

CHAPTER LIX.

A MAN-OF-WAR BUTTON DIVIDES TWO BROTHERS.

The conduct of Mandeville, in claiming the acquaintance of the First Lieutenant under such disreputable circumstances was strongly contrasted by the behaviour of another person on board, placed for a time in a somewhat similar situation.

Among the genteel youths of the after-guard was a lad of about sixteen, a very handsome young fellow, with starry eyes, curly hair of a golden colour, and a bright, sunshiny complexion: he must have been the son of some goldsmith. He was one of the few sailors--not in the main-top--whom I used to single out for occasional conversation. After several friendly interviews he became quite frank, and communicated certain portions of his history. There is some charm in the sea, which induces most persons to be very communicative concerning themselves.

We had lain in Rio but a day, when I observed that this lad--whom I shall here call Frank--wore an unwonted expression of sadness, mixed with apprehension. I questioned him as to the cause, but he chose to conceal it. Not three days after, he abruptly accosted me on the gun-deck, where I happened to be taking a promenade.

"I can't keep it to myself any more," he said; "I must have a

confidant, or I shall go mad!"

"What is the matter?" said I, in alarm.

"Matter enough--look at this!" and he handed me a torn half sheet of an old New York Herald, putting his finger upon a particular word in a particular paragraph. It was the announcement of the sailing from the Brooklyn Navy-yard of a United States store ship, with provisions for the squadron in Rio. It was upon a particular name, in the list of officers and midshipmen, that Frank's fingers was placed.

"That is my own brother," said he; "he must have got a reefer's warrant since I left home. Now, White-Jacket, what's to be done? I have calculated that the store ship may be expected here every day; my brother will then see me--he an officer and I a miserable sailor that any moment may be flogged at the gangway, before his very eyes. Heavens! White-Jacket, what shall I do? Would you run? Do you think there is any chance to desert? I won't see him, by Heaven, with this sailor's frock on, and he with the anchor button!"

"Why, Frank," said I, "I do not really see sufficient cause for this fit you are in. Your brother is an of officer--very good; and you are nothing but a sailor--but that is no disgrace. If he comes on board here, go up to him, and take him by the hand; believe me, he will be glad enough to see you!"

Frank started from his desponding attitude, and fixing his eyes full upon mine, with clasped hands exclaimed, "White-Jacket, I have been from home nearly three years; in that time I have never heard one word from my family, and, though God knows how I love them, yet I swear to you, that though my brother can tell me whether my sisters are still alive, yet, rather than accost him in this lined-frock, I would go ten centuries without hearing one syllable from home?"

Amazed at his earnestness, and hardly able to account for it altogether, I stood silent a moment; then said, "Why, Frank, this midshipman is your own brother, you say; now, do you really think that your own flesh and blood is going to give himself airs over you, simply because he sports large brass buttons on his coat? Never believe it. If he does, he can be no brother, and ought to be hanged--that's all!"

"Don't say that again," said Frank, resentfully; "my brother is a noble-hearted fellow; I love him as I do myself. You don't understand me, White-Jacket; don't you see, that when my brother arrives, he must consort more or less with our chuckle-headed reefers on board here? There's that namby-pamby Miss Nancy of a white-face, Stribbles, who, the other day, when Mad Jack's back was turned, ordered me to hand him the spy-glass, as if he were a Commodore. Do you suppose, now, I want my brother to see me a lackey abroad here? By Heaven it is enough to drive one distracted! What's to be done?" he cried, fiercely.

Much more passed between us, but all my philosophy was in vain, and at

last Frank departed, his head hanging down in despondency.

For several days after, whenever the quarter-master reported a sail entering the harbour, Frank was foremost in the rigging to observe it. At length, one afternoon, a vessel drawing near was reported to be the long-expected store ship. I looked round for Frank on the spar-deck, but he was nowhere to be seen. He must have been below, gazing out of a port-hole. The vessel was hailed from our poop, and came to anchor within a biscuit's toss of our batteries.

That evening I heard that Frank had ineffectually endeavoured to get removed from his place as an oarsman in the First-Cutter--a boat which, from its size, is generally employed with the launch in carrying ship-stores. When I thought that, the very next day, perhaps, this boat would be plying between the store ship and our frigate, I was at no loss to account for Frank's attempts to get rid of his oar, and felt heartily grieved at their failure.

Next morning the bugler called away the First-Cutter's crew, and Frank entered the boat with his hat slouched over his eyes. Upon his return, I was all eagerness to learn what had happened, and, as the communication of his feelings was a grateful relief, he poured his whole story into my ear.

It seemed that, with his comrades, he mounted the store ship's side, and hurried forward to the forecastle. Then, turning anxiously toward

the quarter-deck, he spied two midshipmen leaning against the bulwarks, conversing. One was the officer of his boat--was the other his brother? No; he was too tall--too large. Thank Heaven! it was not him. And perhaps his brother had not sailed from home, after all; there might have been some mistake. But suddenly the strange midshipman laughed aloud, and that laugh Frank had heard a thousand times before. It was a free, hearty laugh--a brother's laugh; but it carried a pang to the heart of poor Frank.

He was now ordered down to the main-deck to assist in removing the stores. The boat being loaded, he was ordered into her, when, looking toward the gangway, he perceived the two midshipmen lounging upon each side of it, so that no one could pass them without brushing their persons. But again pulling his hat over his eyes, Frank, darting between them, gained his oar. "How my heart thumped," he said, "when I actually, felt him so near me; but I wouldn't look at him--no! I'd have died first!"

To Frank's great relief, the store ship at last moved further up the bay, and it fortunately happened that he saw no more of his brother while in Rio; and while there, he never in any way made himself known to him.