CHAPTER XC.

THE MANNING OF NAVIES.

"The gallows and the sea refuse nothing," is a very old sea saying; and, among all the wondrous prints of Hogarth, there is none remaining more true at the present day than that dramatic boat-scene, where after consorting with harlots and gambling on tomb-stones, the Idle Apprentice, with the villainous low forehead, is at last represented as being pushed off to sea, with a ship and a gallows in the distance. But Hogarth should have converted the ship's masts themselves into Tyburn-trees, and thus, with the ocean for a background, closed the career of his hero. It would then have had all the dramatic force of the opera of Don Juan, who, after running his impious courses, is swept from our sight in a tornado of devils.

For the sea is the true Tophet and bottomless pit of many workers of iniquity; and, as the German mystics feign Gehennas within Gehennas, even so are men-of-war familiarly known among sailors as "Floating Hells." And as the sea, according to old Fuller, is the stable of brute monsters, gliding hither and thither in unspeakable swarms, even so is it the home of many moral monsters, who fitly divide its empire with the snake, the shark, and the worm.

Nor are sailors, and man-of-war's-men especially, at all blind to a

true sense of these things. "Purser rigged and parish damned," is the sailor saying in the American Navy, when the tyro first mounts the lined frock and blue jacket, aptly manufactured for him in a State Prison ashore.

No wonder, that lured by some crimp into a service so galling, and, perhaps, persecuted by a vindictive lieutenant, some repentant sailors have actually jumped into the sea to escape from their fate, or set themselves adrift on the wide ocean on the gratings without compass or rudder.

In one case, a young man, after being nearly cut into dog's meat at the gangway, loaded his pockets with shot and walked overboard.

Some years ago, I was in a whaling ship lying in a harbour of the Pacific, with three French men-of-war alongside. One dark, moody night, a suppressed cry was heard from the face of the waters, and, thinking it was some one drowning, a boat was lowered, when two French sailors were picked up, half dead from exhaustion, and nearly throttled by a bundle of their clothes tied fast to their shoulders. In this manner they had attempted their escape from their vessel. When the French officers came in pursuit, these sailors, rallying from their exhaustion, fought like tigers to resist being captured. Though this story concerns a French armed ship, it is not the less applicable, in degree, to those of other nations.

Mix with the men in an American armed ship, mark how many foreigners there are, though it is against the law to enlist them. Nearly one third of the petty officers of the Neversink were born east of the Atlantic. Why is this? Because the same principle that operates in hindering Americans from hiring themselves out as menial domestics also restrains them, in a great measure, from voluntarily assuming a far worse servitude in the Navy. "Sailors wanted for the Navy" is a common announcement along the wharves of our sea-ports. They are always "wanted." It may have been, in part, owing to this scarcity man-of-war's men, that not many years ago, black slaves were frequently to be found regularly enlisted with the crew of an American frigate, their masters receiving their pay. This was in the teeth of a law of Congress expressly prohibiting slaves in the Navy. This law, indirectly, means black slaves, nothing being said concerning white ones. But in view of what John Randolph of Roanoke said about the frigate that carried him to Russia, and in view of what most armed vessels actually are at present, the American Navy is not altogether an inappropriate place for hereditary bondmen. Still, the circumstance of their being found in it is of such a nature, that to some it may hardly appear credible. The incredulity of such persons, nevertheless, must yield to the fact, that on board of the United States ship Neversink, during the present cruise, there was a Virginian slave regularly shipped as a seaman, his owner receiving his wages. Guinea--such was his name among the crew--belonged to the Purser, who was a Southern gentleman; he was employed as his body servant. Never did I feel my condition as a man-of-war's-man so keenly as when seeing this Guinea

freely circulating about the decks in citizen's clothes, and through the influence of his master, almost entirely exempted from the disciplinary degradation of the Caucasian crew. Faring sumptuously in the ward-room; sleek and round, his ebon face fairly polished with content: ever gay and hilarious; ever ready to laugh and joke, that African slave was actually envied by many of the seamen. There were times when I almost envied him myself. Lemsford once envied him outright, "Ah, Guinea!" he sighed, "you have peaceful times; you never opened the book I read in."

