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THE MIDDY AND THE MOORS: AN ALGERINE STORY

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Chapter One
An Algerine Story
The Hero is Blown away, Captured, Crushed, Comforted, and Astonished

One beautiful summer night, about the beginning of the present century, a young naval officer entered the public drawing-room of a hotel at Nice, and glanced round as if in search of some one.

Many people were assembled there—some in robust, others in delicate, health, many in that condition which rendered it doubtful to which class they belonged, but all engaged in the quiet buzz of conversation which, in such a place, is apt to set in after dinner.

The young Englishman, for such he evidently was, soon observed an elderly lady beckoning to him at the other end of the *salon*, and was quickly seated between her and a fragile girl whose hand he gently took hold of.

"Mother," he said, to the elderly lady, "I'm going to have a row on the Mediterranean. The night is splendid, the air balmy, the stars gorgeous."

"Now, George," interrupted the girl, with a little smile, "don't be flowery. We know all about that."

"Too bad," returned the youth; "I never rise to poetry in your presence, Minnie, without being snubbed. But you cannot cure me. Romance is too deeply ingrained in my soul. Poetry flows from me like—like anything! I am a midshipman in the British Navy, a position which affords scope for the wildest enthusiasm, and—and—I'll astonish you yet, see if I don't."

"I am sure you will, dear boy," said his mother; and she believed that he would!

"Of course you will," added his sister; and she at least hoped that he would.

To say truth, there was nothing about the youth—as regards appearance or character—which rendered either the assurance or the hope unwarrantable. He was not tall, but he was strong and active. He was not exactly handsome, but he was possessed of a genial, hearty disposition, a playful spirit, and an earnest soul; also a modestly reckless nature which was quite captivating.

"You won't be anxious about me, mother, if I don't return till pretty late," he said, rising. "I want a good long, refreshing pull, but I'll be back in time to say good-night to you, Minnie, before you go to sleep."

"Your leave expires on Thursday, mind," said his sister; "we cannot spare you long."

"I shall be back in good time, trust me. *Au revoir*," he said, with a pleasant nod, as he left the room.

And they did trust him; for our midshipman, George Foster, was trustworthy; but those "circumstances" over which people have "no control" are troublesome derangers of the affairs of man. That was the last the mother and sister saw of George for the space of nearly two years!

Taking his way to the pebbly shore, young Foster hired a small boat, or punt, from a man who knew him well, declined the owner's services, pushed off, seized the oars, and rowed swiftly out to sea. It was, as he had said, a splendid night. The stars bespangled the sky like diamond-dust. The water was as clear as a mirror, and the lights of Nice seemed to shoot far down into its depths. The hum of the city came off with ever-deepening softness as the distance from the shore increased. The

occasional sound of oars was heard not far off, though boats and rowers were invisible, for there was no moon, and the night was dark notwithstanding the starlight.

There was no fear, however, of the young sailor losing himself while the city lights formed such a glorious beacon astern.

After pulling steadily for an hour or more he rested on his oars, gazed up at the bright heavens, and then at the land lights, which by that time resembled a twinkling line on the horizon.

"Must 'bout ship now," he muttered. "Won't do to keep Minnie waiting."

As he rowed leisurely landward a sudden gust of wind from the shore shivered the liquid mirror into fragments. It was the advance-guard of a squall which in a few minutes rushed down from the mountains of the Riviera and swept out upon the darkening sea.

Young Foster, as we have said, was strong. He was noted among his fellows as a splendid oarsman. The squall, therefore, did not disconcert him, though it checked his speed greatly. After one or two lulls the wind increased to a gale, and in half an hour the youth found, with some anxiety, that he was making no headway against it.

The shore at that point was so much of a straight line as to render the hope of being able to slant-in a faint one. As it was better, however, to attempt that than to row straight in the teeth of the gale, he diverged towards a point a little to the eastward of the port of Nice, and succeeded in making better way through the water, though he made no perceptible approach to land.

"Pooh! It's only a squall—be over in a minute," said the middy, by way of encouraging himself, as he glanced over his shoulder at the flickering lights, which were now barely visible.

He was wrong. The gale increased. Next time he glanced over his shoulder the lights were gone. Dark clouds were gathering up from the northward, and a short jabble of sea was rising which occasionally sent a spurt of spray inboard. Feeling now that his only chance of regaining the shore lay in a strong, steady, persevering pull straight towards it, he once more turned the bow of the little boat into the wind's eye, and gave way with a will.

But what could human muscle and human will, however powerful, do against a rampant nor'wester? Very soon our hero was forced to rest upon his oars from sheer exhaustion, while his boat drifted slowly out to sea. Then the thought of his mother and Minnie flashed upon him, and, with a sudden gush, as it were, of renewed strength he resumed his efforts, and strained his powers to the uttermost—but all in vain.

Something akin to despair now seized on him, for the alternative was to drift out into the open sea, where no friendly island lay between him and the shores of Africa. The necessity for active exertion, however, gave him no time either to rest or think. As the distance from land increased the seas rose higher, and broke so frequently over the boat that it began to fill. To stop rowing—at least, to the extent of keeping the bow to the wind—would have risked turning broadside-on, and being overturned or swamped; there was nothing, therefore, to be done in the circumstances except to keep the boat's head to the wind and drift.

In the midst of the rushing gale and surging seas he sat there, every gleam of hope almost extinguished, when there came to his mind a brief passage from the Bible—"Hope thou in God." Many a time had his mother tried, in days gone by, to impress that text on his mind, but apparently without success. Now it arose before him like a beacon-star. At the same time he thought of the possibility that he might be seen and picked up by a passing vessel.

He could not but feel, however, that the chances of this latter event occurring were small indeed, for a passing ship or boat would not only be going at great speed, but would be very unlikely to see his cockle-shell in the darkness, or to hear his cry in the roaring gale. Still he grasped that hope as the drowning man is said to clutch at a straw.

And the hope was quickly fulfilled, for scarcely had another half-hour elapsed when he observed a sail—the high-peaked sail peculiar to some Mediterranean craft—rise, ghost-like, out of the driving foam and spray. The vessel was making almost straight for him; he knew that it would

pass before there could be time to heave a rope. At the risk of being run down he rowed the punt in front of it, as if courting destruction, but at the same time guided his little craft so skilfully that it passed close to leeward, where the vessel's bulwarks were dipping into the water. Our middy's aim was so exact that the vessel only grazed the boat as it flew past. In that moment young Foster sprang with the agility of a cat, capsized the boat with the impulse, caught the bulwarks and rigging of the vessel, and in another moment stood panting on her deck.

"Hallo! Neptune, what do *you* want here?" cried a gruff voice at Foster's elbows. At the same time a powerful hand grasped his throat, and a lantern was thrust in his face.

"Let go, and I will tell you," gasped the youth, restraining his indignation at such unnecessary violence.

The grasp tightened, however, instead of relaxing.

"Speak out, baby-face," roared the voice, referring, in the latter expression, no doubt, to our hero's juvenility.

Instead of speaking out, George Foster hit out, and the voice with the lantern went down into the lee scuppers!

Then, the glare of the lantern being removed from his eyes, George saw, by the light of the binnacle lamp, that his adversary, a savage-looking Turk—at least in dress—was gathering himself up for a rush, and that the steersman, a huge negro, was grinning from ear to ear.

"Go below!" said a deep stern voice in the Arabic tongue.

The effect of this order was to cause the Turk with the broken lantern to change his mind, and retire with humility, while it solemnised the negro steersman's face almost miraculously.

The speaker was the captain of the vessel; a man of grave demeanour, herculean mould, and clothed in picturesque Eastern costume. Turning with quiet politeness to Foster, he asked him in broken French how he had come on board.

The youth explained in French quite as much broken as that of his interrogator.

"D'you speak English?" he added.

To this the captain replied in English, still more shattered than his French, that he could, "a ver' leetil," but that as he, (the youth), was a prisoner, there would be no occasion for speech at all, the proper attitude of a prisoner being that of absolute silence and obedience to orders.

"A prisoner!" ejaculated Foster, on recovering from the first shock of surprise. "Do you know that I am an officer in the Navy of his Majesty the King of Great Britain?"

