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THE DEATH SHIP

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THE DEATH SHIP

A STRANGE STORY;

AN ACCOUNT OF A CRUISE IN "THE FLYING DUTCHMAN," COLLECTED
FROM THE PAPERS OF THE LATE MR. GHOFFREY FENTON, OF POPLAR,
MASTER MARINER.

BY

W. CLARK RUSSELL,

AUTHOR OF

"THE WRECK OF THE GROSVENOR," "THE GOLDEN HOPE," "A SEA QUEEN,"
ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I

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THE DEATH SHIP.



CHAPTER I.

I SAIL AS SECOND MATE IN THE SARACEN.

I WILL pass by all the explanations concerning the reasons of my going to sea, as I do not desire to forfeit your kind patience by letting this story stand. Enough if I say that after I had been fairly well grounded in English, arithmetic and the like, which plain education I have never wearied of improving by reading everything good that came in my way, I was bound apprentice to a respectable man named Joshua Cox, of Whitby, and

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B

served my time in his vessel, the Laughing Susan—a brave, nimble brigantine.

We traded to Riga, Stockholm, and Baltic ports, and often to Rotterdam, where, having a quick ear, which has sometimes served me for playing upon the fiddle for my mates to dance or sing to, I picked up enough of Dutch to enable me to hold my own in conversing with a Hollander, or Hans Butter-box, as those people used to be called; that is to say, I had sufficient words at command to qualify me to follow what was said and to answer so as to be intelligible; the easier, since, uncouth as that language is, there is so much of it resembling ours in sound that many words in it might easily pass for portions of our tongue grossly and ludicrously articulated. Why I mention this will hereafter appear.

When my apprenticeship term had expired, I made two voyages as second mate, and then obtained an appointment to that

post in a ship named the Saracen, for a voyage to the East Indies. This was *anno* 1796. I was then two-and-twenty years of age, a tall, well-built young fellow, with tawny hair, of the mariner's complexion from the high suns I had sailed under and the hardening gales I had stared into, with dark blue eyes filled with the light of an easy and naturally merry heart, white teeth, very regular, and a glad expression as though, forsooth, I found something gay and to like in all that I looked at. Indeed it, was a saying with my mother that "Geff,"—meaning Geoffrey—that "Geff's appearance was as though a very little joke would set the full measure of his spirits overflowing." But now, it is as an old poet finely wrote:

My golden locks time hath to silver turn'd,
(O time, too swift, and swiftness never ceasing!)
My youth, 'gainst age, and age at youth have spurn'd,
But spurn'd in vain!

And here it is but right to myself that I should say, though as a sailor I am but an

obscure person, yet as a man I may claim some pride and lustre of descent, an ancestor being no less a worthy than one of the boldest of Queen Elizabeth's sea-captains and generals—Edward Fenton, I mean, who was himself of a sound and ancient Nottingham stock; illustrious for his behaviour against the Spaniards in 1588, and for his explorations of the hidden passage of the North Sea, mentioned with other notable matters in the Latin inscription upon his monument by Richard, Earl of Cork, who married his niece.

But enough of such parish talk.

The master of the *Saracen* was one Jacob Skevington, and the mate's name Christopher Hall. We sailed from Gravesend—for with Whitby I was now done—in the month of April, 1796. We were told to look to ourselves when we should arrive in the neighbourhood of the Cape of Good Hope, for it was rumoured that the Dutch, with the help

of the French, were likely to send a squadron to recover Cape Town, that had fallen into the hands of the British in the previous September. However, at the time of our lifting our anchor off Gravesend, the Cape Settlement lay on the other side of the globe; whatever danger there might be there, was too remote to cast the least faint shadow upon us; besides, the sailor was so used to the perils of the enemy and the chase, that nothing could put an element of uneasiness into his plain, shipboard life, short of the assurance of his own or his captain's eyes that the sail that had hauled his wind and was fast growing upon the sea-line, was undeniably an enemy's ship, heavily armed, and big enough to cannonade him into staves.

