"You impudent blackguard, if you say another word I'll give you a good thrashing, and knock some of your equality out of you."

"Indeed," replied Jack, who almost fancied himself back at Mr. Bonnycastle's; "we'll try that."

Whereupon Jack very coolly divested himself of his upper garments, neckerchief, and shirt, much to the surprise of Mr. Vigors, who little contemplated such a proof of decision and confidence, and still more to the delight of the other midshipmen, who would have forfeited a week's allowance to see Vigors well thrashed. Vigors, however, knew that he had gone too far to retreat; he therefore prepared for action, and when ready the whole party went out into the steerage to settle the business.

Vigors had gained his assumed authority more by bullying than fighting, others had submitted to him without a sufficient trial; Jack, on the contrary, had won his way up in school by hard and scientific combat; the result, therefore, may easily be imagined. In less than a quarter of an hour Vigors, beaten dead, with his eyes closed, and three teeth out, gave in; while Jack, after a basin of water, looked as fresh as ever, with the exception of a few trifling scratches.

The news of this victory was soon through the ship; and before Jack had resumed his clothes it had been told confidentially by Sawbridge to the captain.

"So soon!" said Captain Wilson, laughing; "I expected that a midshipman's berth would do wonders; but I did not expect this yet awhile. This victory is the first severe blow to Mr. Easy's equality, and will be more valuable than twenty defeats. Let him now go to his duty, he will soon find his level."

CHAPTER XI

In which our hero proves that all on board should equally sacrifice decency to duty.

THE success of any young man in a profession very much depends upon the occurrences at the commencement of his career, as from those is his character judged, and he is treated accord-

ingly. Jack had chosen to enter the service at a much later period than most lads; he was tall and manly for his age, and his countenance, if not strictly handsome, wore that expression of honesty and boldness which is sure to please. His spirit in not submitting to, and meeting Vigors when he had hardly recovered from his severe prostration of sea-sickness, had gained him with the many respect, and with all, except his antagonist and Mr. Smallsole, goodwill. Instead of being laughed at by his messmates, he was played with, for Jolliffe smiled at his absurdities, and attempted to reason him out of them, and the others liked Jack for himself and his generosity, and moreover, because they looked up to him as a protector against Vigors, who had persecuted them all; for Jack had declared, that as might was right in a midshipman's berth, he would so far restore equality, that if he could not put down those who were the strongest, at all events he would protect the weak, and let who would come into the berth, they must be his master before they should tyrannise over those weaker than he.

Thus did Jack Easy make the best use that he could of his strength, and become, as it were, the champion and security of those who, although much longer at sea and more experienced than he was, were glad to shelter themselves under his courage and skill, the latter of which had excited the admiration of the butcher of the ship, who had been a pugilist by profession. Thus did Jack at once take the rank of an oldster, and soon became the leader of all the mischief. We particularly observe this, because, had it so happened that our hero had succumbed to Vigors, the case would have been the very reverse. He then would have had to go through the ordeal to which most who enter the naval service are exposed, which cannot be better explained than by comparing it to the fagging carried to such an iniquitous extent in public schools.

Mr. Asper, for his own reasons, made him his companion; they walked the night watch together, and he listened to all Jack's nonsense about the rights of man. And here Mr. Asper did good without intending it, for at the same time that he appeared to agree with Jack, to secure his favour, he cautioned him, and pointed out why this equality could not exist altogether on board of a man-of-war.

As for himself, he said, he saw no difference between a lieutenant, or even a captain, and a midshipman, provided they

were gentlemen; he should choose his friends where he liked, and despised that power of annoyance which the service permitted. Of course, Jack and Mr. Asper were good friends, especially as, when half the watch was over, to conciliate his goodwill, and to get rid of his eternal arguing, Mr. Asper would send Jack down to bed.

They were now entering the Straits, and expected to anchor the next day at Gibraltar, and Jack was forward on the forecastle, talking with Mesty, with whom he had contracted a great friendship, for there was nothing that Mesty would not have done for Jack, although he had not been three weeks in the ship; but a little reflection will show that it was natural.

Mesty had been a great man in his own country; he had suffered all the horrors of a passage in a slave-ship; he had been sold as a slave twice; he had escaped—but he found that the universal feeling was strong against his colour, and that on board of a man-of-war he was condemned, although free, to the humblest of offices.

He had never heard any one utter the sentiments, which now beat in his own heart, of liberty and equality—we say now, for when he was in his own country before his captivity he had no ideas of equality—no one has who is in power. But he had been schooled; and although people talked of liberty and equality at New York, he found that what they preached for themselves, they did not practise towards others, and that, in the midst of liberty and equality, he and thousands more were enslaved and degraded beings.

