

## MR. MIDSHIPMAN EASY

the troops was directed to putting out the flames, but their attempts were ineffectual; the mansion was burned to the bare walls, and but little of the furniture saved; indeed, the major part of it had been destroyed in the attack made by Don Silvio and his adherents.

Leaving directions with Pedro and his people that the property collected by the miscreants should be restored to the owners, Don Reberia ordered the horses, and with the whole party put himself under the protection of the troops, who, as soon as they had been refreshed, and taken some repose, bent their way back to Palermo, with the galley-slaves bound and linked together in a long double row.

They halted when they had gone half-way, and remained for the night. The next day at noon, Don Reberia and his family were once more in their palazzo, and our two midshipmen and Mesty took their leave, and repaired on board to make themselves a little less like chimney-sweepers.

Captain Wilson was not out of the ship. Jack made his report, and then went down below, very much pleased at what had passed, especially as he would have another long yarn for the governor on his return to Malta.

## CHAPTER XXXII

*In which our hero and Gascoigne ought to be ashamed of themselves, and did feel what might be called midshipmite compunction.*

THE *Aurora* continued three weeks at Palermo, during which the most active search had been made for the remainder of the galley-slaves, and some few had been captured; but still Don Silvio and a considerable number were at large, and it was said that they had retired to the fastnesses in the mountains. Our hero was constantly on shore at Don Reberia's house, and, after what had passed, he was now looked upon as soon to become a member of the family. The difference of religion was overlooked by Don Reberia and his relations—by all but the confessor, Father Thomaso, who now began to agitate and fulminate into the ears of the Donna Reberia all the pains and

## MR. MIDSHIPMAN EASY

penalties attending heretical connection, such as excommunication and utter damnation. The effects of his remonstrances were soon visible, and Jack found that there was constraint on the part of the old lady, tears on the part of Agnes, and all father confessors heartily wished at the devil ten times a day, on the part of Don Philip and his brother. At last he wormed the truth out of Agnes, who told her tale, and wept bitterly.

"Ned, I don't much like the appearance of things," observed Jack; "I must get rid of that Father Thomaso."

"You'll find that rather difficult," observed Gascoigne; "besides, if you were rid of him you would have his place filled up with another."

"He has frightened that poor old woman into the dismals, and she has the pains of purgatory on her already. I shall go and talk to Mesty."

"How can Mesty help you?"

"I don't know, but you can't; so, for want of better advice, I'll try the Ashantee."

Our hero went to Mesty, and laid the difficult affair open to him.

"I see," said Mesty, showing his filed teeth, "you want him skull."

"No, I don't, Mesty; but I want him out of the way."

"How that possible, Massa Easy?—ship sail day after to-morrow. Now 'pose I ab time, I soon manage all dat. Stop a little."

"Confound it! but there's no stopping," replied Jack.

"Suppose, Massa Easy, you get leave go on shore—not come off again."

"That will be deserting, Mesty."

"By holy poker, I ab it—you go on shore and break your leg."

"Break my leg!—break my leave, you mean?"

"No, Massa Easy—you break your leg—den captain leave you shore, and leave me to take care of you."

"But why should I break my leg, and how am I to break my leg?"

"Only pretend break leg, Massa Easy. Go talk Massa Don Philip, he manage all dat. Suppose man break his leg in seven pieces, it is not possible to take him board."

"Seven pieces, Mesty! that's rather too many. However I'll think of this."

#### MR. MIDSHIPMAN EASY

Jack then went back and consulted Gascoigne, who approved of Mesty's advice, and thought the scheme feasible.

"If we could only pretend that we were thrown out of a caricola—you break your leg, a compound fracture, of course—I break my arm—both left on shore at sick quarters, with Mesty to take care of us."

"Capital, indeed," replied Jack; "I really would not mind it if it really took place; at all events, we'll overturn the caricola."

"But shall we get leave the last day?"

"Yes, it's two days since I have been on shore, for I have not liked to go to Don Rebiera's since what Agnes told me. Besides, my clothes are all on shore, and that will be an excuse for a few hours."

Our two midshipmen applied for leave the next morning to be off in the afternoon. The first lieutenant gave them permission. They hastened to the hotel, sent for Don Philip, and made him a party to their plan. He readily promised his assistance, for he had resolved that our hero should marry his sister, and was fearful of the effect of his absence, coupled with Friar Thomas's influence over his mother. He went to the surgeon of his regiment, who immediately entered into the scheme.