A gleam of satisfaction lighted up the swarthy features of the Turk for a moment as he replied—

"Ver goot. Ransum all de more greater." As he spoke, a call from the look-out at the bow of the vessel induced him to hurry forward.

At the same instant a slight hissing sound caused Foster to turn to the steersman, whose black face was alive with intelligence, while an indescribable hitch up of his chin seemed to beckon the youth to approach with caution.

Foster perceived at once that the man wished his communication, whatever it was, to be unobserved by any one; he therefore moved towards him as if merely to glance at the compass.

"Massa," said the negro, without looking at Foster or changing a muscle of his now stolid visage, "you's in a dreffle fix. Dis yer am a pirit. But *I's* not a pirit, bress you! I's wuss nor dat: I's a awrful hyperkrite! an' I wants to give you good adwice. Wotiver you doos, *don't resist*. You'll on'y git whacked if you do."

"Thank you, Sambo. But what if I do resist in spite of being whacked?"

"Den you bery soon change your mind, das all. Moreober, my name's not Sambo. It am Peter de Great."

As he said so Peter the Great drew himself up to his full height, and he drew himself up to six feet four when he did that!

The captain coming aft at that moment put an abrupt end to the conversation. Two powerful Moorish seamen accompanied him. These, without uttering a word, seized Foster by the arms. In the strength of his indignation our middy was on the point of commencing a tremendous struggle, when Peter the Great's "*don't resist*," and the emphasis with which it had been spoken, came to mind, and he suddenly gave in. His hands were tied behind his back, and he was led down into a small, dimly-lighted cabin, where, being permitted to sit down on a locker, he was left to his own reflections.

These were by no means agreeable, as may well be supposed, for he now knew that he had fallen into the hands of those pests, the Algerine pirates, who at that time infested the Mediterranean.

With the thoughtlessness of youth Foster had never troubled his mind much about the piratical city of Algiers. Of course he knew that it was a stronghold on the northern coast of Africa, inhabited by Moorish rascals, who, taking advantage of their position, issued from their port and pounced upon the merchantmen that entered the Mediterranean, confiscating their cargoes and enslaving their crews and passengers, or holding them to ransom. He also knew, or had heard, that some of the great maritime powers paid subsidies to the Dey of Algiers to allow the vessels of their respective nations to come and go unmolested, but he could scarcely credit the latter fact. It seemed to him, as indeed it was, preposterous. "For," said he to the brother middy who had given him the information, "would not the nations whom the Dey had the impudence to tax join their fleets together, pay him an afternoon visit one fine day, and blow him and his Moors and Turks and city into a heap of rubbish?"

What the middy replied we have now no means of knowing, but certain it is that his information was correct, for some of the principal nations did, at that time, submit to the degradation of this tax, and they did *not* unite their fleets for the extinction of the pirates.

Poor George Foster now began to find out that the terrible truths which he had refused to believe were indeed great realities, and had now begun to affect himself. He experienced an awful sinking of the heart when it occurred to him that no one would ever know anything about his fate, for the little boat would be sure to be found bottom up, sooner or later, and it would of course be assumed that he had been drowned.

Shall it be said that the young midshipman was weak, or wanting in courage, because he bowed his head and wept when the full force of his condition came home to him? Nay, verily, for there was far more of grief for the prolonged agony that was in store for his mother and sister than for the fate that awaited himself. He prayed as well as wept. "God help me—and them!" he exclaimed aloud. The prayer was brief but sincere,—perhaps the more sincere because so brief. At all events it was that acknowledgment of utter helplessness which secures the help of the Almighty Arm.

Growing weary at last, he stretched himself on the locker, and, with the facility of robust health, fell into a sound sleep. Youth, strength, and health are not easily incommoded by wet garments! Besides, the weather was unusually warm at the time.

How long he slept he could not tell, but the sun was high when he awoke, and his clothes were quite dry. Other signs there were that he had slept long, such as the steadiness of the breeze and the more regular motion of the vessel, which showed that the gale was over and the sea going down. There was also a powerful sensation in what he styled his "bread-basket"—though it might, with equal truth, have been called his meat-and-vegetable basket—which told him more eloquently than anything else of the lapse of time.

Rising from his hard couch, and endeavouring to relieve the aching of the bound arms by change of position, he observed that the cabin hatch was open, and that nothing prevented his going on deck, if so disposed. Accordingly, he ascended, though with some difficulty, owing to his not having been trained to climb a ladder in a rough sea without the use of his hands.

A Moor, he observed, had taken his friend Peter the Great's place at the tiller, and the captain stood near the stern observing a passing vessel. A stiffish but steady breeze carried them swiftly over the waves, which, we might say, laughingly reflected the bright sunshine and the deep-blue sky.

Several vessels of different rigs and nationalities were sailing in various directions, both near and far away.

Going straight to the captain with an air of good-humoured *sang froid* which was peculiar to him, Foster said—

"Captain, don't you think I've had these bits of rope-yarn on my wrists long enough? I'm not used, you see, to walking the deck without the use of my hands; and a heavy lurch, as like as not, would send me slap into the lee scuppers—sailor though I be. Besides, I won't jump overboard without leave, you may rely upon that. Neither will I attempt, single-handed, to fight your whole crew, so you needn't be afraid."

The stern Moor evidently understood part of this speech, and he was so tickled with the last remark that his habitual gravity gave place to the faintest flicker of a smile, while a twinkle gleamed for a moment in his eye. Only for a moment, however. Pointing over the side, he bade his prisoner "look."

Foster looked, and beheld in the far distance a three-masted vessel that seemed to bear a strong resemblance to a British man-of-war.

"You promise," said the captain, "not shout or ro–ar."

"I promise," answered our middy, "neither to 'Shout' nor 'ro–ar'—for my doing either, even though like a bull of Bashan, would be of no earthly use at this distance."

"Inglesemans," said the captain, "niver brok the word!" After paying this scarcely-deserved compliment he gave an order to a sailor who was coiling up ropes near him, and the man at once proceeded to untie Foster's bonds.

"My good fellow," said the midshipman, observing that his liberator was the man whom he had knocked down the night before, "I'm sorry I had to floor you, but it was impossible to help it, you know. An Englishman is like a bull-dog. He won't suffer himself to be seized by the throat and choked if he can help it!"

The Turk, who was evidently a renegade Briton, made no reply whatever to this address; but, after casting the lashings loose, returned to his former occupation.

Foster proceeded to thank the captain for his courtesy and make him acquainted with the state of his appetite, but he was evidently not in a conversational frame of mind. Before a few words had been spoken the captain stopped him, and, pointing down the skylight, said, sharply—

"Brukfust! Go!"

Both look and tone admonished our hero to obey. He descended to the cabin, therefore, without finishing his sentence, and there discovered that "brukfust" consisted of two sea-biscuits and a mug of water. To these dainties he applied himself with infinite relish, for he had always been Spartan-like as to the quality of his food, and hunger makes almost any kind of dish agreeable.

While thus engaged he heard a hurried trampling of feet on deck, mingled with sharp orders from the captain. At first he thought the sounds might have reference to taking in a reef to prepare for a squall, but as the noise rather increased, his curiosity was roused, and he was about to return on deck when Peter the Great suddenly leaped into the cabin and took hurriedly from the opposite locker a brace of highly ornamented pistols and a scimitar.

"What's wrong, Peter?" asked Foster, starting up.

"We's a-goin' to fight!" groaned the negro.

"Oh! I's a awrful hyperkrite! You stop where you am, massa, else you'll get whacked."

Despite the risk of being "whacked," the youth would have followed the negro on deck, had not the hatch been slammed in his face and secured. Next moment he heard a volley of musketry on deck. It was instantly replied to by a distant volley, and immediately thereafter groans and curses showed that the firing had not been without effect.

That the pirate had engaged a vessel of some sort was evident, and our hero, being naturally anxious to see if not to share in the fight, tried hard to get out of his prison, but without success.

