

XXVIII. HE GOES TO SUPPER AT THE SIGN OF THE BALTIMORE CLIPPER

In the afternoon our pilot was all alive with his orders; we hove up the anchor, and after a deal of pulling, and hauling, and jamming against other ships, we wedged our way through a lock at high tide; and about dark, succeeded in working up to a berth in Prince's Dock. The hawsers and tow-lines being then coiled away, the crew were told to go ashore, select their boarding-house, and sit down to supper.

Here it must be mentioned, that owing to the strict but necessary regulations of the Liverpool docks, no fires of any kind are allowed on board the vessels within them; and hence, though the sailors are supposed to sleep in the fore-castle, yet they must get their meals ashore, or live upon cold potatoes. To a ship, the American merchantmen adopt the former plan; the owners, of course, paying the landlord's bill; which, in a large crew remaining at Liverpool more than six weeks, as we of the Highlander did, forms no inconsiderable item in the expenses of the voyage. Other ships, however--the economical Dutch and Danish, for instance, and sometimes the prudent Scotch--feed their luckless tars in dock, with precisely the same fare which they give them at sea; taking their salt junk ashore to be cooked, which, indeed, is but scurvy sort of treatment, since it is very apt to induce the scurvy. A parsimonious proceeding like this is regarded with immeasurable disdain by the crews of the New York vessels, who, if their captains treated them after that fashion, would soon bolt and run.

It was quite dark, when we all sprang ashore; and, for the first time, I felt dusty particles of the renowned British soil penetrating into my eyes and lungs. As for stepping on it, that was out of the question, in the well-paved and flagged condition of the streets; and I did not have an opportunity to do so till some time afterward, when I got out into the country; and then, indeed, I saw England, and snuffed its immortal loam-but not till then.

Jackson led the van; and after stopping at a tavern, took us up this street, and down that, till at last he brought us to a narrow lane, filled with boarding-houses, spirit-vaults, and sailors. Here we stopped before the sign of a Baltimore Clipper, flanked on one side by a gilded bunch of grapes and a bottle, and on the other by the British Unicorn and American Eagle, lying down by each other, like the lion and lamb in the millennium.--A very judicious and tasty device, showing a delicate apprehension of the propriety of conciliating American sailors in an English boarding-house; and yet in no way derogating from the honor and dignity of England, but placing the two nations, indeed, upon a footing of perfect equality.

Near the unicorn was a very small animal, which at first I took for a young unicorn; but it looked more like a yearling lion. It was holding up one paw, as if it had a splinter in it; and on its head was a sort of basket-hilted, low-crowned hat, without a rim. I asked a sailor standing by, what this animal meant, when, looking at me with a grin, he

answered, "Why, youngster, don't you know what that means? It's a young jackass, limping off with a kedgereed pot of rice out of the cuddy."

Though it was an English boarding-house, it was kept by a broken-down American mariner, one Danby, a dissolute, idle fellow, who had married a buxom English wife, and now lived upon her industry; for the lady, and not the sailor, proved to be the head of the establishment.

She was a hale, good-looking woman, about forty years old, and among the seamen went by the name of "Handsome Mary." But though, from the dissipated character of her spouse, Mary had become the business personage of the house, bought the marketing, overlooked the tables, and conducted all the more important arrangements, yet she was by no means an Amazon to her husband, if she did play a masculine part in other matters. No; and the more is the pity, poor Mary seemed too much attached to Danby, to seek to rule him as a termagant. Often she went about her household concerns with the tears in her eyes, when, after a fit of intoxication, this brutal husband of hers had been beating her. The sailors took her part, and many a time volunteered to give him a thorough thrashing before her eyes; but Mary would beg them not to do so, as Danby would, no doubt, be a better boy next time.

But there seemed no likelihood of this, so long as that abominable bar of his stood upon the premises. As you entered the passage, it stared upon you on one side, ready to entrap all guests.

It was a grotesque, old-fashioned, castellated sort of a sentry-box, made of a smoky-colored wood, and with a grating in front, that lifted up like a portcullis. And here would this Danby sit all the day long; and when customers grew thin, would patronize his own ale himself, pouring down mug after mug, as if he took himself for one of his own quarter-casks.

Sometimes an old crony of his, one Bob Still, would come in; and then they would occupy the sentry-box together, and swill their beer in concert. This pot-friend of Danby was portly as a dray-horse, and had a round, sleek, oily head, twinkling eyes, and moist red cheeks. He was a lusty troller of ale-songs; and, with his mug in his hand, would lean his waddling bulk partly out of the sentry-box, singing:

"No frost, no snow, no wind, I trow,
Can hurt me if I wold, I am so wrapt, and thoroughly lapt
In jolly good ale and old,--
I stuff my skin so full within,
Of jolly good ale and old."

Or this,

"Four wines and brandies I detest,
Here's richer juice from barley press'd.
It is the quintessence of malt,
And they that drink it want no salt.

Come, then, quick come, and take this beer,
And water henceforth you'll forswear."

