

## XXIX. REDBURN DEFERENTIALLY DISCOURSES CONCERNING THE PROSPECTS OF SAILORS

The ship remained in Prince's Dock over six weeks; but as I do not mean to present a diary of my stay there, I shall here simply record the general tenor of the life led by our crew during that interval; and will then proceed to note down, at random, my own wanderings about town, and impressions of things as they are recalled to me now, after the lapse of so many years.

But first, I must mention that we saw little of the captain during our stay in the dock. Sometimes, cane in hand, he sauntered down of a pleasant morning from the Arms Hotel, I believe it was, where he boarded; and after lounging about the ship, giving orders to his Prime Minister and Grand Vizier, the chief mate, he would saunter back to his drawing-rooms.

From the glimpse of a play-bill, which I detected peeping out of his pocket, I inferred that he patronized the theaters; and from the flush of his cheeks, that he patronized the fine old Port wine, for which Liverpool is famous.

Occasionally, however, he spent his nights on board; and mad, roystering nights they were, such as rare Ben Jonson would have delighted in. For company over the cabin-table, he would have four or five whiskered

sea-captains, who kept the steward drawing corks and filling glasses all the time. And once, the whole company were found under the table at four o'clock in the morning, and were put to bed and tucked in by the two mates. Upon this occasion, I agreed with our woolly Doctor of Divinity, the black cook, that they should have been ashamed of themselves; but there is no shame in some sea-captains, who only blush after the third bottle.

During the many visits of Captain Riga to the ship, he always said something courteous to a gentlemanly, friendless custom-house officer, who staid on board of us nearly all the time we lay in the dock.

And weary days they must have been to this friendless custom-house officer; trying to kill time in the cabin with a newspaper; and rapping on the transom with his knuckles. He was kept on board to prevent smuggling; but he used to smuggle himself ashore very often, when, according to law, he should have been at his post on board ship. But no wonder; he seemed to be a man of fine feelings, altogether above his situation; a most inglorious one, indeed; worse than driving geese to water.

And now, to proceed with the crew.

At daylight, all hands were called, and the decks were washed down; then we had an hour to go ashore to breakfast; after which we worked at the rigging, or picked oakum, or were set to some employment or other, never

mind how trivial, till twelve o'clock, when we went to dinner. At half-past nine we resumed work; and finally knocked off at four o'clock in the afternoon, unless something particular was in hand. And after four o'clock, we could go where we pleased, and were not required to be on board again till next morning at daylight.

As we had nothing to do with the cargo, of course, our duties were light enough; and the chief mate was often put to it to devise some employment for us.

We had no watches to stand, a ship-keeper, hired from shore, relieving us from that; and all the while the men's wages ran on, as at sea. Sundays we had to ourselves.

Thus, it will be seen, that the life led by sailors of American ships in Liverpool, is an exceedingly easy one, and abounding in leisure. They live ashore on the fat of the land; and after a little wholesome exercise in the morning, have the rest of the day to themselves.

Nevertheless, these Liverpool voyages, likewise those to London and Havre, are the least profitable that an improvident seaman can take. Because, in New York he receives his month's advance; in Liverpool, another; both of which, in most cases, quickly disappear; so that by the time his voyage terminates, he generally has but little coming to him; sometimes not a cent. Whereas, upon a long voyage, say to India or China, his wages accumulate; he has more inducements to economize, and

far fewer motives to extravagance; and when he is paid off at last, he goes away jingling a quart measure of dollars.

Besides, of all sea-ports in the world, Liverpool, perhaps, most abounds in all the variety of land-sharks, land-rats, and other vermin, which make the hapless mariner their prey. In the shape of landlords, bar-keepers, clothiers, crimps, and boarding-house loungers, the land-sharks devour him, limb by limb; while the land-rats and mice constantly nibble at his purse.

Other perils he runs, also, far worse; from the denizens of notorious Corinthian haunts in the vicinity of the docks, which in depravity are not to be matched by any thing this side of the pit that is bottomless.

And yet, sailors love this Liverpool; and upon long voyages to distant parts of the globe, will be continually dilating upon its charms and attractions, and extolling it above all other seaports in the world. For in Liverpool they find their Paradise--not the well known street of that name--and one of them told me he would be content to lie in Prince's Dock till he hove up anchor for the world to come.

Much is said of ameliorating the condition of sailors; but it must ever prove a most difficult endeavor, so long as the antidote is given before the bane is removed.

