

FRANK WINSCOMBE'S HEROISM

By FERDY RUSSELL.

[Copyright, 1896, by the Author.] Had it not been for a light breeze that blew refreshingly under the deck...

The Hon. Edward Poulter, who had a special mission to Singapore, was fretting and fuming inwardly that he had ever consented to ship in such a miserable concern as the Kistna merely to save a few days' time...

Emily herself, a sensible looking and fresh complexioned typical English girl, lay back in her deck chair looking very nice, fresh and sweet in her dashing white muslin, gayly trimmed with bright blue ribbons...

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On this particular afternoon in the Indian ocean, during one of the hottest days in the year, this little party had gathered on the poop and found what—"so judge from you," the Hon. Edward Poulter had severely remarked to his wife...

"I am sure you quite puzzle me," and eyes have a language of their own which did not suffer any confusion when the building of the tower of Babel had been abandoned...

"I think," remarked Captain Grant, by way of filling up a pause that now ensued, "that I heard a remark about the sea being monotonous. Well, it is here, as a rule. Perhaps Miss Poulter will do me the honor to look through my glass; it's one of extra power. We'll see if you find anything fresh for us. It's rare to pass anything just hereabouts. Let me hold the glass for you."

"I see nothing. I see nothing at all," she cried. "I was right; the sea is monotonous than the land, ten thousand times over," and she stamped a little feet on the deck with all the vivacity of a playful, spirited child.

Both were on the point of speaking, and both stopped. Winscombe smiled, and his smile was very pleasant. "Ladies first," he said.

"I do believe," she rejoined, "that we were both going to say the same thing."

"And what was that?" "Ah, if I know, you know, and if you know, I know," was the somewhat strange answer.

"I am sure you quite puzzle me, Miss Poulter, but I will be frank, I was going to ask you what you were thinking of."

"I certainly do not agree with that. It has been said that in beauty the world of great waters need not yield the palm of loveliness to the land. The deep has its butterflies as well as the fields, and then look at the countless inhabitants of the ocean. There is, for example, the globe berry, that iridescent creature that is by night phosphorescent and hangs out its living lamps on the waves, and then there are the many voices of the sea."

"What are you two young people talking about so earnestly?" now asked the Hon. Edward Poulter, rising with much staidness and approaching the speakers.

"We were debating, or going to debate, the relative beauty of land and sea."

"And a vera gude subject, too," observed Captain Grant, who had now shoved up his telescope under his arm.

"Not yours, captain," replied Winscombe. "She champions the land, and I the sea, whose azure face reveals the heavens in all their glory."

"I am sure," remarked Mrs. Poulter, roused up by the enthusiasm wherewith the last words were delivered, or rather spouted, "it needs courage to talk like that in this boat."

"Hent, madam," exclaimed Captain Grant. "This is nothing to what we may have yet."

"Then I shall die outright," murmured the lady addressed, closing her eyes like one too exhausted to make another effort.

"You should have more courage, mamma," cried Emily, who was always roused to extra animation when her mother behaved in an unusually foolish way.

"Courage! What is it, I wonder? I don't suppose, child, if you were tried, you'd have any more than me."

"I have often thought," observed Winscombe, "that it would be a most interesting thing if we could collect everybody's real opinion as to what courage is. I don't know, I am sure. In most cases it seems to lead to very different results in those who possess it most."

"Oh!" cried Miss Poulter, and her "Oh!" was more eloquent than a whole speech.

"For my part," observed Captain Grant, "I never think about it at all. I fancy that when a man has to think about it he canna have much of the commodity in himself."

Winscombe smiled, for he detected a shade of contempt in the tone, and, seizing himself out, lazily said: "First at the feast and last at the fray is my motto. I should never run my head into danger. It is not worth while and is far too much trouble."

"Oh, Mr. Winscombe, how can you talk like that," exclaimed both ladies together, "when you jumped in the sea at Aden and saved that poor black man!"

"Did I really? I had forgotten it quite," he laughed and went on: "I suppose it was a foolish impulse; had no time to think, you see. What was the value of the life of that poor black man against mine?"

"You dreadful man!" cried Miss Poulter. "There, I don't believe a word you say. I think you are a lion, there, and she laughed out such a pretty ripple of silver toned laughter and showed at the same time such a pretty little mouth and such dazzling teeth that Winscombe felt thoroughly roused from his lazy lethargy, as which he had given way to his intense desire to tease.

