin, and was seated, at the captain's desire by the side of Agnes. Sir Edward bit his lips, but his son quitted the table, muttering something about plebeian; while the sweet girl was almost fainting with alarm. The captain had noticed a strange peculiarity at our first meeting; and, as I understood afterwards, had answered many inquiries respecting me. My friend, the lieutenant, had also given him some hints, but his heart was too generous to insult an individual because his origin was humble. He himself had climbed through every gradation to his present rank, and desired the proud aspirings of those who considered high birth as the greatest recommendation. Without discomposing himself, he directed the steward to carry the young gentleman's plate to another table. Sir Edward felt this; and rising up, demanded whether his present condition had so far reduced him in the captain's estimation, as to make him the object of insult? 'Sir Edward,' replied the captain, calmly, 'when you have explained yourself, I shall be better able to answer you: at present I am involved in mystery.' 'Look there!' said the Baronet, pointing to me, 'the son of my gardener! Look there!' continued he, turning to his son, 'the heir to the richest baronetage in Great Britain: and that,' pointing to Agnes, 'to my shame be it spoken, is my daughter!' I offered to withdraw. 'Sit still, Mr——,' said the captain, taking me by the hand, rising at the same time with all the dignity which marked his character, 'Sir Edward, he coolly answered, 'it is not in my nature to taunt any one with obligations. I view mankind as united to me by the strongest ties; and whether it was a beggar or a duke, should consider I had only done my

duty, in snatching a fellow-creature from destruction. But, let me ask, where would your Baronetage have been, had not this young officer stepped between you and the grave? Where would your ungrateful son have been, but for his timely aid? And where would this sweet girl, of whom any father ought to be proud—where, I say, would she have been, but for the youth you despise?' He grew warm. 'By heaven! Sir Edward! you would have found the sharks no respecters of birth and riches: they revel in the glorious spoils of Death; and you, ere now, might have satiated their ravenous appetites!' The Baronet shuddered. As for this young officer he has been three years under my command. I have watched him silently and secretly; he is a noble fellow, and shall never want a friend while these old timbers hold together! If he has injured your daughter, say so at once, and I instantly discard him.' 'He has! he has!' exclaimed both Sir Edward. I felt myself inspired with eloquence, and told my tale. 'If,' said I, 'to love Miss Agnes is a crime, it is one that has produced the most happy results, and never, never, will I resign it. To that love I am indebted for my present situation; it has been the Pole-star of my heart, yet never till this moment did my lips avow it. This, then, Sir, is the injury I have committed; and now it remains with you, to drive me from you, or still to cherish the obscure individual whom you are pleased to patronize.' 'Drive you away my boy!' replied the captain; 'no no! I should indeed consider you unworthy of my notice, could you associate with so lovely a lass, and be insensible to her amiable disposition and beauty. But what says the fair lady? Does she, too, despise the poor but honest sailor?' A faint smile passed across her pallid cheek, as she distinctly uttered—'He has preserved my father's life!' At that moment, thrown off my guard, I caught her hand, and pressed it to my lips. Both her father and her brother saw it, but they neither spoke nor moved. 'Come, come!' said the captain, as he turned round to hide the gathering tear: 'let us sit down to dinner, and we'll discuss the matter afterwards. At present, thank God, you are safe: the young folks have yet many years to pass over their heads, and a thousand things may happen.' A pang shot through my breast, 'Thus much, however, I will say: if ever he disgraces his cloth, I will be the first to oppose his designs; but if, on the contrary, he commences as he has begun, I will support him by G—with hand and heart; so, Sir Edward you will have two opponents instead of one.' Sir Edward resumed his seat, his son returned to the table, but it was evidently with great mortification; and the dinner passed off tolerably well.

The infant I had taken from its dying mother was the son of a female passenger, going to join her husband, an officer in the army, who had preceded her about twelve months, at a time when it was impossible she could accompany him. The little infant did not want for nurses in the frigate, as a great many women had been saved, and all were anxious to caress and fondle the child. After touching at the island of Flores for a supply of water and fresh provisions, we pursued our course for home; and though, from my junior station, I could not join the company of Sir Edward and his family, nor even approach the captain except on duty, yet Agnes took frequent opportunities of conversing with me. I did not venture to mention my ardent attention, or request a return of her esteem, yet I had the satisfaction of knowing that we regarded each other with feelings of affection, founded upon the purest desire of promoting each other's happiness. None but those who have witnessed, can form any idea of the beauties of a fine clear summer evening, passed upon the glossy surface of the ocean. It is the season when the officers assemble on the quarter deck, and as they pace fore and aft, enjoy the social and unrestrained converse, which is precious to the heart. The falling shades of twilight conceal the anxious look, the starting tear, as busy Memory conjures up scenes of past joys, and Hope portrays the coming future. It was at these hours that Agnes generally came on deck, and I had sometimes the inexpressible pleasure of enjoying her society. Sir Edward had relaxed in his haughtiness; but his son remained impenetrably stubborn.

At length we arrived in England. The Baronet repaired to London; but previously to his departure, I received the most solemn assurance of the constancy of Agnes. To my friend the lieutenant I was indebted for this last interview; and in his presence our vows of fidelity were pledged. As soon as possible, I visited my parents (whose joy exceeded all bounds) and found them very comfortably settled. A few weeks after our arrival, the Baronet, with his son and daughter, once more embarked for Bombay. I had one farewell letter from Agnes; and every feeling of my soul was roused to renewed exertions in my profession, under the hope of one day calling her mine. It would be a useless, though perhaps not an uninteresting task,