

ALFRED THAYER MAHAN

FROM SAIL TO STEAM,
RECOLLECTIONS OF
NAVAL LIFE

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A. T. Mahan

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PREFACE

When I was a boy, some years before I obtained my appointment in the navy, I spent many of those happy hours that only childhood knows poring over the back numbers of a British service periodical, which began its career in 1828, with the title *Colburn's United Service Magazine*; under which name, save and except the Colburn, it still survives. Besides weightier matters, its early issues abounded in reminiscences by naval officers, then yet in the prime of life, who had served through the great Napoleonic wars. More delightful still, it had numerous nautical stories, based probably on facts, serials under such entrancing titles as "Leaves from my Log Book," by Flexible Grommet, Passed Midshipman; a pen-name, the nautical felicity of which will be best appreciated by one who has had the misfortune to handle a grommet¹ which was not flexible. Then there was "The Order Book," by Jonathan Oldjunk; an epithet so suggestive of

¹ Worcester, quoting from *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, defines "Grommet" as "a small ring or wreath, formed of the strand of a rope, used for various purposes."

the waste-heap, even to a landsman's ears, that one marvels a man ever took it unto himself, especially in that decline of life when we are more sensitive on the subject of bodily disabilities than once we were. Old junk, however, can yet be "worked up," as the sea expression goes, into other uses, and that perhaps was what Mr. Oldjunk meant; his early adventures as a young "luff" were, for economical reasons, worked up into their present literary shape, with the addition of a certain amount of extraneous matter—love-making, and the like. Indeed, so far from uselessness, that veteran seaman and rigid economist, the Earl of St. Vincent, when First Lord of the Admiralty, had given to a specific form of old junk—viz., "shakings"—the honors of a special order, for the preservation thereof, the which forms the staple of a comical anecdote in Basil Hall's *Fragments of Voyages and Travels*; itself a superior example of the instructive "recollections," of less literary merit, which but for Colburn's would have perished.

Any one who has attempted to write history knows what queer nuggets of useful information lie hidden away in such papers; how they often help to reconstruct an incident, or determine a mooted point. If the Greeks, after the Peloponnesian war, had had a Colburn's, we should have a more certain, if not a perfect, clew to the reconstruction of the trireme; and probably even could deduce with some accuracy the daily routine, the several duties, and hear the professional jokes and squabbles, of their officers and crews. The serious people who write history can never fill the place of the gossips, who pour out an

unpremeditated mixture of intimate knowledge and idle trash.

Trash? Upon the whole is not the trash the truest history? perhaps not the most valuable, but the most real? If you want contemporary color, contemporary atmosphere, you must seek it among the impressions which can be obtained only from those who have lived a life amid particular surroundings, which they breathe and which colors them—dyes them in the wool. However skillless, they cannot help reproducing, any more than water poured from an old ink-bottle can help coming out more or less black; although, if sufficiently pretentious, they can monstrously caricature, especially if they begin with the modest time-worn admission that they are more familiar with the marling-spike than with the pen. But even the caricature born of pretentiousness will not prevent the unpremeditated betrayal of conditions, facts, and incidents, which help reconstruct the *milieu*; how much more, then, the unaffected simplicity of the born story-teller. I do not know how Froissart ranks as an authority with historians. I have not read him for years; and my recollections are chiefly those of childhood, with all the remoteness and all the vividness which memory preserves from early impressions. I think I now might find him wearisome; not so in boyhood. He was to me then, and seems to me now, a glorified Flexible Grommet or Jonathan Oldjunk; ranking, as to them, as Boswell does towards the common people of biography. That there are many solid chunks of useful information to be dug out of him I am sure; that his stories are all true, I have no desire to question; but what

among it all is so instructive, so entertaining, as the point of view of himself, his heroes, and his colloquists—the particular contemporary modification of universal human nature in which he lived, and moved, and had his being?

If such a man has the genius of his business, as had Froissart and Boswell, he excels in proportion to his unconsciousness of the fact; his colors run truer. For lesser gobblers, who have not genius, the best way to lose consciousness is just to IT themselves go; if they endeavor to paint artistically the muddle will be worse. To such the proverb of the cobbler and his last is of perennial warning. As a barber once sagely remarked to me, "You can't trim a beard well, unless you're born to it." It is possible in some degree to imitate Froissart and Boswell in that marvellous diligence to accumulate material which was common to them both; but, when gathered, how impossible it is to work up that old junk into permanent engrossing interest let those answer who have grappled with ancient chronicles, or with many biographies. So, with a circumlocution which probably convicts me in advance of decisive deficiency as a narrator, I let myself go. I have no model, unless it be the old man sitting in the sun on a summer's day, bringing forth out of his memories things new and old—mostly old.