Our two midshipmen got into a caricola, rattled up and down the streets, and perceiving Captain Wilson at his window, flogged the horse into a gallop; when abreast of the barracks Jack ran the wheel against a bank, and threw himself and Gascoigne out. Midshipmen are never hurt by these accidents, but fortunately for the success of the enterprise their faces were cut and bruised. Don Philip was standing by; he called the men to pick up our two scamps, carried them into the barracks and sent for the surgeons, who undressed them, put Jack's left leg into a multitude of splints, and did the same to Gascoigne's arm. They were then put to bed, their contused faces, with the blood, left *in statu quo*, while Don Philip sent an orderly, as from the commandant, to Captain Wilson, to acquaint him that two of his officers had been thrown out of a caricola, and were lying dangerously hurt at the barracks.

"Good heavens! it must be Mr. Easy and Mr. Gascoigne!" said Captain Wilson, when the intelligence was communicated; "I saw them galloping down the street like two madmen

#### MR. MIDSHIPMAN EASY

just now. Coxswain, take the gig on board and tell the surgeon to come on shore immediately, and bring him up to me at the barracks."

Captain Wilson then put on his hat, buckled on his sword, and hastened to ascertain the extent of the injury. Don Philip kept out of the way, but the captain was ushered into the room by one of the officers, where he found in two beds our two midshipmen stretched out, the surgeon of the forces and the regimental surgeon in consultation between them, while attendants were standing by each bed with restoratives. The medical gentlemen saluted Captain Wilson, and looked very grave, talked about fractures, contusions, injuries, in the most interminable manner—hoped that Mr. Easy would recover—but had doubts. The other gentleman might do well with care; that is, so far as his arm was concerned, but there appeared to be a concussion of the brain. Captain Wilson looked at the cut and blood-smeared faces of the two young men, and waited with anxiety the arrival of his own surgeon, who came at last, puffing with the haste he had made, and received the report of the brothers of the faculty.

The leg of Mr. Easy fractured in two places—had been set—bone protruding—impossible to move him. Gascoigne, arm, compound fracture—contusion of the brain not certain. Now, that all this would have been discovered to be false if the surgeon had been able to examine, is true; but how could he not credit the surgeon of the forces and the regimental surgeon, and how could he put the young men to fresh tortures by removing splints and unsettling limbs? Politeness, if nothing else, prevented his so doing, for it would have been as much as to say that either he did not credit their report, or that he doubted their skill. He looked at our hero and his companion, who kept their eyes closed and breathed heavily with their mouths open, put on a grave face, as well as his brothers in the art, and reported to Captain Wilson.

"But when can they be moved, Mr. Daly?" inquired the latter; "I cannot wait; we must sail to-morrow, or the next day at the farthest."

The surgeon, as in duty bound, put the question to the others, who replied that there would be great risk in moving before the fever, which might be expected the next day, and which might last ten days; but that Captain Wilson had better

#### MR. MIDSHIPMAN EASY

not think of removing them, as they should have every care and attention where they were, and could rejoin the ship at Malta. Mr. Daly, the surgeon, agreed that this would be the most prudent step, and Captain Wilson then gave his consent.

That being settled, he walked up to the bed of Gascoigne and spoke to him; but Gascoigne knew that he was to have a concussion of the brain, and he made no reply, nor gave any signs of knowing that Captain Wilson was near him. He then went to our hero, who, at the sound of Captain Wilson's voice, slowly opened his eyes without moving his head, and appeared to recognise him.

"Are you in much pain, Easy?" said the captain kindly.

Easy closed his eyes again, and murmured, "Mesty, Mesty!"

"He wants his servant, the ship's corporal, sir," said the surgeon.

"Well," replied Captain Wilson, "he had better have him; he is a faithful fellow, and will nurse him well. When you go on board, Mr. Daly, desire the first lieutenant to send Mesty on shore with Mr. Gascoigne's and Mr. Easy's chests, and his own bag and hammock. Good heavens! I would not for a thousand pounds that this accident had occurred. Poor foolish boys—they run in couples, and if one's in a scrape the other is sure to share it. Gentlemen, I return you many thanks for your kindness, and I must accept of your promised care for my unfortunate officers. I sail to-morrow at daylight. You will oblige me by informing their friends, the Rebieras, of their mischance, as I am sure they will contribute all they can to their comfort." So saying, Captain Wilson bowed and quitted the room, followed by the surgeon.

