

## CHAPTER XXX

*Modern philanthropy, which, as usual, is the cause of much trouble and vexation.*

IN three weeks the *Aurora*, with her prize in tow, arrived at Malta. The wounded were sent to the hospital, and the gallant Russian captain recovered from his wounds about the same time as Mr. Hawkins the chaplain.

Jack, who constantly called to see the chaplain, had a great deal to do to console him. He would shake his hands as he lay in his bed, exclaiming against himself. "Oh," would he say, "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. That I, a man of God, as they term me, who ought to have been down with the surgeons, whispering comfort to the desponding, should have gone on deck (but I could not help it), and have mixed in such a scene of slaughter. What will become of me?"

Jack attempted to console him by pointing out that not only chaplains, but bishops, have been known to fight in armour from time immemorial. But Mr. Hawkins's recovery was long doubtful, from the agitation of his mind. When he was able to walk, Jack introduced to him the Russian captain, who was also just out of his bed.

"I am most happy to embrace so gallant an officer," said the Russian, who recognised his antagonist, throwing his arms round the chaplain, and giving him a kiss on both cheeks. "What is his rank?" continued he, addressing himself to Jack, who replied, very quietly, "that he was the ship's padre."

"The padre!" replied the captain, with surprise, as Hawkins turned away with confusion. "The padre—*par exemple!* Well, I always had a great respect for the Church. Pray, sir," said he, turning to Easy, "do your padres always head your boarders?"

"Always, sir," replied Jack; "it's a rule of the service—and the duty of a padre to show the men the way to heaven. It's our ninety-ninth article of war."

"You are a fighting nation," replied the Russian, bowing to Hawkins, and continuing his walk, not exactly pleased that he had been floored by a parson.

Mr. Hawkins continued very disconsolate for some time; he then invalided, and applied himself to his duties on shore, where he would not be exposed to such temptation from his former habits.

As the *Aurora*, when she was last at Malta, had nearly exhausted the dockyard for her repairs, she was even longer fitting out this time, during which Captain Wilson's despatches had been received by the admiral and had been acknowledged by a brig sent to Malta. The admiral, in reply, after complimenting him upon his gallantry and success, desired that, as soon as he was ready, he should proceed to Palermo with communications of importance to the authorities, and having remained there for an answer, was again to return to Malta to pick up such of his men as might be fit to leave the hospital, and then join the Toulon fleet. This intelligence was soon known to our hero, who was in ecstasies at the idea of again seeing Agnes and her brothers. Once more the *Aurora* sailed away from the high-crowned rocks of Valette, and with a fine breeze dashed through the deep blue waves.

But towards the evening the breeze increased, and they were under double-reefed topsails. On the second day they made the coast of Sicily, not far from where Easy and Gascoigne had been driven on shore; the weather was then more moderate, and the sea had, to a great degree, subsided. They therefore stood in close to the coast, as they had not a leading wind to Palermo. As they stood in, the glasses, as usual, were directed to land, observing the villas with which the hills and valleys were studded, with their white fronts embowered in orange groves.

"What is that, Gascoigne," said Easy, "under that precipice?—it looks like a vessel."

Gascoigne turned his glass in the direction—"Yes, it is a vessel on the rocks: by her prow she looks like a galley."

"It is a galley, sir—one of the row-galleys—I can make out her bank of oars," observed the signalman.

This was reported to Captain Wilson, who also examined her.

"She is on the rocks, certainly," observed he; "and I think I see people on board. Keep her away a point, quarter-master."

The *Aurora* was now steered right for the vessel, and in



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the course of an hour was not more than a mile from her. Their suppositions were correct—it was one of the Sicilian government galleys bilged on the rocks, and they now perceived that there were people on board of her, making signals with their shirts and pieces of linen.

"They must be the galley-slaves, for I perceive that they do not one of them change their positions; the galley must have been abandoned by their officers and seamen, and the slaves left to perish."

"That's very hard," observed Jack to Gascoigne; "they were condemned to the galleys, but not to death."

"They will not have much mercy from the waves," replied Gascoigne; "they will all be in kingdom come to-morrow morning, if the breeze comes more on the land. We have already come up two points this forenoon."

Although Captain Wilson did not join in this conversation, which he overheard as he stood on the forecastle gun, with his glass over the hammocks, it appears he was of the same opinion. But he demurred; he had to choose between allowing so many of his fellow-creatures to perish miserably, or to let loose upon society a set of miscreants, who would again enter a course of crime until they were recaptured, and by so doing probably displease the Sicilian authorities. After some little reflection he resolved that he would take his chance of the latter. The *Aurora* was hove-to in stays, and the two cutters ordered to be lowered down, and the boat's crew to be armed.