Escaping to England he had regained his liberty, but not his equality; his colour had prevented the latter, and in that feeling all the world appeared to conspire together against him, until, to his astonishment, he heard those sentiments boldly expressed from the lips of Jack, and that in a service where it was almost tantamount to mutiny. Mesty, whose character is not yet developed, immediately took a fondness for our hero, and in a hundred ways showed his attachment. Jack also liked Mesty, and was fond of talking with him, and every evening, since the combat with Vigors, they had generally met in the forecastle to discuss the principles of equality and the rights of man.

The boatswain, whose name was Biggs, was a slight, dapper, active little man, who as captain of the foretop had shown an uncommon degree of courage in a hurricane, so much so as to

recommend him to the admiral for promotion. It was given to him; and after the ship to which he had been appointed was paid off, he had been ordered to join H.M. sloop *Harpy*. Jack's conversation with Mesty was interrupted by the voice of the boatswain, who was haranguing his boy. "It's now ten minutes, sir, by my repeater," said the boatswain, "that I have sent for you;" and Mr. Biggs pulled out a huge silver watch, almost as big as a Norfolk turnip. A Jew had sold him the watch; the boatswain had heard of repeaters, and wished to have one. Moses had only shown him watches with the hour and minute hands; he now produced one with a second hand, telling him it was a repeater.

"What makes it a repeater?" inquired the boatswain.

"Common watches," said the cunning Jew, "only tell the minutes and hours; but all repeaters tell the seconds."

The boatswain was satisfied—bought the watch, and although many had told him it was no repeater, he insisted that it was, and would call it so.

"I swear," continued the boatswain, "it's ten minutes and twenty seconds by my repeater."

"If you please, sir," said the boy, "I was changing my trousers when you sent for me, and then I had to stow away my bag again."

"Silence, sir; I'd have you to know that when you are sent for by your officer, trousers or no trousers, it is your duty to come up directly."

"Without trousers, sir?" replied the boy.

"Yes, sir, without trousers; if the captain required me, I should come without my shirt. Duty before decency." So saying, the boatswain lays hold of the boy.

"Surely, Mr. Biggs," said Jack, "you are not going to punish that boy for not coming up without his trousers?"

"Yes, Mr. Easy, I am—I must teach him a lesson. We are bound, now that new-fangled ideas are brought into the ship, to uphold the dignity of the service; and the orders of an officer are not to be delayed ten minutes and twenty seconds because a boy has no trousers on." Whereupon the boatswain administered several smart cuts with his rattan upon the boy, proving that it was quite as well that he had put on his trousers before he came on deck. "There," said Mr. Biggs, "is a lesson for you, you scamp—and, Mr. Easy, it is a lesson

for you also," continued the boatswain, walking away with a most consequential air.

"Murder Irish!" said Mesty; "how him cut caper. De oder day he hawl out de weather ear-ring, and touch him hat to a midshipman. Sure enough, make um cat laugh."

The next day the *Harpy* was at anchor in Gibraltar Bay; the captain went on shore, directing the gig to be sent for him before nine o'clock, after which hour the sally-port is only opened by special permission. There happened to be a ball given by the officers of the garrison on that evening, and a polite invitation was sent to the officers of H.M. sloop *Harpy*. As those who accepted the invitation would be detained late, it was not possible for them to come off that night. And as their services were required for the next day, Captain Wilson allowed them to remain on shore until seven o'clock the next morning, at which hour, as there was a large party, there would be two boats sent for them.

Mr. Asper obtained leave, and asked permission to take our hero with him; to which Mr. Sawbridge consented. Many other officers obtained leave, and among others the boatswain, who, aware that his services would be in request as soon as the equipment commenced, asked permission for this evening. And Mr. Sawbridge, feeling that he could be better spared at this than at any other time, consented. Asper and Jack went to an inn, dined, bespoke beds, and then dressed themselves for the ball, which was very brilliant, and from the company of the officers very pleasant. Captain Wilson looked on at the commencement, and then returned on board. Jack behaved with his usual politeness, danced till two o'clock, and then, as the ball thinned, Asper proposed that they should retire. Having once more applied to the refreshment-room they had procured their hats and were about to depart, when one of the officers of the garrison asked Jack if he would like to see a baboon, which had just been brought down from the rock; and taking some of the cakes they repaired to the court where the animal was chained down to a small tank. Jack fed the brute till all the cakes were gone, and then, because he had no more to give him, the baboon flew at Jack, who, in making his retreat, fell back into the tank, which was about two feet deep. This was a joke, and having laughed heartily they wished the officer good-night, and went to the inn.