"I fear," he replied, "it is a case of a lamb in a lion's skin, then, only. You—not I—have put it on. I've a great idea of number one, Miss Poulter, and of the advantage of a whole skin. It would take a great deal to induce me to attempt a practical illustration of courage."

shift it a little. Now look again. Is it all emptiness and heat?" "Yes, no. Ah, what's that? Oh, what a funny little ship!" The captain was immediately interested. "Funny little ship," he repeated. "What did the ladies mean?"

"You look, captain," she said, offering him the telescope. He adjusted and looked. He looked so long and such a strange expression came over his face that both Miss Poulter and Winscombe grew serious. They knew not why and waited, feeling a sort of strange suspense as the captain still kept his glass steadily directed toward the horizon, on which in the north they might, if unusually sharp and long sighted, have seen a curious, minute, dark, triangular patch against the pearl gray of the far distance.

The captain tucked his telescope under his arm and gave a meaning glance at Winscombe, then merely remarking to Miss Poulter, "Yes, it is a funny little ship," walked away, and presently they saw him and the mate conferring together in low tones, he occasionally indicating by a jerk of his head that point in the northern horizon where the dark, triangular speck could be just discerned without the use of the glass.

Miss Poulter and Winscombe looked at each other inquiringly. "You appear to have very effectually refuted your own argument," he said, smiling. "You have found something to break the monotony of the sea, after all."

"What are they wetting the sails for, I wonder?" asked Mrs. Poulter.

The Hon. Edward Poulter looked with his respectable indifference in the direction his wife indicated and saw the men busily throwing buckets of water on some of the sails. "I really don't know," he replied. "It's not our business, you know, what the sailors do," and he addressed himself to a big blue book which he had conveniently placed on a reading stand by his low deck chair and was now marking in the margin with a gold pencil in a manner that he deemed eminently official and even statesmanlike. Winscombe started, however, at the question of Mrs. Poulter and looked round. Yes, the sailors were certainly busy pouring water on the sails, and fresh sails were being set.

In a moment the whole truth flashed across Harry Winscombe's brain, and as he glanced at the two women before him and at the pompous man of respectability, the Hon. Edward Poulter, a cold thrill shot to his very heart. Evidently Captain Grant was "cracking on" all the canvas he could and making every effort to increase the speed of the Kistna. There was but one rational explanation, he knew. They were either being chased or expecting to be chased, and if really chased it could only be by a pirate.

"Wetting the sails, Mrs. Poulter," he explained, "is to increase the speed of the ship. We have been lying by too much today, and I suppose the captain wants to make up for lost time."

Mrs. Poulter said languidly she should go into her cabin and lie down, while she felt so fatigued, looking toward her husband for some expression of sympathy, which he never vouchsafed her on these occasions, and no wonder, as she was "tiredly fatigued" and quite "dying of exhaustion" at least twenty times during the day. Winscombe gave her his arm down the companion, for Miss Poulter declared that she would not go into that stuffy cabin until she was obliged.

On his return on deck the dark triangular speck on the horizon had sensibly increased in size, and Miss Poulter remarked: "See, there is that funny little ship. Can you tell what she is likely to be?"

Before Winscombe could reply Captain Grant came up, and, seeing Miss Poulter still in her chair, touched her father on his shoulder, "I want to say a word with you." He was very serious, and the Hon. Edward Poulter perceived that something wrong must have happened. The captain signed him and Winscombe to follow him, and when, as he thought, out of earshot of Miss Poulter, he said, "I dare say you guess, gentlemen, what has befallen us?"

"I haven't the least idea," said the Hon. Edward Poulter, turning very pale, however, and looking exceedingly nervous.

"I can guess, sir, pretty well," was Winscombe's quiet reply. "There's no mistaking the rig of a craft like that." Pointing to the now very much larger triangular, dark patch on the horizon just cutting the sky line.

"The glass told me at once," continued Captain Grant, who, unlike his countrymen, became very English in his talk when he was on any kind of difficulty, "that it was a Malay proa. It is a big one, too, and I fear they mean mischief."

"But they surely won't dare to attack such a vessel as this," interjected the Hon. Edward Poulter, standing very erect and looking, as he thought, very magisterial.

Captain Grant smiled. "They're pirates; that's all. That proa is manned by what they call the orang-laut, which means the men of the sea, and they mean to pillage the ship and murder the crew."

"They won't surely murder us!" cried the Hon. Edward Poulter quite as though the murdering of the crew were a matter of no great importance.

"Malay pirates, my good sir, are no respecters of persons," remarked Winscombe quietly. "If once those fellows get on board, we may hold ourselves as dead men."

