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MIDSHIPMAN'S EXPEDIENTS; OR, THE DEPUTY CEEAN SHIRT. A TALE OF THE SEA.

By the author of "Hathin the Heeder," &c.

[Continued from our last.]

On a Sunday morning the marine who is placed as sentinel over the light that is always burning in the cockpit, has no sincere office. His arm is generally made stiff for the ensuing work by continuous brushing. Those also who can boast of the shadow of a beard upon their chins, give, at this important crisis, ample employment to the ship's barber.

In a three-decker there is generally some feud between the larboard and the starboard berths, and whilst the young gentlemen are engaged on their sedulous and all engrossing occupation of Alonizing, the opportunity is generally seized for making predatory excursions into the deserted berths. An ill guarded case-bottle of rum is generally the reward of a successful foray of this sort, a dreadful colubine the attendant upon a failure. We have altered all these things now, in the navy. Little boys, fresh from school, will talk of their injured honour, and oil their Manton hair-triggers at the breath of insult. The young gentlemen, at present, are very pretty behaved young gentlemen indeed; but let neither us nor them, on that account, despise the rough sailor midshipman, who settles their disputes with their lists, thought more of their country's honour than their own, and nobly supported it too, with Duncan, Howe, and Nelson.

But in the midst of this bustling, bawling, brushing and slopping, we must now discover how our hero was employed. He was just about half as miserable as a man that is going to be hung that day fortnight. His captain had, as yet, scarcely noticed him; the lieutenants had openly slighted him, and even his messmates, and the petty officers of his own class, had hitherto affected a contempt for him. Now where a man has to bear up against an accumulation of contumely, you may take it as a sound philosophical truth, that he will do it with the more chance of success, the hotter that he is irritated. "Ths hard, very hard, with soiled linen and a threadbare coat, to attempt to look down on perfumed and well dressed pride. Horace felt this Sunday morning, and felt it bitterly. He had performed his lavations with scrupulosity, his clothes were still good and neat, and he had both his hat and boots in the best order; but he had shipped his last clean shirt on the previous Sunday. Though he knew he had but thirteen, he still continued to count them over and over again, as if the art of enumerating them would increase their number.

Mr. Peter Wilkins, the son of a wholesale chesemonger in Doolley-street, and whose father was the deputy of the ward; and Mr. Jacob Filkins, the son of a retail grocer (but still in a large way,) neatly dressed for muster, stood over poor Horace, insulting him with their pity, and irritating him by their remarks.

"Poor fellow!" said Mr. Peter Wilkins, looking complacently on his own proudly embellished frill, and acting the compassionate, "he hasn't got over a clean shirt—what in the world will he do?"

"Sham Ab'ram, skalk, go on the sick list; brig mit-honite, poor, shabby." Mr. Jacob Filkins loved to be sententious, but he did not so much love the looks that his sententiousness had brought upon him from its object. "Yes," said Peter to his friend Jacob, "you came to the point at once. Now you know, Filkins, folks who are nobodies, and the sons of nobodies, may do very well for cutters and briggs, and craft of that sort, and pass for gentlemen there too, but young gentlemen who belong to line-of-battle ships on duty to sons of nobodies; nay my father allows me forty pence a-year, Filkins, which you know very well; and another, Mrs. Deputy Wilkins, as the top gentry always call her in our ward, takes care that my rig-out never disgraces the ship: why, I have six-and-thirty linen shirts!"

"I know you have," said his Achates, "and I've got almost as many, and five of them are clean yet; but I could not demean myself, you know, looking significantly upon poor Horace."

"No, you couldn't, Filkins. Must not disguise everybody that is nobly, like a gentleman, or I would lend the poor devil one myself."

"Beggan an horseback—ride to the devil," said Filkins.

And thus these two city-sprung worthies mutually inflated the pride of each other. Poor innocents! they knew not all this time how near they were to the verge of danger. Still they stood over Elmsford, marking his every article as he pulled them forth separately from his chest. At length the searcher after clean linen had made a very decent pile of clothes upon the deck, for now he had nearly riddled to the very bottom of this massive receptacle of his goods and chattels. Still the two youths, Wilkins and Filkins, looked down upon his labours with all variations of superciliousness.

"I'm thinking, Mr. Filkins," said the son of the Deputy, "that they'll beat off to divisions in no time, and this brig's midshipmate will be made headed for the rest of the day. I say, come here, all of ye—look at Elmsford—he's raving mad." See here, he's flinging his duds all out of his chest—look! here's a kit for you," continued the orator, giving the pile of garments that lay on the deck a most contemptuous spura with his foot.

