

CHAPTER XIII.

KROUMEN—THE BRIG "PORPOISE"—A BOATSWAIN'S MATE'S POETRY—A NARROW ESCAPE FROM DROWNING—ACCRA—ELMINA—CAPE COAST CASTLE—GRAVE OF L. E. L.—SLAVERS—A YANKEE TRICK—THE SLAVE TRADE—THE "BRIDGTON"—WHYDAH—DAHOMY—PRINCE'S ISLAND—AFRICAN FEVER—SECOND CRUISE TO WINDWARD—MADEIRA—CANARY ISLANDS—WRECK OF THE "YORKTOWN" ON THE ISLAND OF MAYO—RETURN HOME—HOW TO FIND THE MOON'S AGE.

UPON our first visit to Monrovia we had provided ourselves with twenty *Kroumen* to do the boat work of the ship. These men belong to a tribe on the coast near Tradetown; but there are always a number of them to be found at a little village of their own near Monrovia. They are sober and obedient, and the best boatmen in the world. They are regularly enlisted and borne on the ship's books and as their proper names cannot be pronounced—much less spelled—the purser names them to suit himself. These names are printed inside their Sunday hats and if the hat is lost the man loses his identity. On Sundays they were mustered with the rest of the crew, and it was hard to resist a smile at hearing called out such names as: Jack Fryingpan, Giraffe, Upside Down, Bottle of Beer, &c.

When I went on shore to take observations with the artificial horizon (a small trough filled with quicksilver) the boat's crew of *Kroumen* would sit on their haunches near by and gravely watch the operation. As they saw me do this always before sailing from a port they not unnaturally gathered the impression that as I looked in the quicksilver with the sextant *I was looking for the way to the next port!* I encouraged them in this belief to keep them quiet. At Porto Praya, especially, they were always very anxious to know what vessels were anchored off Monrovia, and as I generally knew what vessels *should* be there I could give a correct answer.

We sailed from Porto Praya on our second cruise down the coast in November, 1849. Upon our arrival at Monrovia we found the brig *Porpoise* at anchor (as I had previously predicted.) The second lieutenant of the brig, Israel Waite, was one of the most humorous men I have ever known. Alas poor Yorick! he lost his commission a few years after this time and went to Nicaragua with Walker's filibusters where he was either killed or died of fever. The captain of the *Porpoise* was a nervous man and had a habit of calling everything a "chap;" he would say: "What do you think of that chap," meaning perhaps a rising squall. Waite in turning over the deck to his relief would frequently say: "It looks a little *chappy* on the lee bow." The *Porpoise* had a fine set of fellows in her wardroom and we were very intimate with them. She had, too, that *rara avis*, a poetical *boatswain's mate!* Here is one of his parodies which I happen to recall:

1.

I knew by the smoke that so gracefully curled
Around the fore hatch that dinner was nigh;
And I said if there's anything good in this world
'Tis made in our mess and they call it sea-pie.

2.

'Tis 12 and the boatswain is ordered to pipe,
His mates they stand ready to answer and bawl;
The grog-tub is out and the line stretched along,
Each hand is awaiting the sound of the "call."

3.

By the side of yon grog-tub how sweet 'tis to stand
And listen to catch the dear sound of your name:
But oh! how much sweeter when the tot's in your hand
You drink and are off some sea-pie to claim.

4.

And thus in a snug man-of-war did I say,
With a cook to attend me and make me sea-pie;
With my half pint of whiskey to drink every day,
How sweet could I live, and how calm could I die!

The mess on board the *Porpoise* kept a book called the "goss" book; I do not know the etymology of the word "goss;" but that was its name. All such effusions as the above were entered in it, which is why I remember it. My memory preserves, fortunately for the reader, but one more.

TO ANNAPOLIS.

For many months we happy were
In drinking juleps, eating crabs,
Without a thought, without a care,
We smoked away—not penny grabs!
But oh! the day at length arrived
To pony up the good and just
Round sum of three seventy-five
But very few put down the dust.

