

CHAPTER XIX.

THE *Essex* was to sail at eleven o'clock. Half an hour before that time Mark's hackney coach drew up at the wharf. Ten minutes later Dick Chetwynd, who had, like Mark, driven by a circuitous route, and had made several stoppages, joined him, and as they shook hands slipped a parcel into his hand, and this Mark at once pocketed, and buttoned his coat up tightly; then hailing a boat, they went on board together; they had sent their luggage on the previous evening. On getting on board Mark saw the two prizefighters walking up and down the deck aft. They were quietly dressed, and save for their size would have attracted no attention, and would have been taken for two countrymen on their way to Holland on business.

The two detectives were seated forward, their appearance being that of two quiet business men, commercial travelers or small traders. The two friends first went below, and saw to the cabin which they were to share, and found their luggage was all there. Then they returned on deck. Four or five other passengers were standing watching the last bales of goods coming on board. The tide was just on the turn, and a quarter of an hour later the warps were thrown off, and some of the sails hoisted, and the *Essex* began to move through the water.

"Look there, Dick!" Mark exclaimed. "Do you see that boat lying on its oars in the middle of the stream? That man sitting in the stern is a foreigner, either from Southern Europe or from India."

"He is certainly a dark man, Mark. Still, that may be only a coincidence."

"It is rather a curious one," Mark said. "We are too far off to see his features, but he is apparently watching us off. There, the oars are dipping into the water, now he sees that we are fairly under way."

"Well, Mark, I shall begin to think that you are right. I am bound to say that hitherto I thought that it was ridiculous to suppose that you could have been watched as you thought, and that you had got these diamonds on your brain till you had really become fanciful. However, it certainly looks as if you were right; but even if you were, how on earth could they have found out that we were going by this ship?"

"That is more than I can tell; if they have been watching me they must have known that I was intimate with you; they have seen me come out of Cotter's Bank, and afterwards enter your lodgings; they would feel sure that I had heard that there would be danger connected with the diamonds, and might suppose that I should get some friend to take them from the bank, and may have followed your movements as well as mine. In that case they would have found out that you also went to Cotter's Bank; may have followed you to Tower Street, and found out that you had taken a passage for two to Amsterdam. They may again have seen you go to the bank this morning and have guessed that you had the diamonds about you, and then seeing us together on the wharf would feel pretty certain that it was so. One of them may have hired that boat and watched the *Essex* to see that neither of us went on shore again."

"Now they see that we are off they will know that their game is up," Chetwynd said.

"I am not so sure of that, Dick; there are craft going every day to Antwerp and Flushing, and for anything we know some of them may be on board a craft already dropping down like ourselves by this tide. But even if we had twelve hours' start, by landing, say at Flushing, they would have time to cross by land to Amsterdam and get there before us."

"Yes, I suppose they would; anyhow, it is pretty certain that we shall not be troubled on the voyage."

"Yes, I never thought there was much danger of that, because even if they were on board they would see that you and I, being always together, could not be got rid of without an alarm being given."

Not until they were passing Greenwich did either of

the detectives come near Mark, then as he and Dick were standing by the bulwarks, looking at the hospital, Chester strolled across the deck and, pointing to the building as if asking him some question about it, said:

"There is a colored man forward, dressed as a sailor."

"Is that so?" Mark said. "I see no one aft here who looks suspicious, and I don't think they will try anything till we get to Amsterdam. There was a colored man in a boat watching us as we set sail."

"I saw him, sir. Can he get to Amsterdam before us?"

"Yes, I have no doubt he can; if he lands at Flushing or Antwerp, and takes a post-chaise or a diligence, I should say he could get there twenty-four hours before us. Certainly he could do so if he landed at The Hague, as we have to go a long way round to get into the Zuyder Zee. That is where the real danger will be; still you had better keep a sharp lookout on the man forward."

No more was said. Mark was not long in getting into conversation with the other passengers aft, and later on strolled forward with Dick, asking the sailors some questions as to what sort of passage they were likely to have, and how the wind suited. The men agreed that unless the wind shifted they would not be likely to make a quick passage.

