

*The Perils of Certain
English Prisoners*

by

Charles Dickens



Charles Dickens

The Perils of Certain English Prisoners

by

Charles Dickens

CHAPTER I THE ISLAND OF SILVER-STORE

IT WAS IN THE YEAR of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and forty-four, that I, Gill Davis to command, His Mark, having then the honour to be a private in the Royal Marines, stood a-leaning over the bulwarks of the armed sloop Christopher Columbus, in the South American waters off the Mosquito shore.

My lady remarks to me, before I go any further, that there is no such christian-name as Gill, and that her confident opinion is, that the name given to me in the baptism wherein I was

made, &c., was Gilbert. She is certain to be right, but I never heard of it. I was a foundling child, picked up somewhere or another, and I always understood my christian-name to be Gill. It is true that I was called Gills when employed at Snorridge Bottom betwixt Chatham and Maidstone to frighten birds; but that had nothing to do with the Baptism wherein I was made, &c., and wherein a number of things were promised for me by somebody, who let me alone ever afterwards as to performing any of them, and who, I consider, must have been the Beadle. Such name of Gills was entirely owing to my cheeks, or gills, which at that time of my life were of a raspy description.

My lady stops me again, before I go any further, by laughing exactly in her old way and waving the feather of her pen at me. That action on her part, calls to my mind as I look at her hand with the rings on it—Well! I won't! To be sure it will come in, in its own place. But it's always strange to me, noticing the quiet hand, and noticing it (as I have done, you know, so many times) a-fondling children and grandchildren asleep, to think that when blood and honour were up—there! I won't! not at present!—Scratch it out.

She won't scratch it out, and quite honourable; because we

The Perils of Certain English Prisoners

have made an understanding that everything is to be taken down, and that nothing that is once taken down shall be scratched out. I have the great misfortune not to be able to read and write, and I am speaking my true and faithful account of those Adventures, and my lady is writing it, word for word.

I say, there I was, a-leaning over the bulwarks of the sloop Christopher Columbus in the South American waters off the Mosquito shore: a subject of his Gracious Majesty King George of England, and a private in the Royal Marines.

In those climates, you don't want to do much. I was doing nothing. I was thinking of the shepherd (my father, I wonder?) on the hillsides by Snorridge Bottom, with a long staff, and with a rough white coat in all weathers all the year round, who used to let me lie in a corner of his hut by night, and who used to let me go about with him and his sheep by day when I could get nothing else to do, and who used to give me so little of his victuals and so much of his staff, that I ran away from him—which was what he wanted all along, I expect—to be knocked about the world in preference to Snorridge Bottom. I had been knocked about the world for nine-and-twenty years in all, when I stood looking along those bright blue South American Wa-

ters. Looking after the shepherd, I may say. Watching him in a half-waking dream, with my eyes half-shut, as he, and his flock of sheep, and his two dogs, seemed to move away from the ship's side, far away over the blue water, and go right down into the sky.

"It's rising out of the water, steady," a voice said close to me. I had been thinking on so, that it like woke me with a start, though it was no stranger voice than the voice of Harry Charker, my own comrade.

"What's rising out of the water, steady?" I asked my comrade.

"What?" says he. "The Island."

"O! The Island!" says I, turning my eyes towards it. "True. I forgot the Island."

"Forgot the port you're going to? That's odd, ain't it?"

"It is odd," says I.

"And odd," he said, slowly considering with himself, "ain't even. Is it, Gill?"

He had always a remark just like that to make, and seldom another. As soon as he had brought a thing round to what it was not, he was satisfied. He was one of the best of men, and,

in a certain sort of a way, one with the least to say for himself. I qualify it, because, besides being able to read and write like a Quarter-master, he had always one most excellent idea in his mind. That was, Duty. Upon my soul, I don't believe, though I admire learning beyond everything, that he could have got a better idea out of all the books in the world, if he had learnt them every word, and been the cleverest of scholars.

My comrade and I had been quartered in Jamaica, and from there we had been drafted off to the British settlement of Belize, lying away West and North of the Mosquito coast. At Belize there had been great alarm of one cruel gang of pirates (there were always more pirates than enough in those Caribbean Seas), and as they got the better of our English cruisers by running into out-of-the-way creeks and shallows, and taking the land when they were hotly pressed, the governor of Belize had received orders from home to keep a sharp look-out for them along shore. Now, there was an armed sloop came once a-year from Port Royal, Jamaica, to the Island, laden with all manner of necessaries, to eat, and to drink, and to wear, and to use in various ways; and it was aboard of that sloop which had touched at Belize, that I was a-standing, leaning over the bulwarks.

The Island was occupied by a very small English colony. It had been given the name of Silver-Store. The reason of its being so called, was, that the English colony owned and worked a silver-mine over on the mainland, in Honduras, and used this Island as a safe and convenient place to store their silver in, until it was annually fetched away by the sloop. It was brought down from the mine to the coast on the backs of mules, attended by friendly Indians and guarded by white men; from thence it was conveyed over to Silver-Store, when the weather was fair, in the canoes of that country; from Silver-Store, it was carried to Jamaica by the armed sloop once a-year, as I have already mentioned; from Jamaica, it went, of course, all over the world.

How I came to be aboard the armed sloop, is easily told. Four-and-twenty marines under command of a lieutenant—that officer's name was Linderwood—had been told off at Belize, to proceed to Silver-Store, in aid of boats and seamen stationed there for the chase of the Pirates. The Island was considered a good post of observation against the pirates, both by land and sea; neither the pirate ship nor yet her boats had been seen by any of us, but they had been so much heard of,

The Perils of Certain English Prisoners

that the reinforcement was sent. Of that party, I was one. It included a corporal and a sergeant. Charker was corporal, and the sergeant's name was Drooce. He was the most tyrannical non-commissioned officer in His Majesty's service.

The night came on, soon after I had had the foregoing words with Charker. All the wonderful bright colours went out of the sea and sky in a few minutes, and all the stars in the Heavens seemed to shine out together, and to look down at themselves in the sea, over one another's shoulders, millions deep. Next morning, we cast anchor off the Island. There was a snug harbour within a little reef; there was a sandy beach; there were cocoa-nut trees with high straight stems, quite bare, and foliage at the top like plumes of magnificent green feathers; there were all the objects that are usually seen in those parts, and I am not going to describe them, having something else to tell about.

Great rejoicings, to be sure, were made on our arrival. All the flags in the place were hoisted, all the guns in the place were fired, and all the people in the place came down to look at us. One of those Sambo fellows—they call those natives Sambos, when they are half-negro and half-Indian—had come

off outside the reef, to pilot us in, and remained on board after we had let go our anchor. He was called Christian George King, and was fonder of all hands than anybody else was. Now, I confess, for myself, that on that first day, if I had been captain of the Christopher Columbus, instead of private in the Royal Marines, I should have kicked Christian George King—who was no more a Christian than he was a King or a George—over the side, without exactly knowing why, except that it was the right thing to do.

But, I must likewise confess, that I was not in a particularly pleasant humour, when I stood under arms that morning, aboard the Christopher Columbus in the harbour of the Island of Silver-Store. I had had a hard life, and the life of the English on the Island seemed too easy and too gay to please me. "Here you are," I thought to myself, "good scholars and good livers; able to read what you like, able to write what you like, able to eat and drink what you like, and spend what you like, and do what you like; and much you care for a poor, ignorant Private in the Royal Marines! Yet it's hard, too, I think, that you should have all the half-pence, and I all the kicks; you all the smooth, and I all the rough; you all the oil, and I all the vinegar." It was

as envious a thing to think as might be, let alone its being nonsensical; but, I thought it. I took it so much amiss, that, when a very beautiful young English lady came aboard, I grunted to myself, “Ah! you have got a lover, I’ll be bound!” As if there was any new offence to me in that, if she had!

She was sister to the captain of our sloop, who had been in a poor way for some time, and who was so ill then that he was obliged to be carried ashore. She was the child of a military officer, and had come out there with her sister, who was married to one of the owners of the silver-mine, and who had three children with her. It was easy to see that she was the light and spirit of the Island. After I had got a good look at her, I grunted to myself again, in an even worse state of mind than before, “I’ll be damned, if I don’t hate him, whoever he is!”

My officer, Lieutenant Linderwood, was as ill as the captain of the sloop, and was carried ashore, too. They were both young men of about my age, who had been delicate in the West India climate. I even took that in bad part. I thought I was much fitter for the work than they were, and that if all of us had our deserts, I should be both of them rolled into one. (It may be imagined what sort of an officer of marines I should

have made, without the power of reading a written order. And as to any knowledge how to command the sloop—Lord! I should have sunk her in a quarter of an hour!)

However, such were my reflections; and when we men were ashore and dismissed, I strolled about the place along with Charker, making my observations in a similar spirit.

It was a pretty place: in all its arrangements partly South American and partly English, and very agreeable to look at on that account, being like a bit of home that had got chipped off and had floated away to that spot, accommodating itself to circumstances as it drifted along. The huts of the Sambos, to the number of five-and-twenty, perhaps, were down by the beach to the left of the anchorage. On the right was a sort of barrack, with a South American Flag and the Union Jack, flying from the same staff, where the little English colony could all come together, if they saw occasion. It was a walled square of building, with a sort of pleasure-ground inside, and inside that again a sunken block like a powder magazine, with a little square trench round it, and steps down to the door. Charker and I were looking in at the gate, which was not guarded; and I had said to Charker, in reference to the bit like a powder

The Perils of Certain English Prisoners

magazine, “That’s where they keep the silver you see;” and Charker had said to me, after thinking it over, “And silver ain’t gold. Is it, Gill?” when the beautiful young English lady I had been so bilious about, looked out of a door, or a window—at all events looked out, from under a bright awning. She no sooner saw us two in uniform, than she came out so quickly that she was still putting on her broad Mexican hat of plaited straw when we saluted.

“Would you like to come in,” she said, “and see the place? It is rather a curious place.”

We thanked the young lady, and said we didn’t wish to be troublesome; but, she said it could be no trouble to an English soldier’s daughter, to show English soldiers how their countrymen and country-women fared, so far away from England; and consequently we saluted again, and went in. Then, as we stood in the shade, she showed us (being as affable as beautiful), how the different families lived in their separate houses, and how there was a general house for stores, and a general reading-room, and a general room for music and dancing, and a room for Church; and how there were other houses on the rising ground called the Signal Hill, where they lived in the hotter weather.

“Your officer has been carried up there,” she said, “and my brother, too, for the better air. At present, our few residents are dispersed over both spots: deducting, that is to say, such of our number as are always going to, or coming from, or staying at, the Mine.”

(“He is among one of those parties,” I thought, “and I wish somebody would knock his head off.”)