Now, what with the number of officers of the *Harpy* on shore, who had all put up at the same inn, and other occupants, the landlord was obliged to put his company into double and treble-bedded rooms; but this was of little consequence. Jack was shown into a double-bedded room, and proceeded to undress; the other was evidently occupied, by the heavy breathing which saluted Jack's ear.

As Jack undressed, he recollected that his trousers were wet through, and to dry them he opened the window, hung them out, and then jammed down the window again upon them, to hold them in their position, after which he turned in and fell fast asleep. At six o'clock he was called, as he had requested, and proceeded to dress, but to his astonishment found the window thrown open and his trousers missing. It was evident that his partner in the room had thrown the window open during the night, and that his trousers, having fallen down into the street, had been walked off with by somebody or another. Jack looked out of the window once more, and perceived that whoever had thrown open the window had been unwell during the night. A nice drunken companion I have had, thought Jack; but what's to be done? And in saying this, he walked up to the other bed, and perceived it was tenanted by the boatswain. Well, thought Jack, as Mr. Biggs has thought proper to lose my trousers, I think I have a right to take his, or at least the wear of them to go on board. It was but last night he declared that decency must give way to duty, and that the orders of a superior officer were to be obeyed, with or without garments. I know he is obliged to be on board, and now he shall try how he likes to obey orders in his shirt tails. So cogitating, Jack took the trousers of the boatswain, who still snored, although he had been called, and putting them on, completed the rest of his dress, and quitted the room. He went to that of Mr. Asper, where he found him just ready, and, having paid the bill—for Asper had forgotten his purse—they proceeded down to the sally-port, where they found other officers waiting, sufficient to load the first boat, which shoved off, and they went on board. As soon as he was down below, Jack hastened to change his trousers, and, unobserved by any one, threw those belonging to Mr. Biggs on a chair in his cabin, and, having made a confidant of Mesty, who was delighted, he went on deck, and waited the issue of the affair.

Before Jack left the hotel he had told the waiter that there was the boatswain still fast asleep, and that he must be roused up immediately; and this injunction was obeyed. The boatswain, who had drunk too much the night before, and, as Jack had truly imagined, had opened the window because he was unwell, was wakened up, and hearing how late it was hastened to dress himself. Not finding his trousers he rang the bell, supposing that they had been taken down to be brushed, and in the meantime put on everything else, that he might lose no time; the waiter who answered the bell, denied having taken the trousers out of the room, and poor Mr. Biggs was in a sad quandary. What had become of them, he could not tell—he had no recollection of having gone to bed the night before; he inquired of the waiter, who said that he knew nothing about them—that he was very tipsy when he came home, and that when he called him, he had found the window open, and it appeared that he had been unwell—he supposed that he had thrown his trousers out of the window. Time flew, and the boatswain was in despair. "Could they lend him a pair?"

"He would call his master."

The master of the inn knew very well the difference of rank between officers, and those whom he could trust and those whom he could not. He sent up the bill by the waiter, and stated that, for a deposit, the gentleman might have a pair of trousers. The boatswain felt in his pockets and remembered that all his money was in his trousers pocket. He could not only not leave a deposit, but could not pay his bill. The landlord was inexorable. It was bad enough to lose his money, but he could not lose more.

"I shall be tried by a court-martial, by heavens!" exclaimed the boatswain. "It's not far from the sally-port; I'll make a run for it, and I can slip into one of the boats and get another pair of trousers before I report myself as having come on board;" so, making up his mind, the boatswain took to his heels, and with his check shirt tails streaming in the wind, ran as hard as he could to where the boat was waiting to receive him. He was encountered by many, but he only ran the faster the more they jeered, and at last arrived breathless at his goal, flew down the steps, jumped into the boat, and squatted on the stern-sheets, much to the surprise of the officers and men, who

thought him mad. He stated in a few words that somebody had stolen his trousers during the night; and as it was already late, the boat shoved off, the men as well as officers convulsed with laughter.

"Have any of you a pea-jacket?" inquired the boatswain of the men—but the weather was so warm that none of them had brought a pea-jacket. The boatswain looked round; he perceived that the officers were sitting on a boat-cloak.

"Whose boat-cloak is that?" inquired the boatswain.

"Mine," replied Gascoigne.

"I trust, Mr. Gascoigne, you will have the kindness to lend it to me to go up the side with."

