

## CHAPTER XII.

THE GOOD OR BAD TEMPER OF MEN-OF-WAR'S MEN, IN A GREAT DEGREE, ATTRIBUTABLE TO THEIR PARTICULAR STATIONS AND DUTIES ABOARD SHIP.

Quoin, the quarter-gunner, was the representative of a class on board the Neversink, altogether too remarkable to be left astern, without further notice, in the rapid wake of these chapters.

As has been seen, Quoin was full of unaccountable whimsies; he was, withal, a very cross, bitter, ill-natured, inflammable old man. So, too, were all the members of the gunner's gang; including the two gunner's mates, and all the quarter-gunners. Every one of them had the same dark brown complexion; all their faces looked like smoked hams. They were continually grumbling and growling about the batteries; running in and out among the guns; driving the sailors away from them; and cursing and swearing as if all their conscience had been powder-singed, and made callous, by their calling. Indeed they were a most unpleasant set of men; especially Priming, the nasal-voiced gunner's mate, with the hare-lip; and Cylinder, his stuttering coadjutor, with the clubbed foot. But you will always observe, that the gunner's gang of every man-of-war are invariably ill-tempered, ugly featured, and quarrelsome. Once when I visited an English line-of-battle ship, the gunner's gang were fore and aft, polishing up the batteries, which, according to the Admiral's fancy, had been

painted white as snow. Fidgeting round the great thirty-two-pounders, and making stinging remarks at the sailors and each other, they reminded one of a swarm of black wasps, buzzing about rows of white headstones in a church-yard.

Now, there can be little doubt, that their being so much among the guns is the very thing that makes a gunner's gang so cross and quarrelsome. Indeed, this was once proved to the satisfaction of our whole company of main-top-men. A fine top-mate of ours, a most merry and companionable fellow, chanced to be promoted to a quarter-gunner's berth. A few days afterward, some of us main-top-men, his old comrades, went to pay him a visit, while he was going his regular rounds through the division of guns allotted to his care. But instead of greeting us with his usual heartiness, and cracking his pleasant jokes, to our amazement, he did little else but scowl; and at last, when we rallied him upon his ill-temper, he seized a long black rammer from overhead, and drove us on deck; threatening to report us, if we ever dared to be familiar with him again.

My top-mates thought that this remarkable metamorphose was the effect produced upon a weak, vain character suddenly elevated from the level of a mere seaman to the dignified position of a petty officer. But though, in similar cases, I had seen such effects produced upon some of the crew; yet, in the present instance, I knew better than that;--it was solely brought about by his consorting with with those villainous, irritable, ill-tempered cannon; more especially from his being subject

to the orders of those deformed blunderbusses, Priming and Cylinder.

The truth seems to be, indeed, that all people should be very careful in selecting their callings and vocations; very careful in seeing to it, that they surround themselves by good-humoured, pleasant-looking objects; and agreeable, temper-soothing sounds. Many an angelic disposition has had its even edge turned, and hacked like a saw; and many a sweet draught of piety has soured on the heart from people's choosing ill-natured employments, and omitting to gather round them good-natured landscapes. Gardeners are almost always pleasant, affable people to con-verse with; but beware of quarter-gunners, keepers of arsenals, and lonely light-house men.

It would be advisable for any man, who from an unlucky choice of a profession, which it is too late to change for another, should find his temper souring, to endeavour to counteract that misfortune, by filling his private chamber with amiable, pleasurable sights and sounds. In summer time, an Aeolian harp can be placed in your window at a very trifling expense; a conch-shell might stand on your mantel, to be taken up and held to the ear, that you may be soothed by its continual lulling sound, when you feel the blue fit stealing over you. For sights, a gay-painted punch-bowl, or Dutch tankard--never mind about filling it--might be recommended. It should be placed on a bracket in the pier. Nor is an old-fashioned silver ladle, nor a chased dinner-castor, nor a fine portly demijohn, nor anything, indeed, that savors of eating and drinking, bad to drive off the spleen. But perhaps

the best of all is a shelf of merrily-bound books, containing comedies, farces, songs, and humorous novels. You need never open them; only have the titles in plain sight. For this purpose, *Peregrine Pickle* is a good book; so is *Gil Blas*; so is *Goldsmith*.

But of all chamber furniture in the world, best calculated to cure a bad temper, and breed a pleasant one, is the sight of a lovely wife. If you have children, however, that are teething, the nursery should be a good way up stairs; at sea, it ought to be in the mizzen-top. Indeed, teething children play the very deuce with a husband's temper. I have known three promising young husbands completely spoil on their wives' hands, by reason of a teething child, whose worrisomeness happened to be aggravated at the time by the summer-complaint. With a breaking heart, and my handkerchief to my eyes, I followed those three hapless young husbands, one after the other, to their premature graves.

Gossiping scenes breed gossips. Who so chatty as hotel-clerks, market women, auctioneers, bar-keepers, apothecaries, newspaper-reporters, monthly-nurses, and all those who live in bustling crowds, or are present at scenes of chatty interest.

Solitude breeds taciturnity; that every body knows; who so taciturn as authors, taken as a race?

