

CHAPTER XLV.

PUBLISHING POETRY IN A MAN-OF-WAR.

A day or two after our arrival in Rio, a rather amusing incident occurred to a particular acquaintance of mine, young Lemsford, the gun-deck bard.

The great guns of an armed ship have blocks of wood, called tompions, painted black, inserted in their muzzles, to keep out the spray of the sea. These tompions slip in and out very handily, like covers to butter firkins.

By advice of a friend, Lemsford, alarmed for the fate of his box of poetry, had latterly made use of a particular gun on the main-deck, in the tube of which he thrust his manuscripts, by simply crawling partly out of the porthole, removing the tompion, inserting his papers, tightly rolled, and making all snug again.

Breakfast over, he and I were reclining in the main-top--where, by permission of my noble master, Jack Chase, I had invited him--when, of a sudden, we heard a cannonading. It was our own ship.

"Ah!" said a top-man, "returning the shore salute they gave us

yesterday."

"O Lord!" cried Lemsford, "my Songs of the Sirens!" and he ran down the rigging to the batteries; but just as he touched the gun-deck, gun No. 20--his literary strong-box--went off with a terrific report.

"Well, my after-guard Virgil," said Jack Chase to him, as he slowly returned up the rigging, "did you get it? You need not answer; I see you were too late. But never mind, my boy: no printer could do the business for you better. That's the way to publish, White-Jacket," turning to me--"fire it right into 'em; every canto a twenty-four-pound shot; hull the blockheads, whether they will or no. And mind you, Lemsford, when your shot does the most execution, your hear the least from the foe. A killed man cannot even lisp."

"Glorious Jack!" cried Lemsford, running up and snatching him by the hand, "say that again, Jack! look me in the eyes. By all the Homers, Jack, you have made my soul mount like a balloon! Jack, I'm a poor devil of a poet. Not two months before I shipped aboard here, I published a volume of poems, very aggressive on the world, Jack. Heaven knows what it cost me. I published it, Jack, and the cursed publisher sued me for damages; my friends looked sheepish; one or two who liked it were non-committal; and as for the addle-pated mob and rabble, they thought they had found out a fool. Blast them, Jack, what they call the public is a monster, like the idol we saw in Owhyhee, with the head of a jackass, the body of a baboon, and the tail of a scorpion!"

"I don't like that," said Jack; "when I'm ashore, I myself am part of the public."

"Your pardon, Jack; you are not, you are then a part of the people, just as you are aboard the frigate here. The public is one thing, Jack, and the people another."

"You are right," said Jack; "right as this leg. Virgil, you are a trump; you are a jewel, my boy. The public and the people! Ay, ay, my lads, let us hate the one and cleave to the other."