

## CHAPTER LIV.

"THE PEOPLE" ARE GIVEN "LIBERTY."

Whenever, in intervals of mild benevolence, or yielding to mere politic dictates, Kings and Commodores relax the yoke of servitude, they should see to it well that the concession seem not too sudden or unqualified; for, in the commoner's estimation, that might argue febleness or fear.

Hence it was, perhaps, that, though noble Jack had carried the day captive in his audience at the mast, yet more than thirty-six hours elapsed ere anything official was heard of the "liberty" his shipmates so earnestly coveted. Some of the people began to growl and grumble.

"It's turned out all gammon, Jack," said one.

"Blast the Commodore!" cried another, "he bamboozled you, Jack."

"Lay on your oars a while," answered Jack, "and we shall see; we've struck for liberty, and liberty we'll have! I'm your tribune, boys; I'm your Rienzi. The Commodore must keep his word."

Next day, about breakfast-time, a mighty whistling and piping was heard at the main-hatchway, and presently the boatswain's voice was heard:

"D'ye hear there, fore and aft! all you starboard-quarter watch! get

ready to go ashore on liberty!"

In a paroxysm of delight, a young mizzen-top-man, standing by at the time, whipped the tarpaulin from his head, and smashed it like a pancake on the deck. "Liberty!" he shouted, leaping down into the berth-deck after his bag.

At the appointed hour, the quarter-watch mustered round the capstan, at which stood our old First Lord of the Treasury and Pay-Master-General, the Purser, with several goodly buck-skin bags of dollars, piled up on the capstan. He helped us all round to half a handful or so, and then the boats were manned, and, like so many Esterhazys, we were pulled ashore by our shipmates. All their lives lords may live in listless state; but give the commoners a holiday, and they outlord the Commodore himself.

The ship's company were divided into four sections or quarter-watches, only one of which were on shore at a time, the rest remaining to garrison the frigate--the term of liberty for each being twenty-four hours.

With Jack Chase and a few other discreet and gentlemanly top-men, I went ashore on the first day, with the first quarter-watch. Our own little party had a charming time; we saw many fine sights; fell in--as all sailors must--with dashing adventures. But, though not a few good chapters might be written on this head, I must again forbear; for in

this book I have nothing to do with the shore further than to glance at it, now and then, from the water; my man-of-war world alone must supply me with the staple of my matter; I have taken an oath to keep afloat to the last letter of my narrative.

Had they all been as punctual as Jack Chase's party, the whole quarter-watch of liberty-men had been safe on board the frigate at the expiration of the twenty-four hours. But this was not the case; and during the entire day succeeding, the midshipmen and others were engaged in ferreting them out of their hiding-places on shore, and bringing them off in scattered detachments to the ship.

They came in all imaginable stages of intoxication; some with blackened eyes and broken heads; some still more severely injured, having been stabbed in frays with the Portuguese soldiers. Others, unharmed, were immediately dropped on the gun-deck, between the guns, where they lay snoring for the rest of the day. As a considerable degree of license is invariably permitted to man-of-war's-men just "off liberty," and as man-of-war's-men well know this to be the case, they occasionally avail themselves of the privilege to talk very frankly to the officers when they first cross the gangway, taking care, meanwhile, to reel about very industriously, so that there shall be no doubt about their being seriously intoxicated, and altogether non compos for the time. And though but few of them have cause to feign intoxication, yet some individuals may be suspected of enacting a studied part upon these occasions. Indeed--judging by certain symptoms--even when really

inebriated, some of the sailors must have previously determined upon their conduct; just as some persons who, before taking the exhilarating gas, secretly make up their minds to perform certain mad feats while under its influence, which feats consequently come to pass precisely as if the actors were not accountable for them.

For several days, while the other quarter-watches were given liberty, the Neversink presented a sad scene. She was more like a madhouse than a frigate; the gun-deck resounded with frantic fights, shouts, and songs. All visitors from shore were kept at a cable's length.

These scenes, however, are nothing to those which have repeatedly been enacted in American men-of-war upon other stations. But the custom of introducing women on board, in harbour, is now pretty much discontinued, both in the English and American Navy, unless a ship, commanded by some dissolute Captain, happens to lie in some far away, outlandish port, in the Pacific or Indian Ocean.

The British line-of-battle ship, Royal George, which in 1782 sunk at her anchors at Spithead, carried down three hundred English women among the one thousand souls that were drowned on that memorable morning.

When, at last, after all the mad tumult and contention of "Liberty," the reaction came, our frigate presented a very different scene. The men looked jaded and wan, lethargic and lazy; and many an old mariner, with hand upon abdomen, called upon the Flag-staff to witness that

there were more hot coppers in the Neversink than those in the ship's galley.

