

CHAPTER II.

MY FIRST CRUISE—THE "COLUMBUS 74"—GHOSTS—CROSS THE ATLANTIC—GIBRALTAR—GUARDA COSTA AND SMUGGLERS—PORT MAHON—ASSASSINATION OF MR. PATTERSON—LIEUTENANT CHARLES G. HUNTER—SQUADRON WINTERS IN GENOA—PASSED MIDSHIPMEN BEALE AND MURRAY—THE BRIG "SOMERS"—A DUEL—RETURN TO MAHON—THE "DELAWARE 74"—TOULON—CAPE DE GATA—GIBRALTAR AGAIN—MADEIRA—SAIL FOR THE COAST OF BRAZIL—SATURDAY-NIGHT YARNS—TARGET PRACTICE—IMPROVEMENTS IN GUNNERY—CAPTAIN MARRYATT AND AMERICAN THUNDER.

THE *Columbus* was an old-fashioned 74, built about the beginning of the century. She carried long 32-pounders on her main and lower gun decks, and 32-pounder carronades on her spar deck. She had four 8-inch shell guns, or Paixhams as they were called from their inventor, on the main deck amidships, and the same number on the lower deck. She had made but one short cruise in the Mediterranean, which was said to have been specially marked by two incidents: first, in crossing the Atlantic, she had "fetched a compass" around about a fly-speck on the chart which the Commodore took to be a rock; and secondly, her false keel getting slued athwartships she would neither tack, veer nor sail. She was called at that time an unlucky ship. It was furthermore said by the men that a woman and child had been murdered on her orlop deck while she was laid up in ordinary at the Navy Yard.

In company with many other midshipmen I reported for her early in the summer of 1842, and as she was not ready for her officers and men we took up our quarters at the old National Hotel in Charlestown. Here we remained but a short time in consequence of our mad horseback rides; for

some twenty of us happening to gallop past the commodore's house on a Sunday, we were next day ordered on board the receiving ship *Ohio* for "safe keeping."

Some time in July, however, the *Columbus* was put in commission and we all went on board.

I suppose that a finer body of men than the *Columbus'* crew never trod a ship's deck. In all my experience I have never seen their equal. Some eight hundred strong they could, as the boatswain said, "tear the ship to pieces." She was commanded by Captain William H. Spencer, and had a full complement of officers, among whom were eight passed midshipmen, and about thirty midshipmen—mostly green. In consequence of the ship having a bad name the men commenced to desert while lying in the stream and we were obliged to row guard around her at night to prevent it. In performing this duty I frequently heard the men in the boat declare that they heard a baby crying on the orlop deck—and (as the old sailor says) "being sailor-men, 'taint likely they lied about it;" but I never heard it myself. The orlop deck, which was below the water-line, and very dark and gloomy-looking even in the day-time, had a peculiarly ghostly appearance at night, and indeed a ghost *was* frequently seen descending the ladder of the fore-hatch in the "wee short hour ayont the twal," (whatever that may be) and disappearing through the gratings which covered the fore-hold. It was so fully believed that it became difficult at last to get a marine to walk that lonesome post; but after crossing the Atlantic the story died out, and we heard no more about ghosts; and now I come to think about it one of our passed midshipmen was detached about that time!

Speaking of ghosts reminds me of a singular circumstance which happened to a great-uncle of mine.

He had served in the Revolutionary war, and rose to be a brigadier-general in the the U. S. Army. He was said to be a very brave man; but be that as it may, one night while sleeping, with his door wide open as was his habit, a ghost

appeared to him and said, "Aleck, Aleck, get up!—Aleck, Aleck!" Just then he awakened and replied "Eh!" then instantly recollecting that *it was bad luck to answer a ghost*, he turned it off into, "Eh diddle dinkum dido," as though he was singing. At this—which showed his presence of mind at least—the ghost disappeared.

We sailed from Boston on the 29th day of August, 1842, and after a very smooth passage across the Atlantic arrived at Gibraltar, which I shall always especially remember as being the first foreign port I ever visited.