But: *Satis superque, de reste, bastatemente!* All this is digression and a long one too. Let me pull myself together and resume.

While at Monrovia upon this visit I made a pretty narrow escape from drowning. When we went on shore we never attempted to land in our own boats—the custom was to lie outside the breakers and wait for a canoe to come out and take us in. One morning I started with two of our lieutenants to go on shore to hold a survey on some naval stores, and when we got near the beach the senior officer said it was too rough to land. My friend, Dr. Thomas M. Potter, (now a medical director on the retired list) was in the boat and as we wanted to go on liberty we waited for a canoe and very imprudently both got in her—I in the bow and he in the stern. When we entered the breakers the first one went completely over and swamped us. I knew the *Krouman* was all right, but as soon as I got my head above water I turned to look for Potter; seeing him *diving for his umbrella* I concluded he could take care of himself, so I struck out for the shore which I was the first to reach. Fortunately there were a number of *Kroumen* on the beach watching us and they joined hands and hauled us up as soon as we struck the beach: otherwise we would in-

evitably have been carried back by the undertow and drowned. I remember that when I struck the beach the sand seemed to me to be receding at the rate of 40 miles a minute; "or words to that effect."

In January, 1850, we sailed from Monrovia for a cruise down the coast. We first stopped at Cape Palmas, which struck me as the prettiest of all the settlements in Liberia, and I believe it is the most healthy. From there we went down along the gold coast into the Gulf of Guinea, stopping at Accra, Elmina, and Cape Coast Castle. Elmina and Cape Coast Castle are fortified places; the former is held by the Dutch and the latter by the English. All these places were originally held by the Portuguese who made the first discoveries on this coast; they discovered Madeira in 1419; Cape Bojador in 1439; Cape Verde in 1446; the Cape de Verde islands in 1449; Sierra Leone in 1450; Congo was visited in 1484; and finally Bartolomeo Diaz reached the Cape of Good Hope—called by him the Cape of Storms—in 1486. They were the great navigators of the world at this time.

Cape Coast Castle presents a very imposing appearance from the sea. It is built of brick or stone, and mounts some large guns, principally for the land defence. It has resisted several attacks by the Ashantees. It was here that the poetess, Miss Landon, (L. E. L.) died. She married Governor McLean, and died soon after her arrival at the Castle under somewhat mysterious circumstances. I had a commission from a lady to gather something from her grave—a flower or even a tuft of grass—but I found only a slab to mark where she had been buried in the parade ground, and no green thing within a mile of it.

At Elmina and Cape Coast Castle we were most hospitably entertained by the officers. Poor fellows, they were much cut off from the world and a strange face was a real pleasure to them. These places along the coast, called factories, were originally established for the trade in slaves. At Accra we fell in with H. B. M. brig *Contest*, Captain Spencer, who told

us of a certain American brig *Bridgton* being on the coast and strongly suspected of being a slaver. I had always had a desire to catch a slaver with the slaves on board, for I wanted to see if what I had heard of them was true; but I knew the trouble it gave if one were only taken on suspicion. The difficulty with these vessels was that the slavers took out the same cargo as the regular traders, viz.: rum, tobacco, cotton-cloths, fire arms, &c., &c. Under a cargo of this kind the slavers had lumber for the slave deck, water casks, &c. When they arrived at the place where the slaves were ready to be shipped they would discharge cargo, fill up their water, take the negroes on board with inconceivable rapidity, and put to sea.

