

MR. MIDSHIPMAN EASY

"Yes, Mr. Heasy, quite as good a gentleman as yourself, although I 'ave 'ad misfortunes—I ham of as old a family as hany in the country," replied Mr. Easthupp, now backed by the boatswain; "many the year did I walk Bond Street, and I 'ave as good blood in my weins as you, Mr Heasy, hal-though I have been misfortunate—I've had hadmirals in my family."

"You have grossly insulted this gentleman," said Mr. Biggs, in continuation; "and notwithstanding all your talk of equality, you are afraid to give him satisfaction—you shelter yourself under your quarter-deck."

"Mr. Biggs," replied our hero, who was now very wroth, "I shall go on shore directly we arrive at Malta. Let you and this fellow put on plain clothes, and I will meet you both—and then I'll show you whether I am afraid to give satisfaction."

"One at a time," said the boatswain.

"No, sir, not one at a time, but both at the same time—I will fight both or none. If you are my superior officer, you must descend," replied Jack, with an ironical sneer, "to meet me, or I will not descend to meet that fellow, whom I believe to have been little better than a pickpocket."

This accidental hit of Jack's made the purser's steward turn pale as a sheet, and then equally red. He raved and foamed amazingly, although he could not meet Jack's indignant look, who then turned round again.

"Now, Mr. Biggs, is this to be understood, or do you shelter yourself under your fore-castle?"

"I'm no dodger," replied the boatswain, "and we will settle the affair at Malta."

At which reply Jack returned to Mesty.

"Massa Easy, I look at um face, dat fello, Eastop, he no like it. I go shore wid you, see fair play, anyhow—suppose I can?"

Mr. Biggs having declared that he would fight, of course had to look out for a second, and he fixed upon Mr. Tallboys, the gunner, and requested him to be his friend. Mr. Tallboys, who had been latterly very much annoyed by Jack's victories over him in the science of navigation, and therefore felt ill-will towards him, consented; but he was very much puzzled how to arrange that three were to fight at the same time, for he had no idea of there being two duels, so he went to his cabin and

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commenced reading. Jack, on the other hand, dared not say a word to Jolliffe on the subject; indeed there was no one in the ship to whom he could confide but Gascoigne. He therefore went to him, and although Gascoigne thought it was excessively *infra dig.* of Jack to meet even the boatswain, as the challenge had been given there was no retracting; he therefore consented, like all midshipmen, anticipating fun, and quite thoughtless of the consequences.

The second day after they had been anchored in Valetta harbour, the boatswain and gunner, Jack and Gascoigne, obtained permission to go on shore. Mr. Easthupp, the purser's steward, dressed in his best blue coat, with brass buttons and velvet collar, the very one in which he had been taken up when he had been vowing and protesting that he was a gentleman, at the very time that his hand was abstracting a pocket-book, went up on the quarter-deck and requested the same indulgence; but Mr. Sawbridge refused, as he required him to return staves and hoops at the cooperage. Mesty also, much to his mortification, was not to be spared.

This was awkward, but it was got over by proposing that the meeting should take place behind the cooperage at a certain hour, on which Mr. Easthupp might slip out, and borrow a portion of the time appropriated to his duty, to heal the breach in his wounded honour. So the parties all went on shore, and put up at one of the small inns to make the necessary arrangements.

Mr. Tallboys then addressed Mr. Gascoigne, taking him apart, while the boatswain amused himself with a glass of grog, and our hero sat outside teasing a monkey.

"Mr. Gascoigne," said the gunner, "I have been very much puzzled how this duel should be fought, but I have at last found it out. You see that there are three parties to fight. Had there been two or four there would have been no difficulty as the right line or square might guide us in that instance; but we must arrange it upon the triangle in this."

Gascoigne stared; he could not imagine what was coming.

"Are you aware, Mr. Gascoigne, of the properties of an equilateral triangle?"

"Yes," replied the midshipman, "that it has three equal sides—but what the devil has that to do with the duel?"

"Everything, Mr. Gascoigne," replied the gunner; "it has

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resolved the great difficulty; indeed, the duel between three can only be fought upon that principle. You observe," said the gunner, taking a piece of chalk out of his pocket, and making a triangle on the table, "in this figure we have three points, each equidistant from each other; and we have three combatants—so that, placing one at each point, it is all fair play for the three. Mr. Easy, for instance, stands here, the boatswain here, and the purser's steward at the third corner. Now, if the distance is fairly measured, it will be all right."

"But, then," replied Gascoigne, delighted at the idea, "how are they to fire?"

"It certainly is not of much consequence," replied the gunner, "but still, as sailors, it appears to me that they should fire with the sun; that is, Mr. Easy fires at Mr. Biggs, Mr. Biggs fires at Mr. Easthupp, and Mr. Easthupp fires at Mr. Easy; so that you perceive that each party has his shot at one, and at the same time receives the fire of another."

Gascoigne was in ecstasies at the novelty of the proceeding, the more so as he perceived that Easy obtained every advantage by the arrangement.