As soon as the door was closed the two midshipmen turned their heads round and looked at each other, but they were afraid to speak at first, in case of the return of the surgeon. As soon as it was announced to them that Captain Wilson and Mr. Daly were outside the barrack-gates, our hero commenced—"Do you know, Ned, that my conscience smites me, and if it had not been that I should have betrayed those who wish to oblige us, when poor Captain Wilson appeared so much hurt and annoyed at our accident, I was very near getting up and telling him of the imposition, to relieve his mind."

"I agree with you, Jack, and I felt much the same—but

#### MR. MIDSHIPMAN EASY

what's done cannot be undone. We must now keep up the imposition for the sake of those who, to help us, have deceived him."

"I don't think that you would find an English surgeon who would have consented to such an imposition."

"No, that is certain; but after all, it is an imposition that has hurt nobody."

"Oh, I do not wish to moralise—but I repent of my share in the deceit; and had it to be done over again I would not consent to it."

"Not even for—? but I won't mention her name in barracks."

"I don't know," replied Jack; "but let's say no more about it, and thank these gentlemen for their kindness."

"Yes, but we must keep it up until we see the *Aurora* under all sail."

"And longer too," replied Jack; "we must not let the affair get wind even on shore. We must not recover quickly, but still appear to recover. Don Rebiera and his wife must be deceived. I have a plot in my head, but I cannot work it out clear till I see Mesty."

Don Philip now came in. He had seen Captain Wilson, who had requested him to look after the two invalids, and stated his intention to sail the next morning. They consulted with him, and it was agreed that no one should be acquainted with the real fact but his brother Martin, and that all Palermo should be as much deceived as Captain Wilson, for if not, it would put Father Thomaso on the *qui vive* and make him fulminate more than ever. Our midshipmen ate an excellent dinner, and then remained in bed conversing till it was time to go to sleep; but long before that Mesty had made his appearance with their clothes. The eyes of the Ashantee said all that was necessary—he never spoke a word, but unlashed his hammock and lay down in a corner, and they were soon all three asleep.

The next morning Captain Wilson called to ascertain how our hero and his companion were, but the room had been darkened, and he could not see their faces plainly. Easy thanked him for his kindness in allowing Mesty to attend them, and having received his orders as to their joining the ship as soon as they recovered, and having promised to be very cautious

MR. MIDSHIPMAN EASY

in their behaviour, and keep out of all scrapes, he wished them a speedy recovery, and departed.

In little more than half-an-hour afterwards, Mesty, who had been peeping out of the shutters, suddenly threw them open with a loud laugh.

The *Aurora* was under way, with studding-sails below and aloft, standing out of the roads. Jack and Gascoigne got up, threw off the splints, and danced about in their shirts. As soon as they were quiet again, Mesty said in a grave tone, "Den why you stay at sea, Massa Easy?"

"Very true, Mesty, I've asked myself that question often enough lately; because I'm a fool, I suppose."

"And I, because I can't help it," replied Gascoigne; "never mind, we are on shore now, and I look for a famous cruise."

"But first we must see what the ground is we are to cruise on," replied Jack; "so, Mesty, let us have a palaver, as they say in your country."

The two midshipmen got into their beds, and Mesty sat on the chest between them, looking as grave as a judge. The question was, how to get rid of the padre Thomaso. Was he to be thrown over the mole-head to the fishes—or his skull broke? was Mesty's knife to be resorted to? was he to be kidnapped or poisoned? or were fair means to be employed—persuasion, bribery? Every one knows how difficult it is to get rid of a priest.

As our hero and Gascoigne were not Italians, they thought that bribery would be the more English-like way of doing the thing; so they composed a letter, to be delivered by Mesty to the friar, in which Jack offered to Father Thomaso the moderate sum of one thousand dollars, provided he would allow the marriage to proceed, and not frighten the old lady with ecclesiastical squibs and crackers.

As Mesty was often on shore with Jack, and knew the friar very well by sight, it was agreed that the letter should be confided to his charge; but as it was not consistent that a person in such a state as our hero was represented to be should sit up and write letters, the delivery was deferred for a few days, when after waiting that time, Mesty delivered the letter to the friar, and made signs that he was to take back the answer. The friar beckoned him that he was to accompany him to his room, where he read the letter, and

MR. MIDSHIPMAN EASY

then again made signs to him to follow him. The friar led the way to his monastery, and as soon as Mesty was in his cell, he summoned another who could speak English to act as interpreter.