He was obliged, therefore, to sit there inactive and listen to the wild confusion overhead. At last there came a crash, followed by fiercer shouts and cries. He knew that the vessels had met and that the pirates were boarding. In a few minutes comparative silence ensued, broken only by occasional footsteps and the groaning of the wounded.

Chapter Two
Among Pirates—Enslaved

When George Foster was again permitted to go on deck the sight that he beheld was not calculated to comfort him in his misfortunes.

Several Moorish seamen were going about with bared legs and arms, swishing water on the decks and swabbing up the blood with which they were bespattered. Most of these men were more or less wounded and bandaged, for the crew of the merchantman they had attacked had offered a desperate resistance, knowing well the fate in store for them if captured.

The said merchantman, a large brig, sailed close alongside of the pirate vessel with a prize crew on board. Her own men, who were Russians, had been put in chains in the fore part of their vessel under the forecastle, so as to be out of sight. Her officers and several passengers had been removed to the pirate's quarter-deck. Among them were an old gentleman of dignified bearing, and an elderly lady who seemed to be supported, physically as well as mentally, by a tall, dark-complexioned, noble-looking girl, who was evidently the daughter of the old gentleman, though whether also the daughter of the elderly lady young Foster could not discover, there being little or no resemblance between them. The memory of his mother and sister strongly inclined the sympathetic midshipman to approach the party and offer words of consolation to the ladies. As he advanced to them for that purpose, a doubt as to which language he should use assailed him. French, he knew, was the language most likely to be understood, but a girl with such magnificent black eyes must certainly be Spanish! His knowledge of Spanish was about equal to that of an ill-trained parrot, but what of that? Was he not a Briton, whose chief characteristic is to go in for anything and stick at nothing?

We do not venture to write down what he said, but when he had said it the blank look of the elderly lady and the peculiar look of the girl induced him to repeat the speech in his broken—his very much broken—French, whereupon the old gentleman turned to him gravely and said—

"My vife is Engleesh, an' my datter is Danish—no, not joost—vell, she is 'af-an'-'af. Speak to dem in your nattif tong."

"*You* are not English, anyhow, old boy," thought Foster, as he turned with a mingled feeling of confusion and recklessness to the elderly lady.

"Pardon me, madam," he said, "but from the appearance of—of—your—"

He was interrupted at this point by the captain, who, flushed and blood-bespattered from the recent fight, came aft with a drawn scimitar in his hand, and sternly ordered the young midshipman to go forward.

It was a humiliating position to be placed in; yet, despite the "stick-at-nothing" spirit, he felt constrained to obey, but did so, nevertheless, with an air of defiant ferocity which relieved his feelings to some extent. The said feelings were utterly ignored by the pirate captain, who did not condescend even to look at him after the first glance, but turned to the other captives and ordered them, in rather less stern tones, to "go below," an order which was promptly obeyed.

On reaching the fore part of the vessel, Foster found several of the crew engaged in bandaging each other's wounds, and, from the clumsy way in which they went to work, it was very clear that they were much more accustomed to inflict wounds than to bandage them.

Now it must be told that, although George Foster was not a surgeon, he had an elder brother who was, and with whom he had associated constantly while he was studying and practising for his degree; hence he became acquainted with many useful facts and modes of action connected with the healing art, of which the world at large is ignorant. Perceiving that one of the pirates was bungling a very simple operation, he stepped forward, and, with that assurance which results naturally from the combination of conscious power and "cheek," took up the dressing of the wound.

At first the men seemed inclined to resent the interference, but when they saw that the "Christian" knew what he was about, and observed how well and swiftly he did the work, they stood aside and calmly submitted.

Foster was interrupted, however, in the midst of his philanthropic work by Peter the Great, who came forward and touched him on the shoulder.

"Sorry to 't'rupt you, sar, but you come wid me."

"Mayn't I finish this operation first?" said Foster, looking up.

"No, sar. My orders is prumptory."

Our amateur surgeon dropped the bandage indignantly and followed the negro, who led him down into the hold, at the further and dark end of which he saw several wounded men lying, and beside them one or two whose motionless and straightened figures seemed to indicate that death had relieved them from earthly troubles.

Amongst these men he spent the night and all next day, with only a couple of biscuits and a mug of water to sustain him. Next evening Peter the Great came down and bade him follow him to the other end of the hold.

"Now, sar, you go in dere," said the negro, stopping and pointing to a small door in the bulkhead, inside of which was profound darkness.

Foster hesitated and looked at his big conductor.

"'Bey orders, sar!" said the negro, in a loud, stern voice of command. Then, stooping as if to open the little door, he added, in a low voice, "Don' be a fool, massa. *Submit*! Das de word, if you don' want a whackin'. It's a friend advises you. Dere's one oder prisoner dere, but he's wounded, an' won't hurt you. *Go* in! won't you?"

Peter the Great accompanied the last words with a violent thrust that sent the hapless middy headlong into the dark hole, but as he closed and fastened the door he muttered, "Don' mind my leetle ways, massa. You know I's bound to be a hyperkrite."

Having thus relieved his conscience, Peter returned to the deck, leaving the poor prisoner to rise and, as a first consequence, to hit his head on the beams above him.

The hole into which he had been thrust was truly a "black hole," though neither so hot nor so deadly as that of Calcutta. Extending his arms cautiously, he touched the side of the ship with his left hand; with the other he felt about for some time, but reached nothing until he had advanced a step, when his foot touched something on the floor, and he bent down to feel it, but shrank hastily back on touching what he perceived at once was a human form.

"Pardon me, friend, whoever you are," he said quickly, "I did not mean to—I did not know —are you badly hurt?"

But no reply came from the wounded man—not even a groan.

A vague suspicion crossed Foster's mind. The man might be dying of his wounds. He spoke to him again in French and Spanish, but still got no reply! Then he listened intently for his breathing, but all was as silent as the tomb. With an irresistible impulse, yet instinctive shudder, he laid his hand on the man and passed it up until it reached the face. The silence was then explained. The face was growing cold and rigid in death.

Drawing back hastily, the poor youth shouted to those outside to let them know what had occurred, but no one paid the least attention to him. He was about to renew his cries more loudly, when the thought occurred that perhaps they might attribute them to fear. This kept him quiet, and he made up his mind to endure in silence.

If there had been a ray of light, however feeble, in the hold, he thought his condition would have been more bearable, for then he could have faced the lifeless clay and looked at it; but to know that it was there, within a foot of him, without his being able to see it, or to form any idea of what it was like, made the case terrible indeed. Of course he drew back from it as far as the little space allowed, and crushed himself up against the side of the vessel; but that did no good, for the idea occurred to

his excited brain that it might possibly come to life again, rise up, and plunge against him. At times this thought took such possession of him that he threw up his arms to defend himself from attack, and uttered a half-suppressed cry of terror.

At last nature asserted herself, and he slept, sitting on the floor and leaning partly against the vessel's side, partly against the bulkhead. But horrible dreams disturbed him. The corpse became visible, the eyes glared at him, the blood-stained face worked convulsively, and he awoke with a shriek, followed immediately by a sigh of relief on finding that it was all a dream. Then the horror came again, as he suddenly remembered that the dead man was still there, a terrible reality!

At last pure exhaustion threw him into a dreamless and profound slumber. The plunging of the little craft as it flew southward before a stiff breeze did not disturb him, and he did not awake until some one rudely seized his arm late on the following day. Then, in the firm belief that his dream had come true at last, he uttered a tremendous yell and struggled to rise, but a powerful hand held him down, and a dark lantern revealed a coal-black face gazing at him.

"Hallo! massa, hold on. I did tink you mus' be gone dead, for I holler'd in at you 'nuff to bust de kittle-drum ob your ear—if you hab one!"

"Look there, Peter," said Foster, pointing to the recumbent figure, while he wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"Ah! poor feller. He gone de way ob all flesh; but he hoed sooner dan dere was any occasion for—tanks to de captain."

As he spoke he held the lantern over the dead man and revealed the face of a youth in Eastern garb, on whose head there was a terrible sword-cut. As they looked at the sad spectacle, and endeavoured to arrange the corpse, the negro explained that the poor fellow had been a Greek captive who to save his life had joined the pirates and become a Mussulman; but, on thinking over it, had returned to the Christian faith and refused to take part in the bloody work which they were required to do. It was his refusal to fight on the occasion of the recent attack on the merchantman that had induced the captain to cut him down. He had been put into the prison in the hold, and carelessly left there to bleed to death.

