

**MR. MIDSHIPMAN
EASY**

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Mr. Midshipman Easy by Frederick Marryat

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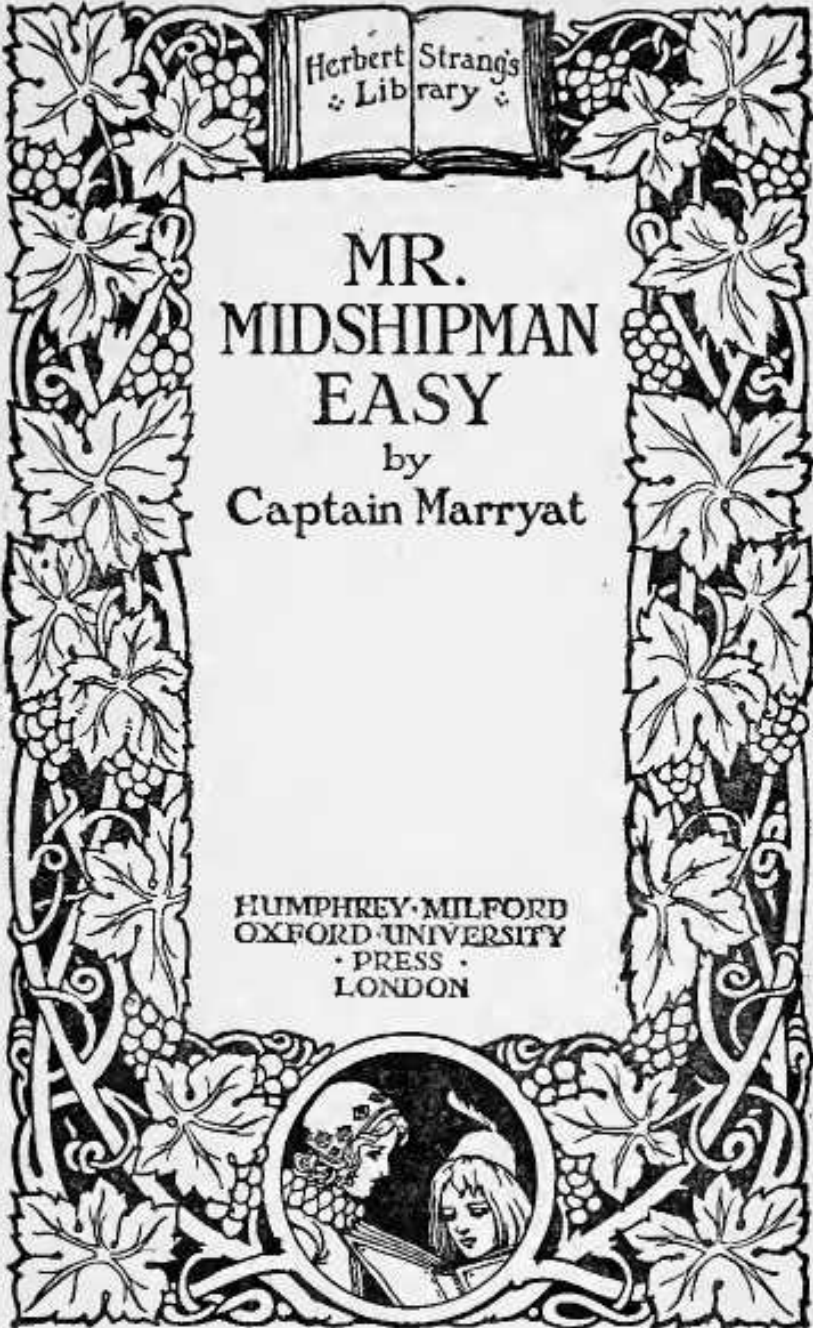
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FREDERICK MARRYAT

**MR. MIDSHIPMAN
EASY**





Herbert Strang's
Library

MR.
MIDSHIPMAN
EASY
by
Captain Marryat

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and home reading.*

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1922

INTRODUCTION

LIKE many boys who have not become famous, Frederick Marryat had a rooted objection to school, and an equally strong determination to get away to sea. He ran away three times from an excellent academy at Ponders End because, as he explained, he was obliged to wear his elder brother Joseph's left-off clothes; and when at last he left school and was placed in charge of a tutor he ran away again, although what his reason was on this occasion history does not record. His father, Mr. Joseph Marryat, M.P. and chairman of the committee at Lloyd's, hurried after him and caught him. But he seems to have been so much impressed by his son's determination that he yielded on the point of principle, and in 1806, at the age of fourteen, the boy entered as a midshipman on the frigate *Impérieuse* commanded by Captain Lord Cochrane, and as soon as he got aboard sailed for the Mediterranean.

It was on the *Impérieuse* that Marryat accumulated the great store of personal experiences upon which he drew in after life in writing his inimitable romances of the navy. Trafalgar had shattered the naval power of France and Spain so far as great fleets were concerned. The war had become a war of blockade, of single-ship actions, of cutting-out; and the

5
1845

Introduction

Mediterranean was the principal scene of these operations. Marryat was particularly fortunate in his captain, for Lord Cochrane (afterwards Lord Dundonald) was a giant among giants as a frigate commander. During his three years' service on the *Impérieuse* Marryat witnessed more than fifteen engagements, including the capture or destruction of three warships and twelve merchant vessels, and the demolition of a fort.

"The cruises of the *Impérieuse*," he tells us, "were periods of continual excitement, from the hour in which she hove up her anchor till she dropped it again in port; the day that passed without a shot being fired in anger was with us a blank day; the boats were hardly secured on the booms than they were cast loose and out again; the yard and stay tackles were for ever hoisting up and lowering down. The expedition with which parties were formed for service; the rapidity of the frigate's movements, night and day; the hasty sleep, snatched at all hours; the waking up at the report of the guns, which seemed the only key-note to the hearts of those on board; the beautiful precision of our fire, obtained by constant practice; the coolness and courage of our captain, inoculating the whole of the ship's company; the suddenness of our attacks, the gathering after the combat, the killed lamented, the wounded almost envied; the powder so burnt into our faces that years could not remove it; the proved character of every man and officer on board; the implicit trust and the adoration we felt for our commander; the ludicrous situations which would occur even in the extremest danger and create mirth when death was staring you in the face; the hair-breadth escapes, and the indifference to life shown by all—when memory sweeps along those years of excitement, even now my pulse beats more quickly with the reminiscence."

Introduction

After six years as a midshipman Marryat was appointed lieutenant, and in 1815 he became commander. Twelve years later he retired from the navy, having seen probably as much fighting as any man of his rank, and carrying with him no fewer than twenty-seven certificates, recommendations and votes of thanks for saving the lives of others at the risk of his own. On leaving the navy he devoted himself to literature and began to issue the series of romances that made him the first and greatest of our novelists of the sea. *Frank Mildmay*, *The King's Own*, *Peter Simple*, *Jacob Faithful*, *Mr. Midshipman Easy* and others followed one another in quick succession, until in 1841 Marryat abandoned the writing of adult novels and with *Masterman Ready* began his almost equally famous stories for children.

Mr. Midshipman Easy, although written for the grown-ups, has been the delight of generations of youngsters; but for the reading of boys and girls the story has seemed to me to need some considerable editorial pruning. This treatment will not, I venture to hope, render it less enjoyable to young readers. Their elders can obtain the original text.

HERBERT STRANG.