"Is your master recovering?"

"Yes," replied Mesty, "he is at present doing well."

"Have you served him long?"

"No," replied Mesty

"Are you very fond of him? does he treat you well, give you plenty of money?"

At these questions, the artful black conceived that there was something in the wind, and he therefore very quietly replied, "I do not care much for him."

The friar fixed his keen eye upon Mesty, and perceived there was a savage look about the black, from which he augured that he was a man who would suit his purpose.

"Your master offers me a thousand dollars; would you wish to gain this money for yourself?"

Mesty grinned, and showed his sharp-filed teeth.

"It would make me a rich man in my own country."

"It would," replied the friar; "now, you shall have it, if you will only give your master a small powder."

"I understand," replied Mesty; "hab those things in my country."

"Well—do you consent?—if so, I will write the letter to get the money."

"Suppose they find me out?" replied Mesty.

"You will be safe, and you shall be sent away as soon as possible—say, will you consent?"

"The whole thousand dollars?"

"Every one of them."

"Den give me the powder!"

"Stay a little," replied the friar, who went out of the cell, and in about ten minutes returned with an answer to our hero's letter, and a paper containing a greyish powder.

"Give him this in his soup or anything—spread it on his meat, or mix it up with his sugar if he eats an orange."

"I see," replied Mesty.

"The dollars shall be yours, I swear it on the holy cross."

Mesty grinned horribly, took his credentials, and then asked, "When I come again?"

MR. MIDSHIPMAN EASY

"As soon as you have received the money bring it to me at Don Rebiera's—then give the powder; as soon as it is given you must let me know, for you must not remain in Palermo. I will myself conduct you to a place of safety."

Mesty then quitted the cell, and was shown out of the monastery.

"By de holy poker, he one d—n rascal!" muttered Mesty, as he was once in the open air. "But stop a little."

The Ashantee soon arrived at the barracks, and repeated the whole of the conference between him and the Friar Thomaso.

"It must be poison, of course," observed Gascoigne; "suppose we try it upon some animal?"

"No, Massa Gascoigne," replied Mesty, "I try it myself, by-and-by. Now what we do?"

"I must give you the order for the thousand dollars, Mesty," replied Jack. "The rascal here writes to me that for that sum he will consent not only not to oppose me, but agrees to assist my cause; but the great question is, whether he will keep his word with you, Mesty; if not, I shall lose my money. So therefore we must now have another palaver, and argue the point."

The point was argued between Jack and Gascoigne. A thousand dollars was a large sum, but Jack's father was a philosopher. After many pros and cons, it was at last decided that the money should be given to Mesty; but Mesty should state, when he took the money to the friar, that he had administered the powder, and claim it when he presented it.

The next day, the order for the money was given to Mesty, and he went to the Friar Thomaso with it. The friar hastened with Mesty to the monastery, and sent for the interpreter.

"You have given it?" inquired the friar.

"Yes—not one hour ago. Here de order for de money."

"You must run for the money before he is dead, for the powder is very rapid."

"And me," replied Mesty, apparently much alarmed, "where am I to go?"

"As soon as you bring the money here, you must go back to the barracks. Remain there till he is dead, and then return here. I will have all ready, and take you, as soon as it is dusk, to a monastery of our order in the mountains, where no one will think of looking for you, till the affair is blown over;

MR. MIDSHIPMAN EASY

and then I will find you a passage in some vessel out of the island."

Mesty hastened for the money, and taking it in a large bag to the monastery, delivered it to the friar's charge, and then returned to the barracks to Easy and Gascoigne. It was agreed that he should go with the friar, who would probably remain away some time; indeed, Mesty insisted upon so doing. Mesty stayed two hours, and then returned about dusk to the monastery, and reported the death of our hero. He remained there until it was dark, and then the friar ordered him to tie the bag of dollars to his saddle-bow. They mounted two mules, which stood already caparisoned, and quitted Palermo.

In the morning Don Philip, as usual, made his appearance, and told our hero that the friar had been summoned away by the abbot, and would not return for some time.

"I came to tell you this news," said Don Philip, "as I thought it would please you; the sooner you are now well the better. I mean to propose your being both removed to my father's palazzo, and then you can recover your lost ground during the confessor's absence."

"And I have the means," replied Jack, showing the friar's letter. Don Philip read it with astonishment, but was still more surprised when he heard the whole story from Jack. He was for a time silent; at last he said—

"I am sorry for your poor black."

