

## CHAPTER XIV.

A MORNING CALL—ORDERED TO THE SURVEYING BRIG "WASHINGTON"—  
 SURVEY OF NANTUCKET SHOALS—BLOCK ISLAND AND NO MAN'S LAND—  
 PILOT DAGGETT—THE PILOT OF THE "BIBB"—ANECDOTES—ORDERED  
 TO THE "PRINCETON"—A NIGHT WITH THE "SPIRIT-RAPPERS"—AM DE-  
 TACHED FROM THE "PRINCETON" AND ORDERED TO THE "CYANE."

UPON the conclusion of the court-martial on Captain Mars-  
 ton, before which I appeared as a witness, I was granted the  
 usual three months' "leave." While at home on this "leave"  
 I was frequently requested by my mother and sister, who were  
 not visiting at the time, to call on their friend Miss Zanes, who  
 was living at one of the largest private boarding-houses in the  
 city. I never returned from a walk that I was not asked if I  
 had called upon Miss Zanes, until it became at last a house-  
 hold word. Being very bashful I did not like the idea of  
 calling alone and introducing myself, but finally I screwed my  
 courage up to the sticking place.

Calling at the house I inquired if Miss Zanes was in, and  
 being answered in the affirmative, I sent up my card and  
 entered the parlor. I had not been long seated when the door  
 opened and a lady appeared. I met her, introduced myself as  
 Passed Midshipman Parker of the navy, and shook hands with  
 her. I thought she seemed embarrassed, but she advanced to  
 the fire and sat down. I drew up a chair and commenced the  
 conversation with an allusion to certain atmospherical changes,  
 etc., but I made but little headway. Miss Zanes is quiet and  
 timid, I thought, I must endeavor to bring her out. While re-  
 volving in my mind the best manner of accomplishing this the  
 door opened and another lady appeared; she had her hat on. It  
 flashed across me in a moment! I had made a mistake. *This*  
 was Miss Zanes; she had been out walking, and had just come  
 in and heard of my being in the parlor. I advanced to the

door, bowed, introduced myself as Passed Midshipman Parker  
 of the navy, and shook her warmly by the hand; at the same  
 time congratulating myself upon my self-possession and per-  
 ception. She went to the fire, took a seat, and entered into  
 conversation with the first lady. I also took a chair and occa-  
 sionally tried to get a word in edgeways, (so to speak); but in  
 a little while they both rose and went to the window and sat  
 down in the alcove. Well, I thought, this is a most extraor-  
 dinary proceeding on the part of Miss Zanes! But I could  
 not remain alone at the fire-place, so I picked up a chair and  
 followed them. The mischief of it was that I was not certain  
 now *which was Miss Zanes!* I became somewhat confused and  
 rather red in the face. I did the best I could under these  
 novel circumstances and put in a remark now and then to  
 which they did not deign to reply. While meditating a retreat,  
 and not exactly sure as to which one *to shake hands with* in  
 making *mes adieux* the door opened, and a third lady appeared  
 upon the scene!

By George, said I to myself, I have been all wrong, *this* must  
 be Miss Zanes! I advanced to meet her, introduced myself as  
 before, and fortunately for my brain it *was* Miss Zanes: the  
 real Simon pure. I begged her to explain to the other ladies  
 that I was *not* an escaped lunatic with a mania for introducing  
 myself to people; shook her *very* warmly by the hand and  
 evaporated through the front door. If Miss Zanes had not  
 made her appearance when she did I would have introduced  
 myself to all the boarders in the Butler house (as it was just  
 before the dinner hour) and would probably have ended by  
 being sent to an asylum. I have not had the pleasure of meet-  
 ing Miss Zanes from that day to this.

At the expiration of my "leave" I was ordered to the survey-  
 ing brig *Washington*, lieutenant commanding S. Swartwout.  
 The party was in charge of lieutenant commanding Charles H.  
 McBlair, and consisted of the steamer *Bibb*, the brig *Washing-*  
*ton* and a small schooner which we chartered for the season.  
 We spent the summer of 1851 in surveying the Nantucket

Shoals, and what with gales of wind and fogs we did not get a great many working days. I had the command of the "tender," and when we did have fair weather would have to sit upon deck from about 4 A. M. till 8 in the evening taking an angle every five minutes. I found it uninteresting as well as hard work and was not sorry when the season was over.

Happening to ride out a gale on the shoals I comprehended how so many small fishing vessels are lost on the banks; for if one holds on too long she will swamp before a man can get forward to slip the chain; indeed it is impossible to do so.

We did some independent work in the *Washington* afterwards off Block island and No-man's-land. Block island and Nantucket were primitive places in those days, but are now popular summer resorts. Our pilot, Mr. Daggett, had been the pilot of the frigate *Congress* in the war of 1812, and related many interesting incidents concerning it. He said they were once nine months at sea without going into port. The present Commodore Ingraham who was a midshipman in the ship has since corroborated many of Daggett's statements. The pilot of the *Bibb* was quite another character; brought up on Nantucket island, going to sea in the summer and working at his trade in the winter, he was one of the most original men I have ever met. He had a fund of anecdotes, and most of them were out of the usual run of sea-yarns; one was of a man who was taken very ill from having eaten twelve lobsters. The doctor not relieving him of his pain, he went off and commenced praying as follows: "Oh Lord, you know I am not like those Methodist fellows who are always praying for help and doing nothing for themselves—but if you will relieve me of six of these lobsters I'll try and grapple with the other half-dozen myself."

