

The Sea Scourge

CHAPTER XVIII.—(Continued.)

"There is another estate further up the river, I believe?" resumed Fox.

"Yes," answered Marl; "there is one ten miles up, owned by Lopez Garonne. I say ten miles up—I mean his boundary is there. His dwelling is over fifteen miles."

"I thought I should go up there." Laroon would have asked more questions, but at this juncture the meal was prepared and the guest moved to the table.

The pirate captain had noticed not only some peculiarities in the voice and face of his guest, but the effect that had been produced on Paul. He had seen it all, even to a look which Mary herself gave the newcomer. After the man had taken his seat at the table, Laroon commenced to pace up and down the room, and when he was where he could look upon his guest's face, he did so most keenly. At length he stopped in his walk and beckoned for Paul to follow him, at the same time taking a lighted candle from the mantel and leaving the room.

Just as the youth closed the door after him the guest had finished his repast, and with a quick, decided movement, he arose and moved close to Mary's side. The maiden did not shrink from him nor shudder, for there was something so naturally kind in his countenance, and then he wore such an appearance of modesty and goodness that she felt rather drawn toward him by some inward force.

"You are a child of Mr. Laroon?" he said, inquiringly, as he sat down by her side.

"I am—am—yes, I suppose a ward," the maiden answered, with some embarrassment.

"But not a very happy one, I should say," remarked the man, at the same time placing his hand upon her shoulder.

"I have been sick, sir," said Mary, feeling sure that he alluded to her looks.

"Ah; a physical, bodily ailment? Then your mind is well. In spirit and soul you are at peace."

Mary started and gazed fixedly into the man's face. There was something like a smile upon it, but it was a very sad and melancholy one.

"Mayhap I know not your meaning," she at length murmured. She could not feel offended with him, for his very look and tone forbade it.

The guest cast his eyes about the room, as if to assure himself that they two were alone together, and then said:

"I have been informed of some circumstances which led me to suppose that you were not very happy here. Have I been informed correctly?"

Mary burst into tears. The question touched upon a spring that opened every wound afresh.

The stranger drew one of her small, white hands within his own, and then he drew her head upon his bosom. It was a very strange movement, but Mary did not resist it. No, she pillowed her head there as though it were her home, nor did she seem to think that he was a stranger who thus supported her.

"Weep not now, my child," he said, in tones as sweet as a mother's voice. "If the pi—captain should return and find you thus, he would wonder at it."

"And do you know, then, my guardian's character?" asked Mary, raising her head quickly, and speaking earnestly.

"I do know Marl Laroon well, and I know his business. But let that drop where it is. I can perhaps help you."

"And you have known me before?" uttered Mary, half imploringly.

"Not exactly; but I think I have known those who did once know you. I promised a person that if ever I came across you, I would help you if it lay in my power, and I suppose I must now keep my promise."

"What do you know of me or mine? Oh, tell me if you can!"

"—ah! Here comes Laroon. I know nothing that would benefit you now to know. But take hope, I must leave you in the morning, but I shall return. I have come all the way here only to help you, and I tell you thus early of my mission that you may have more to hope for. Be careful now, and do not let him see that you have learned anything. All may depend upon your secrecy and care."

And so saying, he resumed his seat, awaiting the appearance of Laroon.

CHAPTER XIX.

When Laroon called Paul out from the room where the guest was eating, he went at once to a private apartment, and closed the door. Paul wondered what all this meant, for the pirate showed by his countenance that he had some purpose in it. After they had gained this place, Marl walked up and down the room several times before he spoke, and during that time he seemed to be in nervous thought.

"Paul," he said at length, stopping in front of the wondering youth, "you have noticed that man who is now in the room we have just left?"

"Yes," returned the youth, looking up with an expression of curiosity.

"Do you think you have ever seen him before?" resumed the captain, carefully. "Is there not something familiar about his face and voice?"

"There is, certainly," returned Paul, after a moment's thought. "There is something about him that calls up a recollection in my mind, but it has no form or feature. But why should you ask me?"

