

Literature, &c.

THE COCKPIT DUEL.

"TALKING about Duels," said the Boat-swain's mate, "puts me in mind of one as happened among the midshipmen of a line-of-battle ship. I belonged to, and if you like messmates, I'll just overhaul it to you."

A ready assent was yielded to this proposal, and Tom Whisler, after a short preface, related the following particulars, which I shall give in his own particular idiom.

They were rather a skylarking, randomish, set of blades, were the midshipmen in that ship, as, messmates, you know most young gentlemen are—and as full of tricks as St. Jago is of monkeys. We were fitting out in port, and had just got the rigging over the lower-mastheads, and there was only two of the Leftenant had joined, so in course there was plenty for 'em to do 'pon deck, without troubling themselves with looking out after the youngsters below, though they kept them pretty tight at boat and dock-yard duty too. Well, one day, it was raining heavy, and the hands were principally working under cover on the main deck, and I was down in the after cockpit getting the tiers cleared out for the cables as were expected to come alongside. The young gentlemen were all on 'em on the miscellaneous lay, skulking about, and tormenting each other, and one of 'em hauls up close to me and says—

"Tom, we're going to have a bit of fun with Mr. Moody," says he, "for he's only a know nothing, and is always boasting of his grandfather, Lord somebody or other, and his uncle the Baronet, and his uncle the Bishop."

"Add why not, Mr. Quinton?" says I, as I went on with my work, "if so he's got rich and titled relatives, there's never no harm in being proud of 'em as long as they deserve it, and I hopes they will be able by-and-by to think as much of him?"

"Oh, but it isn't altogether that, Tom," says the young officer, "but he is so proud himself, though he is as poor as a rat in a miser's kitchen."

"As to his being poor," says I, "that's no fault of his, Mr. Quinton, and I don't never like to see any one unpraised or punished for his misfortunes."

"But then," says the youngster, "he sails so large in his talk about his courage, and what he'd do if anybody insulted him, so that we are going to put his bravery to the proof. Hark, Tom, don't you hear them?"

"Why yes, it's plain enough to hear 'em, Mr. Quinton," says I, "but I'm thinking it's hardly fair for all hands to be badgering a young officer as has just joined, and never was at sea afore," for d'ye see, messmates, it was always a constant practice, when any midshipman came aboard as was a greenhorn, and had never dipped his hands in salt water, to play him all manner of trick, and they were like young devils as to which could torment him most. Now Mr. Moody was a youth of good connexions, and hailed his relations with long handles to their names; but his own father was a poor man with a large family, his mother having displeased her parents by making a love match—and I say, messmates, what the use of getting spoiled, unless love twists the strands? To be sure a cargo of shiners goes a great way in the regard of hoisting aboard the pleasures of life, such as grog and bacca, and what not, but money can't clap a purchase on the heart to bowse out its dear affections, as most on you knows. So Mr. Moody's mother took to loving one of your long-shore craft as they call a poet, and wrote books, and her friends tried to make 'em part company—not because he had an ugly figure-head or was out of trim in his bearings, for he was a fine handsome fellow, and talked all sorts of verses like an angel—nor could they log anything down again him in regard of his character, for he was as steady and well-behaved as a first-rate Bishop; but then, d'ye see, messmates, he was poor. Howsoever, all her family could do, they could not put her out of conceit of him, and so they got canderously married, which as soon as it was found out, got her discharged from the family muster book, and she was cast adrift to seek her fortune. Still she was happy with her husband, and he was happy with her; so that they were both happy together, and cared nothing for the breezes of the world, blow high, blow low. He served out his verses and his poems—nothing equal to Dibdin's though—and she played 'em off on the penny-forty—a rum name for music, messmates—and so they lived like a couple of turtle doves. But by-and-by there was a youngster launched into life, and in due course of time another, and so they went on, whilst, as ill-luck would have it, an opposition party starts up, and the world, as it always does, throwing overboard all thoughts of past services, runs down Mr. Moody, and hoists the other over his head. Well, the long and the short of it is, messmates, that as the book-binding concern failed, they shipped their moorings, and dropped down the stream of poverty, for none of the nobles would lend 'em so much as a keedge anchor to bring up and howl on by; and what was the use of a long range of titles to cling to, as slipped through their fingers like the buttered tail of a pig, or a topsel-tye well greased? Mr. Moody tried to get an appointment abroad, and mayhap might have done so, if so be he could have waited long enough; but somehow or another, there was so many to serve, that he always got disappointed; and at last, finding he had but small hopes to ride out the gale of adversity, with nothing but promises for ground tackle, he bears up and takes schoolmaster in a small way, serving out a due allowance of poetry and birch-rod alternately. But the husband and the wife always rowed in the

same boat, there was no wrangling nor grumbling; they never ceased to love each other, and they doated on their eldest boy, who, as I told you afore, had got the rating of a midshipman in the line-of-battle ship, through the kindness of an old friend who had just come home from Inge. I learned all this afterwards, messmates, but I thought it would be just as well to overhaul the matter here. Well, then, he was down in the cockpit, and about as happy as an unfortunate swab in the darbies looking forward to three dozen at the gang-way.