"Now, you come along, massa," said the negro, taking up the lantern, "we's all goin' on shore."

"On shore! Where have we got to?"

"To Algiers, de city ob pirits; de hotbed ob wickedness; de home ob de Moors an' Turks an' Cabyles, and de cuss ob de whole wurld."

Poor Foster's heart sank on hearing this, for he had heard of the hopeless slavery to which thousands of Christians had been consigned there in time past, and his recent experience of Moors had not tended to improve his opinion of them.

A feeling of despair impelled him to seize the negro by the arm as he was about to ascend the ladder and stop him.

"Peter," he said, "I think you have a friendly feeling towards me, because you've called me massa more than once, though you have no occasion to do so."

"Dat's 'cause I'm fond o' you. I always was fond o' a nice smood young babby face, an' I tooked a fancy to you de moment I see you knock Joe Spinks into de lee scuppers."

"So—he was an Englishman that I treated so badly, eh?"

"Yes, massa, on'y you didn't treat him bad 'nuff. But you obsarve dat I on'y calls you massa w'en we's alone an' friendly like. W'en we's in public I calls you 'sar' an' speak gruff an' shove you into black holes."

"And why do you act so, Peter?"

"'Cause, don't you see, I's a hyperkrite. I tole you dat before."

"Well, I can guess what you mean. You don't want to appear too friendly? Just so. Well, now, I have got nobody to take my part here, so as you are a free man I wish you would keep an eye on me

when we go ashore, and see where they send me, and speak a word for me when it is in your power. You see, they'll give me up for drowned at home and never find out that I'm here."

"'A free man!'" repeated the negro, with an expansion of his mouth that is indescribable. "You tink I's a free man! but I's a slabe, same as yourself, on'y de diff'rence am dat dere's nobody to ransum *me*, so dey don't boder deir heads 'bout me s'long as I do my work. If I don't do my work I'm whacked; if I rebel and kick up a shindy I'm whacked wuss; if I tries to run away I'm whacked till I'm dead. Das all. But I's not free. No, no not at all! Hows'ever I's free-an'-easy, an' dat make de pirits fond o' me, which goes a long way, for dere's nuffin' like lub!"

Foster heartily agreed with the latter sentiment and added—

"Well, now, Peter, I will say no more, for as you profess to be fond of me, and as I can truly say the same in regard to you, we may be sure that each will help the other if he gets the chance. But, tell me, are you really one of the crew of this pirate vessel?"

"No, massa, only for dis viage. I b'longs to a old sinner called Hassan, what libs in de country, not far from de town. He not a bad feller, but he's obs'nit—oh! as obs'nit as a deaf an' dumb mule. If you want 'im to go one way just tell him to go toder way—an' you've got 'im."

At that moment the captain's voice was heard shouting down the hatchway, demanding to know what detained the negro and his prisoners. He spoke in that jumble of languages in use at that time among the Mediterranean nations called Lingua Franca, for the negro did not understand Arabic.

"Comin', captain, comin'," cried the negro, in his own peculiar English—which was, indeed, his mother tongue, for he had been born in the United States of America. "Now, den, sar," (to Foster), "w'en you goin' to move you stumps? Up wid you!"

Peter emphasised his orders with a real kick, which expedited his prisoner's ascent, and, at the same time, justified the negro's claim to be a thorough-paced "hyperkrite!"

"Where's the other one?" demanded the captain angrily.

"Escaped, captain!" answered Peter.

"How? You must have helped him," cried the captain, drawing his ever-ready sword and pointing it at the breast of the negro, who fell upon his knees, clasped his great hands, and rolled his eyes in an apparent agony of terror.

"Don't, captain. I isn't wuth killin', an' w'en I's gone, who'd cook for you like me? De man escaped by jumpin' out ob his body. He's gone dead!"

"Fool!" muttered the pirate, returning his sword to its sheath, "bind that prisoner, and have him and the others ready to go on shore directly."

In a few seconds all the prisoners were ranged between the cabin hatchway and the mast. The hands of most of the men were loosely tied, to prevent trouble in case desperation should impel any of them to assault their captors, but the old Dane and the women were left unfettered.

And now George Foster beheld, for the first time, the celebrated city, which was, at that period, the terror of the merchant vessels of all nations that had dealings with the Mediterranean shores. A small pier and breakwater enclosed a harbour which was crowded with boats and shipping. From this harbour the town rose abruptly on the side of a steep hill, and was surrounded by walls of great strength, which bristled with cannon. The houses were small and square-looking, and in the midst, here and there, clusters of date-palms told of the almost tropical character of the climate, while numerous domes, minarets, and crescents told of the Moor and the religion of Mohammed.

But religion in its true sense had little footing in that piratical city, which subsisted on robbery and violence, while cruelty and injustice of the grossest kind were rampant. Whatever Islamism may have taught them, it did not produce men or women who held the golden rule to be a virtue, and certainly few practised it. Yet we would not be understood to mean that there were none who did so. As there were Christians in days of old, even in Caesar's household, so there existed men and women who were distinguished by the Christian graces, even in the Pirate City. Even there God had not left Himself without a witness.

As the vessel slowly entered the harbour under a very light breeze, she was boarded by several stately officers in the picturesque costume—turbans, red leathern boots, etcetera—peculiar to the country. After speaking a few minutes with the captain, one of the officers politely addressed the old Dane and his family through an interpreter; but as they spoke in subdued tones Foster could not make out what was said. Soon he was interrupted by a harsh order from an unknown Moor in an unknown tongue.

An angry order invariably raised in our hero the spirit of rebellion. He flushed and turned a fierce look on the Moor, but that haughty and grave individual was accustomed to such looks. He merely repeated his order in a quiet voice, at the same time translating it by pointing to the boat alongside. Foster felt that discretion was the better part of valour, all the more that there stood at the Moor's back five or six powerful Arabs, who seemed quite ready to enforce his instructions.

The poor middy glanced round to see if his only friend, Peter the Great, was visible, but he was not; so, with a flushed countenance at thus being compelled to put his pride in his pocket, he jumped into the boat, not caring very much whether he should break his neck by doing so with tied hands, or fall into the sea and end his life in a shark's maw!

In a few minutes he was landed on the mole or pier, and made to join a band of captives, apparently from many nations, who already stood waiting there.

Immediately afterwards the band was ordered to move on, and as they marched through the great gateway in the massive walls Foster felt as if he were entering the portals of Dante's Inferno, and had left all hope behind. But his feelings misled him. Hope, thank God! is not easily extinguished in the human breast. As he tramped along the narrow and winding streets, which seemed to him an absolute labyrinth, he began to take interest in the curious sights and sounds that greeted him on every side, and his mind was thus a little taken off himself.

And there was indeed much there to interest a youth who had never seen Eastern manners or customs before. Narrow and steep though the streets were—in some cases so steep that they formed flights of what may be styled broad and shallow stairs—they were crowded with bronzed men in varied Eastern costume; Moors in fez and gay vest and red morocco slippers; Turks with turban and pipe; Cabyles from the mountains; Arabs from the plains; water-carriers with jar on shoulder; Jews in sombre robes; Jewesses with rich shawls and silk kerchiefs as headgear; donkeys with panniers that almost blocked the way; camels, and veiled women, and many other strange sights that our hero had up to that time only seen in picture-books.

Presently the band of captives halted before a small door which was thickly studded with large nails. It seemed to form the only opening in a high dead wall, with the exception of two holes about a foot square, which served as windows. This was the Bagnio, or prison, in which the slaves were put each evening after the day's labour was over, there to feed and rest on the stone floor until daylight should call them forth again to renewed toil. It was a gloomy courtyard, with cells around it in which the captives slept. A fountain in the middle kept the floor damp and seemed to prove an attraction to various centipedes, scorpions, and other noisome creatures which were crawling about.