"The wind is northeasterly," one of them said. "We can only just lay our course now, and it will be dead against us in some of the reaches. Still, I think we shall manage to make down to sea with only a tack or two, but when we are once fairly out of the river it will be a long leg and a short one, and going up round the Texel it will be dead against us. Except that it would be a bit worse if it had a little more east in it, it is about as foul a wind as we could have, and I don't see any sign of a change, worse luck."

Presently, moving about among them, he got next to Gibbons.

"I don't think we shall have any trouble on board," he said; "if there is any, it will be after we have landed."

But you can keep an eye on that foreign sailor standing alone there up in the bows."

"All right, sir; if you like, I can manage to get into a quarrel with him, and can warrant that he won't get out of his berth before it is time to go ashore."

"No, I would leave him alone, Gibbons; as long as he is forward he can do no harm; but if you see him working his way aft, after it gets dark, it will do him no harm if you manage to stumble against him and give him a clout on the head."

"All right, sir; if I hit him once he won't want another. The fellow seems quiet enough, and as far as strength goes he don't look stronger than a girl."

After chatting for some time longer Mark and Dick Chetwynd went aft again. The *Essex* did not put into any intermediate port, and it was only on the sixth day after sailing that she approached Amsterdam. The voyage had passed off without any incident except that at nine o'clock one evening there had been a slight noise on deck and the sound of a fall. The friends went up at once. Several of the sailors had run aft, and Gibbons was explaining matters to them.

"I was walking up and down the deck," he said, "when I saw this chap staring down through the skylight, and I said to him, 'I don't call it good manners to be prying down into your betters' cabin.' He did not answer or move, so I gave him a push, when he turned upon me like a wild cat, and drew his knife from his girdle. There it is, on the other side of the deck. As I did not want daylight put into me, I just knocked him down."

"Served him right," one of the sailors said. "He had no right to come aft at all, and if he drew his knife on you you were quite right in laying him out. But you must have hit him mighty hard, for you have knocked the life pretty near out of him. Well, we may as well carry him forward and throw a bucket of water over him. That is the worst of these foreign chaps; they are always so ready with their knives. However, I don't think he will be likely to try his hand on an Englishman again."

Mark and his friend went below again. In the morn-

ing Mark asked one of the sailors if the foreigner was much hurt.

"Well, he is a good bit hurt, sir. That big chap looks as strong as a bullock, and his blow has flattened the foreign chap's nose. He cannot see out of his eyes this morning, and is keeping his bunk. They cannot stand a blow, those foreign chaps; but I don't suppose that any of us would have stood such a blow as that, without feeling it pretty heavy. The man who hit him is quite sorry this morning that he hit him quite so hot, but, as he says, when a fellow draws a knife on you, you have not got much time for thinking it over, and you have got to hit quick and hard. I told him he needn't be sorry about it. I consider when a fellow draws a knife that hanging aint too bad for him, whether he gets it into a man or not." There was a growl of assent from two or three sailors standing round, for in those days the use of the knife was almost unknown in England, and was abhorrent to Englishmen, both as being cowardly and unfair, and as being a purely foreign crime.

"It will be dark before we get alongside," Mark said to the two detectives. "Do you two walk first; we will keep just behind you, and the others shall follow as close as they can keep to us. If anyone is looking out for us they will see that we are a strong party, and that it would be no good to attack us, for even if they were to stab me it would not be possible to search me for the diamonds when I am with a party like this."

It was indeed quite dark when the brig brought up outside a tier of vessels lying by the wharf. A few oil lamps burning by the quay showed that there were a good many people still sauntering about. The party waited until the rest of the passengers had landed. They learned from one of those who knew the place that the hotel to which they were going was but three or four hundred yards away, and obtained directions how to find it.

"Now we will go," Mark said. "Gibbons, you had better keep a sharp lookout on your own account. That fellow you knocked down may try to put a knife into you."

"I will keep a sharp lookout, sir, never you fear."

"I think, Tring, you had better watch Gibbons; he is more in danger than I am. Have you seen the man go on shore?"

"Yes, he was the very first to cross onto the next vessel," Tring said.

The loungers on the quay had gathered together to watch the passengers as they left the ship, and by the dim light from one of the oil lamps it could be seen that the majority of them were of the roughest class. As they were passing through them a man with a cry of rage sprang at Gibbons with an uplifted knife. Tring's fist struck him under the ear as he was in the act of striking, and he fell like a log. There was a cry of "Down with them!" and a rush of a score of men, most of whom were armed with heavy bludgeons.