“Some of our married ladies live here,” she said, “during at least half the year, as lonely as widows, with their children.”

“Many children here, ma’am?”

“Seventeen. There are thirteen married ladies, and there are eight like me.”

There were not eight like her—there was not one like her—in the world. She meant single.

“Which, with about thirty Englishmen of various degrees,” said the young lady, “form the little colony now on the Island. I don’t count the sailors, for they don’t belong to us. Nor the soldiers,” she gave us a gracious smile when she spoke of the soldiers, “for the same reason.”

“Nor the Sambos, ma’am,” said I.

“No.”

“Under your favour, and with your leave, ma’am,” said I, “are they trustworthy?”

“Perfectly! We are all very kind to them, and they are very grateful to us.”

“Indeed, ma’am? Now—Christian George King?”

“Very much attached to us all. Would die for us.”

She was, as in my uneducated way I have observed, very beautiful women almost always to be, so composed, that her composure gave great weight to what she said, and I believed it.

Then, she pointed out to us the building like a powder magazine, and explained to us in what manner the silver was brought from the mine, and was brought over from the mainland, and was stored here. The Christopher Columbus would have a rich lading, she said, for there had been a great yield that year, a much richer yield than usual, and there was a chest of jewels besides the silver.

When we had looked about us, and were getting sheepish, through fearing we were troublesome, she turned us over to a young woman, English born but West India bred, who served her as her maid. This young woman was the widow of a non-commissioned officer in a regiment of the line. She had got

married and widowed at St. Vincent, with only a few months between the two events. She was a little saucy woman, with a bright pair of eyes, rather a neat little foot and figure, and rather a neat little turned-up nose. The sort of young woman, I considered at the time, who appeared to invite you to give her a kiss, and who would have slapped your face if you accepted the invitation.

I couldn’t make out her name at first; for, when she gave it in answer to my inquiry, it sounded like Beltot, which didn’t sound right. But, when we became better acquainted—which was while Charker and I were drinking sugar-cane sangaree, which she made in a most excellent manner—I found that her Christian name was Isabella, which they shortened into Bell, and that the name of the deceased non-commissioned officer was Tott. Being the kind of neat little woman it was natural to make a toy of—I never saw a woman so like a toy in my life—she had got the plaything name of Belltott. In short, she had no other name on the island. Even Mr. Commissioner Pordage (and he was a grave one!) formally addressed her as Mrs. Belltott, but, I shall come to Mr. Commissioner Pordage presently.

The Perils of Certain English Prisoners

The name of the captain of the sloop was Captain Maryon, and therefore it was no news to hear from Mrs. Belltott, that his sister, the beautiful unmarried young English lady, was Miss Maryon. The novelty was, that her christian-name was Marion too. Marion Maryon. Many a time I have run off those two names in my thoughts, like a bit of verse. Oh many, and many, and many a time!

We saw out all the drink that was produced, like good men and true, and then took our leaves, and went down to the beach. The weather was beautiful; the wind steady, low, and gentle; the island, a picture; the sea, a picture; the sky, a picture. In that country there are two rainy seasons in the year. One sets in at about our English Midsummer; the other, about a fortnight after our English Michaelmas. It was the beginning of August at that time; the first of these rainy seasons was well over; and everything was in its most beautiful growth, and had its loveliest look upon it.

“They enjoy themselves here,” I says to Charker, turning surly again. “This is better than private-soldiering.”

We had come down to the beach, to be friendly with the boat’s-crew who were camped and hutted there; and we were

approaching towards their quarters over the sand, when Christian George King comes up from the landing-place at a wolf’s-trot, crying, “Yup, So-Jeer!”—which was that Sambo Pilot’s barbarous way of saying, Hallo, Soldier! I have stated myself to be a man of no learning, and, if I entertain prejudices, I hope allowance may be made. I will now confess to one. It may be a right one or it may be a wrong one; but, I never did like Natives, except in the form of oysters.

So, when Christian George King, who was individually unpleasant to me besides, comes a trotting along the sand, clucking, “Yup, So-Jeer!” I had a thundering good mind to let fly at him with my right. I certainly should have done it, but that it would have exposed me to reprimand.

“Yup, So-Jeer!” says he. “Bad job.”

“What do you mean?” says I.

“Yup, So-Jeer!” says he, “Ship Leakee.”

“Ship leaky?” says I.

“Iss,” says he, with a nod that looked as if it was jerked out of him by a most violent hiccup—which is the way with those savages.

I cast my eyes at Charker, and we both heard the pumps

going aboard the sloop, and saw the signal run up, "Come on board; hands wanted from the shore." In no time some of the sloop's liberty-men were already running down to the water's edge, and the party of seamen, under orders against the Pirates, were putting off to the Columbus in two boats.

"O Christian George King sar berry sorry!" says that Sambo vagabond, then. "Christian George King cry, English fashion!" His English fashion of crying was to screw his black knuckles into his eyes, howl like a dog, and roll himself on his back on the sand. It was trying not to kick him, but I gave Charker the word, "Double-quick, Harry!" and we got down to the water's edge, and got on board the sloop.

By some means or other, she had sprung such a leak, that no pumping would keep her free; and what between the two fears that she would go down in the harbour, and that, even if she did not, all the supplies she had brought for the little colony would be destroyed by the sea-water as it rose in her, there was great confusion. In the midst of it, Captain Maryon was heard hailing from the beach. He had been carried down in his hammock, and looked very bad; but he insisted on being stood there on his feet; and I saw him, myself, come off in the boat,

sitting upright in the stern-sheets, as if nothing was wrong with him.

A quick sort of council was held, and Captain Maryon soon resolved that we must all fall to work to get the cargo out, and that when that was done, the guns and heavy matters must be got out, and that the sloop must be hauled ashore, and caulked, and the leak stopped. We were all mustered (the Pirate-Chace party volunteering), and told off into parties, with so many hours of spell and so many hours of relief, and we all went at it with a will. Christian George King was entered one of the party in which I worked, at his own request, and he went at it with as good a will as any of the rest. He went at it with so much heartiness, to say the truth, that he rose in my good opinion almost as fast as the water rose in the ship. Which was fast enough, and faster.

Mr. Commissioner Pordage kept in a red-and-black japanned box, like a family lump-sugar box, some document or other, which some Sambo chief or other had got drunk and spilt some ink over (as well as I could understand the matter), and by that means had given up lawful possession of the Island. Through having hold of this box, Mr. Pordage got his

The Perils of Certain English Prisoners

title of Commissioner. He was styled Consul too, and spoke of himself as “Government.”

He was a stiff-jointed, high-nosed old gentleman, without an ounce of fat on him, of a very angry temper and a very yellow complexion. Mrs. Commissioner Pordage, making allowance for difference of sex, was much the same. Mr. Kitten, a small, youngish, bald, botanical and mineralogical gentleman, also connected with the mine—but everybody there was that, more or less—was sometimes called by Mr. Commissioner Pordage, his Vice-commissioner, and sometimes his Deputy-consul. Or sometimes he spoke of Mr. Kitten, merely as being “under Government.”

The beach was beginning to be a lively scene with the preparations for careening the sloop, and with cargo, and spars, and rigging, and water-casks, dotted about it, and with temporary quarters for the men rising up there out of such sails and odds and ends as could be best set on one side to make them, when Mr. Commissioner Pordage comes down in a high fluster, and asks for Captain Maryon. The Captain, ill as he was, was slung in his hammock betwixt two trees, that he might direct; and he raised his head, and answered for himself.

“Captain Maryon,” cries Mr. Commissioner Pordage, “this is not official. This is not regular.”

“Sir,” says the Captain, “it hath been arranged with the clerk and supercargo, that you should be communicated with, and requested to render any little assistance that may lie in your power. I am quite certain that hath been duly done.”

“Captain Maryon,” replied Mr. Commissioner Pordage, “there hath been no written correspondence. No documents have passed, no memoranda have been made, no minutes have been made, no entries and counter-entries appear in the official muniments. This is indecent. I call upon you, sir, to desist, until all is regular, or Government will take this up.”

“Sir,” says Captain Maryon, chafing a little, as he looked out of his hammock; “between the chances of Government taking this up, and my ship taking herself down, I much prefer to trust myself to the former.”

“You do, sir?” cries Mr. Commissioner Pordage.

“I do, sir,” says Captain Maryon, lying down again.

“Then, Mr. Kitten,” says the Commissioner, “send up instantly for my Diplomatic coat.”

He was dressed in a linen suit at that moment; but, Mr. Kit-

ten started off himself and brought down the Diplomatic coat, which was a blue cloth one, gold-laced, and with a crown on the button.

“Now, Mr. Kitten,” says Pordage, “I instruct you, as Vice-commissioner, and Deputy-consul of this place, to demand of Captain Maryon, of the sloop Christopher Columbus, whether he drives me to the act of putting this coat on?”

“Mr. Pordage,” says Captain Maryon, looking out of his hammock again, “as I can hear what you say, I can answer it without troubling the gentleman. I should be sorry that you should be at the pains of putting on too hot a coat on my account; but, otherwise, you may put it on hind-side before, or inside-out, or with your legs in the sleeves, or your head in the skirts, for any objection that I have to offer to your thoroughly pleasing yourself.”

“Very good, Captain Maryon,” says Pordage, in a tremendous passion. “Very good, sir. Be the consequences on your own head! Mr. Kitten, as it has come to this, help me on with it.”

When he had given that order, he walked off in the coat, and all our names were taken, and I was afterwards told that Mr.

Kitten wrote from his dictation more than a bushel of large paper on the subject, which cost more before it was done with, than ever could be calculated, and which only got done with after all, by being lost.

Our work went on merrily, nevertheless, and the Christopher Columbus, hauled up, lay helpless on her side like a great fish out of water. While she was in that state, there was a feast, or a ball, or an entertainment, or more properly all three together, given us in honour of the ship, and the ship’s company, and the other visitors. At that assembly, I believe, I saw all the inhabitants then upon the Island, without any exception. I took no particular notice of more than a few, but I found it very agreeable in that little corner of the world to see the children, who were of all ages, and mostly very pretty—as they mostly are. There was one handsome elderly lady, with very dark eyes and gray hair, that I inquired about. I was told that her name was Mrs. Venning; and her married daughter, a fair slight thing, was pointed out to me by the name of Fanny Fisher. Quite a child she looked, with a little copy of herself holding to her dress; and her husband, just come back from the mine, exceeding proud of her. They were a good-looking set of

The Perils of Certain English Prisoners

people on the whole, but I didn't like them. I was out of sorts; in conversation with Charker, I found fault with all of them. I said of Mrs. Venning, she was proud; of Mrs. Fisher, she was a delicate little baby-fool. What did I think of this one? Why, he was a fine gentleman. What did I say to that one? Why, she was a fine lady. What could you expect them to be (I asked Charker), nursed in that climate, with the tropical night shining for them, musical instruments playing to them, great trees bending over them, soft lamps lighting them, fire-flies sparkling in among them, bright flowers and birds brought into existence to please their eyes, delicious drinks to be had for the pouring out, delicious fruits to be got for the picking, and every one dancing and murmuring happily in the scented air, with the sea breaking low on the reef for a pleasant chorus.