Here the captives just arrived had their bonds removed, and were left to their own devices, each having received two rolls of black bread before the jailor retired and locked them up for the night.

Taking possession of an empty cell, George Foster sat down on the stone floor and gazed at the wretched creatures around him, many of whom were devouring their black bread with ravenous haste. The poor youth could hardly believe his eyes, and it was some time before he could convince himself that the whole thing was not a dream but a terrible reality.

Chapter Three
The Bagnio—Our Hero sees something of Misery, and is sold as a Slave

There are some things in this world so unbelievable that even when we know them to be true we still remain in a state of semi-scepticism.

When our unfortunate midshipman awoke next morning, raised himself on his elbow, and felt that all his bones and muscles were stiff and pained from lying on a stone floor, it was some time before he could make out where he was, or recall the events of the last few days. The first thing that revived his sluggish memory was the scuttling away, in anxious haste, of a scorpion that had sought and found comfortable quarters during the night under the lee of his right leg. Starting up, he crushed the reptile with his foot.

"You will get used to that," said a quietly sarcastic voice with a slightly foreign accent, close to him.

The speaker was a middle-aged man with grey hair, hollow cheeks, and deep sunken eyes.

"They trouble us a little at first," he continued, "but, as I have said, we get used to them. It is long since I cared for scorpions."

"Have you, then, been long here?" asked Foster.

"Yes. Twelve years."

"A prisoner?—a slave?" asked the midshipman anxiously.

"A prisoner, yes. A slave, yes—a mummified man; a dead thing with life enough to work, but not yet quite a brute, more's the pity, for then I should not care! But here I have been for twelve years—long, long years! It has seemed to me an eternity."

"It *is* a long time to be a slave. God help you, poor man!" exclaimed Foster.

"You will have to offer that prayer for yourself, young man," returned the other; "you will need help more than I. At first we are fools, but time makes us wise. It even teaches Englishmen that they are not unconquerable."

The man spoke pointedly and in a harsh sarcastic tone which tended to check Foster's new-born compassion; nevertheless, he continued to address his fellow-sufferer in a sympathetic spirit.

"You are not an Englishman, I think," he said, "though you speak our language well."

"No, I am French, but my wife is English."

"Your wife! Is she here also?"

"Thank God—no," replied the Frenchman, with a sudden burst of seriousness which was evidently genuine. "She is in England, trying to make up the sum of my ransom. But she will never do it. She is poor. She has her daughter to provide for besides herself, and we have no friends. No, I have hoped for twelve years, and hope is now dead—nearly dead."

The overwhelming thoughts that this information raised in Foster's mind rendered him silent for a few minutes. The idea of the poor wife in England, toiling for twelve years almost hopelessly to ransom her husband, filled his susceptible heart with pity. Then the thought of his mother and Minnie—who were also poor—toiling for years to procure his ransom, filled him with oppressive dread. To throw the depressing subject off his mind, he asked how the Frenchman had guessed that he was an Englishman before he had heard him speak.

"I know your countrymen," he answered, "by their bearing. Besides, you have been muttering in your sleep about 'Mother and Minnie.' If the latter is, as I suppose, your sweetheart—your *fiancée*—the sooner you get her out of your mind the better, for you will never see her more."

Again Foster felt repelled by the harsh cynicism of the man, yet at the same time he felt strangely attracted to him, a fact which he showed more by his tones than his words when he said—

"My friend, you are not yet enrolled among the infallible prophets. Whether I shall ever again see those whom I love depends upon the will of God. But I don't wonder that with your sad experience you should give way to despair. For myself, I will cling to the hope that God will deliver me, and I would advise you to do the same."

"How many I have seen, who had the sanguine temperament, like yours, awakened and crushed," returned the Frenchman. "See, there is one of them," he added, pointing to a cell nearly opposite, in which a form was seen lying on its back, straight and motionless. "That young man was such another as you are when he first came here."

"Is he dead?" asked the midshipman, with a look of pity.

"Yes—he died in the night while you slept. It was attending to him in his last moments that kept me awake. He was nothing to me but a fellow-slave and sufferer, but I *was* fond of him. He was hard to conquer, but they managed it at last, for they beat him to death."

"Then they did *not* conquer him," exclaimed Foster with a gush of indignant pity. "To beat a man to death is to murder, not to conquer. But you called him a young man. The corpse that lies there has thin grey hair and a wrinkled brow."

"Nevertheless he was young—not more than twenty-seven—but six years of this life brought him to what you see. He might have lived longer, as I have, had he been submissive!"

Before Foster could reply, the grating of a rusty key in the door caused a movement as well as one or two sighs and groans among the slaves, for the keepers had come to summon them to work. The Frenchman rose and followed the others with a hook of sullen indifference. Most of them were without fetters, but a few strong young men wore chains and fetters more or less heavy, and Foster judged from this circumstance, as well as their expressions, that these were rebellious subjects whom it was difficult to tame.

Much to his surprise, the youth found that he was not called on to join his comrades in misfortune, but was left behind in solitude. While casting about in his mind as to what this could mean, he observed in a corner the two rolls of black bread which he had received the previous night, and which, not being hungry at the time, he had neglected. As a healthy appetite was by that time obtruding itself on his attention, he took hold of one and began to eat. It was not attractive, but, not being particular, he consumed it. He even took up the other and ate that also, after which he sighed and wished for more! As there was no more to be had, he went to the fountain in the court and washed his breakfast down with water.

About two hours later the door was again opened, and a man in the uniform of a janissary entered. Fixing a keen glance on the young captive, he bade him in broken English rise and follow.

By this time the lesson of submission had been sufficiently impressed on our hero to induce him to accord prompt obedience. He followed his guide into the street, where he walked along until they arrived at a square, on one side of which stood a large mosque. Here marketing was being carried on to a considerable extent, and, as he threaded his way through the various groups, he could not help being impressed with the extreme simplicity of the mode of procedure, for it seemed to him that all a man wanted to enable him to set himself up in trade was a few articles of any kind—old or new, it did not matter which—with a day's lease of about four feet square of the market pavement. There the retail trader squatted, smoked his pipe, and calmly awaited the decrees of Fate!

One of these small traders he noted particularly while his conductor stopped to converse with a friend. He was an old man, evidently a descendant of Ishmael, and clothed in what seemed to be a ragged cast-off suit that had belonged to Abraham or Isaac. He carried his shop on his arm in the shape of a basket, out of which he took a little bit of carpet, and spread it close to where they stood. On this he sat down and slowly extracted from his basket, and spread on the ground before him, a couple of old locks, several knives, an old brass candlestick, an assortment of rusty keys, a flat-iron, and half a dozen other articles of household furniture. Before any purchases were made, however, the janissary moved on, and Foster had to follow.

Passing through two or three tortuous and narrow lanes, which, however, were thickly studded with shops—that is, with holes in the wall, in which merchandise was displayed outside as well as in—they came to a door which was strictly guarded. Passing the guards, they found themselves in a court, beyond which they could see another court which looked like a hall of justice—or injustice, as the case might be. What strengthened Foster in the belief that such was its character, was the fact that, at the time they entered, an officer was sitting cross-legged on a bench, smoking comfortably, while in front of him a man lay on his face with his soles turned upwards, whilst an executioner was applying to them the punishment of the bastinado. The culprit could not have been a great offender, for, after a sharp yell or two, he was allowed to rise and limp away.

Our hero was led before the functionary who looked like a judge. He regarded the middy with no favour. We should have recorded that Foster, when blown out to sea, as already described, had leaped on the pirate's deck without coat or vest. As he was still in this dismantled condition, and had neither been washed nor combed since that event occurred, his appearance at this time was not prepossessing.

"Who are you, and where do you come from?" was the first question put by an interpreter.

Of course Foster told the exact truth about himself. After he had done so, the judge and interpreter consulted together, glancing darkly at their prisoner the while. Then the judge smiled significantly and nodded his head. The interpreter turned to a couple of negroes who stood ready to execute any commands, apparently, and said a few words to them. They at once took hold of Foster and fastened a rope to his wrist. As they did so, the interpreter turned to the poor youth and said—

"What you tell is all lies."

"Indeed, indeed, it is not," exclaimed the midshipman fervently.

