

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

THE SOCIAL STATE IN A MAN-OF-WAR.

Bur the floggings at the gangway and the floggings through the fleet, the stealings, highway robberies, swearings, gamblings, blasphemings, thimble-riggings, smugglings, and tipplings of a man-of-war, which throughout this narrative have been here and there sketched from the life, by no means comprise the whole catalogue of evil. One single feature is full of significance.

All large ships of war carry soldiers, called marines. In the *Neversink* there was something less than fifty, two thirds of whom were Irishmen. They were officered by a Lieutenant, an Orderly Sergeant, two Sergeants, and two Corporals, with a drummer and fifer. The custom, generally, is to have a marine to each gun; which rule usually furnishes the scale for distributing the soldiers in vessels of different force.

Our marines had no other than martial duty to perform; excepting that, at sea, they stood watches like the sailors, and now and then lazily assisted in pulling the ropes. But they never put foot in rigging or hand in tar-bucket.

On the quarter-bills, these men were stationed at none of the great

guns; on the station-bills, they had no posts at the ropes. What, then, were they for? To serve their country in time of battle? Let us see. When a ship is running into action, her marines generally lie flat on their faces behind the bulwarks (the sailors are sometimes ordered to do the same), and when the vessel is fairly engaged, they are usually drawn up in the ship's waist--like a company reviewing in the Park. At close quarters, their muskets may pick off a seaman or two in the rigging, but at long-gun distance they must passively stand in their ranks and be decimated at the enemy's leisure. Only in one case in ten--that is, when their vessel is attempted to be boarded by a large party, are these marines of any essential service as fighting men; with their bayonets they are then called upon to "repel!"

If comparatively so useless as soldiers, why have marines at all in the Navy? Know, then, that what standing armies are to nations, what turnkeys are to jails, these marines are to the seamen in all large men-of-war. Their muskets are their keys. With those muskets they stand guard over the fresh water; over the grog, when doled; over the provisions, when being served out by the Master's mate; over the "brig" or jail; at the Commodore's and Captain's cabin doors; and, in port, at both gangways and forecastle.

Surely, the crowd of sailors, who besides having so many sea-officers over them, are thus additionally guarded by soldiers, even when they quench their thirst--surely these man-of-war's-men must be desperadoes indeed; or else the naval service must be so tyrannical that the worst

is feared from their possible insubordination. Either reason holds good, or both, according to the character of the officers and crew.

It must be evident that the man-of-war's-man casts but an evil eye on a marine. To call a man a "horse-marine," is, among seamen, one of the greatest terms of contempt.

But the mutual contempt, and even hatred, subsisting between these two bodies of men--both clinging to one keel, both lodged in one household--is held by most Navy officers as the height of the perfection of Navy discipline. It is regarded as the button that caps the uttermost point on their main-mast.

Thus they reason: Secure of this antagonism between the marine and the sailor, we can always rely upon it, that if the sailor mutinies, it needs no great incitement for the marine to thrust his bayonet through his heart; if the marine revolts, the pike of the sailor is impatient to charge. Checks and balances, blood against blood, that is the cry and the argument.

What applies to the relation in which the marine and sailor stand toward each other--the mutual repulsion implied by a system of checks--will, in degree, apply to nearly the entire interior of a man-of-war's discipline. The whole body of this discipline is emphatically a system of cruel cogs and wheels, systematically grinding up in one common hopper all that might minister to the moral well-being

of the crew.

It is the same with both officers and men. If a Captain have a grudge against a Lieutenant, or a Lieutenant against a midshipman, how easy to torture him by official treatment, which shall not lay open the superior officer to legal rebuke. And if a midshipman bears a grudge against a sailor, how easy for him, by cunning practices, born of a boyish spite, to have him degraded at the gangway. Through all the endless ramifications of rank and station, in most men-of-war there runs a sinister vein of bitterness, not exceeded by the fireside hatreds in a family of stepsons ashore. It were sickening to detail all the paltry irritabilities, jealousies, and cabals, the spiteful detractions and animosities, that lurk far down, and cling to the very keelson of the ship. It is unmanning to think of. The immutable ceremonies and iron etiquette of a man-of-war; the spiked barriers separating the various grades of rank; the delegated absolutism of authority on all hands; the impossibility, on the part of the common seaman, of appeal from incidental abuses, and many more things that might be enumerated, all tend to beget in most armed ships a general social condition which is the precise reverse of what any Christian could desire. And though there are vessels, that in some measure furnish exceptions to this; and though, in other ships, the thing may be glazed over by a guarded, punctilious exterior, almost completely hiding the truth from casual visitors, while the worst facts touching the common sailor are systematically kept in the background, yet it is certain that what has here been said of the domestic interior of a

man-of-war will, in a greater or less degree, apply to most vessels in the Navy. It is not that the officers are so malevolent, nor, altogether, that the man-of-war's-man is so vicious. Some of these evils are unavoidably generated through the operation of the Naval code; others are absolutely organic to a Navy establishment, and, like other organic evils, are incurable, except when they dissolve with the body they live in.