Gibraltar is a rocky promontory, some 1400 feet high, at the southern extremity of Spain. It is at the entrance to the Mediterranean sea, and the straits here are fifteen miles wide. It is strongly fortified on the western front, and its galleries, cut out of solid rock, are one of the sights of the world. The eastern face is entirely inaccessible to assault. The town is built at the foot of the promontory, and the bay is nine miles across. The name comes from the Arabic words *gibel al Tarif* (the rock of Tarif): the name of the general who took it in 711. The Spanish took it in 1302, and it fell into the hands of the English under Admiral Rooke in 1704. In 1779 the Spanish made a desperate effort to recover it. It was defended by General George Eliott. The siege lasted three years, and has been described by Drinkwater whose book is a model of its kind. The rock is separated from the main by a low, sandy neck of land called the neutral ground. At St. Roche and Algeiras the Spaniards have erected extensive fortifications and a large garrison is kept. The English garrison Gibraltar with their best troops.

Gibraltar is generally said to *command* the straits; but this must be understood in a "Pickwickian sense" at the present day. There is nothing to prevent steamers going through at any time. It is valuable to the British as a depot for stores, and the harbor gives protection to their vessels, just as Malta does. The current runs *in* from the ocean at all times—a singular fact;—the surplus water is probably carried out by an under current.

A stay here of a few days is an excellent introduction to the Mediterranean; for, I believe, there are natives of most of the countries of Europe to be met with; as well as many inhabitants of Asia and Africa. I spent many hours in the captain's gig at the mole, and saw Englishmen, Spaniards, Frenchmen, Russians, Germans, Italians, Turks, Jews, Armenians, Egyptians, Arabs, Moors and Negroes intermingled. A novel sight to any one, but especially to a greenhorn!

We sailed from Gibraltar after a short stay for Port Mahon. The day after sailing we saw a Spanish *Guarda Costa* chasing a large smugglers' boat. The smugglers ran under our lee for protection, and as we were sailing only about four knots an hour they easily kept up with us with their oars. There were about twenty men in the boat, and fine, hearty-looking fellows they were, and their red caps gave them a most picturesque appearance. Our captain took no notice of them, and the *Guarda Costa* did not approach any nearer, but sailed along in company. After night fell the smugglers left us, and I presume made for the shore.

Gibraltar is a free port, and there was at that time much smuggling done between it and Algeiras and other Spanish ports.

Upon our arrival off Port Mahon we fell in with the U. S. frigate *Congress*, a new frigate on her first cruise. She was built in Portsmouth, N. H., and at that time was said to be the largest frigate afloat. We were struck by a heavy squall that afternoon, the first I had ever seen. The *Columbus* came out of it all right; as she did out of all kinds of weather. Though an old-fashioned ship she was the finest sea-boat I have ever seen; moreover she sailed well and could be handled like a pilot boat. It would surprise some of the young officers who have never sailed in anything but the long, narrow ships of the present navy to see one of these old-time ships beating in a narrow channel. Upon our arrival at Mahon we found the entire squadron, consisting of the frigate *Congress* and sloop-of-war *Fairfield* and *Preble*, assembled there. Commodore

Charles Morgan, who commanded the squadron, now hoisted his flag aboard our ship, and I was appointed his Aid.

Port Mahon is on the island of Minorca. Its harbor is one of the best in the Mediterranean—a natural mole runs along the shore, and is occupied by shops with naval stores. At the time of our visit provisions and clothing were to be had very cheap and in great abundance.

It was off Mahon that Admiral John Byng had a partial engagement with the French squadron in May, 1756; for his conduct on this occasion he was shot on board the *Monarch* at Spithead, March 14, 1757. Voltaire says this was done "*pour encourager les autres!*"

The article of war under which Byng was tried, says: "If any person, through cowardice, disaffection or *negligence*, shall fail to put his ship in readiness for battle, etc., he shall suffer death." The admiral was acquitted of cowardice and disaffection, but found guilty of *negligence*, which, under the articles of war, required a sentence of death. It is well known now, however, that he was shot to satisfy the clamors of a political party. Not the only man or woman so sacrificed. In point of fact it was the admiral's second-in-command who acted badly in not supporting him, and who richly deserved punishment, but got off scot free.

