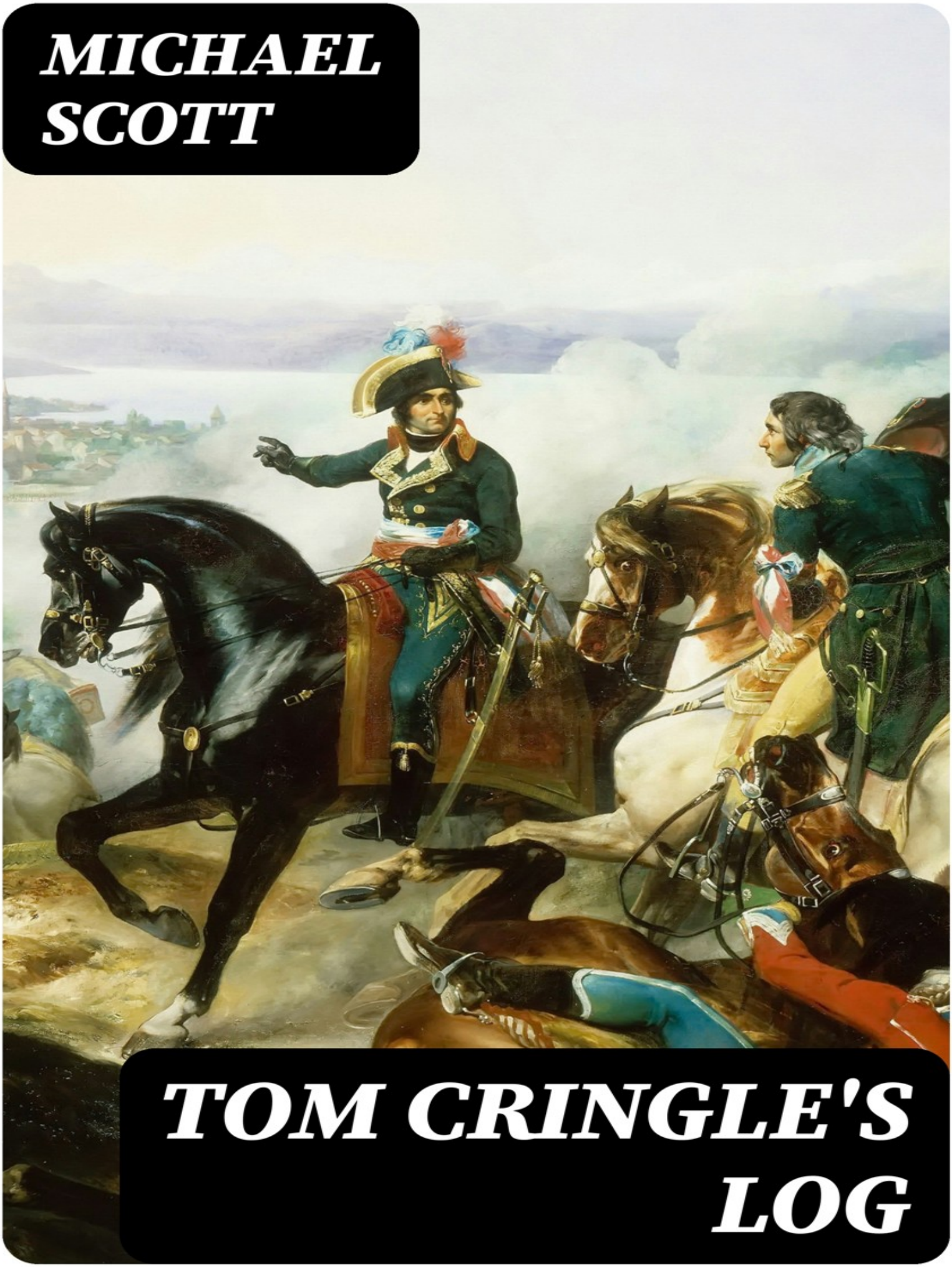
MICHAEL SCOTT



TOM CRINGLE'S LOG

Michael Scott

Tom Cringle's Log

EAN 8596547248446

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

Table of Contents

(1789—1835)

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I.—The Launching of the Log.

Table of Contents

Dazzled by the glories of Trafalgar, I, Thomas Cringle, one fine morning in the merry month of May, in the year one thousand eight hundred and so and so, magnanimously determined in my own mind, that the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland should no longer languish under the want of a successor to the immortal Nelson, and being then of the great perpendicular altitude of four feet four inches, and of the mature age of thirteen years, I thereupon betook myself to the praiseworthy task of tormenting, to the full extent of my small ability, every man and woman who had the misfortune of being in any way connected with me, until they had agreed to exert all their interest, direct or indirect, and concentrate the same in one focus upon the head and heart of Sir Barnaby Blueblazes, vice-admiral of the red squadrons a Lord of the Admiralty, and one of the old plain K.B.‘s (for he flourished before the time when a gallant action or two tagged half of the letters of the alphabet to a man’s name, like the tail of a paper kite), in order that he might be graciously pleased to have me placed on the quarterdeck of one of his Majesty’s ships of war without delay.