Alas! Handsome Mary. What avail all thy private tears and remonstrances with the incorrigible Danby, so long as that brewery of a toper, Bob Still, daily eclipses thy threshold with the vast diameter of his paunch, and enthrones himself in the sentry-box, holding divided rule with thy spouse?

The more he drinks, the fatter and rounder waxes Bob; and the songs pour out as the ale pours in, on the well-known principle, that the air in a vessel is displaced and expelled, as the liquid rises higher and higher in it.

But as for Danby, the miserable Yankee grows sour on good cheer, and dries up the thinner for every drop of fat ale he imbibes. It is plain and demonstrable, that much ale is not good for Yankees, and operates differently upon them from what it does upon a Briton: ale must be drank in a fog and a drizzle.

Entering the sign of the Clipper, Jackson ushered us into a small room on one side, and shortly after, Handsome Mary waited upon us with a courtesy, and received the compliments of several old guests among our crew. She then disappeared to provide our supper. While my shipmates were now engaged in tippling, and talking with numerous old acquaintances of theirs in the neighborhood, who thronged about the

door, I remained alone in the little room, meditating profoundly upon the fact, that I was now seated upon an English bench, under an English roof, in an English tavern, forming an integral part of the English empire. It was a staggering fact, but none the less true.

I examined the place attentively; it was a long, narrow, little room, with one small arched window with red curtains, looking out upon a smoky, untidy yard, bounded by a dingy brick-wall, the top of which was horrible with pieces of broken old bottles, stuck into mortar.

A dull lamp swung overhead, placed in a wooden ship suspended from the ceiling. The walls were covered with a paper, representing an endless succession of vessels of all nations continually circumnavigating the apartment. By way of a pictorial mainsail to one of these ships, a map was hung against it, representing in faded colors the flags of all nations. From the street came a confused uproar of ballad-singers, bawling women, babies, and drunken sailors.

And this is England?

But where are the old abbeys, and the York Minsters, and the lord mayors, and coronations, and the May-poles, and fox-hunters, and Derby races, and the dukes and duchesses, and the Count d'Orsays, which, from all my reading, I had been in the habit of associating with England? Not the most distant glimpse of them was to be seen.

Alas! Wellingborough, thought I, I fear you stand but a poor chance to see the sights. You are nothing but a poor sailor boy; and the Queen is not going to send a deputation of noblemen to invite you to St. James's.

It was then, I began to see, that my prospects of seeing the world as a sailor were, after all, but very doubtful; for sailors only go round the world, without going into it; and their reminiscences of travel are only a dim recollection of a chain of tap-rooms surrounding the globe, parallel with the Equator. They but touch the perimeter of the circle; hover about the edges of terra-firma; and only land upon wharves and pier-heads. They would dream as little of traveling inland to see Kenilworth, or Blenheim Castle, as they would of sending a car overland to the Pope, when they touched at Naples.

From these reveries I was soon roused, by a servant girl hurrying from room to room, in shrill tones exclaiming, "Supper, supper ready."

Mounting a rickety staircase, we entered a room on the second floor. Three tall brass candlesticks shed a smoky light upon smoky walls, of what had once been sea-blue, covered with sailor-scrawls of foul anchors, lovers' sonnets, and ocean ditties. On one side, nailed against the wainscot in a row, were the four knaves of cards, each Jack putting his best foot foremost as usual. What these signified I never heard.

But such ample cheer! Such a groaning table! Such a superabundance of solids and substantial! Was it possible that sailors fared thus?--the

sailors, who at sea live upon salt beef and biscuit?

First and foremost, was a mighty pewter dish, big as Achilles' shield, sustaining a pyramid of smoking sausages. This stood at one end; midway was a similar dish, heavily laden with farmers' slices of head-cheese; and at the opposite end, a congregation of beef-steaks, piled tier over tier. Scattered at intervals between, were side dishes of boiled potatoes, eggs by the score, bread, and pickles; and on a stand adjoining, was an ample reserve of every thing on the supper table.

We fell to with all our hearts; wrapt ourselves in hot jackets of beef-steaks; curtailed the sausages with great celerity; and sitting down before the head-cheese, soon razed it to its foundations.

Toward the close of the entertainment, I suggested to Peggy, one of the girls who had waited upon us, that a cup of tea would be a nice thing to take; and I would thank her for one. She replied that it was too late for tea; but she would get me a cup of "swipes" if I wanted it.

Not knowing what "swipes" might be, I thought I would run the risk and try it; but it proved a miserable beverage, with a musty, sour flavor, as if it had been a decoction of spoiled pickles. I never patronized swipes again; but gave it a wide berth; though, at dinner afterward, it was furnished to an unlimited extent, and drunk by most of my shipmates, who pronounced it good.

But Bob Still would not have pronounced it so; for this stripes, as I learned, was a sort of cheap substitute for beer; or a bastard kind of beer; or the washings and rinsings of old beer-barrels. But I do not remember now what they said it was, precisely. I only know, that swipes was my abomination. As for the taste of it, I can only describe it as answering to the name itself; which is certainly significant of something vile. But it is drunk in large quantities by the poor people about Liverpool, which, perhaps, in some degree, accounts for their poverty.