

XII. HE GIVES SOME ACCOUNT OF ONE OF HIS SHIPMATES CALLED JACKSON

While we sat eating our beef and biscuit, two of the men got into a dispute, about who had been sea-faring the longest; when Jackson, who had mixed the burgoo, called upon them in a loud voice to cease their clamor, for he would decide the matter for them. Of this sailor, I shall have something more to say, as I get on with my narrative; so, I will here try to describe him a little.

Did you ever see a man, with his hair shaved off, and just recovered from the yellow fever? Well, just such a looking man was this sailor. He was as yellow as gamboge, had no more whisker on his cheek, than I have on my elbows. His hair had fallen out, and left him very bald, except in the nape of his neck, and just behind the ears, where it was stuck over with short little tufts, and looked like a worn-out shoe-brush. His nose had broken down in the middle, and he squinted with one eye, and did not look very straight out of the other. He dressed a good deal like a Bowery boy; for he despised the ordinary sailor-rig; wearing a pair of great over-all blue trowsers, fastened with suspenders, and three red woolen shirts, one over the other; for he was subject to the rheumatism, and was not in good health, he said; and he had a large white wool hat, with a broad rolling brim. He was a native of New York city, and had a good deal to say about highlanders, and rowdies, whom he denounced as only good for the gallows; but I thought he looked a good deal like a

highlander himself.

His name, as I have said, was Jackson; and he told us, he was a near relation of General Jackson of New Orleans, and swore terribly, if any one ventured to question what he asserted on that head. In fact he was a great bully, and being the best seaman on board, and very overbearing every way, all the men were afraid of him, and durst not contradict him, or cross his path in any thing. And what made this more wonderful was, that he was the weakest man, bodily, of the whole crew; and I have no doubt that young and small as I was then, compared to what I am now, I could have thrown him down. But he had such an overawing way with him; such a deal of brass and impudence, such an unflinching face, and withal was such a hideous looking mortal, that Satan himself would have run from him. And besides all this, it was quite plain, that he was by nature a marvelously clever, cunning man, though without education; and understood human nature to a kink, and well knew whom he had to deal with; and then, one glance of his squinting eye, was as good as a knock-down, for it was the most deep, subtle, infernal looking eye, that I ever saw lodged in a human head. I believe, that by good rights it must have belonged to a wolf, or starved tiger; at any rate, I would defy any oculist, to turn out a glass eye, half so cold, and snaky, and deadly. It was a horrible thing; and I would give much to forget that I have ever seen it; for it haunts me to this day.

It was impossible to tell how old this Jackson was; for he had no beard, and no wrinkles, except small crowsfeet about the eyes. He might have

seen thirty, or perhaps fifty years. But according to his own account, he had been to sea ever since he was eight years old, when he first went as a cabin-boy in an Indiaman, and ran away at Calcutta. And according to his own account, too, he had passed through every kind of dissipation and abandonment in the worst parts of the world. He had served in Portuguese slavers on the coast of Africa; and with a diabolical relish used to tell of the middle-passage, where the slaves were stowed, heel and point, like logs, and the suffocated and dead were unmanacled, and weeded out from the living every morning, before washing down the decks; how he had been in a slaving schooner, which being chased by an English cruiser off Cape Verde, received three shots in her hull, which raked through and through a whole file of slaves, that were chained.

He would tell of lying in Batavia during a fever, when his ship lost a man every few days, and how they went reeling ashore with the body, and got still more intoxicated by way of precaution against the plague. He would talk of finding a cobra-di-capello, or hooded snake, under his pillow in India, when he slept ashore there. He would talk of sailors being poisoned at Canton with drugged "shampoo," for the sake of their money; and of the Malay ruffians, who stopped ships in the straits of Caspar, and always saved the captain for the last, so as to make him point out where the most valuable goods were stored.

His whole talk was of this land; full of piracies, plagues and poisonings. And often he narrated many passages in his own individual career, which were almost incredible, from the consideration that few

men could have plunged into such infamous vices, and clung to them so long, without paying the death-penalty.

But in truth, he carried about with him the traces of these things, and the mark of a fearful end nigh at hand; like that of King Antiochus of Syria, who died a worse death, history says, than if he had been stung out of the world by wasps and hornets.

Nothing was left of this Jackson but the foul lees and dregs of a man; he was thin as a shadow; nothing but skin and bones; and sometimes used to complain, that it hurt him to sit on the hard chests. And I sometimes fancied, it was the consciousness of his miserable, broken-down condition, and the prospect of soon dying like a dog, in consequence of his sins, that made this poor wretch always eye me with such malevolence as he did. For I was young and handsome, at least my mother so thought me, and as soon as I became a little used to the sea, and shook off my low spirits somewhat, I began to have my old color in my cheeks, and, spite of misfortune, to appear well and hearty; whereas he was being consumed by an incurable malady, that was eating up his vitals, and was more fit for a hospital than a ship.