We laid the *Washington* up in New York in October, and then went to Washington for the winter, where we were employed in office work.

In the spring of 1852 preparations were being made for

Commodore Perry's Japan expedition. I was ordered to the *Princeton*, a new screw sloop just completed at the Boston Yard and designated as one of the vessels of the squadron.

I had a very curious experience with the "spirit rappers" the night I arrived in Boston. It was in the midst of the excitement caused by the revelations of the Fox girls, and there were more or less believers in every town in New England. I met at the Tremont House my friends Passed Midshipmen Hare and Selden, the first a "true believer," the latter a sceptic in the rapping business, and they proposed that we should visit a "medium" that night. Before starting it was decided that Hare should be the questioner and that he should summon up the spirit of a Passed Midshipman Simmons, who had been drowned off the coast of Brazil a year before. Simmons was a friend of mine, but an enemy of Hare. We got to the house of a Mr. Leroy Sunderland about midnight and were ushered into a back parlor where we found the "medium" seated. She was a pale, delicate-looking young woman, of nervous temperament and a frightened air. She had the appearance of a person addicted to the use of narcotics. She was very lady-like in her dress and manner, and for a few minutes we sat around the table, which was an ordinary mahogany centre-table, engaged in conversation. After awhile the spirit of Simmons made its arrival known by a series of *raps* under the table, and we proceeded to business. I should mention that we were each provided with a pencil and a card with the alphabet printed on it. All communications were made by means of this alphabet, the questioner putting his pencil on each letter in succession, and the spirit designating the correct one by a *rap*, until the word was spelled out. Suffice it to say that all Hare's questions were answered with the most remarkable accuracy, though we knew the "medium" could have no suspicion of who we were. Finally the spirit said to Hare: "I do not like you and will not answer any more questions." I must say I was staggered at this reply and I suspect showed it. The "medium" then said to the spirit: "Is there any person

in the room you *will* answer?" The reply was indicated by the table moving sharply up against my breast! The "medium" directed me to ask a question and I confess that the whole proceeding had astonished me so much that I could scarcely keep my hand from trembling. However, I asked a question, and it being by this time very late I thought it well to break up the séance; so I put my foot under the table and tilted it. The "medium" instantly rose and said there would be no more communications, that some one had tilted the table. I "acknowledged the corn" (no pun-ish-ment), and we all engaged in conversation again. The "medium" now turned her attention especially to me; she said I *could* become a first-class medium; that she knew I was sceptical then, but that if I would only have faith I would become a far better medium than she; that my *appearance* indicated it; (by the way, considering the appearance of the young lady, and that of Mr. Leroy Sunderland himself, this was not so much of a compliment as one might suppose), and gave many other good reasons for her belief. So earnest was she in this that after we had left the room she called me back and said the "spirits" would do almost anything to make me a "true believer," and that if I wished it they would *rap* on the head of my bed that night! I assured her that I would come again to see the "spirits" and that I did not wish them to *rap* on the head of my bed; I was most impressive on this point. I felt nervous enough without that.

We returned to the hotel and I went to bed. I was awakened by hearing a spirit talking to me. I opened my eyes and saw a dim outline of *something* clothed in white robes. Although I could not exactly *hear* the words I knew that the spirit said: "We are anxious to convert you; get up and you will see something wonderful;" I rose in bed and saw directly in front of me *a cross of fire!* I lay down again completely dazed, and convinced that this was a revelation. Just then I heard the "boots" in the passage, and this gave me courage. I rose again and at first saw the cross of fire as before—gazing

steadily at it I rose and walked towards it. The inside shutters of my room were *in two parts*, and the first gleam of the rising sun shining on them had made the burning cross. It was not until I had actually touched the shutter that the illusion was dispelled, and if I had not risen the second time I suppose I should have become a spiritualist. I went many times after this to see them, and I observed that while my friend Hare's questions were always answered correctly, mine never were. I thought that perhaps the "mediums" were expert physiognomists—they watched the face of the questioner as he rested his pencil on the letter, and remembered that "the wish is father to the thought."

I reported for the *Princeton* as ordered. She was a long, narrow vessel with a great shear, and not at all adapted to the naval service. We were towed to Baltimore by the *Mississippi* to take in the machinery, which had been contracted for. Commander Sidney Smith Lee was ordered to command her, and my dear friend and mentor, Frank Murray, was one of the lieutenants. I should have been charmed to sail with them, but finding there was no chance of the ship getting to sea became impatient and exchanged into the sloop-of-war *Cyane*, Captain George N. Hollins, at Norfolk, bound to the West Indies. I may say here that the *Princeton* never *did* get to sea; she was a miserable failure in every respect, and was finally sent to Philadelphia to end her days as a receiving ship.