One morning, when all hands were called to witness punishment, the Purser's slave, as usual, was observed to be hurrying down the ladders toward the ward-room, his face wearing that peculiar, pinched blueness, which, in the negro, answers to the paleness caused by nervous agitation in the white. "Where are you going, Guinea?" cried the deck-officer, a humorous gentleman, who sometimes diverted himself with the Purser's slave, and well knew what answer he would now receive from him. "Where are you going, Guinea?" said this officer; "turn about; don't you hear the call, sir?" "'Scuse me, massa!" said the slave, with a low salutation; "I can't 'tand it; I can't, indeed, massa!" and, so saying, he disappeared beyond the hatchway. He was the only person on board, except the hospital-steward and the invalids of the sick-bay, who was exempted from being present at the administering of the scourge. Accustomed to light and easy duties from his birth, and so fortunate as to meet with none but gentle masters, Guinea, though a bondman, liable to be saddled with a mortgage, like a horse--Guinea, in

India-rubber manacles, enjoyed the liberties of the world.

Though his body-and-soul proprietor, the Purser, never in any way individualised me while I served on board the frigate, and never did me a good office of any kind (it was hardly in his power), yet, from his pleasant, kind, indulgent manner toward his slave, I always imputed to him a generous heart, and cherished an involuntary friendliness toward him. Upon our arrival home, his treatment of Guinea, under circumstances peculiarly calculated to stir up the resentment of a slave-owner, still more augmented my estimation of the Purser's good heart.

Mention has been made of the number of foreigners in the American Navy; but it is not in the American Navy alone that foreigners bear so large a proportion to the rest of the crew, though in no navy, perhaps, have they ever borne so large a proportion as in our own. According to an English estimate, the foreigners serving in the King's ships at one time amounted to one eighth of the entire body of seamen. How it is in the French Navy, I cannot with certainty say; but I have repeatedly sailed with English seamen who have served in it.

One of the effects of the free introduction of foreigners into any Navy cannot be sufficiently deplored. During the period I lived in the Neversink, I was repeatedly struck by the lack of patriotism in many of my shipmates. True, they were mostly foreigners who unblushingly avowed, that were it not for the difference of pay, they would as lief

man the guns of an English ship as those of an American or Frenchman. Nevertheless, it was evident, that as for any high-toned patriotic feeling, there was comparatively very little--hardly any of it--evinced by our sailors as a body. Upon reflection, this was not to be wondered at. From their roving career, and the sundering of all domestic ties, many sailors, all the world over, are like the "Free Companions," who some centuries ago wandered over Europe, ready to fight the battles of any prince who could purchase their swords. The only patriotism is born and nurtured in a stationary home, and upon an immovable hearth-stone; but the man-of-war's-man, though in his voyagings he weds the two Poles and brings both Indies together, yet, let him wander where he will, he carries his one only home along with him: that home is his hammock. "Born under a gun, and educated on the bowsprit," according to a phrase of his own, the man-of-war-man rolls round the world like a billow, ready to mix with any sea, or be sucked down to death in the maelstrom of any war.

Yet more. The dread of the general discipline of a man-of-war; the special obnoxiousness of the gangway; the protracted confinement on board ship, with so few "liberty days;" and the pittance of pay (much less than what can always be had in the Merchant Service), these things contrive to deter from the navies of all countries by far the majority of their best seamen. This will be obvious, when the following statistical facts, taken from Macpherson's Annals of Commerce, are considered. At one period, upon the Peace Establishment, the number of men employed in the English Navy was 25,000; at the same time, the

English Merchant Service was employing 118,952. But while the necessities of a merchantman render it indispensable that the greater part of her crew be able seamen, the circumstances of a man-of-war admit of her mustering a crowd of landsmen, soldiers, and boys in her service. By a statement of Captain Marryat's, in his pamphlet (A. D. 1822) "On the Abolition of Impressment," it appears that, at the close of the Bonaparte wars, a full third of all the crews of his Majesty's fleets consisted of landsmen and boys.

Far from entering with enthusiasm into the king's ships when their country were menaced, the great body of English seamen, appalled at the discipline of the Navy, adopted unheard-of devices to escape its press-gangs. Some even hid themselves in caves, and lonely places inland, fearing to run the risk of seeking a berth in an outward-bound merchantman, that might have carried them beyond sea. In the true narrative of "John Nichol, Mariner," published in 1822 by Blackwood in Edinburgh, and Cadell in London, and which everywhere bears the spontaneous impress of truth, the old sailor, in the most artless, touching, and almost uncomplaining manner, tells of his "skulking like a thief" for whole years in the country round about Edin-burgh, to avoid the press-gangs, prowling through the land like bandits and Burkers. At this time (Bonaparte's wars), according to "Steel's List," there were forty-five regular press-gang stations in Great Britain.[5]

