

cerned in the play. As she repeated Sheridan's words, her pitying smile died away into lines of sorrow, seeing how blindly he would turn Alice's steps from one danger to a deeper one. She recalled, too, at the word, the supreme desolation and misery of that one who now spent her days in the hospital.

Taking this as an agreement with his request, Mr Sheridan resolved that his conduct towards the captain should be absolutely reserved, until the vessel reached port. Then, what to do was beset with difficulties. That dire punishment would overtake the villain was clear; but what if his public arraignment would disturb the peace of Alice, whose slowly-healing wounds would thus be torn open?

Instead of coming to a decision, Sheridan resolved that, on the first opportunity he would lay the whole matter before Mr Wyville, and follow his advice.

Soon after entering the tropics, the *Hougue-mont* had caught the trade winds, and sailed swiftly down the level seas. Her tall masts dwindled pigmy-like as she passed beneath the awful shadow of Teneriffe. Her sky-sails cut a line on the cliff a finger's breadth from the sea; while above her towered into the air the twelve thousand feet of tremendous pinnacle. She coasted the great North-western bulge of Africa; and here for the first time since leaving England, her speed was checked, the trade winds faded and died, the sea lost its ripples, but kept its waves, that rose and fell slowly, with long monotonous rolls, like an ocean of molten glass. The sails of the *Hougue-mont* slapped backward and forward, the ropes hung useless, the ship pennant clung down the mast. The convict ship was becalmed off the coast of Africa, seven degrees above the Line.

The faces of the ship's officers grew serious when the wind died. They did not welcome a calm in such a latitude and at that season. The heat was intense and continuous, scarcely lowering by ten degrees at night.

"I wish we were five degrees to the westward," said Sheridan to Mr Wyville, his old marine lore recurring to him; "I hate this Gulf of Guinea."

"Why?" asked Mr Wyville, standing in shade of a sail, while the young military officer sat beside Sheridan on the rail.

"I hate it first for its sharks; you can't dip your hands in this water, for a thousand miles South and East, without having it snapped off. I hate it for its low coast, where so many splendid ships have sailed straight to destruction. I hate it for its siroccos, whirlwinds, and, above all, I hate it for its fevers. I don't think there's anything good about the coast of Guinea."

"That is a bad showing, certainly," said the military officer.

"Yes; and it's quite true," continued Sheridan. "No one can say a good word about this coast."

"Not so fast, not so fast," said Mr Wyville, smiling at Sheridan's earnestness. "On this very coast, within two hundred miles of us, is being solved one of the most interesting political problems in human history. Yonder lies a settlement with a national story unequalled for dignity and pathos."

Sheridan and the young soldier looked up astonished.

"What is it?" asked Sheridan.

"The Republic of Liberia," said Mr Wyville.

Sheridan looked at the soldier, who at the same moment looked at him. They both smiled broadly, confessing their ignorance.

"I was too busy with sandalwood—" began Sheridan.

"And I with tactics," said the soldier. "But what is this Republic, sir?"

"A new country honestly acquired," said Mr Wyville; "the only country on earth not torn by force from its rightful owners. A country where slaves have peacefully founded a nation of elevated freedom; where black men have faced God in manly dignity, and declared their right to wipe out the scriptural curse; whose citizenship is an honour to the holder, and whose citizens are an honour to mankind."

"Who are the citizens?" asked the surprised officer.

"Slaves from America!" said Wyville, with an earnestness that made them forget the heat; "the men who bear on their bodies the mark of the lash, and on their minds the rust of accursed laws; men who might be pardoned for hating their kind. God bless them!" and, as he spoke, he looked away in the direction of the land; "the kindest and most amiable race on earth. They have carried with them from the great Republic of the West only that which was good—its first principles. Its unrepugnant practices they have left behind."

"Will they not become corrupt?" asked Sheridan.

"When?"

"When they become rich," said the officer, innocently.

"It is to be feared," answered Mr Wyville. "But they have one safeguard."

"What is that?"

"Their climate is deadly to white men," said Mr Wyville.

The appearance of Captain Draper, coming from his stateroom, interrupted the conversation. The young officer stopped to chat to him, while Mr Wyville and Sheridan walked to the other side of the poop.

"There are two powers of government represented on this ship," said Sheridan, determined to bring the conversation to the point he wished to speak about; "which is in command—the civil or military? The captain of the vessel or the military officer?"

"Neither."

"I do not understand."

"When convicts sail from England they are assumed to be at once in the Penal Colony. As soon as the convict ship leaves land, she becomes subject to the penal law of Western Australia."

"Who administers the law on board?"

"The representative of the Comptroller-General of Convicts, the actual authority over the criminals in Western Australia."

"Then we have a representative of the Comptroller-General on board?"

"No."

"Pardon me, Mr Wyville; you speak riddles to-day. You said a moment ago that every convict ship had such a representative."

"Yes; unless it have the Comptroller himself."

"Then we have—Are you the Comptroller-General?"

"Yes. The office was vacant, and at the request of the Prime Minister I accepted a temporary appointment. I am glad it was offered; for it will enable me to see our new law fairly started."

(To be continued.)

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