

## XXIV.

## SAILORS IN NEW YORK.

JACK ON SHORE. — LAND-SHARKS. — BETHELS. — WATER STREET RAMBLE.

## JACK ON SHORE.

AMONG the most neglected of the population of New York the sailor will be found. Something is done for him, not much, and few avail themselves of the little assistance that is presented. A few chapels along the East and North Rivers, known as Bethels, contain on Sunday a handful of the sons of the sea. A few Homes have been erected, but the charges of extortion and cruelty, and the bad repute that hangs around them, turn even moral sailors to the common boarding-houses for seamen. Thousands of them live in places of degradation, where they love to be. Now, as for generations past, the story of a New York sailor is told in a few words. Home from a long voyage, he is seized by men who lay in wait for him; enticed into some one of the many dens where sailors congregate, vile liquor is given to him in abundance; women, hardened, cruel, and vile, rob him of all his cash; in a drunken spree he is turned into the street; he signs the shipping articles, and is beyond Sandy Hook before he awakes from his drunken revelry.

## HOMES FOR SEAMEN.

Jack has his abode in New York as well as the aristocracy, although its location is somewhat different. Any one can find him who wishes to. Where the lanes are the darkest and filthiest, where the dens are the deepest and foulest, where the low bar-rooms, groggeries, and dance-houses are the most numerous, where the vilest women and men abide, in the black sea of drunkenness, lewdness, and sin, the sailor has his New York home. In one street there are more than a hundred houses for seamen, and each one viler than in any other locality in New York. His landlord keeps him in debt. He is robbed in a few days of all his hard-earned wages, — robbed boldly by daylight, and he has no redress. A walk along this single street reveals a sight not to be found in any other part of the city, not to be exceeded by any other vile locality in the world; — a hundred houses, located on both sides of the street, the most infamous in the city, where brawls, rioting, robberies, and murders take place; a hundred dance-houses, whose unblushing boldness throws open doors and windows, that all who will may look in on the motley group of boys and old women, girls and old men, seamen and landsmen, reeking with drunkenness, obscenity, and blasphemy; hundreds of low groggeries, each crowded with customers, black and white, old and young, foreign and native! All along the sidewalk women sit, stand, or recline; women clean and women filthy; neatly dressed and in the vilest array; women at work, and modest, apparently, as can be found in any street, steadily at their employ, with children around them; women

who load the air with vilest imprecations, and assault the passer by with insolence, ribaldry, and profanity.

#### SAILOR DANCE-HOUSES.

The dance-houses kept by the Germans are very neat, tasty, and attractive. The bar which stands by the door is as elegant as that at the St. Nicholas or Fifth Avenue Hotel. Polished counters, brass railings burnished like gold, huge looking-glasses reflecting back the elegant decanters and bottles in the rear, flowers, pictures, statuary, paintings, make the place equal to any gin palace in London. The decoy dancers are of the better class, but persons on the direct road to the lowest stratum. Pianos exquisitely played, with harp and viol and other instruments, make music of which Wallack would not be ashamed. Captains, mates, long-shoremen, and the higher order of seamen, patronize these better class establishments, and commence here their travels in the path that leads to death. By the side of these more genteel sailor dance-houses will be seen dwellings of the lower grade. Some of them are in low, damp cellars, down rickety stairs, with white-washed walls and a fetid atmosphere, where a dozen of the most degraded creatures can be found, bloated, bold, blasphemous, dressed in short scarlet or fancy dresses and red boots, presenting a ghastly and sickening sight. The room dimly lighted by candles, a negro playing on a wheezing fiddle, a group of men in appearance and manners to match the women, make not a bad specimen of Pandemonium. Here all night long the sound of revelry, the shouts of the drunken, and oaths of reeking blasphemy, can be heard. The keeper