A forced, interior quietude, in the midst of great out-ward commotion, breeds moody people. Who so moody as railroad-brakemen,

steam-boat-engineers, helmsmen, and tenders of power-looms in cotton factories? For all these must hold their peace while employed, and let the machinery do the chatting; they cannot even edge in a single syllable.

Now, this theory about the wondrous influence of habitual sights and sounds upon the human temper, was suggested by my experiences on board our frigate. And al-though I regard the example furnished by our quarter-gunners--especially him who had once been our top-mate--as by far the strongest argument in favour of the general theory; yet, the entire ship abounded with illustrations of its truth. Who were more liberal-hearted, lofty-minded, gayer, more jocund, elastic, adventurous, given to fun and frolic, than the top-men of the fore, main, and mizzen masts? The reason of their liberal-heartedness was, that they were daily called upon to expatiate themselves all over the rigging. The reason of their lofty-mindedness was, that they were high lifted above the petty tumults, carping cares, and paltrinesses of the decks below.

And I feel persuaded in my inmost soul, that it is to the fact of my having been a main-top-man; and especially my particular post being on the loftiest yard of the frigate, the main-royal-yard; that I am now enabled to give such a free, broad, off-hand, bird's-eye, and, more than all, impartial account of our man-of-war world; withholding nothing; inventing nothing; nor flattering, nor scandalising any; but meting out to all--commodore and messenger-boy alike--their precise

descriptions and deserts.

The reason of the mirthfulness of these top-men was, that they always looked out upon the blue, boundless, dimpled, laughing, sunny sea. Nor do I hold, that it militates against this theory, that of a stormy day, when the face of the ocean was black, and overcast, that some of them would grow moody, and chose to sit apart. On the contrary, it only proves the thing which I maintain. For even on shore, there are many people naturally gay and light-hearted, who, whenever the autumnal wind begins to bluster round the corners, and roar along the chimney-stacks, straight becomes cross, petulant, and irritable. What is more mellow than fine old ale? Yet thunder will sour the best nut-brown ever brewed.

The Holders of our frigate, the Troglodytes, who lived down in the tarry cellars and caves below the berth-deck, were, nearly all of them, men of gloomy dispositions, taking sour views of things; one of them was a blue-light Calvinist. Whereas, the old-sheet-anchor-men, who spent their time in the bracing sea-air and broad-cast sunshine of the fore-castle, were free, generous-hearted, charitable, and full of good-will to all hands; though some of them, to tell the truth, proved sad exceptions; but exceptions only prove the rule.

The "steady-cooks" on the berth-deck, the "steady-sweepers," and "steady-spit-box-musterers," in all divisions of the frigate, fore and aft, were a narrow-minded set; with contracted souls; imputable, no doubt, to their groveling duties. More especially was this evinced in

the case of those odious ditchers and night scavengers, the ignoble "Waisters."

The members of the band, some ten or twelve in number, who had nothing to do but keep their instruments polished, and play a lively air now and then, to stir the stagnant current in our poor old Commodore's torpid veins, were the most gleeful set of fellows you ever saw. They were Portuguese, who had been shipped at the Cape De Verd islands, on the passage out. They messed by themselves; forming a dinner-party, not to be exceeded in mirthfulness, by a club of young bridegrooms, three months after marriage, completely satisfied with their bargains, after testing them.

But what made them, now, so full of fun? What indeed but their merry, martial, mellow calling. Who could he a churl, and play a flageolet? who mean and spiritless, braying forth the souls of thousand heroes from his brazen trumpet? But still more efficacious, perhaps, in ministering to the light spirits of the band, was the consoling thought, that should the ship ever go into action, they would be exempted from the perils of battle. In ships of war, the members of the "music," as the band is called, are generally non-combatants; and mostly ship, with the express understanding, that as soon as the vessel comes within long gun-shot of an enemy, they shall have the privilege of burrowing down in the cable-tiers, or sea coal-hole. Which shows that they are inglorious, but uncommonly sensible fellows.

Look at the barons of the gun-room--Lieutenants, Purser, Marine officers, Sailing-master--all of them gentlemen with stiff upper lips, and aristocratic cut noses. Why was this? Will any one deny, that from their living so long in high military life, served by a crowd of menial stewards and cot-boys, and always accustomed to command right and left; will any one deny, I say, that by reason of this, their very noses had become thin, peaked, aquiline, and aristocratically cartilaginous? Even old Cuticle, the Surgeon, had a Roman nose.

But I never could account how it came to be, that our grey headed First Lieutenant was a little lop-sided; that is, one of his shoulders disproportionately dropped. And when I observed, that nearly all the First Lieutenants I saw in other men-of-war, besides many Second and Third Lieutenants, were similarly lop-sided, I knew that there must be some general law which induced the phenomenon; and I put myself to studying it out, as an interesting problem. At last, I came to the conclusion--to which I still adhere--that their so long wearing only one epaulet (for to only one does their rank entitle them) was the infallible clew to this mystery. And when any one reflects upon so well-known a fact, that many sea Lieutenants grow decrepit from age, without attaining a Captaincy and wearing two epaulets, which would strike the balance between their shoulders, the above reason assigned will not appear unwarrantable.