"And a kick for you," said the enraged Horace, starting up, and sent the astonished Wilkins some feet off by the vigour of the application, until he was brought up by falling down into a basin of well used soap and water, that effectually spoiled the frill and collar of his clean shirt for that day.

"My friend," said Filkins intruding his long nose.

"Hand him that," replied Horace, striking this said interesting nose smartly over his bridge. As the water rushed forth from the rock, when stricken by the wand of Moses, so rushed forth the sanguineous streams from the magnificent organ of Filkins; and thus, in less than one minute, were two clean shirts spoiled.

"I'll have the satisfaction of a gentleman, the moment we get on shore," said Wilkins, putting on another shirt.

"And so will I," said Filkins, pulling off his bloody one.

"Then you'll get more than you are entitled to," said Horace, working away at his chest.

"Low fellow—brig's midshipman—father would astonish him ashore," muttered Wilkins.

"Very low—how he would stare—our wille at Peckham—green verandah—American glass—in a small sugar-cask—painted and varnished—looks like a vase—had him there—know who's who," replied Filkins.

After all, the petty cares of life are the most annoying—the most subduing. We can meet great misfortunes with firmness, and bear up bravely against terrible reverses. In our country invaded, our fields plundered, and our lives, and the lives of those who are dear to us threatened, we grid up our loins like strong men; our sleep becomes more sound; there is even a smile of haughtiness and defiance upon our countenances. In a struggle of this sort we may be destroyed, but the better part of us, the soul, cannot be overcome. But to appear among our equals mean, ridiculous, sordid, beggarly; those are the stings that enter into and fester the heart of the proud man. Horace Elmsford would much rather have marched up to a well served battery, than have faced the annoyances of that Sunday morning.

But he was not entirely without resource. The genius of love was, all this terrible time of tribulation, watching near him. He was too proud to feign sickness to avoid the muster; he had reached the very bottom of his chest, and in despair. At length he saw included in lavender sprigs, and delicately enveloped in clean writing paper, the well

starched and immaculate cambie handkerchief that he had taken from the lady Isabella. He opened it out, and looked upon it fondly. He threw his whole soul into the mass of recollections, and, for a short space, forgot mysteriously down the stream of time. In those moments he did the beautiful girl justice; he acquitted her of heartlessness, and pronounced himself guilty of folly the most inexcusable. "I," said he, "to aspire to the hand of the only daughter of an earl, who cannot, on a Sunday, command a clean shirt. Presumption—madness!"

"Yes," continued he, half aloud, "her conduct was the wisest, discreetest. She showed me that she liked me well enough to encourage me to be worthy of her—to win her by my worth; and if there is vigour in this arm, and firmness in this heart, I'll win her yet." After this rashness he did not turn his face to the wall, for there was no wall, withal, to turn his face to; but he turned it against the casing of the chain-pumps, and, clapping the cambie to his lips, gave it, with the best round-butt, half a dozen hearty kisses, after the manner of lovers. Then, not thinking those endearments sufficient, he placed the love-bomb against his bosom, and then a new light broke in upon him; it was the inspiration of love. Surely it is no great stretch of the imagination to suppose, that a very small emanation of the soul of his own Isabella was near, and whispered him the brilliant idea.

Despair was no longer on his brow, but pride and cheerfulness mantled over his countenance. Horace was a lad of ingenuity; no one better understood how to rig a jury-mast, contrive a make-shift rudder, or achieve ends with the least possible means. He put on the cleanest shirt that he had; he then divided the pure and precious cambie exactly into halves; so he cut through the worked coronet in the centre, he signed a little, but considered it altogether as a good omen. "We will divide our honours as well as our hearts," he said. Having made this division, and taking care that the hemmed corners should be before, he brought two of them up through his black silk handkerchief, and lo! a pair of finer or stiffer shirt collars were not exhibited in the grand fleet that day. Having adjusted this peculiarly to his satisfaction, he brought the remainder of the handkerchief, having first impressed two or three points upon it, over his bosom, and, uniting the two parts in front with a handsome diamond pin, behold, he stood forth a naval exquisite of the first water. Of course, a few compe pins were put in requisition, in order to keep this splendid invention in its proper situation.