"God bless me, you don't mean it! But, captain, there's your crew. We must beat them off. I say, you won't let those ruffians get on board, will you?" and the speaker looked piteously at the captain, who, with Winscombe, could have laughed outright at the absurd figure made by the Hon. Edward Poulter had not the occasion been far too serious to be made a subject for mirth under any circumstances.

Captain Grant looked gravely at the speaker. "It's clear," he thought, "you'd never do for army or navy." Then he said: "We have no means, if they out sail us, to keep them off. You don't know what devils they are. It must be a big one, this proa, for they usually go in couples, or more. I suppose the rascals think one hand is enough in a purse and are prying on their own account without any partner. However, if the worst happens, of course you'll take a hand with the rest of us. The worst of it is we are not provided with many arms."

Yes, the Hon. Poulter would certainly "take a hand with the rest," but in the meantime he would go below and break the dreadful news to his wife, and, looking thoroughly scared, he scuttled below.

"Not much to be got out of him," observed Captain Grant to Winscombe, who asked what arms they had.

"We've unfortunately no guns, as you see. I have about a dozen old rifles, and I and the mate have half a dozen revolvers. We muster only about 80 in all, you know, and that includes the cook. That proa is a big fellow and carries over 200 men. If they once board us, we shall have a poor chance."

"Are they certain to out sail us?" "Look for yourself. It is only a question of time. We are doing our very best and cannot carry another yard of sail. Besides, when they get nearer, they'll probably begin to pepper us and out up our rigging."

Winscombe looked steadily at the proa, whose form could now be pretty clearly defined, and he owned to himself that unless a miracle happened it would be only a question of time for the pirate to be alongside them.

He looked at Captain Grant. There was no need to speak, and he took a turn on the deck. Miss Poulter remained on deck, pretending to be absorbed in a book, but in reality full of curiosity and some misgiving as to what was going to happen. She rose and advanced to meet Winscombe. "What is the matter," she asked, "for I know that something has happened?"

"I am afraid, Miss Poulter, that something is going to happen. Your 'funny little ship' is, we fear, a pirate."

He saw a kind of spasms pass over her face. She turned pale, but evidently made a brave effort, and then gasped rather than said, "But there's no danger, I hope."

"I hope not," he answered gravely, "but be sure we shall do our best. Meanwhile I advise you to go down below. This is not a place for you now."

While she seemed hesitating Captain Grant came up, and, putting his hands on her shoulders, said: "My dear young lady, I must order you down below. You must obey, you know," and gently but firmly he led her reluctantly down the companion.

Meanwhile Winscombe remained lost in thought, leaning on the railing and not even looking in the direction of the strange and mysterious sail.

While he remained thus a little puff of smoke and a flash showed against the horizon, and it was evident that the proa carried a long gun, for the ball could be seen ricocheting from wave to wave, but very wide indeed of the Kistna. Most of the sailors were now on deck, and Winscombe thought they looked anything rather than men resolved to sell their lives dearly. Perhaps the consciousness that to such attacks as these they had no means of replying had a paralyzing effect. Captain Grant hurried on deck.

"What do you think of our chances?" he asked.

"Very badly indeed. But I think I can save the ship if you will let me."

Captain Grant stared and looked at the young man with an evident astonishment.

"You'll be cried. 'And how?'" "That you shall see, I hope, but you must order the men to obey my orders exactly, and then, I think, we can manage to circumvent those devils."

This was readily agreed to. In truth, Captain Grant was at his wits' end. He regarded the ship and cargo as good as lost and had little hope of anybody on board, not excepting himself, escaping with life.

It was perfectly certain that the proa would eventually out sail them, do what they might, and what means had a score or so of men with only a dozen rifles for preventing 200 or 300 Malays from pouring up the ship's sides directly the proa came fairly alongside?

They might even nicely calculate about how long it would take to take their enemy close up, and then he might thoroughly rake the vessel with his guns. Everybody except the Poulters knew all this well, and consequently everybody seemed exceedingly down hearted except Winscombe, who now stripped off his coat and waistcoat and appeared full of animation. Captain Grant, who began to think this young man had really a head on his shoulders, determined to carry out all his plans thoroughly, and as he had none of his own and was secretly in utter despair and desperation at the strait to which they had been reduced he felt a sort of zeal in helping Winscombe as much as possible, though he could not as yet see what possible good could come of his proposal. These were simple

enough at first. He directed a spar to be rigged out at the extremity of their spanker boom so as to swing round by hauling on a rope and project about 30 feet beyond the ship's bulwark. He then rove a rope through a block at the extremity and arranged it so that those who held the other end from the deck, by letting go, could let it run out at the end so as to drop plump when weighted.