"Mr. Easy, do you take one cutter and the armourers; pull on board of the galley, release those people, and land them in small divisions. Mr. Gascoigne, you will take the other to assist Mr. Easy, and when he lands them in his boat, you will pull by his side ready to act, in case of any hostile attempt on the part of the scoundrels; for we must not expect gratitude; of course, land them at the nearest safe spot for debarkation."

In pursuance of these orders, our two midshipmen pulled away to the vessel. They found her fixed hard upon the rocks, which had pierced her slight timbers, and as they had supposed, the respectable part of her crew, with the commander, had taken to the boats, leaving the galley-slaves to their fate. She pulled fifty oars, but had only thirty-six manned. These oars were forty feet long, and ran in from

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the thole-pin with a loom six feet long, each manned by four slaves, who were chained to their seat before it by a running chain made fast by a padlock in amidships. A plank, of two feet wide, ran fore and aft the vessel between the two banks of oars, for the boatswain to apply the lash to those who did not sufficiently exert themselves.

"Viva los Inglesos!" cried the galley-slaves, as Easy climbed up over the quarter of the vessel.

"I say, Ned, did you ever see such a precious set of villains?" observed Easy, as he surveyed the faces of the men who were chained.

"No," replied Gascoigne; "and I think if the captain had seen them as we have, that he would have left them where they were."

"I don't know—but, however, our orders are positive. Armourer, knock off all the padlocks, beginning aft; when we have a cargo we will land them. How many are there?—twelve dozen; twelve dozen villains to let loose upon society. I have a great mind to go on board again and report my opinion to the captain—one hundred and forty-four villains, who all deserve hanging—for drowning is too good for them."

"Our orders are to liberate them, Jack."

"Yes; but I should like to argue this point with Captain Wilson."

"They'll send after them fast enough, Jack, and they'll all be in limbo again before long," replied Gascoigne.

"Well, I suppose we must obey orders; but it goes against my conscience to save such villainous-looking rascals. Armourer, hammer away."

The armourer, who with the seamen appeared very much of Jack's opinion, and had not commenced his work, now struck off the padlocks one by one with his sledge-hammer. As soon as they were released the slaves were ordered into the cutter, and when it was sufficiently loaded Jack shoved off, followed by Gascoigne as guard, and landed them at the point about a cable's length distant. It required six trips before they were all landed; the last cargo were on shore, and Easy was desiring the men to shove off, when one of the gallerians turned round, and cried out to Jack in a mocking tone, "Addio, signor, a reveder la." Jack started, stared, and in



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the squalid, naked wretch who addressed him, he recognised Don Silvio!

"I will acquaint Don Rebiera of your arrival, signor," said the miscreant, springing up the rocks, and mixing with the rest, who now commenced hooting and laughing at their preservers.

"Ned," observed Easy to Gascoigne, "we have let that rascal loose."

"More's the pity," replied Gascoigne; "but we have only obeyed orders."

"It can't be helped, but I've a notion there will be some mischief out of this."

"We obeyed orders," replied Gascoigne.

"We've let the rascals loose not ten miles from Don Rebiera's."

"Obeyed orders, Jack."

"With a whole gang to back him, if he goes there."

"Orders, Jack."

"Agnes at his mercy."

"Captain's orders, Jack."

"I shall argue this point when I go on board," replied Jack.

"Too late, Jack."

"Yes," replied Easy, sinking down on the stern-sheets with a look of despair.

"Give way, my lads, give way."

Jack returned on board, and reported what he had done; also that Don Silvio was among those liberated; and he ventured to mention his fears of what might take place from their contiguity to the house of Don Rebiera. Captain Wilson bit his lips; he felt that his philanthropy had induced him to act without his usual prudence.

"I have done a rash thing, Mr. Easy, I am afraid. I should have taken them all on board and delivered them up to the authorities. I wish I had thought of that before. We must get to Palermo as fast as we can, and have the troops sent after these miscreants. Hands 'bout ship, fill the main yard."

The wind had veered round, and the *Aurora* was now able to lay up clear of the island of Maritimo. The next morning she anchored in Palermo Roads—gave immediate notice to the authorities, who, wishing Captain Wilson's philanthropy at the

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devil, immediately despatched a large body of troops in quest of the liberated malefactors. Captain Wilson, feeling for Jack's anxiety about his friends, called him over to him on deck, and gave him and Gascoigne permission to go on shore.

"Will you allow me to take Mesty with me, sir, if you please?" said Jack.

"Yes, Mr. Easy; but recollect that, even with Mesty, you are no match for one hundred and fifty men; so be prudent. I send you to relieve your anxiety, not to run into danger."

