

**THE SCOURGE OF THE
OCEAN: A STORY
OF THE ATLANTIC**

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The Scourge of the Ocean: A Story of the Atlantic by Robert Burts

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ROBERT BURTS

**THE SCOURGE OF THE
OCEAN: A STORY
OF THE ATLANTIC**

THE
SCOURGE OF THE OCEAN;

A
STORY OF THE ATLANTIC.

BY
AN OFFICER OF THE U. S. NAVY.

Recent History

Such were the tales that won belief,
And such the coloring fancy gave
To a young, warm, and dauntless chief,
One who no more than mortal brave
Fought for the land his soul adored,
"For happy homes and altars free,"
His only talisman the sword,
His only spell-word, *Liberty!*—MOORE.

c.c.c.

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TO

MORGAN NEVILLE, ESQ.,

THIS VOLUME

IS MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

AS A TRIBUTE OF ADMIRATION FOR HIS TALENTS, AND GRATITUDE FOR HIS FRIENDSHIP,

BY

HIS MUCH OBLIGED SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

THE
SCOURGE OF THE OCEAN.

CHAPTER I.

And hast thou marked the pensive shade
That many a time obscures my brow?—MOORE.

THE first scene of this humble drama opens in New York, at a period when the Island City, though not possessing the extent and magnificence of the present day, was still the most important among all her rivals of the sea-board.

Her excellent harbor, together with the many commercial advantages offered by her particular locality, had drawn both foreign and domestic traffic to her shores, and she was even then fast attaining that pre-eminence which, in the space of little more than half a century, not only elevated her, in point of wealth and size, above all her sisters of the Union, but has also conceded to her an important rank amongst the mighty emporiums of the world.

This narrative commences at a time when much excitement prevailed throughout the colonies. The indignation of the Americans had been aroused by the oppressive measures of the British Parliament, and a general spirit of dissatisfaction was manifested from Maine to Georgia.

Some time previous, George Grenville had introduced into the House of Commons that famous bill which first awoke the patient colonist to a sense of the tyranny of Great Britain, and though their remonstrances proved successful in obtaining its repeal in the year after its passage, that spirit of resistance and insubordination to the measures of their rulers continued to augment, until it finally caused the mighty revolution that forever severed the political bonds that had before united the two countries.

A heavy frigate and two smaller vessels of war swung at their moorings off the southern end of Manhattan Island, fit emblems of the jealousy of that mighty power that sent them forth, to assert and maintain their supremacy over the rest of the world. An observer conversant with nautical affairs, might have perceived at a glance

that they had entered the harbor for a prolonged stay; all their sails, with the exception of the topsails, spanker, and jib, were unbent; the lighter yards were stowed in the rigging instead of being at their proper stations aloft, and the nakedness of the spars betrayed the absence of that delicate gear that characterizes a vessel ready for sea; the lower yards were nicely paralleled to each other, describing right angles with the firm and well-supported spars to which they were attached; and the running rigging belonging to the few sails that still remained upon their respective yards was as taut as the strings of a well-tuned harp; the long black guns looked out upon the scene with their usual gloom, but the peaceful contour of every other feature disrobed them of that fearful aspect they might wear in a more hostile situation. Presently the loud clear strokes of the bell, giving forth the hour of eight, were heard almost simultaneously from the three ships, whilst the banner of England rose to their peaks, fluttered for a moment, and then gave forth their blazoned fields to the breeze; this was the signal for a dozen of the same gaudy ensigns to be unfurled over more than one structure in and about New York. Twenty years afterwards saw a different flag waving upon the scene, but as yet the mighty declaration of July, 1776, existed only in the dreams and hopes of the American patriot.

Upon one of the city wharves stood two individuals, whom we would particularize from amongst a number of others that were lounging about with the air of men who have a curiosity that they are willing to satisfy with any and every object that may be presented. The younger of the two in question might be about twenty years in age, although the deep, thoughtful expression of his brow certainly belonged to a maturer time of life; he was delicately though beautifully formed, and the attitude in which he had placed his person served to exemplify the grace and ease of his demeanor; his mouth was rigid in expression, his eyes dark, deep, and penetrating, and his hair black as the wing of the raven; his cheek was pale, and his features dignified, and calm; there was in his appearance no touch of that characteristic levity that generally belongs to officers of his grade, for he was a midshipman, as his uniform intimated; but, on the contrary, there was all that *hauteur* that we associate with the idea of one who commands. The other individual was the boatswain of the frigate, a well-made athletic man, with a pair of tremendous black whiskers, and a coat of fine broadcloth, which, however, seemed to have been made for a still larger individual than the wearer. It appeared upon interrogation, that the liberty of Mr. Spikes had some time before been stopped for a little indiscretion whilst on terra firma, and he, the said Mr. Spikes, being in need of an outer garment, did instruct and authorize John Cartridge, gunner of his majesty's frigate Ganymede, to be measured for the same, and cause it to be made and dispatched on board to him, the aforementioned Spikes.

