CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE FRIGATE IN HARBOUR.--THE BOATS.--GRAND STATE RECEPTION OF THE COMMODORE.

In good time we were up with the parallel of Rio de Janeiro, and, standing in for the land, the mist soon cleared; and high aloft the famed Sugar Loaf pinnacle was seen, our bowsprit pointing for it straight as a die.

As we glided on toward our anchorage, the bands of the various men-of-war in harbour saluted us with national airs, and gallantly lowered their ensigns. Nothing can exceed the courteous etiquette of these ships, of all nations, in greeting their brethren. Of all men, your accomplished duellist is generally the most polite.

We lay in Rio some weeks, lazily taking in stores and otherwise preparing for the passage home. But though Rio is one of the most magnificent bays in the world; though the city itself contains many striking objects; and though much might be said of the Sugar Loaf and Signal Hill heights; and the little islet of Lucia; and the fortified Ihla Dos Cobras, or Isle of the Snakes (though the only anacondas and adders now found in the arsenals there are great guns and pistols); and Lord Wood's Nose--a lofty eminence said by seamen to resemble his lordship's conch-shell; and the Prays do Flamingo--a noble tract of

beach, so called from its having been the resort, in olden times, of those gorgeous birds; and the charming Bay of Botofogo, which, spite of its name, is fragrant as the neighbouring Larangieros, or Valley of the Oranges; and the green Gloria Hill, surmounted by the belfries of the queenly Church of Nossa Senora de Gloria; and the iron-gray Benedictine convent near by; and the fine drive and promenade, Passeo Publico; and the massive arch-over-arch aqueduct, Arcos de Carico; and the Emperor's Palace; and the Empress's Gardens; and the fine Church de Candelaria; and the gilded throne on wheels, drawn by eight silken, silver-belled mules, in which, of pleasant evenings, his Imperial Majesty is driven out of town to his Moorish villa of St. Christova--ay, though much might be said of all this, yet must I forbear, if I may, and adhere to my one proper object, the world in a man-of-war.

Behold, now, the Neversink under a new aspect. With all her batteries, she is tranquilly lying in harbour, surrounded by English, French, Dutch, Portuguese, and Brazilian seventy-fours, moored in the deep-green water, close under the lee of that oblong, castellated mass of rock, Ilha Dos Cobras, which, with its port-holes and lofty flag-staffs, looks like another man-of-war, fast anchored in the way. But what is an insular fortress, indeed, but an embattled land-slide into the sea from the world Gibraltars and Quebecs? And what a main-land fortress but a few decks of a line-of-battle ship transplanted ashore? They are all one--all, as King David, men-of-war from their youth.

Ay, behold now the Neversink at her anchors, in many respects presenting a different appearance from what she presented at sea. Nor is the routine of life on board the same.

At sea there is more to employ the sailors, and less temptation to violations of the law. Whereas, in port, unless some particular service engages them, they lead the laziest of lives, beset by all the allurements of the shore, though perhaps that shore they may never touch.

Unless you happen to belong to one of the numerous boats, which, in a man-of-war in harbour, are continually plying to and from the land, you are mostly thrown upon your own resources to while away the time. Whole days frequently pass without your being individually called upon to lift a finger; for though, in the merchant-service, they make a point of keeping the men always busy about something or other, yet, to employ five hundred sailors when there is nothing definite to be done wholly surpasses the ingenuity of any First Lieutenant in the Navy.

As mention has just been made of the numerous boats employed in harbour, something more may as well be put down concerning them. Our frigate carried a very large boat--as big as a small sloop--called a launch, which was generally used for getting off wood, water, and other bulky articles. Besides this, she carried four boats of an arithmetical progression in point of size--the largest being known as the first cutter, the next largest the second cutter, then the third

and fourth cutters. She also carried a Commodore's Barge, a Captain's Gig, and a "dingy," a small yawl, with a crew of apprentice boys. All these boats, except the "dingy," had their regular crews, who were subordinate to their cockswains--petty officers, receiving pay in addition to their seaman's wages.

The launch was manned by the old Tritons of the fore-castle, who were no ways particular about their dress, while the other boats--commissioned for genteeler duties--were rowed by young follows, mostly, who had a dandy eye to their personal appearance. Above all, the officers see to it that the Commodore's Barge and the Captain's Gig are manned by gentlemanly youths, who may do credit to their country, and form agreeable objects for the eyes of the Commodore or Captain to repose upon as he tranquilly sits in the stern, when pulled ashore by his barge-men or gig-men, as the case may be. Some sailors are very fond of belonging to the boats, and deem it a great honour to be a Commodore's barge-man; but others, perceiving no particular distinction in that office, do not court it so much.

On the second day after arriving at Rio, one of the gig-men fell sick, and, to my no small concern, I found myself temporarily appointed to his place.

"Come, White-Jacket, rig yourself in white--that's the gig's uniform to-day; you are a gig-man, my boy--give ye joy!" This was the first announcement of the fact that I heard; but soon after it was officially

ratified.

I was about to seek the First Lieutenant, and plead the scantiness of my wardrobe, which wholly disqualified me to fill so distinguished a station, when I heard the bugler call away the "gig;" and, without more ado, I slipped into a clean frock, which a messmate doffed for my benefit, and soon after found myself pulling off his High Mightiness, the Captain, to an English seventy-four.