"Fine gentlemen and fine ladies, Harry?" I says to Charker. "Yes, I think so! Dolls! Dolls! Not the sort of stuff for wear, that comes of poor private soldiering in the Royal Marines!"

However, I could not gainsay that they were very hospitable people, and that they treated us uncommonly well. Every man of us was at the entertainment, and Mrs. Belltott had more partners than she could dance with: though she danced all night,

too. As to Jack (whether of the Christopher Columbus, or of the Pirate pursuit party, it made no difference), he danced with his brother Jack, danced with himself, danced with the moon, the stars, the trees, the prospect, anything. I didn't greatly take to the chief-officer of that party, with his bright eyes, brown face, and easy figure. I didn't much like his way when he first happened to come where we were, with Miss Maryon on his arm. "O, Captain Carton," she says, "here are two friends of mine!" He says, "Indeed? These two Marines?"—meaning Charker and self. "Yes," says she, "I showed these two friends of mine when they first came, all the wonders of Silver-Store." He gave us a laughing look, and says he, "You are in luck, men. I would be disrated and go before the mast to-morrow, to be shown the way upward again by such a guide. You are in luck, men." When we had saluted, and he and the lady had waltzed away, I said, "You are a pretty fellow, too, to talk of luck. You may go to the Devil!"

Mr. Commissioner Pordage and Mrs. Commissioner, showed among the company on that occasion like the King and Queen of a much Greater Britain than Great Britain. Only two other circumstances in that jovial night made much sepa-

rate impression on me. One was this. A man in our draft of marines, named Tom Packer, a wild unsteady young fellow, but the son of a respectable shipwright in Portsmouth Yard, and a good scholar who had been well brought up, comes to me after a spell of dancing, and takes me aside by the elbow, and says, swearing angrily:

“Gill Davis, I hope I may not be the death of Sergeant Drooce one day!”

Now, I knew Drooce had always borne particularly hard on this man, and I knew this man to be of a very hot temper: so, I said:

“Tut, nonsense! don’t talk so to me! If there’s a man in the corps who scorns the name of an assassin, that man and Tom Packer are one.”

Tom wipes his head, being in a mortal sweat, and says he:

“I hope so, but I can’t answer for myself when he lords it over me, as he has just now done, before a woman. I tell you what, Gill! Mark my words! It will go hard with Sergeant Drooce, if ever we are in an engagement together, and he has to look to me to save him. Let him say a prayer then, if he knows one, for it’s all over with him, and he is on his Death-

bed. Mark my words!”

I did mark his words, and very soon afterwards, too, as will shortly be taken down.

The other circumstance that I noticed at that ball, was, the gaiety and attachment of Christian George King. The innocent spirits that Sambo Pilot was in, and the impossibility he found himself under of showing all the little colony, but especially the ladies and children, how fond he was of them, how devoted to them, and how faithful to them for life and death, for present, future, and everlasting, made a great impression on me. If ever a man, Sambo or no Sambo, was trustful and trusted, to what may be called quite an infantine and sweetly beautiful extent, surely, I thought that morning when I did at last lie down to rest, it was that Sambo Pilot, Christian George King.

This may account for my dreaming of him. He stuck in my sleep, cornerwise, and I couldn’t get him out. He was always flitting about me, dancing round me, and peeping in over my hammock, though I woke and dozed off again fifty times. At last, when I opened my eyes, there he really was, looking in at the open side of the little dark hut; which was made of leaves, and had Charker’s hammock slung in it as well as mine.

The Perils of Certain English Prisoners

“So-Jeer!” says he, in a sort of a low croak. “Yup!”

“Hallo!” says I, starting up. “What? You are there, are you?”

“Iss,” says he. “Christian George King got news.”

“What news has he got?”

“Pirates out!”

I was on my feet in a second. So was Charker. We were both aware that Captain Carton, in command of the boats, constantly watched the mainland for a secret signal, though, of course, it was not known to such as us what the signal was.

Christian George King had vanished before we touched the ground. But, the word was already passing from hut to hut to turn out quietly, and we knew that the nimble barbarian had got hold of the truth, or something near it.

In a space among the trees behind the encampment of us visitors, naval and military, was a snugly-screened spot, where we kept the stores that were in use, and did our cookery. The word was passed to assemble here. It was very quickly given, and was given (so far as we were concerned) by Sergeant Drooce, who was as good in a soldier point of view, as he was bad in a tyrannical one. We were ordered to drop into this space, quietly, behind the trees, one by one. As we assembled

here, the seamen assembled too. Within ten minutes, as I should estimate, we were all here, except the usual guard upon the beach. The beach (we could see it through the wood) looked as it always had done in the hottest time of the day. The guard were in the shadow of the sloop’s hull, and nothing was moving but the sea,—and that moved very faintly. Work had always been knocked off at that hour, until the sun grew less fierce, and the sea-breeze rose; so that its being holiday with us, made no difference, just then, in the look of the place. But I may mention that it was a holiday, and the first we had had since our hard work began. Last night’s ball had been given, on the leak’s being repaired, and the careening done. The worst of the work was over, and to-morrow we were to begin to get the sloop afloat again.

We marines were now drawn up here under arms. The chace-party were drawn up separate. The men of the Columbus were drawn up separate. The officers stepped out into the midst of the three parties, and spoke so as all might hear. Captain Carton was the officer in command, and he had a spy-glass in his hand. His coxswain stood by him with another spy-glass, and with a slate on which he seemed to have been taking down signals.

“Now, men!” says Captain Carton; “I have to let you know, for your satisfaction: Firstly, that there are ten pirate-boats, strongly manned and armed, lying hidden up a creek yonder on the coast, under the overhanging branches of the dense trees. Secondly, that they will certainly come out this night when the moon rises, on a pillaging and murdering expedition, of which some part of the mainland is the object. Thirdly—don’t cheer, men!—that we will give chase, and, if we can get at them, rid the world of them, please God!”

Nobody spoke, that I heard, and nobody moved, that I saw. Yet there was a kind of ring, as if every man answered and approved with the best blood that was inside of him.

“Sir,” says Captain Maryon, “I beg to volunteer on this service, with my boats. My people volunteer, to the ship’s boys.”

“In His Majesty’s name and service,” the other answers, touching his hat, “I accept your aid with pleasure. Lieutenant Linderwood, how will you divide your men?”

I was ashamed—I give it out to be written down as large and plain as possible—I was heart and soul ashamed of my thoughts of those two sick officers, Captain Maryon and Lieutenant Linderwood, when I saw them, then and there. The

spirit in those two gentlemen beat down their illness (and very ill I knew them to be) like Saint George beating down the Dragon. Pain and weakness, want of ease and want of rest, had no more place in their minds than fear itself. Meaning now to express for my lady to write down, exactly what I felt then and there, I felt this: “You two brave fellows that I had been so grudgeful of, I know that if you were dying you would put it off to get up and do your best, and then you would be so modest that in lying down again to die, you would hardly say, ‘I did it!’”

It did me good. It really did me good.

But, to go back to where I broke off. Says Captain Carton to Lieutenant Linderwood, “Sir, how will you divide your men? There is not room for all; and a few men should, in any case, be left here.”

There was some debate about it. At last, it was resolved to leave eight Marines and four seamen on the Island, besides the sloop’s two boys. And because it was considered that the friendly Sambos would only want to be commanded in case of any danger (though none at all was apprehended there), the officers were in favour of leaving the two non-commissioned

The Perils of Certain English Prisoners

officers, Drooce and Charker. It was a heavy disappointment to them, just as my being one of the left was a heavy disappointment to me—then, but not soon afterwards. We men drew lots for it, and I drew “Island.” So did Tom Packer. So of course, did four more of our rank and file.

When this was settled, verbal instructions were given to all hands to keep the intended expedition secret, in order that the women and children might not be alarmed, or the expedition put in a difficulty by more volunteers. The assembly was to be on that same spot at sunset. Every man was to keep up an appearance, meanwhile, of occupying himself in his usual way. That is to say, every man excepting four old trusty seamen, who were appointed, with an officer, to see to the arms and ammunition, and to muffle the rullocks of the boats, and to make everything as trim and swift and silent as it could be made.

The Sambo Pilot had been present all the while, in case of his being wanted, and had said to the officer in command, five hundred times over if he had said it once, that Christian George King would stay with the So-Jeers, and take care of the booffer ladies and the booffer child—booffer being that native’s expression for beautiful. He was now asked a few questions

concerning the putting off of the boats, and in particular whether there was any way of embarking at the back of the Island: which Captain Carton would have half liked to do, and then have dropped round in its shadow and slanted across to the main. But, “No,” says Christian George King. “No, no, no! Told you so, ten time. No, no, no! All reef, all rock, all swim, all drown!” Striking out as he said it, like a swimmer gone mad, and turning over on his back on dry land, and spluttering himself to death, in a manner that made him quite an exhibition.

The sun went down, after appearing to be a long time about it, and the assembly was called. Every man answered to his name, of course, and was at his post. It was not yet black dark, and the roll was only just gone through, when up comes Mr. Commissioner Pordage with his Diplomatic coat on.

“Captain Carton,” says he, “Sir, what is this?”

“This, Mr. Commissioner” (he was very short with him), “is an expedition against the Pirates. It is a secret expedition, so please to keep it a secret.”

“Sir,” says Commissioner Pordage, “I trust there is going to be no unnecessary cruelty committed?”

“Sir,” returns the officer, “I trust not.”

“That is not enough, sir,” cries Commissioner Pordage, getting wroth. “Captain Carton, I give you notice. Government requires you to treat the enemy with great delicacy, consideration, clemency, and forbearance.”

“Sir,” says Captain Carton, “I am an English officer, commanding English Men, and I hope I am not likely to disappoint the Government’s just expectations. But, I presume you know that these villains under their black flag have despoiled our countrymen of their property, burnt their homes, barbarously murdered them and their little children, and worse than murdered their wives and daughters?”

“Perhaps I do, Captain Carton,” answers Pordage, waving his hand, with dignity; “perhaps I do not. It is not customary, sir, for Government to commit itself.”

