

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

MAN-OF-WAR BARBERS.

The allusion to one of the ship's barbers in a previous chapter, together with the recollection of how conspicuous a part they enacted in a tragical drama soon to be related, leads me now to introduce them to the reader.

Among the numerous artists and professors of polite trades in the Navy, none are held in higher estimation or drive a more profitable business than these barbers. And it may well be imagined that the five hundred heads of hair and five hundred beards of a frigate should furnish no small employment for those to whose faithful care they may be intrusted. As everything connected with the domestic affairs of a man-of-war comes under the supervision of the martial executive, so certain barbers are formally licensed by the First Lieutenant. The better to attend to the profitable duties of their calling, they are exempted from all ship's duty except that of standing night-watches at sea, mustering at quarters, and coming on deck when all hands are called. They are rated as able seamen or ordinary seamen, and receive their wages as such; but in addition to this, they are liberally recompensed for their professional services. Herein their rate of pay is fixed for every sailor manipulated--so much per quarter, which is charged to the sailor, and credited to his barber on the books

of the Purser.

It has been seen that while a man-of-war barber is shaving his customers at so much per chin, his wages as a seaman are still running on, which makes him a sort of sleeping partner of a sailor; nor are the sailor wages he receives altogether to be reckoned as earnings. Considering the circumstances, however, not much objection can be made to the barbers on this score. But there were instances of men in the *Neversink* receiving government money in part pay for work done for private individuals. Among these were several accomplished tailors, who nearly the whole cruise sat cross-legged on the half deck, making coats, pantaloons, and vests for the quarter-deck officers. Some of these men, though knowing little or nothing about sailor duties, and seldom or never performing them, stood upon the ship's books as ordinary seamen, entitled to ten dollars a month. Why was this? Previous to shipping they had divulged the fact of their being tailors. True, the officers who employed them upon their wardrobes paid them for their work, but some of them in such a way as to elicit much grumbling from the tailors. At any rate, these makers and menders of clothes did not receive from some of these officers an amount equal to what they could have fairly earned ashore by doing the same work. It was a considerable saving to the officers to have their clothes made on board.

The men belonging to the carpenter's gang furnished another case in point. There were some six or eight allotted to this department. All the cruise they were hard at work. At what? Mostly making chests of

drawers, canes, little ships and schooners, swifts, and other elaborated trifles, chiefly for the Captain. What did the Captain pay them for their trouble? Nothing. But the United States government paid them; two of them (the mates) at nineteen dollars a month, and the rest receiving the pay of able seamen, twelve dollars.

To return.

The regular days upon which the barbers shall exercise their vocation are set down on the ship's calendar, and known as shaving days. On board of the Neversink these days are Wednesdays and Saturdays; when, immediately after breakfast, the barbers' shops were opened to customers. They were in different parts of the gun-deck, between the long twenty-four pounders. Their furniture, however, was not very elaborate, hardly equal to the sumptuous appointments of metropolitan barbers. Indeed, it merely consisted of a match-tub, elevated upon a shot-box, as a barber's chair for the patient. No Psyche glasses; no hand-mirror; no ewer and basin; no comfortable padded footstool; nothing, in short, that makes a shore "shave" such a luxury.

Nor are the implements of these man-of-war barbers out of keeping with the rude appearance of their shops. Their razors are of the simplest patterns, and, from their jagged-ness, would seem better fitted for the preparing and harrowing of the soil than for the ultimate reaping of the crop. But this is no matter for wonder, since so many chins are to be shaven, and a razor-case holds but two razors. For only two razors

does a man-of-war barber have, and, like the marine sentries at the gangway in port, these razors go off and on duty in rotation. One brush, too, brushes every chin, and one lather lathers them all. No private brushes and boxes; no reservations whatever.

As it would be altogether too much trouble for a man-of-war's-man to keep his own shaving-tools and shave himself at sea, and since, therefore, nearly the whole ship's company patronise the ship's barbers, and as the seamen must be shaven by evening quarters of the days appointed for the business, it may be readily imagined what a scene of bustle and confusion there is when the razors are being applied. First come, first served, is the motto; and often you have to wait for hours together, sticking to your position (like one of an Indian file of merchants' clerks getting letters out of the post-office), ere you have a chance to occupy the pedestal of the match-tub. Often the crowd of quarrelsome candidates wrangle and fight for precedency, while at all times the interval is employed by the garrulous in every variety of ship-gossip.