So with resolved spirits, which many of us had cheered and heartened by a few farewell drams—for of all parts of the sea-faring life the saying good-bye to those we love, and whom the God of Heaven alone knows

whether we shall ever clasp to our breasts again, is the hardest—we plied the capstan with a will, raising the anchor to a chorus that fetched an echo from the river's banks up and down the Reach ; and then sheeting home our topsails, dragging upon the halliards with piercing, far-sounding songs, we gathered the weight of the pleasant sunny wind into those spacious hollows, and in a few minutes had started upon our long journey.

Yet, though my parting with my friends had not been of a nature to affect my spirits, and though I was accounted to be, and indeed was, a merry, careless fellow, I was sensible of an unaccountable depression as, amidst the duties which occupied me, I would cast glances at the houses of Gravesend and the shore sliding by, and hear, in momentary hushes, tremulous tinkling sounds raised by the water wrinkling, current-like under our round and pushing bows.

CHAPTER II.

WE MEET AND SPEAK THE LOVELY NANCY, SNOW.

FOR days and days after we had cleared the Channel and entered upon those deep waters, which, off soundings sway in brilliant blue billows, sometimes paling into faint azure or weltering in dyes as purely dark as the violet, according as the mood of the sky is, nothing whatever of consequence befell. We were forty of a company. Captain Skevington was a stout but sedate sailor, who had used the sea for many years, and had confronted so many perils there was scarce^e_{ly} an ocean-danger you could name about which he could not talk from personal experience. He was, likewise, a man of education and intelligence,

with a manner about him at times not very intelligible, though his temper was always excellent and his skill as a seaman equal to every call made upon it. We carried six twelve-pounders and four brass swivels and a plentiful store of small-arms and ammunition. Our ship was five years old, a good sailer, handsomely found in all respects of sails and tackling, so that any prospect we might contemplate of falling in with privateers and such gentry troubled us little; since with a brave ship and nimble heels, high hot hearts, English cannon and jolly British beef for the working of them, the mariner need never doubt that the Lord will own him wherever he may go and whatever he may do.

We crossed the Equator in longitude thirty degrees west, then braced up to the Trade Wind that heeled us with a brisk gale in five degrees south latitude, and so skirted the sea in that great African bight 'twixt Cape

Palmas and the Cape of Good Hope, formerly called, and very properly, I think, the Ethiopic Ocean; for, though to be sure it is all Atlantic Ocean, yet, methinks, it is as fully entitled to a distinctive appellation as is the Bay of Biscay, that is equally one sea with that which rolls into it.

One morning in July, we being then somewhat south of the latitude of the island of St. Helena, a seaman who was on the top-sail-yard hailed the deck, and cried out that there was a sail right ahead. It was an inexpressibly bright morning; the sun had been risen two hours, and he stood—a white flame of the blinding and burning brilliance he seems to catch up from the dazzling sands of Africa as he soars over them—in a sky of the most dainty sapphire fairness; not a cloud—no, not so big as a fading wreath of tobacco smoke anywhere visible, so that the ends of the sea went round with the clearness of the circle of a glass table, only that a small

wind, very sweet and pleasant to every sense, blowing a little off our starboard bow, fluttered the ocean into a sort of hovering look, and its trembling caused the wake of the sun to resemble the leaping and frolicking of shoals of wet and sparkling mackerel.

We waited with much expectation and some anxiety for the stranger to approach near enough to enable us to gather her character, or even her nationality; for the experienced eye will always observe a something in the ships of the Dutch and French nations to distinguish the flags they belong to. It was soon evident that she was standing directly for us, shown by the speed with which her sails rose; but when her hull was fairly exposed, Captain Skevington, after a careful examination of her, declared her to be a vessel of about one hundred tons, probably a snow—her mainmast being in one with her foremast—and so we stood on, leaving it to her to be wary if she chose.