Such are the lamentable effects of suddenly and completely releasing "the people" of a man-of-war from arbitrary discipline. It shows that, to such, "liberty," at first, must be administered in small and moderate quantities, increasing with the patient's capacity to make good use of it.

Of course while we lay in Rio, our officers frequently went ashore for pleasure, and, as a general thing, conducted themselves with propriety. But it is a sad thing to say, that, as for Lieutenant Mad Jack, he enjoyed himself so delightfully for three consecutive days in the town, that, upon returning to the ship, he sent his card to the Surgeon, with his compliments, begging him to drop into his state-room the first time he happened to pass that way in the ward-room.

But one of our Surgeon's mates, a young medico of fine family but slender fortune, must have created by far the strongest impression among the hidalgos of Rio. He had read Don Quixote, and, instead of curing him of his Quixotism, as it ought to have done, it only made him still more Quixotic. Indeed, there are some natures concerning whose moral maladies the grand maxim of Mr. Similia Similibus Curantur Hahneman does not hold true, since, with them, like cures not like, but only aggravates like. Though, on the other hand, so incurable are the moral maladies of such persons, that the antagonist maxim,

contraria contrariis curantur, often proves equally false.

Of a warm tropical day, this Surgeon's mate must needs go ashore in his blue cloth boat-cloak, wearing it, with a gallant Spanish toss, over his cavalier shoulder. By noon, he perspired very freely; but then his cloak attracted all eyes, and that was huge satisfaction. Nevertheless, his being knock-kneed, and spavined of one leg, sorely impaired the effect of this hidalgo cloak, which, by-the-way, was some-what rusty in front, where his chin rubbed against it, and a good deal bedraggled all over, from his having used it as a counterpane off Cape Horn.

As for the midshipmen, there is no knowing what their mammas would have said to their conduct in Rio. Three of them drank a good deal too much; and when they came on board, the Captain ordered them to be sewed up in their hammocks, to cut short their obstreperous capers till sober.

This shows how unwise it is to allow children yet in their teens to wander so far from home. It more especially illustrates the folly of giving them long holidays in a foreign land, full of seductive dissipation. Port for men, claret for boys, cried Dr. Johnson. Even so, men only should drink the strong drink of travel; boys should still be kept on milk and water at home. Middies! you may despise your mother's leading-strings, but they are the man-ropes my lads, by which many youngsters have steadied the giddiness of youth, and saved themselves from lamentable falls. And middies! know this, that as infants, being too early put on their feet, grow up bandy-legged, and curtailed of

their fair proportions, even so, my dear middies, does it morally prove with some of you, who prematurely are sent off to sea.

These admonitions are solely addressed to the more diminutive class of midshipmen--those under five feet high, and under seven stone in weight.

Truly, the records of the steerages of men-of-war are full of most melancholy examples of early dissipation, disease, disgrace, and death. Answer, ye shades of fine boys, who in the soils of all climes, the round world over, far away sleep from your homes.

Mothers of men! If your hearts have been cast down when your boys have fallen in the way of temptations ashore, how much more bursting your grief, did you know that those boys were far from your arms, cabined and cribbed in by all manner of iniquities. But this some of you cannot believe. It is, perhaps, well that it is so.

But hold them fast--all those who have not yet weighed their anchors for the Navy-round and round, hitch over hitch, bind your leading-strings on them, and clinching a ring-bolt into your chimney-jam, moor your boys fast to that best of harbours, the hearth-stone.

But if youth be giddy, old age is staid; even as young saplings, in the litheness of their limbs, toss to their roots in the fresh morning air; but, stiff and unyielding with age, mossy trunks never bend. With pride

and pleasure be it said, that, as for our old Commodore, though he might treat himself to as many "liberty days" as he pleased, yet throughout our stay in Rio he conducted himself with the utmost discretion.

But he was an old, old man; physically, a very small man; his spine was as an unloaded musket-barrel--not only attenuated, but destitute of a solitary cartridge, and his ribs were as the ribs of a weasel.

Besides, he was Commodore of the fleet, supreme lord of the Commons in Blue. It beseemed him, therefore, to erect himself into an ensample of virtue, and show the gun-deck what virtue was. But alas! when Virtue sits high aloft on a frigate's poop, when Virtue is crowned in the cabin a Commodore, when Virtue rules by compulsion, and domineers over Vice as a slave, then Virtue, though her mandates be outwardly observed, bears little interior sway. To be efficacious, Virtue must come down from aloft, even as our blessed Redeemer came down to redeem our whole man-of-war world; to that end, mixing with its sailors and sinners as equals.