"Because I thought you might possibly help me out with the puzzle."

"But who do you think he is?"

Laroon did not answer this question at once, for it evidently took him unprepared; but he soon surmounted the difficulty and said:

"Ah, I do now remember a Mr. Fox

who lived close by your father's; I think that must be it."

"That would seem the most reasonable to me," added Paul, "for if I had ever seen him before it must be as you suggest."

"That's it," resumed Laroon, starting across the room. "That's it," he repeated, as he came back. "You may return now."

Paul left the room, and as soon as he was gone the pirate captain commenced to pace the floor.

"It may be all accident—his coming here. But he will know us—he will know us, unless I am mistaken in the man. But I will make myself sure. I can do that, at all events."

As he spoke thus, his countenance brightened, and soon afterwards he rejoined his guest.

But there was one other person in that room who watched the countenances of all with more than ordinary interest, and who surely did so to some effect if the changes of her own face could have been seen. This was Oteheva. She had slipped into the room unperceived by all save Mary, when the guest's supper had been brought in; and when he revealed his business to Mary, she had been so far behind the projection of the jamb of the fireplace that he did not notice her. She had heard all, and she had seen all; but most particularly now did she watch the movements of Marl Laroon, for she read his thoughts in his looks. Only Mary knew the girl, and even she did not know all her wondrous powers of perception and ingenuity. So Marl Laroon's secret thoughts were not his own, and even a mystic form that floated in the stranger guest's soul was not his alone. Into his soul the girl had probed with her strange wand, and she read that night a new and holy truth.

At length the hour grew late, and the stranger asked for rest. Old Hagar was sent out to conduct him to his room, and in this Oteheva read a warning which others saw not. James Fox arose, and having bid the company good-night, he followed the old woman from the room. It was late for Mary to be up, and she and Oteheva also left. Paul had nothing now to detain him, and he, too, sought his own room. And Marl Laroon was left alone. He gazed about him, and a shudder crept through his frame.

"Why did he come?"

So spoke the dark man to himself, and then he walked away into the darkness, and back again. Then he stood still and repeated the question. He gazed about him, and he saw the dim specters floating about in the dim corners of the room. They were men and women whom he had murdered. And he saw another specter—and he covered his face with his hands. Soon he started up, and his fists were clenched, and with the right one he smote his breast.

"Why did he come?"

And as the words echoed through the high place an answer seemed to come back:

"Vengeance!"

And again the sweat stood cold and heavy upon the dark man's brow. He saw two children—two laughing, prattling, gleesome children—and he remembered that cold, wet, cheerless day when he fled with them to Boston. He remembered the Cross-Hands Inn, and the night he spent there. He remembered when he went up to his bed that night—how he saw the children asleep—the boy with a stern, sorrowful face, and the girl with a calm, confiding smile. He remembered how that tiny white arm was thrown over the boy's neck, and how the boy's hand rested protectively upon her shoulder.

And Marl Laroon is an old man—old, at least, in crime and trials. Only forty years have passed to his debt in the great life book, but see how laden with accounts those years are! See the lines of silver already in his hair, and the lines of woe already on his brow. And Marl Laroon thinks of those children now, as they have just left him, and for the moment a softer shade rests upon his dark face. Not once in all these years has that boy done him harm by word or deed—and not once in all the while has the girl given him cause for complaint, until the past few days. He sees them the only pure things he has about him, and they would flee from him. Why is it so? Too well he knows. But the thought comes to his mind, and he speaks again to himself:

"She shall be mine!"

Then he starts away again and penetrates the gloom, and when he turns even the lamp itself has changed to a specter, for it is gone, and a hideous-looking object has taken its place. He starts back and clasps his hands in fear, for his mind is not with present things, and he stops not to reason. But soon he sees the lamp again, and the specter has passed away, but not from sight, for it has only moved from before the light and now stands before the smoldering fire.

"Who's there?" he gasps.

"Hagar," is the response.

And the pirate is himself again, for now another incarnate demon is with him; to combat with the dwellers of the unseen world.