A neat trick was played upon the English brigs *Contest* and *Kingfisher* by the captain of one of these vessels. He was in port with them, and at first was suspected; but as he flew the American flag the Englishmen were chary of searching him. After some time, as he continued to sell his goods as a regular trader, their suspicions were allayed and he became quite sociable with the two English captains. He had just arrived on the coast, had plenty of good liquors and cigars, and was very hospitable. The captains frequently dined with him and no doubt found it pleasant to be relieved of the restrictions of a man-of-war. One evening the conversation turned on the sailing qualities of their respective vessels and the American said he would like to give them a trial. The next morning he got underweigh with the land breeze and in passing the English brigs hailed their commanders and challenged them to a race. They both got underweigh, followed him out, and in the afternoon when the usual sea breeze set in they had a trial of speed "on a wind." At sunset the English vessels parted company as they were obliged to return to their stations. The American bid them an affectionate adieu. When the brigs got back they found he had taken on board a full cargo of slaves the preceding night, and as he had 24 hours start it was useless to pursue.

When slaves are actually on board a vessel it is hard to say whether their condition is ameliorated by being recaptured or not. If they are recaptured they cannot be restored to their homes; for they are taken from the interior, and if landed, the coast tribes make them prisoners again: so some other disposition must be made of them. If captured by an English man-of-war they are sent to Sierra Leone, or enlisted in the West India regiments; if an American man-of-war captures them they are landed at Monrovia and apprenticed to the Liberians for a term of years; and if they are not slaves their condition is so near it that I was unable to perceive the difference.

On our way down to Whydah we fell in with the brig *Bridgton*. I boarded her and brought her captain back with me, with his "papers." He was a Portuguese and had not an American in his crew. He was evidently much frightened, but after some conversation with our captain he convinced him that his "papers" were all right: as indeed they seemed to be. The brig was cleared from Bahia and her "papers" were countersigned by the American consul. When the captain found we intended to let him go he became as saucy as a Pasquotank man in the herring season. We furnished him with an anchor and cable, for which he gave us an order on his owners in Philadelphia. The *Bridgton* accompanied us to Whydah, and here we found the launch of the *Kingfisher*, commanded by a Lieutenant Hamilton.

The English used to keep their boats stretched along the coast, at intervals of ten miles, and in this way one vessel watched a long strip of coast. The brig *Perry*, commanded by Commander Foote (afterwards a distinguished admiral) was the only vessel of our squadron that adopted this plan and she was rewarded by the capture of several slavers. One was a large ship with six or eight hundred slaves on board. The *Perry* was under English colors when she saw her, and the ship hoisting American colors, Captain Foote took possession of her. Hamilton of the *Kingfisher* had been after

the *Bridgton* for some time. He was very glad to spend his nights with us while at Whydah; but I observed he kept a bright lookout for the *Kingfisher*, and was always off bright and early. He was a capital fellow and we were glad to have him. He told us that the captain of the *Bridgton* was very "cheeky" since our arrival and would point to our flag and tell him he could not "touch him now." Hamilton always told him he was only waiting for him to get his slaves on board to capture him. We heard afterwards that the *Bridgton* got off with a full cargo of slaves a few days after our departure, in spite of Hamilton.

Whydah is the principal seaport of the kingdom of Dahomey, of which we have heard so much of late years. An Englishman who had been in the country for some time gave me an interesting account of the king and his people. Speaking of their snake temples—for they worship snakes—he said that an English cooper, not long in the country, was one day cooping a cask, and seeing a large snake near by he chopped its head off. It was with much difficulty that the foreigners saved his life; he was sent out of the country and a large fine paid. He told me that when the king desired to send a message to a deceased friend or relative he would send for a slave, give him the message and have his head cut off; he said he had never seen a slave exhibit any fear, and I have been told the same of the Chinese when about to suffer death.

From Whydah we went to Prince's island to water ship. This is a beautiful spot, nearly on the equator; the land is very high and as vessels anchor near the shore the hills seem to be nearly overhead. We enjoyed our visit here very much, principally on account of the fresh-water bathing. Many streams run into the sea from the mountains near the village, and in a hard rain it is wonderful to see the rapidity with which the water rises. In company with half-a-dozen officers I walked across the island to visit an old city which had been abandoned. I found there the ruins of stone churches, monasteries, etc., simi-

lar to the old city on St. Jago island. It had evidently been a place of importance. These old cities all have romantic histories if one could only get at them. The Portuguese seemed in those days to build cities first, and look for a harbor afterwards. St. Paul de Loanda, in about nine degrees south latitude, was the largest and most important of all their cities on the west coast. It still belongs to Portugal, but is of little consequence now; though the recent operations on the Congo river may resuscitate it.