A. T. Mahan.

INTRODUCING MYSELF

While extracts from the following pages were appearing in *Harper's Magazine*, I received a letter from a reader hoping that I would say something about myself before entering the navy. This had been outside my purpose, which was chiefly to narrate what had passed around me that I thought interesting; but it seems possibly fit to establish in a few words my antecedents by heredity and environment.

I was born September 27, 1840, within the boundaries of the State of New York, but not upon its territory; the place, West Point on the Hudson River, having been ceded to the General Government for the purposes of the Military Academy, at which my father, Dennis Hart Mahan, was then Professor of Engineering, as well Civil as Military. He himself was of pure Irish blood, his father and mother, already married, having emigrated together from the old country early in the last century; but he was also American by birthright, having been born in April, 1802, very soon after the arrival of his parents in the city of New York. There also he was baptized into the Roman Catholic Church, in the parish of St. Peter's, the church building of which now stands far down town, in Barclay Street. It is not, I believe, the same that existed in 1802.

Very soon afterwards, before he reached an age to remember, his parents removed to Norfolk, Virginia, where he grew up

and formed his earliest associations. As is usual, these colored his whole life; he was always a Virginian in attachment and preference. In the days of crisis he remained firm to the Union, by conviction and affection; but he broke no friendships, and to the end there continued in him that surest positive indication of local fondness, admiration for the women of what was to him his native land. In beauty, in manner, and in charm, they surpassed. "Your mother is Northern," he once said to me, "and very few can approach her; but still, in the general, none compare for me with the Southern woman." The same causes, early association, gave him a very pronounced dislike to England; for he could remember the War of 1812, and had experienced the embittered feeling which was probably nowhere fiercer than around the shores of the Chesapeake, the scene of the most wide-spread devastation inflicted, partly from motives of policy, partly as measures of retaliation. Spending afterwards three or four years of early manhood in France, he there imbibed a warm liking for the people, among whom he contracted several intimacies. He there knew personally Lafayette and his family; receiving from them the hospitality which the Marquis' service in the War of Independence, and his then recent ovation during his tour of the United States in 1825, prompted him to extend to Americans. This communication with a man who could tell, and did tell him, intimate stories of intercourse with Washington doubtless emphasized my father's patriotic prejudices as well as his patriotism. When he revisited France, in 1856, he found

many former friends still alive, and when I myself went there for the first time, in 1870, he asked me too to hunt them up; but they had all then disappeared. His fondness for the French doubtless accentuated his repugnance to the English, at that time still their traditional enemy. The combination of Irish and French prepossession could scarcely have resulted otherwise; and thus was evolved an atmosphere in which I was brought up, not only passively absorbing, but to a certain degree actively impressed with love for France and the Southern section of the United States, while learning to look askance upon England and abolitionists. The experiences of life, together with subsequent reading and reflection, modified and in the end entirely overcame these early prepossessions.

My father was for over forty years professor at West Point, of which he had been a graduate. In short, the Academy was his life, and he there earned what I think I am modest in calling a distinguished reputation. The best proof of this perhaps is that at even so early a date in our national history as his graduation from the Academy, in 1824, he was thought an officer of such promise as to make it expedient to send him to France for the higher military education in which the country of Napoleon and his marshals then stood pre-eminent. From 1820, when he entered the Academy as a pupil, to his death in 1871, he was detached from it only these three or four years. Yet this determination of his life's work proceeded from a mere accident, scarcely more than a boy's fancy. He had begun the study of medicine, under

Dr. Archer, of Richmond; but he had a very strong wish to learn drawing. In those primitive days the opportunity of instruction was wanting where he lived; and hearing that it was taught at the Military Academy he set to work for an appointment, not from inclination to the calling of a soldier, but as a means to this particular end. It is rather singular that he should have had no bias towards the profession of arms; for although he drifted almost from the first into the civil branch, as a teacher and then professor, I have never known a man of more strict and lofty military ideas. The spirit of the profession was strong in him, though he cared little for its pride, pomp, and circumstance. I believe that in this observation others who knew him well agreed with me.