“It matters very little, Mr. Pordage, whether or no. Believing that I hold my commission by the allowance of God, and not that I have received it direct from the Devil, I shall certainly use it, with all avoidance of unnecessary suffering and with all merciful swiftness of execution, to exterminate these people from the face of the earth. Let me recommend you to go home, sir, and to keep out of the night-air.”

Never another syllable did that officer say to the Commissioner, but turned away to his men. The Commissioner buttoned his Diplomatic coat to the chin, said, “Mr. Kitten, attend me!” gasped, half choked himself, and took himself off.

It now fell very dark, indeed. I have seldom, if ever, seen it darker, nor yet so dark. The moon was not due until one in the morning, and it was but a little after nine when our men lay down where they were mustered. It was pretended that they were to take a nap, but everybody knew that no nap was to be got under the circumstances. Though all were very quiet, there was a restlessness among the people; much what I have seen among the people on a race-course, when the bell has rung for the saddling for a great race with large stakes on it.

At ten, they put off; only one boat putting off at a time; another following in five minutes; both then lying on their oars until another followed. Ahead of all, paddling his own outlandish little canoe without a sound, went the Sambo pilot, to take them safely outside the reef. No light was shown but once, and that was in the commanding officer’s own hand. I lighted the dark lantern for him, and he took it from me when he embarked. They had blue lights and such like with them, but kept

themselves as dark as Murder.

The expedition got away with wonderful quietness, and Christian George King soon came back dancing with joy.

“Yup, So-Jeer,” says he to myself in a very objectionable kind of convulsions, “Christian George King sar berry glad. Pirates all be blown a-pieces. Yup! Yup!”

My reply to that cannibal was, “However glad you may be, hold your noise, and don’t dance jigs and slap your knees about it, for I can’t abear to see you do it.”

I was on duty then; we twelve who were left being divided into four watches of three each, three hours’ spell. I was relieved at twelve. A little before that time, I had challenged, and Miss Maryon and Mrs. Belltott had come in.

“Good Davis,” says Miss Maryon, “what is the matter? Where is my brother?”

I told her what was the matter, and where her brother was.

“O Heaven help him!” says she, clasping her hands and looking up—she was close in front of me, and she looked most lovely to be sure; he is not sufficiently recovered, not strong enough for such strife!”

“If you had seen him, miss,” I told her, “as I saw him when

he volunteered, you would have known that his spirit is strong enough for any strife. It will bear his body, miss, to wherever duty calls him. It will always bear him to an honourable life, or a brave death.”

“Heaven bless you!” says she, touching my arm. “I know it. Heaven bless you!”

Mrs. Belltott surprised me by trembling and saying nothing. They were still standing looking towards the sea and listening, after the relief had come round. It continuing very dark, I asked to be allowed to take them back. Miss Maryon thanked me, and she put her arm in mine, and I did take them back. I have now got to make a confession that will appear singular. After I had left them, I laid myself down on my face on the beach, and cried for the first time since I had frightened birds as a boy at Snorridge Bottom, to think what a poor, ignorant, low-placed, private soldier I was.

It was only for half a minute or so. A man can’t at all times be quite master of himself, and it was only for half a minute or so. Then I up and went to my hut, and turned into my hammock, and fell asleep with wet eyelashes, and a sore, sore heart. Just as I had often done when I was a child, and had been worse used than usual.

I slept (as a child under those circumstances might) very sound, and yet very sore at heart all through my sleep. I was awoke by the words, "He is a determined man." I had sprung out of my hammock, and had seized my firelock, and was standing on the ground, saying the words myself. "He is a determined man." But, the curiosity of my state was, that I seemed to be repeating them after somebody, and to have been wonderfully startled by hearing them.

As soon as I came to myself, I went out of the hut, and away to where the guard was. Charker challenged:

"Who goes there?"

"A friend."

"Not Gill?" says he, as he shouldered his piece.

"Gill," says I.

"Why, what the deuce do you do out of your hammock?" says he.

"Too hot for sleep," says I; "is all right?"

"Right!" says Charker, "yes, yes; all's right enough here; what should be wrong here? It's the boats that we want to know of. Except for fire-flies twinkling about, and the lonesome splashes of great creatures as they drop into the water, there's nothing

going on here to ease a man's mind from the boats."

The moon was above the sea, and had risen, I should say, some half-an-hour. As Charker spoke, with his face towards the sea, I, looking landward, suddenly laid my right hand on his breast, and said, "Don't move. Don't turn. Don't raise your voice! You never saw a Maltese face here?"

"No. What do you mean?" he asks, staring at me.

"Nor yet, an English face, with one eye and a patch across the nose?"

"No. What ails you? What do you mean?"

I had seen both, looking at us round the stem of a cocoa-nut tree, where the moon struck them. I had seen that Sambo Pilot, with one hand laid on the stem of the tree, drawing them back into the heavy shadow. I had seen their naked cutlasses twinkle and shine, like bits of the moonshine in the water that had got blown ashore among the trees by the light wind. I had seen it all, in a moment. And I saw in a moment (as any man would), that the signalled move of the pirates on the mainland was a plot and a feint; that the leak had been made to disable the sloop; that the boats had been tempted away, to leave the Island unprotected; that the pirates had landed by some se-

The Perils of Certain English Prisoners

creted way at the back; and that Christian George King was a double-dyed traitor, and a most infernal villain.

I considered, still all in one and the same moment, that Charker was a brave man, but not quick with his head; and that Sergeant Drooce, with a much better head, was close by. All I said to Charker was, "I am afraid we are betrayed. Turn your back full to the moonlight on the sea, and cover the stem of the cocoa-nut tree which will then be right before you, at the height of a man's heart. Are you right?"

"I am right," says Charker, turning instantly, and falling into the position with a nerve of iron; "and right ain't left. Is it, Gill?"

A few seconds brought me to Sergeant Drooce's hut. He was fast asleep, and being a heavy sleeper, I had to lay my hand upon him to rouse him. The instant I touched him he came rolling out of his hammock, and upon me like a tiger. And a tiger he was, except that he knew what he was up to, in his utmost heat, as well as any man.

I had to struggle with him pretty hard to bring him to his senses, panting all the while (for he gave me a breather), "Sergeant, I am Gill Davis! Treachery! Pirates on the Island!"

The last words brought him round, and he took his hands off. "I have seen two of them within this minute," said I. And so I told him what I had told Harry Charker.

His soldierly, though tyrannical, head was clear in an instant. He didn't waste one word, even of surprise. "Order the guard," says he, "to draw off quietly into the Fort." (They called the enclosure I have before mentioned, the Fort, though it was not much of that.) "Then get you to the Fort as quick as you can, rouse up every soul there, and fasten the gate. I will bring in all those who are at the Signal Hill. If we are surrounded before we can join you, you must make a sally and cut us out if you can. The word among our men is, 'Women and children!'"

He burst away, like fire going before the wind over dry reeds. He roused up the seven men who were off duty, and had them bursting away with him, before they know they were not asleep. I reported orders to Charker, and ran to the Fort, as I have never run at any other time in all my life: no, not even in a dream.

The gate was not fast, and had no good fastening: only a double wooden bar, a poor chain, and a bad lock. Those, I secured as well as they could be secured in a few seconds by one pair of hands, and so ran to that part of the building where

Miss Maryon lived. I called to her loudly by her name until she answered. I then called loudly all the names I knew—Mrs. Macey (Miss Maryon’s married sister), Mr. Macey, Mrs. Venning, Mr. and Mrs. Fisher, even Mr. and Mrs. Pordage. Then I called out, “All you gentlemen here, get up and defend the place! We are caught in a trap. Pirates have landed. We are attacked!”

At the terrible word “Pirates!”—for, those villains had done such deeds in those seas as never can be told in writing, and can scarcely be so much as thought of—cries and screams rose up from every part of the place. Quickly lights moved about from window to window, and the cries moved about with them, and men, women, and children came flying down into the square. I remarked to myself, even then, what a number of things I seemed to see at once. I noticed Mrs. Macey coming towards me, carrying all her three children together. I noticed Mr. Pordage in the greatest terror, in vain trying to get on his Diplomatic coat; and Mr. Kitten respectfully tying his pocket-handkerchief over Mrs. Pordage’s nightcap. I noticed Mrs. Belltott run out screaming, and shrink upon the ground near me, and cover her face in her hands, and lie all of a bundle,

shivering. But, what I noticed with the greatest pleasure was, the determined eyes with which those men of the Mine that I had thought fine gentlemen, came round me with what arms they had: to the full as cool and resolute as I could be, for my life—ay, and for my soul, too, into the bargain!

The chief person being Mr. Macey, I told him how the three men of the guard would be at the gate directly, if they were not already there, and how Sergeant Drooce and the other seven were gone to bring in the outlying part of the people of Silver-Store. I next urged him, for the love of all who were dear to him, to trust no Sambo, and, above all, if he could got any good chance at Christian George King, not to lose it, but to put him out of the world.

“I will follow your advice to the letter, Davis,” says he; “what next?”

My answer was, “I think, sir, I would recommend you next, to order down such heavy furniture and lumber as can be moved, and make a barricade within the gate.”

“That’s good again,” says he: “will you see it done?”

“I’ll willingly help to do it,” says I, “unless or until my superior, Sergeant Drooce, gives me other orders.”

The Perils of Certain English Prisoners

He shook me by the hand, and having told off some of his companions to help me, bestirred himself to look to the arms and ammunition. A proper quick, brave, steady, ready gentleman!

One of their three little children was deaf and dumb, Miss Maryon had been from the first with all the children, soothing them, and dressing them (poor little things, they had been brought out of their beds), and making them believe that it was a game of play, so that some of them were now even laughing. I had been working hard with the others at the barricade, and had got up a pretty good breast-work within the gate. Drooce and the seven men had come back, bringing in the people from the Signal Hill, and had worked along with us: but, I had not so much as spoken a word to Drooce, nor had Drooce so much as spoken a word to me, for we were both too busy. The breastwork was now finished, and I found Miss Maryon at my side, with a child in her arms. Her dark hair was fastened round her head with a band. She had a quantity of it, and it looked even richer and more precious, put up hastily out of her way, than I had seen it look when it was carefully arranged. She was very pale, but extraordinarily quiet and still.

“Dear good Davis,” said she, “I have been waiting to speak one word to you.”

I turned to her directly. If I had received a musket-ball in the heart, and she had stood there, I almost believe I should have turned to her before I dropped.

“This pretty little creature,” said she, kissing the child in her arms, who was playing with her hair and trying to pull it down, “cannot hear what we say—can hear nothing. I trust you so much, and have such great confidence in you, that I want you to make me a promise.”

“What is it, Miss?”

“That if we are defeated, and you are absolutely sure of my being taken, you will kill me.”

“I shall not be alive to do it, Miss. I shall have died in your defence before it comes to that. They must step across my body to lay a hand on you.”

