

MR. MIDSHIPMAN EASY

"His language was unpardonable," observed Jack.

"Since I've been in the service, Mr. Easy, I have always observed that some officers appear to imagine, that because they are under the king's pennant, they are warranted in insulting and tyrannising over all those who have not the honour to hoist it; whereas, the very fact of their being king's officers should be an inducement to them to show an example of courtesy and gentlemanly conduct in the execution of their duty, however unpleasant it may be."

"It is only those who, insignificant themselves, want to make themselves of importance by the pennant they serve under," replied our hero.

"Very true, Mr. Easy; but you are not aware that a great part of the ill-will shown to the service is owing to the insolence of those young men in office. The king's name is a warrant for every species of tyranny and unwarrantable conduct. I remember Mrs. Oxbelly telling one of them, when——"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Oxbelly," interrupted Jack, "but we have no time to chat now; the breeze is coming down fast, and I perceive the prizes are closing. Let us lower down the boat, send the men on board again, and give them their orders—which I will do in writing, in case they part company."

"Very true, sir. It will be dark in half-an-hour, and as we are now standing in-shore, they will think that we intend to remain on the coast. As soon as it is quite dark we will shape our course for Palermo. I will go down and look at the chart."

CHAPTER XLI

Which winds up the nautical adventures of Mr. Midshipman Easy.

IN half-an-hour the prizes were again alongside, the men put on board, and the boat hoisted up. The frigate still remained becalmed to leeward, and hoisted in her boats. They watched until she was hid by the shades of night, and then wearing round stood away, with the wind two points free, for the coast of Sicily. The next morning when the sun rose

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there was nothing in sight. Strange anomaly, in a state of high civilisation, where you find your own countrymen avoided and more dreaded than even your foes!

The run was prosperous, the weather was fine, and the prizes did not part company.

On the sixteenth day the *Rebiera* and her convoy anchored in Palermo Bay. The wind was light in the morning that they stood in, and as Jack had a large blue flag with *Rebiera* in white letters hoisted at the main, Don Philip and Don Martin were on board and greeting our hero, before the *Rebiera's* anchor had plunged into the clear blue water.

The information which our hero received, after having been assured of the health of Agnes and her parents, was satisfactory. The disappearance of the friar had, at first, occasioned much surprise; but as the servants of Don Rebiera swore to his return without the black, and the letter of Don Rebeira, sent to the convent, requesting his presence, was opened and read, there was no suspicion against the family. A hundred conjectures had been afloat, but gradually they had subsided, and it was at last supposed that he had been carried off by the banditti, some of whom had been taken, and acknowledged that they had seized a friar, on a day which they could not recollect. The reader will remember that it was Mesty.

The *Rebiera* received pratique, and Jack hastened on shore with Don Philip and his brother, and was once more in company of Agnes, who, in our hero's opinion, had improved since his departure. Most young men in love think the same after an absence, provided it is not too long. The prizes were sold and the money distributed, and every man was satisfied, as the cargoes fetched a larger sum than they had anticipated.

We must pass over the "pros" and "cons" of Don Rebiera and his lady, the pleading of Jack for immediate nuptials, the unwillingness of the mother to part with her only daughter, the family consultation, the dowry, and all these particulars. A month after his arrival Jack was married, and was, of course, as happy as the day was long.

A few days afterwards Mr. Oxbelly advised departure, as the expenses of the vessel were heavy, and it was his duty so to do. Don Philip and Don Martin obtained leave to go to England with their sister and her husband. Nevertheless,

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Jack, who found Palermo a very pleasant residence, was persuaded by the Don and his wife to remain there a month, and then there was crying and sobbing, and embracing, and embarking; and at last the *Rebiera*, whose cabins had been arranged for the reception of the party, weighed and made sail for Malta, Jack having promised to call upon the governor.

In four days they anchored in Valette Harbour, and Jack paid his respects to his old friend, who was very glad to see him. The governor sent his own barge for Mrs. Easy, and she was installed in the state apartments, which were acknowledged to be very comfortable. Our hero had, as usual, a long story to tell the governor, and the governor listened to it very attentively, probably because he thought it would be the last, which opportunity Jack employed to narrate the unfortunate end of his father.