The stone I had set thus recklessly a-rolling, had not been in motion above a fortnight, when it fell with unanticipated violence, and crushed the heart of my poor mother, while it terribly bruised that of me, Thomas; for as I sat at breakfast with the dear old woman, one fine Sunday

morning, admiring my new blue jacket and snow white trowsers, and shining well soaped face, and nicely brushed hair, in the pier glass over the chimney piece, I therein saw the door behind me open, and Nicodemus, the waiting man, enter and deliver a letter to the old lady, with a formidable looking seal.

I perceived that she first ogled the superscription, and then the seal, very ominously, and twice made as if she would have broken the missive open, but her heart seemed as often to fail her. At length she laid it down-heaved a long deep sigh—took off her spectacles, which appeared dim-wiped them, put them on again, and making a sudden effort, tore open the letter, read it hastily over, but not so rapidly as to prevent her hot tears falling with a small tiny tap tap on the crackling paper.

Presently she pinched my arm, pushed the blistered manuscript under my nose, and utterly unable to speak to me, rose, covered her face with her hands, and left the room weeping bitterly. I could hear her praying in a low, solemn, yet sobbing and almost inarticulate voice, as she crossed the passage to her own dressing-room.—“Even as thou wilt, oh Lord—not mine, but thy holy will be done—yet, oh! it is a bitter bitter thing for a widowed mother to part with her only boy.”

Now came my turn—as I read the following epistle three times over, with a most fierce countenance, before thoroughly understanding whether I was dreaming or awake—in truth, poor little fellow as I was, I was fairly stunned.

“Admiralty, such a date.

“DEAR MADAM, It gives me very great pleasure to say that your son is appointed to the Breeze frigate, now fitting at Portsmouth for foreign service. Captain Wigemwell is a most excellent officer, and a good man, and the schoolmaster on board is an exceedingly decent person I am informed; so I congratulate you on his good fortune in beginning his career, in which I wish him all success, under such favourable auspices. As the boy is, I presume, all ready, you had better send him down on Thursday next, at latest, as the frigate will go to sea, wind and weather permitting, positively on Sunday morning.”

“I remain, my dear Madam,”

“Yours very faithfully,”

“BARNABY BLUEBLAZES, K.B.”

However much I had been moved by my mother’s grief, my false pride came to my assistance, and my first impulse was to chant a verse of some old tune, in a most doleful manner. “All right—all right,” I then exclaimed, as I thrust half a doubled up muffin into my gob, but it was all chew, chew, and no swallow—not a morsel could I force down my parched throat, which tightened like to throttle me.

Old Nicodemus had by this time again entered the room, unseen and unheard, and startled me confoundedly, as he screwed his words in his sharp cracked voice into my larboard ear. “Jane tells me your mamma is in a sad taking, Master Tom. You ben’t going to leave us, all on a heap like, be you? Surely your stay until your sister comes from your uncle Job’s? You know there are only two on ye—You won’t leave the old lady all alone, Master Thomas, win ye?’ The worthy old fellow’s voice quavered here, and the tears

hopped over his old cheeks through the flour and tallow like peas, as he slowly drew a line down the forehead of his well-powdered pate, with his fore-finger.

“No—no—why, yes,” exclaimed I, fairly overcome; “that is—oh Nic, Nic you old fool, I wish I could cry, man—I wish I could cry!” and straightway I hied me to my chamber, and wept until I thought my very heart would have burst.

In my innocence and ignorance, child as I was, I had looked forward to several months preparation; to buying and fitting of uniforms, and dirks, and cocked hat, and swaggering therein, to my own great glory, and the envy of all my young relations; and especially I desired to parade my fire—new honours before the large dark eyes of my darling little creole cousin, Mary Palma; whereas I was now to be bundled on board, at a few days warning, out of a ready-made furnishing shop, with lots of ill-made, glossy, hard mangled duck trowsers, the creases as sharp as the backs of knives, and—“oh, it never rains, but it pours,” exclaimed I; “surely all this promptitude is a little de plus in Sir Barnaby.”

However, away I was trundled at the time appointed, with an aching heart, to Portsmouth, after having endured the misery of a first parting from a fond mother, and a host of kind friends; but, miserable as I was, according to my preconceived determination, I began my journal the very day I arrived, that nothing connected with so great a man should be lost, and most weighty did the matters therein related appear to me at the time; but seen through the long vista of, I won’t say how many years, I really must confess that the Log, for long long after I first went to sea in the

Breeze, and subsequently when removed to the old Kraaken line-of-battle ship, both of which were constantly part of blockading squadrons, could be compared to nothing more fitly than a dish of trifle, anciently called syllabub, with a stray plum here and there scattered at the bottom. But when, after several weary years, I got away in the dear old Torch, on a separate cruise, incidents came fast enough with a vengeance—stem, unyielding, iron events, as I found to my heavy cost, which spoke out trumpet-tongued and fiercely for themselves, and whose tremendous simplicity required no adventitious aid in the narration to thrill through the hearts of others. So, to avoid yarn-spinning, I shall evaporate my early Logs, and blow off as much of the froth as I can, in order to present the residuum free of flummery to the reader—just to give him a taste here and there, as it were, of the sort of animal I was at that time. Thus:

Thomas Cringle, his log-book.