The work of a teacher, however important and absorbing in itself, does not usually offer much of interest to readers. My father, by the personal contact of teacher and taught, knew almost every one of the distinguished generals who fought in the War of Secession, on either the Union or the Confederate side. With scarcely an exception, they had been his pupils; but his own life was uneventful. He married, in 1839, Mary Helena Okill, of New York City. My mother's father was English, her mother an American, but with a strong strain of French blood; her maiden name, Mary Jay, being that of a Huguenot family which had left France under Louis XIV. By the time of her birth, in 1786, a good deal of American admixture had doubtless qualified the original French; but I remember her well, and though she lived

to be seventy-three, she had up to the last a vivacity and keen enjoyment of life, more French than American, reflected from quick black eyes, which fairly danced with animation through her interest in her surroundings.

From my derivation, therefore, I am a pretty fair illustration of the mix-up of bloods which seems destined to bring forth some new and yet undecipherable combination on the North American continent. One-half Irish, one-fourth English, and a good deal more than "a trace" of French, would appear to be the showing of a quantitative analysis. Yet, as far as I understand my personality, I think to see in the result the predominance which the English strain has usually asserted for itself over others. I have none of the gregariousness of either the French or Irish; and while I have no difficulty in entering into civil conversation with a stranger who addresses me, I rarely begin, having, upon the whole, a preference for an introduction. This is not perverseness, but lack of facility; and I believe Froissart noted something of the same in the Englishmen of five hundred years ago. I have, too, an abhorrence of public speaking, and a desire to slip unobserved into a back seat wherever I am, which amount to a mania; but I am bound to admit I get both these dispositions from my father, whose Irishry was undiluted by foreign admixture.

In my boyhood, till I was nearly ten, West Point was a very sequestered place. It was accessible only by steam-boats; and during great part of the winter months not by them, the Hudson being frozen over most of the season as far as ten to twenty

miles lower down. The railroad was not running before 1848, and then it followed the east bank of the river. One of my early recollections is of begging off from school one day, long enough to go to a part of the post distant from our house, whence I caught my first sight of a train of cars on the opposite shore. Another recollection is of the return of a company of engineer soldiers from the War with Mexico. The detachment was drawn up for inspection where we boys could see it. One of the men had grown a full beard, a sight to me then as novel as the railroad, and I announced it at home as a most interesting fact. I had as yet seen only clean-shaven faces. Among my other recollections of childhood are, as superintendent of the Academy, Colonel Robert E. Lee, afterwards the great Confederate leader; and McClellan, then a junior engineer officer.

As my boyhood advanced the abolition movement was gaining strength, to the great disapprobation and dismay of my father, with his strong Southern and Union sympathies. I remember that when *Uncle Tom's Cabin* came out, in my twelfth year, the master of the school I attended gave me a copy; being himself, I presume, one of the rising party adverse to slavery. My father took it out of my hands, and I came to regard it much as I would a bottle labelled "Poison." In consequence I never read it in the days of its vogue, and I have to admit that since then, in mature years, I have not been able to continue it after beginning. The same motives, in great part, led to my being sent to a boarding-school in Maryland, near Hagerstown, which drew its pupils very

largely, though not exclusively, from the South. The environment would be upon the whole Southern. I remained there, however, only two years, my father becoming dissatisfied with my progress in mathematics. In 1854, therefore, I matriculated as a freshman at Columbia College in the city of New York, where I remained till I went to the Naval Academy.

My entrance into the navy was greatly against my father's wish. I do not remember all his arguments, but he told me he thought me much less fit for a military than for a civil profession, having watched me carefully. I think myself now that he was right; for, though I have no cause to complain of unsuccess, I believe I should have done better elsewhere. While thus more than dissenting from my choice, he held that a child should not be peremptorily thwarted in his scheme of life. Consequently, while he would not actively help me in the doubtful undertaking of obtaining an appointment, which depended then as now upon the representative from the congressional district, he gave me the means to go to Washington, and also two or three letters to personal friends; among them Jefferson Davis, then Secretary of War, and James Watson Webb, a prominent character in New York journalism and in politics, both state and national.

Thus equipped, I started for Washington on the first day of 1856, being then three months over fifteen. As I think now of my age, and more than usual diffidence, and of my omission, to win the favor of a politician who had constituents to reward, whereas to all my family practical politics were as foreign as

Sanskrit, I know not whether the situation were more comical or pathetic. On the way I foregathered with a Southern lad, some three years my senior, returning home from England, where he had been at school. He beguiled the time by stories of his experiences, to me passing strange; and I remember, in crossing the Susquehanna, which was then by ferry-boat, looking at the fields of ice fragments, I said it would be unpleasant to fall in. "I would sooner have a knife stuck into me," he replied. I wonder what became of him, for I never knew his name. Of course he entered the Confederate army; but what besides?