These arrangements, being very cleverly superintended by Winscombe, did not take long. He now came down from the spanker boom, where he had been scrambling about the supplementary spar quite like a monkey, as some of the men said, and desired them to hoist an empty barrel up on the poop. In the bottom of this he placed a layer of gunpowder about a quarter of an inch thick, and, having covered this in with stiff brown paper, he poured in a quantity of tar, and then put in a fresh layer of gunpowder in a brown paper package, a sort of big cartridge, and so on until finally he piled in tar at the top. A chain was scoured round the barrel, and it was hooked on to the end of a rope rove through the block at the end of the spar secured to the spanker boom. Captain Grant grinned. He thought he saw what Winscombe was after, but he could not exactly see how he meant to bring this highly explosive and combustible contrivance to bear upon the proa.

Winscombe did not keep him long in doubt. He first had the barrel gently hauled up and then as gently let down, to see that the apparatus worked easily, and then gave his final directions. The Kistna was to lower her flag and shorten sail, but to place all the disposable men ready to spread every stitch directly he gave the signal. The man at the helm was to steer so as to insure the proa coming up on their quarter, and, as the vessel approached, the spanker, with its long supplementary boom, was to be swung out so as to lie right over the proa, the barrel being already hauled close up at the extreme, when Winscombe lay full length upon the spar. His business was to set the tar on the surface in a blaze, and then, those below letting go the rope, the barrel would fall right on the deck of the proa.

Even while explaining this the pirate began to yaw and recommenced firing, aiming at their rigging, and presently sending a shot right through their fore-sail. "You see his tactics," said Winscombe. "He could haul us, but he is afraid of losing his plunder and won't sink us just at present. The sooner we get him alongside the better. We shall know our fate in full five minutes then."

So saying, he swarmed up the spanker and lighted a small torch he had contrived and with which he meant to fire the top of the tar in the barrel.

It was a terrible moment. Any instant a ball might hit his aerial mine and blow him to atoms with his own petard, and then there was the critical moment to come when he and his suspended magazine would be exposed to the small arms of the Malays. But he thought of none of these things. Never had he seemed so gay and light hearted during the whole voyage as now, when he lay out on the spar with his contrivance beneath him, a few feet down, waiting for the one instant of time which must deliver or destroy them all.

His orders were obeyed implicitly. His rare courage and coolness had infected the crew with intense admiration, and each man was fully nerved to do his utmost. Sail was shortened, the red ensign, which had been kept flying, was suddenly run down, and the pirates in the proa gave vent to terrific yells, which were feebly replied to by shrieks that Winscombe plainly heard from the cabin below him. He set his teeth close. Even he, hardened and nerved as he was, could not restrain his heart from a terrible palpitation, for any moment he might, he knew, be blown himself to atoms, to say nothing of the danger from the missiles from the pirates, whom he could now plainly see swarming on their deck. They seemed some hundreds strong, brandishing their spears and looking like so many demons.

His weakness was but momentary. The proa approached closer and closer. Presently the vessels lay nearly parallel; then, as if by mutual consent, they drew nearer, and Winscombe saw the armed Malays all crowding to one side so as to be ready to spring up and board the Kistna simultaneously from stem to stern.

Nearer and nearer. He determined not to be premature, although he could hardly restrain himself. Then as the vessels came within the distance he had calculated he shouted, and out ran the spar right over the proa's deck and stopped by her upper boom, where it locked. Just as he anticipated, the pirates were eagerly bent on boarding. Few of them noticed the extraordinary swinging right over them of the Kistna's spanker boom.

With a steady hand he fired the tar, and as he did so shouted for the men to let go.

As the barrels banged down all in a blaze on the pirate's deck Winscombe, by one tremendous effort, slid himself back and just escaped the torrent of fire and the fearful concussion of the first shock as the boom exploded the topmost layer of powder.

All sail was reast on the Kistna with the nimbleness of men dreading to be hurt by themselves, and by the cleverness of the steersman, the captain himself, there was a clear space between the Kistna and the proa as layer after layer of powder ignited and blew up, enveloping the pirate in dense smoke, through which tongues of flame could be seen burning.

The Kistna slowly drew ahead, and, watching their late antagonists through their glasses, they could plainly see that all was utter confusion and that the vessel lately so formidable was doomed. Already some of her crew were putting off a small boat, and as the distance between the two vessels increased the proa, a fourth into one tremendous blaze and a pyramid of flames roared up to the sky.

They were saved.



It was a terrible moment.

