

XVII. THE COOK AND STEWARD

It was on a Sunday we made the Banks of Newfoundland; a drizzling, foggy, clammy Sunday. You could hardly see the water, owing to the mist and vapor upon it; and every thing was so flat and calm, I almost thought we must have somehow got back to New York, and were lying at the foot of Wall-street again in a rainy twilight. The decks were dripping with wet, so that in the dense fog, it seemed as if we were standing on the roof of a house in a shower.

It was a most miserable Sunday; and several of the sailors had twinges of the rheumatism, and pulled on their monkey-jackets. As for Jackson, he was all the time rubbing his back and snarling like a dog.

I tried to recall all my pleasant, sunny Sundays ashore; and tried to imagine what they were doing at home; and whether our old family friend, Mr. Bridenstoke, would drop in, with his silver-mounted tasseled cane, between churches, as he used to; and whether he would inquire about myself.

But it would not do. I could hardly realize that it was Sunday at all.

Every thing went on pretty much the same as before. There was no church to go to; no place to take a walk in; no friend to call upon. I began to think it must be a sort of second Saturday; a foggy Saturday, when school-boys stay at home reading Robinson Crusoe.

The only man who seemed to be taking his ease that day, was our black cook; who according to the invariable custom at sea, always went by the name of the doctor.

And doctors, cooks certainly are, the very best medicos in the world; for what pestilent pills and potions of the Faculty are half so serviceable to man, and health-and-strength-giving, as roasted lamb and green peas, say, in spring; and roast beef and cranberry sauce in winter? Will a dose of calomel and jakp do you as much good? Will a bolus build up a fainting man? Is there any satisfaction in dining off a powder? But these doctors of the frying-pan sometimes loll men off by a surfeit; or give them the headache, at least. Well, what then? No matter. For if with their most goodly and ten times jolly I medicines, they now and then fill our nights with tribulations, and abridge our days, what of the social homicides perpetrated by the Faculty? And when you die by a pill-doctor's hands, it is never with a sweet relish in your mouth, as though you died by a frying-pan-doctor; but your last breath villainously savors of ipecac and rhubarb. Then, what charges they make for the abominable lunches they serve out so stingily! One of their bills for boluses would keep you in good dinners a twelve-month.

Now, our doctor was a serious old fellow, much given to metaphysics, and used to talk about original sin. All that Sunday morning, he sat over his boiling pots, reading out of a book which was very much soiled and covered with grease spots: for he kept it stuck into a little leather strap, nailed to the keg where he kept the fat skimmed off the water in which the salt beef was cooked. I could hardly believe my eyes when I found this book was the Bible.

I loved to peep in upon him, when he was thus absorbed; for his smoky studio or study was a strange-looking place enough; not more than five feet square, and about as many high; a mere box to hold the stove, the pipe of which stuck out of the roof.

Within, it was hung round with pots and pans; and on one side was a little looking-glass, where he used to shave; and on a small shelf were his shaving tools, and a comb and brush. Fronting the stove, and very close to it, was a sort of narrow shelf, where he used to sit with his legs spread out very wide, to keep them from scorching; and there, with his book in one hand, and a pewter spoon in the other, he sat all that Sunday morning, stirring up his pots, and studying away at the same time; seldom taking his eye off the page. Reading must have been very hard work for him; for he muttered to himself quite loud as he read; and big drops of sweat would stand upon his brow, and roll off, till they hissed on the hot stove before him. But on the day I speak of, it was no wonder that he got perplexed, for he was reading a mysterious passage in the Book of Chronicles. Being aware that I knew how to read, he called

me as I was passing his premises, and read the passage over, demanding an explanation. I told him it was a mystery that no one could explain; not even a parson. But this did not satisfy him, and I left him poring over it still.

He must have been a member of one of those negro churches, which are to be found in New York. For when we lay at the wharf, I remembered that a committee of three reverend looking old darkies, who, besides their natural canonicals, wore quaker-cut black coats, and broad-brimmed black hats, and white neck-cloths; these colored gentlemen called upon him, and remained conversing with him at his cookhouse door for more than an hour; and before they went away they stepped inside, and the sliding doors were closed; and then we heard some one reading aloud and preaching; and after that a psalm was sung and a benediction given; when the door opened again, and the congregation came out in a great perspiration; owing, I suppose, to the chapel being so small, and there being only one seat besides the stove.