I remember my week's stay in Washington much as I suppose a man overboard remembers the incidents of that experience. Memory is an odd helpmate; why some circumstances take hold and others not is "one of those things no fellow can find out." I saw the member of Congress, who I find by reference to have been Ambrose S. Murray, representative of the district within which West Point lay. He received me kindly, but with the reserve characteristic of most interviews where one party desires a favor for which he has nothing in exchange to offer. I think, however, that Mr. Webb, with whom and his family I breakfasted one day, said some good words for me. Jefferson Davis was a graduate of the Military Academy, of 1827; and although his term there had overlapped my father's by only one year, his interest in everything pertaining to the army had maintained between them an acquaintance approaching intimacy. He therefore was very cordial to the boy before him,

and took me round to the office of the then Secretary of the Navy, Mr. James C. Dobbin, of North Carolina; just why I do not understand yet, as the Secretary could not influence my immediate object. Perhaps he felt the need of a friendly chat; for I remember that, after presenting me, the two sat down and discussed the President's Message, of which Davis expressed a warm approval. This being the time of the protracted contest over the Speakership, which ended in the election of Banks, I suppose the colleagues were talking about a document which was then ready, and familiar to them, but which was not actually sent to Congress until it organized, some weeks after this interview. Probably their conversation was the aftermath of a cabinet meeting.

I returned home with fairly sanguine hopes, which on the journey received a douche of cold water from an old gentleman, a distant connection of my family, to visit whom I stopped a few hours in Philadelphia. He asked about my chance of the appointment; and being told that it seemed good, he rejoined, "Well, I hope you won't get it. I have known many naval officers, captains and lieutenants, in different parts of the world"—for his time, he was then nearly eighty, he had travelled extensively—"I have talked much with them, and know that it is a profession with little prospect." Then he quoted Dr. Johnson: "No man will be a sailor who has contrivance enough to get himself into jail; for being in a ship is being in a jail with the chance of being drowned"; and further to overwhelm me, he clinched the saying

by a comment of his own. "In a ship of war you run the risk of being killed as well as that of being drowned." The interview left me a perplexed but not a wiser lad.

Late in the ensuing spring Mr. Murray wrote me that he would nominate me for the appointment. Just what determined him in my favor I do not certainly know; but, as I remember, Mr. Davis had authorized me to say to him that, if the place were given me, he would use his own influence with President Pierce to obtain for a nominee from his district a presidential appointment to the Military Academy. Mr. Murray replied that such a proposition was very acceptable to him, because the tendency among his constituents was much more to the army than to the navy. At that day, besides one cadet at West Point for each congressional district, which was in the gift of the representative, the law permitted the President a certain number of annual appointments, called "At Large"; the object being to provide for sons of military and naval officers, whose lack of political influence made it difficult otherwise to enter the school. This presidential privilege has since been extended to the Naval Academy, but had not then. The proposed interchange in my case, therefore, would be practically to give an officer's son an appointment at large in the navy. Whether this arrangement was actually carried out, I have never known nor inquired; but it has pleased me to believe, as I do, that I owed my entrance to the United States navy to the interposition of the first and only President of the Southern Confederacy, whose influence with

Mr. Pierce is a matter of history.

I entered the Naval Academy, as an "acting midshipman,"
September 30, 1856.

I

NAVAL CONDITIONS BEFORE THE WAR OF SECESSION

THE OFFICERS AND SEAMEN

Naval officers who began their career in the fifties of the past century, as I did, and who survive till now, as very many do, have been observant, if inconspicuous, witnesses of one of the most rapid and revolutionary changes that naval science and warfare have ever undergone. It has been aptly said that a naval captain who fought the Invincible Armada would have been more at home in the typical war-ship of 1840, than the average captain of 1840 would have been in the advanced types of the American Civil War.² The twenty years here chosen for comparison cover the middle period of the century which has but recently expired. Since that time progress has gone on in accelerating ratio; and if the consequent changes have been less radical in kind, they have been more extensive in scope. It is interesting to observe that within the same two decades, in 1854, occurred the formal visit of Commodore Perry to Japan, and the negotiations of the treaty

² J. R. Soley, *The Blockade and the Cruisers*, 1883. Scribner's, *Navy in the Civil War*.

bringing her fairly within the movement of Western civilization; starting her upon the path which has resulted in the most striking illustration yet given of the powers of modern naval instruments, ships and weapons, diligently developed and elaborated during the period that has since elapsed.

