

Next Friday: Our New Serial by Henry St. John.

CAPTAIN NEMO

OR, TRACKED O'ER THE SEAS.

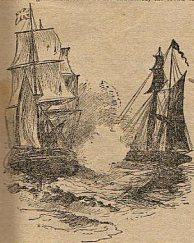
By CHAS. HAMILTON.

Author of "The Corsair Captain," &c., &c.

CHAPTER I.

THE TWO SCHOONERS—DRIVEN TO DOOM.

Dark stormclouds lowered over sea and land, and the waves of the Atlantic broke on the rocks and banks of the Northern Bahama Islands, with a sullen roar that presaged an approaching commotion of the elements. The wind had been increasing in violence all day, and at sunset it blew with steady force towards the shore. The skipper of a small schooner that was drifting towards the rocky reefs of one of the northernmost of the two thousand islands that form the Bahama group, walked the deck of his vessel in nervous perturbation. His eyes were directed alternately at the sea, the sky, and at a large vessel which was following in his wake. The latter was a schooner, with a long, low hull, and tapering masts that, in spite of the rising storm, were crowded with canvas. One look at her would have told her character. The raking masts, the unusual number of guns for a vessel of her dimensions, the crowd of



The Englishman poured in her broadside.

well-armed men that thronged her decks, and, above all, the sullen person that stared in the breeze from her peak, all proved the vessel to be one of the pirate craft which at that period infested the waters of the Bahama. On her black hull was seen the name "Sea-wolf," painted in white.

"There is no hope," said the skipper of the little vessel, an American, trading between Baltimore and the West Indies, addressing his first mate, who stood by his side. "That vessel is the 'Sea-wolf,' of whom we heard so much in Baltimore, and we have the choice of surrendering and getting our throats cut, or of running ashore and going to pieces."

"Then let us go ashore, Captain Brail," answered the mate,

with an anxious look at the line of coral reefs that showed just above the water directly ahead of the little "Water-bird."

"Anything is better than falling into the clutches of the Black Pirate."

As the mate spoke, there came a puff of white smoke from the bow of the "Sea-wolf," and a cannon-ball bursted across the quarter of a mile of agitated water that intervened between the two ships.

"That's a signal to heave to," said Captain Brail, dashing his hat at the pursuer. "But they shall be baffled, the pirate dogs, for I'll send the 'Water-bird' to the bottom before they shall take her!"

"Captain Brail," said a soft voice beside the skipper, "are we in peril of capture?"

"Yes, Mrs. Fairfax," replied Brail, turning to the lady, who was a slender, delicate-featured young woman of twenty-five. "You must know soon, so I may as well tell you now. Unless your vessel leaves us, we are doomed!"

"Heaven help us!" murmured the lady, clasping tighter the hand of a little lad of five or six who walked by her side. "Is there no hope?"

"I am sorry to say there is none, madam," replied the captain. "The Black Pirate is known far and wide as a merciless brute, and rather than fall into his power I have resolved to run my ship ashore."

"If we only had a little sea-room, we might elude them yet," said the mate, glancing keenly over the troubled ocean. "The 'Water-bird' could show a clean pair of heels to any craft about. I warrant, in a stern chase, but we are so encumbered with reefs that I fear it is impossible to gain the open sea."

"Let us keep on," said the skipper gloomily. "If we must go down, perhaps we may be able to take the Black Pirate to Davy Jones' locker with us. The hurricane will be upon us in a few minutes, and then the most skillful seaman alive could not save a ship on this lee-shore."

The crew of the "Water-bird," six all told, had gathered round their chief, and they listened to his words in gloomy silence. There was some consolation in the thought that they might include their foes in their own destruction, but not much. But the sailors had heard too much of the cruelty of the commander of the "Sea-wolf" to wish to trust themselves into his hands.

"The hurricane!—the hurricane!" suddenly shouted one of the seamen, a tall, broad-shouldered English tar, pointing to the eastward with outstretched finger. The captain's eyes followed the line indicated, and he saw an immense black cloud rolling up from the eastern horizon. The sun had now almost disappeared, and a sort of twilight covered the sea.

The masts of the "Water-bird" were bare of canvas, and everything was prepared for the shock. Brail's eyes wandered to the pirate ship, and he saw seamen cut on the yards swiftly furling the sails. But the approach of the tempest did not frighten the rovers from their prey. Under set storm-sails, the "Sea-wolf" still glided through the water towards the fleeing trader. From her bow-chaser came another puff of smoke and a loud report, and a ball whistled between the masts of the "Water-bird."

"There's Captain Nemo!" exclaimed the mate, as a tall figure, clad in black, showed himself on the poop of the pirate, with a speaking-trumpet in his hand. The two vessels were now close enough to allow of hailing.

"Schooner, ahoy!" came from the Black Pirate. "What ship is that?"

"The 'Water-bird,' Baltimore," answered Brail through his trumpet.

"Heave to, or I'll sink you!"

Brail made no reply, but turned his head to look at the black cloud in the east, which had increased to an alarming extent, and was rolling towards the two ships with frightful rapidity. The wind had risen to a gale, and the waves were already agitated by the oncoming tempest.