“But, if you are alive, you brave soldier.” How she looked at me! “And if you cannot save me from the Pirates, living, you will save me, dead. Tell me so.”

Well! I told her I would do that at the last, if all else failed. She took my hand—my rough, coarse hand—and put it to her

lips. She put it to the child's lips, and the child kissed it. I believe I had the strength of half a dozen men in me, from that moment, until the fight was over.

All this time, Mr. Commissioner Pordage had been wanting to make a Proclamation to the Pirates to lay down their arms and go away; and everybody had been hustling him about and tumbling over him, while he was calling for pen and ink to write it with. Mrs. Pordage, too, had some curious ideas about the British respectability of her nightcap (which had as many frills to it, growing in layers one inside another, as if it was a white vegetable of the artichoke sort), and she wouldn't take the nightcap off, and would be angry when it got crushed by the other ladies who were handing things about, and, in short, she gave as much trouble as her husband did. But, as we were now forming for the defence of the place, they were both poked out of the way with no ceremony. The children and ladies were got into the little trench which surrounded the silver-house (we were afraid of leaving them in any of the light buildings, lest they should be set on fire), and we made the best disposition we could. There was a pretty good store, in point of amount, of tolerable swords and cutlasses. Those were issued. There

were, also, perhaps a score or so of spare muskets. Those were brought out. To my astonishment, little Mrs. Fisher that I had taken for a doll and a baby, was not only very active in that service, but volunteered to load the spare arms.

"For, I understand it well," says she, cheerfully, without a shake in her voice.

"I am a soldier's daughter and a sailor's sister, and I understand it too," says Miss Maryon, just in the same way.

Steady and busy behind where I stood, those two beautiful and delicate young women fell to handling the guns, hammering the flints, looking to the locks, and quietly directing others to pass up powder and bullets from hand to hand, as unflinching as the best of tried soldiers.

Sergeant Drooce had brought in word that the pirates were very strong in numbers—over a hundred was his estimate—and that they were not, even then, all landed; for, he had seen them in a very good position on the further side of the Signal Hill, evidently waiting for the rest of their men to come up. In the present pause, the first we had had since the alarm, he was telling this over again to Mr. Macey, when Mr. Macey suddenly cried out: "The signal! Nobody has thought of the signal!"

The Perils of Certain English Prisoners

We knew of no signal, so we could not have thought of it.

“What signal may you mean, sir?” says Sergeant Drooce, looking sharp at him.

“There is a pile of wood upon the Signal Hill. If it could be lighted—which never has been done yet—it would be a signal of distress to the mainland.”

Charker cries, directly: “Sergeant Drooce, dispatch me on that duty. Give me the two men who were on guard with me to-night, and I’ll light the fire, if it can be done.”

“And if it can’t, Corporal—” Mr. Macey strikes in.

“Look at these ladies and children, sir!” says Charker. “I’d sooner light myself, than not try any chance to save them.”

We gave him a Hurrah!—it burst from us, come of it what might—and he got his two men, and was let out at the gate, and crept away. I had no sooner come back to my place from being one of the party to handle the gate, than Miss Maryon said in a low voice behind me:

“Davis, will you look at this powder? This is not right.”

I turned my head. Christian George King again, and treachery again! Sea-water had been conveyed into the magazine, and every grain of powder was spoiled!

“Stay a moment,” said Sergeant Drooce, when I had told him, without causing a movement in a muscle of his face: “look to your pouch, my lad. You Tom Packer, look to your pouch, confound you! Look to your pouches, all you Marines.”

The same artful savage had got at them, somehow or another, and the cartridges were all unserviceable. “Hum!” says the Sergeant. “Look to your loading, men. You are right so far?”

Yes; we were right so far.

“Well, my lads, and gentlemen all,” says the Sergeant, “this will be a hand-to-hand affair, and so much the better.”

He treated himself to a pinch of snuff, and stood up, square-shouldered and broad-chested, in the light of the moon—which was now very bright—as cool as if he was waiting for a play to begin. He stood quiet, and we all stood quiet, for a matter of something like half-an-hour. I took notice from such whispered talk as there was, how little we that the silver did not belong to, thought about it, and how much the people that it did belong to, thought about it. At the end of the half-hour, it was reported from the gate that Charker and the two were falling back on us, pursued by about a dozen.

“Sally! Gate-party, under Gill Davis,” says the Sergeant, “and bring ‘em in! Like men, now!”

We were not long about it, and we brought them in. “Don’t take me,” says Charker, holding me round the neck, and stumbling down at my feet when the gate was fast, “don’t take me near the ladies or the children, Gill. They had better not see Death, till it can’t be helped. They’ll see it soon enough.”

“Harry!” I answered, holding up his head. “Comrade!”

He was cut to pieces. The signal had been secured by the first pirate party that landed; his hair was all singed off, and his face was blackened with the running pitch from a torch.

He made no complaint of pain, or of anything. “Good-bye, old chap,” was all he said, with a smile. “I’ve got my death. And Death ain’t life. Is it, Gill?”

Having helped to lay his poor body on one side, I went back to my post. Sergeant Drooce looked at me, with his eyebrows a little lifted. I nodded. “Close up here men, and gentlemen all!” said the Sergeant. “A place too many, in the line.”

The Pirates were so close upon us at this time, that the foremost of them were already before the gate. More and more came up with a great noise, and shouting loudly. When we

believed from the sound that they were all there, we gave three English cheers. The poor little children joined, and were so fully convinced of our being at play, that they enjoyed the noise, and were heard clapping their hands in the silence that followed.

Our disposition was this, beginning with the rear. Mrs. Venning, holding her daughter’s child in her arms, sat on the steps of the little square trench surrounding the silver-house, encouraging and directing those women and children as she might have done in the happiest and easiest time of her life. Then, there was an armed line, under Mr. Macey, across the width of the enclosure, facing that way and having their backs towards the gate, in order that they might watch the walls and prevent our being taken by surprise. Then there was a space of eight or ten feet deep, in which the spare arms were, and in which Miss Maryon and Mrs. Fisher, their hands and dresses blackened with the spoilt gunpowder, worked on their knees, tying such things as knives, old bayonets, and spear-heads, to the muzzles of the useless muskets. Then, there was a second armed line, under Sergeant Drooce, also across the width of the enclosure, but facing to the gate. Then came the breast-

The Perils of Certain English Prisoners

work we had made, with a zigzag way through it for me and my little party to hold good in retreating, as long as we could, when we were driven from the gate. We all knew that it was impossible to hold the place long, and that our only hope was in the timely discovery of the plot by the boats, and in their coming back.

I and my men were now thrown forward to the gate. From a spy-hole, I could see the whole crowd of Pirates. There were Malays among them, Dutch, Maltese, Greeks, Sambos, Negroes, and Convict Englishmen from the West India Islands; among the last, him with the one eye and the patch across the nose. There were some Portuguese, too, and a few Spaniards. The captain was a Portuguese; a little man with very large ear-rings under a very broad hat, and a great bright shawl twisted about his shoulders. They were all strongly armed, but like a boarding party, with pikes, swords, cutlasses, and axes. I noticed a good many pistols, but not a gun of any kind among them. This gave me to understand that they had considered that a continued roll of musketry might perhaps have been heard on the mainland; also, that for the reason that fire would be seen from the mainland they would not set the Fort in flames

and roast us alive; which was one of their favourite ways of carrying on. I looked about for Christian George King, and if I had seen him I am much mistaken if he would not have received my one round of ball-cartridge in his head. But, no Christian George King was visible.

A sort of a wild Portuguese demon, who seemed either fierce-mad or fierce-drunk—but, they all seemed one or the other—came forward with the black flag, and gave it a wave or two. After that, the Portuguese captain called out in shrill English, “I say you! English fools! Open the gate! Surrender!”

As we kept close and quiet, he said something to his men which I didn’t understand, and when he had said it, the one-eyed English rascal with the patch (who had stepped out when he began), said it again in English. It was only this. “Boys of the black flag, this is to be quickly done. Take all the prisoners you can. If they don’t yield, kill the children to make them. Forward!” Then, they all came on at the gate, and in another half-minute were smashing and splitting it in.

We struck at them through the gaps and shivers, and we dropped many of them, too; but, their very weight would have carried such a gate, if they had been unarmed. I soon found

Sergeant Drooce at my side, forming us six remaining marines in line—Tom Packer next to me—and ordering us to fall back three paces, and, as they broke in, to give them our one little volley at short distance. “Then,” says he, “receive them behind your breastwork on the bayonet, and at least let every man of you pin one of the cursed cockchafers through the body.”

We checked them by our fire, slight as it was, and we checked them at the breastwork. However, they broke over it like swarms of devils—they were, really and truly, more devils than men—and then it was hand to hand, indeed.

We clubbed our muskets and laid about us; even then, those two ladies—always behind me—were steady and ready with the arms. I had a lot of Maltese and Malays upon me, and, but for a broadsword that Miss Maryon’s own hand put in mine, should have got my end from them. But, was that all? No. I saw a heap of banded dark hair and a white dress come thrice between me and them, under my own raised right arm, which each time might have destroyed the wearer of the white dress; and each time one of the lot went down, struck dead.

Drooce was armed with a broadsword, too, and did such things with it, that there was a cry, in half-a-dozen languages, of

“Kill that sergeant!” as I knew, by the cry being raised in English, and taken up in other tongues. I had received a severe cut across the left arm a few moments before, and should have known nothing of it, except supposing that somebody had struck me a smart blow, if I had not felt weak, and seen myself covered with spouting blood, and, at the same instant of time, seen Miss Maryon tearing her dress and binding it with Mrs. Fisher’s help round the wound. They called to Tom Packer, who was scouring by, to stop and guard me for one minute, while I was bound, or I should bleed to death in trying to defend myself. Tom stopped directly, with a good sabre in his hand.

In that same moment—all things seem to happen in that same moment, at such a time—half-a-dozen had rushed howling at Sergeant Drooce. The Sergeant, stepping back against the wall, stopped one howl for ever with such a terrible blow, and waited for the rest to come on, with such a wonderfully unmoved face, that they stopped and looked at him.

“See him now!” cried Tom Packer. “Now, when I could cut him out! Gill! Did I tell you to mark my words?”

I implored Tom Packer in the Lord’s name, as well as I could in my faintness, to go to the Sergeant’s aid.

The Perils of Certain English Prisoners

“I hate and detest him,” says Tom, moodily wavering. “Still, he is a brave man.” Then he calls out, “Sergeant Drooce, Sergeant Drooce! Tell me you have driven me too hard, and are sorry for it.”

The Sergeant, without turning his eyes from his assailants, which would have been instant death to him, answers.

“No. I won’t.”