Arrived in Portsmouth by the Defiance at ten, A.M. on such a day. Waited on the Commissioner, to whom I had letters, and said I was appointed to the Breeze. Same day, went on board and took up my berth; stifling hot; mouldy biscuit; and so on. My mother’s list makes it fifteen shirts, whereas I only have twelve.

Admiral made the signal to weigh, wind at S.W. fresh and squally. Stockings should be one dozen worsted, three of cotton, two of silk; find only half a dozen worsted, two of cotton, and one of silk.

Fired a gun and weighed.

Sailed for the Fleet off Vigo, deucidly sea-sick was told that fat pork was the best specific, if bolted half raw; did not

find it much of a tonic passed a terrible night, and for four hours of it obliged to keep watch, more dead than alive. The very second evening we were at sea, it came on to blow, and the night fell very dark, with heavy rain. Towards eight bells in the middle watch, I was standing on a gun well forward on the starboard side, listening to the groaning of the main-tack, as the swelling sail, the foot of which stretched transversely right athwart the ship’s deck in a black arch, struggled to tear it up, like some dark impalpable spirit of the air striving to burst the chains that held him, and escape high up into the murky clouds, or a giant labouring to uproot an oak, and wondering in my innocence how hempen cord could brook such strain when just as the long waited-for strokes of the bell sounded gladly in mine ear, and the shrill clear note of the whistle of the boatswain’s mate had been followed by his gruff voice, grumbling hoarsely through the gale, “Larboard watch, ahoy!” The look-out at the weather gangway, who had been relieved, and beside whom I had been standing a moment before, stepped past me, and scrambled up on the booms “Hillo, Howard, where away, my man?” said I.

“Only to fetch my”—

Crack!—the main tack parted, and up flew the sail with a thundering flap, loud as the report of a cannon-shot, through which, however, I could distinctly hear a heavy smash, as the large and ponderous blocks at the clew of the sail struck the doomed sailor under the ear, and whirled him off the booms over the fore-yard-arm into the sea, where he perished, as heaving-to was impossible, and useless if practicable, as his head must have been smashed to atoms.

This is one of the stray plums of the trifle, what follows is a whisk of the froth, written when we looked into Corunna, about a week after the embarkation of the army:—

MONODY ON THE DEATH OF SIR JOHN MOORE.

Farewell, thou pillar of the war,
Warm-hearted soldier, Moore, farewell,
In honour’s firmament a star,
As bright as ere in glory fell.

Deceived by weak or wicked men,
How gallantly thou stood’st at bay,
Like lion hunted to his den,
Let France tell, on that bloody day.

No boastful splendour round thy bier,
No blazon’d trophies o’er thy grave;
But thou had’st more, the soldier’s tear,
The heart-warm offering of the brave.

On Lusitania’s rock-girt coast,
All coffinless thy relics lie,
Where all but honour bright was lost,
Yet thy example shall not die.

Albeit no funeral knell was rung,
Nor o’er thy tomb in mournful wreath
The laurel twined with cypress hung,
Still shall it live while Britons breathe.

What though, when thou wert lowly laid,
Instead of all the pomp of woe,
The volley o’er thy bloody bed
Was thunder’d by an envious foe:—

Inspired by it in after time,
A race of heroes will appear,
The glory of Britannia’s clime,
To emulate thy bright career.

And there will be, of martial fire,
Those who all danger will endure;
Their first, best aim, but to aspire
To die thy death—the death of Moore.

To return. On the evening of the second day, we were off Falmouth, and then got a slant of wind that enabled us to lie our course.

Next morning, at daybreak, saw a frigate in the northeast quarter, making signals;—soon after we bore up. Bay of Biscay—tremendous swell—Cape Finisterre—blockading squadron off Cadiz—in-shore squadron—and so on, all trifle and no plums.