Up to this time Mahon had been the wintering port of the American squadron and we were making our preparations for it when a melancholy event took place: the sailing-master of the *Congress*, Mr. Patterson, was assassinated!

He had been on shore and was returning to his ship very late at night—some time in the mid-watch in fact—and was descending the hill by the winding path which led to the landing-place of his boat. Following Mr. Patterson at some little distance were Lieutenant Charles G. Hunter and the surgeon of the *Fairfield*; they were startled at hearing Mr. Patterson cry out, and as they quickened their steps, he met them with the expression: "The villain has murdered me," and fell dead at their feet. He had two, or, perhaps three stabs directly

through his heart, either of which, the doctor said, would have killed him; so that the assassin was no novice in the art. While the doctor knelt down by the side of the murdered officer, Hunter drew his pistol and started in pursuit of the murderer. He saw his shadow in the moonlight as he ran towards the *house of Blazes* (as the sailors called it), but could not get a shot at him, and he finally returned to the assistance of the doctor. I shall have something more to say of this Lieutenant Hunter when I come to relate some incidents of the Mexican war.

There was a large number of Spanish troops in Mahon at this time, and it was thought that the murder was committed by a soldier; but the truth was never known—by us, at least. I think it was in consequence of this affair that the commodore decided not to winter in Mahon; and the American squadron has never wintered there since.

A few days after the burial of Mr. Patterson we sailed in company with the squadron for Spezia, it was said; but in passing near by Genoa it presented so inviting an appearance that the commodore was induced to go in, and finally decided to winter there. The vessels were moored head and stern under the lee of the mole, and we remained here in safety all the winter. We rode out several heavy gales and had plenty of exercise in housing topmasts and sending down lower yards. Take it all in all it was the best disciplined squadron I have ever served in, and it was a credit to the country.

Genoa being the birth-place of Columbus, our ship attracted particular attention, and we were crowded with visitors and overwhelmed with invitations. We in the steerage were kept under pretty taut discipline, and were only occasionally permitted to visit the shore. Our mornings were spent on the half-deck, under the professor of mathematics, and the rest of our time was taken up by our watches and writing our log-books, or journals. For this reason I do not know much about Genoa, and therefore (contrary to the custom of some travelers) will not attempt to describe it.

One incident I will relate which occurred in the harbor: one dark, stormy night while a number of us were sitting in the bow port a cry of "man overboard" was heard from the *Congress*, lying half a cable's length inside of us. Passed Midshipman E. F. Beale sprung out of the port, swam to the man, and held him until a boat picked them both up. To say nothing of the gallantry of the act, it always struck me as most remarkable that on so dark a night he should have found the man, and that afterwards the boat should have found them both! This was not the first time that Mr. Beale had rescued a man from drowning. He resigned from the navy a few years after this cruise, and highly distinguished himself in California during the war with Mexico. He is now General Beale, and resides in the city of Washington.

Our ship was fortunate in having a remarkably fine set of passed midshipmen, and the midshipmen were still more fortunate from their close association with them. One can readily understand the influence they would naturally exert over a set of boys ranging from fourteen to eighteen years of age. The *tone* of the steerage was given by them. Among the number was Francis Key Murray, than whom a nobler spirit never served under the United States flag. Frank, generous, brave, and self-contained in a remarkable degree, he influenced all with whom he came in contact; he had "the heart to conceive, the understanding to direct, and the hand to execute." It was his fortune to be thrown early in life in responsible and critical situations. In a fight with the Seminole Indians at Indian Key, Florida, where he had only a few sick and convalescent men to aid him; in riding out a gale of wind off Cape Hatteras in the brig *Washington*, where his commander, Lieutenant George Bache, and a number of men were washed overboard and drowned; and in command of the Coast Survey steamer *Jefferson*, shipwrecked on the coast of Patagonia, he showed in these as in every other situation of his life the same heroic qualities. It was my good fortune to be honored by his friendship. He lived but a few years after the close of the

civil war, and to borrow the words of General Harry Lee on a similar occasion (for my feeble pen is unequal to the task), he died "embalmed in the tears of his faithful comrades, and honored by the regret of the whole navy."

