

## Literature, &amp;c.

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From Hogg's Instructor.

## TOM BENSON'S NOTES.

## THE DUEL.

'Give way my boys—give way!' cried our first lieutenant, as we stretched to the oars, and sent our boat through the waters of New York Bay, as if she had been a flying fish.

'Pull with a will!' Cogley you are Nantucket bred—aint you?' said Mr Rhind, the senior Reeler, who was at the tiller, and who looked to leeward with eyes that flashed as keenly and anxiously, as if he had been in the whale-fishing trade, and had seen the blow of a spermaceti.

'Shall it be said that the Vermonts are no match at a long and strong pull, for the Potomacs?' cried the first lieutenant, seating himself beside one of the oarsmen, and bending to the work with a right good will. 'Yo ho! here we go,' and he sung out cheerily to the boats' crew, who excited by the ejaculation of their superiors, seemed to lift the barge right from the bosom of the water, and to send her like a winged harpoon through the air.

'Cheerily men, well pulled!' Hurrah! cried the first lieutenant, clapping his hands and laughing, while his eyes danced in his head with excitement. 'These Potomacs begin to feel our northern frost through their mittens. They should have sunshine and smooth water, if they wish to hold their own with old Sancy Vermont at a long pull.' 'Ay, ay,' chimed in Mr Rhind; whose flushed cheek and keen eye showed that he too was deeply interested in what seemed to be regarded as a trial of boatmanship; 'they feel old Boreas blowing from the caverns of the Catskills, and freezing up their blood. They are too far north to beat the lads who were cradled at Nantucket, and Cape Cod.'

'They shall teach you double-shuffle and cut the fiddle at the ball to night, however, Mr Rhind, I tell you,' said Mr Rydal, the second lieutenant, who still continued to pull and inspire the men to go ahead.

'Yes, yes, Rydal! they could teach us all sort of footwork I know,' replied the gay young officer, from the famous Mazourka to the last loafer-kick, but we can give them the heel and toe too, when it comes to strong hands and good bottom. Don't you see how the distance between us widens? First for Manhattan! hurrah!' and on we swept with right good will, under the cheering influence of our officers' enthusiasm.

At this time there lay in the bay of New York, the two United States' warships, the Vermont and Potomac. We Vermonters had returned from a cruise in the south, the Potomac had been on a northern station, and by a lucky, or perhaps unlucky coincidence, we both cast anchor off the little Island of Rock-Oben, on the morning preceding Christmas 18—. There is a jealousy between the north and south, which has existed since the birth of the Federal Compact, and which is growing stronger every day. This jealousy assumes different forms with different men; but it nevertheless manifests itself in all, from the vulgar opposition of loafers to the distant reserve of Legislators and well bred gentlemen. We of the Vermont were northerners, chiefly of the New England states, and the recent loss of a brave lieutenant in New Orleans, together with sundry corporeal recollections borne by several of the crew, did not at all render the proximity of the Potomac and her southern agreeable. There were few civilities exchanged between the officers of either ship; for old captain Burr had refused to dine with captain Railton of the Potomac, and as he had merely stated, that it would not be convenient for him to do so, the refusal was construed into a slight, as no counter invitation followed it. The civic authorities of New York, who like the civic authorities of a good many other places, delighted to honour the warriors of their country, had invited the officers of both ships, however, to a ball on Christmas eve, and it was to this dancing affair that we were skipping along with our bending ash blades and cheering cries. It was with the boat of the Potomac, therefore, that we were competing; and as the feelings that animated us were none of the most kindly, we pulled as if our lives depended upon it, in all the eagerness and selfishness of national rivalry.

'That fellow does not seem to have rollocks on the side of his dugout,' said young Rhind: see how the oars lurch; and he smiled as he watched the regular and vigorous strokes of our oars, as they rose and fell into the surging water that danced behind us in a long track of foam.

'Ah! your southerner for a long pull at the oarbook; and a swift chase after a runaway nigger, but he may go to bed when Boston and Bedford-bred men take the oar against him,' cried Mr. Rydal.

Despite of the jokes of our superiors, however, and the vigorous pulling of our men, the barge of the Potomac continued to run parallel with us, and to put us to our mettle.