The party was at once broken up, heavy blows were exchanged, the two pugilists rolling their assailants over like ninepins, but receiving several heavy blows from their assailants' clubs. A rush of five or six men separated Mark from the others. Those in front of him he struck down, but a moment later received a tremendous blow on the back of the head which struck him to the ground unconscious. His companions were all too busy defending themselves against their assailants to notice what had been done, and as the attack had taken place in the center of the roadway behind the quay, there was no lamp, and the fight was taking place in almost total darkness.

By this time many people had run up at the sound of the fray. A minute later there was a cry that the watch were coming, and four or five men with lanterns emerged from one of the streets leading down to the quays, and hurried towards the spot. The fight at once ceased, the men who had attacked mingled with the crowd, and when the watch came up they found the five Englishmen clustered together and ten or twelve men lying on the ground.

The instant that the fight had ceased Dick Chetwynd asked, "Where is Mr. Thorndyke?"

No answer was given. The other four men simul-

taneously uttered exclamations of alarm. The crowd was thinning fast as the watch came up.

"What is all this about?" one of them asked in Dutch.

"Do any of you speak English?" Dick asked.

"I do," one of them said.

"We landed five minutes ago from that craft," continued Dick, "and as we came across we were attacked by a band of ruffians. An Englishman, one of our party, is missing."

"Whose bodies are these?" the watchman asked, raising his lantern and pointing to them.

"Perhaps Mr. Thorndyke is among them," Dick Chetwynd said.

The fallen figures were examined by the light of the lanterns. Mark was not among them. The watchmen uttered an exclamation of astonishment as they looked at the men's faces.

"What did you strike them with?" the one who spoke first asked.

"Struck them with our fists, of course," Gibbons replied. They will do well enough; you need not bother about them, they will come round again presently. The question is, Where is Mr. Thorndyke?"

The whole of the lookers-on had dispersed, each fearing that he might be charged with taking part in the outrage.

"This is a very serious matter," Chetwynd said. "We have every reason to believe that the attack was premeditated, for the gentleman who is missing was known to have some valuables on him; all these fellows ought to be taken and locked up and made to give an account of themselves. We are going to the *Hôtel d'Hollande*, where you can find us at any time. I dare say some of these scoundrels are known to you, and that may give you a clue as to where Mr. Thorndyke is."

"I have but little hope that he will be found alive; no doubt he has been stabbed and his body carried off so that they can search his clothes at their leisure. We came in a strong party to prevent the risk of an attack upon Mr. Thorndyke. Here is my card. It is of no use our attempting to search by ourselves, but if you will get

these fellows taken to the watch-house, and will call at the hotel, we will join your party and help you to search the places you think he has most likely been taken to."

"I think, sir, you had better come with me to the watch-house, and see the Lieutenant, and tell him what has happened."

"I will just take my friends to the hotel, and shall be back from there before you have got men to take these fellows away. If you go to one of those ships and borrow a bucket, empty it over each of them; you will find that will bring them to!"

As soon as they arrived at the hotel Dick ordered a private sitting room and five bedrooms.

"We have made a terrible mess of this, lads," he said gloomily. "I don't say that it is any of our faults, but it is a horrible affair. I have not the least doubt that Mr. Thorndyke has been killed, and it is no satisfaction to us that we have pretty nearly done for a dozen of those scoundrels."

"I would not have had it happen for a hundred pounds, nor a thousand, sir. If there had been daylight we could have licked a score of them in spite of their bludgeons, but they came with such a rush at us that we got separated before we knew where we were. I don't think that it was our fault. I feel as much ashamed as if I had thrown up the sponge in the ring at the end of the first round. To think that we came over here, four of us, and yourself, sir, on purpose to take care of Mr. Thorndyke, all well save a few knocks with those sticks, and Mr. Thorndyke killed and carried off before we have been on shore five minutes. A better young fellow I never put on the gloves with;" and Gibbons passed the back of his hand across his eyes.

"Well, I must be off now," Chetwynd said. "I feel heartbroken over it. I have known him since we were boys together; and what makes it worse is that only three days ago he became engaged to be married. How we are going to take the news back God only knows!"

