

## CHAPTER XXX.

### A PEEP THROUGH A PORT-HOLE AT THE SUBTERRANEAN PARTS OF A MAN-OF-WAR.

While now running rapidly away from the bitter coast of Patagonia, battling with the night-watches--still cold--as best we may; come under the lee of my white-jacket, reader, while I tell of the less painful sights to be seen in a frigate.

A hint has already been conveyed concerning the subterranean depths of the Neversink's hold. But there is no time here to speak of the spirit-room, a cellar down in the after-hold, where the sailor's "grog" is kept; nor of the cable-tiers, where the great hawsers and chains are piled, as you see them at a large ship-chandler's on shore; nor of the grocer's vaults, where tierces of sugar, molasses, vinegar, rice, and flour are snugly stowed; nor of the sail-room, full as a sail-maker's loft ashore--piled up with great top-sails and top-gallant-sails, all ready-folded in their places, like so many white vests in a gentleman's wardrobe; nor of the copper and copper-fastened magazine, closely packed with kegs of powder, great-gun and small-arm cartridges; nor of the immense shot-lockers, or subterranean arsenals, full as a bushel of apples with twenty-four-pound balls; nor of the bread-room, a large apartment, tinned all round within to keep out the mice, where the hard biscuit destined for the consumption of

five hundred men on a long voyage is stowed away by the cubic yard; nor of the vast iron tanks for fresh water in the hold, like the reservoir lakes at Fairmount, in Philadelphia; nor of the paint-room, where the kegs of white-lead, and casks of linseed oil, and all sorts of pots and brushes, are kept; nor of the armoror's smithy, where the ship's forges and anvils may be heard ringing at times; I say I have no time to speak of these things, and many more places of note.

But there is one very extensive warehouse among the rest that needs special mention--the ship's Yeoman's storeroom. In the Neversink it was down in the ship's basement, beneath the berth-deck, and you went to it by way of the Fore-passage, a very dim, devious corridor, indeed. Entering--say at noonday--you find yourself in a gloomy apartment, lit by a solitary lamp. On one side are shelves, filled with balls of marline, ratlin-stuf, seizing-stuff, spun-yarn, and numerous twines of assorted sizes. In another direction you see large cases containing heaps of articles, reminding one of a shoemaker's furnishing-store--wooden serving-mallets, fids, toggles, and heavers: iron prickers and marling-spikes; in a third quarter you see a sort of hardware shop--shelves piled with all manner of hooks, bolts, nails, screws, and thimbles; and, in still another direction, you see a block-maker's store, heaped up with lignum-vitae sheeves and wheels.

Through low arches in the bulkhead beyond, you peep in upon distant vaults and catacombs, obscurely lighted in the far end, and showing

immense coils of new ropes, and other bulky articles, stowed in tiers, all savouring of tar.

But by far the most curious department of these mysterious store-rooms is the armoury, where the spikes, cutlasses, pistols, and belts, forming the arms of the boarders in time of action, are hung against the walls, and suspended in thick rows from the beams overhead. Here, too, are to be seen scores of Colt's patent revolvers, which, though furnished with but one tube, multiply the fatal bullets, as the naval cat-o'-nine-tails, with a cannibal cruelty, in one blow nine times multiplies a culprit's lashes; so that when a sailor is ordered one dozen lashes, the sentence should read one hundred and eight. All these arms are kept in the brightest order, wearing a fine polish, and may truly be said to reflect credit on the Yeoman and his mates.

Among the lower grade of officers in a man-of-war, that of Yeoman is not the least important. His responsibilities are denoted by his pay. While the petty officers, quarter-gunners, captains of the tops, and others, receive but fifteen and eighteen dollars a month--but little more than a mere able seamen--the Yeoman in an American line-of-battle ship receives forty dollars, and in a frigate thirty-five dollars per month.

He is accountable for all the articles under his charge, and on no account must deliver a yard of twine or a ten-penny nail to the boatswain or carpenter, unless shown a written requisition and order

from the Senior Lieutenant. The Yeoman is to be found burrowing in his underground store-rooms all the day long, in readiness to serve licensed customers. But in the counter, behind which he usually stands, there is no place for a till to drop the shillings in, which takes away not a little from the most agreeable part of a storekeeper's duties. Nor, among the musty, old account-books in his desk, where he registers all expenditures of his stuffs, is there any cash or check book.

The Yeoman of the Neversink was a somewhat odd specimen of a Troglodyte. He was a little old man, round-shouldered, bald-headed, with great goggle-eyes, looking through portentous round spectacles, which he called his barnacles. He was imbued with a wonderful zeal for the naval service, and seemed to think that, in keeping his pistols and cutlasses free from rust, he preserved the national honour untarnished. After general quarters, it was amusing to watch his anxious air as the various petty officers restored to him the arms used at the martial exercises of the crew. As successive bundles would be deposited on his counter, he would count over the pistols and cutlasses, like an old housekeeper telling over her silver forks and spoons in a pantry before retiring for the night. And often, with a sort of dark lantern in his hand, he might be seen poking into his furthest vaults and cellars, and counting over his great coils of ropes, as if they were all jolly puncheons of old Port and Madeira.

By reason of his incessant watchfulness and unaccountable bachelor

oddities, it was very difficult for him to retain in his employment the various sailors who, from time to time, were billeted with him to do the duty of subalterns. In particular, he was always desirous of having at least one steady, faultless young man, of a literary taste, to keep an eye to his account-books, and swab out the armoury every morning. It was an odious business this, to be immured all day in such a bottomless hole, among tarry old ropes and villainous guns and pistols. It was with peculiar dread that I one day noticed the goggle-eyes of Old Revolver, as they called him, fastened upon me with a fatal glance of good-will and approbation. He had somehow heard of my being a very learned person, who could both read and write with extraordinary facility; and moreover that I was a rather reserved youth, who kept his modest, unassuming merits in the background. But though, from the keen sense of my situation as a man-of-war's-man all this about my keeping myself in the back ground was true enough, yet I had no idea of hiding my diffident merits under ground. I became alarmed at the old Yeoman's goggling glances, lest he should drag me down into tarry perdition in his hideous store-rooms. But this fate was providentially averted, owing to mysterious causes which I never could fathom.