"Go!" said the interpreter.

A twitch from the rope at the same moment recalled our hero to his right mind; and the remembrance of the poor wretch who had just suffered the bastinado, and also of Peter the Great's oft-repeated reference to "whacking," had the effect of crushing the spirit of rebellion which had just begun to arise in his breast. Thus he was conducted ignominiously into the street and back to the market-square, where he was made to stand with a number of other men, who, like himself, appeared to be slaves. For what they were there waiting he could not tell, but he was soon enlightened, as after half an hour, a dignified-looking Moor in flowing apparel came forward, examined one of the captives, felt his muscles, made him open his mouth, and otherwise show his paces, after which he paid a sum of money for him and a negro attendant led him away.

"I'm to be sold as a slave," Foster involuntarily groaned aloud.

"Like all the rest of us," growled a stout sailor-like man, who stood at his elbow.

Foster turned quickly to look at him, but a sudden movement in the group separated them after the first glance at each other.

By way of relieving his overcharged feelings he tried to interest himself in the passers-by. This, however, he found very difficult, until he observed a sturdy young Cabyle coming along with two enormous feathery bundles suspended over his right shoulder, one hanging before, the other behind. To his surprise these bundles turned out to be living fowls, tied by the legs and hanging with their heads down. There could not, he thought, have been fewer than thirty or forty birds in each bundle, and it occurred to him at once that they had probably been carried to market thus from some distance in the country. At all events, the young Cabyle seemed to be dusty and warm with walking. He even seemed fatigued, for, when about to pass the group of slaves, he stopped to rest and flung down his load. The shock of the fall must have snapped a number of legs, for a tremendous cackle burst from the bundles as they struck the ground.

This raised the thought in Foster's mind that he could hope for no mercy where such wanton cruelty was not even deemed worthy of notice by the bystanders; but the sound of a familiar voice put all other thoughts to flight.

"Dis way, massa, you's sure to git fuss-rate fellers here. We brought 'im in on'y yesterday—all fresh like new-laid eggs."

The speaker was Peter the Great. The man to whom he spoke was a Moor of tall stature and of somewhat advanced years.

Delighted more than he could express, in his degraded and forlorn condition, at this unlooked-for meeting with his black friend, Foster was about to claim acquaintance, when the negro advanced to the group among whom he stood, exclaiming loudly—

"Here dey am, massa, dis way." Then turning suddenly on Foster with a fierce expression, he shouted, "What you lookin' at, you babby-faced ijit? Hab you nebber seen a handsome nigger before dat you look all t'under-struck of a heap? Can't you hold your tongue, you chatterin' monkey?" and with that, although Foster had not uttered a syllable, the negro fetched him a sounding smack on the cheek, to the great amusement of the bystanders.

Well was it then for our middy that it flashed into his mind that Peter the Great, being the most astounding "hyperkrite" on earth, was at work in his deceptive way, else would he have certainly retaliated and brought on himself swift punishment—for slaves were not permitted to resent injuries or create riots. As it was, he cast down his eyes, flushed scarlet, and restrained himself.

"Now, massa," continued the negro, turning to the fine, sailor-like man who had spoken to Foster a few minutes before, "here's a nice-lookin' man. Strong an' healfy—fit for anyt'ing no doubt."

"Ask him if he understands gardening," said the Moor.

We may remark, in passing, that Peter the Great and his owner had a peculiar mode of carrying on conversation. The latter addressed his slave in the Lingua Franca, while Peter replied in his own nigger English, which the Moor appeared to understand perfectly. Why they carried it on thus we cannot explain, but it is our duty to record the fact.

"Understand gardening!" exclaimed the sailor, in supreme contempt, "I should think not. Wot d'you take me for, you black baboon! Do I look like a gardener? Ploughin' an' diggin' I knows nothin' about wotsomever, though I *have* ploughed the waves many a day, an' I'm considered a fust-rate hand at diggin' into wittles."

"Oh! massa, das de man for your money! Buy him, quick!" cried the negro, with a look of earnest entreaty at his master. "He say he's ploughed many a day, an"s a fuss-rate hand at diggin'. *Do* buy 'im!"

But the Moor would not buy him. Either he understood the sailor's language to some extent, or that inveterate obstinacy of which Peter had made mention as being part of his character was beginning to assert itself.

"Ask this one what he knows about it," said the Moor, pointing to a thin young man, whose sprightly expression showed that he had not yet fully realised what fate was in store for him in the pirates' stronghold.

"Wich is it you mean, massa, dis one?" said Peter, purposely mistaking and turning to Foster. "Oh! you needn't ask about *him*. He not wuff his salt. I could tell him at a mile off for a lazy, useless feller. Gib more trouble dan he's wuff. Dere now, dis looks a far better man," he added, laying hold of the thin sprightly youth and turning him round. "What d'ye t'ink ob dis one?"

"I *told* you to ask that one," replied the Moor sharply.

"Can you do gardenin', you feller?" asked Peter.

"Oui, oui—un peu," replied the youth, who happened to be French, but understood English.

"None ob your wee-wees an' poo-poos to me. Can't you speak English?"

"Oui, yes, I gardin ver' leetle."

"Jus' so. Das de man for us, massa, if you won't hab de oder. I likes de look ob 'im. I don't t'ink he'll be hard on de wittles, an' he's so t'in dat he won't puspire much when he works in de sun in summer. Do buy *him*, massa."

But "massa" would not buy him, and looked hard for some time at our hero.

"I see how it am," said the negro, growing sulky. "You set your heart on dat useless ijit. Do come away, massa, it 'ud break my heart to lib wid sich a feller."

This seemed to clinch the matter, for the Moor purchased the objectionable slave, ordered Peter the Great to bring him along, and left the market-place.

"Didn't I tell you I's de greatest hyperkrite as ever was born?" said Peter, in a low voice, when sufficiently far in rear to prevent being overheard by his master.

"You certainly did," replied Foster, who felt something almost like satisfaction at this change in his fate; "you are the most perfect hypocrite that I ever came across, and I am not sorry for it. Only I hope you won't deceive your friends."

"Honour bright!" said the negro, with a roll of the eyes and a solemnity of expression that told far more than words could express.

"Can you tell me," asked the middy, as they walked along, "what has become of that fine-looking girl that was captured with her father and mother by your captain?"

"Don't say *my* captain, sar," replied Peter sternly. "He no captain ob mine. I was on'y loaned to him. But I knows nuffin ob de gall. Bery likely she's de Dey's forty-second wife by dis time. Hush! look sulky," he added quickly, observing that his master was looking back.

Poor Foster found himself under the necessity of following his black friend's lead, and acting the "hyperkrite," in order to prevent their friendship being discovered. He did it with a bad grace, it is true, but felt that, for his friend's sake if not his own, he was bound to comply. So he put on an expression which his cheery face had not known since that period of infancy when his frequent demands for sugar were not gratified. Wheels worked within wheels, however, for he felt so disgusted with the part he had to play that he got into the sulks naturally!

"Fuss-rate!" whispered Peter, "you's a'most as good as myself."

By this time they had reached one of the eastern gates of the city. It was named Bab-Azoun. As they passed through it the negro told his brother-slave that the large iron hooks which ornamented the wall there were used for the purpose of having criminals cast on them; the wretched victims being left to hang there, by whatever parts of their bodies chanced to catch on the hooks, till they died.

Having reached the open country outside the walls, they walked along a beautiful road, from which were obtained here and there splendid views of the surrounding country. On one side lay the blue Mediterranean, with its picturesque boats and shipping, and the white city descending to the very edge of the sea; on the other side rose the wooded slopes of a suburb named Mustapha, with numerous white Moorish houses in the midst of luxuriant gardens, where palms, bananas, cypresses, aloes, lemon-trees, and orange groves perfumed the balmy air, and afforded grateful shade from the glare of the African sun.

Into one of those gardens the Moor at last turned and led the way to a house, which, if not in itself beautiful according to European notions of architecture, was at least rendered cheerful with whitewash, and stood in the midst of a beauty and luxuriance of vegetation that could not be surpassed.