As he hurried down the street towards the wharf he saw a number of lanterns coming towards him, and ten or twelve watchmen came along escorting the prisoners,

many of whose faces were covered with blood; then came four other watchmen carried a body on a stretcher.

"One of them is dead," the watchman who had before spoken said to Dick. "A foreign seaman, a Lascar I should say, from his color; we found an open knife by his side."

"That is the man who began the fray," Chetwynd said. "He was on the point of stabbing one of my companions when another hit him under the ear."

"What!" the watchman said. "He must have been hit like the kick of a horse. All these prisoners seem to have been struck but once; two of them cannot speak. I think their jaws are broken; four of them have broken noses, and another has had all his front teeth knocked out, while the others are nearly as bad."

"I see you have brought with you some of their bludgeons," Dick said, pointing to one of the watchmen carrying a great bundle of sticks over his shoulder.

"Yes, sir, twenty-three of them; it certainly seems to show that it was a planned thing. Most of these fellows' faces are so bruised that I cannot say who they are at present, but two or three are known as the worst ruffians in the city, and I have no doubt we shall find that they all belong to the same gang."

By this time they had arrived at the watch-house, a building of considerable size; the prisoners were first lodged in a strong room with barred windows and very heavy doors, and then the watchman went with Chetwynd to the Lieutenant's room. The officer had just returned, having hurried down with a re-enforcement to the wharf as soon as he had heard of the fray, and tried to obtain some information from the people who had gathered round, attracted by the lanterns of the watch. He had already learned from the watchmen all they knew about the affair. As he spoke English well, he at once addressed Dick:

"This is a serious affair, sir."

"A very serious affair, for, indeed, I am afraid that my dearest friend has been murdered."

"Will you kindly give me the particulars?" the officer said, sitting down to the table with a pen in his hand.

Dick Chetwynd told him the story of how Mr. Thorndyke, having some very valuable jewels that he wished to dispose of, and believing that he would be attacked by a band of robbers, had asked him to accompany him, and had brought four detective officers and pugilists to protect him against any sudden attack.

"Ah, that accounts for the terrible blows that these fellows received," the officer said. "And your friend, was he a strong man?"

"He was a man exceptionally strong, and a match for either of the pugilists that he brought over. I have no doubt that he was stabbed, though of course he might have been brought down by a blow from one of the bludgeons. He must have been completely insensible when carried off."

"The watchman here tells me that three or four of these ruffians are known, and perhaps if you will give orders for the blood to be washed off the others' faces some more may be recognized and prove an aid in enabling you to form an idea where Mr. Thorndyke has been carried. I trust that you will send out a party to search for him. I and the four men with me will gladly join them, and may be of use if any resistance is offered."

The Lieutenant at once gave orders to the watchman to go down and see that the prisoners all washed their faces. As soon as he returned with the report that this was done the officer went down with Dick Chetwynd to examine them. Three or four of the men with lanterns also went in. Eight out of eleven men were recognized; the other three, whose features were so swollen that they could not see out of their eyes, could not be made out, but their companions, on being questioned, gave their names.

"They all belong to a gang of wharf thieves and plunderers. They live in a slum near the water. I will have men posted in the lanes leading to it, and will myself go with you to see that a search is made of every house; but first I will try to find out from these fellows where he was to be taken. Now, my men," he said, "anyone of you who will tell me where one of the party you attacked was to be taken to will find things made easy for him at his trial."

None of the men spoke for a minute, and then one said: "We know nothing about it; how should we, when we were all knocked stupid?"

"No, but you might know where he was to be taken."

"I know nothing about that. We all got word to mind we were on the wharf when a brig, that was seen coming up, came alongside, and that we were to have a hundred francs each for attacking some of the passengers as they landed. Six of them came along together, and one said, 'These are the men.' A black sailor came up first and spoke to two or three men in some foreign language. I don't know who the men were; it was too dark to see their faces. It was one of them who gave the order. It seemed an easy job enough when there were twenty-five of us with heavy sticks, but it didn't turn out so. I only know that I hit one big fellow a blow that ought to have knocked him down, and the next moment there was a crash, and I don't know anything more about it until a lot of water was thrown over me and one of the watch helped me to my feet. I don't know whether the others know more than I do, but I don't think they do."

All the others protested at once that they were equally ignorant. They had gone to earn a hundred francs. They had been told that the money was all right, but who found it or who were the men to be attacked they had not the least idea.