At length the Kraaken, in which I had now served for some time, was ordered home, and sick of knocking about in a fleet, I got appointed to a fine eighteen-gun sloop, the Torch, in which we sailed on such a day for the North Sea—wind foul—weather thick and squally; but towards evening on the third day, being then off Harwich, it moderated, when we made more sail, and stood on, and next morning, in the cold, miserable, drenching haze of an October daybreak, we passed through a fleet of fishing-boats at anchor. “At anchor,” thought I, “and in the middle of the sea,”—but so it was—all with their tiny cabooses, smoking cheerily, and a solitary figure, as broad as it was long, stiffly walking to and fro on the confined decks of the little vessels. It was now that I knew the value of the saying, “a fisherman’s walk, two steps and overboard.” With regard to these same fishermen,

I cannot convey a better notion of them, than by describing one of the two North Sea pilots whom we had on board. This pilot was a tall, raw-boned subject, about six feet or so, with a blue face—I could not call it red—and a hawk's-bill nose of the colour of bronze. His head was defended from the weather by what is technically called a south-west, pronounced sow-west,—cap, which is in shape like the thatch of a dustman, composed of canvass, well tarred, with no snout, but having a long flap hanging down the back to carry the rain over the cape of the jacket. His chin was embedded in a red comforter that rose to his ears. His trunk was first of all cased in a shirt of worsted stocking-net; over this he had a coarse linen shirt, then a thick cloth waistcoat; a shag jacket was the next layer, and over that was rigged the large cumbrous pea jacket, reaching to his knees. As for his lower spars, the rig was still more peculiar;—first of all, he had on a pair of most comfortable woollen stockings, what we call fleecy hosiery—and the beauties are peculiarly nice in this respect—then a pair of strong fearnaught trowsers; over these again are drawn up another pair of stockings, thick, coarse, rig-and-furrowed as we call them in Scotland, and above all this were drawn a pair of long, well-greased, and liquored boots, reaching half-way up the thigh, and altogether impervious to wet. However comfortable this costume may be in bad weather in board, it is clear enough that any culprit so swathed, would stand a poor chance of being saved, were he to fall overboard. The wind now veered round and round, and baffled, and checked us off, so that it was the sixth night after we had taken our departure from Harwich before we saw Heligoland light. We then bore

away for Cuxhaven, and I now knew for the first time that we had a government emissary of some kind or another on board, although he had hitherto confined himself strictly to the captain’s cabin.

All at once it came on to blow from the north-east, and we were again driven back among the English fishing boats. The weather was thick as buttermilk, so we had to keep the bell constantly ringing, as we could not see the jib-boom end from the forecastle. Every now and then we heard a small, hard, clanking tinkle, from the fishing-boats, as if an old pot had been struck instead of a bell, and a faint hollo, “Fishing-smack,” as we shot past them in the fog, while we could scarcely see the vessels at all. The morning after this particular time to which I allude, was darker than any which had gone before it; absolutely you could not see the breadth of the ship from you; and as we had not taken the sun for five days, we had to grope our way almost entirely by the lead. I had the forenoon watch, during the whole of which we were amongst a little fleet of fishing-boats, although we could scarcely see them, but being unwilling to lose ground by lying to, we fired a gun every half hour, to give the small craft notice of our vicinity, that they might keep their bells a-going. Every three or four minutes, the marine drum-boy, or some amateur performer,—for most sailors would give a glass of grog any day to be allowed to beat a drum for five minutes on end—beat a short roll, and often as we drove along, under a reefed foresail, and close reefed topsails, we could hear the answering tinkle before we saw the craft from which it proceeded; and when we did perceive her as we flew across her stern, we could only see it, and her mast,

and one or two well-swathed, hardy fishermen, the whole of the little vessel forward being hid in a cloud.

I had been invited this day to dine with the Captain, Mr Splinter, the first lieutenant being also of the party; the cloth had been withdrawn, and we had all had a glass or two of wine a-piece, when the fog settled down so thickly, although it was not more than five o'clock in the afternoon, that the captain desired that the lamp might be lit. It was done, and I was remarking the contrast between the dull, dusky, brown light, or rather the palpable London fog that came through the skylight, and the bright yellow sparkle of the lamp, when the second lieutenant, Mr Treenail, came down the ladder.

"We have shoaled our water to five fathoms, sir—shells and stones.—Here, Wilson, bring in the lead."

The leadsman, in his pea-jacket and shag trowsers, with the raindrop hanging to his nose, and a large knot in his cheek from a junk of tobacco therein stowed, with pale, wet visage, and whiskers sparkling with moisture, while his long black hair hung damp and lank over his fine forehead and the stand-up cape of his coat, immediately presented himself at the door, with the lead in his claws, an octagonal-shaped cone, like the weight of a window-sash, about eighteen inches long, and two inches diameter at the bottom, tapering away nearly to a point at top, where it was flattened, and a hole pierced for the line to be fastened to. At the lower end—the but-end, as I would say there was a hollow scooped out, and filled with grease, so that when the lead was cast, the quality of the soil, sand, or shells, or mud, that came up adhering to this lard, indicated, along with the

depth of water, our situation in the North Sea; and by this, indeed, we guided our course, in the absence of all opportunity of ascertaining our position by observations of the sun.

The Captain consulted the chart—“Sand and shells; why, you should have deeper water, Mr Treenail. Any of the fishing-boats near you?”

“Not at present, sir; but we cannot be far off some of them.”