Our ship was perfectly healthy the whole time we were on this station. We were never allowed to remain out of the ship after sunset, and the ship never entered the rivers. In 1844 the *Preble* lost many of her crew while lying in a river on the coast, since which time it is forbidden by the Department to do so. I think the health of the station compares favorably with the West Indies or coast of Brazil. We had but one case of real African fever and the patient recovered.

Leaving Prince's island we sailed for Porto Praya, touching at many ports on our way up the coast. We sailed from Porto Praya for a cruise to windward in June, in company with the *Portsmouth*. We beat up through the islands (Cape de Verdes) and I was much surprised at the strength of the trades. As we got to the northward of Mayo the wind freshened to double reefs, and at noon we were actually hove to under a close-reefed main topsail and fore storm staysail. At 4 P. M. the same day we had the royals set. We arrived at Funchal on the 1st of July and for the month we remained there did nothing but enjoy ourselves. It was our third visit and we had many acquaintances. We commenced the round by having all of our friends on board to a *déjeuner à la fourchette* on the 4th of July, and after that there was a succession of picnics, dinner parties, etc. Mr. Howard March, our consul, kept open house and his partner, Mr. Beyman, did the honors.

About the 1st of August we left Madeira for the Canary islands and spent another month between Teneriffe and Palmas. These islands belong to Spain. They were known to the

ancients under the name of the *Fortunate Islands*. One can readily understand why they were known as they can be seen from the coast of Africa. The peak of Teneriffe, 12,000 feet high, is visible in clear weather at a distance of 150 miles. The Spaniards discovered these islands about 1330. They were inhabited at that time by a race called *Guanches*, probably Arabs from the adjacent coast. All trace of these people is now lost, which is much to be regretted. The Spaniards extirpated them during the 16th century. From Gomera, the most westerly island, Columbus sailed to discover the new world.

We sailed from Palmas about August 30th, 1850, on what was to prove the last cruise of the *Yorktown*. We had fresh trades and fine weather and steered to make *Bonavista* the northernmost of the Cape de Verde islands. We expected to meet our relief, the sloop-of-war *Dale*, at Porto Praya whence we would sail for home. It may be imagined that we were all in fine spirits. Our cruise was up; we had lost but one or two men by sickness; there had been no courts-martial, and nothing had occurred to break the harmony existing on board. The second day out I remember that when I marked the chart in the wardroom I called attention to the fact that we were abreast the point where Captain Riley was wrecked in the brig *Commerce* in the early part of the century, and he and his crew made prisoners by the Arabs.

We made the island of *Bonavista* as expected, and on the 4th of September ran along the eastern side of the island of *Sal* with a strong trade wind blowing. At sunset that day we hauled round the south point of that island and shaped a course to pass to the northward of the island of *Mayo*. There was some discussion as to this, for the usual course was to go to the southward of *Mayo*; but no danger was anticipated as there was plenty of room and to spare between *Mayo* and the island to the northward of it. The ship was under top gallant sails and the lee clew of the mainsail, and running 9 knots, with the wind on the starboard quarter. At 1 A. M. we hauled

up the mainsail. I had the morning watch and at 4 A. M. relieved Lieutenant Caldwell, who, after passing the orders, expatiated upon the good breakfast he expected to wake up to in Porto Praya, where we expected to arrive by 8 A. M.

