

man of his rank in the ship. So too with the Captain; and the Ward-room officers, warrant officers, midshipmen, the master-at-arms' mess, and the common seamen;--all of them, respectively, dine together, because they are, respectively, on a footing of equality.

CHAPTER VII.

BREAKFAST, DINNER, AND SUPPER.

Not only is the dinner-table a criterion of rank on board a man-of-war, but also the dinner hour. He who dines latest is the greatest man; and he who dines earliest is accounted the least. In a flag-ship, the Commodore generally dines about four or five o'clock; the Captain about three; the Lieutenants about two; while the people (by which phrase the common seamen are specially designated in the nomenclature of the quarter-deck) sit down to their salt beef exactly at noon.

Thus it will be seen, that while the two estates of sea-kings and sea-lords dine at rather patrician hours--and thereby, in the long run, impair their digestive functions--the sea-commoners, or the people, keep up their constitutions, by keeping up the good old-fashioned, Elizabethan, Franklin-warranted dinner hour of twelve.

Twelve o'clock! It is the natural centre, key-stone, and very heart of the day. At that hour, the sun has arrived at the top of his hill; and as he seems to hang poised there a while, before coming down on the other side, it is but reasonable to suppose that he is then stopping to dine; setting an eminent example to all mankind. The rest of the day is called afternoon; the very sound of which fine old Saxon word conveys a feeling of the lee bulwarks and a nap; a summer sea--soft breezes creeping over it; dreamy dolphins gliding in the distance. Afternoon! the word implies, that it is an after-piece, coming after the grand drama of the day; something to be taken leisurely and lazily. But how can this be, if you dine at five? For, after all, though *Paradise Lost* be a noble poem, and we men-of-war's men, no doubt, largely partake in the immortality of the immortals yet, let us candidly confess it, shipmates, that, upon the whole, our dinners are the most momentous attainments of these lives we lead beneath the moon. What were a day without a dinner? a dinnerless day! such a day had better be a night.

Again: twelve o'clock is the natural hour for us men-of-war's men to dine, because at that hour the very time-pieces we have invented arrive at their terminus; they can get no further than twelve; when straightway they continue their old rounds again. Doubtless, Adam and Eve dined at twelve; and the Patriarch Abraham in the midst of his cattle; and old Job with his noon mowers and reapers, in that grand plantation of Uz; and old Noah himself, in the Ark, must have gone to dinner at precisely eight bells (noon), with all his floating

families and farm-yards.

But though this antediluvian dinner hour is rejected by modern Commodores and Captains, it still lingers among "the people" under their command. Many sensible things banished from high life find an asylum among the mob.

Some Commodores are very particular in seeing to it, that no man on board the ship dare to dine after his (the Commodore's,) own dessert is cleared away.--Not even the Captain. It is said, on good authority, that a Captain once ventured to dine at five, when the Commodore's hour was four. Next day, as the story goes, that Captain received a private note, and in consequence of that note, dined for the future at half-past three.

Though in respect of the dinner hour on board a man-of-war, the people have no reason to complain; yet they have just cause, almost for mutiny, in the outrageous hours assigned for their breakfast and supper.

Eight o'clock for breakfast; twelve for dinner; four for supper; and no meals but these; no lunches and no cold snacks. Owing to this arrangement (and partly to one watch going to their meals before the other, at sea), all the meals of the twenty-four hours are crowded into a space of less than eight! Sixteen mortal hours elapse between supper and breakfast; including, to one watch, eight hours on deck! This is

barbarous; any physician will tell you so. Think of it! Before the Commodore has dined, you have supped. And in high latitudes, in summer-time, you have taken your last meal for the day, and five hours, or more, daylight to spare!

Mr. Secretary of the Navy, in the name of the people, you should interpose in this matter. Many a time have I, a maintop-man, found myself actually faint of a tempestuous morning watch, when all my energies were demanded--owing to this miserable, unphilosophical mode of allotting the government meals at sea. We beg you, Mr. Secretary, not to be swayed in this matter by the Honourable Board of Commodores, who will no doubt tell you that eight, twelve, and four are the proper hours for the people to take their Meals; inasmuch, as at these hours the watches are relieved. For, though this arrangement makes a neater and cleaner thing of it for the officers, and looks very nice and superfine on paper; yet it is plainly detrimental to health; and in time of war is attended with still more serious consequences to the whole nation at large. If the necessary researches were made, it would perhaps be found that in those instances where men-of-war adopting the above-mentioned hours for meals have encountered an enemy at night, they have pretty generally been beaten; that is, in those cases where the enemies' meal times were reasonable; which is only to be accounted for by the fact that the people of the beaten vessels were fighting on an empty stomach instead of a full one.