

## CHAPTER LXVI.

### FUN IN A MAN-OF-WAR.

After the race (our man-of-war Derby) we had many days fine weather, during which we continued running before the Trades toward the north. Exhilarated by the thought of being homeward-bound, many of the seamen became joyous, and the discipline of the ship, if anything, became a little relaxed. Many pastimes served to while away the Dog-Watches in particular. These Dog-Watches (embracing two hours in the early part of the evening) form the only authorised play-time for the crews of most ships at sea.

Among other diversions at present licensed by authority in the Neversink, were those of single-stick, sparring, hammer-and-anvil, and head-bumping. All these were under the direct patronage of the Captain, otherwise--seeing the consequences they sometimes led to--they would undoubtedly have been strictly prohibited. It is a curious coincidence, that when a navy captain does not happen to be an admirer of the Fisticuffs his crew seldom amuse themselves in that way.

Single-stick, as every one knows, is a delightful pastime, which consists in two men standing a few feet apart, and rapping each other over the head with long poles. There is a good deal of fun in it, so long as you are not hit; but a hit--in the judgment of discreet

persons--spoils the sport completely. When this pastime is practiced by connoisseurs ashore, they wear heavy, wired helmets, to break the force of the blows. But the only helmets of our tars were those with which nature had furnished them. They played with great gun-rammers.

Sparring consists in playing single-stick with bone poles instead of wooden ones. Two men stand apart, and pommel each other with their fists (a hard bunch of knuckles permanently attached to the arms, and made globular, or extended into a palm, at the pleasure of the proprietor), till one of them, finding himself sufficiently thrashed, cries enough.

Hammer-and-anvil is thus practised by amateurs: Patient No. 1 gets on all-fours, and stays so; while patient No. 2 is taken up by his arms and legs, and his base is swung against the base of patient No. 1, till patient No. 1, with the force of the final blow, is sent flying along the deck.

Head-bumping, as patronised by Captain Claret, consists in two negroes (whites will not answer) butting at each other like rams. This pastime was an especial favourite with the Captain. In the dog-watches, Rose-water and May-day were repeatedly summoned into the lee waist to tilt at each other, for the benefit of the Captain's health.

May-day was a full-blooded "bull-negro," so the sailors called him, with a skull like an iron tea-kettle, wherefore May-day much fancied

the sport. But Rose-water, he was a slender and rather handsome mulatto, and abhorred the pastime. Nevertheless, the Captain must be obeyed; so at the word poor Rose-water was fain to put himself in a posture of defence, else May-day would incontinently have bumped him out of a port-hole into the sea. I used to pity poor Rose-water from the bottom of my heart. But my pity was almost aroused into indignation at a sad sequel to one of these gladiatorial scenes.

It seems that, lifted up by the unaffected, though verbally unexpressed applause of the Captain, May-day had begun to despise Rose-water as a poltroon--a fellow all brains and no skull; whereas he himself was a great warrior, all skull and no brains.

Accordingly, after they had been bumping one evening to the Captain's content, May-day confidentially told Rose-water that he considered him a "nigger," which, among some blacks, is held a great term of reproach. Fired at the insult, Rose-water gave May-day to understand that he utterly erred; for his mother, a black slave, had been one of the mistresses of a Virginia planter belonging to one of the oldest families in that state. Another insulting remark followed this innocent disclosure; retort followed retort; in a word, at last they came together in mortal combat.

The master-at-arms caught them in the act, and brought them up to the mast. The Captain advanced.

"Please, sir," said poor Rose-water, "it all came of dat 'ar bumping; May-day, here, aggrawated me 'bout it."

"Master-at-arms," said the Captain, "did you see them fighting?"

"Ay, sir," said the master-at-arms, touching his cap.

"Rig the gratings," said the Captain. "I'll teach you two men that, though I now and then permit you to play, I will have no fighting. Do your duty, boatswain's mate!" And the negroes were flogged.

Justice commands that the fact of the Captain's not showing any leniency to May-day--a decided favourite of his, at least while in the ring--should not be passed over. He flogged both culprits in the most impartial manner.

As in the matter of the scene at the gangway, shortly after the Cape Horn theatricals, when my attention had been directed to the fact that the officers had shipped their quarter-deck faces--upon that occasion, I say, it was seen with what facility a sea-officer assumes his wonted severity of demeanour after a casual relaxation of it. This was especially the case with Captain Claret upon the present occasion. For any landsman to have beheld him in the lee waist, of a pleasant dog-watch, with a genial, good-humoured countenance, observing the gladiators in the ring, and now and then indulging in a playful remark--that landsman would have deemed Captain Claret the indulgent

father of his crew, perhaps permitting the excess of his kind-heartedness to encroach upon the appropriate dignity of his station. He would have deemed Captain Claret a fine illustration of those two well-known poetical comparisons between a sea-captain and a father, and between a sea-captain and the master of apprentices, instituted by those eminent maritime jurists, the noble Lords Tenterden and Stowell.

But surely, if there is anything hateful, it is this shipping of the quarter-deck face after wearing a merry and good-natured one. How can they have the heart? Methinks, if but once I smiled upon a man--never mind how much beneath me--I could not bring myself to condemn him to the shocking misery of the lash. Oh officers! all round the world, if this quarter-deck face you wear at all, then never unship it for another, to be merely sported for a moment. Of all insults, the temporary condescension of a master to a slave is the most outrageous and galling. That potentate who most condescends, mark him well; for that potentate, if occasion come, will prove your uttermost tyrant.