It was evening, but such an evening! you might have picked up pearls from an oyster bed, or counted the scales upon a shrimp, by the light of the clear full moon. The stars seemed to have received an extra polish, for they twinkled and shone like marines' belt-plates upon review-day. Mayhap they reflected the light of the thousand eyes that were

beaming in New York that night, lit up with the radiance of light and joyous hearts. The aurora borealis, too was dancing round the moon, and whirling and capering amongst the stars, in all the fantastic vagaries of a giddy youngster 'at a husking-bee, and in all the bright hues of the rainbow; so that we observed everything around us, near and afar off, as distinctly as if it had been day. The barge of the Potomac was running on our larboard quarter, and the current of the Hudson was consequently more sensibly felt by them than us. To have allowed them to touch the quay before us would therefore have been a dire disgrace, we having the advantage of the smoother water, so we gave way with a will, and had landed and driven for the Astor House before our rivals had touched the shore. Halloo! what a hubbub, what a bustle, what a glare of light, met our eyes as the Jarvis pulled up at old Jacob Astor's palace! I and Alandro Dias had been ordered by lieutenant Briggs to attend him and his juniors in the capacity of hanger-on, and we, of course had mounted aloft with the knight of the whip. When we pulled up before the brightly illuminated portal and looked into the gaily painted corridors, across which waiters and ladies and gentlemen were flying frantically, I was so taken aback with the sight, and so confused by the humming murmurs and loud exclamations of the crowd, that in my hurry to descend, I awkwardly missed my footing, and falling upon some of the most eager onlookers, I soon found myself upon terra firma, and rolling about like a porpoise. I gathered myself to my feet as quickly as possible, and tearing open the coach door, I handed my officers from the vehicle as the Potomacs drove up.

It was into a brightly-lighted ante-room, around which ladies' and gentlemen's upper garments of fur and broad cloth were hanging, that the officers of both ships were ushered; and, although they were perfectly well-bred in their salutations, and evidently frank as sailors always are to each other, I saw their eyes running over each others' persons as if they had no objections to pick a hole in a neighbour's coat. There was one man amongst the Potomacs whom I shall never forget; and neither would you, gentle reader, if you had seen him as I saw him, and if you had heard the on breaks of his violence as I heard them. Lieutenant Bavar was tall and muscular, and people who are not over-fastidious in their ideas of manly beauty might set him down at once as a very handsome man. He was was more of the Hercules than the Apollo, however; for, although perfectly free and easy in his carriage, impressions of his strength and agility would obtrude themselves upon the mind of a close observer, rather than those of grace and symmetry. His face had been torn up with small-pox, and perhaps it was a desire to curtain over its roughness that had induced him to allow his beard and mous aches to grow so luxuriantly; no matter, his black glaring eyes shone from his hirsute face like those of a tiger sparkling in the jungle. The longer you looked at this man, the longer you would look; there was a fascination in his eyes which chained yours to them; but, in addition to this charm of the serpent's, they combined the fear inspiring qualities of the tigers'. His complexion was sallow, very sallow—indeed it was whispered that there was African blood in his veins; and so jealous was he of the last sympathetic allusion to the poor negroes, that it is probable he sought to conceal his consanguinity by his assumption of extreme hatred. There was a wicked twitch now and again agitating his moustache, that did not speak much in favour of his patience; and when I followed my own officers, the ultra-polite mayor, and some of his aldermen, together with the Potomac's lieutenants, to the door of the ball-room, I did not like Bavar, nor, I am sure, did any one who was within ten yards of him.

I have been at the Sarrey Zoological Gardens, where all sorts of birds in all sorts of feathers are to be seen hopping on their spurs as lightly as flower-girls at a May fair; and I have seen the butterflies of the tropics wheeling in the sun in robes of the loveliest prismatic hues; but a New York Christmas ball beats them all to a quail's wing. Every costume, in every colour and make, is seen flitting through the dance—not in the affectionation of an opera or fancy ball, but with all the earnestness of nationality. Here you might see two Scottish Highlanders flitting about in their fantastic costume and talking Gaelic; and there some stylish Frenchmen and ladies chattering away as if they were moving through the salons of Paris; Dutch and Germans were plentiful as raisins in plum-pudding, and as grave as their progenitors of New Amsterdam; while United States' naval and uniforms were as abundant as buttons on a lacquey's jacket.

The chandeliers, which hang suspended from the roof of the saloon, were glittering like thousands of sparkling stars, while the evergreens that festooned the pillars of the recesses were as fresh as if they grew in Arcadia. Alandro Dias and I felt that they were not at home amongst all this garish show and grandeur, so we ported our helmets for the bar and smoking-room, and soon found ourselves as comfortable as a stove, grog, and cigars, could make us.