While in Genoa we got the news of the unfortunate affair of the brig *Somers*, before alluded to. It caused much excitement on board our ship, as our captain was the uncle of Midshipman Spencer, and the captain's clerk was his brother. Knowing as I did most of the officers of the *Somers*, I always felt much interest in the matter. Different opinions have been held as to the action of Captain Mackenzie, but I do not propose to discuss it.

Only a few months ago I saw the death announced of Mr. Deslondes, who was a midshipman in the *Somers*. I expect he was the last survivor among the officers. It is a remarkable fact that the *Somers* sunk in a squall off Vera Cruz, (as I shall hereafter describe); and most of the officers who were in her at the time of the mutiny died sudden and tragic deaths.

During the winter here two of our midshipmen broke upon the monotony by fighting a duel, in which one was badly wounded in the knee, though he subsequently recovered. There was nothing singular in their fighting a duel, for midshipmen often took a shot at each other in that day; but in this case the principals and seconds all went out *in the same carriage*, and not getting into the country as soon as they expected, the seconds decided to post their men *in the street*, and let them fight there; this they did with the result mentioned; after which they all returned in the same carriage again in a very amicable manner. The Genoese marveled much at the strange conduct of these North Americans, and said it was not their *costumbre del pais*. No notice was taken of the matter by either the American or Genoese authorities.

In the spring of 1843 the squadron sailed for Mahon. Upon our arrival we went busily to work filling up our provisions and water for a long cruise up the Levant; for rumor said the *Delaware*, 74, bearing the flag of Commodore Charles Morris,

was coming over from the coast of Brazil to relieve us, and we were to take her place on that station; which was not to our liking. We were to fill up and get off before the arrival of the *Delaware*, and would make a long summer cruise before we could be found, at least that was the "galley news." However, one fine morning the *Delaware* arrived with our orders to proceed to the coast of Brazil.

We sailed with the entire squadron, parted company the second day out, and went to Toulon. From Toulon we returned to Mahon, remained a few days and sailed for Gibraltar. We had the usual blow off Cape de Gata, celebrated in the old sailor song of "Off Cape de Gatte I lost my hat, and where do you think I found it?"

During the blockade of Toulon by the British squadron in the latter part of the last century vessels bound thence to Gibraltar for stores would frequently find themselves unable to beat round this cape, and would bear up for one of the Italian ports for supplies—here the sailors received instead of rum a kind of wine they did not like, and which they called *black-strap*: from this they came to say on such occasions that they were *black-strapped* off the cape. We beat round in a few days and arrived at Gibraltar. Our commodore used to go on shore every evening about sunset, and I passed most of the nights waiting for him in the barge at the "ragged staff." We finally sailed for Rio Janeiro, touching *en route* at the delightful island of Madeira.

I recall with much pleasure the pleasant Saturday nights on this passage. I was a member of the passed midshipmen's mess, some members of which sang and played upon the guitar, and all spun a good yarn.

Among our best *raconteurs* were passed midshipman J. Hogan Brown and Mr. James Tilton. This latter gentleman had a varied experience; he entered the navy as a captain's clerk; went round the world in the U. S. brig *Perry*, as purser; served through General Scott's campaign in Mexico as captain of voltigeurs; became civil engineer, surveyor general of Wash-

ington territory, and finally died in Washington city. He was a gallant officer and a chivalric man.

One of his best stories, told to me in after years, was of Brown himself. Brown was the navigator of the brig *Perry*, and on a passage from China to Mexico he allowed the chronometers (by which they found the longitude) to run down. They were bound to San Blas, and running to make Cape St. Lucas, which is high and can be seen a long way off. The captain, Jot Stone Paine, was not told that the chronometers had run down and that they were depending on *dead reckoning* for the longitude. Brown got on the parallel of the Cape, and steering due east kept a good lookout ahead. He kept a foretopman at the masthead with orders to come down and tell him *quietly* when he saw the land, and not otherwise to announce it—promising him a bottle of whiskey in return. Accordingly one day shortly before twelve o'clock the foretopman came down and reported the land in sight from aloft. He was told by Brown to return to the masthead, and when the bell struck *one* to report it in the usual manner. A little after twelve o'clock the captain came out of the cabin and said: "Well, Mr. Brown, when do you think we will make the land?"