To be sure, the youngster, finding himself in uniform, went off with flowing sheets in his talk about his great relatives who had never done nothing to save his parents from being wrecked, if so be as they'd been driven on the rocks, nor yet gave him a helping hand in regard of his outfit. But when youngsters get palavering together, they're just at giddy, as so many geese; for, d'ye mind, they haven't the experience to lay up the strands of an argument into a good need-fast, or to coil away their ideas, so that when they want to overhaul a range the fakes may run clear without catching. And so it was with young Mr. Moody, and whilst the others encouraged him on, he couldn't see as they were tying his craft amongst the shoals and quicksands of ridicule on purpose to bump him ashore, and make game of him.

One of the young gentlemen was called Mr. Larkins, and I'm blessed but the name he hailed by tallied exactly with the cast of his figure head and the trim of his craft, for he was externally larking about so much or other, and his very face displayed a mixture of fun and mischief that set everybody laughing. But there was always a rogue's yarn of ill nature and spite laid up with the strands of his merriment, and he never cared what pain he gave to others so as he could enjoy pleasure himself; even the man thus he'd make free with as hail, fellow well met one half hour he'd report and get punished the next half hour, mayhap, for the very fault, as he'd led him to commit—nobody liked him, and yet every body laughed at his humour. Well, this Mr. Larkins took to tormenting young Moody soon after he was entered on the books and had joined the mess, and now, at the time of my speaking, had got him into a sort of raffle by first of all working upon his pride, and then taunting him in regard of his poverty; and the rest of the young seamps readily joined in the sport, because just then they had nothing else to do—not as ever they were backward in all sorts of devilry; but there being no particular duty carrying on either ashore or afloat, it came more natural to 'em to pipe to mischief.

"Well, we've discovered it all," says young Larkins to Moody, as they came out at last; and so you're a gentleman in disguise, come to sea to wear your old clothes out—eh? I thought it was that from the first."

"You may think whatsoever you please," says Moody, whose blood was up—"Let me be what I will, I trust I shall never disgrace myself or my family by becoming Merry Andrew to a midshipman's mess."

"Do you mean that to be personal?" says Larkins, assuming anger, and really vexed at this hard hit, which told all the better in regard of its being the truth. "Sdeath, sir, you had better mind what you are about. But conceit and ragged shirts always stick to the same back."

"As to being personal," says Moody, "if the cap fits your head, I beg you'd wear it. For the second I am minding—carefully minding what I am about. The latter is more applicable to yourself than to any one I know."

"To me, sir—applicable to me?" says Larkins, "I as can show an inventory of four dozen white frilled shirts!"

"But you haven't got 'em in your chest, Larkins," sings out a youngster; "you have only eight to my certain knowledge, though you have clapped a figure of four in the marking ahead of the figures, and there they are, forty-one, forty-two, and so on up to forty-eight."

A general laugh followed this exposure, messmates, for the facts were pretty well known to be true. "I wish some of you, as is near him, would give that youngster a clout of the head for me," says Larkins.

"Which you will return him again," sings out the other, as he gave them a wide berth, and sprang up the latter ladder; "them are only debts you ever pay, Larkins."

"I'll pay you by and by," says Larkins, "and take a receipt in full of all demands, depend upon it, my fine fellows; I'd have you know, but I've got other business on hand."

"With me, I presume," says Moody in a rather contemptible manner, "but I would advise you not to carry your nonsense too far; for though you're young in the Service, I am not ignorant of the circumstances of life and the regulations of good society, though perhaps, I should be out in my latitude to observe any kind of that last here."

"Mutiny, mutiny!" shouts Larkins, as he clasps his hands together—"will you bear these reflections on your gentility. Reefers—will you submit to be insulted by a greenhorn as never saw blue water, and don't never know the main tack from the cook's tormentors? Are our sacred privileges to be invaded by a punny boaster as talks about rich relatives which he never had, and titles that are not to be found among the nobility of this country, whatever they may be at Madagascar or the Sandwich Islands? What do you say, gentlemen? will you endure all this, and yet call yourselves officers?"

"He's in good hands, Larkins," says several as wanted to egg 'em on, "you are the oldest and the ugliest among us, and you shall be our champion—pistols, cutlasses, or boarding-

pikes, or 24-pounders, if you like such delicate articles better."

