

LETTERS FROM BERMUDA.

LETTER XIII.

HAMILTON, February, 18—.

DEAR FRIEND.—Last week we went over in a steam-tug, the Pioneer, with some ladies from the Hotel to see the dockyards in Ireland Isle. We got a pass and registered our names. Probably the most important position in the Bermudas is Ireland Isle, which, though not much more than a mile in length and a quarter of a mile in breadth, contains the dockyard and other establishments connected with the Royal Navy. The Camber, which is a dock sheltered from the usual swell of the ocean by an excellent break-water, has proved of great service to many war vessels that continually visit Bermuda. But the principal feature of attraction is "the Great Bermuda Dock," a floating mass of iron, the largest structure of the kind in the world. It was constructed for the purpose of dry-docking Her Majesty's war-vessels in need of repair while on the station, and is so large that vessels of the first class can be taken on with ease, with everything on board. The dock, which is of iron, was built in England, and left that country for Bermuda in June, 1869, being towed across the Atlantic by two powerful men-of-war, with a small one astern to steer by. After a very smooth voyage of twenty-five days, this enormous mass reached its destination and was safely placed in the bed prepared for it, an excavation made to the depth of 54 feet below low water, from which no less than 1,200,000 cubic feet of sand and coral debris was removed.

The Royal Naval Hospital stands on a hill immediately above the dockyard, while beneath, occupying a large space of ground, prettily ornamented by cedar groves and smooth grassy glades, is the Naval Cemetery.

We ascended the steep ladder-like steps to the top deck of the great floating dock. It resembles a gigantic steamboat cut in two parts, opened lengthways down the middle. A vessel was inside undergoing repairs. There are stone steps under the water to get at the bottom of the boat. The water can be drawn off after the manner of a canal and leave the vessel quite dry in the dock. The number of rivets in the dock is 8,000,000. The weight of them is 800 tons. It is divided longitudinally into 8 watertight compartments and transversely into 6, so that it contains, irrespective of engine-rooms, pump wells, etc., 48 distinct water-tight compartments by which the position of the water required for working the dock may be regulated. There are 8 pumps of 10 horse power each, which will lift 16 tons of water a minute. All the different compartments are worked by valves from the upper deck. There is also a pair of steam shears, 100 feet high, lifting 80 tons. They were lifting the mast of a large vessel while we were there.

We saw some strange looking floating objects called Turret-ships, iron armour-plated. One of them was shaped like a gigantic cheese, the Scorpion, 4 guns, 2,751 tons; another, the Terror, armour-plated, 8 guns, 1,844 tons, a regular floating battery, and many others of the same ilk.

This day we had the pleasure of seeing a sham sea-fight. While walking about looking at the different vessels anchored there, we observed that the names painted on them were most inappropriate to war-ships—names of gentle feathered creatures, such as Dove, Plover, Bullfinch, &c. While discussing the matter we heard confused noises, sounds of firing off guns; shouts of reef the main sail, port the helm, luff—stand at ease, athwart ships, starboard, lee, furl the mizzen sail, Larboard, man the pumps, &c., &c. Then a volley was fired, and the smoke wrapped the vessels as in a

mist. While we were yet viewing this specimen of Naval warfare the battle ended, the smoke cleared away, and the unhurt wounded were carried tenderly to the cock-pit by their sorrowful messmates amid cheers and shouts from the Victors.

Upon enquiry we found that the jolly tars were not daily in the habit of amusing themselves with school-boy freaks and kittenish gambols, but that the Vice Admiral, Sir A.—K.—, K.O.B., etc., was making a tour of inspection, and the men were going through their naval drill and military exercises. The Vice Admiral soon appeared, a distinguished looking officer in full naval uniform, which is a magnificent dress half covered with gold lace and having heavy gold epaulettes. He landed, accompanied by—not "his sisters and his cousins and his aunts," but by several young midshipmen and his Secretary, Captain F—. The latter gentleman, in passing, recognized and saluted us. He turned back and said he was on duty, in waiting on the Vice Admiral, or he would be most happy to be our guide. He then introduced our party to the Captains and Commanders of the Bullfinch and Plover, who were standing near, having landed with the Vice Admiral, and left us in charge of these naval heroes. We expressed our surprise at the singular names of the war vessels, and one said they were so called because they were *game* to the last! The officers kindly took us over the Bullfinch, which was as bright and gayly colored as her pretty namesake. They offered us cake and wine in the cabin and showed us all possible attention.

I love the Sailor—his eventful life—
His generous spirit his contempt of danger—
His firmness in the gale, the wreck and strife;
And though a wild and reckless Ocean ranger,
God grant he make that port when life is o'er
Where storms are hushed and billows break no more.

One of the young ladies of our party, a very young lady, caused the officers to smile by innocently asking, among other questions, to which they listened and answered with polite gravity—Did they carry passengers? No. Nor merchandise? No. "Well," said she "what are they for? What is the use of all these beautiful ships?" This seemed to amuse the naval officers highly. Miss — did not evidently comprehend the necessity of a standing armed Fleet. She did not fully appreciate the Royal Navy by which "Britannia rules the waves."

As Blackstone says in one of his works: "The Royal Navy of England has ever been its greatest defence and ornament; it is its ancient and natural strength; the floating bulwark of the Island; an arm moreover from which, however strong and powerful, no danger can be apprehended to liberty, and accordingly it has been assiduously cultivated from the earliest ages."

But in spite of Blackstone's learned mandate, perhaps the young maiden, in the innocence of her youthful heart, believed in the sentiment which the poet Longfellow expresses in the following verses:

"Were half the power that fills the world
With terror;
Were half the wealth bestowed on camps
and courts
Given to redeem the human mind from error,
There were no need of arsenals, fleets and forts.

The warrior's name would be a name
abhorred,
And every Nation that should lift again
Its hand against a brother, on its forehead
Should wear for ever more the Curse of Cain."

"They shall beat their swords into
ploughshares and their spears into pruning
hooks. Nation shall not lift sword against
nation, neither shall they learn war any
more."—Is. ii., 4.

"I love, I dearly love to see
Bright steel gleam through the land;
'Tis a goodly sight, but it must be
Held in the reaper's tawny hand."

I shall relate the account of our
visit to H. M. S. Bellerophon in my
next epistle. Adieu. PLACIDIA.

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