"How was it that you all had these bludgeons—there were no knives found on any of you?"

The man who spoke before said:

"The order was 'No knives,' and before we went down to the wharf each of us was searched and a stick given to us. I suppose from that, that whoever paid for the job didn't want blood to be shed; it suited us well enough, for it was a job there was sure to be a row over, and I don't suppose any of us wanted to put his head in a noose. I know that we all said to each other as we went out that it did not want such sticks as we had to give a man a thrashing, but the man who hired us, whoever he was, knew his customers better than we did."

The officer translated the man's words as they were

spoken to Dick, and on hearing the last speech, the latter said:

"Then there is still hope that Thorndyke may only have been stunned; that is a greater reason for our losing no time in looking for him, for I am afraid that they won't hesitate to kill him when they have got him hidden away."

"I expect," the Lieutenant said, "they thought that if any of the watch came upon them as they were carrying him off, they might be at once arrested if it was found that they were carrying a dead man, whilst if he were only stunned they would say that it was a drunken comrade who had fallen and knocked his head against something. I agree with you, sir; we had better start on our search at once."

"Will you pass the Hôtel d'Hollande? If not, I will run and bring my men."

"Yes, I will go that way; it will be no further."

Dick walked on fast.

"We have no news of him," he said, as he entered the room where the four men were anxiously awaiting him, "but we and the watch are now going to search the slums where the men who were taken prisoners all live; come down now, and I will tell you what I have learned, before the others come up. There is reason for believing that he was not stabbed," he went on, as they reached the street, "for the men all say that they were armed only with clubs, and that the strictest orders were given that none were to carry knives, therefore there is little doubt that he was at the time only stunned. But I am bound to say that this gives me very small ground for hoping that we may find him alive. I fear they only stunned him, so that they might carry him safely to their haunts, for if stopped they could say that it was a drunken comrade, who had fallen and hurt himself. I fear that when they get him into one of their dens they will make short work of him, therefore it is clear that there is not a moment to be lost. Ah, here comes the watch."

There were eight men with the Lieutenant.

"I have already sent off ten others," he said as he joined Chetwynd, "to watch the lanes, and let no one

go in or out. I thought it best not to lose a moment about that, for when the men see that we have learned from the others where the gang came from, and have closed the avenues of escape, they will hesitate about murdering their prisoner if he was still alive when my men got there."

In a quarter of an hour they arrived at the end of a narrow lane, where two watchmen were standing with lanterns.

"You have seen nor heard nothing?" the Lieutenant asked him.

"No, sir, we have not seen a man moving in the lane."

"There is just one hope that we might be in time," the Lieutenant said, as he went on down the lane, "and that is, that the fellows when they gather will be so dismayed at finding that nearly half their number are missing, and know that some of them are pretty sure to make a clean breast of it, they will hesitate to complete their crime. It is one thing to rob a man in the streets, quite another to murder him in cold blood. There is likely to be a good deal of difference of opinion among them, some of the more desperate being in favor of carrying the thing through, but others are sure to be against it, and nothing may have been done. You may be sure that the sight of my men at the end of the lanes will still further alarm them. I have no doubt the news that we have surrounded the district has already been circulated, and that if alive now he is safe, for they will think it is better to suffer a year or two's imprisonment than to be tried for murder. We are sure to make some captures, for it is probable that several of the others will bear marks of the fight. Each man we take we will question separately; one or other of them is pretty safe to be ready to say where your friend was taken to if I promise him that he shan't be prosecuted."

Every house in the district was searched from top to bottom. Six men, with cut and bruised faces, were found shamming sleep, and were separately questioned closely; all declared that they knew nothing whatever of anyone being carried there.

"It is of no use your denying your share in the affair,"

the Lieutenant said. "Your comrades have confessed that there were twenty-five of you hired to carry out this, and that you received a hundred francs each. Now, if this gentleman is not found, it will be a hanging matter for some of you, and you had better tell all you know. If you will tell us where he is, I will promise that you shan't be included in the list of those who will be prosecuted."

The reply, although put in different words, was identical with that of the prisoners.

"We had nothing to do with carrying him off; we were hired only to knock the men down who were pointed out to us; not a word was said about carrying them off. He may have been carried off, that we cannot say, but he has certainly not been brought here, and none of us had anything to do with it."