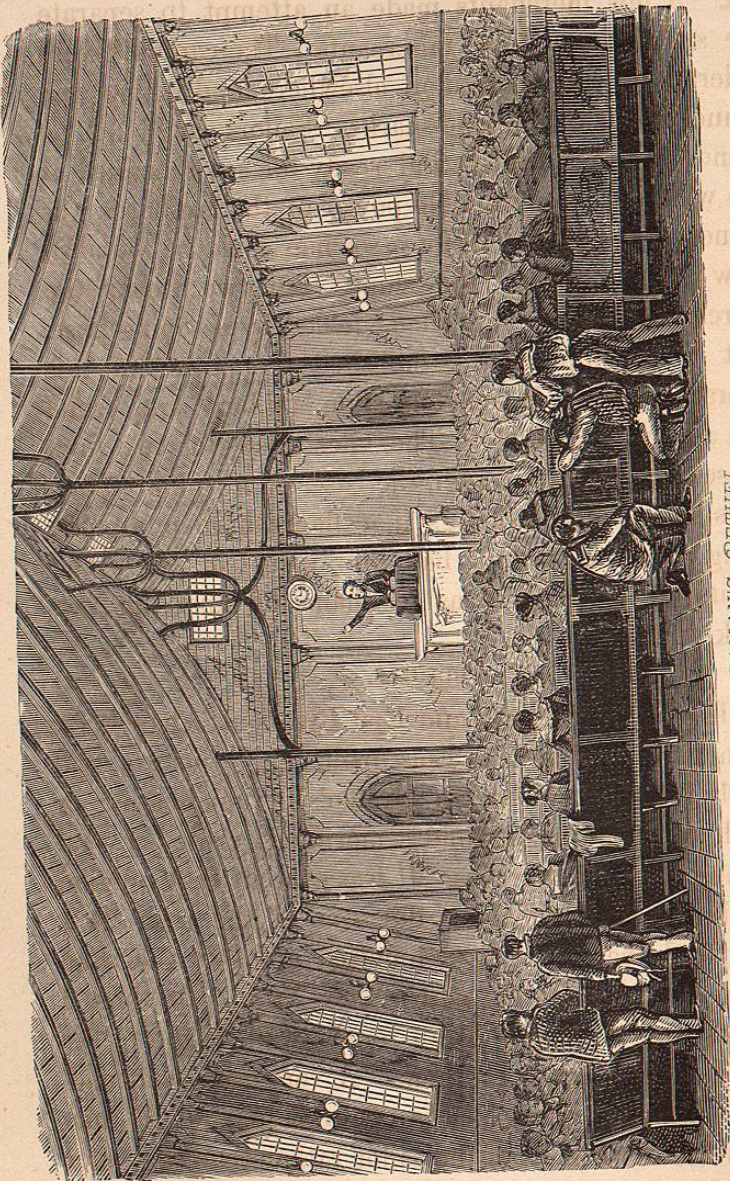
of the den, the most desperate of his class, stands at the door. He welcomes all comers, and admission is free. All who come have a partner assigned them. The lewd and boisterous dance begins; at its close all go up to the bar to drink. The wife of the keeper — or the one who passes for his wife — presides over this department, which corresponds to the vile den in which it stands. The customers pay for the entertainment and the music by treating themselves and their companions. The drinks over, the dancing commences again. After every round all present go up and drink, and alternate drinking and dancing continue through the night. No one is allowed to remain unless he joins in the dance. Should he refuse to pay for the liquor, he would be hustled out of the cellar on to the sidewalk, and probably brutally assaulted. The landlord is usually able to do this himself. A bully, brutal and as rugged as an ox, he is always able to defend himself. If not, he has companions within call. All the desperate women, at a signal from their keeper, like bloodhounds, would tear a man to pieces. Customers come in, take a dance, treat the company, and depart. Some remain for an hour or two; some are carried off senseless, for the vile liquor is often drugged; some are removed to foul dens that surround the place, and are never heard of more. Stupefied and robbed, many are sent to sea and never return; many are foully dealt with. Poor Jack's millennium is far in the future!

## LAND-SHARKS.

This term is applied to a class of men, rapacious, tyrannical, brutal, and degraded, who hold the New York sailor in their grip, and never relinquish their hold till he is beyond Sandy Hook, and who grasp him before he lands on his return voyage. From necessity or choice, ship captains play into the hands of these desperadoes, make them of importance, and help them to fleece the sailor, and to hold him in degrading tyranny. Their character and their business are well known to merchants and to commanders of vessels. Next to the pilot they board the vessel off Sandy Hook, fasten on the sailor, and secure him and his luggage. Some few captains will not allow these land-sharks on board. But when resisted, so desperate are they that they have to be beaten off by clubs. A resolute captain often has to put his flag at half-mast, and call the police boat to his assistance. The police have sometimes to shoot these fellows before they can be driven back. The captain engages a crew from these men. Owing to the system of advanced wages, sailors go to sea in debt, and so the land-sharks get their wages from the captain, get the men drunk, and hustle them on board the vessels for a long voyage. On board the ship, the sailor awakes from his debauch, and finds himself without clothing, friendless and penniless. He does not know who shipped him, what ship he is on, or where he is going. When he comes back he will find a long account run up against him, said to have been contracted while he was drunk. Again he will be robbed of his earnings, kept on shore as long as

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it is profitable to keep him, drugged, and sent again to sea. A few merchants made an attempt to separate the sailors from these miscreants. The captains were ordered to find their men elsewhere, and to have no connection with the land-sharks. Sailors could not be found. Vessels loaded and ready for sea remained at the wharves. The terrible power of the landlords was found in the fact that not a seaman could be found in New York to man the ships. For two weeks the merchants held out, and then yielded by a compromise. But that compromise established the power of this depraved class. Fraud, extortion, robbery and crime had a new lease of life. The vilest dens for boarding-houses, the deadliest rum, the basest companions, gamblers and women, lodgings in cellars where no human being ought to be kept, bad literature, bad songs and corrupting music, hold as in chains of steel the New York sailor.