Whether she had at once made sure of us as an honest trader, I cannot say ; she never budged her helm by so much as the turn of a spoke, but came smoothly along, a very pretty shining object, rolling on the soft, long-drawn swell in such a way as to dart shadows across the moonlike gleaming of her canvas with the breathings of their full bosoms—so that the sight reminded me of the planet Venus as I once beheld her after she had passed from the tincture of the ruby into the quick light of the diamond, lightly troubled by the swift passage of a kind of gossamer scud, as though the winds on high sought to clothe her naked beauty with a delicate raiment of their own wearing, from which she was forever escaping into the liquid indigo she loves to float in.

After a little the English ensign was seen to flutter at her fore-topgallant-masthead. To this signal we instantly replied by hoisting our colour ; and shortly after midday, arriving

abreast of each other, we backed our topsail-yard, she doing the like, and so we lay steady upon the calm sea, and so close, that we could see the faces of her people over the rail, and hear the sound, though not the words, of the voice of the master giving his orders.

It was Captain Skevington's intention to board her, as he suspected she was from the Indies, and capable therefore of giving us some hints concerning the Dutch, into whose waters, in a manner of speaking, we were now entering; accordingly the jolly boat was lowered and pulled away for the stranger, that proved to be the snow, *Lovely Nancy*, of Plymouth—name of cruel omen as I shall always deem it, though I must ever love the name of *Nancy* as being that of a fair-haired sister who died in her fifteenth year.

As many of my readers may not be acquainted with sea terms, it may be fit to say here, that a snow is nothing more than a

brig, with the trifling addition of a thin mast abaft her mainmast, upon which her trysail or boom mainsail sets. I guess these vessels will always bear this name until their trysail-masts go out of fashion.

But to return.

I know not why I should have stood looking very longingly at that Plymouth ship whilst our captain was on board her; for though to be sure we had now been at sea since April, whilst she was homeward bound, yet I was well satisfied with the Saracen and all on board. I was glad to be getting a living and earning in wages money enough to put away; my dream being to save so much as would procure me an interest in a ship, for out of such slender beginnings have sprung many renowned merchant princes in this country. But so it was. My heart yearned for that snow as though I had a sweetheart on board. Even Mr. Hall, the mate, a plain, literal, practical seaman, with

as much sentiment in him as you may find in the first Dutchman you meet in the Amsterdam fish-market, even he noticed my wistful eyes, and clapping me on the back, cries out—

“Why, Fenton, my lad, I believe you’d be glad to go home in that little wagon yonder if the captain would let ye.”

“I believe I would, sir,” I replied; “and yet if I could, I don’t know that I would, either.”

He laughed and turned away, ridiculing what he reckoned a piece of lady-like sentiment; and that it was no more, I daresay I was as sure as he, though I wished the depression at the devil, for it caused me to feel, whilst it was on me, as though a considerable slice of my manhood had slipped away overboard.

It is one of the few pleasures time permits to old men to recall the sweet, or gay, or fair pictures which charmed them when young.

And which of all our faculties is more wonderful as a piece of mechanism, and more Divine in its life-giving properties, than Memory, which enables the Spirit to quicken dust that has lain for many years in the womb of time; to attire it and to return to it its passions, emotions, and all other qualities; to put back the cycles the sun has run and oblige him to shine on forms which were then infants, but are now grass-hidden ridges; on houses then stately but now long since swept away; on meadows and orchards then bright with daisies, ruddy with fruit, but now covered with houses and busy streets whose sidewalks echo to the tread of generations more dream-like in that past to which the aged eye turns than ever can be the dead who then lived.