Dancing may be a very fine art on land, but I never saw it get real downright justice done it except by sailors. Heel and toe, snuff the buckle, high kick and treble, that's the dandy for Jack. I have seen your ladies and gentlemen sliding through the mazes of the dance as if they had been on land-skates—so easy, so airy, so indifferently. They might have fallen asleep, while going down the middle

or crossing hands, but there is none of this pasover work with Jack. He has to dance he knows, when he begins to it; and he does dance, not like a dog to an organ man, but like a man who is determined to keep ahead of every mortal wind instrument or stringed instrument that ever foot kept time to. He dances as he works—that is right hard and earnestly; and then, as he generally has the serving out of his own grog at dancing bees, he does not keep his thumb in the measure, I tell you, but pours in the rum to keep up the sweat and steam. It does not matter whether a seaman be officer or foremastman, there is none of the dolphin about him, when dancing is to be done; and then, again, when he has finished the caper, he soon finds his way to the smoking saloon and brandy-bottle.

Alandro and I had not long been seated, when the officers of the Potomac and Vermont came tumbling into the berth where we sat, like boarders to the deck of a gold laden galleon, and laughing, joking and skipping like kids at midsummer. They quickly seated themselves round a table, and were soon mingling the smoke of cigars with the fumes of brandy, and spicing their rapartee with snatches of song.

Mr Briggs, the first lieutenant of the Vermont, and Mr Rydal the second, were two of the closest friends and happiest tempered men that ever walked together upon the same deck. The former was a little reserved and even diffident in his disposition, it is true, while the latter was free and open in heart as he was in face; but the diffidence of the one and the freedom of the other did not prevent each other from discovering, that his brother officer's heart was a mate for his own. Angry I had never seen either of them, but I knew them both to be brave, for I had seen their courage tried, not in brawls or fights, but in the endurance of toil and danger; they were beloved by all on board of our ship; and so numerous had been the instances of friendship which they had manifested towards each other that one of the fore-castle oracles had called them Damon and Pythias. They seated themselves at the same table with Bavar and several of the seniors of the Potomac, and began talking; while young Rhind and several reekers crushed in beside Alandro and myself.

'So captain Railton represents the Potomac aloft,' said Mr Rhind to one of the youths who accompanied him.

'Yes, and I suppose your old man has sent his captain of marines to stand sponsor for the Vermont,' replied the gay boy.

'Well I guess both Mr Briggs and Rydal there are glad to depute to old Tom Frizzle the duty. He'll be as proud as Punch after it, however,' said our mid laughing; 'and I should not wonder to see him take precedence of every officer in the ship, save our commander, after to night.'

'Come Tom Benson, drink! fire away Alandro,' and so with loud laughter and jokes the young men were driving round the spirits and working themselves into rear admirals in tobacco smoke, when a deep imprecation and then a crash of a broken chair made us spring to our feet, and hurry to the spot whence the sounds came. With his knee resting on the floor, and his hand upon the fragments of the chair, Mr Rydal was calmly looking into the face of Bavar, who was struggling in the arms of Lieutenant Briggs and his brother officers, when we approached. 'How did this happen?' said my comrade, the fiery captain of the Vermont, and his nostrils expanded and his chest heaved as he touched his hat and looked fixedly at the prostrate gentleman. Rydal spoke not a word in answer, however; but there was a fixed and cold look of resolve upon his usually manly and open face, that completely changed his character as he rose to his feet, and making a rapid signal to Mr Briggs, turned upon his heel, and whistling a low air, walked coolly and slowly from the room. The tall and athletic southerner seemed furious, for he exerted his Herculean strength to the utmost, and threw from him with great violence those who attempted to hold him by the arms. Mr Briggs was of rather light make but of great muscular strength and he was the only one who maintained his hold upon the angry Bavar, whose face was agitated with fiendish-like-fury, and who strove to throw the young man down with all his might. Waiters and loungers from the ball room had been drawn to witness this disgraceful spectacle by the sounds of tumult and combat, and the two were vociferating loudly; so that instead of their being any prospect of cessation of the quarrel, some half-dozen more were likely to be drawn into it.

I was calculating what was to be done to rescue my officer from the hands of this madman, when Alandro Dias shouted out, 'Belay there!' and clutching Bavar in his arms, threw him on the ground.

'Back there will you, you Vermonts!' cried the angry Potomacs when they saw their man floored, and some of the officers rushed threateningly upon my comrade; but he folded his arms across his broad, manly chest, and looked so calmly and firmly in their faces that the bravest of them had not the heart to lay a finger on him.

Panting, and with his hair and clothes dishevelled, Mr Briggs hurried to join his friend, and Dias and I followed. 'This is monstrous Rydal,' he exclaimed bitterly, when they met; 'and I thought I had never seen two faces so perplexed or sorrow stricken as were those of these young men when they looked at each other. We shall be talked of as having disgraced our profession, and men shall call us the bullies of drunken brawls,' said

Briggs, walking up and down the corridor with hurried steps.