As I am sometimes by nature inclined to indulge in unauthorized surmisings about the thoughts going on with regard to me, in the people I meet; especially if I have reason to think they dislike me; I will not put it down for a certainty that what I suspected concerning this Jackson relative to his thoughts of me, was really the truth. But only

state my honest opinion, and how it struck me at the time; and even now, I think I was not wrong. And indeed, unless it was so, how could I account to myself, for the shudder that would run through me, when I caught this man gazing at me, as I often did; for he was apt to be dumb at times, and would sit with his eyes fixed, and his teeth set, like a man in the moody madness.

I well remember the first time I saw him, and how I was startled at his eye, which was even then fixed upon me. He was standing at the ship's helm, being the first man that got there, when a steersman was called for by the pilot; for this Jackson was always on the alert for easy duties, and used to plead his delicate health as the reason for assuming them, as he did; though I used to think, that for a man in poor health, he was very swift on the legs; at least when a good place was to be jumped to; though that might only have been a sort of spasmodic exertion under strong inducements, which every one knows the greatest invalids will sometimes show.

And though the sailors were always very bitter against any thing like sogering, as they called it; that is, any thing that savored of a desire to get rid of downright hard work; yet, I observed that, though this Jackson was a notorious old soger the whole voyage (I mean, in all things not perilous to do, from which he was far from hanging back), and in truth was a great veteran that way, and one who must have passed unhurt through many campaigns; yet, they never presumed to call him to account in any way; or to let him so much as think, what they thought of

his conduct. But I often heard them call him many hard names behind his back; and sometimes, too, when, perhaps, they had just been tenderly inquiring after his health before his face. They all stood in mortal fear of him; and cringed and fawned about him like so many spaniels; and used to rub his back, after he was undressed and lying in his bunk; and used to run up on deck to the cook-house, to warm some cold coffee for him; and used to fill his pipe, and give him chews of tobacco, and mend his jackets and trowsers; and used to watch, and tend, and nurse him every way. And all the time, he would sit scowling on them, and found fault with what they did; and I noticed, that those who did the most for him, and cringed the most before him, were the very ones he most abused; while two or three who held more aloof, he treated with a little consideration.

It is not for me to say, what it was that made a whole ship's company submit so to the whims of one poor miserable man like Jackson. I only know that so it was; but I have no doubt, that if he had had a blue eye in his head, or had had a different face from what he did have, they would not have stood in such awe of him. And it astonished me, to see that one of the seamen, a remarkably robust and good-humored young man from Belfast in Ireland, was a person of no mark or influence among the crew; but on the contrary was hooted at, and trampled upon, and made a butt and laughing-stock; and more than all, was continually being abused and snubbed by Jackson, who seemed to hate him cordially, because of his great strength and fine person, and particularly because of his red cheeks.

But then, this Belfast man, although he had shipped for an able-seaman, was not much of a sailor; and that always lowers a man in the eyes of a ship's company; I mean, when he ships for an able-seaman, but is not able to do the duty of one. For sailors are of three classes-- able-seaman, ordinary-seaman, and boys; and they receive different wages according to their rank. Generally, a ship's company of twelve men will only have five or six able seamen, who if they prove to understand their duty every way (and that is no small matter either, as I shall hereafter show, perhaps), are looked up to, and thought much of by the ordinary-seamen and boys, who reverence their very pea-jackets, and lay up their sayings in their hearts.

But you must not think from this, that persons called boys aboard merchant-ships are all youngsters, though to be sure, I myself was called a boy, and a boy I was. No. In merchant-ships, a boy means a green-hand, a landsman on his first voyage. And never mind if he is old enough to be a grandfather, he is still called a boy; and boys' work is put upon him.

But I am straying off from what I was going to say about Jackson's putting an end to the dispute between the two sailors in the fore-castle after breakfast. After they had been disputing some time about who had been to sea the longest, Jackson told them to stop talking; and then bade one of them open his mouth; for, said he, I can tell a sailor's age just like a horse's--by his teeth. So the man laughed, and opened his

mouth; and Jackson made him step out under the scuttle, where the light came down from deck; and then made him throw his head back, while he looked into it, and probed a little with his jackknife, like a baboon peering into a junk-bottle. I trembled for the poor fellow, just as if I had seen him under the hands of a crazy barber, making signs to cut his throat, and he all the while sitting stock still, with the lather on, to be shaved. For I watched Jackson's eye and saw it snapping, and a sort of going in and out, very quick, as if it were something like a forked tongue; and somehow, I felt as if he were longing to kill the man; but at last he grew more composed, and after concluding his examination, said, that the first man was the oldest sailor, for the ends of his teeth were the evenest and most worn down; which, he said, arose from eating so much hard sea-biscuit; and this was the reason he could tell a sailor's age like a horse's.