"Of course, sir," replied Jack, touching his hat, and walking away quietly till he came to the hatchway, when he darted down like a shot, and was immediately occupied with his preparations.

In half-an-hour our two midshipmen, with Mesty, had landed, and proceeded to the inn where they had put up before; they were armed up to the teeth. Their first inquiries were for Don Philip and his brother.

"Both on leave of absence," replied the landlord, "and staying with Don Rebiera."

"That's some comfort," thought Jack. "Now we must get horses as fast as we can. Mesty, can you ride?"

"By all de power, can I ride, Massa Easy; suppose you ride Kentucky horse, you ride anyting."

In half-an-hour four horses and a guide were procured, and at eight o'clock in the morning the party set off in the direction of Don Rebiera's country seat.

They had not ridden more than six miles when they came up with one of the detachments sent out in pursuit of the liberated criminals. Our hero recognised the commanding officer as an old acquaintance, and imparting to him the release of Don Silvio, and his fears upon Don Rebiera's account, begged him to direct his attention that way.

"Corpo di Bacco—you are right, Signor Mid," replied the officer, "but Don Philip is there, and his brother too, I believe. I will be there by ten o'clock to-morrow morning; we will march almost the whole night."

"They have no arms," observed Easy.

"No, but they will soon get them; they will go to some small town in a body, plunder it, and then seek the protection of the mountains. Your captain has given us a pretty job."

Jack exchanged a few more words, and then, excusing him-



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self on account of his haste, put the spurs to his horse and regained his own party, who now proceeded at a rapid pace.

"O signor!" said the guide, "we shall kill the horses."

"I'll pay for them," said Jack.

"Yes, but we shall kill them before we get there, Jack," replied Gascoigne, "and have to walk the rest of the way."

"Very true, Ned; let's pull up, and give them their wind."

"By de holy poker, Massa Easy, but my shirt stick to my ribs," cried Mesty, whose black face was hung with dewdrops from their rapid course.

"Never mind, Mesty."

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon when they arrived at the seat of Don Rebiera. Jack threw himself off his jaded steed, and hastened into the house, followed by Gascoigne. They found the whole family collected in the large sitting-room, quite ignorant of any danger threatening them, and equally astonished and pleased at the arrival of their old friends. Jack flew to Agnes, who screamed when she saw him, and felt so giddy afterwards that he was obliged to support her. Having seated her again, he was kindly greeted by the old people and the two young officers. After a few minutes dedicated to mutual inquiries, our hero stated the cause of their expeditious arrival.

"Don Silvio with one hundred and fifty gallerians let loose on the coast yesterday afternoon!" exclaimed Don Rebiera. "You are right; I only wonder they were not here last night. But I expect Pedro from the town; he has gone down with a load of wine; he will bring us intelligence."

"At all events, we must be prepared," said Don Philip; "the troops, you say, will be here to-morrow morning."

"Holy Virgin!" exclaimed the ladies, in a breath.

"How many can we muster?" said Gascoigne.

"We have five men here, or we shall have by the evening," replied Don Philip—"all, I think, good men—my father, my brother, and myself."

"We are three—four with the guide, whom I know nothing about."

"Twelve in all—not one too many; but I think that now we are prepared, if they attack, we can hold out till the morning."

"Had we not better send the ladies away?" said Jack.

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"Who is to escort them?" replied Don Philip; "we shall only weaken our force; besides, they may fall into the miscreants' hands."

"Shall we all leave the house together? they can but plunder it," observed Don Rebiera.

"Still we may be intercepted by them, and our whole force will be nothing against so many," observed Don Philip, "if we are without defence, whereas in the house we shall have an advantage."

"E' vero," replied Don Rebiera thoughtfully; "then let us prepare, for depend upon it, Don Silvio will not lose such an opportunity to wreak his vengeance. He will be here to-night; I only wonder he has not been here with his companions before. However, Pedro will arrive in two hours."

"We must now see what means we have of defence," said Philip. "Come, brother—will you come, sir?"

#### CHAPTER XXXI

*Regular set-to, in which the parties beaten are not knocked down, but rise higher and higher at each discomfiture—Nothing but the troops could have prevented them from going up to heaven.*

DON REBIERA and his two sons quitted the room, Gascoigne entered into conversation with the signora, while Easy took this opportunity of addressing Agnes. He had been too much occupied with the consultation to pay her much attention before. He had spoken with his eyes fixed upon her, and had been surprised at the improvement which had taken place in less than a year. He now went to her, and asked her, in a low voice, whether she had received his letter.

"Oh yes!" replied she, colouring.

"And were you angry with what I said, Agnes?" in a low tone.

"No," replied she, casting her eyes down on the floor.

"I repeat now what I said, Agnes—I have never forgotten you."

"But——"