

## CHAPTER IX.

### OF THE POCKETS THAT WERE IN THE JACKET.

I MUST make some further mention of that white jacket of mine.

And here be it known--by way of introduction to what is to follow--that to a common sailor, the living on board a man-of-war is like living in a market; where you dress on the door-steps, and sleep in the cellar. No privacy can you have; hardly one moment's seclusion. It is almost a physical impossibility, that you can ever be alone. You dine at a vast table d'hote; sleep in commons, and make your toilet where and when you can. There is no calling for a mutton chop and a pint of claret by yourself; no selecting of chambers for the night; no hanging of pantaloons over the back of a chair; no ringing your bell of a rainy morning, to take your coffee in bed. It is something like life in a large manufactory. The bell strikes to dinner, and hungry or not, you must dine.

Your clothes are stowed in a large canvas bag, generally painted black, which you can get out of the "rack" only once in the twenty-four hours; and then, during a time of the utmost confusion; among five hundred other bags, with five hundred other sailors diving into each, in the midst of the twilight of the berth-deck. In some measure to obviate this inconvenience, many sailors divide their wardrobes between their

hammocks and their bags; stowing a few frocks and trowsers in the former; so that they can shift at night, if they wish, when the hammocks are piped down. But they gain very little by this.

You have no place whatever but your bag or hammock, in which to put anything in a man-of-war. If you lay anything down, and turn your back for a moment, ten to one it is gone.

Now, in sketching the preliminary plan, and laying out the foundation of that memorable white jacket of mine, I had had an earnest eye to all these inconveniences, and re-solved to avoid them. I proposed, that not only should my jacket keep me warm, but that it should also be so constructed as to contain a shirt or two, a pair of trowsers, and divers knick-knacks--sewing utensils, books, biscuits, and the like. With this object, I had accordingly provided it with a great variety of pockets, pantries, clothes-presses, and cupboards.

The principal apartments, two in number, were placed in the skirts, with a wide, hospitable entrance from the inside; two more, of smaller capacity, were planted in each breast, with folding-doors communicating, so that in case of emergency, to accommodate any bulky articles, the two pockets in each breast could be thrown into one. There were, also, several unseen recesses behind the arras; insomuch, that my jacket, like an old castle, was full of winding stairs, and mysterious closets, crypts, and cabinets; and like a confidential writing-desk, abounded in snug little out-of-the-way lairs and

hiding-places, for the storage of valuables.

Superadded to these, were four capacious pockets on the outside; one pair to slip books into when suddenly startled from my studies to the main-royal-yard; and the other pair, for permanent mittens, to thrust my hands into of a cold night-watch. This last contrivance was regarded as needless by one of my top-mates, who showed me a pattern for sea-mittens, which he said was much better than mine.

It must be known, that sailors, even in the bleakest weather, only cover their hands when unemployed; they never wear mittens aloft, since aloft they literally carry their lives in their hands, and want nothing between their grasp of the hemp, and the hemp itself.--Therefore, it is desirable, that whatever things they cover their hands with, should be capable of being slipped on and off in a moment. Nay, it is desirable, that they should be of such a nature, that in a dark night, when you are in a great hurry--say, going to the helm--they may be jumped into, indiscriminately; and not be like a pair of right-and-left kids; neither of which will admit any hand, but the particular one meant for it.

My top-mate's contrivance was this--he ought to have got out a patent for it--each of his mittens was provided with two thumbs, one on each side; the convenience of which needs no comment. But though for clumsy seamen, whose fingers are all thumbs, this description of mitten might do very well, White-Jacket did not so much fancy it. For when your hand

was once in the bag of the mitten, the empty thumb-hole sometimes dangled at your palm, confounding your ideas of where your real thumb might be; or else, being carefully grasped in the hand, was continually suggesting the insane notion, that you were all the while having hold of some one else's thumb.

No; I told my good top-mate to go away with his four thumbs, I would have nothing to do with them; two thumbs were enough for any man.

For some time after completing my jacket, and getting the furniture and household stores in it; I thought that nothing could exceed it for convenience. Seldom now did I have occasion to go to my bag, and be jostled by the crowd who were making their wardrobe in a heap. If I wanted anything in the way of clothing, thread, needles, or literature, the chances were that my invaluable jacket contained it. Yes: I fairly hugged myself, and revelled in my jacket; till, alas! a long rain put me out of conceit of it. I, and all my pockets and their contents, were soaked through and through, and my pocket-edition of Shakespeare was reduced to an omelet.

However, availing myself of a fine sunny day that followed, I emptied myself out in the main-top, and spread all my goods and chattels to dry. But spite of the bright sun, that day proved a black one. The scoundrels on deck detected me in the act of discharging my saturated cargo; they now knew that the white jacket was used for a storehouse. The consequence was that, my goods being well dried and again stored

away in my pockets, the very next night, when it was my quarter-watch on deck, and not in the top (where they were all honest men), I noticed a parcel of fellows skulking about after me, wherever I went. To a man, they were pickpockets, and bent upon pillaging me. In vain I kept clapping my pocket like a nervous old gentlemen in a crowd; that same night I found myself minus several valuable articles. So, in the end, I masoned up my lockers and pantries; and save the two used for mittens, the white jacket ever after was pocketless.