At this, every body made merry, and looked at each other, as much as to say--come, boys, let's laugh; and they did laugh; and declared it was a rare joke.

This was always the way with them. They made a point of shouting out, whenever Jackson said any thing with a grin; that being the sign to them that he himself thought it funny; though I heard many good jokes from others pass off without a smile; and once Jackson himself (for, to tell the truth, he sometimes had a comical way with him, that is, when his back did not ache) told a truly funny story, but with a grave face; when, not knowing how he meant it, whether for a laugh or otherwise,

they all sat still, waiting what to do, and looking perplexed enough; till at last Jackson roared out upon them for a parcel of fools and idiots; and told them to their beards, how it was; that he had purposely put on his grave face, to see whether they would not look grave, too; even when he was telling something that ought to split their sides. And with that, he flouted, and jeered at them, and laughed them all to scorn; and broke out in such a rage, that his lips began to glue together at the corners with a fine white foam.

He seemed to be full of hatred and gall against every thing and every body in the world; as if all the world was one person, and had done him some dreadful harm, that was rankling and festering in his heart. Sometimes I thought he was really crazy; and often felt so frightened at him, that I thought of going to the captain about it, and telling him Jackson ought to be confined, lest he should do some terrible thing at last. But upon second thoughts, I always gave it up; for the captain would only have called me a fool, and sent me forward again.

But you must not think that all the sailors were alike in abasing themselves before this man. No: there were three or four who used to stand up sometimes against him; and when he was absent at the wheel, would plot against him among the other sailors, and tell them what a shame and ignominy it was, that such a poor miserable wretch should be such a tyrant over much better men than himself. And they begged and conjured them as men, to put up with it no longer, but the very next time, that Jackson presumed to play the dictator, that they should all

withstand him, and let him know his place. Two or three times nearly all hands agreed to it, with the exception of those who used to slink off during such discussions; and swore that they would not any more submit to being ruled by Jackson. But when the time came to make good their oaths, they were mum again, and let every thing go on the old way; so that those who had put them up to it, had to bear all the brunt of Jackson's wrath by themselves. And though these last would stick up a little at first, and even mutter something about a fight to Jackson; yet in the end, finding themselves unbefriended by the rest, they would gradually become silent, and leave the field to the tyrant, who would then fly out worse than ever, and dare them to do their worst, and jeer at them for white-livered poltroons, who did not have a mouthful of heart in them. At such times, there were no bounds to his contempt; and indeed, all the time he seemed to have even more contempt than hatred, for every body and every thing.

As for me, I was but a boy; and at any time aboard ship, a boy is expected to keep quiet, do what he is bid, never presume to interfere, and seldom to talk, unless spoken to. For merchant sailors have a great idea of their dignity, and superiority to greenhorns and landsmen, who know nothing about a ship; and they seem to think, that an able seaman is a great man; at least a much greater man than a little boy. And the able seamen in the Highlander had such grand notions about their seamanship, that I almost thought that able seamen received diplomas, like those given at colleges; and were made a sort A.M.S, or Masters of Arts.

But though I kept thus quiet, and had very little to say, and well knew that my best plan was to get along peaceably with every body, and indeed endure a good deal before showing fight, yet I could not avoid Jackson's evil eye, nor escape his bitter enmity. And his being my foe, set many of the rest against me; or at least they were afraid to speak out for me before Jackson; so that at last I found myself a sort of Ishmael in the ship, without a single friend or companion; and I began to feel a hatred growing up in me against the whole crew--so much so, that I prayed against it, that it might not master my heart completely, and so make a fiend of me, something like Jackson.

XII. HE HAS A FINE DAY AT SEA, BEGINS TO LIKE IT; BUT CHANGES HIS MIND

The second day out of port, the decks being washed down and breakfast over, the watch was called, and the mate set us to work.

It was a very bright day. The sky and water were both of the same deep hue; and the air felt warm and sunny; so that we threw off our jackets. I could hardly believe that I was sailing in the same ship I had been in during the night, when every thing had been so lonely and dim; and I could hardly imagine that this was the same ocean, now so beautiful and