“Well, let me know when you come near any of them.”

A little after this, as became my situation, I rose and made my bow, and went on deck.

By this time the night had fallen, and it was thicker than ever, so that, standing beside the man at the wheel, you could not see farther forward than the booms; yet it was not dark, either,—that is, it was moonlight, so that the haze, thick as it was, had that silver gauze-like appearance, as if it had been luminous in itself, that cannot be described to any one who has not seen it. The gun had been fired just as I came on deck, but no responding tinkle gave notice of any vessel being in the neighbourhood. Ten minutes, it may have been a quarter of an hour, when a short roll of the drum was beaten from the forecastle, where I was standing. At the moment I thought I heard a holla, but I could not be sure. Presently I saw a small light, with a misty halo surrounding it, just under the bowsprit.

“Port your helm,” sung out the boatswain,—“port your helm, or we shall be over a fishing-boat!”

A cry arose from beneath a black object was for an instant distinguishable and the next moment a crash was

heard. The sprit-sail-yard rattled, and broke off sharp at the point where it crossed the bowsprit; and a heavy smashing thump against our bows told, in fearful language, that we had run her down. Three of the men and a boy hung on by the rigging of the bowsprit, and were brought safely on board; but two poor fellows perished with their boat. It appeared, that they had broken their bell; and although they saw us coming, they had no better means than shouting, and showing a light, to advertise us of their vicinity.

Next morning the wind once more chopped round, and the weather cleared, and in four-and-twenty hours thereafter we were off the mouth of the Elbe, with three miles of white foaming shoals between us and the land at Cuxhaven, roaring and hissing, as if ready to swallow us up. It was low water, and, as our object was to land the emissary at Cuxhaven, we had to wait, having no pilot for the port, although we had the signal flying for one all morning, until noon, when we ran in close to the green mound which constituted the rampart of the fort at the entrance. To our great surprise, when we hoisted our colours and pennant, and fired a gun to leeward, there was no flag hoisted in answer at the flag-staff, nor was there any indication of a single living soul on shore to welcome us. Mr Splinter and the Captain were standing together at the gangway—“Why, sir,” said the former, “this silence somewhat surprises me: what say you, Cheragoux?” to the government emissary or messenger already mentioned, who was peering through the glass close by.

“Why, mi Lieutenant, I don’t certain dat all ish right on sore dere.’

“No?” said Captain Deadeye; “why, what do you see?”

“It ish not so mosh vat I shee, as vat I no shee, sir, dat trembles me. It cannot surely be possib dat de Prussian an’ Hanoverian troop have left de place, and dat dese dem Franceman ave advance so far as de Elbe autrefois, dat ish, once more?’

“French!” said Deadeye, “Poo, nonsense; no French hereabouts; none nearer than those cooped up in Hamburgh with Davoust, take my word for it.”

“I sall take your vord for any ting else in de large vorld, mi Capitain; but I see someting glance behind dat rampart, parapet you call, dat look dem like de shako of de infanterie legere of dat willain de Emperor Napoleon. Ah! I see de red worsted epaulet of de grenadier also; sacre! vat is dat pof of vite smoke?”

What it was we soon ascertained to our heavy cost, for the shot that had been fired at us from a long 32-pound gun, took effect right abaft the foremast, and killed three men outright, and wounded two. Several other shots followed, but with less sure aim. Returning the fire was of no use, as our carronades could not have pitched their metal much more than halfway; or, even if they had been long guns, they would merely have plumped the balls into the turf rampart, without hurting any one. So we wisely hauled off, and ran up the river with the young flood for about an hour, until we anchored close to the Hanoverian bank, near a gap in the dike, where we waited till the evening.

As soon as the night fell, a boat with muffled oars was manned, to carry the messenger on shore. I was in it; Mr Treenail, the second lieutenant, steering. We pulled in right

for a breach in the dike, lately cut by the French, in order to inundate the neighbourhood; and as the Elbe at high water is hereabouts much higher than the surrounding country, we were soon sucked into the current, and had only to keep our oars in the water, pulling a stroke now and then to give the boat steerage way. As we shot through the gap into the smooth water beyond, we once more gave way, the boat's head being kept in the direction of lights that we saw twinkling I in the distance, apparently in some village beyond the inner embankment, when all at once we dashed in amongst thousands of wild-geese, which rose with a clang, and a concert of quacking, screaming, and hissing, that was startling enough. We skimmed steadily on in the same direction "Oars, men!" We were by this time close to a small cluster of houses, perched on the forced ground or embankment, and the messenger hailed in German.

"Qui vive!" sung out a gruff voice; and we heard the clank of a musket, as if some one had cast it from his shoulder, and caught it in his hands, as he brought it down to the charge. Our passenger seemed a little taken aback; but he hailed again, still in German. "Parole," replied the man. A pause. "The watchword, or I fire." We had none to give.