'Tis thus when I think of that Plymouth snow; for leaning back in my chair and closing these eyes, that morning shines all around me; the tremulous sea of blue, of a

satin sheen in its tiny riplings, shot with milder tints where the currents run as though they were the thin fingers of the wind toying with the bosom of the deep, bends to the distant sky upon whose lowermost reaches it flings the same opal lustre it gathers at its horizon ; the air blows fitfully, like the warm breathings from a woman's sweet lips, and sometimes stills our sails and sometimes suffers them to flutter in sounds soothing as the murmurs of a midsummer night breeze amid the high branches of a sleeping oak. The snow had black sides but was painted white from her water-line ; and though there was no lack of draining weeds and clustered shells upon her bilge and run, yet, with every slow roll from us, the wet whiteness, taking the meridian effulgence, broke out in a glory as of virgin silver, enriched by the marine adhesions, into the very likeness of a resplendent mosaic of precious metal and green glass.

Such magic has the sea to beautify whatever it is permitted to possess long enough for its powers of enrichment to work their way!

Her canvas flashed out of shadow into brightness with every lift of the swell; the ripples ran a dissolving tracery along her bends, as dainty to see as the choicest lace; the weather-clouded faces of her men looked at us over the stout bulwark-rail that was broken by a few open ports through which you spied the mouths of little cannon; and it was laughable to mark her figurehead, that represented an admiral in a cocked hat—a cheap dockyard purchase, no doubt, for the effigy was ridiculously out of character and foolishly too big for the vessel—bowing to the blue surface that flowed in lines of azure light to the cutwater, as though there were some mermaid there to whom he would be glad to “make a leg,” as the old saying was.

CHAPTER III.

THE CAPTAIN AND I TALK OF THE DEATH SHIP.

AFTER three-quarters-of-an-hour, or thereabouts, Captain Skevington returned. We then trimmed to our course again, and, ere long, the Plymouth snow was astern of us, rolling her spread of canvas in a saluting way that was like a flourish of farewell.

Whilst the jolly boat was being hoisted, the captain stood gazing at the snow with a very thoughtful face, and then burying his hands in his pockets, he took several turns up and down the deck with his head bowed, and his whole manner not a little grave. He presently went to the mate, and talked with him, but it looked as though Mr. Hall found

little to raise concern in what the captain said, as he often smiled, and once or twice broke into a laugh that seemed to provoke a kind of remonstrance from the master, who yet acted as though he were but half in earnest too; but they stood too far away for me to catch a syllable of their talk.

It was my watch below at eight o'clock that evening. I was sitting alone in the cabin, sipping a glass of rum and water, ready to go to bed when I had swallowed the dose. There was but one lamp, hanging from a midship beam, and the cabin was somewhat darksome. The general gloom was deepened by the bulkhead being of a sombre, walnut colour, without any relief—such as probably would have been furnished had we carried passengers—from table-glass or silver, or such furniture. I mention these matters because they gave their complexion to the talk I am now to repeat.

Presently, down into this interior through

the companion hatch comes Captain Skevington. I drained my glass and rose to withdraw.

"Stop a minute, Fenton," says he; "what have you been drinking there?"

I told him.

"Another drop can't hurt you," said he; "you have four hours to sleep it off in." With which he called to the boy to bring him a bottle of brandy from his cabin. He bid me help myself whilst he lighted a pipe of tobacco, and then said: "The master of the snow we met to-day warns us to keep a bright look-out for the Dutch. He told me that yesterday he spoke an American ship that was short of flour, and learnt from the Yankee—though how Jonathan got the news I don't know—that there's a Dutch squadron making for the Cape, in charge of Admiral Lucas, and that among the ships is the *Dordrecht* of sixty-six guns and two forty-gun frigates."

"But should we fall in with them will they meddle with us, do you think, sir?" said I.

"Beyond question," he answered.

"Then," said I, "there is nothing for it but to keep a sharp look-out. We have heels, anyway."

He smoked his pipe with a serious face, as though not heeding me; then looking at me steadfastly, he exclaimed, "Fenton, you've been a bit of a reader in your time, I believe. Did your appetite that way ever bring you to dip into magic, necromancy, the Black Art, and the like of such stuff?"