"We will make the land, sir," said Brown, "at half-past twelve o'clock," (one bell).

"We will, eh?" said the captain. "Yes, sir," replied Brown in his most pompous manner, "at half-past twelve precisely."

Just then the bell struck, and the man at the masthead roared out in a stentorian voice, "Land ho!"

"By George," said Captain Jot, "that's the most remarkable landfall I ever made!" and he afterwards told the first-lieutenant that he considered Brown one of the most skilful navigators he had ever met!

Tilton told me also that one night, in the *Perry*, (*Saturday* night be it noted) the fellows insisted upon looking over Brown's journal, which they had noticed he wrote up every night. After some resistance on Brown's part one of the mess

opened it, and began to read aloud. Tilton said the yarns in it all commenced in this way: "being once in Berlin," or "happening to remain overnight in St. Petersburg," etc. As Brown had never been in any of the places referred to, he was taken to task, and finally said that when he returned from a cruise and went to his home in Alabama, he frequently dined out and was always expected to tell of his travels; so he made it a practice to copy all the yarns he heard in the mess in his journal for future reference.

One of Brown's stories was that when he was first appointed, he reported for duty on board the schooner *Experiment*, at the navy yard, Philadelphia; he was put in charge of the deck to keep the first watch, from 8 P. M. to midnight, though he had never seen a man-of-war before in his life. About 9 o'clock the captain put his head out of the cabin door and said: "Quarter-master, how is the *hawse*?" (this was simply to inquire into the state of the cables by which the vessel was anchored). "The hawse is all right, sir," answered the quarter-master. "Hello!" says Brown to himself, "they have a *horse* on board, it seems," and he went forward to take a look at him! Not finding him, he returned to the quarter-deck and asked the quarter-master whether the captain had not asked him as to the condition of the horse. "Yes, sir," he replied, "the hawse is all right!" "Well," says Brown, "I so understood you," and he passed the remainder of his watch looking for him!

Taking into consideration what I have said concerning Brown's journal, this *may* have happened to some other officer: especially as the records of the Navy Department show that Brown's first orders were to the sloop-of-war *Levant*, at Pensacola!

On the passage from Madeira to Rio Janeiro we had target practice for the first time. I well remember the preparations for it; it took so long to get ready for the great event that we seemed to require a resting spell of six months before we tried it again. Then, *shells* were a great bother to us; as they were

kept in the shell-room, and no one was allowed even to look at them; it seemed to be a question with the division-officers whether the fuse went in first or the sabot; or whether the fuse should be ignited before putting the shell in the gun or not! However, we used to fire them off, though I cannot say I ever saw them hit anything.

We were great in running the guns in and out rapidly, but some parts of the "manual" would strike an officer of these days as very ridiculous; for instance, after the guns were pointed, the orders were, very slowly and deliberately, "handle your match and lockstring," "cock your lock," "blow your match," "stand by,"—"fire": and if the ship did not remain stationary all this time it was not our fault. We were great, too, in "boarding" and "repelling boarders" in those days, and to see the *Columbus'* officers and crew engaged in this business was a sight to behold.

The Mexican war taught us a good deal about gunnery, and what we did not learn then we picked up in the civil war, when greater advances were made in ordnance, rams, and torpedoes in four years than the European nations had made in centuries. But although the navy has made such gigantic strides in gunnery it has not improved in ships and seamen; indeed, I was told only the other day that an old growl of a boatswain was heard to say: "Formerly we had wooden ships and iron men; now we have iron ships and wooden men!"

As I have said before, the navy as it was in 1843 could not be better described, as to its *personnel*, than by Captain Marryatt in his novels.

Speaking of him reminds me of an anecdote I read which happened while he was travelling in this country. He was in a small town in New England, and his pompous manner did not tend to make him popular. A thunder storm coming up, the captain said in a condescending manner to the landlord: "You have very heavy thunder in this country!" "Well! we *dew*, considerin' the number of inhabitants," was the reply.