"Pull round, men," said the lieutenant, with great quickness; "pull the starboard oars; we are in the wrong box; back water the larboard. That's it! give way, men."

A flash-crack went the sentry's piece, and ping sung the ball over our heads. Another pause. Then a volley from a whole platoon. Again all was dark and silent. Presently a field-piece was fired, and several rockets were let off in our

direction, by whose light we could see a whole company of French soldiers standing to their arms, with several cannon, but we were speedily out of the reach of their musketry. Several round shots were now fired, that hissed, recochetting along the water close by us. Not a word was spoken in the boat all this time; we continued to pull for the opening in the dike, although, the current being strong against us, we made but little way; while the chance of being cut off by the Johnny Crapeau, getting round the top of the embankment, so as to command the gap before we could reach it, became every moment more alarming.

The messenger was in great tribulation, and made several barefaced attempts to stow himself away under the stem sheets.

The gallant fellows who composed the crew strained at their oars until every thing cracked again; but as the flood made, the current against us increased, and we barely held our own. “Steer her, out of the current, man,” said the lieutenant to the coxswain; the man put the tiller to port as he was ordered.

“Vat you do soch a ting for, Mr Capitain Lieutenant?” said the emissary. “Oh! you not pershave you are rone in order de igh bank! How you sall satisfy me no France infanterie legere dere, too, more as in de fort, eh? How you sall satisfy me, Mister Capitain Lieutenant, eh?”

“Hold your blasted tongue, will you,” said Treenail, “and the infantry legere be damned simply. Mind your eye, my fine fellow, or I shall be much inclined to see whether you will be Legere in the Elbe or no. Hark!”

We all pricked up our ears, and strained our eyes, while a bright, spitting sparkling fire of musketry opened at the gap, but there was no ping pinging of the shot overhead.

“They cannot be firing at us, sir,” said the coxswain; “none of them bullets are telling hereaway.”

Presently a smart fire was returned in three distinct clusters from the water, and whereas the firing at first had only lit up the dark figures of the French soldiery, and the black outline of the bank on which they were posted, the flashes that answered them shewed us three armed boats attempting to force the passage. In a minute the firing ceased; the measured splash of oars was heard, as boats approached us.

“Who’s there?” sung out the lieutenant.

“Torches,” was the answer.

“All’s well, Torches,” rejoined Mr Treenail; and presently the jollyboat, and launch, and cutter of the Torch, with twenty marines, and thirty-six seamen, all armed, were alongside.

“What cheer, Treenail, my boy?” quoth Mr Splinter.

“Why, not much; the French, who we were told had left the Elbe entirely, are still here, as well as at Cuxhaven, not in force certainly, just sufficiently strong to pepper us very decently in the outgoing?”

“What, are any of the people hurt?”

“No,” said the garrulous emissary. “No, not hurt, but some of us frightened leetle piece—ah, very mosh, je vous assure.”

“Speak for yourself, Master Plenippo,” said Treenail. “But, Splinter, my man, now since the enemy have occupied the

dike in front, how the deuce shall we get back into the river, tell me that?”

“Why,” said the senior lieutenant, “we must go as we came.”

And here the groans from two poor fellows who had been hit were heard from the bottom of the launch. The cutter was by this time close to us, on the larboard side, commanded by Mr Julius Caesar Tip, the senior midshipman, vulgarly called in the ship Bathos, from his rather unromantic name. Here also a low moaning evinced the precision of the Frenchmen’s fire.

“Lord, Mr Treenail, a sharp brush that was.”

“Hush!” quoth Treenail. At this moment three rockets hissed up into the dark sky, and for an instant the hull and rigging of the sloop of war at anchor in the river glanced in the blue-white glare, and vanished again, like a spectre, leaving us in more thick darkness than before.

“Gemini! what is that now?” quoth Tip again, as we distinctly heard the commixed rumbling and rattling sound of artillery scampering along the dike.

“The ship has sent up these rockets to warn us of our danger,” said Mr Treenail. “What is to be done? Ah, Splinter, we are in a scrape—there they have brought up field-pieces, don’t you hear?”

Splinter had heard it as well as his junior officer. “True enough, Treenail; so the sooner we make a dash through the opening the better.”

“Agreed.”

By some impulse peculiar to British sailors, the men were just about cheering, when their commanding officer’s voice

controlled them. “Hark, my brave fellows, silence, as you value your lives.”

So away we pulled, the tide being now nearly on the turn, and presently we were so near the opening that we could see the signal lights in the rigging of the sloop of war. All was quiet on the dike.

“Thank God, they have retreated after all,” said Mr Treenail.

“Whoo—o, whoo—o,” shouted a gruff voice from the shore.

“There they are still,” said Splinter. “Marines, stand by, don’t throw away a shot; men, pull like fury. So—give way, my lads, a minute of that strain will shoot us alongside of the old brig—that’s it—hurrah!”