[FOOTNOTE-5] Besides this domestic kidnapping, British frigates, in friendly or neutral harbours, in some instances pressed into their service foreign sailors of all nations from the public wharves. In certain cases, where Americans were concerned, when "protections" were found upon their persons, these were destroyed; and to prevent the American consul from claiming his sailor countrymen, the press-gang generally went on shore the night previous to the sailing of the frigate, so that the kidnapped seamen were far out to sea before they could be missed by their friends. These things should be known; for in case the English government again goes to war with its fleets, and should again resort to indiscriminate impressment to man them, it is well that both Englishmen and Americans, that all the world be prepared to put down an iniquity outrageous and insulting to God and man.

In a later instance, a large body of British seamen solemnly assembled upon the eve of an anticipated war, and together determined, that in case of its breaking out, they would at once flee to America, to avoid being pressed into the service of their country--a service which degraded her own guardians at the gangway.

At another time, long previous to this, according to an English Navy officer, Lieutenant Tomlinson, three thousand seamen, impelled by the same motive, fled ashore in a panic from the colliers between Yarmouth

Roads and the Nore. Elsewhere, he says, in speaking of some of the men on board the king's ships, that "they were most miserable objects." This remark is perfectly corroborated by other testimony referring to another period. In alluding to the lamented scarcity of good English seamen during the wars of 1808, etc., the author of a pamphlet on "Naval Subjects" says, that all the best seamen, the steadiest and best-behaved men, generally succeeded in avoiding the impress. This writer was, or had been, himself a Captain in the British fleet.

Now it may be easily imagined who are the men, and of what moral character they are, who, even at the present day, are willing to enlist as full-grown adults in a service so galling to all shore-manhood as the Navy. Hence it comes that the skulkers and scoundrels of all sorts in a man-of-war are chiefly composed not of regular seamen, but of these "dock-lopers" of landsmen, men who enter the Navy to draw their grog and murder their time in the notorious idleness of a frigate. But if so idle, why not reduce the number of a man-of-war's crew, and reasonably keep employed the rest? It cannot be done. In the first place, the magnitude of most of these ships requires a large number of hands to brace the heavy yards, hoist the enormous top-sails, and weigh the ponderous anchor. And though the occasion for the employment of so many men comes but seldom, it is true, yet when that occasion does come--and come it may at any moment--this multitude of men are indispensable.

But besides this, and to crown all, the batteries must be manned. There

must be enough men to work all the guns at one time. And thus, in order to have a sufficiency of mortals at hand to "sink, burn and destroy;" a man-of-war, through her vices, hopelessly depraving the volunteer landsmen and ordinary seamen of good habits, who occasionally enlist--must feed at the public cost a multitude of persons, who, if they did not find a home in the Navy, would probably fall on the parish, or linger out their days in a prison.

Among others, these are the men into whose mouths Dibdin puts his patriotic verses, full of sea-chivalry and romance. With an exception in the last line, they might be sung with equal propriety by both English and American man-of-war's-men.

"As for me, in all weathers, all times, tides, and ends,
Naught's a trouble from duty that springs;
For my heart is my Poll's, and my rhino's my friends,
And as for my life, it's the king's.

To rancour unknown, to no passion a slave,
Nor unmanly, nor mean, nor a railer," etc.

I do not unite with a high critical authority in considering Dibdin's ditties as "slang songs," for most of them breathe the very poetry of the ocean. But it is remarkable that those songs--which would lead one to think that man-of-war's-men are the most care-free, contented, virtuous, and patriotic of mankind--were composed at a time when the

English Navy was principally manned by felons and paupers, as mentioned in a former chapter. Still more, these songs are pervaded by a true Mohammedan sensualism; a reckless acquiescence in fate, and an implicit, unquestioning, dog-like devotion to whoever may be lord and master. Dibdin was a man of genius; but no wonder Dibdin was a government pensioner at L200 per annum.

But notwithstanding the iniquities of a man-of-war, men are to be found in them, at times, so used to a hard life; so drilled and disciplined to servitude, that, with an incomprehensible philosophy, they seem cheerfully to resign themselves to their fate. They have plenty to eat; spirits to drink; clothing to keep them warm; a hammock to sleep in; tobacco to chew; a doctor to medicine them; a parson to pray for them; and, to a penniless castaway, must not all this seem as a luxurious Bill of Fare?