Opening a door in this building, the Turk entered. His slaves followed, and Foster, to his surprise, found what may be styled a miniature garden in the courtyard within.

Chapter Four
Our Middy is put to Work—Also put on his "word-of-Honour," and receives a Great Shock of Surprise

George Foster soon found that his master and owner, Ben-Ahmed, was a stern and exacting, but by no means an ill-natured or cruel, man. He appeared to be considerably over sixty years of age, but showed no signs of abated vigour. In character he was amiable and just, according to his light, but dignified and reticent.

His first act, after seating himself cross-legged on a carpet in a marble and tessellated recess, was to call for a hookah. He smoked that for a few minutes and contemplated the courtyard on which the recess opened. It was a pleasant object of contemplation, being filled with young orange-trees and creeping plants of a tropical kind, which were watered by a stone fountain in the centre of the court. This fountain also served to replenish a marble bath, to cool the sultry air, and to make pleasant tinkling music. Of course the nose was not forgotten in this luxurious assemblage of things that were gratifying to ear and eye. Flowers of many kinds were scattered around, and sweet-scented plants perfumed the air.

Ben-Ahmed's next act, after having lighted his pipe, was to summon Peter the Great and his new slave—the former to act as interpreter, for it was a peculiarity of this Moor that though he appeared to understand English he would not condescend to speak it.

After asking several questions as to our hero's name, age, and calling in life, he told Peter to inform Foster that escape from that country was impossible, that any attempt to escape would be punished with flogging and other torture, that perseverance in such attempts would result in his being sent to work in chains with the Bagnio slaves and would probably end in death from excessive toil, torture, and partial starvation. Having said this, the Moor asked several questions—through the negro, and always in the Lingua Franca.

"Massa bids me ax," said Peter, "if you are a gentleman, an' if you know it am de custom in England for gentleman-pris'ners to give dere word-ob-honour dat dey not run away, an' den go about as if dey was free?"

"Tell him that every officer in the service of the King of England is considered a gentleman."

"Come now, sar," interrupted Peter sternly, "you know das not true. I bin in England myself—cook to a French rest'rung in London—an' I nebber hear dat a *pleece* officer was a gentleman!"

"Well, I mean every commissioned officer in the army and navy," returned Foster, "and when such are taken prisoner I am aware that they are always allowed a certain amount of freedom of action on giving their word of honour that they will not attempt to escape."

When this was explained to Ben-Ahmed, he again said a few words to the negro, who translated as before.

"Massa say dat as you are a gentleman if you will gib your word-ob-honour not to escape, he will make you free. Not kite free, ob course, but free to work in de gardin widout chains; free to sleep in de out-house widout bein' locked up ob nights, an' free to enjoy you'self w'en you gits de chance."

Foster looked keenly at the negro, being uncertain whether or not he was jesting, but the solemn features of that arch "hyperkrite" were no index to the working of his eccentric mind—save when he permitted them to speak; then, indeed, they were almost more intelligible than the plainest language.

"And what if I refuse to pledge my word for the sake of such freedom?" asked our hero.

"W'y, den you'll git whacked, an' you'll 'sperience uncommon hard times, an' you'll change you mind bery soon, so I t'ink, on de whole, you better change 'im at once. Seems to me you's a remarkably obs'nit young feller!"

With a sad feeling that he was doing something equivalent to locking the door and throwing away the key, Foster gave the required promise, and was forthwith conducted into the garden and set to work.

His dark friend supplied him with a new striped cotton shirt—his own having been severely torn during his recent adventures—also with a pair of canvas trousers, a linen jacket, and a straw hat with a broad rim; all of which fitted him badly, and might have caused him some discomfort in other circumstances, but he was too much depressed just then to care much for anything. His duty that day consisted in digging up a piece of waste ground. To relieve his mind, he set to work with tremendous energy, insomuch that Peter the Great, who was looking on, exclaimed—

"Hi! what a digger you is! You'll bust up altogidder if you goes on like dat. De moles is nuffin' to you."

But Foster heeded not. The thought that he was now doomed to hopeless slavery, perhaps for life, was pressed home to him more powerfully than ever, and he felt that if he was to save himself from going mad he must work with his muscles like a tiger, and, if possible, cease to think. Accordingly, he went on toiling till the perspiration ran down his face, and all his sinews were strained.

"Poor boy!" muttered the negro in a low tone, "he's tryin' to dig his own grave. But he not succeed. Many a man try dat before now and failed. Howsomeber, it's blowin' a hard gale wid him just now—an' de harder it blow de sooner it's ober. Arter de storm comes de calm."

With these philosophic reflections, Peter the Great went off to his own work, leaving our hero turning over the soil like a steam-plough.

Strong though Foster was—both of muscle and will—he was but human after all. In course of time he stopped from sheer exhaustion, flung down the spade, and, raising himself with his hands stretched up and his face turned to the sky, he cried—

"God help me! what shall I do?"

Then, dropping his face on his hands, he stood for a considerable time quite motionless.

"What a fool I was to promise not to try to escape!" he thought, and a feeling of despair followed the thought, but a certain touch of relief came when he reflected that at any time he could go boldly to his master, withdraw the promise, and take the consequences.

He was still standing like a statue, with his hands covering his face, when he felt a light touch on his shoulder. It was the negro who had returned to see how he was getting on.

"Look yar, now, Geo'ge," he said in quite a fatherly manner, "dis'll neber do. My massa buy you to work in de gardin, not to stand like a statoo washin' its face widout soap or water. We don't want no more statoos. Got more'n enuff ob marble ones all around. Besides, you don't make a good statoo—leastwise not wid dem slop clo'es on. Now, come yar, Geo'ge. I wants a little combersation wid you. I'll preach you a small sarmin if you'll allow me."

So saying, Peter led his assistant slave into a cool arbour, where Ben-Ahmed was wont at times to soothe his spirits with a pipe.

"Now, look yar, Geo'ge, dis won't do. I say it once and for all—dis *won't do*."

"I know it won't, Peter," replied the almost heart-broken middy, with a sad smile, "you're very kind. I know you take an interest in me, and I'll try to do better, but I'm not used to spade-work, you know, and—"

"Spade-work!" shouted Peter, laying his huge black hand on Foster's shoulder, and giving him a squeeze that made him wince, "das not what I mean. Work! w'y you's done more'n a day's work in one hour, judging by de work ob or'nary slabes. No, das not it. What's wrong is dat you don't rightly understand your priv'leges. Das de word, your priv'leges. Now, look yar. I don't want you to break your heart before de time, an' fur dat purpus I would remind you dat while dar's life dar's hope. Moreober, you's got no notion what luck you're in. If a bad massa got hold ob you, he gib you no noo clo'es, he gib you hard, black bread 'stead o' de good grub what you gits yar. He make you work

widout stoppin' all day, and whack you on de sole ob your foots if you dar say one word. Was you eber whacked on de sole ob your foots?"

"No, never," replied Foster, amused in spite of himself by the negro's earnest looks and manner.

"Ho! den you don't know yet what Paradise am."

"Paradise, Peter? You mean the other place, I suppose."

"No, sar, I mean not'ing ob de sort. I mean de Paradise what comes arter it's ober, an' you 'gins to git well again. Hah! but you'll find it out some day. But, to continoo, you's got eberyt'ing what's comfrable here. If you on'y sawd de Bagnio slabes at work—I'll take you to see 'em some day—den you'll be content an' pleased wid your lot till de time comes when you escape."

"Escape! How can I escape, Peter, now that I have given my word of honour not to try?"

"Not'ing easier," replied the negro calmly, "you's on'y got to break your word-ob-honour!"

"I'm sorry to hear you say that, my friend," returned Foster, "for it shakes my confidence in you. You must know that an English gentleman *never* breaks his word—that is, he never *should* break it—and you may rest assured that I will not break mine. If your view of such matters is so loose, Peter, what security have I that you won't deceive *me* and betray *me* when it is your interest or your whim to do so?"

"Security, Massa? I lub you! I's fond o' your smood babby face. Isn't dat security enough?"

Foster could not help admitting that it was, as long as it lasted! "But what," he asked, "what security has Ben-Ahmed that you won't be as false to him as you recommend me to be?"

