

"GOOD FORTUNE TO THE 'BLACK PRINCE.'"

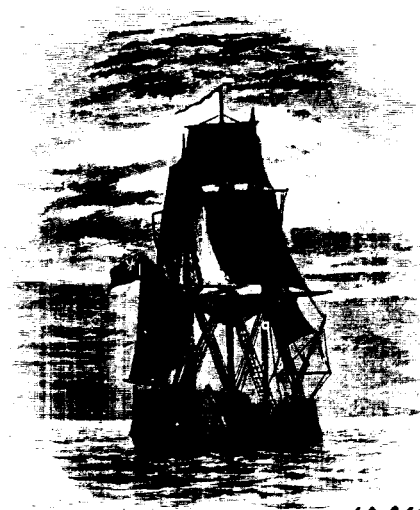
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THE CRUISE
OF
THE "BLACK PRINCE"

PRIVATEER

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THE CRUISE OF THE "BLACK PRINCE."

CHAPTER I.

ONE evening I was sitting in the comfortable parlour of the Woolpack Inn, in Dale Street, Liverpool, with mine host, John Pye, discussing a bowl of punch brewed from right Jamaica and limes, which I had made a present to him on my return from the West Indies, and smoking a pipe of Carolina tobacco, when my old schoolfellow Tom Merrick came in, shaking the wet off his shaggy dreadnought coat, and said, "I heard you were here, Bob, and have come to make an offer to you on behalf of my father and his partner, old Floyd. They were arguing between themselves to whom to offer the command of their ship the *Black Prince*, and I said, 'There's my old schoolfellow Hawkins is now without a ship,' and I thought that they could do no better than get you. At first they said that, as you were at school with me, you must

be quite a boy, forgetting, as old people often do, that as they grow old those they have remembered as children become men of middle age—though, for that matter, I hope at thirty-eight neither of us are yet commencing to go downhill—and it took a good deal of my persuasion, and telling how old Grog Vernon had spoken so highly of your services at the taking of Porto Bello, and of the seamanship you showed in bringing that crazy old *Elizabeth* home from Charleston, before they consented to let me come to you; and now I have been hunting for you for the last three hours, but have run you to earth at last. Now, I make you the offer, will you accept the command of the *Black Prince*?"

"Take command of the *Black Prince*! why, I should think I would. She's the finest ship that sails out of Liverpool. I shall never forget seeing her work up past Tom Shot's Point in old Calabar, and how Price—or Ap Rhys, as he loved to be called—handled her. But what has become of Price? They can never have had any disagreement with him."

"Oh no; there has been no disagreement, but Captain Ap Rhys, as we must all call him now, has been left by a relation of his a snug farm in Wales, and he has borne up for the farm, and, from what I hear, he not only succeeds to the farm, but also to the pulpit of a small chapel which his cousin was minister of."

"I hope Ap Rhys will prove as good a farmer and preacher as he was a sailor; and I think it likely, for he always was what we sailors call of a serious turn of mind. I am infinitely obliged to his relation for leaving him the farm, and giving me the chance of commanding the *Black Prince*."

"Well, Bob, you'll take her? I thought you would, and I'll come as super-cargo. And, I've something more to tell you. We have heard that war with France is to be declared, and my father and Mr. Floyd have determined to apply for a letter of marque."

"What! am I to command her as a privateer? That's next best to being captain of a man-of-war."

"Yes, my lad; but she is not only to go privateering—she is to make the round voyage to Africa and the West Indies, and trust to her heels and her guns to escape capture."

"She can certainly sail, and we'll pick up a right good crew. There were three or four good men in that old *Elizabeth*, and if they have not been picked up by the crimps, I dare say we may be able to get them—and they all have served in men-of-war. There's Black Jack Jago, and his great chum that the men called Bloodred Bill—Cundy's his name; John Beer, Tom Batten, and Harry Moxon—all Falmouth men, and good sailors. And then there's many a tidy man to be found on the banks of the Mersey."

"There you go off at score. You just come down to the office on the quayside to-morrow morning, and you will get your instructions."

"All right. But where is the ship now? I only got back from my uncle's farm this afternoon, where I have been since I left the *Elizabeth*, and know nothing of the news of the town."

"Well, she's up on the beach at Runcorn, to have her bottom resheathed where necessary, and breamed; and just before Captain Ap Rhys left her she had got a new gang of lower rigging over the mastheads, and the mate is busy setting it up. I think the old dad did a good thing when he built her. Last voyage Ap Rhys carried six hundred and fifty-seven slaves from Calabar to Jamaica, and never lost one on the whole voyage. All Liverpool said a ship of five hundred tons was far too big for the African or any other trade."

"Is she five hundred tons? I did not think her so big. She is frigate built, and, with her poop, she has as much room as some of our two-deckers—rather a different class of ship from the old *Elizabeth*."

"I believe you, my boy, and, as you say, she can sail well. She'll show a clean pair of heels to any John Crapands who may be too big for her. Now I must be off. I'll tell my father you'll be down at the office by eight o'clock in the

morning. Another glass of punch, to drink the health of the master of the *Black Prince*."

"All right, Tom. Here, host, fill Mr. Merrick's and my glasses—bumpers,—and join us in wishing good fortune to the *Black Prince* and her new skipper."

John Pye was ready enough to comply, and the toast was drunk with enthusiasm, and after exchanging good nights, Tom left me and rode away.

As soon as he had gone, I asked Pye if he knew of the whereabouts of Jack Jago and his old ship-mates.

"Jack Jago? D'ye mean the man they call Black Jack, who was a prisoner with the Moors?"

"Yes, the same."

"Well, I can't rightly say. I heard he was seen a few days ago, but he's lying low, for fear of the press-gang; but the tender dropped down to the bar this afternoon, and he'd be safe now. I think I know most of the cribs where they stow themselves, but he's too wide awake to trust to the crimps, and it may take some time to find him. Any way I'll send a lad round to look for him, and he'll be here if he's to be found by seven in the morning?"

"All right. Will you do it at once?"

"I'll send at once. Good night. Do you want anything more before you go to bed?"

"No, thank you."