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Poetry.

FROM THE PERSIAN OF SADI.

Once from a cloud, a drop of rain
Fell trembling in the sea;
And when she saw the wide-spread main,
Shame veiled her modesty.

What place in this wide sea have I?
What room is left for me?
Sure it were better that I die
In this immensity;

But while herself-abasing fear
Its lowliness confessed,
A shell received and welcomed her
And pressed her to its breast:

And nourished there the drop became,
A pearl for royal eyes—
Exalted by its lowly shame
And humbled but to rise.

THE SKIPPER AND HIS SON

It was many years ago, before the introduction of steam or ironclads into our navy, that his Majesty's ship *Meuledefoin* was fitting out at Plymouth.

The *Meuledefoin* had, once upon a time, been a French frigate! but, as was the custom in those days, it was not long before she became an English one.

As soon as she was towed into Plymouth Sound, the dockyard authorities began thinking what they could do with her. The constructor of the Navy inspected her, and the Board at the Admiralty had a meeting on the subject.

After a vast deal of hard work (because, although you may laugh at the idea, thinking it very hard work for those who are not accustomed to it, and everybody knows how little a Board, particularly an Admiralty one, ever thinks) instead of letting her be a smart, saucy frigate, capable of doing her fourteep knots on a bowline, they determined to raise her into a line-of-battle ship.

This was done. It only cost seventy thousand pounds, and she was placed in the second class ordinary.

Then, some fifteen years later, she was docked, repaired, and commissioned by Commodore Fortescue.

Captain Fortescue had been (a long time ago) a smart captain, a clever seaman, and an excellent good fellow.

But, unfortunately, he got into trouble. It may serve as a warning to our readers, if ever they are placed in the same position, so we will detail how it was supposed to have occurred.

He had just been promoted to his post rank for taking an enemy's frigate of nearly double the size of his own ship, in which action he received seventeen separate wounds.

He had been appointed to the command of a fine frigate, and one day his evil spirit conducted him into one of the Dutch ports.

In this harbour he discovered a corvette with the British ensign and pendant.

He was naturally much surprised at not being saluted; and, after anchoring and furling sails, was about to make the signal for the junior captain to come aboard.

Before, however, he had time to do this, a cutter came alongside from the corvette, with a message from Count Meinheim, of Hanover, requesting him to dip his ensign and salute him, as he was related to the British royal family.

Fortescue returned an answer to the effect that if the captain of the corvette would salute the captain of the frigate (his senior), then he would honor the relative of the royal family.

Again the Count sent his boat, and ordered Fortescue to salute.

But the impetuous young seaman replied that "He might go to—well, heaven, and then he wouldn't." The next morning the corvette left harbour; and in less than three weeks, Fortescue received his orders to proceed home, and pay off all standing.

This was done, and since then he was kept ashore on half-pay.

But a new Ministry having come in by some fluke, he was appointed to the command of the *Meuledefoin*, to fly the broad pennant up the Mediterranean.

The Captain was walking up and down the quarter-deck with quick, nervous steps, and looked as if something had put him out of temper, which, truth to tell, was not very difficult, for his long spell ashore had not improved that quality in him.

"Hum! ten officers want to go ashore," he muttered to himself, "and the first lieutenant and commander, too. Never used to be so when I was a junior. Hum! Service going to the devil!"

Half a dozen turns up and down, and suddenly Fortescue stopped short, as if he had been paralyzed.

Just in front of him stood a youth of about fourteen, with every feature the counterpart of his own.

The same dark hair, inclined to be curly, and the same sharp, black eyes; while the curved Roman

nose might have been cast in the same mould. The turn of the chin, the contour of the head, and even the regular, upright carriage, were precisely similar.

"Come on board to join sir," observed the youngster, who was in the uniform of a midshipman.

For a moment or two the Captain gasped, as if endeavouring to speak; and then he burst forth, "Good heavens, boy! what is your name?"

"Henry Clarence, sir," replied the middy.

The Captain's Christian names, by the bye, were Henry William Clarence.

"Where do you come from?"

"London, sir."

"Very good! You can go below."

And, covering his eyes with his hand, Fortescue walked aft, and entered his cabin.

Not without some difficulty, young Clarence, who had never been aboard ship before, managed to find his way down into the gun-room.

His advent produced quite a sensation. Two youngsters who were having a quiet spar in one corner, left off with their hands remaining fixed in the air. A mate, who was in the act of pouring out some rum into a glass, ceased the operation in order to stare at the new-comer; and an oldster, who was hammering a little fellow for cheeking him, suspended his labours, and permitted his victim to escape.

At length an assistant-surgeon, who in those days used to mess in the gun-room, pulled himself together and spoke.

"Hallo, youngster! what's your name?"

"Harry Clarence."

"By jingo, Peters, isn't he like him, eh?"

"He is so," replied Peters, the mate aforesaid; "as like as two eggs."