"Yes, yes," says Larkins, "the respectability of the mess demands satisfaction—my own wounded honour—"

"Clap a plaster of tar upon your wound, if so be as you can find it," shouts the youngster on the ladder; "but it ain't by no means possible to injure nothing."

The flight of a boot-jack at the youngsters head, and which he narrowly escaped by bending down, stopped his voice for a few minutes; but it was plain that with all his striving to be cool, Larkins was getting into a passion.

"Gentlemen," says Moody, in a bit of a sneer, as he puts on his hat, "gentlemen, I shall leave you to your old pastime, which from what I have seen, looks as if it had been pretty much practised among you before. I joined—"

"And what may that be?" axes two or three on 'em in a breath, for they were nettled at his being so independent and sharp.

"What may that be?" repeats Moody, as he was walking away, "making fools of one another to be sure." He turns round again—

"I came into the Service with good feelings and wishes for you all—I hoped to be received with generosity by my new associates, and as I was wholly unacquainted with the duties of a ship of war, I expected to find young and ardent minds ready to show their friendship by giving me a lift in my education. But what have I found it since the very first hour of my coming on board?—persecution—persecution—persecution—nothing but persecution, which neither the work of the day nor the silence of night has clapped a stopper on. Base tricks have been played me in the dark—I have met with nothing but mortification in the light—what have I done—"

"You should have taken your text before you began to preach," said Larkins, interrupting him; and the next moment a wet swab, thrown by some on 'em from a gloomy part of the deck, struck Mr. Moody in the face, and made his nose bleed; but he did not seem to heed it, for snatching up the boot-jack which had been chided at the youngster, as I told you afore, he dashed at Larkins, and with one blow laid him flat on his beam-ends. But he did not remain so long, for starting up again, he struck Moody, and, being much bigger and stronger, he capozed him in an instant. Well, this throwed 'em all into confusion, and the matter began to get somt serious. One or two sides with Moody, and takes his part, and the rest goes over to Larkins, talking very big words for such small mouths. At last, after some confab among 'em, it was agreed that the quarrel should be decided off-hand, by a duel with ship's pistols, and a couple of brace were got out of the arm chest. Now, thinks I to myself, this is a little bit too much of the monkey, so I beckons Mr. Quinton to me, and says I, "Them are venturesome things to handle, Mr. Quinton, and I can't lay idle here and see such weapons used, countryman again countryman, as ought only to be pointed at our enemies—so if the young gentlemen don't carry them back to their proper stowage,"

says I, "why then I must report it to the First Lieutenant."

"Oh, it's all fun," says Mr. Quinton, "there'll be no harm done—only a few grains of powder in each pistol, to make a flash, and see whether Moody can stand fire."

"But even then, Mr. Quinton," it isn't by no manner of means fair," says I, "for Mr. Larkins will know that there is never no shot in the pistol to hurt him, but Mr. Moody will not know it. To make all square both on 'em should have been led to believe there was ball and then they would have been equal."

"That's very true, Tom," says he, "but it can't be done now; and as it's only a bit of harmless fun, why let 'em play it out."

"But I don't like to see game made of anything," Mr. Quinton, says I somut positively, "specially making game of them there instruments of death, and I shall insist upon its going no further, whether in fun or in earnest."

And so I walks at towards the gun room, where they had all gone into, but the door was fast, and afore I could force it open, I hears the reports of two pistols, followed by loud roars of laughter, and, bursting in, found the place filled with smoke, which, howsoever, soon cleared off, and there stood Mr. Moody, the very model of despair, one hand twisted in his curly locks, and the discharged pistol in the other, hanging by his side. On the deck, throwing his limbs about, as if they didn't belong to him, laid Mr. Larkins, whilst the rest were looking on, and admiring how natively he acted, dying to decyve his opponent, who fancied the weapons had been loaded with ball.

"Well done, Larkins," shouts one; "He's regularly done for," sings out another; "My hys Moody, but you're a good shot," says a third, and so they carried on, alternately speaking to Moody and to Larkins; and I own messmates, that I was astonished to see how well the fallen middy could counterfeite the last struggles, as one or two of his own party kneeled over him. At last he gave a convulsive spring, turned over on his face, and laid quite still.

"Come, come, young gentlemen," says I "avast at all this here gammoning concern. Don't frighten yourself Mr. Moody, he's owaly shamming it, and even that's no credit to him. Rouse up Mr. Larkins, and show it's all nonsense—you've gone quite far enough."

"Ah—yes," says several of his side, "it's of no use playing any longer, Larkins, Moody stood fire nobly; and so let's have no more of it." And so 'em went to shift the body.

But the prostrate young man seemed determined to carry on the trick, for he laid without moving a limb.

