

MR. MIDSHIPMAN EASY

time I will send down and see if a vessel can be chartered for Malta."

Our hero and Gascoigne fully admitted the wisdom of this measure, and prepared for their departure; indeed, now that Don Rebiera's resolution had been made known to our hero, he cared more for obtaining his father's consent than he did for remaining to enjoy himself at Palermo; and before noon of the next day all was ready, the vessel had been procured, Jack took his leave of Agnes and her mother, and accompanied by Don Rebiera and Don Philip (for Don Martin was on duty a few miles from Palermo), went down to the beach, and having bid them farewell, embarked with Gascoigne and Mesty on board of the two-masted latteen which had been engaged, and before sunset not a steeple of Palermo was to be seen.

"What are you thinking of, Jack?" said Gascoigne, after our hero had been silent half-an-hour.

"I have been thinking, Ned, that we are well out of it."

"So do I," replied Gascoigne; and here the conversation dropped for a time.

"What are you thinking of now, Jack?" said Gascoigne, after a long pause.

"I've been thinking that I've a good story for the old governor."

"Very true," replied Gascoigne; and both were again silent for some time.

"What are you thinking of now, Jack?" said Gascoigne, after another long interval.

"I've been thinking that I shall leave the service," replied Jack.

"I wish you would take me with you," replied Gascoigne, with a sigh; and again they were both in deep contemplation.

"What are you thinking of now, Jack?" said Gascoigne again.

"Of Agnes," replied our hero.

"Well, if that's the case, I'll call you when supper's ready. In the meantime I'll go and talk with Mesty."

MR. MIDSHIPMAN EASY

CHAPTER XXXIV

Jack leaves the service, in which he had no business, and goes home to mind his own business.

ON the fourth day they arrived at Malta, and our two midshipmen, as soon as they had settled with the padrone of the vessel, went up to the government house. They found the governor in the verandah, who held out both his hands, one to each.

"Glad to see you, my lads. Well, Jack, how's the leg—all right? don't limp? And your arm, Gascoigne?"

"All right, sir, and as sound as ever it was," replied they both.

"Then you're in luck, and have made more haste than you deserve after your mad pranks; but now sit down, and I suppose, my friend Jack, you have a story to tell me."

"Oh yes, Sir Thomas, and a very long one."

"Then I won't have it now, for I expect people on business; we'll have it after dinner. Get your things up and take possession of your rooms. The *Aurora* sailed four days ago. You've had a wonderful recovery."

"Wonderful, sir!" replied our hero; "all Palermo rings with it."

"Well, you may go now—I shall see you at dinner. Wilson will be delighted when he hears that you have got round again, for he was low-spirited about it, I can tell you, which is more than you deserve."

"He's right there," said our hero to Gascoigne, as they walked away.

When dinner was over, Jack narrated to the governor the adventures of Mesty, with which he was much interested; but when they were quite alone in the evening, the governor called our two midshipmen into the verandah and said—

"Now, my lads, I'm not going to preach, as the saying is, but I've been long enough in the world to know that a compound fracture of the leg is not cured in fourteen or sixteen days. I ask you to tell me the truth. Did not you deceive Captain Wilson on this point?"

MR. MIDSHIPMAN EASY

"I am ashamed to say that we did, sir," replied Easy.

"How did you manage that, and why?"

Jack then went into further details relative to himself and his amour, stating his wish to be left behind, and all that had passed.

"Well, there's some excuse for you, but none for the surgeons. If any surgeon here had played such a trick, I would have hung him, as sure as I'm governor. This affair of yours has become serious. Mr. Easy, we must have some conversation on the matter to-morrow morning."

The next morning the packet from England was reported off the harbour's mouth. After breakfast the letters were brought on shore, and the governor sent for our hero.

"Mr. Easy, here are two letters for you; I am sorry to say, with black seals. I trust that they do not bring the intelligence of the death of any very near relative."

Jack bowed without speaking, took the letters and went to his room. The first he opened was from his father.

"MY DEAR JOHN,—You will be much grieved to hear that your poor mother, after sitting in the corner for nearly two years waiting for the millennium, appeared to pine away; whether from disappointment or not I do not know; but at last, in spite of all Dr. Middleton could do, she departed this life; and as the millennium would not come to her as she expected, it is to be hoped she is gone to the millennium. She was a good wife, and I always let her have her own way. Dr. Middleton does not appear to be satisfied as to the cause of her death, and has wished to examine; but I said no, for I am a philosopher, and it is no use looking for causes after effects; but I have done since her death what she never would permit me to do during her life. I have had her head shaved, and examined it very carefully as a phrenologist, and most curiously has she proved the truth of the sublime science. I will give you the result. Determination, very prominent; Benevolence, small; Caution, extreme; Veneration, not very great; Philo-progenitiveness, strange to say, is very large, considering she has but one child; Imagination, very strong; you know, my dear boy, she was always imagining some nonsense or another. Her other organs were all moderate. Poor, dear creature! she is gone, and we may