But there is no privacy in a cockpit. The above operation had been watched by many a wondering, many an admiring eye, and two pair of envious and jealous ones. These belonged to the kicked and beaten Wilkins and Filkins. About five minutes before the drum had beaten to divisions, these two gentlemen had repaired to the quarter-deck, and, in a minute and a-half precisely, every one there became acquainted with the nature of the ingenious contrivance that was about to be offered to their admiration.

The captain did nothing but rub his chin with delight at the invitation; and so eager was he to have an ocular proof of its perfection, that he ordered them to beat off full two minutes before the accustomed time.

Rub, dub-a-dub. The marines, half smothered with pipe-clay, and their eyes protruding from their sockets, on account of their clubbed pistols being tied so tightly behind, are under arms on the poop. Every officer in the ship, in his show clothes, is or ought to be on the quarter-deck, and the seamen come up, not musing and scrambling as at the hostess's pipe, but with a decent quiet befitting the sacred day. Every man is scrupulously clean, and they range themselves in a double row entirely round the ship.

Up with the crowds of master's mates and midshipmen came Horace Elmsford, with his division list in his hand. He is the exposure of all eyes; every officer has something to say to him, and the gallant captain himself, for the first time, condescends to speak to him,

and bids him give a detail of the loss of the brig of loss of war to which he had recently belonged.

Poor Horace, he was more than half aware of the cause of all the utterings, and jokings, and scrutinizing glances with which he was honoured; and he was covered with confusion, and his face became the deepest scarlet, when Sir Hildebrand Capsule asked him if he had saved from the wreck his whole stock of clean shirts.

"I perceive," said his tormenter, "that your linen is of a peculiar texture of fineness; but I rather wish that you would patronize frills, as you see they are worn by myself and all the other officers of my ship."

After having made Horace pass through this purgatory, the captain turned to the first lieutenant, and said, "I like the young fellow's looks amazingly; he is very handsome, and his features remarkable for intelligence and ingenuousness. I should like to show him some civility; I admire his contrivance exceedingly. Do you know any thing of his connexions?"

"Nothing at all, Sir Hildebrand. No great things, I should suspect, from whence he came. Mr. Wilkins, his messmate, says that he is very low and very poor; that he knows nothing of genteel society. Indeed, from several quarters I have heard reports so unfavourable of him, that, as yet, we have not asked him to dine in the ward-room.—There are a sad set of scamps, just now, in the small craft of our navy."

"I am very sorry to hear this, indeed. He certainly has the air of a gentleman, though he seems to be laboring under a deal of confusion and embarrassment. Did he bring no letters of recommendation with him?"

"None at all, Sir Hildebrand."

"Sorry for it. I should like to have had him at my own table; but we must be careful Mr. Dix—our must be careful. How does he do his duty?"

"Not a fault to find with him, Sir Hildebrand."

"Then, by sheaves and blocks, he shall dine with me to-morrow; tax his ingenuity again; look at him Dix, he is as handsome as a figure-head, newly painted and gilded from the dock-yard."

In the meantime the divisions had been mustered, the various reports made, and every officer, with the exception of the captain and his first lieutenant, had lanced his miserable sneer against the gentleman with the simulated clean shirt; every one, with the above exceptions, having pronounced him "low—very low."

But, at the precise moment, Horace Elmsford was not the only object of interest. An hour before, an English frigate had been in sight of the fleet, and the admiral had made the signal to send boats on board of her, for letters and parcels from dear little England. The six-oared cutter had been absent almost half an hour. The captain was just upon the point of sending the men below, when she pulled alongside, and a bag full of letters was handed up, and two small boxes.

Independently of the letters in the bag, there was a parcel of letters for the captain, immediately from the admiralty. These, of course, were put into the captain's hands where he stood, whilst the bag and boxes were carried into the cabin. The captain breaks the seal of two or three; every eye in the ship is upon him except Horace's; he has no interest in the proceedings; he is only anxious to hide himself in the gloomy recesses of the cock-pit. There he stands to leeward, and as far from the other groups of officers as the amplitude of the deck will allow.

Sir Hildebrand has read one particular letter slowly through; he seems transfixed with surprise, and in his astonishment he has dropped it upon the deck; before any can assist him he has picked it up again, and reads it through still more slowly; all manner of doubt is seen to vanish from his countenance; it is now lighted up with a rich smile of joyousness, and a little archness is mingled with its expression of happiness. He walks rapidly over to leeward; the clusters of officers make