

CHAPTER XXXII.

A DISH OF DUUNDERFUNK.

In men-of-war, the space on the uppermost deck, round about the main-mast, is the Police-office, Court-house, and yard of execution, where all charges are lodged, causes tried, and punishment administered. In frigate phrase, to be brought up to the mast, is equivalent to being presented before the grand-jury, to see whether a true bill will be found against you.

From the merciless, inquisitorial baiting, which sailors, charged with offences, too often experience at the mast, that vicinity is usually known among them as the bull-ring.

The main-mast, moreover, is the only place where the sailor can hold formal communication with the captain and officers. If any one has been robbed; if any one has been evilly entreated; if any one's character has been defamed; if any one has a request to present; if any one has aught important for the executive of the ship to know--straight to the main-mast he repairs; and stands there--generally with his hat off--waiting the pleasure of the officer of the deck, to advance and communicate with him. Often, the most ludicrous scenes occur, and the most comical complaints are made.

One clear, cold morning, while we were yet running away from the Cape, a raw boned, crack-pated Down Easter, belonging to the Waist, made his appearance at the mast, dolefully exhibiting a blackened tin pan, bearing a few crusty traces of some sort of a sea-pie, which had been cooked in it.

"Well, sir, what now?" said the Lieutenant of the Deck, advancing.

"They stole it, sir; all my nice dunderfunk, sir; they did, sir," whined the Down Easter, ruefully holding up his pan. "Stole your dunderfunk! what's that?"

"Dunderfunk, sir, dunderfunk; a cruel nice dish as ever man put into him."

"Speak out, sir; what's the matter?"

"My dunderfunk, sir--as elegant a dish of dunderfunk as you ever see, sir--they stole it, sir!"

"Go forward, you rascal!" cried the Lieutenant, in a towering rage, "or else stop your whining. Tell me, what's the matter?"

"Why, sir, them 'ere two fellows, Dobs and Hodnose, stole my dunderfunk."

"Once more, sir, I ask what that dundledunk is? Speak!" "As cruel a nice----"

"Be off, sir! sheer!" and muttering something about non compos mentis, the Lieutenant stalked away; while the Down Easter beat a melancholy retreat, holding up his pan like a tambourine, and making dolorous music on it as he went.

"Where are you going with that tear in your eye, like a travelling rat?" cried a top-man.

"Oh! he's going home to Down East," said another; "so far eastward, you know, shippy, that they have to pry up the sun with a handspike."

To make this anecdote plainer, be it said that, at sea, the monotonous round of salt beef and pork at the messes of the sailors--where but very few of the varieties of the season are to be found--induces them to adopt many contrivances in order to diversify their meals. Hence the various sea-rolls, made dishes, and Mediterranean pies, well known by men-of-war's-men--Scouse, Lob-scouse, Soft-Tack, Soft-Tommy, Skillagalee, Burgoo, Dough-boys, Lob-Dominion, Dog's-Body, and lastly, and least known, Dunderfunk; all of which come under the general denomination of Manavalins.

Dunderfunk is made of hard biscuit, hashed and pounded, mixed with

beef fat, molasses, and water, and baked brown in a pan. And to those who are beyond all reach of shore delicacies, this dunderfunk, in the feeling language of the Down Easter, is certainly "a cruel nice dish."

Now the only way that a sailor, after preparing his dunderfunk, could get it cooked on board the Neversink, was by slyly going to Old Coffee, the ship's cook, and bribing him to put it into his oven. And as some such dishes or other are well known to be all the time in the oven, a set of unprincipled gourmands are constantly on the look-out for the chance of stealing them. Generally, two or three league together, and while one engages Old Coffee in some interesting conversation touching his wife and family at home, another snatches the first thing he can lay hands on in the oven, and rapidly passes it to the third man, who at his earliest leisure disappears with it.

In this manner had the Down Easter lost his precious pie, and afterward found the empty pan knocking about the forecastle.