As the shaving days are unalterable, they often fall upon days of high seas and tempestuous winds, when the vessel pitches and rolls in a frightful manner. In consequence, many valuable lives are jeopardised from the razor being plied under such untoward circumstances. But these sea-barbers pride themselves upon their sea-legs, and often you will see them standing over their patients with their feet wide apart, and scientifically swaying their bodies to the motion of the ship, as they

flourish their edge-tools about the lips, nostrils, and jugular.

As I looked upon the practitioner and patient at such times, I could not help thinking that, if the sailor had any insurance on his life, it would certainly be deemed forfeited should the president of the company chance to lounge by and behold him in that imminent peril. For myself, I accounted it an excellent preparation for going into a sea-fight, where fortitude in standing up to your gun and running the risk of all splinters, comprise part of the practical qualities that make up an efficient man-of-war's man.

It remains to be related, that these barbers of ours had their labours considerably abridged by a fashion prevailing among many of the crew, of wearing very large whiskers; so that, in most cases, the only parts needing a shave were the upper lip and suburbs of the chin. This had been more or less the custom during the whole three years' cruise; but for some time previous to our weathering Cape Horn, very many of the seamen had redoubled their assiduity in cultivating their beards preparatory to their return to America. There they anticipated creating no small impression by their immense and magnificent homeward-bounders--so they called the long fly-brushes at their chins. In particular, the more aged sailors, embracing the Old Guard of sea grenadiers on the forecastle, and the begrimed gunner's mates and quarter-gunners, sported most venerable beards of an exceeding length and hoariness, like long, trailing moss hanging from the bough of some aged oak. Above all, the Captain of the Forecastle, old Ushant--a fine

specimen of a sea sexagenarian--wore a wide, spreading beard, gizzled and grey, that flowed over his breast and often became tangled and knotted with tar. This Ushant, in all weathers, was ever alert at his duty; intrepidly mounting the fore-yard in a gale, his long beard streaming like Neptune's. Off Cape Horn it looked like a miller's, being all over powdered with frost; sometimes it glittered with minute icicles in the pale, cold, moonlit Patagonian nights. But though he was so active in time of tempest, yet when his duty did not call for exertion, he was a remarkably staid, reserved, silent, and majestic old man, holding himself aloof from noisy revelry, and never participating in the boisterous sports of the crew. He resolutely set his beard against their boyish frolickings, and often held forth like an oracle concerning the vanity thereof. Indeed, at times he was wont to talk philosophy to his ancient companions--the old sheet-anchor-men around him--as well as to the hare-brained tenants of the fore-top, and the giddy lads in the mizzen.

Nor was his philosophy to be despised; it abounded in wisdom. For this Ushant was an old man, of strong natural sense, who had seen nearly the whole terraqueous globe, and could reason of civilized and savage, of Gentile and Jew, of Christian and Moslem. The long night-watches of the sailor are eminently adapted to draw out the reflective faculties of any serious-minded man, however humble or uneducated. Judge, then, what half a century of battling out watches on the ocean must have done for this fine old tar. He was a sort of a sea-Socrates, in his old age "pouring out his last philosophy and life," as sweet Spenser has it;

and I never could look at him, and survey his right reverend beard, without bestowing upon him that title which, in one of his satires, Persius gives to the immortal quaffer of the hemlock--Magister Barbatus--the bearded master.

Not a few of the ship's company had also bestowed great pains upon their hair, which some of them--especially the genteel young sailor bucks of the After-guard--wore over their shoulders like the ringleted Cavaliers. Many sailors, with naturally tendril locks, prided themselves upon what they call love curls, worn at the side of the head, just before the ear--a custom peculiar to tars, and which seems to have filled the vacated place of the old-fashioned Lord Rodney cue, which they used to wear some fifty years ago.

But there were others of the crew labouring under the misfortune of long, lank, Winnebago locks, carrotty bunches of hair, or rebellious bristles of a sandy hue. Ambitious of redundant mops, these still suffered their carrots to grow, spite of all ridicule. They looked like Huns and Scandinavians; and one of them, a young Down Easter, the unenvied proprietor of a thick crop of inflexible yellow bamboos, went by the name of Peter the Wild Boy; for, like Peter the Wild Boy in France, it was supposed that he must have been caught like a catamount in the pine woods of Maine. But there were many fine, flowing heads of hair to counter-balance such sorry exhibitions as Peter's.

What with long whiskers and venerable beards, then, of every variety of

cut--Charles the Fifth's and Aurelian's--and endless goatees and imperials; and what with abounding locks, our crew seemed a company of Merovingians or Long-haired kings, mixed with savage Lombards or Longobardi, so called from their lengthy beards.