It is needless to say that all were loud in their praise of Winscombe, but for whose invention, gallantry and coolness not one of the Kistna company would have lived to tell the tale of their encounter with pirates off Sumatra.

As he laughingly said, his combined bombshells and aerial fire tub had proved more than the pirates could grapple with. He declared that his success was chiefly due to the utter surprise of his unexpected attack from above and to the admirable way in which Captain Grant steered and the men told off for that purpose swung him to within a foot of the right point. But it had been nervous work, and for some days Winscombe was quite prostrate, although he had what was to him a heavenly time, thanks to the tender nursing of Emily Poulter, who declared between tears and smiles that he had turned out "the lion" she thought him after all.

As for the Hon. Edward Poulter, he was unwell, and with his wife showed themselves sincerely grateful. He could not quite forbear from a little harmless boasting of the fight he should have made had these devils got on board, but he privately determined never again to venture in any vessel small enough to be in real peril from the most formidable Malay proa.

THE END.

Scotch Thrift Again.

When the history of the Blackwall tunnel comes to be written, the story will be incomplete unless it includes an account of the following incident: Quite recently the men who were working as usual in the compressed air lock were alarmed to hear first a rushing sound and then an ominous roar, followed in turn by the bursting open of the ground overhead. Before they had time to guess what had happened their jackets and even their shirts flew off their backs in shreds, as if by magic, and some bags of cement were hurled away by the tremendous draft of the moment. The men fortunately kept their heads, and so far as circumstances would permit remained at their posts ready to cope with any emergency.

One of the gang, however, was greatly distressed. Howling in a most unaccountable manner, he hastened to the end of the tunnel. "Let me out! Let me out!" he cried to the man in charge of the entrance to the air chamber, and he was speedily assisted in the lift to the upper regions. Seeing him pale, exhausted, and attired only in his trousers, those at the mouth of the shaft crowded eagerly round him, anxious to ascertain the nature and extent of his injuries. "Are you much hurt?" asked one. "Gi'e me a vest," gasped the refugee. "What's the matter with you?" inquired another, to which he impatiently made reply, "Gi'e me a vest, mon, as dinna stan glowerin there."

Finding cross examination useless, search was made for the missing garment, which had been drawn through the burst in the tunnel by the draft, and was mingled with the remains of other similar articles. It had half a sovereign in the pocket! Hence the thrifty Scotchman's anxiety, for, like his fellow workmen, he had escaped without personal injury.—London Daily Telegraph.

Learned the Funnel Trick.

Jerry Lynch has finally learned the funnel trick. He took it in two doses—one on one evening and the other the next. The senator sauntered up to the Bohemian club the other day and saw two or three of the younger members attempting a new feat, and he watched them with interest. One of them stuck a funnel in the top of his trousers, threw his head back, placed a 50 cent piece on his forehead and tried to drop it in the funnel by slowly lowering his head. After all had failed Jerry insisted on trying it, though all had tried to dissuade him from attempting a feat too difficult for them. The funnel was placed in the waistband of his trousers, and he threw back his head to receive the coin on his expansive brow. At that juncture a pitcher of ice water was emptied into the funnel, and by the time Jerry got through dancing the jokers had vanished. The senator's temper improved with dry raiment, and the next night at the club he started in to show a couple of friends the funnel trick.

"It's this way," he explained. "You put the funnel in the top of your pantaloons, so, then throw your head back, so, and—wow!"

Again Jerry was forced to change his raiment, and he is not showing people what he knows about the funnel trick.—San Francisco News Letter.

An Invalid's Nightdress.

The difficulty of changing a nightdress when a sick person is too feeble to aid the process is a problem, the sufferer being often quite exhausted by the effort. Experience of this has taught me that a design for a nightdress that would slip on without strain or difficulty would be a boon and a blessing. The simplest way is to make it button all the way down from neck to hem.

One of these is of long cloth, trimmed with insertion and embroidery, the yoke of alternate tucks and insertion. It opens all the way to the feet, the buttons being concealed by the trimming; but, if liked, the trimming may cease in the ordinary way a little below the waist, a neat false hem worked with buttonholes carrying down the necessary opening to the feet. For such a garment about 4 or 5 yards of long cloth will be required, 4 1/2 yards of insertion and 9 yards of embroidered edging, if this is brought all the way down the front.—Pittsburg Dispatch.

Catching a Tartar.

"To catch a Tartar" recalls a story, told at least two centuries ago, of an Irish exile in the service of the Austrian government who was captured by a Tartar horseman and who shouted back to his captain that he had caught a Tartar, but that the fellow refused to be brought into camp.