"I would not have said so at the time, Mr. Easy, but now the wound is healed I tell you that it is the best thing that could have happened—poor old gentleman! he was mad indeed."

Our hero remained a fortnight at Malta, and then Signora Easy was re-embarked, and once more the *Rebiera* made sail.

"Fare you well, my lad; what I have seen of your brothers-in-law pleases me much; and as for your wife, it will be your own fault if she is not all that you would wish. If ever I come to England again, I will pay my first visit to Forest Hill. God bless you!"

But Sir Thomas never did go back to England, and this was their final adieu. Once more the *Rebiera* pursued her course, stopped a day or two at Gibraltar, shared the proceeds of the captured gunboat, and then made sail for England, where she arrived without adventure or accident in three weeks. Thus ended the last cruise of Mr. Midshipman Easy. As soon as their quarantine at the Motherbank was over, they disembarked, and found Dr. Middleton and Mr. Hanson waiting for them at the George Hotel. Our hero scarcely had time to introduce his wife, when the waiter said that a lady wished to speak to him. She did not wait to know if Jack was visible, but forced her way past him. Jack looked at her large proportions, and decided at once that it must be Mrs. Oxbelly, in which conjecture he was right.

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"Pray, sir, what do you mean by carrying off my husband in that way?" exclaimed the lady, red with anger.

"God forbid that I should have to carry your husband, Mrs. Oxbelly, he is rather too heavy."

"Yes, sir, but it's little better than kidnapping, and there's a law for kidnapping children at all events. I shall send my lawyer to you, that you may depend upon."

"You hardly can consider your husband as a child, Mrs. Oxbelly," replied Jack, laughing.

"Very well, sir, we shall see. Pray, where is he now?"

"He is on board, Mrs. Oxbelly, and will be delighted to see you."

"I'm not quite so sure of that."

"He's very anxious to see little Billy," said Gascoigne.

"What do you know of little Billy, young man?"

"And more than anxious to be on shore again. He's quite tired of sleeping single, Mrs. Oxbelly."

"Ah, very well, he has been talking, has he? very well," exclaimed the lady, in a rage.

"But," said Easy, "I am happy to say, that with pay and prize-money, during his short absence, he has brought home nearly five hundred pounds."

"Five hundred pounds!—you don't say so, sir?" exclaimed Mrs. Oxbelly; "are you sure of that?"

"Quite sure," rejoined Gascoigne.

"Five hundred pounds!—Well, that is comfortable—dear me! how glad I shall be to see him! Well, Mr. Easy, it was hard to part with him in so unhandsome a way—but all's for the best in this world. What a dear nice lady your wife is, Mr. Easy—but I won't intrude—I beg pardon. Where is the brig, Mr. Easy?"

"Now coming into harbour," replied Gascoigne; "if you bargain, you can get off for twopence."

"Five hundred pounds!" exclaimed Mrs. Oxbelly, whose wrath was now appeased.

"By all power, she no fool of a woman dat," said Mesty, as she retreated curtseying. "I tink Mr. Oxbelly very right sleep tingle."

We have now come to the end of our hero's adventures; that afternoon they all started for Forest Hill, where everything was ready for their reception. The *Rebiera's* men were

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paid off, and were soon distributed on board of his Majesty's ships; the vessel was sold, and Mr. Oxbelly retired to South-sea, to the society of his wife and little Billy. Whether he obtained from his wife a divorce *de thoro* is not handed down.

Our hero, who was now of age, invited all within twenty miles of home to balls and dinners, became a great favourite, kept a pack of hounds, rode with the foremost, received a deputation to stand for the county, in the Conservative interest, was elected without much expense, which was very wonderful, and took his seat in Parliament. Don Philip and Don Martin, after two months' stay, took their passage back to Palermo, fully satisfied with the prospects of their sister as to competence and happiness. Jack had no occasion to argue the point with Agnes; she conformed at once to the religion of her husband, proved an excellent and affectionate wife, and eventually the mother of four children, three boys and a girl.

Mesty held his post with dignity, and proved himself trustworthy. Gascoigne, by the interest of the Conservative member, soon obtained the rank of post-captain, and was always his devoted and sincere friend. And thus ends the history of Mr. Midshipman Easy.

THE END