'Mr Briggs,' said Rydal, somewhat sternly and I thought at the time even somewhat reproachfully, 'a casual expression of pity for his great grandmother's race roused that ruffian to insult and then to strike me. Was I the cause of this disgraceful brawl?'

'You! my dear fellow,' exclaimed Briggs rapidly, 'oh no no! It was the most cowardly attack I ever had the misfortune to behold. 'Then go my friend,' whispered Rydal, 'and tell that scoundrel to meet me at Hoboken in half an hour.'

In a short time, Messrs. Rydal and Briggs were seated with myself and comrade in a Whitehall barge, with which we pulled quickly towards the little Island in the Bay. The night was clear and beautiful, but I never felt so chill and spiritless in any expedition in which I had engaged. There was not a word spoken by one of us in the boat; we all seemed to feel our errand; even the old white-hailer who held the tiller seemed like a statue of rock, not a remark upon the weather, not a joke upon the times passed his lips. We landed upon the bleak bare isle, where many a foolish youth, and bearded man had often before come upon a like errand with ourselves. I saw the ground measured off, and heard the seconds debating upon the forms of the combat, and I think I never felt cold blooded, premeditated murder so palpably brought before my mind's eye.

'This is a fine code of honour,' said I to myself, 'which now gives to that black bearded ruffian the chance of killing the man he had already insulted and struck.' I had ideas of shackles and a mad house for such a fellow, but 'honour' said no, while it opened Harry Rydal's breast for his bullet.

I never felt in such a state of agitation as when I saw the weapons handed to these two men, with which they might destroy each other. I saw the kindly and high-souled gentleman's life pitted against that of the bully and the duellist, and I thought there must be something morally wrong in a method of deciding a dispute in which morality had no more chance than vice. Would it not have been better to have borne insult and even blows, while society cashiered his insult from the station of gentleman? thought I. Yet whispered conviction, if society would cashier and degrade all those who act as Bavar did, but on the contrary, she is the vampire who sucks the life blood from many generous youth. She forces them, by an imperious opinion, to seek the death of those who injure them, and if they have the courage to resist the homicidal impulse, she drives them into ignominy from her halls. Had this affair remained in the condition to which the sanguinary Bavar had brought it; he would have been received into the homes of the proud as a blameless and honourable man; while Rydal the free, the kind, the generous, would have been shunned and despised. Out upon honour, I say, that reverses the law of justice, and allows crime to blaze its powder and bullets in the face of virtue. The wind was moaning fitfully through the bare branches of the trees which grew close upon the bleak tract of shoreland where the deed of murder was to be perpetrated. The moon and stars looked intensely down upon us, and they seemed to flicker a thousand interdictions from Heaven against our purposes, as we stood at our stations, and gazed upon each other in silence. Bavar took his position with a swaggering air, and showed he was no novice in this game, while Rydal stepped hesitatingly to his place. It was wonderful to contrast the demeanor of the duellist now to what it was not two hours prior at Astor House. He was calm cool and insolently audacious, for he joked with his second, and affected to admire a view of the city, with its thousand lighted windows; he made some allusion to the gates, as they loomed through the pale moonlight, and hoped that those on board of the were comfortable.

'Steady Harry,' said Mr Briggs, in a whisper, to his friend, 'he wishes to provoke you by his nonchalance, and murder you if he can; but steady, my boy; I know the rocks of the Catskills have not a firmer heart than thou hast.'

'Yes, but mine is less callous than thine, Jack,' replied the young man, smiling slightly. 'Remember me to my mother and sister should I fall.'

'I have settled that you wheel and fire the third call' said Briggs, hurriedly interrupting him it is your best chance, Harry, hear he is a dead shot with an aim at sixteen paces—this is eighteen. Don't expose a finer more than necessary, and be cool—God bless you!'

My head swam with giddy excitement, the seconds left their men alone, and walked towards the same point. Mr Rydal and Briggs stood opposite to each other, with their backs looking towards different points, and with their deadly weapons in their right hands; they both seemed as steady as rocks. 'Now, gentlemen,' cried Mr Briggs, who had won the toss for teller, 'Ready!' It seemed as if a hoop of iron girt my chest when I heard the word, for I gasped for breath, and my mind actually spun round. 'You wheel when I call three, and then fire,' said Mr Briggs, calmly. The antagonists nodded in answer. 'The one—two—three!' he shouted, as quickly as he could articulate the words, and suddenly the reports of two pistols seemed to mingle in one concussion. I uttered a cry of joy as I looked towards the spot where Rydal stood, for he appeared to be unhurt, while the pistol of