

CHAPTER LIII.

SEAFARING PERSONS PECULIARLY SUBJECT TO BEING UNDER THE WEATHER.--THE

EFFECTS OF THIS UPON A MAN-OF-WAR CAPTAIN.

It has been said that some midshipmen, in certain cases, are guilty of spiteful practices against the man-of-war's-man. But as these midshipmen are presumed to have received the liberal and lofty breeding of gentlemen, it would seem all but incredible that any of their corps could descend to the paltriness of cherishing personal malice against so conventionally degraded a being as a sailor. So, indeed, it would seem. But when all the circumstances are considered, it will not appear extraordinary that some of them should thus cast discredit upon the warrants they wear. Title, and rank, and wealth, and education cannot unmake human nature; the same in cabin-boy and commodore, its only differences lie in the different modes of development.

At sea, a frigate houses and homes five hundred mortals in a space so contracted that they can hardly so much as move but they touch. Cut off from all those outward passing things which ashore employ the eyes, tongues, and thoughts of landsmen, the inmates of a frigate are thrown upon themselves and each other, and all their ponderings are introspective. A morbidness of mind is often the consequence, especially upon long voyages, accompanied by foul weather, calms, or

head-winds. Nor does this exempt from its evil influence any rank on board. Indeed, high station only ministers to it the more, since the higher the rank in a man-of-war, the less companionship.

It is an odious, unthankful, repugnant thing to dwell upon a subject like this; nevertheless, be it said, that, through these jaundiced influences, even the captain of a frigate is, in some cases, indirectly induced to the infliction of corporal punishment upon a seaman. Never sail under a navy captain whom you suspect of being dyspeptic, or constitutionally prone to hypochondria.

The manifestation of these things is sometimes remarkable. In the earlier part of the cruise, while making a long, tedious run from Mazatlan to Callao on the Main, baffled by light head winds and frequent intermitting calms, when all hands were heartily wearied by the torrid, monotonous sea, a good-natured fore-top-man, by the name of Candy--quite a character in his way--standing in the waist among a crowd of seamen, touched me, and said, "D'ye see the old man there, White-Jacket, walking the poop? Well, don't he look as if he wanted to flog someone? Look at him once."

But to me, at least, no such indications were visible in the deportment of the Captain, though his thrashing the arm-chest with the slack of the spanker-out-haul looked a little suspicious. But any one might have been doing that to pass away a calm.

"Depend on it," said the top-man, "he must somehow have thought I was making sport of him a while ago, when I was only taking off old Priming, the gunner's mate. Just look at him once, White-Jacket, while I make believe coil this here rope; if there arn't a dozen in that 'ere Captain's top-lights, my name is horse-marine. If I could only touch my tile to him now, and take my Bible oath on it, that I was only taking off Priming, and not him, he wouldn't have such hard thoughts of me. But that can't be done; he'd think I meant to insult him. Well, it can't be helped; I suppose I must look out for a baker's dozen afore long."

I had an incredulous laugh at this. But two days afterward, when we were hoisting the main-top-mast stun'-sail, and the Lieutenant of the Watch was reprimanding the crowd of seamen at the halyards for their laziness--for the sail was but just crawling up to its place, owing to the languor of the men, induced by the heat--the Captain, who had been impatiently walking the deck, suddenly stopped short, and darting his eyes among the seamen, suddenly fixed them, crying out, "You, Candy, and be damned to you, you don't pull an ounce, you blackguard! Stand up to that gun, sir; I'll teach you to be grinning over a rope that way, without lending your pound of beef to it. Boatswain's mate, where's your colt? Give that man a dozen."

Removing his hat, the boatswain's mate looked into the crown aghast; the coiled rope, usually worn there, was not to be found; but the next instant it slid from the top of his head to the deck. Picking it up,

and straightening it out, he advanced toward the sailor.

"Sir," said Candy, touching and retouching his cap to the Captain, "I was pulling, sir, as much as the rest, sir; I was, indeed, sir."

"Stand up to that gun," cried the Captain. "Boatswain's mate, do your duty."

Three stripes were given, when the Captain raised his finger.

"You----,[3] do you dare stand up to be flogged with your hat on! Take it off, sir, instantly."

[FOOTNOTE-3] The phrase here used I have never seen either written or printed, and should not like to be the first person to introduce it to the public.

Candy dropped it on deck.

"Now go on, boatswain's mate." And the sailor received his dozen.

With his hand to his back he came up to me, where I stood among the by-standers, saying, "O Lord, O Lord! that boatswain's mate, too, had a

spite agin me; he always thought it was me that set afloat that yarn about his wife in Norfolk. O Lord! just run your hand under my shirt will you, White-Jacket? There!! didn't he have a spite agin me, to raise such bars as them? And my shirt all cut to pieces, too--arn't it, White-Jacket? Damn me, but these coltings puts the tin in the Purser's pocket. O Lord! my back feels as if there was a red-hot gridiron lashed to it. But I told you so--a widow's curse on him, say I--he thought I meant him, and not Priming."