

The Cruise of the Midge (Volume 1 of 2) At this instant the battery on shore began to play in earnest; not in broadsides, but by single guns, as fast as they could pepper; some of the shot coming through and through both sides of the polacre. We immediately hauled off for the opposite bank of the river, but took the ground on a bank, where the current, setting strong down, jammed us hard and fast. We were about two cables length from the brig at this time, and the sun was now near setting. The firing continued, the flashes became brighter, the smoke began, as the sky darkened, to grow luminous, and presently the polacre appeared to be sinking. She is settling fast down forward, said I; by St Patrick, she is sinking, sure enough,—there—there she goes; what a list to port she is getting! She slowly fell over on her beam-ends, in the mud, with every thing under water but about ten feet of the quarter bulwark next us, and the masts and rigging; which the setting sun was now gilding. The long shadows of the palms on the western bank now gradually crept across the whole breadth of the unwholesome stream, chasing the blood-red gleam of the sinking sun, first from the water, and then from the eastern bank, where it lingered for a moment, on the topmost branches of the trees, from which it also speedily disappeared, until the only objects that vouched for his being still above the horizon, were the wand-like tops of the polacres tall masts, that shone like burnished brass rods for a brief moment; and then blackened under the fast falling darkness, which rapidly shrouded the whole melancholy scene; while creeping churchyard-looking vapours, as if the pestilence no longer walked in darkness, but had become palpable to the senses of sight, smell, and feeling, shrouded every object on the shores from our view, like a London fog. Myriads of musquittoes now began to attack us in every way, and several white cranes flitted past and around us, like ghosts, sailing slowly on their wide-spread wings; the chirping and croaking of numberless insects and reptiles came off strong from the banks, borne on the putrid exhalations that were like to poison us; the rushing of the river, that in the daytime we could scarcely hear, now sounded loud and hoarse, and rippled, lip, lipping against the stem as we lay aground, before circling away in dark frothy eddies in our wake.

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