“Hurrah!” shouted the men in answer, but his and their exclamations were cut short by a volley of musketry. The fierce mustaches, pale faces, glazed shakoes, blue uniforms, and red epaulets, of the French infantry, glanced for a moment, and then all was dark again.

“Fire!” The marines in the three boats returned the salute, and by the flashes we saw three pieces of field. Artillery in the very act of being unlimbered. We could distinctly hear the clash of the mounted artillerymen’s sabres against their horses’ flanks as they rode to the rear, their burnished accoutrements glancing at every sparkle of the musketry.

We pulled like fiends, and being the fastest boat, soon headed the launch and cutter, who were returning the enemy’s fire brilliantly, when crack—a six-pound shot drove our boat into staves, and all hands were the next moment

squattering in the water. I sank a good bit, I suppose, for when I rose to the surface, half drowned and giddy and confused, and striking out at random, the first thing I recollected was a hard hand being wrung into my neckerchief, while a gruff voice shouted in my ear.

“Rendez vous, mon cher”

Resistance was useless. I was forcibly dragged up the bank, where both musketry and cannon were still playing on the boats, which had, however, by this time got a good offing. I soon knew they were safe by the Torch opening a fire of round and grape on the head of the dike, a contain proof that the boats had been accounted for. The French party now ceased firing, and retreated by the edge of the inundation, keeping the dike between them and the brig, all except the artillery, who had to scamper off, running the gauntlet on the crest of the embankment until they got beyond the range of the carronades. I was conveyed between two grenadiers along the water’s edge so long as the ship was firing; but when that ceased, I was clapped on one of the limbers of the field-guns, and strapped down to it between two of the artillerymen.

We rattled along, until we came up to the French bivouac, where, round a large fire, kindled in what seemed to have been a farmyard, were assembled about fifty or sixty French soldiers. Their arms were piled under the low projecting roof of an outhouse, while the fire flickered upon their dark figures, and glanced on their bright accoutrements, and lit up the wall of the house that composed one side of the square. I was immediately marched between a file of men into a small room, where the commanding officer of the

detachment was seated at a table, a blazing wood fire roaring in the He was a genteel, slender, dark man, with very large black mustaches, and fine sparkling black eyes, and had apparently just dismounted, for the mud was fresh on his boots and trowsers. The latter were blue, with a broad gold lace down the seam, and fastened by a strap under his boot, from which projected a long fixed spur, which to me was remarkable as an unusual dress for a Dire, the British army being, at the time I write of, still in the age of breeches and gaiters, or tall boots, long cues and pipeclay—that is, those troops which I had seen at home, although I believe the great Duke had already relaxed a number of these absurdities in Spain.

His single-breasted coat was buttoned up to his throat, and without an inch of lace except on his crimson collar, which fitted close round his neck, and was richly embroidered with gold acorns and oak leaves, as were the crimson cuffs to his sleeves. He wore two immense and very handsome gold epaulets.

“My good boy,” said he, after the officer who had captured me had told his story—“so your Government thinks the Emperor is retreating from the Elbe?”

I was a tolerable French scholar as times went, and answered him as well as I could.

“I have said nothing about that, sir; but, from your question, I presume you command the rear-guard, Colonel?”

“How strong is your squadron on the river?” said he, parrying the question.

“There is only one sloop of war, sir”—and I spoke the truth.

He looked at me, and smiled incredulously; and then continued “I don’t command the rear-guard, sir—but I waste time—are the boats ready?”

He was answered in the affirmative.

“Then set fire to the houses, and let off the rockets; they will see them at Cuxhaven—men,” fall in—march—and off we all trundled towards the river again.

When we arrived there, we found ten Blankanese boats, two of them very large, and fitted with sliding platforms. The four fieldpieces were run on board, two into each; one hundred and fifty men embarked in them and the other craft, which I found partly loaded with sacks of corn. I was in one of the smallest boats with the colonel. When we were all ready to shove off, “Lafont,” he said, “are the men ready with their couteaux?”

“They are, sir,” replied the sergeant.

“Then cut the horses’ throats—but no firing.” A few bubbling groans, and some heavy falls, and a struggling splash or two in the water, showed that the poor artillery horses had been destroyed.

The wind was fair up the river, and away we bowled before it. It was clear to me that the colonel commanding the post had overrated our strength, and, under the belief that we had cut him off from Cuxhaven, he had determined on falling back on Hamburgh.

When the morning broke, we were close to the beautiful bank below Altona. The trees were beginning to assume the russet hue of autumn, and the sun shone gaily on the pretty villas and bloomin Gartens on the hill side, while here and there a Chinese pagoda, or other fanciful pleasure-house,

with its gilded trellised work, and little bells depending from the eaves of its many roofs, glancing like small golden balls, rose from out the fast thinning recesses of the woods.

But there was no life in the scene—‘twas “Greece, but living Greece no more,”—not a fishing-boat was near, scarcely a solitary figure crawled along the beach.