"I lub massa too!" answered the negro, with a bland smile.

"What! love a man whom you have described to me as the most obstinate fellow you ever knew?"

"Ob course I do," returned Peter. "W'y not? A obs'nit man may be as good as anoder man what can be shoved about any way you please. Ha! you not know yit what it is to hab a *bad* massa. Wait a bit; you find it out, p'r'aps, soon enough. Look yar."

He bared his bosom as he spoke, and displayed to his wondering and sympathetic friend a mass of old scars and gashes and healed-up sores.

"Dis what my last massa do to me, 'cause I not quite as smart as he wish. De back am wuss. Oh, if you know'd a bad massa, you'd be thankful to-day for gettin' a good un. Now, what I say is, nobody never knows what's a-goin' to turn up. You just keep quiet an' wait. Some slabes yar hab waited patiently for ten-fifteen year, an' more. What den? Sure to 'scape sooner or later. Many are ransum in a year or two. Oders longer. Lots ob 'em die, an' 'scape dat way. Keep up your heart, Geo'ge, whateber you do, and, if you won't break your word-ob-honour, something else'll be sure to turn up."

Although the negro's mode of affording comfort and encouragement was not based entirely on sound principles, his cheery and hopeful manner went a long way to lighten the load of care that had been settling down like a dead weight on young Foster's heart, and he returned to his work with a happier spirit than he had possessed since the day he leaped upon the deck of the pirate vessel. That night he spent under the same roof with his black friend and a number of the other slaves, none of whom, however, were his countrymen, or could speak any language that he understood. His bed was the tiled floor of an out-house, but there was plenty of straw on it. He had only one blanket, but the nights as well as days were warm, and his food, although of the simplest kind and chiefly vegetable, was good in quality and sufficient in quantity.

The next day, at the first blush of morning light, he was aroused with the other slaves by Peter the Great, who, he found, was the Moor's overseer of domestics. He was put to the same work as before, but that day his friend the negro was sent off on a mission that was to detain him several days from home. Another man took Peter's place, but, as he spoke neither English nor French, no communication passed between the overseer and slave except by signs. As, however, the particular job on which he had been put was simple, this did not matter. During the period of Peter's absence the poor youth felt the oppression of his isolated condition keenly. He sank to a lower condition than

before, and when his friend returned, he was surprised to find how much of his happiness depended on the sight of his jovial black face!

"Now, Geo'ge," was the negro's first remark on seeing him, "you's down in de blues again!"

"Well, I confess I have not been very bright in your absence, Peter. Not a soul to speak a word to; nothing but my own thoughts to entertain me; and poor entertainment they have been. D'you know, Peter, I think I should die if it were not for you."

"Nebber a bit ob it, massa. You's too cheeky to die soon. I's noticed, in my 'sperience, dat de young slabes as has got most self-conceit an' imprence is allers hardest to kill."

"I scarce know whether to take that as encouragement or otherwise," returned Foster, with the first laugh he had given vent to for a long time.

"Take it how you please, Geo'ge, as de doctor said to de dyin' man—won't matter much in de long-run. But come 'long wid me an' let's hab a talk ober it all. Let's go to de bower."

In the bower the poor middy found some consolation by pouring his sorrows into the great black sympathetic breast of Peter the Great, though it must be confessed that Peter occasionally took a strange way to comfort him. One of the negro's perplexities lay in the difficulty he had to convince our midshipman of his great good-fortune in having fallen into the hands of a kind master, and having escaped the terrible fate of the many who had cruel tyrants as their owners, who were tortured and beaten when too ill to work, who had bad food to eat and not too much of it, and who were whipped to death sometimes when they rebelled. Although Foster listened and considered attentively, he failed to appreciate what his friend sought to impress, and continued in a state of almost overwhelming depression because of the simple fact that he was a slave—a bought and sold slave!

"Now, look yar, Geo'ge," said the negro, remonstratively, "you *is* a slabe; das a fact, an' no application ob fut rule or compasses, or the mul'plication table, or any oder table, kin change dat. Dere you am—a slabe! But you ain't a 'bused slabe, a whacked slabe, a tortered slabe, a dead slabe. You're all alibe an' kickin', Geo'ge! So you cheer up, an' somet'ing sure to come ob it; an' if not'ing comes ob it, w'y, de cheerin' up hab come ob it anyhow."

Foster smiled faintly at this philosophical view of his case, and did make a brave effort to follow the advice of his friend.

"Das right, now, Geo'ge; you laugh an' grow fat. Moreober, you go to work now, for if massa come an' find us here, he's bound to know de reason why! Go to work, Geo'ge, an' forgit your troubles. Das *my* way—an' I's got a heap o' troubles, bress you!"

So saying, Peter the Great rose and left our forlorn midshipman sitting in the arbour, where he remained for some time ruminating on past, present, and future instead of going to work.

Apart from the fact of his being a slave, the youth's condition at the moment was by no means disagreeable, for he was seated in a garden which must have borne no little resemblance to the great original of Eden, in a climate that may well be described as heavenly, with a view before him of similar gardens which swept in all their rich luxuriance over the slopes in front of him until they terminated on the edge of the blue and sparkling sea.

While seated there, lost in reverie, he was startled by the sound of approaching footsteps—very different indeed from the heavy tread of his friend Peter. A guilty conscience made him glance round for a way of escape, but there was only one entrance to the bower. While he was hesitating how to act, an opening in the foliage afforded him a passing glimpse of a female in the rich dress of a Moorish lady.

He was greatly surprised, being well aware of the jealousy with which Mohammedans guard their ladies from the eyes of men. The explanation might lie in this, that Ben-Ahmed, being eccentric in this as in most other matters, afforded the inmates of his harem unusual liberty. Before he had time to think much on the subject, however, the lady in question turned into the arbour and stood before him.

If the word “thunderstruck” did justice in any degree to the state of mind which we wish to describe we would gladly use it, but it does not. Every language, from Gaelic to Chinese, equally fails to furnish an adequate word. We therefore avoid the impossible and proceed, merely remarking that from the expression of both faces it was evident that each had met with a crushing surprise.

We can understand somewhat the midshipman’s state of mind, for the being who stood before him was—was—well, we are again nonplussed! Suffice it to say that she was a girl of fifteen summers —the other forty-five seasons being, of course, understood. Beauty of feature and complexion she had, but these were lost, as it were, and almost forgotten, in her beauty of expression—tenderness, gentleness, urbanity, simplicity, and benignity in a state of fusion! Now, do not run away, reader, with the idea of an Eastern princess, with gorgeous black eyes, raven hair, tall and graceful form, etcetera! This apparition was fair, blue-eyed, golden-haired, girlish, sylph-like. She was graceful, indeed, as the gazelle, but not tall, and with an air of suavity that was irresistibly attractive. She had a “good” face as well as a beautiful, and there was a slightly pitiful look about the eyebrows that seemed to want smoothing away.

How earnestly George Foster desired—with a gush of pity, or something of that sort—to smooth it away. But he had too much delicacy of feeling as well as common sense to offer his services just then.

“Oh, sir!” exclaimed the girl, in perfect English, as she hastily threw a thin gauze veil over her face, “forgive me! I did not know you were here—else—my veil—but why should *I* mind such customs? You are an Englishman, I think?”

Foster did not feel quite sure at that moment whether he was English, Irish, Scotch, or Dutch, so he looked foolish and said—

“Y–yes.”

“I knew it. I was sure of it! Oh! I am *so* glad!” exclaimed the girl, clasping her delicate little hands together and bursting into tears.

This was such a very unexpected climax, and so closely resembled the conduct of a child, that it suddenly restored our midshipman to self-possession. Stepping quickly forward, he took one of the girl’s hands in his, laid his other hand on her shoulder, and said—

“Don’t cry, my poor child! If I can help you in any way, I’ll be only too glad; but pray don’t, *don’t* cry so.”

“I—I—can’t help it,” sobbed the girl, pulling away her hand—not on account of propriety, by any means: that never entered her young head—but for the purpose of searching for a kerchief in a pocket that was *always*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.