He asked me this with a certain strangeness of expression in his eyes, and I thought it proper to fall into his humour. So I replied that in the course of my reading I might have come across hints of such things, but that I had given them too little attention to qualify me to reason about them or to form an opinion.

"I recollect when I was a lad," said he,

passing my answer by, so to speak, "hearing an old lady that was related to my mother, tell of a trick that was formerly practised and credited, too; a person stood at a grave and invoked the dead, who made answer."

I smiled, thinking that only an old woman would talk thus.

"Stop!" cried he, but without temper. "She said it was common for a necromancer to invoke and obtain replies; but that though answers were returned, they were not spoken by the dead, but by the Devil. The proof being that death is a separation of the soul from the body, that the immortal soul cannot inhabit the corpse that is mere dust, that therefore the dead cannot speak, themselves, but that the voices which seem to proceed from them are uttered by the Evil One."

"Why the Evil One?" said I.

"Because he delights in whatever is out of nature, and in doing violence to the harmonious fabric of the universe."

“That sounds like a good argument, sir,” said I, still smiling.

“But,” continued he, “suppose the case of men now living, though by the laws of Nature they should have died long since. Would you say that they exist as a corpse does when invoked—that is, by the possession and voice of the Devil, or that they are informed by the same souls which were in them when they uttered their first cry in this life.”

“Why, sir,” I answered, “seeing that the soul is immortal, there is no reason why it should not go on inhabiting the clay it belongs to, so long as that clay continues to possess the physical power to be moved and controlled by it.”

“That’s a shrewd view,” said he, seemingly well-pleased. “But see here, my lad! our bodies are built to last three score and ten years. Some linger to an hundred; but so few beyond, that every month of continued

being renders them more and more a sort of prodigies. As the end of a long life approaches—say a life of ninety years—there is such decay, such dry-rot, that the whole frame is but one remove from ashes. Now, suppose there should be men living who are known to be at least a hundred and fifty years old—nay, add an average of forty to each man and call them one hundred and ninety years old—but who yet exhibit no signs of mortality ; would not you say that the bounds of Nature having been long since passed, their bodies are virtually corpses, imitating life by a semblance of soul that is properly the voice and possession of the Devil ?”

“ How about Methusaleh, and others of those ancient times ?”

“ I’m talking of to-day,” he answered. “ ’Tis like turning up the soil to work back into ancient history ; you come across things which there’s no making anything of.”

"But what man is there now living who has reached to a hundred-and-ninety?" cried I, still struck by his look, yet, in spite of that, wondering at his gravity, for there was a determination in his manner of reasoning that made me see he was in earnest.

"Well," said he, smoking very slowly, "the master of that snow, one Samuel Bullock, of Rotherhithe, whom I recollect as mate of a privateer some time since, told me that when he was off the Agulhas Bank, he made out a sail upon his starboard bow, braced up, and standing west-sou'-west. There was something so unusual and surprising about her rig that the probability of her being an enemy went clean out of his mind, and he held on, influenced by the sort of curiosity a man might feel who follows a sheeted figure at night, not liking the job, yet constrained to it by sheer force of unnatural relish. 'Twas the first dogwatch; the sun drawing down; but daylight was

yet abroad, when the stranger was within hail upon their starboard quarter, keeping a close luff, yet points off, on account of the antique fit of her canvas. Bullock, as he talked, fell a-trembling, though no stouter-hearted man sails the ocean, and I could see the memory of the thing working in him like a bloody conscience. He cried out, 'May the bountiful God grant that my ship reaches home in safety!' I said, 'What vessel was she, think you?' 'Why, captain,' says he, 'what but the vessel which 'tis God's will should continue sailing about these seas?' I started to hear this, and asked if he saw any of the crew. He replied that only two men were to be seen—one steering at a long tiller on the poop deck, and the other pacing near him on the weather side. 'I seized the glass,' said he, 'and knelt down, that those I viewed should not observe me, and plainly caught the face of him who walked.' "

"How did Bullock describe him, sir?" said I.