"Why so?" replied Jack.

"You will never see him again, depend upon it. A thousand dollars would sign the death-warrant of a thousand blacks; but there is another reason—they will put him out of the way, that he may not give evidence. Where is the powder?"

"Mesty has it; he would not part with it."

"He is a shrewd fellow, that black; he may be too much for the friar," replied Don Philip.

"He means mischief, I'm sure," replied Gascoigne.

"Still I feel a great deal of alarm about him," replied Easy; "I wish now that I had not let him go."

"Are you sure that he went?"

"No, I am not; but the friar told him that he should take him to the mountains as soon as it was dark."

#### MR. MIDSHIPMAN EASY

"And probably he will," replied Don Philip, "as the best place to get rid of him. However, the whole of this story must be told both to my father and my mother; to the former, that he may take the right measures, and to my mother, that it may open her eyes. Give me the copy of the letter you wrote to the friar, and then I shall have it all."

The report of the accident which had occurred to Easy and Gascoigne had been spread and fully believed throughout Palermo. Indeed, as usual, it had been magnified, and asserted that they could not recover. To Agnes only had the case been imparted in confidence by Don Philip, for her distress at the first intelligence had been so great that her brother could not conceal it.

Two days after Don Philip had made his parents acquainted with the villainy of the friar, the midshipmen were transported to the palazzo, much to the surprise of everybody, and much to the renown of the surgeons, who were indemnified for their duplicity and falsehood by an amazing extension of their credit as skilful men.

After their arrival at the palazzo, Don Rebiera was also entrusted with the secret, but it went no farther. As now there was no particular hurry for our hero to get well, he was contented and happy in the society of Agnes and her parents; the old lady, after she had been informed of the conduct of Friar Thomaso, having turned round in our hero's favour, and made a vow never to have a confessor in the house again. Jack and Gascoigne were now as happy as could be; all their alarm was about Mesty, for whose return they were most anxious.

To Don Rebiera, Jack made known formally his intentions with regard to Agnes. He fully satisfied him as to his qualifications and his property, and Don Rebiera was fully aware of his debt of gratitude to our hero. But all he required was the consent of Jack's father, and until this was obtained, he would not consent to the marriage taking place. Jack attempted to argue the point; his father, he said, had married without consulting him, and therefore he had a right to marry without consulting his father. But Don Rebiera, not having any acquaintance with the rights of man and equality, did not feel the full force of Jack's argument, and made it a *sine quâ non* that his parents should write and consent to the alliance before it took place.



#### MR. MIDSHIPMAN EASY

"And probably he will," replied Don Philip, "as the best place to get rid of him. However, the whole of this story must be told both to my father and my mother; to the former, that he may take the right measures, and to my mother, that it may open her eyes. Give me the copy of the letter you wrote to the friar, and then I shall have it all."

The report of the accident which had occurred to Easy and Gascoigne had been spread and fully believed throughout Palermo. Indeed, as usual, it had been magnified, and asserted that they could not recover. To Agnes only had the case been imparted in confidence by Don Philip, for her distress at the first intelligence had been so great that her brother could not conceal it.

Two days after Don Philip had made his parents acquainted with the villainy of the friar, the midshipmen were transported to the palazzo, much to the surprise of everybody, and much to the renown of the surgeons, who were indemnified for their duplicity and falsehood by an amazing extension of their credit as skilful men.

After their arrival at the palazzo, Don Rebiera was also entrusted with the secret, but it went no farther. As now there was no particular hurry for our hero to get well, he was contented and happy in the society of Agnes and her parents; the old lady, after she had been informed of the conduct of Friar Thomaso, having turned round in our hero's favour, and made a vow never to have a confessor in the house again. Jack and Gascoigne were now as happy as could be; all their alarm was about Mesty, for whose return they were most anxious.

To Don Rebiera, Jack made known formally his intentions with regard to Agnes. He fully satisfied him as to his qualifications and his property, and Don Rebiera was fully aware of his debt of gratitude to our hero. But all he required was the consent of Jack's father, and until this was obtained, he would not consent to the marriage taking place. Jack attempted to argue the point; his father, he said, had married without consulting him, and therefore he had a right to marry without consulting his father. But Don Rebiera, not having any acquaintance with the rights of man and equality, did not feel the full force of Jack's argument, and made it a *sine quid non* that his parents should write and consent to the alliance before it took place.