“Sergeant Drooce!” cries Tom, in a kind of an agony. “I have passed my word that I would never save you from Death, if I could, but would leave you to die. Tell me you have driven me too hard and are sorry for it, and that shall go for nothing.”

One of the group laid the Sergeant’s bald bare head open. The Sergeant laid him dead.

“I tell you,” says the Sergeant, breathing a little short, and waiting for the next attack, “no. I won’t. If you are not man enough to strike for a fellow-soldier because he wants help, and because of nothing else, I’ll go into the other world and look for a better man.”

Tom swept upon them, and cut him out. Tom and he fought their way through another knot of them, and sent them flying, and came over to where I was beginning again to feel, with

inexpressible joy, that I had got a sword in my hand.

They had hardly come to us, when I heard, above all the other noises, a tremendous cry of women’s voices. I also saw Miss Maryon, with quite a new face, suddenly clap her two hands over Mrs. Fisher’s eyes. I looked towards the silver-house, and saw Mrs. Venning—standing upright on the top of the steps of the trench, with her gray hair and her dark eyes—hide her daughter’s child behind her, among the folds of her dress, strike a pirate with her other hand, and fall, shot by his pistol.

The cry arose again, and there was a terrible and confusing rush of the women into the midst of the struggle. In another moment, something came tumbling down upon me that I thought was the wall. It was a heap of Sambos who had come over the wall; and of four men who clung to my legs like serpents, one who clung to my right leg was Christian George King.

“Yup, So-Jeer,” says he, “Christian George King sar berry glad So-Jeer a prisoner. Christian George King been waiting for So-Jeer sech long time. Yup, yup!”

What could I do, with five-and-twenty of them on me, but be tied hand and foot? So, I was tied hand and foot. It was all

over now—boats not come back—all lost! When I was fast bound and was put up against the wall, the one-eyed English convict came up with the Portuguese Captain, to have a look at me.

“See!” says he. “Here’s the determined man! If you had slept sounder, last night, you’d have slept your soundest last night, my determined man.”

The Portuguese Captain laughed in a cool way, and with the flat of his cutlass, hit me crosswise, as if I was the bough of a tree that he played with: first on the face, and then across the chest and the wounded arm. I looked him steady in the face without tumbling while he looked at me, I am happy to say; but, when they went away, I fell, and lay there.

The sun was up, when I was roused and told to come down to the beach and be embarked. I was full of aches and pains, and could not at first remember; but, I remembered quite soon enough. The killed were lying about all over the place, and the Pirates were burying their dead, and taking away their wounded on hastily-made litters, to the back of the Island. As for us prisoners, some of their boats had come round to the usual harbour, to carry us off. We looked a wretched few, I thought,

when I got down there; still, it was another sign that we had fought well, and made the enemy suffer.

The Portuguese Captain had all the women already embarked in the boat he himself commanded, which was just putting off when I got down. Miss Maryon sat on one side of him, and gave me a moment’s look, as full of quiet courage, and pity, and confidence, as if it had been an hour long. On the other side of him was poor little Mrs. Fisher, weeping for her child and her mother. I was shoved into the same boat with Drooce and Packer, and the remainder of our party of marines: of whom we had lost two privates, besides Charker, my poor, brave comrade. We all made a melancholy passage, under the hot sun over to the mainland. There, we landed in a solitary place, and were mustered on the sea sand. Mr. and Mrs. Macey and their children were amongst us, Mr. and Mrs. Pordage, Mr. Kitten, Mr. Fisher, and Mrs. Belltott. We mustered only fourteen men, fifteen women, and seven children. Those were all that remained of the English who had lain down to sleep last night, unsuspecting and happy, on the Island of Silver-Store.

CHAPTER III*
THE RAFTS ON THE RIVER

WE CONTRIVED TO KEEP afloat all that night, and, the stream running strong with us, to glide a long way down the river. But, we found the night to be a dangerous time for such navigation, on account of the eddies and rapids, and it was therefore settled next day that in future we would bring-to at sunset, and encamp on the shore. As we knew of no boats that the Pirates possessed, up at the Prison in the Woods, we settled always to encamp on the opposite side of the stream, so as to have the breadth of the river between our sleep and them. Our opinion was, that if they were acquainted with any near way by land to the mouth of this river, they would come up it in force, and retake us or kill us, according as they could; but that if that was not the case, and if the river ran by none of their secret stations, we might escape.

*Dicken's didn't write the second chapter and it is omitted in this edition. In it the prisoners are firstly made a ransom of for the treasure left on the Island and then manage to escape from the Pirates.

When I say we settled this or that, I do not mean that we planned anything with any confidence as to what might happen an hour hence. So much had happened in one night, and such great changes had been violently and suddenly made in the fortunes of many among us, that we had got better used to uncertainty, in a little while, than I dare say most people do in the course of their lives.

The difficulties we soon got into, through the off-settings and point-currents of the stream, made the likelihood of our being drowned, alone,—to say nothing of our being retaken—as broad and plain as the sun at noonday to all of us. But, we all worked hard at managing the rafts, under the direction of the seamen (of our own skill, I think we never could have prevented them from oversetting), and we also worked hard at making good the defects in their first hasty construction—which the water soon found out. While we humbly resigned ourselves to going down, if it was the will of Our Father that was in Heaven, we humbly made up our minds, that we would all do the best that was in us.

And so we held on, gliding with the stream. It drove us to this bank, and it drove us to that bank, and it turned us, and

whirled us; but yet it carried us on. Sometimes much too slowly; sometimes much too fast, but yet it carried us on.

My little deaf and dumb boy slumbered a good deal now, and that was the case with all the children. They caused very little trouble to any one. They seemed, in my eyes, to get more like one another, not only in quiet manner, but in the face, too. The motion of the raft was usually so much the same, the scene was usually so much the same, the sound of the soft wash and ripple of the water was usually so much the same, that they were made drowsy, as they might have been by the constant playing of one tune. Even on the grown people, who worked hard and felt anxiety, the same things produced something of the same effect. Every day was so like the other, that I soon lost count of the days, myself, and had to ask Miss Maryon, for instance, whether this was the third or fourth? Miss Maryon had a pocket-book and pencil, and she kept the log; that is to say, she entered up a clear little journal of the time, and of the distances our seamen thought we had made, each night.

So, as I say, we kept afloat and glided on. All day long, and every day, the water, and the woods, and sky; all day long, and every day, the constant watching of both sides of the river,

and far a-head at every bold turn and sweep it made, for any signs of Pirate-boats, or Pirate-dwellings. So, as I say, we kept afloat and glided on. The days melting themselves together to that degree, that I could hardly believe my ears when I asked "How many now, Miss?" and she answered "Seven."

To be sure, poor Mr. Pordage had, by about now, got his Diplomatic coat into such a state as never was seen. What with the mud of the river, what with the water of the river, what with the sun, and the dews, and the tearing boughs, and the thickets, it hung about him in discoloured shreds like a mop. The sun had touched him a bit. He had taken to always polishing one particular button, which just held on to his left wrist, and to always calling for stationery. I suppose that man called for pens, ink, and paper, tape, and scaling-wax, upwards of one thousand times in four-and-twenty hours. He had an idea that we should never get out of that river unless we were written out of it in a formal Memorandum; and the more we laboured at navigating the rafts, the more he ordered us not to touch them at our peril, and the more he sat and roared for stationery.

Mrs. Pordage, similarly, persisted in wearing her nightcap. I doubt if any one but ourselves who had seen the progress of

The Perils of Certain English Prisoners

that article of dress, could by this time have told what it was meant for. It had got so limp and ragged that she couldn't see out of her eyes for it. It was so dirty, that whether it was vegetable matter out of a swamp, or weeds out of the river, or an old porter's-knot from England, I don't think any new spectator could have said. Yet, this unfortunate old woman had a notion that it was not only vastly genteel, but that it was the correct thing as to propriety. And she really did carry herself over the other ladies who had no nightcaps, and who were forced to tie up their hair how they could, in a superior manner that was perfectly amazing.

I don't know what she looked like, sitting in that blessed nightcap, on a log of wood, outside the hut or cabin upon our raft. She would have rather resembled a fortune-teller in one of the picture-books that used to be in the shop windows in my boyhood, except for her stateliness. But, Lord bless my heart, the dignity with which she sat and moped, with her head in that bundle of tatters, was like nothing else in the world! She was not on speaking terms with more than three of the ladies. Some of them had, what she called, "taken precedence" of her—in getting into, or out of, that miserable little shelter!—and others had

not called to pay their respects, or something of that kind. So, there she sat, in her own state and ceremony, while her husband sat on the same log of wood, ordering us one and all to let the raft go to the bottom, and to bring him stationery.

What with this noise on the part of Mr. Commissioner Pordage, and what with the cries of Sergeant Drooce on the raft astern (which were sometimes more than Tom Packer could silence), we often made our slow way down the river, anything but quietly. Yet, that it was of great importance that no ears should be able to hear us from the woods on the banks, could not be doubted. We were looked for, to a certainty, and we might be retaken at any moment. It was an anxious time; it was, indeed, indeed, an anxious time.

On the seventh night of our voyage on the rafts, we made fast, as usual, on the opposite side of the river to that from which we had started, in as dark a place as we could pick out. Our little encampment was soon made, and supper was eaten, and the children fell asleep. The watch was set, and everything made orderly for the night. Such a starlight night, with such blue in the sky, and such black in the places of heavy shade on the banks of the great stream!

Those two ladies, Miss Maryon and Mrs. Fisher, had always kept near me since the night of the attack. Mr. Fisher, who was untiring in the work of our raft, had said to me:

“My dear little childless wife has grown so attached to you, Davis, and you are such a gentle fellow, as well as such a determined one;” our party had adopted that last expression from the one-eyed English pirate, and I repeat what Mr. Fisher said, only because he said it; “that it takes a load off my mind to leave her in your charge.”

I said to him: “Your lady is in far better charge than mine, Sir, having Miss Maryon to take care of her; but, you may rely upon it, that I will guard them both—faithful and true.”

Says he: “I do rely upon it, Davis, and I heartily wish all the silver on our old Island was yours.”

That seventh starlight night, as I have said, we made our camp, and got our supper, and set our watch, and the children fell asleep. It was solemn and beautiful in those wild and solitary parts, to see them, every night before they lay down, kneeling under the bright sky, saying their little prayers at women’s laps. At that time we men all uncovered, and mostly kept at a distance. When the innocent creatures rose up, we murmured

“Amen!” all together. For, though we had not heard what they said, we know it must be good for us.