The island of *Mayo* was in sight on our port beam, and the island of *St. Jago* ahead; the weather was clear with flying trade clouds. The captain who had been up all night came out of his cabin and asked me how far I thought we were from *Mayo*. The peaks visible to us were some distance inland, and it was difficult to judge. Our lookouts were cautioned to be on the *qui vive*, and I had scarcely issued the order when the forecastle lookout called out: "breakers ahead." It was just before 5 o'clock, and the day was beginning to dawn. I immediately slapped the helm hard down and manned the lee main braces, intending to brace up aft, brace abox the head yards, and wear short round on her heel; but she had hardly come up a point when she struck, and fetched up all standing. It was a miracle that the masts did not go over the bows. We now braced up fore and aft, and attempted to force her over. Upon sounding the well it was found that there was already much water in her, and we manned the pumps and commenced pumping. By this time all hands were on deck, and the first lieutenant, Mr. Rootes, had just relieved me when the carpenter came up, and in a low, calm voice said: "It is of no use to pump; *the ship's bottom is knocked out!*" And so it was; she had struck on sunken, sharp-pointed rocks, and as she rose and fell with the sea which was pretty heavy the bottom was crushed in, and the water tanks, &c., in the hold were rammed up against the berth deck beams. Finding that it was useless to attempt to save the ship we now turned our attention to the saving of life and material. The boats were hoisted out and lowered and towed a-stern with marines in them to prevent any one getting in without orders, and the upper masts and yards were sent down on deck. The ship had now settled down on the rocks with the water about knee-deep on the berth deck.

When day broke we found we were on the north end of

Mayo island about a mile from the shore. Outside of us, at a distance of a mile, was a reef on which the sea was breaking heavily; had we struck on that reef not a man would have been saved. The purser's safe with the ship's money and books were taken up into the cabin, and the men were ordered to bring their bags up on the spar deck. While we were engaged in this the ship suddenly fell over on her starboard beam ends, and there was a rush for the boats, which were soon filled with the marines, landsmen and idlers. The officers and our best men, however, stuck to the ship and clambered up the sides to the weather rail. The masts were cut away, and although some men were aloft at the time they were rescued unhurt. As soon as I got on the weather side I turned to take a view of the scene, and the first man I noticed was Caldwell sitting on the weather main brace bumpkin with a loaf of bread under his arm, and a very tall plume sticking up in his old straw *sombrero*. It seems that as the ship capsized he had grabbed at the captain's flower-pots and seized the plume which he stuck in his hat. The ship now lay completely over on her starboard side, with the water over her hatchways. Lieutenant Frailey who was below when the ship went over made a narrow escape; he found all the ladders carried away and could not get on deck; as the water came pouring in it swept him aft, and with a receding swell he was carried to the hatchway, where the boatswain caught sight of him, and with the assistance of the gunner hauled him up on deck in an exhausted condition. The ship had no air-ports and the lower deck was lighted by dead lights let into the spar deck. As the ship capsized, the pressure of the air forced out all those on the port side. Two of the wardroom servants (Portuguese) who were caught below took refuge in the master's room, and thrust their hands through these openings with loud cries for assistance. The boatswain, Mr. Young, and the gunner, Mr. Oliver, who were conspicuous for their activity and courage on this occasion, cut the hole larger with axes and soon got them on deck. They certainly came up

through a *very small hole*, and were so dreadfully frightened that they forgot all the English they had previously learned, nor did they recover it while I was with them. The boats being loaded to the water's edge were sent ashore to land their men, and we hung on to the wreck to await their return. Our best men stuck by the officers and were perfectly unconcerned; the only fear I had was that she might slip off the rocks and go down in deep water. In the course of an hour the boats returned, and the ship was formally abandoned *without the loss of a man*. Mr. Rootes was the last man to leave the wreck.