"There goes the flag of old England," said the youth, as the bunting arose to the peaks of the vessels of war: "I never behold that banner without feeling the two opposite emotions of veneration and

dislike; there is food for both the admiration and displeasure of mankind in the contemplation of that emblem." This was uttered partly in soliloquy, and partly in address to the boatswain.

"It's dev'lish strange, Mr. Everett, that you should speak in that kind o' way of the flag you sarve under," muttered Spikes; "but I suppose you, being a colonist born, don't altogether trim your ideas on the same tack with the chaps in parliament. It's nat'ral, you know, to have a kind o' hankering after the place o' one's birth; but as to that piece o' bunting, sir, begging your pardon for my bluntness, I've fought under it, bled under it, and d—n me if I wouldn't like to die under it."

"While I applaud your sentiments, Mr. Spikes," returned the youth, calmly but impressively, "let me wish you to understand that I cast no shadow of disrespect upon you ensign. I would only say, that whilst I remember the thousand scenes of glory with which it is associated, I cannot forget that it has invaded the peace of unoffending nations, and carried death, terror, and slavery, as the price of victory, to the hearts and homes of nearly every Christian and Infidel of the known world."

"As to that, Mr. Everett, I've nothing to say; if the king chooses to have a hand in what's going on abroad, Frederick Spikes is not the man to ask him the why and the wherefore."

"You are a loyal subject, Mr. Spikes, and I wish I could add, a reasonable one."

"I don't know what you term reason," resumed the boatswain; "you're a strange young man, Mr. Everett, and often spin out some singular ideas. I s'pose, however, it's what the knowing ones call philosophy. Howsomer it don't suit me. Whatever his majesty chooses to undertake, I'll be d—d if I don't back him in, always begging your pardon for my bluntness, sir."

"Then," resumed the midshipman, "you are at all times willing to become the instrument to enforce the unjust decrees of your sovereign; is it so? Do I understand you to say that you will oppress the innocent, burn, plunder, and destroy, without another license than the will of any tyrant who may claim your allegiance?"

"Look ye, Mr. Everett," returned Spikes, somewhat warmly, "you know I love ye, as does every officer and man in the ship, with the exception of the first Luff, and he, d—n him, hardly knows a swab from a slush tub, so that his good will is like a reefer's wardrobe, not worth having; you know I've taken some little trouble to larn you how to fit rigging, knot, clinch, splice, and all that sort o' thing, and you must now excuse me when I tell you, that had any one else coupled the epithet of tyrant with the name of his majesty, God bless him, d—n me if I wouldn't have sarved him out a ration of slap chops that he'd have remembered forever and a day after."

"I must congratulate myself, then," said the youth, with a smile, "upon having secured the esteem of Mr. Spikes; but I am still unanswered."

"Right or wrong, I love my king, and will sarve him; I have eaten

his bread from a boy, and d—n me if it shall be said that Frederick Spikes ever hailed after the name of that chap Judas."

The midshipman regarded the speaker with a look of mingled sorrow and admiration; no wonder, thought he, that England triumphs over the world; upheld by such spirits as those, to what supremacy might she not arrive? When men cease to exercise the dear prerogative of thinking for themselves, and allow their actions to be guided by the will of a monarch, then does that country over whose destiny he presides become invincible. Here is a being, thought he, that will rush into battle, fight and die without even inquiring or heeding the cause for which he is periling the first gift of God to his creatures. It was some time before Everett again spoke, and when he did his speech had taken the hue of his feelings, and the tenor of his discourse was more in an instructive than in an interrogative strain.

"You cannot but be aware," said he, "of the injustice with which the mother country is at present oppressing these her colonies? By what right does she arrogate the authority of taxing them? You see the spirit of opposition has already been aroused amongst them. They cry loudly against the measures of parliament, and that body, instead of repealing her disgusting enactments, send armed forces here to enforce them. What must be the result of all this? Tell me, do you think that three millions of men, separated by an immense ocean from that country which governs them, and possessing an extent of territory infinitely superior, will long tamely submit to such impositions? Assuredly not. A revolution is now fermenting in this land; we behold the indications of it daily; and mark me! the time is not very far distant, when another than yon ensign will float from the flag-staff of that battery. But here comes the boat, and with your permission we will waive the subject."

Fifteen minutes afterwards the midshipman and his companion stood upon the quarter-deck of his Britannic majesty's frigate *Ganymede*.

George Everett, though connected with the most ancient families of Virginia, was himself an orphan. Like many other youths of the colonies, he had entered the naval service of Great Britain; and had performed, at the period of his introduction to the reader, a probation of more than three years. During this time, his correct and gentlemanly deportment had gained for him the esteem of all with whom he sailed. But there was one individual, who for a trifling offence, and one which none but a narrow mind could have remembered, conceived a dislike to Everett, which he did not fail to manifest in a thousand little ways.

This person was the first lieutenant of the frigate, the officer, of all on board, who had the power of rendering the ship pleasant or disagreeable to her inmates. If there was any unpleasant duty to perform, George was always selected for its execution; if, on the other hand, there was any service to be done which was more honorable than another, George was always excluded from amongst those who were detailed for it. If a ball was given on shore, George was detained on board under some trivial pretext, and if it took place on