"Where did you put our guest?" asked Marl, approaching the woman.

"In the turret chamber."

"And did you nothing more?"

"He asked for water, I gave it him. He will sleep more soundly than he would if he had drunk not."

"But not to danger?"

"No; only for the night. I doubt if he feels it beyond the rising of the sun."

"Good Hagar, then art a very jewel. What shall I pay thee? As much as you want. Come to me on my wedding day. No—hold. On the day after."

"Plenty."

With this assurance the old black hag went away, and Marl Laroon was once more alone. He looked at his watch, and it wanted yet an hour of midnight. Midnight was with him a charmed hour, and he loved to work at that mystic period between two days.

CHAPTER XX.

The turret chamber was so called from being situated below one of the turrets of the building, the other turret being raised upon the center, and consequently over the hall. This chamber was in the southwest corner of the building and overlooked the stream that ran through the yard. In this chamber the stranger guest was put to sleep. There were two doors leading from it, and these he locked before he retired.

It was midnight, and the man slept soundly. He heard no noise—no sound disturbed him. Upon that side of the room near the bed a secret door was opened. It was a door which no stranger could ever have discovered, for it was only one broad panel made to swing back. This panel opened, and Marl Laroon entered the room in his stocking feet. He stood when he first entered, until he heard a low, deep, regular breathing of one in sound sleep, and then he approached the bed. He moved to the head of it, and carefully held up a pocket lantern so that its rays should not fall upon the face. Then he worked down the coverlid and sheet, working as carefully as a mother would handle her sick infant. Then he opened the shirt at its bosom, and soon the broad, full breast was exposed, and there was a deep, heavy scar there, running from the upper point of the collar bone to the center breast. A single instant the pirate looked at the scar, and then he put back the clothing he had removed. He stopped not to examine anything else, but stealthily he glided away from the place, and noiselessly closed the panel after him.

"I knew him at first," he muttered to himself, after he had gained the hall. "Why did he come?"

One long hour the captain walked up and down the wide hall, with the lantern in his hand. Then he went out into the court, and crossed over to the low building against the wall where the male slaves slept. He entered here and awoke a slave named Warda.

"Warda," whispered Marl, "come with me."

The slave threw a blanket over his shoulders, and followed his master out into the court. The rain had ceased falling, and the clouds were fast rolling off, but yet the air was chilly, and the pirate captain entered the building he had left, and pursued his way to the apartment where he had received his guest the night before.

Marl Laroon did not dream that his movements were all watched. He did not see the dark, slight figure that hung upon the steps like a shadow. When he entered the great drawing room he did not notice that through another door a dim figure floated and lay concealed beneath a wide ottoman.

"Warda," commenced Marl, as soon as the door was closed behind him, "did you see the stranger who came here last night?"

"No, master."

"A stranger did come, and he sleeps now in the turret chamber. I think he will leave here to-morrow for the estate of Lopez Garonne. If he does I shall send you to show him the way. Before he reaches Garonne's I would like to have him turn off and visit that place from which man never came back. Do you understand me now?"

"I am sure that you want the man killed."

"Exactly, Warda. And I want it done without mistake. Now, mark me; do this faithfully, and you shall have Oteheva for your wife."

The man clasped his hands with a savage joy, but they fell to his side in a moment more, and in a tone of doubt he said:

"But the young missus won't let me have her."

"As soon as the young mistress is my wife the maid shall be yours; and that will be very soon. Do this for me, faithfully and surely, without a third person's knowing it, and Oteheva shall be yours as I live."

"I'll kill a thousand enemies for you at that price," uttered Warda, with sparkling eyes of vengeful joy.

Long had Warda loved the bright-eyed maid of the Muyscas, but she would not yet be his, for she loved him not, and to protect herself from his importunities she had persuaded Mary to forbid him ever again to molest her maid with his propositions of love. Laroon knew all this, and though Warda would have obeyed him without such reward, yet he knew that such a course would ensure more complete success.

