

CHAPTER LX.

A MAN-OF-WAR'S-MAN SHOT AT.

There was a seaman belonging to the fore-top--a mess-mate, though not a top-mate of mine, and no favourite of the Captain's,--who, for certain venial transgressions, had been prohibited from going ashore on liberty when the ship's company went. Enraged at the deprivation--for he had not touched earth in upward of a year--he, some nights after, lowered himself overboard, with the view of gaining a canoe, attached by a rope to a Dutch galiot some cables'-lengths distant. In this canoe he proposed paddling himself ashore. Not being a very expert swimmer, the commotion he made in the water attracted the ear of the sentry on that side of the ship, who, turning about in his walk, perceived the faint white spot where the fugitive was swimming in the frigate's shadow. He hailed it; but no reply.

"Give the word, or I fire!"

Not a word was heard.

The next instant there was a red flash, and, before it had completely ceased illuminating the night the white spot was changed into crimson. Some of the officers, returning from a party at the Beach of the Flamingoes, happened to be drawing near the ship in one of her cutters.

They saw the flash, and the bounding body it revealed. In a moment the topman was dragged into the boat, a handkerchief was used for a tourniquet, and the wounded fugitive was soon on board the frigate, when, the surgeon being called, the necessary attentions were rendered.

Now, it appeared, that at the moment the sentry fired, the top-man--in order to elude discovery, by manifesting the completest quietude--was floating on the water, straight and horizontal, as if reposing on a bed. As he was not far from the ship at the time, and the sentry was considerably elevated above him--pacing his platform, on a level with the upper part of the hammock-nettings--the ball struck with great force, with a downward obliquity, entering the right thigh just above the knee, and, penetrating some inches, glanced upward along the bone, burying itself somewhere, so that it could not be felt by outward manipulation. There was no dusky discoloration to mark its internal track, as in the case when a partly-spent ball--obliquely hitting--after entering the skin, courses on, just beneath the surface, without penetrating further. Nor was there any mark on the opposite part of the thigh to denote its place, as when a ball forces itself straight through a limb, and lodges, perhaps, close to the skin on the other side. Nothing was visible but a small, ragged puncture, bluish about the edges, as if the rough point of a tenpenny nail had been forced into the flesh, and withdrawn. It seemed almost impossible, that through so small an aperture, a musket-bullet could have penetrated.

The extreme misery and general prostration of the man, caused by the

great effusion of blood--though, strange to say, at first he said he felt no pain from the wound itself--induced the Surgeon, very reluctantly, to forego an immediate search for the ball, to extract it, as that would have involved the dilating of the wound by the knife; an operation which, at that juncture, would have been almost certainly attended with fatal results. A day or two, therefore, was permitted to pass, while simple dressings were applied.

The Surgeon of the other American ships of war in harbour occasionally visited the Neversink, to examine the patient, and incidentally to listen to the expositions of our own Surgeon, their senior in rank. But Cadwallader Cuticle, who, as yet, has been but incidentally alluded to, now deserves a chapter by himself.