"Are you any relation to the skipper, youngster?" continued the assistant-surgeon.

"Not that I know of," replied Clarence. "Why do you inquire?"

"Never your mind," answered the other.

Then, as soon as Clarence had walked away to the other end of the room, he continued.

"I say, Peters, that looks fishy, doesn't it? Why he's the very image of the old man, isn't he?"

"Yes, he is," answered Peters; and then placing one finger alongside his nose, and looking wondrously cunning he continued, "I shouldn't be surprized if he was side-wind—wrong end of the blanket you know—for I've heard that the skipper was a wonderfully gay fellow."

"Just what I thought," replied the young *Æsculapius*; "but it isn't very good taste, is it, for him to introduce that sort of thing among officers—ah—and gentlemen?"

"No, Potts; I agree with you," replied the mate, "it is not the right thing; in fact, I take it it's a downright insult. Why should we have to mess with the lord knows who? I've a darned good mind—"

"Steady Peters, steady; remember, it's only a suspicion as yet. Let's have the youngster over here and question him on his antecedents."

"Right, Potts, right. Here, you—what's your name?—Clarence, come here!"

No notice was taken of this, the youngster continuing to look out of the port.

"I say, don't you hear when you are spoken to? Come here."

The one who was being addressed might have been deaf for all the notice he took.

So now the assistant-surgeon, who—Heaven save the mark!—considered himself more refined than his messmate, began, "Mr. Clarence, will you be good enough to step over here? We have been hailing you for nearly five minutes."

"Indeed!" answered Clarence, slowly proceeding towards them. "I heard voices, but I imagined you were calling a dog."

"By Jove, he's cool!" muttered Peters.

"We wish to ask you a few questions, youngster," commenced Mr. Potts, with a vast amount of dignity.

"To begin with, we desire to know where you were born, who was your father, what he was, and where you have been living?"

Having finished this list of queries, he looked over to Peters to see what he thought of the matter.

Peters nodded his head gravely, as if endorsing what his messmate had just said.

"Pardon me, replied Clarence, with rather a sneering smile, "but its a bad rule that will not work both ways; or in case that axiom may be beyond your depth, let me say what is good for the goose is good for the gander. Just now you told me youngsters should ask no questions. Allow me to inform you that it is not the correct thing for oldsters either."

For a moment or two the two heads of the mess were dumbfounded; a small crowd began gathering round them; and for all the mess to hear a youngster like this to answer them in such a manner, it was not to be thought of for an instant.

"Silence sir!" exclaimed Potts with a majestic frown. "What applies to you does not apply to us. Answer my questions, or—"

And he held up his fist in a menacing manner.

"I shall not answer you, replied Clarence firmly. "If you want to know anything about me, you had better ask the captain. I suppose he is aware of the officers he receives on board; and as for your fist, I'm not afraid of that."

At this, all the youngsters began to applaud and grin, for Potts and Peters, owing to their superior size, kept all the little fellows in a species of bondage.

Potts did not like the allusion to the Captain, but he liked still less the plaudits and smiles of the small fry.

Rising to his feet, he stretched forward, intending to seize Clarence by the neck and drag him over his knee.

But the latter, watching his opportunity, drew back half a pace, and suddenly let out "one, two right and left."

The first blow landed in Potts' left eye, and staggered him, while the second hit him full in the mouth cut his lips, and sent him backwards over the chair on to the deck.

At this there was a perfect yell of triumph and delight, and the youngsters commenced a war-dance round the fallen bully.

Peters immediately rose to his rescue, and in less than three minutes there was a free fight going on. All at once a deep voice was heard.

"What does this mean, young gentlemen?"

The first lieutenant was standing in the doorway, attended by the master-at-arms and a ship's corporal.

At this sight, the different encounters that were taking place at once came to an end.

Peters dragged himself out from underneath the table, looking rather the worse for wear; and Potts and Clarence, who had been rolling on the deck together, jumped to their feet, and looked rather ashamed.

The names of all those present were taken, and the lieutenant retired.

The evening came, and the night passed over with the usual discomforts on board ship.

Of course there was the usual difficulty of getting into a hammock, and the usual facility of tumbling out, but as our hero was only cut down twice, he passed off pretty well.

The next morning after quarters, the young gentlemen who had been present at the fracas in the gun-room were ordered aft on the quarter-deck before the Commander.

The Captain was walking up and down on the other side, but, as the inquiry proceeded, he drew nearer and nearer.

This is a most disgraceful matter, young gentlemen, commenced the Commander, and I am surprised to see amongst you some of those who should have been setting a better example to the younger members of your mess.

Of course at this the oldsters endeavored to look very much ashamed.

Now I wished to know who were the ringleaders in this affair?

Not a sound was heard.

The Commander paused, but receiving no reply continued.

Now I must insist on knowing what the cause of this disgraceful disturbance was. Unless I am told, I shall punish you all round most severely.

The next moment Clarence stepped forth.

