

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

THE REBELS BROUGHT TO THE MAST.

Though many heads of hair were shorn, and many fine beards reaped that day, yet several still held out, and vowed to defend their sacred hair to the last gasp of their breath. These were chiefly old sailors--some of them petty officers--who, presuming upon their age or rank, doubtless thought that, after so many had complied with the Captain's commands, they, being but a handful, would be exempted from compliance, and remain a monument of our master's clemency.

That same evening, when the drum beat to quarters, the sailors went sullenly to their guns, and the old tars who still sported their beards stood up, grim, defying, and motionless, as the rows of sculptured Assyrian kings, who, with their magnificent beards, have recently been exhumed by Layard.

When the proper time arrived, their names were taken down by the officers of divisions, and they were afterward summoned in a body to the mast, where the Captain stood ready to receive them. The whole ship's company crowded to the spot, and, amid the breathless multitude, the venerable rebels advanced and unhatted.

It was an imposing display. They were old and venerable mariners; their

cheeks had been burned brown in all latitudes, wherever the sun sends a tropical ray. Reverend old tars, one and all; some of them might have been grandsires, with grandchildren in every port round the world. They ought to have commanded the veneration of the most frivolous or magisterial beholder. Even Captain Claret they ought to have humiliated into deference. But a Scythian is touched with no reverential promptings; and, as the Roman student well knows, the august Senators themselves, seated in the Senate-house, on the majestic hill of the Capitol, had their holy beards tweaked by the insolent chief of the Goths.

Such an array of beards! spade-shaped, hammer-shaped, dagger-shaped, triangular, square, peaked, round, hemispherical, and forked. But chief among them all, was old Ushant's, the ancient Captain of the Forecastle. Of a Gothic venerableness, it fell upon his breast like a continual iron-gray storm.

Ah! old Ushant, Nestor of the crew! it promoted my longevity to behold you.

He was a man-of-war's-man of the old Benbow school. He wore a short cue, which the wags of the mizzen-top called his "plug of pig-tail." About his waist was a broad boarder's belt, which he wore, he said, to brace his main-mast, meaning his backbone; for at times he complained of rheumatic twinges in the spine, consequent upon sleeping on deck, now and then, during the night-watches of upward of half a century. His

sheath-knife was an antique--a sort of old-fashioned pruning-hook; its handle--a sperm whale's tooth--was carved all over with ships, cannon, and anchors. It was attached to his neck by a lanyard, elaborately worked into "rose-knots" and "Turks' heads" by his own venerable fingers.

Of all the crew, this Ushant was most beloved by my glorious captain, Jack Chase, who one day pointed him out to me as the old man was slowly coming down the rigging from the fore-top.

"There, White-Jacket! isn't that old Chaucer's shipman?"

"A dagger hanging by a las hadde he,
About his nekke, under his arm adown;
The hote sommer hadde made his beard all brown.
Hardy he is, and wise; I undertake
With many a tempest has his beard be shake.'

From the Canterbury Tales, White-Jacket! and must not old Ushant have been living in Chaucer's time, that Chaucer could draw his portrait so well?"