As soon as we got on shore we picked out good boats' crews and returned to the ship where we commenced getting sails and spars for tents and sent them on shore. All the provisions we could get at were also landed. The water was spoiled five minutes after the ship struck, and it was well for us that we found it on the island. As it was we suffered much for the want of it the first day. By sunset we had sent ashore many necessary articles and we all landed. I shall never forget the headache I had when I got on shore, nor the magical effects of a cup of tea which a sailor brought me in a tin pot. We slept that night on the beach in the tents we had erected. The next morning we went again to the wreck, and the *Kroumen* who were demoralized the first day now proved very efficient. The ship's money which consisted of doubloons and silver dollars in bags had been put on the transom in the cabin, and was now lying to leeward of it under water with *débris* of all kinds. The *Kroumen* recovered a good deal of it by diving. I noticed that when they became exhausted they would say they would make one more dive and stop. At the last dive they would come up with both hands full of money and *their mouths also!* We winked at this proceeding, remembering the old adage that you should never "look a gift horse in the mouth."

Had it not been for these water-dogs we would not have recovered a cent. As the ship broke up, different articles floated on shore; among them many quarter casks of good Madeira wine. These we had to stave to prevent the men from getting

at it. We remained here several days and then removed to the southern end of the island, where there was a town inhabited by negroes. Some of us went by land and the rest in the boats. Upon our arrival the officers and men were distributed among the houses, and Lieutenant Spottswood was sent in the launch to Porto Praya to notify the Consul of our condition. He soon returned with a schooner loaded with provisions from the naval store-house. There were a few Portuguese in the village; a *commandante*, of course, and about twenty black soldiers. The American Consul was a Portuguese negro who had received some education in Lisbon. We found him a very sensible and hospitable man. Mayo exports salt only. Ships go to the town I am writing of for it. There is no harbor, and the salt is taken off with much difficulty; it is collected in pans. We remained on the island 33 days anxiously looking for the arrival of the *Dale*. Our amusements were salt-water bathing, riding donkey races and shooting. We found large numbers of quail and guinea fowls on the island; the latter the most difficult bird to shoot I have ever met with. Our men remained healthy and we lost but one man by sickness. The huts we lived in were comfortable enough in dry weather; but in rainy weather the roofs leaked badly. Calling upon one of the midshipmen one morning I found him in bed reading Shakespeare; he was smoking a pipe and had a glass of aguadiente convenient; and to make himself still more comfortable had an umbrella hoisted to protect himself from the rain which was falling heavily, and from which the roof of his shanty did not protect him. On the 8th of October the *Dale* arrived, and the next day we went in her to Porto Praya where we found the *Portsmouth*, Commodore Gregory, and the *John Adams*, Captain Powell. To this latter ship we were now transferred and sailed in her for home. We ran the trades down to the island of St. Thomas where we stopped to water. We remained but a few days and then sailed for Norfolk where we arrived in December, 1850. Captain Marston was tried by a court martial for the loss of his ship and honorably acquitted.

Before closing this chapter I am reminded to give a "rule for finding the moon's age," given me by Captain Marston—not that it is *new*, for I have seen it in almanacs many times since then, but because I have never known any one, save myself, to make a proper practical use of it. I am reminded of it here, because I wanted to know if there was a moon on the night the *Yorktown* was wrecked and have applied the rule to find out. Of course all almanacs give the moon's age; but then one cannot always have an almanac at hand.

The rule is used by the Church in determining festivals, feast days, etc. It is as follows: "To the epact, add the day of the month, and to this sum add the number of the month from March (*inclusive*). This sum if less than 30 will be the moon's age; should the sum exceed 30, subtract 30 and the remainder will be the moon's age." The moon's age calculated in this way *may* be one day in error.

The epact can be found in the Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church. Knowing it for one year it is easily calculated, as it increases by 11 from one year to the next, and 30 is dropped when the sum exceeds 30. It should be observed that the epact is reckoned from March to March. I will give an example of the application of this rule:

Required the moon's age on the 5th day of September, 1850.	
Epact for 1850	17
Number of months from March to September (<i>inclusive</i>) .	7
Day of the month	5
Moon's age	<u>29</u>

So there was no moon on that night.