There was on board of the Neversink a fore-top-man by the name of Landless, who, though his back was cross-barred, and plaided with the ineffaceable scars of all the floggings accumulated by a reckless tar during a ten years' service in the Navy, yet he perpetually wore a hilarious face, and at joke and repartee was a very Joe Miller.

That man, though a sea-vagabond, was not created in vain. He enjoyed life with the zest of everlasting adolescence; and, though cribbed in an oaken prison, with the turnkey sentries all round him, yet he paced the gun-deck as if it were broad as a prairie, and diversified in

landscape as the hills and valleys of the Tyrol. Nothing ever disconcerted him; nothing could transmute his laugh into anything like a sigh. Those glandular secretions, which in other captives sometimes go to the formation of tears, in him were expectorated from the mouth, tinged with the golden juice of a weed, wherewith he solaced and comforted his ignominious days.

"Rum and tobacco!" said Landless, "what more does a sailor want?"

His favourite song was "Dibdin's True English Sailor," beginning,

"Jack dances and sings, and is always content,
In his vows to his lass he'll ne'er fail her;
His anchor's atrip when his money's all spent,
And this is the life of a sailor."

But poor Landless danced quite as often at the gangway, under the lash, as in the sailor dance-houses ashore.

Another of his songs, also set to the significant tune of The King, God bless him! mustered the following lines among many similar ones:

"Oh, when safely landed in Boston or 'York,
Oh how I will tipple and jig it;
And toss off my glass while my rhino holds out,

In drinking success to our frigate!"

During the many idle hours when our frigate was lying in harbour, this man was either merrily playing at checkers, or mending his clothes, or snoring like a trumpeter under the lee of the booms. When fast asleep, a national salute from our batteries could hardly move him. Whether ordered to the main-truck in a gale; or rolled by the drum to the grog-tub; or commanded to walk up to the gratings and be lashed, Landess always obeyed with the same invincible indifference.

His advice to a young lad, who shipped with us at Valparaiso, embodies the pith and marrow of that philosophy which enables some man-of-war's-men to wax jolly in the service.

"Shippy!" said Landless, taking the pale lad by his neckerchief, as if he had him by the halter; "Shippy, I've seen sarvice with Uncle Sam--I've sailed in many Andrew Millers. Now take my advice, and steer clear of all trouble. D'ye see, touch your tile whenever a swob (officer) speaks to you. And never mind how much they rope's-end you, keep your red-rag belayed; for you must know as how they don't fancy sea-lawyers; and when the sarving out of slops comes round, stand up to it stiffly; it's only an oh Lord! Or two, and a few oh my Gods!--that's all. And what then? Why, you sleeps it off in a few nights, and turn out at last all ready for your grog."

This Landless was a favourite with the officers, among whom he went by

the name of "Happy Jack." And it is just such Happy Jacks as Landless that most sea-officers profess to admire; a fellow without shame, without a soul, so dead to the least dignity of manhood that he could hardly be called a man. Whereas, a seaman who exhibits traits of moral sensitiveness, whose demeanour shows some dignity within; this is the man they, in many cases, instinctively dislike. The reason is, they feel such a man to be a continual reproach to them, as being mentally superior to their power. He has no business in a man-of-war; they do not want such men. To them there is an insolence in his manly freedom, contempt in his very carriage. He is unendurable, as an erect, lofty-minded African would be to some slave-driving planter.

Let it not be supposed, however, that the remarks in this and the preceding chapter apply to all men-of-war. There are some vessels blessed with patriarchal, intellectual Captains, gentlemanly and brotherly officers, and docile and Christianised crews. The peculiar usages of such vessels insensibly softens the tyrannical rigour of the Articles of War; in them, scourging is unknown. To sail in such ships is hardly to realise that you live under the martial law, or that the evils above mentioned can anywhere exist.

And Jack Chase, old Ushant, and several more fine tars that might be added, sufficiently attest, that in the Neversink at least, there was more than one noble man-of-war's-man who almost redeemed all the rest.

Wherever, throughout this narrative, the American Navy, in any of its

bearings, has formed the theme of a general discussion, hardly one syllable of admiration for what is accounted illustrious in its achievements has been permitted to escape me. The reason is this: I consider, that so far as what is called military renown is concerned, the American Navy needs no eulogist but History. It were superfluous for White-Jacket to tell the world what it knows already. The office imposed upon me is of another cast; and, though I foresee and feel that it may subject me to the pillory in the hard thoughts of some men, yet, supported by what God has given me, I tranquilly abide the event, whatever it may prove.