"What weapon will you take?" asked the pirate.

"I'll carry all three," answered the Indian, "the sword, the knife and the pistol; and I'll use what comes handiest. I can perhaps put a pistol to his head and finish him quickest. But he shall die before he reaches Lopez Garonne's. I'll take him in the ravine beyond the bluffs. Nobody will hear a pistol there, and I can throw the body down among the rocks, and it'll be eaten up in a few days."

"Then it is all understood," said Marl. "Now remember; when the stranger—Mr. Fox—is ready to set out, I shall send you with him as his guide. You know the rest."

And so the master and the slave separated, and the master went now to seek his rest. Oteheva crawled out from beneath the ottoman, and having assured herself that the pirate's work for the night was done, she, too, went away to sleep.

(To be continued.)

When an out-of-town widower marries a town girl, the question most frequently asked is, "How old is he?"

A CHOICE SELECTION OF INTERESTING ITEMS.

Comments and Criticisms Based Upon the Happenings of the Day—Historical and News Notes.

A whipped Japanese is a dead Japanese—none other genuine.

We may be shy on wheat, but who cares so long as the apple crop is larger than usual.

There is a growing belief that the term "grand finance" is merely one of the synonyms for grand larceny.

A woman can save a lot of money in matches by keeping the gas burning, so as not to have to light it.

Professor Benbow successfully steered his air ship for 500 yards at St. Louis. But it's a thousand miles to Washington.

Western civilization is permeating China. In another generation it will not be considered a disgrace for a Chinese woman of high rank to stand in a broad footing.

London is getting giddy. The daughter of the Lord Mayor has been jilted by an Egyptian official and somebody exploded a bunch of firecrackers in Westminster Abbey.

Artlessness is held to be the prerogative of childhood. But why should so valuable a jewel be denied older people? Is there any virtue that is really unbecoming an adult?

"Tips to Millionaires" is the title of a magazine article by Israel Zangwill. After Zangwill has been over here a little longer he will learn that all head waiters are not millionaires, even if they do look and act like it.

The Chinese idea of neutrality is shown by the readiness with which they sell provisions to either party upon the production of the price. In his respect the neutrality ideas of the Orient and of the Occident seem to be a full accord.

The man who imagines unionism is only a passing feature of industrialism badly deceived. Unionism is here to stay. And it ought to stay. It may be abused, betimes, but it has accomplished much; not only for labor, but for civilization.

Rawhide, or even leather, if boiled for hours, will make a nutritious soup, says a writer in Country Life in America on the subject of what a man lost in the woods may find to eat. Many a man has bridged the awful gap by boiling his boots, whence the phrase to express the final extreme, "I'll eat my boots first." Mark Twain was once put to this final resort and recorded afterward that "the holes tasted the best."

A housekeepers' club recently organized in an Arizona city opens its meetings by a roll call to which each woman is expected to respond with a tested recipe or a helpful domestic suggestion. The others write them down. Then for an hour the members assist their hostess with her mending, or whatever sewing she may have on hand, and the next hour they devote to their own sewing—fancy work being prohibited. Thus is revived the helpful old fashion of the "sewing bee," so called, doubtless, because the sewing and the buzzing were simultaneous.

"Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori"—thus it has always been and thus it will be so long as international disagreements continue to be settled by resort to arms. Not only do patriots deem it sweet and becoming to die for their country, but the memory of those who fall in defense of flag and country is cherished more sacredly than that of those who achieve the greatest and most beneficent triumphs in the arts of peace. No other fame is so enduring as that of the military hero. On no others are honors so gratefully bestowed. This is demonstrated in the history of the United States quite as conclusively as in that of any other country.