At that time, too, as was only natural, those poor mothers in our company, whose children had been killed, shed many tears. I thought the sight seemed to console them while it made them cry; but, whether I was right or wrong in that, they wept very much. On this seventh night, Mrs. Fisher had cried for her lost darling until she cried herself asleep. She was lying on a little couch of leaves and such-like (I made the best little couch I could for them every night), and Miss Maryon had covered her, and sat by her, holding her hand. The stars looked down upon them. As for me, I guarded them.

“Davis!” says Miss Maryon. (I am not going to say what a voice she had. I couldn’t if I tried.)

“I am here, Miss.”

“The river sounds as if it were swollen to-night.”

“We all think, Miss, that we are coming near the sea.”

“Do you believe now, we shall escape?”

“I do now, Miss, really believe it.” I had always said I did; but, I had in my own mind been doubtful.

“How glad you will be, my good Davis, to see England again!”

The Perils of Certain English Prisoners

I have another confession to make that will appear singular. When she said these words, something rose in my throat; and the stars I looked away at, seemed to break into sparkles that fell down my face and burnt it.

“England is not much to me, Miss, except as a name.”

“O, so true an Englishman should not say that!—Are you not well to-night, Davis?” Very kindly, and with a quick change.

“Quite well, Miss.”

“Are you sure? Your voice sounds altered in my hearing.”

“No, Miss, I am a stronger man than ever. But, England is nothing to me.”

Miss Maryon sat silent for so long a while, that I believed she had done speaking to me for one time. However, she had not; for by-and-by she said in a distinct clear tone:

“No, good friend; you must not say that England is nothing to you. It is to be much to you, yet—everything to you. You have to take back to England the good name you have earned here, and the gratitude and attachment and respect you have won here: and you have to make some good English girl very happy and proud, by marrying her; and I shall one day see her, I hope, and make her happier and prouder still, by telling

her what noble services her husband’s were in South America, and what a noble friend he was to me there.”

Though she spoke these kind words in a cheering manner, she spoke them compassionately. I said nothing. It will appear to be another strange confession, that I paced to and fro, within call, all that night, a most unhappy man, reproaching myself all the night long. “You are as ignorant as any man alive; you are as obscure as any man alive; you are as poor as any man alive; you are no better than the mud under your foot.” That was the way in which I went on against myself until the morning.

With the day, came the day’s labour. What I should have done—without the labour, I don’t know. We were afloat again at the usual hour, and were again making our way down the river. It was broader, and clearer of obstructions than it had been, and it seemed to flow faster. This was one of Drooce’s quiet days; Mr. Pordage, besides being sulky, had almost lost his voice; and we made good way, and with little noise.

There was always a seaman forward on the raft, keeping a bright look-out. Suddenly, in the full heat of the day, when the children were slumbering, and the very trees and reeds appeared to be slumbering, this man—it was Short—holds up

his hand, and cries with great caution: “Avast! Voices ahead!”

We held on against the stream as soon as we could bring her up, and the other raft followed suit. At first, Mr. Macey, Mr. Fisher, and myself, could hear nothing; though both the seamen aboard of us agreed that they could hear voices and oars. After a little pause, however, we united in thinking that we could hear the sound of voices, and the dip of oars. But, you can hear a long way in those countries, and there was a bend of the river before us, and nothing was to be seen except such waters and such banks as we were now in the eighth day (and might, for the matter of our feelings, have been in the eightieth), of having seen with anxious eyes.

It was soon decided to put a man ashore, who should creep through the wood, see what was coming, and warn the rafts. The rafts in the meantime to keep the middle of the stream. The man to be put ashore, and not to swim ashore, as the first thing could be more quickly done than the second. The raft conveying him, to get back into mid-stream, and to hold on along with the other, as well as it could, until signalled by the man. In case of danger, the man to shift for himself until it should be safe to take him on board again. I volunteered to be the man.

We knew that the voices and oars must come up slowly against the stream; and our seamen knew, by the set of the stream, under which bank they would come. I was put ashore accordingly. The raft got off well, and I broke into the wood.

Steaming hot it was, and a tearing place to get through. So much the better for me, since it was something to contend against and do. I cut off the bend of the river, at a great saving of space, came to the water’s edge again, and hid myself, and waited. I could now hear the dip of the oars very distinctly; the voices had ceased.

The sound came on in a regular tune, and as I lay hidden, I fancied the tune so played to be, “Chris’en—George—King! Chris’en—George—King! Chris’en—George—King!” over and over again, always the same, with the pauses always at the same places. I had likewise time to make up my mind that if these were the Pirates, I could and would (barring my being shot) swim off to my raft, in spite of my wound, the moment I had given the alarm, and hold my old post by Miss Maryon.

“Chris’en—George—King! Chris’en—George—King! Chris’en—George—King!” coming up, now, very near.

I took a look at the branches about me, to see where a

The Perils of Certain English Prisoners

shower of bullets would be most likely to do me least hurt; and I took a look back at the track I had made in forcing my way in; and now I was wholly prepared and fully ready for them.

“Chris’en—George—King! Chris’en—George—King! Chris’en—George—King!” Here they are!

Who were they? The barbarous Pirates, scum of all nations, headed by such men as the hideous little Portuguese monkey, and the one-eyed English convict with the gash across his face, that ought to have gashed his wicked head off? The worst men in the world picked out from the worst, to do the cruellest and most atrocious deeds that ever stained it? The howling, murdering, black-flag waving, mad, and drunken crowd of devils that had overcome us by numbers and by treachery? No. These were English men in English boats—good blue-jackets and red-coats—marines that I knew myself, and sailors that knew our seamen! At the helm of the first boat, Captain Carton, eager and steady. At the helm of the second boat, Captain Maryon, brave and bold. At the helm of the third boat, an old seaman, with determination carved into his watchful face, like the figure-head of a ship. Every man doubly and trebly armed from head to foot. Every man lying-to at his work, with a will

that had all his heart and soul in it. Every man looking out for any trace of friend or enemy, and burning to be the first to do good or avenge evil. Every man with his face on fire when he saw me, his countryman who had been taken prisoner, and hailed me with a cheer, as Captain Carton’s boat ran in and took me on board.

I reported, “All escaped, sir! All well, all safe, all here!”

God bless me—and God bless them—what a cheer! It turned me weak, as I was passed on from hand to hand to the stern of the boat: every hand patting me or grasping me in some way or other, in the moment of my going by.

“Hold up, my brave fellow,” says Captain Carton, clapping me on the shoulder like a friend, and giving me a flask. “Put your lips to that, and they’ll be red again. Now, boys, give way!”

The banks flew by us as if the mightiest stream that ever ran was with us; and so it was, I am sure, meaning the stream to those men’s ardour and spirit. The banks flew by us, and we came in sight of the rafts—the banks flew by us, and we came alongside of the rafts—the banks stopped; and there was a tumult of laughing and crying, and kissing and shaking of hands,

and catching up of children and setting of them down again, and a wild hurry of thankfulness and joy that melted every one and softened all hearts.

I had taken notice, in Captain Carton's boat, that there was a curious and quite new sort of fitting on board. It was a kind of a little bower made of flowers, and it was set up behind the captain, and betwixt him and the rudder. Not only was this arbour, so to call it, neatly made of flowers, but it was ornamented in a singular way. Some of the men had taken the ribbons and buckles off their hats, and hung them among the flowers; others had made festoons and streamers of their handkerchiefs, and hung them there; others had intermixed such trifles as bits of glass and shining fragments of locket and tobacco-boxes with the flowers; so that altogether it was a very bright and lively object in the sunshine. But why there, or what for, I did not understand.

Now, as soon as the first bewilderment was over, Captain Carton gave the order to land for the present. But this boat of his, with two hands left in her, immediately put off again when the men were out of her, and kept off, some yards from the shore. As she floated there, with the two hands gently backing

water to keep her from going down the stream, this pretty little arbour attracted many eyes. None of the boat's crew, however, had anything to say about it, except that it was the captain's fancy.

The captain—with the women and children clustering round him, and the men of all ranks grouped outside them, and all listening—stood telling how the Expedition, deceived by its bad intelligence, had chased the light Pirate boats all that fatal night, and had still followed in their wake next day, and had never suspected until many hours too late that the great Pirate body had drawn off in the darkness when the chase began, and shot over to the Island. He stood telling how the Expedition, supposing the whole array of armed boats to be ahead of it, got tempted into shallows and went aground; but not without having its revenge upon the two decoy-boats, both of which it had come up with, overhand, and sent to the bottom with all on board. He stood telling how the Expedition, fearing then that the case stood as it did, got afloat again, by great exertion, after the loss of four more tides, and returned to the Island, where they found the sloop scuttled and the treasure gone. He stood telling how my officer, Lieutenant Linderwood, was left

The Perils of Certain English Prisoners

upon the Island, with as strong a force as could be got together hurriedly from the mainland, and how the three boats we saw before us were manned and armed and had come away, exploring the coast and inlets, in search of any tidings of us. He stood telling all this, with his face to the river; and, as he stood telling it, the little arbour of flowers floated in the sunshine before all the faces there.

Leaning on Captain Carton's shoulder, between him and Miss Maryon, was Mrs. Fisher, her head drooping on her arm. She asked him, without raising it, when he had told so much, whether he had found her mother?

"Be comforted! She lies," said the Captain gently, "under the cocoa-nut trees on the beach."

"And my child, Captain Carton, did you find my child, too? Does my darling rest with my mother?"

"No. Your pretty child sleeps," said the Captain, "under a shade of flowers."

His voice shook; but there was something in it that struck all the hearers. At that moment there sprung from the arbour in his boat a little creature, clapping her hands and stretching out her arms, and crying, "Dear papa! Dear mamma! I am not

killed. I am saved. I am coming to kiss you. Take me to them, take me to them, good, kind sailors!"

Nobody who saw that scene has ever forgotten it, I am sure, or ever will forget it. The child had kept quite still, where her brave grandmamma had put her (first whispering in her ear, "Whatever happens to me, do not stir, my dear!"), and had remained quiet until the fort was deserted; she had then crept out of the trench, and gone into her mother's house; and there, alone on the solitary Island, in her mother's room, and asleep on her mother's bed, the Captain had found her. Nothing could induce her to be parted from him after he took her up in his arms, and he had brought her away with him, and the men had made the bower for her. To see those men now, was a sight. The joy of the women was beautiful; the joy of those women who had lost their own children, was quite sacred and divine; but, the ecstasies of Captain Carton's boat's crew, when their pet was restored to her parents, were wonderful for the tenderness they showed in the midst of roughness. As the Captain stood with the child in his arms, and the child's own little arms now clinging round his neck, now round her father's, now round her mother's, now round some one who pressed

up to kiss her, the boat's crew shook hands with one another, waved their hats over their heads, laughed, sang, cried, danced—and all among themselves, without wanting to interfere with anybody—in a manner never to be represented. At last, I saw the coxswain and another, two very hard-faced men, with grizzled heads, who had been the heartiest of the hearty all along, close with one another, get each of them the other's head under his arm, and pommel away at it with his fist as hard as he could, in his excess of joy.