“What is that?” after we had passed Blankanese, said the colonel quickly. “Who are those?” as a group of three of four men presented themselves at a sharp turning of the road, that wound along the foot of the hill close to the shore.

“The uniform of the Prussians,” said one.

“Of the Russians,” said another.

“Poo,” said a third, “it is a picket of the Prince’s;” and so it was, but the very fact of his having advanced his outposts so far, showed how he trembled for his position.

After answering their hail, we pushed on, and as the clocks were striking twelve, we were abreast of the strong beams, that were clamped together with iron, and constituted the boom or chief water defence of Hamburgh. We passed through, and found an entire regiment under arms, close by the Custom-house. Somehow or other, I had drank deep of that John Bull prejudice, which delights to disparage the physical conformation of our Gallic neighbours, and hugs itself with the absurd notion, “that on one pair of English legs doth march three Frenchmen.” But when I saw the weather-beaten soldierlike veterans, who formed this compact battalion, part of the elite of the first corps, more commanding in its aspect from severe service having worn all the gilding and lace away—“there was not a piece of feather in the host” I felt the reality before me fast

overcoming my preconceived opinion. I had seldom or ever seen so fine a body of men, tall, square, and muscular, the spread of their shoulders set off from their large red worsted epaulets, and the solidity of the mass increased by their wide trowsers, which in my mind contrasted advantageously with the long gaiters and tight integuments of our own brave fellows.

We approached a group of three mounted officers, and in a few words the officer, whose prisoner I was, explained the affair to the chef de baton, whereupon I was immediately placed under the care of' a sergeant and six rank and file, and marched along the chief canal for a mile, where I could not help remarking the numberless large rafts—you could not call them boats—of unpainted pine timber, which had arrived from the upper Elbe, loaded with grain: with gardens, absolute gardens, and cowhouses, and piggeries on board; while their crews of Fierlanders, men, women, and children, cut a most extraordinary appearance,—the men in their jackets, with buttons like pot-lids, and trowsers fit to carry a month's provender and a couple of children in; and the women with bearings about the quarters, as if they had cut holes in large cheeses, three feet in diameter at least, and stuck themselves through them—such sterns—and as to their costumes, all very fine in a Flemish painting, but the devils appeared to be awfully nasty in real life.

But we carried on until we came to a large open space fronting a beautiful piece of water, which I was told was the Alster. As I walked through the narrow streets, I was struck with the peculiarity of the gables of the tall houses being all turned towards the thoroughfare, and with the stupendous

size of the churches. We halted for a moment, in the porch of one of the latter, and my notions of decency were not a little outraged, by seeing it filled with a squadron of dragoons, the men being in the very act of cleaning their horses.

At length we came to the open space on the Alster, a large parade, faced by a street of splendid houses on the left hand, with a row of trees between them, and the water on the right.

There were two regiments of foot bivouacking here, with their arms piled under the trees, while, the men were variously employed, some on duty before the houses, others cleaning their accoutrements, and others again playing at all kinds of games. Presently we came to a crowd of soldiers clustered round a particular spot, some laughing, others cracking coarse jests, but none at all in the least serious. We could not get near enough to see distinctly what was going on; but we afterwards saw, when the crowd had dispersed, three men in the dress of respectable burghers, hanging from a low gibbet,—so low in fact, that although their heads were not six inches from the beam, their feet were scarcely three from the ground. I was here placed in a guard-house, and kept there until the evening, when I was again marched off under my former escort, and we soon arrived at the door of a large mansion, fronting this parade, where two sentries were walking backwards and forwards before the door, while five dragoon horses, linked together, stood in the middle of the street, with one soldier attending them, but there was no other particular bustle, to mark the headquarters of the General commanding. We advanced to the entrance—the

sentries carrying arms—and were immediately ushered into a large saloon, the massive stair winding up along the walls, with the usual heavy wooden balustrade. We ascended to the first floor, where we were encountered by three aides-de-camp, in full dress, leaning with their backs against the hardwood railing, laughing and joking with each other, while two wall-lamps right opposite cast a bright flashing light on their splendid uniforms. They were all decorated with one order or another.

We approached.

“Whence, and who have we here?” said one of them, a handsome young man, apparently not above twenty-two, as I judged, with small tiny black, jet-black, mustaches, and a noble countenance; fine dark eyes, and curls dark and clustering.

The officer of my escort answered, “A young Englishman, enseigne de vaisseau.”

I was no such thing, as a poor middy has no commission, but only his rating, which even his captain, without a court-martial, can take away at any time, and turn him before the mast.

At this moment, I heard the clang of a sabre, and the jingle of spurs on the stairs, and the group was joined by my captor, Colonel——.

“Ah, Colonel!” exclaimed the aides, in a volley, “where the devil have you come from? We thought you were in Bruxelles at the nearest.”

The colonel put his hand on his lips and smiled, and then slapped the young officer who spoke first with his glove. “Never mind, boys, I have come to help you here—you will