Consider, that, with the majority of them, the very fact of their being

sailors, argues a certain recklessness and sensualism of character, ignorance, and depravity; consider that they are generally friendless and alone in the world; or if they have friends and relatives, they are almost constantly beyond the reach of their good influences; consider that after the rigorous discipline, hardships, dangers, and privations of a voyage, they are set adrift in a foreign port, and exposed to a thousand enticements, which, under the circumstances, would be hard even for virtue itself to withstand, unless virtue went about on crutches; consider that by their very vocation they are shunned by the better classes of people, and cut off from all access to respectable and improving society; consider all this, and the reflecting mind must very soon perceive that the case of sailors, as a class, is not a very promising one.

Indeed, the bad things of their condition come under the head of those chronic evils which can only be ameliorated, it would seem, by ameliorating the moral organization of all civilization.

Though old seventy-fours and old frigates are converted into chapels, and launched into the docks; though the "Boatswain's Mate" and other clever religious tracts in the nautical dialect are distributed among them; though clergymen harangue them from the pier-heads: and chaplains in the navy read sermons to them on the gun-deck; though evangelical boarding-houses are provided for them; though the parsimony of ship-owners has seconded the really sincere and pious efforts of Temperance Societies, to take away from seamen their old rations of grog

while at sea:--notwithstanding all these things, and many more, the relative condition of the great bulk of sailors to the rest of mankind, seems to remain pretty much where it was, a century ago.

It is too much the custom, perhaps, to regard as a special advance, that unavoidable, and merely participative progress, which any one class makes in sharing the general movement of the race. Thus, because the sailor, who to-day steers the Hibernia or Unicorn steam-ship across the Atlantic, is a somewhat different man from the exaggerated sailors of Smollett, and the men who fought with Nelson at Copenhagen, and survived to riot themselves away at North Corner in Plymouth;--because the modern tar is not quite so gross as heretofore, and has shaken off some of his shaggy jackets, and docked his Lord Rodney queue:--therefore, in the estimation of some observers, he has begun to see the evils of his condition, and has voluntarily improved. But upon a closer scrutiny, it will be seen that he has but drifted along with that great tide, which, perhaps, has two flows for one ebb; he has made no individual advance of his own.

There are classes of men in the world, who bear the same relation to society at large, that the wheels do to a coach: and are just as indispensable. But however easy and delectable the springs upon which the insiders pleasantly vibrate: however sumptuous the hammer-cloth, and glossy the door-panels; yet, for all this, the wheels must still revolve in dusty, or muddy revolutions. No contrivance, no sagacity can lift them out of the mire; for upon something the coach must be bottomed; on

something the insiders must roll.

Now, sailors form one of these wheels: they go and come round the globe; they are the true importers, and exporters of spices and silks; of fruits and wines and marbles; they carry missionaries, ambassadors, opera-singers, armies, merchants, tourists, and scholars to their destination: they are a bridge of boats across the Atlantic; they are the primum mobile of all commerce; and, in short, were they to emigrate in a body to man the navies of the moon, almost every thing would stop here on earth except its revolution on its axis, and the orators in the American Congress.

And yet, what are sailors? What in your heart do you think of that fellow staggering along the dock? Do you not give him a wide berth, shun him, and account him but little above the brutes that perish? Will you throw open your parlors to him; invite him to dinner? or give him a season ticket to your pew in church?--No. You will do no such thing; but at a distance, you will perhaps subscribe a dollar or two for the building of a hospital, to accommodate sailors already broken down; or for the distribution of excellent books among tars who can not read. And the very mode and manner in which such charities are made, bespeak, more than words, the low estimation in which sailors are held. It is useless to gainsay it; they are deemed almost the refuse and offscourings of the earth; and the romantic view of them is principally had through romances.

But can sailors, one of the wheels of this world, be wholly lifted up from the mire? There seems not much chance for it, in the old systems and programmes of the future, however well-intentioned and sincere; for with such systems, the thought of lifting them up seems almost as hopeless as that of growing the grape in Nova Zembla.

But we must not altogether despair for the sailor; nor need those who toil for his good be at bottom disheartened, or Time must prove his friend in the end; and though sometimes he would almost seem as a neglected step-son of heaven, permitted to run on and riot out his days with no hand to restrain him, while others are watched over and tenderly cared for; yet we feel and we know that God is the true Father of all, and that none of his children are without the pale of his care.