"Upon my word, Mr. Tallboys, I give you great credit; you have a profound mathematical head, and I am delighted with your arrangement. Of course, in these affairs, the principals are bound to comply with the arrangements of the seconds, and I shall insist upon Mr. Easy consenting to your excellent and scientific proposal."

Gascoigne went out, and pulling Jack away from the monkey, told him what the gunner had proposed, at which Jack laughed heartily.

The gunner also explained it to the boatswain, who did not very well comprehend, but replied—

"I dare say it's all right—shot for shot, and d—n all favours."

The parties then repaired to the spot with two pairs of ship's pistols which Mr. Tallboys had smuggled on shore; and as soon as they were on the ground the gunner called Mr. Easthupp out of the cooperage. In the meantime Gascoigne had been measuring an equilateral triangle of twelve paces, and marked it out. Mr. Tallboys, on his return with the purser's steward, went over the ground, and finding that it was "equal angles subtended by equal sides," declared that it was all right. Easy took his station, the boatswain was put into his, and

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Mr. Easthupp, who was quite in a mystery, was led by the gunner to the third position.

"But, Mr. Tallboys," said the purser's steward, "I don't understand this. Mr. Easy will first fight Mr. Biggs, will he not?"

"No," replied the gunner, "this is a duel of three. You will fire at Mr. Easy, Mr. Easy will fire at Mr. Biggs, and Mr. Biggs will fire at you. It is all arranged, Mr. Easthupp."

"But," said Mr. Easthupp, "I do not understand it. Why is Mr. Biggs to fire at me? I have no quarrel with Mr. Biggs."

"Because Mr. Easy fires at Mr. Biggs, and Mr. Biggs must have his shot as well."

"If you have ever been in the company of gentlemen, Mr. Easthupp," observed Gascoigne, "you must know something about duelling."

"Yes, yes, I've kept the best company, Mr. Gascoigne, and I can give a gentleman satisfaction; but——"

"Then, sir, if that is the case, you must know that your honour is in the hands of your second, and that no gentleman appeals."

"Yes, yes, I know that, Mr. Gascoigne; but still I've no quarrel with Mr. Biggs, and therefore, Mr. Biggs, of course you will not aim at me."

"Why, you don't think that I am going to be fired at for nothing," replied the boatswain; "no, no, I'll have my shot, anyhow."

"But at your friend, Mr. Biggs?"

"All the same, I shall fire at somebody—shot for shot, and hit the luckiest."

"Vel, gentlemen, I purtest against these proceedings," replied Mr. Easthupp; "I came here to have satisfaction from Mr. Easy, and not to be fired at by Mr. Biggs."

"Don't you have satisfaction when you fire at Mr. Easy?" replied the gunner; "what more would you have?"

"I purtest against Mr. Biggs firing at me."

"So you would have a shot without receiving one," cried Gascoigne; "the fact is that this fellow's a confounded coward, and ought to be kicked into the cooperage again."

At this affront Mr. Easthupp rallied, and accepted the pistol offered by the gunner.

"You 'ear those words, Mr. Biggs; pretty language to use to a gentleman. You shall 'ear from me, sir, as soon as the

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ship is paid off. I purtest no longer, Mr. Tallboys; death before dishonour. I'm a gentleman, damme!"

At all events, the swell was not a very courageous gentleman, for he trembled most exceedingly as he pointed his pistol.

The gunner gave the word, as if he were exercising the great guns on board ship.

"Cock your locks!"—"Take good aim at the object!"—"Fire!"—"Stop your vents!"

The only one of the combatants who appeared to comply with the latter supplementary order was Mr. Easthupp, who clapped his hand to his trousers behind, gave a loud yell, and then dropped down; the bullet having passed clean through his seat of honour, from his having presented his broadside as a target to the boatswain as he faced towards our hero. Jack's shot had also taken effect, having passed through both the boatswain's cheeks, without further mischief than extracting two of his best upper double teeth, and forcing through the hole of the further cheek the boatswain's own quid of tobacco. As for Mr. Easthupp's ball, as he was very unsettled, and shut his eyes before he fired, it had gone the Lord knows where.

The purser's steward lay on the ground and screamed. The boatswain spit his double teeth and two or three mouthfuls of blood out, and then threw down his pistols in a rage.

"A pretty business, by God," sputtered he; "he's put my pipe out. How the devil am I to pipe to dinner when I'm ordered, all my wind 'scaping through the cheeks?"

In the meantime the others had gone to the assistance of the purser's steward, who continued his vociferations. They examined him, and considered a wound in that part not to be dangerous.

"Hold your confounded bawling," cried the gunner, "or you'll have the guard down here; you're not hurt."

"Han't hi?" roared the steward. "Oh, let me die, let me die; don't move me!"

"Nonsense," cried the gunner, "you must get up and walk down to the boat; if you don't we'll leave you—hold your tongue, confound you. You won't? then I'll give you something to halloo for."

Whereupon Mr. Tallboys commenced cuffing the poor wretch right and left, who received so many swinging boxes of the ear that he was soon reduced to merely pitiful plaints



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of, "Oh dear!—such inhumanity—I purtest—oh dear! must I get up? I can't, indeed."

"I do not think he can move, Mr. Tallboys," said Gascoigne; "I should think the best plan would be to call up two of the men from the cooperage, and let them take him at once to the hospital."