MR. MIDSHIPMAN EASY

well wail, for a better mother or a better wife never existed. And now, my dear boy, I must request that you call for your discharge, and come home as soon as possible. I cannot exist without you, and I require your assistance in the grand work I have in contemplation. The time is at hand, the cause of equality will soon triumph; the abject slaves now hold up their heads; I have electrified them with my speeches, but I am getting old and feeble; I require my son to leave my mantle to, as one prophet did to another, and then I will, like him, ascend in glory.—Your affectionate father,

"NICODEMUS EASY."

From this it would appear, thought Jack, that my mother is dead, and that my father is mad. For some time our hero remained in a melancholy mood; he dropped many tears to the memory of his mother, whom, if he had never respected, he had much loved; and it was not till half-an-hour had elapsed that he thought of opening the other letter. It was from Dr. Middleton.

"MY DEAR BOY,—Although not a correspondent of yours, I take the right of having watched you through all your childhood, and from a knowledge of your disposition to write you a few lines. That you have, by this time, discarded your father's foolish, nonsensical philosophy, I am very sure. It was I who advised your going away for that purpose, and I am sure that, as a young man of sense, and the heir to a large property, you will before this have seen the fallacy of your father's doctrines. Your father tells me that he has requested you to come home, and allow me to add any weight I may have with you in persuading you to do the same. It is fortunate for you that the estate is entailed, or you might soon be a beggar, for there is no saying what debts he might, in his madness, be guilty of. He has already been dismissed from the magistracy by the lord-lieutenant, in consequence of his haranguing the discontented peasantry, and I may say, exciting them to acts of violence and insubordination. He has been seen dancing and hurraing round a stack fired by an incendiary. He has turned away his keepers, and allowed all poachers to go over the manor. In short, he is not in his senses; and although I am far from advising coercive measures, I do consider that it is

MR. MIDSHIPMAN EASY

absolutely necessary that you should immediately return home, and look after what will one day be your property. You have no occasion to follow the profession, with eight thousand pounds per annum. You have distinguished yourself,—now make room for those who require it for their subsistence. God bless you. I shall soon hope to shake hands with you.—Yours most truly,
G. MIDDLETON."

There was matter for deep reflection in these two letters, and Jack never felt before how much his father had been in the wrong. That he had gradually been weaned from his ideas was true, but still he had, to a certain degree, clung to them, as we do to a habit; but now he felt that his eyes were opened; the silly, almost unfeeling letter of his father upon the occasion of his mother's death, opened his eyes. For a long while Jack was in a melancholy meditation, and then casting his eyes upon his watch, he perceived that it was almost dinner-time. That he could eat his dinner was certain, and he scorned to pretend to feel what he did not. He therefore dressed himself and went down, grave, it is true, but not in tears. He spoke little at dinner, and retired as soon as it was over, presenting his two letters to the governor, and asking his advice for the next morning. Gascoigne followed him, and to him he confided his trouble; and Ned, finding that Jack was very low-spirited, consoled him to the best of his power, and brought a bottle of wine which he procured from the butler. Before they retired to bed, Jack had given his ideas to his friend, which were approved of, and wishing him a good-night, he threw himself into bed, and was soon fast asleep.

"One thing is certain, my good fellow," observed the governor to our hero, as he gave him back his letters at the breakfast table the next morning; "that your father is as mad as a March hare. I agree with that doctor, who appears a sensible man, that you had better go home immediately."

"And leave the service altogether, sir?" replied Jack.

"Why, I must say, that I do not think you exactly fitted for it. I shall be sorry to lose you, as you have a wonderful talent for adventure, and I shall have no more yarns to hear when you return; but, if I understand right from Captain Wilson, you were brought into the profession because he thought that the service might be of use in eradicating false

MR. MIDSHIPMAN EASY

notions, rather than from any intention or necessity of your following it up as a profession."

"I suspect that was the case, sir," replied Jack; "as, for my own part, I hardly know why I entered it."

"To find a mare's nest, my lad; I've heard all about it; but never mind that. The question is now about your leaving it, to look after your own property, and I think I may venture to say, that I can arrange all that matter at once, without referring to admiral or captain. I will be responsible for you, and you may go home in the packet, which sails on Wednesday for England."

"Thank you, Sir Thomas, I am much obliged to you," replied Jack.

"You, Mr. Gascoigne, I shall, of course, send out by the first opportunity to rejoin your ship."