But notwithstanding his religious studies and meditations, this old fellow used to use some bad language occasionally; particularly of cold, wet stormy mornings, when he had to get up before daylight and make his fire; with the sea breaking over the bows, and now and then dashing into his stove.

So, under the circumstances, you could not blame him much, if he did rip a little, for it would have tried old Job's temper, to be set to work

making a fire in the water.

Without being at all neat about his premises, this old cook was very particular about them; he had a warm love and affection for his cook-house. In fair weather, he spread the skirt of an old jacket before the door, by way of a mat; and screwed a small ring-bolt into the door for a knocker; and wrote his name, "Mr. Thompson," over it, with a bit of red chalk.

The men said he lived round the corner of Forecastle-square, opposite the Liberty Pole; because his cook-house was right behind the foremast, and very near the quarters occupied by themselves.

Sailors have a great fancy for naming things that way on shipboard. When a man is hung at sea, which is always done from one of the lower yard-arms, they say he "takes a walk up Ladder-lane, and down Hemp-street."

Mr. Thompson was a great crony of the steward's, who, being a handsome, dandy mulatto, that had once been a barber in West-Broadway, went by the name of Lavender. I have mentioned the gorgeous turban he wore when Mr. Jones and I visited the captain in the cabin. He never wore that turban at sea, though; but sported an uncommon head of frizzled hair, just like the large, round brush, used for washing windows, called a Pope's Head.

He kept it well perfumed with Cologne water, of which he had a large

supply, the relics of his West-Broadway stock in trade. His clothes, being mostly cast-off suits of the captain of a London liner, whom he had sailed with upon many previous voyages, were all in the height of the exploded fashions, and of every kind of color and cut. He had claret-colored suits, and snuff-colored suits, and red velvet vests, and buff and brimstone pantaloons, and several full suits of black, which, with his dark-colored face, made him look quite clerical; like a serious young colored gentleman of Barbados, about to take orders.

He wore an uncommon large pury ring on his forefinger, with something he called a real diamond in it; though it was very dim, and looked more like a glass eye than any thing else. He was very proud of his ring, and was always calling your attention to something, and pointing at it with his ornamented finger.

He was a sentimental sort of a darky, and read the "Three Spaniards," and "Charlotte Temple," and carried a lock of frizzled hair in his vest pocket, which he frequently volunteered to show to people, with his handkerchief to his eyes. Every fine evening, about sunset, these two, the cook and steward, used to sit on the little shelf in the cook-house, leaning up against each other like the Siamese twins, to keep from falling off, for the shelf was very short; and there they would stay till after dark, smoking their pipes, and gossiping about the events that had happened during the day in the cabin. And sometimes Mr. Thompson would take down his Bible, and read a chapter for the edification of Lavender, whom he knew to be a sad profligate and gay

deceiver ashore; addicted to every youthful indiscretion. He would read over to him the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife; and hold Joseph up to him as a young man of excellent principles, whom he ought to imitate, and not be guilty of his indiscretion any more. And Lavender would look serious, and say that he knew it was all true--he was a wicked youth, he knew it--he had broken a good many hearts, and many eyes were weeping for him even then, both in New York, and Liverpool, and London, and Havre. But how could he help it? He hadn't made his handsome face, and fine head of hair, and graceful figure. It was not he, but the others, that were to blame; for his bewitching person turned all heads and subdued all hearts, wherever he went. And then he would look very serious and penitent, and go up to the little glass, and pass his hands through his hair, and see how his whiskers were coming on.

XVIII. HE ENDEAVORS TO IMPROVE HIS MIND; AND TELLS OF ONE BLUNT AND HIS

DREAM BOOK

On the Sunday afternoon I spoke of, it was my watch below, and I thought I would spend it profitably, in improving my mind.

My bunk was an upper one; and right over the head of it was a bull's-