The gunner went down to the cooperage to call the men. Mr. Biggs, who had bound up his face as if he had a toothache, for the bleeding had been very slight, came up to the purser's steward.

"What the hell are you making such a howling about? Look at me, with two shot-holes through my figure-head, while you have only got one in your stern. I wish I could change with you, by heavens, for I could use my whistle then—now if I attempt to pipe, there will be such a wasteful expenditure of his Majesty's stores of wind, that I never shall get out a note. A wicked shot of yours, Mr. Easy."

"I really am very sorry," replied Jack, with a polite bow, "and I beg to offer my best apology."

During this conversation the purser's steward felt very faint, and thought he was going to die.

"Oh dear! oh dear! what a fool I was; I never was a gentleman—only a swell. I shall die; I never will pick a pocket again—never—never—God forgive me!"

"Why, confound the fellow," cried Gascoigne—"so you were a pickpocket, were you?"

"I never will again," replied the fellow, in a faint voice. "Hi'll hamend and lead a good life—a drop of water—oh! lagged at last!"

Then the poor wretch fainted away; and Mr. Tallboys coming up with the men, he was taken on their shoulders and walked off to the hospital, attended by the gunner and also the boatswain, who thought he might as well have a little medical advice before he went on board.

"Well, Easy," said Gascoigne, collecting the pistols and tying them up in his handkerchief, "I'll be shot but we're in a pretty scrape; there's no hushing this up. I'll be hanged if I care, it's the best piece of fun I ever met with." And at the remembrance of it Gascoigne laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks. Jack's mirth was not quite so excessive,

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as he was afraid that the purser's steward was severely hurt, and expressed his fears.

"At all events you did not hit him," replied Gascoigne; "all you have to answer for is the boatswain's mug—I think you've stopped his jaw for the future."

"I'm afraid that our leave will be stopped for the future," replied Jack.

"That we may take our oaths of," replied Gascoigne.

"Then look you, Ned," said Easy; "I've lots of dollars—we may as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb, as the saying is. I vote that we do not go on board."

"Sawbridge will send and fetch us," replied Ned; "but he must find us first."

"That won't take long, for the soldiers will soon have our description and rout us out. We shall be pinned in a couple of days."

"Confound it; and they say that the ship is to be hove down, and that we shall be here six weeks at least, cooped up on board in a broiling sun, and nothing to do but to watch the pilot fish playing round the rudder and munch bad apricots. I won't go on board. Look ye, Jack," said Gascoigne, "have you plenty of money?"

"I have twenty doubloons, besides dollars," replied Jack.

"Well, then, we will pretend to be so much alarmed at the result of this duel that we dare not show ourselves lest we should be hung. I will write a note and send it to Jolliffe, to say that we have hid ourselves until the affair is blown over, and beg him to intercede with the captain and first lieutenant. I will tell him all the particulars, and refer to the gunner for the truth of it; and then I know that, although we should be punished, they will only laugh. But I will pretend that East-hupp is killed, and we are frightened out of our lives. That will be it; and then let's get on board one of the speronares which come with fruit from Sicily, sail in the night for Palermo, and then we'll have a cruise for a fortnight, and when the money is all gone we'll come back."

"That's a capital idea, Ned, and the sooner we do it the better. I will write to the captain, begging him to get me off from being hung, and telling him where we have fled to, and that letter shall be given after we have sailed."

They were two very nice lads—our hero and Gascoigne.

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CHAPTER XVIII

In which our hero sets off on another cruise, in which he is not blown off shore.

GASCOIGNE and our hero were neither of them in uniform, and they hastened to Nix Mangare stairs, where they soon picked up the padrone of a speronare. They went with him into a wine shop, and with the assistance of a little English from a Maltese boy, whose shirt hung out of his trousers, they made a bargain, by which it was agreed that, for the consideration of two doubloons, he would sail that evening and land them at Gergenti, or some other town in Sicily, providing them with something to eat and gregos to sleep upon.

Our two midshipmen then went back to the tavern from which they had set off to fight the duel, and ordering a good dinner to be served in a back room, they amused themselves with killing flies as they talked over the events of the day and waited for their dinner.

As Mr. Tallboys did not himself think proper to go on board till the evening, and Mr. Biggs also wished it to be dark before he went up the ship's side, the events of the duel did not transpire till the next morning. Even then it was not known from the boatswain or gunner, but by an hospital mate coming on board to inform the surgeon that there was one of their men wounded under their charge, but that he was doing very well.

Mr. Biggs had ascended the side with his face bound up.

"Confound that Jack Easy," said he, "I have only been on leave twice since I sailed from Portsmouth. Once I was obliged to come up the side without my trousers, and show my bare stern to the whole ship's company, and now I am coming up and dare not show my figure-head." He reported himself to the officer of the watch, and hastening to his cabin, went to bed and lay the whole night awake from pain, thinking what excuse he could possibly make for not coming on deck next morning to his duty.

He was, however, saved this trouble, for Mr. Jolliffe brought the letter of Gascoigne up to Mr. Sawbridge, and the captain had received that of our hero.