"Indeed I will not," replied Gascoigne, who would sooner have thrown it overboard and have lost it, than not beheld the anticipated fun; "recollect I asked you for a fishing-line, when we were becalmed off Cape St. Vincent, and you sent word that you'd see me d—d first. Now I'll just see you the same before you have my boat-cloak."

"Oh, Mr. Gascoigne, I'll give you three lines, directly I get on board."

"I dare say you will, but that won't do now. 'Tit for tat,' Mr. Boatswain, and hang all favours," replied Gascoigne, who was steering the boat, having been sent on shore for the others. "In bow—rowed of all." The boat was laid alongside—the relentless Gascoigne caught up his boat-cloak as the other officers rose to go on board, and rolling it up, in spite of the earnest entreaties of Mr. Biggs, tossed it into the main chains, to the man who had thrown the stern fast; and to make the situation of Mr. Biggs still more deplorable, the first lieutenant was standing looking into the boat, and Captain Wilson walking the quarter-deck.

"Come, Mr. Biggs, I expected you off in the first boat," cried Mr. Sawbridge; "be as smart as you please, for the yards are not yet squared."

"Shall I go ahead in this boat, and square them, sir?"

"That boat! no; let her drop astern, jump up here and lower down the dingey. What the devil do you sit there for, Mr. Biggs?—you'll oblige me by showing a little more activity, or, by Jove, you may save yourself the trouble of asking to go on shore again. Are you sober, sir?"

The last observation decided Mr. Biggs. He sprung up

from the boat just as he was, and touched his hat as he passed the first lieutenant.

"Perfectly sober, sir, but I've lost my trousers."

"So it appears, sir," replied Mr. Sawbridge, as Mr. Biggs stood on the planeshear of the sloop where the hammock netting divides for an entrance, with his shirt tails fluttering in the sea breeze; but Mr. Sawbridge could not contain himself any longer, he ran down the ship ladder which led on the quarter-deck, choked with laughter. Mr. Biggs could not descend until after Mr. Sawbridge, and the conversation had attracted the notice of all, and every eye in the ship was on him.

"What's all this?" said Captain Wilson, coming to the gangway.

"Duty before decency," replied Jack, who stood by enjoying the joke.

Mr. Biggs recollected the day before—he cast a furious look at Jack, as he touched his hat to the captain, and then dived down to the lower deck.

If anything could add to the indignation of the boatswain, it was to find that his trousers had come on board before him. He now felt that a trick had been played him, and also that our hero must have been the party, but he could prove nothing; he could not say who slept in the same room, for he was fast asleep when Jack went to bed, and fast asleep when Jack quitted the room.

The truth of the story soon became known to all the ship, and "duty before decency" became a by-word. All that the boatswain could do he did, which was to revenge himself upon the poor boy—and Gascoigne and Jack never got any fishing tackle. The boatswain was as obnoxious to the men as Vigors, and in consequence of Jack's known opinions upon the rights of man, and his having floored their two greatest enemies, he became a great favourite with the seamen, and as all favourites are honoured by them with a sobriquet, our hero obtained that of Equality Jack.

CHAPTER XII

In which our hero prefers going down to going up; a choice, it is to be hoped, he will reverse upon a more important occasion.

THE next day being Sunday, the hands were turned up to divisions, and the weather not being favourable, instead of the service the articles of war were read with all due respect shown to the same, the captain, officers, and crew with their hats off in a mizzling rain. Jack, who had been told by the captain that these articles of war were the rules and regulations of the service, by which the captain, officers, and men were equally bound, listened to them as they were read by the clerk with the greatest attention. He little thought that there were about five hundred orders from the admiralty tacked on to them, which, like the numerous codicils of some wills, contained the most important matter, and to a certain degree make the will nugatory.

Jack listened very attentively, and as each article was propounded felt that he was not likely to commit himself in that point, and although he was rather astonished to find such a positive injunction against swearing, considered quite a dead letter in the ship, he thought that, altogether, he saw his way very clear. But to make certain of it, as soon as the hands had been piped down, he begged the clerk to let him have a copy of the articles.

Now the clerk had three, being the allowance of the ship, or at least all that he had in his possession, and made some demur at parting with one; but at last he proposed—some rascal, as he said, having stolen his toothbrush—that if Jack would give him one he would give him one of the copies of the articles of war. Jack replied that the one he had in use was very much worn, and that unfortunately he had but one new one, which he could not spare. Thereupon the clerk, who was a very clean personage, and could not bear that his teeth should be dirty, agreed to accept the one in use, as Jack could not part with the other. The exchange was made, and Jack read the articles of war over and over again, till he thought he was fully master of them.