

VIII. HE IS PUT INTO THE LARBOARD WATCH; GETS SEA-SICK; AND RELATES SOME OTHER OF HIS EXPERIENCES

It was now getting dark, when all at once the sailors were ordered on the quarter-deck, and of course I went along with them.

What is to come now, thought I; but I soon found out. It seemed we were going to be divided into watches. The chief mate began by selecting a stout good-looking sailor for his watch; and then the second mate's turn came to choose, and he also chose a stout good-looking sailor. But it was not me;--no; and I noticed, as they went on choosing, one after the other in regular rotation, that both of the mates never so much as looked at me, but kept going round among the rest, peering into their faces, for it was dusk, and telling them not to hide themselves away so in their jackets. But the sailors, especially the stout good-looking ones, seemed to make a point of lounging as much out of the way as possible, and slouching their hats over their eyes; and although it may only be a fancy of mine, I certainly thought that they affected a sort of lordly indifference as to whose watch they were going to be in; and did not think it worth while to look any way anxious about the matter. And the very men who, a few minutes before, had showed the most alacrity and promptitude in jumping into the rigging and running aloft at the word of command, now lounged against the bulwarks and most lazily; as if they were quite sure, that by this time the officers must know who the best men were, and they valued themselves well enough to be willing to

put the officers to the trouble of searching them out; for if they were worth having, they were worth seeking.

At last they were all chosen but me; and it was the chief mate's next turn to choose; though there could be little choosing in my case, since I was a thirteener, and must, whether or no, go over to the next column, like the odd figure you carry along when you do a sum in addition.

"Well, Buttons," said the chief mate, "I thought I'd got rid of you. And as it is, Mr. Rigs," he added, speaking to the second mate, "I guess you had better take him into your watch;--there, I'll let you have him, and then you'll be one stronger than me."

"No, I thank you," said Mr. Rigs.

"You had better," said the chief mate--"see, he's not a bad looking chap--he's a little green, to be sure, but you were so once yourself, you know, Rigs."

"No, I thank you," said the second mate again. "Take him yourself--he's yours by good rights--I don't want him." And so they put me in the chief mate's division, that is the larboard watch.

While this scene was going on, I felt shabby enough; there I stood, just like a silly sheep, over whom two butchers are bargaining. Nothing that had yet happened so forcibly reminded me of where I was, and what I had

come to. I was very glad when they sent us forward again.

As we were going forward, the second mate called one of the sailors by name:—"You, Bill?" and Bill answered, "Sir?" just as if the second mate was a born gentleman. It surprised me not a little, to see a man in such a shabby, shaggy old jacket addressed so respectfully; but I had been quite as much surprised when I heard the chief mate call him Mr. Rigs during the scene on the quarter-deck; as if this Mr. Rigs was a great merchant living in a marble house in Lafayette Place. But I was not very long in finding out, that at sea all officers are Misters, and would take it for an insult if any seaman presumed to omit calling them so. And it is also one of their rights and privileges to be called sir when addressed--Yes, sir; No, sir; Ay, ay, sir; and they are as particular about being sirred as so many knights and baronets; though their titles are not hereditary, as is the case with the Sir Johns and Sir Joshuas in England. But so far as the second mate is concerned, his titles are the only dignities he enjoys; for, upon the whole, he leads a puppyish We indeed. He is not deemed company at any time for the captain, though the chief mate occasionally is, at least deck-company, though not in the cabin; and besides this, the second mate has to breakfast, lunch, dine, and sup off the leavings of the cabin table, and even the steward, who is accountable to nobody but the captain, sometimes treats him cavalierly; and he has to run aloft when topsails are reefed; and put his hand a good way down into the tar-bucket; and keep the key of the boatswain's locker, and fetch and carry balls of marline and seizing-stuff for the sailors when at work in the rigging; besides doing

many other things, which a true-born baronet of any spirit would rather die and give up his title than stand.

Having been divided into watches we were sent to supper; but I could not eat any thing except a little biscuit, though I should have liked to have some good tea; but as I had no pot to get it in, and was rather nervous about asking the rough sailors to let me drink out of theirs; I was obliged to go without a sip. I thought of going to the black cook and begging a tin cup; but he looked so cross and ugly then, that the sight of him almost frightened the idea out of me.