As we were bounding along, the cockswain suddenly cried "Oars!" At the word every oar was suspended in the air, while our Commodore's barge floated by, bearing that dignitary himself. At the sight, Captain Claret removed his chapeau, and saluted profoundly, our boat lying motionless on the water. But the barge never stopped; and the Commodore made but a slight return to the obsequious salute he had received.

We then resumed rowing, and presently I heard "Oars!" again; but from another boat, the second cutter, which turned out to be carrying a Lieutenant ashore. If was now Captain Claret's turn to be honoured. The cutter lay still, and the Lieutenant off hat; while the Captain only nodded, and we kept on our way.

This naval etiquette is very much like the etiquette at the Grand Porte of Constantinople, where, after washing the Sublime Sultan's feet, the Grand Vizier avenges himself on an Emir, who does the same office for him.

When we arrived aboard the English seventy-four, the Captain was received with the usual honours, and the gig's crew were conducted below, and hospitably regaled with some spirits, served out by order of the officer of the deck.

Soon after, the English crew went to quarters; and as they stood up at their guns, all along the main-deck, a row of beef-fed Britons, stalwart-looking fellows, I was struck with the contrast they afforded to similar sights on board of the Neversink.

For on board of us our "quarters" showed an array of rather slender, lean-checked chaps. But then I made no doubt, that, in a sea-tussle, these lantern-jawed varlets would have approved themselves as slender Damascus blades, nimble and flexible; whereas these Britons would have been, perhaps, as sturdy broadswords. Yet every one remembers that story of Saladin and Richard trying their respective blades; how gallant Richard clove an anvil in twain, or something quite as ponderous, and Saladin elegantly severed a cushion; so that the two monarchs were even--each excelling in his way--though, unfortunately for my simile, in a patriotic point of view, Richard whipped Saladin's armies in the end.

There happened to be a lord on board of this ship--the younger son of an earl, they told me. He was a fine-looking fellow. I chanced to stand by when he put a question to an Irish captain of a gum; upon the

seaman's inadvertently saying sir to him, his lordship looked daggers at the slight; and the sailor touching his hat a thousand times, said, "Pardon, your honour; I meant to say my lord, sir!"

I was much pleased with an old white-headed musician, who stood at the main hatchway, with his enormous bass drum full before him, and thumping it sturdily to the tune of "God Save the King!" though small mercy did he have on his drum-heads. Two little boys were clashing cymbals, and another was blowing a fife, with his cheeks puffed out like the plumpest of his country's plum-puddings.

When we returned from this trip, there again took place that ceremonious reception of our captain on board the vessel he commanded, which always had struck me as exceedingly diverting.

In the first place, while in port, one of the quarter-masters is always stationed on the poop with a spy-glass, to look out for all boats approaching, and report the same to the officer of the deck; also, who it is that may be coming in them; so that preparations may be made accordingly. As soon, then, as the gig touched the side, a mighty shrill piping was heard, as if some boys were celebrating the Fourth of July with penny whistles. This proceeded from a boatswain's mate, who, standing at the gangway, was thus honouring the Captain's return after his long and perilous absence.

The Captain then slowly mounted the ladder, and gravely marching

through a lane of "side-boys," so called--all in their best bibs and tuckers, and who stood making sly faces behind his back--was received by all the Lieutenants in a body, their hats in their hands, and making a prodigious scraping and bowing, as if they had just graduated at a French dancing-school. Meanwhile, preserving an erect, inflexible, and ram-rod carriage, and slightly touching his chapeau, the Captain made his ceremonious way to the cabin, disappearing behind the scenes, like the pasteboard ghost in Hamlet.

But these ceremonies are nothing to those in homage of the Commodore's arrival, even should he depart and arrive twenty times a day. Upon such occasions, the whole marine guard, except the sentries on duty, are marshalled on the quarter-deck, presenting arms as the Commodore passes them; while their commanding officer gives the military salute with his sword, as if making masonic signs. Meanwhile, the boatswain himself--not a boatswain's mate--is keeping up a persevering whistling with his silver pipe; for the Commodore is never greeted with the rude whistle of a boatswain's subaltern; that would be positively insulting. All the Lieutenants and Midshipmen, besides the Captain himself, are drawn up in a phalanx, and off hat together; and the side-boys, whose number is now increased to ten or twelve, make an imposing display at the gangway; while the whole brass band, elevated upon the poop, strike up "See! the Conquering Hero Comes!" At least, this was the tune that our Captain always hinted, by a gesture, to the captain of the band, whenever the Commodore arrived from shore.

It conveyed a complimentary appreciation, on the Captain's part, of the Commodore's heroism during the late war.

To return to the gig. As I did not relish the idea of being a sort of body-servant to Captain Claret--since his gig-men were often called upon to scrub his cabin floor, and perform other duties for him--I made it my particular business to get rid of my appointment in his boat as soon as possible, and the next day after receiving it, succeeded in procuring a substitute, who was glad of the chance to fill the position I so much undervalued.

And thus, with our counterlikes and dislikes, most of us men-of-war's-men harmoniously dove-tail into each other, and, by our very points of opposition, unite in a clever whole, like the parts of a Chinese puzzle. But as, in a Chinese puzzle, many pieces are hard to place, so there are some unfortunate fellows who can never slip into their proper angles, and thus the whole puzzle becomes a puzzle indeed, which is the precise condition of the greatest puzzle in the world--this man-of-war world itself.