When we had well rested and refreshed ourselves—and very glad we were to have some of the heartening things to eat and drink that had come up in the boats—we recommenced our voyage down the river: rafts, and boats, and all. I said to myself, it was a very different kind of voyage now, from what it had been; and I fell into my proper place and station among my fellow-soldiers.

But, when we halted for the night, I found that Miss Maryon had spoken to Captain Carton concerning me. For, the Captain came straight up to me, and says he, “My brave fellow, you have been Miss Maryon's body-guard all along, and you shall remain so. Nobody shall supersede you in the distinction

and pleasure of protecting that young lady.” I thanked his honour in the fittest words I could find, and that night I was placed on my old post of watching the place where she slept. More than once in the night, I saw Captain Carton come out into the air, and stroll about there, to see that all was well. I have now this other singular confession to make, that I saw him with a heavy heart. Yes; I saw him with a heavy, heavy heart.

In the day-time, I had the like post in Captain Carton's boat. I had a special station of my own, behind Miss Maryon, and no hands but hers ever touched my wound. (It has been healed these many long years; but, no other hands have ever touched it.) Mr. Pordage was kept tolerably quiet now, with pen and ink, and began to pick up his senses a little. Seated in the second boat, he made documents with Mr. Kitten, pretty well all day; and he generally handed in a Protest about something whenever we stopped. The Captain, however, made so very light of these papers, that it grew into a saying among the men, when one of them wanted a match for his pipe, “Hand us over a Protest, Jack!” As to Mrs. Pordage, she still wore the night-cap, and she now had cut all the ladies on account of her not having been formally and separately rescued by Captain Car-

ton before anybody else. The end of Mr. Pordage, to bring to an end all I know about him, was, that he got great compliments at home for his conduct on these trying occasions, and that he died of yellow jaundice, a Governor and a K.C.B.

Sergeant Drooce had fallen from a high fever into a low one. Tom Packer—the only man who could have pulled the Sergeant through it—kept hospital aboard the old raft, and Mrs. Belltott, as brisk as ever again (but the spirit of that little woman, when things tried it, was not equal to appearances), was head-nurse under his directions. Before we got down to the Mosquito coast, the joke had been made by one of our men, that we should see her gazetted Mrs. Tom Packer, vice Belltott exchanged.

When we reached the coast, we got native boats as substitutes for the rafts; and we rowed along under the land; and in that beautiful climate, and upon that beautiful water, the blooming days were like enchantment. Ah! They were running away, faster than any sea or river, and there was no tide to bring them back. We were coming very near the settlement where the people of Silver-Store were to be left, and from which we Marines were under orders to return to Belize.

Captain Carton had, in the boat by him, a curious long-barrelled Spanish gun, and he had said to Miss Maryon one day that it was the best of guns, and had turned his head to me, and said:

“Gill Davis, load her fresh with a couple of slugs, against a chance of showing how good she is.”

So, I had discharged the gun over the sea, and had loaded her, according to orders, and there it had lain at the Captain’s feet, convenient to the Captain’s hand.

The last day but one of our journey was an uncommonly hot day. We started very early; but, there was no cool air on the sea as the day got on, and by noon the heat was really hard to bear, considering that there were women and children to bear it. Now, we happened to open, just at that time, a very pleasant little cove or bay, where there was a deep shade from a great growth of trees. Now, the Captain, therefore, made the signal to the other boats to follow him in and lie by a while.

The men who were off duty went ashore, and lay down, but were ordered, for caution’s sake, not to stray, and to keep within view. The others rested on their oars, and dozed. Awnings had been made of one thing and another, in all the boats,

and the passengers found it cooler to be under them in the shade, when there was room enough, than to be in the thick woods. So, the passengers were all afloat, and mostly sleeping. I kept my post behind Miss Maryon, and she was on Captain Carton's right in the boat, and Mrs. Fisher sat on her right again. The Captain had Mrs. Fisher's daughter on his knee. He and the two ladies were talking about the Pirates, and were talking softly; partly, because people do talk softly under such indolent circumstances, and partly because the little girl had gone off asleep.

I think I have before given it out for my Lady to write down, that Captain Carton had a fine bright eye of his own. All at once, he darted me a side look, as much as to say, "Steady—don't take on—I see something!"—and gave the child into her mother's arms. That eye of his was so easy to understand, that I obeyed it by not so much as looking either to the right or to the left out of a corner of my own, or changing my attitude the least trifle. The Captain went on talking in the same mild and easy way; but began—with his arms resting across his knees, and his head a little hanging forward, as if the heat were rather too much for him—began to play with the Spanish gun.

"They had laid their plans, you see," says the Captain, taking up the Spanish gun across his knees, and looking, lazily, at the inlaying on the stock, "with a great deal of art; and the corrupt or blundering local authorities were so easily deceived;" he ran his left hand idly along the barrel, but I saw, with my breath held, that he covered the action of cocking the gun with his right—"so easily deceived, that they summoned us out to come into the trap. But my intention as to future operations—" In a flash the Spanish gun was at his bright eye, and he fired.

All started up; innumerable echoes repeated the sound of the discharge; a cloud of bright-coloured birds flew out of the woods screaming; a handful of leaves were scattered in the place where the shot had struck; a crackling of branches was heard; and some lithe but heavy creature sprang into the air, and fell forward, head down, over the muddy bank.

"What is it?" cries Captain Maryon from his boat. All silent then, but the echoes rolling away.

"It is a Traitor and a Spy," said Captain Carton, handing me the gun to load again. "And I think the other name of the animal is Christian George King!"

Shot through the heart. Some of the people ran round to the

The Perils of Certain English Prisoners

spot, and drew him out, with the slime and wet trickling down his face; but his face itself would never stir any more to the end of time.

“Leave him hanging to that tree,” cried Captain Carton; his boat’s crew giving way, and he leaping ashore. “But first into this wood, every man in his place. And boats! Out of gunshot!”

It was a quick change, well meant and well made, though it ended in disappointment. No Pirates were there; no one but the Spy was found. It was supposed that the Pirates, unable to retake us, and expecting a great attack upon them to be the consequence of our escape, had made from the ruins in the Forest, taken to their ship along with the Treasure, and left the Spy to pick up what intelligence he could. In the evening we went away, and he was left hanging to the tree, all alone, with the red sun making a kind of a dead sunset on his black face.

Next day, we gained the settlement on the Mosquito coast for which we were bound. Having stayed there to refresh seven days, and having been much commended, and highly spoken of, and finely entertained, we Marines stood under orders to march from the Town-Gate (it was neither much of a town nor much of a gate), at five in the morning.

My officer had joined us before then. When we turned out at the gate, all the people were there; in the front of them all those who had been our fellow-prisoners, and all the seamen.

“Davis,” says Lieutenant Linderwood. “Stand out, my friend!”

I stood out from the ranks, and Miss Maryon and Captain Carton came up to me.

“Dear Davis,” says Miss Maryon, while the tears fell fast down her face, “your grateful friends, in most unwillingly taking leave of you, ask the favour that, while you bear away with you their affectionate remembrance, which nothing can ever impair, you will also take this purse of money—far more valuable to you, we all know, for the deep attachment and thankfulness with which it is offered, than for its own contents, though we hope those may prove useful to you, too, in after life.”

I got out, in answer, that I thankfully accepted the attachment and affection, but not the money. Captain Carton looked at me very attentively, and stepped back, and moved away. I made him my bow as he stepped back, to thank him for being so delicate.

“No, miss,” said I, “I think it would break my heart to accept of money. But, if you could condescend to give to a man

so ignorant and common as myself, any little thing you have worn—such as a bit of ribbon—”

She took a ring from her finger, and put it in my hand. And she rested her hand in mine, while she said these words:

“The brave gentlemen of old—but not one of them was braver, or had a nobler nature than you—took such gifts from ladies, and did all their good actions for the givers’ sakes. If you will do yours for mine, I shall think with pride that I continue to have some share in the life of a gallant and generous man.”

For the second time in my life she kissed my hand. I made so bold, for the first time, as to kiss hers; and I tied the ring at my breast, and I fell back to my place.

Then, the horse-litter went out at the gate with Sergeant Drooce in it; and the horse-litter went out at the gate with Mrs. Belltott in it; and Lieutenant Linderwood gave the word of command, “Quick march!” and, cheered and cried for, we went out of the gate too, marching along the level plain towards the serene blue sky, as if we were marching straight to Heaven.

When I have added here that the Pirate scheme was blown to shivers, by the Pirate-ship which had the Treasure on board

being so vigorously attacked by one of His Majesty’s cruisers, among the West India Keys, and being so swiftly boarded and carried, that nobody suspected anything about the scheme until three-fourths of the Pirates were killed, and the other fourth were in irons, and the Treasure was recovered; I come to the last singular confession I have got to make.

It is this. I well knew what an immense and hopeless distance there was between me and Miss Maryon; I well knew that I was no fitter company for her than I was for the angels; I well knew, that she was as high above my reach as the sky over my head; and yet I loved her. What put it in my low heart to be so daring, or whether such a thing ever happened before or since, as that a man so uninstructed and obscure as myself got his unhappy thoughts lifted up to such a height, while knowing very well how presumptuous and impossible to be realised they were, I am unable to say; still, the suffering to me was just as great as if I had been a gentleman. I suffered agony—agony. I suffered hard, and I suffered long. I thought of her last words to me, however, and I never disgraced them. If it had not been for those dear words, I think I should have lost myself in despair and recklessness.

The Perils of Certain English Prisoners

The ring will be found lying on my heart, of course, and will be laid with me wherever I am laid. I am getting on in years now, though I am able and hearty. I was recommended for promotion, and everything was done to reward me that could be done; but my total want of all learning stood in my way, and I found myself so completely out of the road to it that I could not conquer any learning, though I tried. I was long in the service, and I respected it, and was respected in it, and the service is dear to me at this present hour.

At this present hour, when I give this out to my Lady to be written down, all my old pain has softened away, and I am as happy as a man can be, at this present fine old country-house of Admiral Sir George Carton, Baronet. It was my Lady Carton who herself sought me out, over a great many miles of the wide world, and found me in Hospital wounded, and brought me here. It is my Lady Carton who writes down my words. My Lady was Miss Maryon. And now, that I conclude what I had to tell, I see my Lady's honoured gray hair droop over her face, as she leans a little lower at her desk; and I fervently thank her for being so tender as I see she is, towards the past pain and trouble of her poor, old, faithful, humble soldier.



This is a Nose Silo Ebook