

II

AT THE SIGN OF THE ANCHOR AND CHAIN

THE Anchor and Chain is a warm, pleasantly noisy place by the water-side at St. John's, with a not ungrateful reek of rum and tobacco for such outport folk as we; forever filled, too, with big, twinkling, trumpeting men, of our simple kind, which is the sort the sea rears. There for many a mellow hour of the night was I perched upon a chair at my uncle's side, delighting in the cheer which enclosed me—in the pop of the cork, the inspiriting passage of the black bottle, the boisterous talk and salty tales, the free laughter—but in which I might not yet, being then but seven years old, actively partake.

When in the first of it my uncle called for his dram, he would never fail to catch the bar-maid's hand, squeeze it under the table, with his left eyelid falling and his displaced jaw solemnly ajar, informing her the while, behind his thumb and forefinger, the rest of that hand being gone, that I was a devil of a teetotaler: by which (as I thought, and, I'll be bound, he knew well I would think) my years were excused and I was admitted to the company of whiskered skippers