"He said he wore a great beard and was very tall, and that he was like a man that had died and that when dug up preserved his death-bed aspect; he was like such a corpse artificially animated, and most terrible to behold from his suggestions of death-in-life. I pressed him to tell me more, but he is a person scanty of words for the want of learning. However, his fears were the clearest relation he could give me of what he had seen."

"It was the Phantom Ship he saw, you think, sir?" said I.

"I am sure. He bid me dread the sight of it more than the combined navies of the French and the Dutch. The apparition was encountered in latitude twenty miles south of thirty-six degrees. 'Tis a spectre to be shunned, Fenton, though it cost us every rag of sail we own to keep clear."

"Then what you would say, captain," said I, "is, that the people who work that ship have ceased to be living men by reason of their great age, which exceeds by many years our bodies' capacity of wear and tear; and that they are actually corpses influenced by the Devil—who is warranted by the same Divine permission we find recorded in the Book of Job, to pursue frightful and unholy ends?"

"It is the only rational view," he answered. "If the Phantom Ship be still afloat, and navigated by a crew, they cannot be men in the sense that this ship's company are men."

"Well, sir," said I, cheerfully, "I reckon it will be all one whether they be fiends, or flesh and blood miraculously wrought to last unto the world's end, for it is a million to nothing that we don't meet her. The Southern Ocean is a mighty sea, a ship is but a little speck, and once we get the Mada-

gascar coast on our bow we shall be out of the Death Ship's preserves."

However, to my surprise, I found that he maintained a very earnest posture of mind in this matter. To begin with, he did not in the least question the existence of the Dutch craft; he had never beheld her, but he knew those who had, and related tales of dismal issues of such encounters. The notion that the crew were corpses, animated into a mocking similitude of life, was strongly infixed in his mind; and he obliged me to tell him all that I could remember of magical, ghostly, supernatural circumstances I had read about or heard of, until I noticed it was half-an-hour after nine, and that, at this rate, my watch on deck would come round before I had had a wink of sleep.

However, though I went to my cabin, it was not to rest. I lay for nearly two hours wide awake. No doubt the depression I had marked in myself had exactly fitted my mind

for such fancies as the captain had talked about. It was indeed impossible that I should soberly accept his extraordinary view touching the endevilment of the crew of the Death Ship. Moreover, I hope I am too good a Christian to believe in that Satyr which was the coinage of crazy, fanatical heads in the Dark Ages, that cheaply-imagined Foul Fiend created to terrify the weak-minded with a vision of split-hoofs, legs like a beast's, a barbed tail, flaming eyes, and nostrils discharging the sickening fumes of sulphur.

But concerning the Phantom Ship herself—the Flying Dutchman as she has been styled—'tis a spectre that has too often crossed the path of the mariner to admit of its existence being questioned. If there be spirits on land, why not at sea, too? There are scores who believe in apparitions, not on the evidence of their own eyes—they may never have beheld such a sight—but on the testimony of wit-

nesses sound in their religion and of unassailable integrity ; and why should we not accept the assurance of plain, honest sailors, that there may be occasionally encountered off the Agulhas Bank, and upon the southern and eastern coast of the African extremity, a wild and ancient fabric, rigged after a fashion long fallen into disuse, and manned by a crew figured as presenting something of the aspect of death in their unholy and monstrous vitality ?

I turned this matter freely over in my mind as I lay in my little cabin, my thoughts finding a melancholy musical setting in the melodious sobbing of water washing past under the open port, and snatching distressful impulses from the gloom about me, that was rendered cloud-like by the moon who was climbing above our mastheads, and clothing the vast placid scene outside with the beauty of her icy light ; and then at seven bells fell asleep, but was called half-an-hour

later, at midnight, to relieve Mr. Hall, whose four hours' spell below had come round.