"Thank you, Sir Thomas, I am much obliged to you," replied Gascoigne, making a bow.

"You'll break no more arms, if you please, sir," continued the governor; "a man in love may have some excuse in breaking his leg, but you had none."

"I beg your pardon, sir; if Mr. Easy was warranted in breaking his leg out of love, I submit that I could do no less than break my arm out of friendship."

"Hold your tongue, sir, or I'll break your head from the very opposite feeling," replied the governor good-humouredly. "But observe, young man, I shall keep this affair secret, as in honour bound; but let me advise you, as you have only your profession to look to, to follow it up steadily. It is high time that you and Mr. Easy were separated. He is independent of the service, and you are not. A young man possessing such ample means will never be fitted for the duties of a junior officer. He can do no good for himself, and is certain to do much harm to others; a continuance of his friendship would probably end in your ruin, Mr. Gascoigne. You must be aware, that if the greatest indulgence had not been shown to Mr. Easy by his captain and first lieutenant, he never could have remained in the service so long as he has done."

As the governor made the last remark in rather a severe tone, our two midshipmen were silent for a minute. At last Jack observed, very quietly—

MR. MIDSHIPMAN EASY

"And yet, sir, I think, considering all, I have behaved pretty well."

"You have behaved very well, my good lad, on all occasions in which your courage and conduct, as an officer, have been called forth. I admit it; and had you been sent to sea with a mind properly regulated, and without such an unlimited command of money, I have no doubt but that you would have proved an ornament to the service. Even now I think you would, if you were to remain in the service under proper guidance and necessary restrictions, for you have, at least, learnt to obey, which is absolutely necessary before you are fit to command. But recollect what your conduct would have brought upon you, if you had not been under the parental care of Captain Wilson. But let us say no more about that; a midshipman with the prospect of eight thousand pounds a year is an anomaly which the service cannot admit, especially when that midshipman is resolved to take to himself a wife."

"I hope that you approve of that step, sir."

"That entirely depends upon the merit of the party, which I know nothing of, except that she has a pretty face, and is of one of the best Sicilian families. I think the difference of religion a ground of objection."

"We will argue that point, sir," replied Jack.

"Perhaps it will be the cause of more argument than you think for, Mr. Easy; but every man makes his own bed, and as he makes it, so must he lie down in it."

"What am I to do about Mesty, sir? I cannot bear the idea of parting with him."

"I am afraid that you must; I cannot well interfere there."

"He is of little use to the service, sir; he has been sent to sick quarters as my servant; if he may be permitted to go home with me, I will procure his discharge as soon as I arrive, and send him on board the guard-ship till I obtain it."

"I think that, on the whole, he is as well out of the service as in it, and therefore I will, on consideration, take upon myself the responsibility, provided you do as you say."

The conversation was here ended, as the governor had business to attend to, and Jack and Gascoigne went to their rooms to make their arrangements.

"The governor is right," observed Gascoigne; "it is better that we part, Jack. You have half unfitted me for the service

MR. MIDSHIPMAN EASY

already; I have a disgust of the midshipmen's berth; the very smell of pitch and tar has become odious to me. This is all wrong; I must forget you and all our pleasant cruises on shore, and once more swelter in my greasy jacket. When I think that, if our pretended accidents were discovered, I should be dismissed the service, and the misery which that would cause to my poor father, I tremble at my escape. The governor is right, Jack; we must part, but I hope you never will forget me."

"My hand upon it, Ned. Command my interest, if ever I have any—my money—what I have, and the house, whether it belongs to me or my father—as far as you are concerned at least, I adhere to my notions of perfect equality."

"And abjure them, I trust, Jack, as a universal principle."

"I admit, as the governor asserts, that my father is as mad as a March hare."

"That is sufficient; you don't know how glad it makes me to hear you say that."

The two friends were inseparable during the short time that they remained together. They talked over their future prospects, their hopes and anticipations, and when the conversation flagged, Gascoigne brought up the name of Agnes.

Mesty's delight at leaving the service, and going home with his patron, was indescribable. He laid out a portion of his gold in a suit of plain clothes, white linen shirts, and in every respect the wardrobe of a man of fashion; in fact, he was now a complete gentleman's gentleman; was very particular in frizzing his woolly hair—wore a white neckcloth, gloves, and cane. Every one felt inclined to laugh when he made his appearance; but there was something in Mesty's look, which, at all events, prevented their doing so before his face. The day for sailing arrived. Jack took leave of the governor, thanking him for his great kindness, and stating his intention of taking Malta in his way out to Palermo in a month or two. Gascoigne went on board with him, and did not go down the vessel's side till it was more than a mile clear of the harbour.