It was my fault, sir, if you please, said he; and if one must suffer for the lot, let it be me.

For a moment the Commander looked at the speaker in the utmost astonishment, and then, with a frown, he said, I trust you are not jesting, young sir, for I can assure you this is no joking matter. Explain yourself. What do you mean?

By this time the Captain had drawn up alongside the Commander.

Why, it is very simple, sir, answered Clarence, as innocently as a sucking dove. I only joined yesterday, and when I entered the berth, somebody wanted to know my name. I told him that, and then he took such an interest in me, that he wished to inquire into all my private affairs regarding my father, mother, and all the rest. I lost my temper at this, and answered that he had better inquire from the Captain as to who his officers were.

Here the Commander turned round, and gazed in astonishment from the boy to the man, evidently just struck by the wonderful likeness.

Captain Fortescue was lividly pale, and was gnawing his under-lip.

Then sir, continued Clarence, this fellow was going to thrash me for my answer; but not caring for that sort of treatment, I resisted, and—and then the rough-and-tumble began.

Oh, oh! that was it, was it? Then who was the gentleman that began catechising you in the manner you have related?

Well, really, sir, not having been on board twenty-four hours, upon my word I don't know anybody's name yet, replied Clarence, with a look of the most supreme innocence.

You may not know his name, answered the Com-

mander; but please be good enough to pick him out from among these young gentlemen.

Sir, exclaimed Clarence, with an indescribable turn of the head,—sir, I am a gentleman!

For a few moments the Commander was silent, and then, speaking very slowly, he said, Very good; then, as you refuse to inform me of the real originator of this turmoil, I must punish you. I shall stop your leave until we go to sea.

That is not sufficient, Captain Edie! burst out the Captain. He deserves a far more rigorous punishment. When I was last at sea, a youngster daring to answer a superior officer in that manner would have been most severely punished.

The Commander drew the skipper on one side, and spoke to him for a few minutes, most likely representing that fifteen years make a good deal of difference in naval discipline, as well as in other things.

Then he returned and dismissed them all.

On arriving down below, Clarence received many a hearty shake of the hand, and was informed by several of his messmates that he was a thorough good fellow.

The youngster did not suffer much from his punishment, as the *Meuledefoin* weighed anchor and proceeded to sea before the end of the week.

A soon as the lumbering old two-decker got out into the Channel it was discovered that she was well named.

She wouldn't tack a bit; there was the deuce's own work in getting her about, under any circumstances; and, even with a strong breeze, six knots an hour was the utmost that could be knocked out of her, under all plain sail, and even then she went one knot to leeward for every two forward.

After three days suffering, the usual penalty insisted on by Neptune from all those visiting his domains for the first time, our hero found his feet again, and was placed in a watch.

By this time all hands had noticed the wonderful similarity between the youngster and the Commodore, and no doubt the latter had overheard one or two of the remarks—not very complimentary to him—that had been made on the subject.

At all events, as if by extreme severity he wished to discountance the suspicion, he was always down upon the unfortunate youngster.

At one time he was on the wrong side of the deck, at another he was not in uniform (his waistcoat was not buttoned up) and again he was punished for not raising his cap to his Majesty's quarter-deck, upon ascending from below.

On the other hand, Edie, the Commander, had taken an early opportunity of informing the boy that, for purposes of work or reading, he was at liberty to make use of the cabin.

"Of course, you will understand, he concluded, "that I was obliged to punish you with regard to that, disturbance in the gun room. It was my duty; but, at the same time, I wish you to be aware that I do not think any the worse of you for it."

As soon as they got to sea, both men and officers discovered that there was a vast deal of difference between the Commander and the Captain. The former was of the new school, the latter of the old, and he seemed to be under the impression that the work could not be carried on without a certain amount of swearing and blackguarding.

After passing Gibraltar, the youngster in charge of the mizen-top went on to the sick list for some cause or another, and Clarence was promoted to the position.

The first day when, in the afternoon, the hands were turned up for drill, he ran away up aloft as smart as a monkey, but when he arrived in the top he had no more idea as to what was his duty than if he had been in command of a shooting star.

"Hands reef topsails—one reef! Topsail halliards, stand by! Way aloft! Round in! Lower away! Trice up! Lay out!"

And the reef was taken in, and the men were down from aloft in time even to please the skipper.

But as if he had determined not to remain pleased, he gave the order to "Stand by to go about!"

This was always a sore point with the unweildy old tub, and everyone began to look out for squalls accordingly.

"Ready about! Helm all! Raise tacks and sheets!"

And then there was the duce to pay and no pitch hot.

The clumsy old craft wouldn't go about. She was taken aback, and missed stays most shamefully.

The skipper raved and swore until he was red in the face, finding fault with everybody who came near him.

Just as the helm had been shifted, and the head sheets hauled aft, the first lieutenant, who was forward, sent Clarence aft to enquire of the Captain whether he should try again, or go on on the old tack.