CHAPTER IV.

WE ARE CHASED AND NEARLY CAPTURED.

WE talked occasionally of the Phantom Ship after this for a few days, the captain on one occasion, to my surprise, producing an old volume on magic and sorcery which it seems he had, along with an odd collection of books, in his cabin, and arguing and reasoning out of it. But he never spoke of this thing in the presence of the mate who, to be sure, was a simple, downright man, without the least imaginable flavour of imagination to render sapid the lean austerity of his thoughts, and who, therefore, as you may suppose, as little credited the stories told of the Dutchman's ship as the Ebrew Jew believes in our Lord

Hence, as there were but the captain and

me to keep this shuttlecock of a fancy flying, it fluttered before long to the ground ; perhaps the quicker, because on the Sunday following our speaking with the Plymouth snow, there happened a piece of work, sharp and real enough to drive all ideas of visions and phantasms out of our heads.

It was ten o'clock in the morning when a sail was descried broad on the larboard beam. We gave her no heed at first. It being the Sabbath, and a warm sweet morning, the men having nothing to do, hung about the decks, smoking, telling stories and the like ; and being cleanly attired in jackets and white trousers, they contributed a choice detail to the general structure of well-kept decks, shining brass work, massive shrouds soaring from the black dead-eyes to the great round tops, with further rigging of a similar kind ruling the topmasts to the cross-trees, and on yet to the topgallant heights, ropes crossing ropes and ratline following ratline, till the

tracery, both in its substance aloft and its shadows below and in the inclined hollows of the sails, puzzled the eye with the complexity of a spider's web ; whilst from the water-ways to the lower yard-arms and thence to the ends of the yards above, mounted the vast sheets of canvas, each central surface arching in snow to the raining light of the sun, like the fair full breasts of a virgin, passed the taut bolt-ropes, narrowing as they rose till, the royal-yards being reached, the sails there swelled yearning skywards as though they were portions of the prismatic ribbed and pearly beds of cloud directly over the ship, rent from them by the sweep of our trucks and knitted by our seamen to those lofty spars.

It was not long, however, before we made out that the vessel down in the eastern quarter was steering large, and at the time the appearance of her canvas assured us of this, she slackened away her larboard braces

to head up for us, hauling upon a bowline with a suddenness that left her intention to parley with us questionless.

We hoisted the English ensign and held on a bit, viewing her with an intentness that brought many of our eyes to a squint ; then the captain, observing that she showed no colours and was a big ship, put his helm up for a run.

No sooner had we braced in our yards, when the fellow behind us squared away too, and threw out lower and topmast studding-sails with a rapidity that satisfied us she was a man-of-war, apparently a liner. This notion, joined to the belief that she was a Dutchman, was start enough for us all. Our small company were not likely to hold their own against the disciplined masses of a two or three decker, even though she should prove a Spaniard. Our guns were too few to do anything with tiers of batteries heavy enough to blow us out of water. So as there

was nothing for it but a fair trial of speed, we sprung to our work like hounds newly unleashed, got her dead before it, ran out studding-sail booms on both sides and sent the sails aloft soaking wet for the serviceableness of the weight the wetness would give, and stationing men in the tops and cross-trees we whipped up buckets of water to them, with which they drenched the canvas, till our cloths must have looked as dark as a collier's to the ship astern of us.

It was very slow work at first, and we were thankful for that; for every hour carried us nearer to the night into which the moon now entered so late and glowed with such little power, even when she had floated high, that we could count, after sundown, upon several hours of darkness; but it was not long before it became evident to us all that, spite of the ceaseless wetting of our sails, the ship in our wake was growing. Then, satisfied of her superiority, and convinced of our nationality,

she let fly a fore-castle gun at us, of the ball of which we saw nothing, and hoisted the Dutch colours at her fore-royal masthead, where, at all events, we could not fail to distinguish the flag.

