

Hamburg!

Bless my soul! and here I am on the great Atlantic Ocean, actually beholding a ship from Holland! It was passing strange. In my intervals of leisure from other duties, I followed the strange ship till she was quite a little speck in the distance.

I could not but be struck with the manner of the two sea-captains during their brief interview. Seated at their ease on their respective "poops" toward the stern of their ships, while the sailors were obeying their behests; they touched hats to each other, exchanged compliments, and drove on, with all the indifference of two Arab horsemen accosting each other on an airing in the Desert. To them, I suppose, the great Atlantic Ocean was a puddle.

XVI. AT DEAD OF NIGHT HE IS SENT UP TO LOOSE THE MAIN-SKYSAIL

I must now run back a little, and tell of my first going aloft at middle watch, when the sea was quite calm, and the breeze was mild.

The order was given to loose the main-skysail, which is the fifth and highest sail from deck. It was a very small sail, and from the

forecastle looked no bigger than a cambric pocket-handkerchief. But I have heard that some ships carry still smaller sails, above the skysail; called moon-sails, and skyscrapers, and cloud-rakers. But I shall not believe in them till I see them; a skysail seems high enough in all conscience; and the idea of any thing higher than that, seems preposterous. Besides, it looks almost like tempting heaven, to brush the very firmament so, and almost put the eyes of the stars out; when a flaw of wind, too, might very soon take the conceit out of these cloud-defying cloud-rakers.

Now, when the order was passed to loose the skysail, an old Dutch sailor came up to me, and said, "Buttons, my boy, it's high time you be doing something; and it's boy's business, Buttons, to loose de royals, and not old men's business, like me. Now, d'ye see dat leelle fellow way up dare? dare, just behind dem stars dare: well, tumble up, now, Buttons, I zay, and looze him; way you go, Buttons."

All the rest joining in, and seeming unanimous in the opinion, that it was high time for me to be stirring myself, and doing boy's business, as they called it, I made no more ado, but jumped into the rigging. Up I went, not daring to look down, but keeping my eyes glued, as it were, to the shrouds, as I ascended.

It was a long road up those stairs, and I began to pant and breathe hard, before I was half way. But I kept at it till I got to the Jacob's Ladder; and they may well call it so, for it took me almost into the

clouds; and at last, to my own amazement, I found myself hanging on the skysail-yard, holding on might and main to the mast; and curling my feet round the rigging, as if they were another pair of hands.

For a few moments I stood awe-stricken and mute. I could not see far out upon the ocean, owing to the darkness of the night; and from my lofty perch, the sea looked like a great, black gulf, hemmed in, all round, by beetling black cliffs. I seemed all alone; treading the midnight clouds; and every second, expected to find myself falling--falling--falling, as I have felt when the nightmare has been on me.

I could but just perceive the ship below me, like a long narrow plank in the water; and it did not seem to belong at all to the yard, over which I was hanging. A gull, or some sort of sea-fowl, was flying round the truck over my head, within a few yards of my face; and it almost frightened me to hear it; it seemed so much like a spirit, at such a lofty and solitary height.

Though there was a pretty smooth sea, and little wind; yet, at this extreme elevation, the ship's motion was very great; so that when the ship rolled one way, I felt something as a fly must feel, walking the ceiling; and when it rolled the other way, I felt as if I was hanging along a slanting pine-tree.

But presently I heard a distant, hoarse noise from below; and though I could not make out any thing intelligible, I knew it was the mate

hurrying me. So in a nervous, trembling desperation, I went to casting off the gaskets, or lines tying up the sail; and when all was ready, sung out as I had been told, to "hoist away!" And hoist they did, and me too along with the yard and sail; for I had no time to get off, they were so unexpectedly quick about it. It seemed like magic; there I was, going up higher and higher; the yard rising under me, as if it were alive, and no soul in sight. Without knowing it at the time, I was in a good deal of danger, but it was so dark that I could not see well enough to feel afraid--at least on that account; though I felt frightened enough in a promiscuous way. I only held on hard, and made good the saying of old sailors, that the last person to fall overboard from the rigging is a landsman, because he grips the ropes so fiercely; whereas old tars are less careful, and sometimes pay the penalty.

After this feat, I got down rapidly on deck, and received something like a compliment from Max the Dutchman.

This man was perhaps the best natured man among the crew; at any rate, he treated me better than the rest did; and for that reason he deserves some mention.

Max was an old bachelor of a sailor, very precise about his wardrobe, and prided himself greatly upon his seamanship, and entertained some straight-laced, old-fashioned notions about the duties of boys at sea. His hair, whiskers, and cheeks were of a fiery red; and as he wore a red shirt, he was altogether the most combustible looking man I ever saw.

Nor did his appearance belie him; for his temper was very inflammable; and at a word, he would explode in a shower of hard words and imprecations. It was Max that several times set on foot those conspiracies against Jackson, which I have spoken of before; but he ended by paying him a grumbling homage, full of resentful reservations.

Max sometimes manifested some little interest in my welfare; and often discoursed concerning the sorry figure I would cut in my tatters when we got to Liverpool, and the discredit it would bring on the American Merchant Service; for like all European seamen in American ships, Max prided himself not a little upon his naturalization as a Yankee, and if he could, would have been very glad to have passed himself off for a born native.

But notwithstanding his grief at the prospect of my reflecting discredit upon his adopted country, he never offered to better my wardrobe, by loaning me any thing from his own well-stored chest. Like many other well-wishers, he contented him with sympathy. Max also betrayed some anxiety to know whether I knew how to dance; lest, when the ship's company went ashore, I should disgrace them by exposing my awkwardness in some of the sailor saloons. But I relieved his anxiety on that head.

He was a great scold, and fault-finder, and often took me to task about my short-comings; but herein, he was not alone; for every one had a finger, or a thumb, and sometimes both hands, in my unfortunate pie.