"Come, come, Larkins," said his second, "you have acted your part most admirably, and frightened poor Moody out of seven years' growth. It's a shame to carry the farce on any longer—get up and shake hands with him."

"I shall be most happy to do so," says Moody, and delighted at being told that it was all gammon; for he had begun to grow a little frantic when he thought he had wounded and perhaps killed him. "Yes, I shall be very happy," says he, laughing heartily, "very happy indeed, if he will howl out his hand to me and be friends."

But still Larkins never moved nor showed any signs or symptoms of being reconciled. "This is rank folly," says his second, "come rouse and butt. Well, if you won't, you shall be treated like a dead man. Here, catch howd of his head, arms, and legs, some on you, and we'll lay him out on the mers table. Bwar a hand reefers, d'ye hear?" He stooped down, turned the young man over—there was a pool of black blood under where his breast had laid—a ball had passed through his heart—he was a lifeless corpse.

As soon as the truth was known, there was a wild cry among the Midshipmen, and upbraiding each other, they rushed from the gun room, so that only I and Mr. Moody and the dead body remained. In a minute or so the Doctor's mate came in; but after feeling the pulse and examining the wound, he declared the cruise of life was up—he was no longer in existence, and even his spirit had got beyond hail. As for poor Moody, he sat himself on the gun-carriage, wringing his hands in agony, and bursting out into loud cries and lamentations. Down came the two Leftenants to inquire into the matter, and all the Midshipmen were summoned into the gun room, to give evidence over the bleeding corpse of their old comrade. But no one could tell how the fatal affair had happened—the seconds who loaded the pistols declared that they had put in nothing more than a small quantity of powder; and no one had seen anything like a ball. What I knew of it I told the Leftenants, from beginning to end. Poor Moody was placed under confinement; but nobody, believing he put in the ball himself—though its sartin that from the first he supposed that it was so loaded and took the whole concern quite serious. It was a melancholy sight, was young Larkins' funeral; for, though nobody could give him a good name, yet he had those qualities about him that made him missed more than a better man. All the ship's boats followed in procession, with their colours half staff down, and his relatives and the midshipmen tailed after the coffin when they got ashore. But there was no heart so sad among them as poor Moody's, confined as he was in the after cockpit, and upbraiding himself as having committed murder. His mother almost doated upon him—he was her first-born, and had always been her pet; and mayhap it was a bit of pride on her part in telling him of the great families he was allied to, that did all the mischief by making him vain. But he was a clever lad, and had a power of learning at his fingers' ends. Well, his mother came aboard, and it was a sad meeting between the two, for everything they said to try and comfort one another, but did more to make 'em miserable. His father, not able to come, for he continued ill in his hammock, hove down with a fever burning him up—and this increased the poor lad's misery. As for Mr. Larkins's friends, nothing could console them, and they were dreadfully bitter against poor Moody for having shot him, tho' he in a great measure brought it on himself. Mrs. Moody promised to do all she could for her son again the day of trial; and so she did, for she got an old relative, as was a dignitary of the Church, to stand her friend, and he exhorted himself to see as the young man should have fair play.

At last the day of trial came; the court martial flag was hoisted in the old Gladiator, and there was as fine a set of fellows collected together as members, as ever any one would wish to see. Admiral Sir Richard Bickerton, was President, and Sir Harry Neale, Lord Keith, Sir Richard Keats, and ever so many more Captains, who were afterwards all hands on 'em Admirals, were members—so that the prisoner was sure of having justice served out to him. And his mother in her widow's dress—for her husband had died—was allowed to be aboard, and tried to cheer up his spirits, though she was sadly downhearted herself; but the officers behaved kindly to her, and she hoped all would go favourably for her son. Poor Mr. Moody, whatsoever he might feel, behaved like a trump when he got before the court—and its no pleasant sensation, messmates, I'm thinking, to stand in the presence of all them officers, with the provost marshal at your side, carrying his cutlash over his shoulder, and every eye looking upon you, as if they'd look you through and through. Howsoever he stood it very well, though his lips quivered when the charge of murder was read out against him; but he rallied his courage, knocked off a tear that had trickled down on the tip of his nose, and said "Not guilty," in a voice as clear as my call, and that hasn't a flaw in it.

The witnesses were all examined, and every one on 'em spoke of the provocation that the prisoner had received, but none of them could say he was backward to fight—on the contrary they were forced to admit that he was uncommon eager for it, and believed the pistols were both loaded with ball. The whole story was correctly told, and then they overhauled the question as to how the pistol came to have a shot in it. Here they got to a dead fix—not a soul could or would tell, and it was at last supposed that the pistol had been put away in the arm chest undischarged, and the fact was not discovered by the second, who merely put in some powder.

Two hours were granted Mr. Moody to prepare his defence, and exactly at the last turn of