When supper was over, for they never talk about going to tea aboard of a ship, the watch to which I belonged was called on deck; and we were told it was for us to stand the first night watch, that is, from eight o'clock till midnight.

I now began to feel unsettled and ill at ease about the stomach, as if matters were all topsy-turvy there; and felt strange and giddy about the head; and so I made no doubt that this was the beginning of that dreadful thing, the sea-sickness. Feeling worse and worse, I told one of the sailors how it was with me, and begged him to make my excuses very civilly to the chief mate, for I thought I would go below and spend the night in my bunk. But he only laughed at me, and said something about my mother not being aware of my being out; which enraged me not a little, that a man whom I had heard swear so terribly, should dare to take such a holy name into his mouth. It seemed a sort of blasphemy, and it seemed

like dragging out the best and most cherished secrets of my soul, for at that time the name of mother was the center of all my heart's finest feelings, which ere that, I had learned to keep secret, deep down in my being.

But I did not outwardly resent the sailor's words, for that would have only made the matter worse.

Now this man was a Greenlander by birth, with a very white skin where the sun had not burnt it, and handsome blue eyes placed wide apart in his head, and a broad good-humored face, and plenty of curly flaxen hair. He was not very tall, but exceedingly stout-built, though active; and his back was as broad as a shield, and it was a great way between his shoulders. He seemed to be a sort of lady's sailor, for in his broken English he was always talking about the nice ladies of his acquaintance in Stockholm and Copenhagen and a place he called the Hook, which at first I fancied must be the place where lived the hook-nosed men that caught fowling-pieces and every other article that came along. He was dressed very tastefully, too, as if he knew he was a good-looking fellow. He had on a new blue woolen Havre frock, with a new silk handkerchief round his neck, passed through one of the vertebral bones of a shark, highly polished and carved. His trowsers were of clear white duck, and he sported a handsome pair of pumps, and a tarpaulin hat bright as a looking-glass, with a long black ribbon streaming behind, and getting entangled every now and then in the rigging; and he had gold anchors in his ears, and a silver ring on one of his fingers, which was

very much worn and bent from pulling ropes and other work on board ship. I thought he might better have left his jewelry at home.

It was a long time before I could believe that this man was really from Greenland, though he looked strange enough to me, then, to have come from the moon; and he was full of stories about that distant country; how they passed the winters there; and how bitter cold it was; and how he used to go to bed and sleep twelve hours, and get up again and run about, and go to bed again, and get up again--there was no telling how many times, and all in one night; for in the winter time in his country, he said, the nights were so many weeks long, that a Greenland baby was sometimes three months old, before it could properly be said to be a day old.

I had seen mention made of such things before, in books of voyages; but that was only reading about them, just as you read the Arabian Nights, which no one ever believes; for somehow, when I read about these wonderful countries, I never used really to believe what I read, but only thought it very strange, and a good deal too strange to be altogether true; though I never thought the men who wrote the book meant to tell lies. But I don't know exactly how to explain what I mean; but this much I will say, that I never believed in Greenland till I saw this Greenlander. And at first, hearing him talk about Greenland, only made me still more incredulous. For what business had a man from Greenland to be in my company? Why was he not at home among the icebergs, and how could he stand a warm summer's sun, and not be melted away? Besides,

instead of icicles, there were ear-rings hanging from his ears; and he did not wear bear-skins, and keep his hands in a huge muff; things, which I could not help connecting with Greenland and all Greenlanders.

But I was telling about my being sea-sick and wanting to retire for the night. This Greenlander seeing I was ill, volunteered to turn doctor and cure me; so going down into the fore-castle, he came back with a brown jug, like a molasses jug, and a little tin cannikin, and as soon as the brown jug got near my nose, I needed no telling what was in it, for it smelt like a still-house, and sure enough proved to be full of Jamaica spirits.

"Now, Buttons," said he, "one little dose of this will be better for you than a whole night's sleep; there, take that now, and then eat seven or eight biscuits, and you'll feel as strong as the mainmast."