“Confound such luck!” cries Skevington at this. “How can our apple-bows contend with those pyramids of sails there? What’s to be done?” he says, as if thinking aloud. “It’s clear she’s our master in running, and I fear she’ll be more than our match on a bowline — with the weather gage too! And yet, by the thunder of Heaven, Mr. Hall, it does go against the current of any sort of English blood to haul down that piece of bunting there,” says he, casting his eyes at the peak where our flag was blowing, ‘to the command of a Dutchman’s cannon!’

“The wind’s coming away more easterly,” said the mate, with a slow turning of his gaze into the quarter he mentioned, “and it’ll be breezing up presently, if there’s any signifi-

tion in the darker blue of the sea that way."

It happened as he said ; but the Dutchman got the first slant of it, and you saw the harder pulling of his canvas in the rounded rigidity of light upon the cloths, whilst the dusky line of the wind, followed by the flashings of the small seas, whose leaping heads it showered into spray, was yet approaching our languid ship, whose lower and heavy canvas often flapped in the weak air.

A couple of shot came flying after us from the man-of-war's bowchasers ere the breeze swept to our spars ; and now the silvery line of the white water that her stem was hewing up and sending in a brilliant whirl past her was easy do be seen ; aye, 'twas even possible to make out the very lines of her reef-points upon the fore-course and topsail, whilst through the glass you could discern groups of men stationed upon her forecastle, and mark some quarter-deck figure now and again

impatiently bound on to the rail and overhang it like a davit, with an arm round a backstay, in his eagerness to see how fast they were coming up with us.

With all element of terror in it extinguished by time, it is a sight to recall with a sailor's fondness; for indeed the Dutchman was a fine ship, very tall, with port-lids painted red inside, so that with the guns projecting from them, in two tiers, the aspect was that of rows of crimson, wolfish jaws, every beast with his tongue out; her yards were immensely square, and her studding-sail booms extending great spaces of canvas far over the side, she showed upon the dark blue frothing ocean like some Heaven-seeking hill, fleecily clad with snow to twenty feet above the water-line, where it was black rock down to the wash of the froth. In the freshening wind, as it came up to us, I seemed to catch an echo of the drum-like roll of the briskening gale in those airy heights, and to hear the

seething of the boiling stuff at her forefoot. But, thanks be to Heaven, there was now a swift racing of foam from under our counter, whence it streamed away with a noise delicious to hearken to, as though it was the singing of the rain of a thunder-cloud upon hard land ; for whenever the breeze gathered its weight in our canvas the Saracen sprang from it meteor-fashion, and away we sped with helm right amidships, and the wind flashing fair over the taffrail.

The excitement of this chase was deep in us when the captain gave orders to train a couple of guns aft and to continue firing at the pursuing craft ; which was done, the powder-smoke blowing like prodigious glistening cobwebs into our canvas forward. Meanwhile, the English colours flew hardily at our peak, whilst preventer guys were clapped on the swinging-booms and other gear added to give strength aloft ; for the wind was increasing as if by magic, the

ribbed clouds had broken up and large bodies of vapour were sailing overhead with many ivory-white shoulders crowding upon the horizon, and the strain upon the studding-sail tacks was extremely heavy. But you saw that it was Captain Skevington's intention to make the Saracen drag what she could not carry, and to let what chose blow away before he started a rope-yarn, whilst we had that monster astern there sticking to our skirts; and by this time it was manifest that with real weight in the wind our heels were pretty nearly as keen as hers, which made us hope that should the breeze freshen yet we might eventually get away.

Well, at three o'clock it was blowing downright hard, though the weather was fine, the heavens mottled, the clouds being compacted and sailing higher, stormy in complexion and moving slowly; the sea had grown hollow and was most gloriously violet in colour, with plumes of snow, which curled