Morning was breaking before the search was concluded. The detectives, accustomed as they were to visit the worst slums of London, were horrified at the crowding, the squalor, and the misery of the places they entered.

"My opinion, Mr. Chetwynd," Gibbons growled, "is that the best thing to do would be to put a score of soldiers at the end of all these lanes, and then to burn the whole place down, and make a clean sweep of it. I never saw such a villainous-looking crew in all my life. I have been in hopes all along that some of them would resist; it would have been a real pleasure to have let fly at them."

"They are a villainous set of wretches, Gibbons, but they may not be all criminals."

"Well, I don't know, sir; but I know that if I were on a jury, and any of the lot were in the dock, I should not want to hear any evidence against them; their faces are enough to hang them."

At last the search was over, and they were glad indeed when they emerged from the lanes and breathed the pure air outside, for all the Englishmen felt sick at the poisonous air of the dens they had entered. The prisoners, as they were taken, had been sent off to the watch-house.

"I begin to think that the story these fellows tell is a true one, Mr. Chetwynd," the Lieutenant said, "and that

they had nothing to do with carrying your friend off. In the first place, they all tell the same story: that in itself would not be much, as that might have been settled beforehand; but it is hardly likely that one of the lot would not have been ready to purchase his life by turning on the others. There is very little honor among thieves; and as they know that we have taken their mates—for no doubt we were watched as we marched them up the town—they would make sure that someone would turn traitor, and would think they might as well be beforehand. I fancy that the men, whoever they are, who hired this gang to attack you, carried out that part of the business themselves."

"I am afraid that is so," Dick agreed; "and I fear in that case that he is in even worse hands than if these ruffians here had taken him."

"Well, sir, can you furnish us with any clew?"

"The only clew is that they were most probably dark men. That man who was killed was undoubtedly one of them. I should say that they would probably be got up as foreign sailors."

"Well, that is something to go upon, at any rate. I will send round men at once to all the places by the quays where sailors board, and if three or four of them have been together at any place we are sure to hear of it, and the moment I have news I will send to your hotel."

"Thank you; I don't see that we can be of any use at present, but you will find us ready to turn out again the moment we hear that you have news."

When the party returned to the hotel they sat talking the matter over for upwards of an hour. All were greatly discouraged, for they had little hope indeed of ever learning what had become of Mark. As they had started out Dick had told the night porter that he could not say what time they might return, but that before the house closed he must have a couple of bottles of spirits and some tumblers sent up to their sitting room, together with some bread and cold meat, for that they might not return until morning, and would need something before they went to bed, as they had had nothing since their dinner, at one o'clock.

"It wants something to take the taste of that place out of one's mouth," Tring said to Dick, as, directly they entered, he poured some spirits into the glasses. "I feel as queer as if I had been hocussed."

All, indeed, were feeling the same, and it was not until they had eaten their supper and considerably lowered the spirits in the two bottles that they began to talk. The two detectives were the principal speakers, and both of these were of opinion that the only shadow of hope remaining rested upon Mark himself.

"Unless they finished him before he came round," Malcolm said, "they would find him an awkward customer to deal with. Mr. Thorndyke has got his head screwed on right, and if, as you say, they are Indians, Mr. Chetwynd, I should think that if he once comes fairly round, unless he is tied up, he will be a match for them, even with their knives. That is the only chance I see. Even if the watch do find out that three or four foreign sailors have been at one of the boarding-houses and did not turn up last night, I don't think we shall be much nearer. They will probably only have carried him some distance along the wharf, got to some quiet place where there is a big pile of wood, or something of that sort, then put a knife into him, searched for the diamonds, which you may be sure they would find easily enough wherever he had hidden them, and then make off, most likely for Rotterdam or The Hague; they could be at either of these places by this time, and will mostly likely divide the diamonds and get on board different craft, bound for London or Hull, or indeed any other port, and then ship for India. From what Mr. Thorndyke said they did not want the diamonds to sell, but only to carry back to some temple from which they were stolen twenty years ago."

Chester was of precisely the same opinion.

"I am afraid, Mr. Chetwynd," he added, as they rose to go to their rooms for two or three hours' sleep, "the only news that we shall get in the morning is that Mr. Thorndyke's body has been found."