But I felt very little like doing as I was bid, for I had some scruples about drinking spirits; and to tell the plain truth, for I am not ashamed of it, I was a member of a society in the village where my mother lived, called the Juvenile Total Abstinence Association, of which my friend, Tom Legare, was president, secretary, and treasurer, and kept the funds in a little purse that his cousin knit for him. There was three and sixpence on hand, I believe, the last time he brought in his accounts, on a May day, when we had a meeting in a grove on the river-bank. Tom was a very honest treasurer, and never spent the Society's money for peanuts; and besides all, was a fine, generous boy,

whom I much loved. But I must not talk about Tom now.

When the Greenlander came to me with his jug of medicine, I thanked him as well as I could; for just then I was leaning with my mouth over the side, feeling ready to die; but I managed to tell him I was under a solemn obligation never to drink spirits upon any consideration whatever; though, as I had a sort of presentiment that the spirits would now, for once in my life, do me good, I began to feel sorry, that when I signed the pledge of abstinence, I had not taken care to insert a little clause, allowing me to drink spirits in case of sea-sickness. And I would advise temperance people to attend to this matter in future; and then if they come to go to sea, there will be no need of breaking their pledges, which I am truly sorry to say was the case with me. And a hard thing it was, too, thus to break a vow before unbroken; especially as the Jamaica tasted any thing but agreeable, and indeed burnt my mouth so, that I did not relish my meals for some time after. Even when I had become quite well and strong again, I wondered how the sailors could really like such stuff; but many of them had a jug of it, besides the Greenlander, which they brought along to sea with them, to taper off with, as they called it. But this tapering off did not last very long, for the Jamaica was all gone on the second day, and the jugs were tossed overboard. I wonder where they are now?

But to tell the truth, I found, in spite of its sharp taste, the spirits I drank was just the thing I needed; but I suppose, if I could have had a cup of nice hot coffee, it would have done quite as well, and perhaps

much better. But that was not to be had at that time of night, or, indeed, at any other time; for the thing they called coffee, which was given to us every morning at breakfast, was the most curious tasting drink I ever drank, and tasted as little like coffee, as it did like lemonade; though, to be sure, it was generally as cold as lemonade, and I used to think the cook had an icehouse, and dropt ice into his coffee. But what was more curious still, was the different quality and taste of it on different mornings. Sometimes it tasted fishy, as if it was a decoction of Dutch herrings; and then it would taste very salty, as if some old horse, or sea-beef, had been boiled in it; and then again it would taste a sort of cheesy, as if the captain had sent his cheese-parings forward to make our coffee of; and yet another time it would have such a very bad flavor, that I was almost ready to think some old stocking-heels had been boiled in it. What under heaven it was made of, that it had so many different bad flavors, always remained a mystery; for when at work at his vocation, our old cook used to keep himself close shut-up in his caboose, a little cook-house, and never told any of his secrets.

Though a very serious character, as I shall hereafter show, he was for all that, and perhaps for that identical reason, a very suspicious looking sort of a cook, that I don't believe would ever succeed in getting the cooking at Delmonico's in New York. It was well for him that he was a black cook, for I have no doubt his color kept us from seeing his dirty face! I never saw him wash but once, and that was at one of his own soup pots one dark night when he thought no one saw him. What

induced him to be washing his face then, I never could find out; but I suppose he must have suddenly waked up, after dreaming about some real estate on his cheeks. As for his coffee, notwithstanding the disagreeableness of its flavor, I always used to have a strange curiosity every morning, to see what new taste it was going to have; and though, sure enough, I never missed making a new discovery, and adding another taste to my palate, I never found that there was any change in the badness of the beverage, which always seemed the same in that respect as before.

It may well be believed, then, that now when I was seasick, a cup of such coffee as our old cook made would have done me no good, if indeed it would not have come near making an end of me. And bad as it was, and since it was not to be had at that time of night, as I said before, I think I was excusable in taking something else in place of it, as I did; and under the circumstances, it would be unhandsome of them, if my fellow-members of the Temperance Society should reproach me for breaking my bond, which I would not have done except in case of necessity. But the evil effect of breaking one's bond upon any occasion whatever, was witnessed in the present case; for it insidiously opened the way to subsequent breaches of it, which though very slight, yet carried no apology with them.