The moment a hero appears and wins men's hearts they set about killing him. If he is a soldier or sailor they dower him with bull pups and buy houses for him, and then turn and rend him when he disposes of them. They set banquets in his honor and compel him to talk at them, and then try him down as a tiresome after-dinner speaker. They nickname him "the Just" and then ostracise him because they get tired of the nickname. In sheer perversity they unearth a tin soldier and hail him as "a bigger man than old Grant." Or they faintly name their idol as "a good old has-been." For his fame it were better often that the man who has deserved well of all men should die while his exploits are great upon him. When you have been made legendary during your life there is nothing left

Last year England imported 210,000 tons of butter. The United States exported about 4,000 tons. These facts leave a fair inference that England offers an open market for more than fifty times as much butter as we are in the habit of exporting. England's purchases of this article from foreign countries and from her colonies amount to about \$100,000,000 a year. Our export sales of it approximate \$1,500,000. England purchased last year about 136,000 tons of cheese. Our total exports were in the vicinity of 8,000 tons, worth about \$2,250,000. Canada, whom we are prone to regard as an economic inferior, exported ten times as much as we did. This leaves a fair inference that there is in England alone a possible market for some \$40,000,000 worth of cheese every year.

There is a story that when Marryat's "Japhet in Search of a Father" was running as a serial the usual signals were neglected by an American and a British boat which met at sea and a substitute appeared in the query, "Has Japhet found his father yet?" That was seventy years ago, and ship loads of books have been written since. Not only was Japhet not the final work of its kind, but tales of adventure have poured forth in amazing quantity and with all the variety that is indicated in the range from a dime novel to Stevenson's "Treasure Island." Furthermore, the public that feasts on these later productions knows little of Japhet. Some readers pick him up by chance, others search him out because they have a curiosity about one of the old authors who was once very popular. Meanwhile the vast majority go after the books of the year and are not conscious that they are losing anything. Possibly, too, there is no loss, but it may be said also that Japhet would answer as well for its purpose now as ever it did. While it falls much below "Treasure Island" in artistic value and considerably below it in sustained interest, it is a lively performance and greatly superior to much of the contemporary literature that has usurped its place. Moreover, when we say superior we include in the idea those elements that make such works popular. People who want just a rattling good story will find it in this diverting narrative. Probably the signaling boat would not be repeated if it were running as a serial now, but it is quite conceivable that it might be celebrated as a book of the year. On the score of fashion alone there would certainly be nothing to prevent, for there is nothing that stamps it as belonging exclusively to a peculiar time or a peculiar mood of the reading public. The new books take its place simply because they are newly published, which is a happy thought for the new author. Each generation must have its own output, including ephemeral stuff that appears and disappears in a single season. And while the critics rage Miss Corelli points with pride to the fact that forty-three tons of paper were used in the first edition of her latest.

Prunes shipped to France.

The glamor of a foreign name is potent in selling comestibles. Many a box of prunes labeled "French" sells at a price that, together with the label, convinces the critical Eastern housewife of the high quality of its contents, and puts it beyond the reach of the boarding house keeper. She buys "California" prunes, to the disgust of her boarders, who, did they but know it, are grumbling over fruit identical in quality with that set before the critical housewife's husband. For the French have a trick that, while reprehensible, reflects credit on our product. At Bordeaux, the real center of the prune trade of the world, the prune crop for 1903 was a failure. California prunes were bought by Bordeaux dealers, who repacked them in attractive form, made them lithographically French, and shipped them back to America.

Albion W. Tourgee, American consul at Bordeaux, is authority for this statement, made in a consular report. He says that the prune crop at Bordeaux last year was only one-twentieth of the normal output; yet in the last six months of the year the dealers there reshipped some \$20,000 worth of California prunes to America, where their supposed origin and their attractive packing found them a ready market.

There is an obvious moral in this, which is that California prune growers should pack their fruit as well as the French do, and make it in every way as tempting in appearance. It might not be a bad plan, either, to put a copy of Conqui Tourgee's report in each box.

—San Francisco Argonaut.

The Old and the New.

"Who were those two women who just registered?" inquired the hotel proprietor.

"Mrs. Mary McGinnis and her daughter, Miss Mayne MacYunes," replied the clerk.—Philadelphia Press.

You are not having an unrestrained, good old time in eating corn off the cob unless you have kernels clear around to the back of your ears.