## BETHELS.

All along the North and East Rivers are chapels for seamen. The Baptists, Episcopalians, Methodists, and Presbyterians have each a seamen's Bethel, floating or on shore. One bright Sunday morning I visited several of these seamen churches. It was evident that religion has but a feeble hold on the sons of the sea. It is estimated that there are a hundred and fifty thousand sailors belonging to the port of New York. Of these I suppose not a thousand can be found in all the places of worship assigned to them. A very sparse attendance is seen in these places of worship, and the majority are the friends of the sailor rather than the sailor himself. The English and Scotch, known as from the

old country, attend the Episcopal Bethel. The great mass of sailors in New York prefer to spend their Sundays in drinking, gambling, dancing, and carousing. A few earnest, devoted missionaries move round among them, and try to do them good. Bibles and tracts are scattered on the right hand and on the left. But what are these among thousands of bold, bad women, vicious books, corrupting pictures, lascivious poetry, and debasing songs?

#### WATER STREET RAMBLE.

A walk along Water Street of a Sunday afternoon, or any night in the week, will give a better idea of the degradation of the sailor, and the vicious influences that surround him, than any pen can describe. By day the streets and sidewalks are literally crowded. Every house is a trap, and every person a destroyer. Without decency, without shame, the vile population herd on the pavement, fill the air with blasphemy, hail the sailor with imprecations and profanity, and shout back and forth from one side of the street to the other in language shocking to every moral sense. At night every room and cellar is a dance-house, reeking with pestilential vapors, and crowded with debased men and women; the sound of the piano, viol, and harp are heard on all sides with the sounds of the revellers. The women who dwell in this quarter are the lowest and most debased of their class. They stand on the lowest round of the ladder, that leads down to the deepest infamy. Crime and vice has done its worst with them. The lowest degradation that a woman can reach, they have

reached. Their next remove is to the almshouse, penitentiary, or to a pauper's burial. Their dress is flashy, untidy, covered with tinsel, while they are loaded down with brass jewelry. Their coarse hair is dressed in the latest fashion, their dresses short, arms and neck bare, and their appearance as disgusting as can be conceived. They have no ambition. They work for their daily bread and a shelter for their heads, liable at any minute to have their finery stripped from them and to be turned into the streets. The love of drink is all that remains. They know that with every round of the dance they will go to the bar and quench, for a moment, the fierce flame that nearly consumes them. Their brutal master stands in the centre of the floor, and keeps them at their hard and repulsive work. They rest but a moment upon the hard benches, between the dances, as the new comers must be served, and the profits of the bar kept up. The most brutal, profane, and insulting language is addressed by the keeper to the dancing-women of his house. If they falter, if they hesitate, if from weariness they hang back, or from fatigue are unable to rise, they are covered with horrid imprecations, torrents of abuse are poured upon them, or they are knocked down by the bully, and brutally beaten by the tyrant that lords it over them. The career of these women is short. Poverty, crime, disease, suffering, soon do their work.

In such a locality and in such society the New York sailor loves to dwell. From these stews and dens the men are taken on whose fidelity the lives of thousands depend, and who represent, in foreign

lands, the intelligence, culture, and religion of America. They furnish the means by which men roll in wealth, sit in their crimson pews, and live in lordly dwellings. But few think of the sailor to whom the metropolis is indebted for its high place among the nations of the earth, or attempt his elevation.

## XXV.

## FULTON STREET PRAYER-MEETING.

EARLY DUTCH CHURCH. — FOUNDER OF THE DAILY PRAYER-MEETING. —  
FIRST NOONDAY MEETING. — ITS PERSONALE. — AN INSIDE VIEW. —  
FLIES IN THE OINTMENT. — FINALE.

## EARLY DUTCH CHURCH.

WE cannot separate Fulton Street Prayer-Meeting from the Collegiate Church of New York, for this body founded the prayer-meeting, and has so far sustained it. The Collegiate Church is the original church of Manhattan. Our Dutch ancestors were a pious race. They scattered themselves from the Battery to Westchester, and from Hackensack to Wallabout Bay. Within the fort at the Battery they built a church as soon as they landed. It was a rude place of worship, but precious to them; and to the sanctuary they gathered every Sunday. Distance was no hinderance. Some lived twenty miles away, and they walked the whole distance. They would not travel on the Sabbath. They started on foot Saturday afternoons, to reach the sanctuary before midnight. Worshipping on the Sabbath, they remained until after midnight. When the Sabbath was fully past, they took up their line of march. With the songs of Marot they beguiled