When I received my appointment to the Naval School at Annapolis, in the early part of the year 1856, the United States navy was under the influence of one of those spasmodic awakenings which, so far as action is concerned, have been the chief characteristic of American statesmanship in the matter of naval policy up to twenty years ago. Since then there has been a more continuous practical recognition of the necessity for a sustained and consistent development of naval power. This wholesome change has been coincident with, and doubtless largely due to, a change in appreciation of the importance of naval power in the realm of international relations, which, within the same period, has passed over the world at large. The United States of America began its career under the Constitution of 1789 with no navy; but in 1794 the intolerable outrages of the Barbary pirates, and the humiliation of having to depend upon the armed ships of Portugal for the protection of American trade, aroused Congress to vote the building of a half-dozen frigates, with the provision, however, that the building should stop if an arrangement with Algiers were reached. Not till 1798 was the navy separated from the War Department. The President at that date, John Adams, was, through his New England origin, in

profound sympathy with all naval questions; and, while minister to Great Britain, in 1785, had had continual opportunity to observe the beneficial effect of maritime activity and naval power upon that kingdom. He had also bitter experience of the insolence of its government towards our interests, based upon its conscious control of the sea. He thus came into office strongly biassed towards naval development. To the impulse given by him contributed also the outrageous course towards our commerce initiated by the French Directory, after Bonaparte's astounding campaigns in Italy had struck down all opposition to France save that of the mistress of the seas. The nation, as represented in Congress, woke up, rubbed, its eyes, and built a small number of vessels which did exemplary service in the subsequent quasi war with France. Provision was made for a further increase; and it is not too much to say that this beginning, if maintained, might have averted the War of 1812. But within four years revulsion came. Adams gave place to Jefferson and Madison, the leaders of a party which frankly and avowedly rejected a navy as an element of national strength, and saw in it only a menace to liberty. Save for the irrepressible marauding of the Barbary corsairs, and the impressment of our seamen by British ships-of-war, the remnant of Adams' ships would not improbably have been swept out of existence. This result was feared by naval officers of the day; and with what good reason is shown by the fact that, within six months of the declaration of the War in 1812, and when the party in control was determined that war there should be, a

proposition to increase the navy received but lukewarm support from the administration, and was voted down in Congress. The government, awed by the overwhelming numbers of the British fleet, proposed to save its vessels by keeping them at home; just as a few years before it had undertaken to save its commerce by forbidding its merchant-ships to go to sea.

Such policy with regard to a military service means to it not sleep, but death. The urgent remonstrances of three or four naval captains obtained a change of plan; and at the end of the year the President admitted that, for the very reasons advanced by them, the activity of a small squadron, skilfully directed, had insured the safe return of much the most part of our exposed merchant-shipping. It is not, however, such broad general results of sagacious management that bring conviction to nations and arouse them to action. Professionally, the cruise of Rodgers's squadron, unsuccessful in outward seeming, was a much more significant event, and much more productive, than the capture of the *Guerrière* by the *Constitution*; but it was this which woke up the people. The other probably would not have turned a vote in either House. As a military exploit the frigate victory was exaggerated, and not unnaturally; but no words can exaggerate its influence upon the future of the American navy. Here was something that men could see and understand, even though they might not correctly appreciate. Coinciding as the tidings did with the mortification of Hull's surrender at Detroit, they came at a moment which was truly psychological.

Bowed down with shame at reverse where only triumph had been anticipated, the exultation over victory where disaster had been more naturally awaited produced a wild reaction. The effect was decisive. Inefficient and dilatory as was much of the subsequent administration of the navy, there was never any further question of its continuance. And yet, from the ship which thus played the most determining part in the history of her service, it has been proposed to take her name, and give it to another, of newer construction; as though with the name could go also the association. Could any other *Victory* be Nelson's *Victory* to Great Britain? Can calling a man George Washington help to perpetuate the services of the one Washington? The last much-vaunted addition to the British fleet, the *Dreadnaught*, bears a family name extending back over two centuries, or more. She is one of a series reasonably perpetuated, ship after ship, as son after sire; a line of succession honored in the traditions of the nation. So there were *Victorys*, before the one whose revered hulk still maintains a hallowed association; but her individual connection with one event has set her apart. The name might be transferred, but with it the association cannot be transmitted. But not even the *Victory*, with all her clinging memories, did for the British navy what the *Constitution* did for the American.

There was thenceforward no longer any question about votes for the navy. Ships of the line, frigates, and sloops, were ordered to be built, and the impulse thus received never wholly died out. Still, as with all motives which in origin are emotional

rather than reasoned, there was lack of staying power. As the enthusiasm of the moment languished, there came languor of growth; or, more properly, of development. Continuance became routine in character, tending to reproduce contentedly the old types consecrated by the War of 1812. There was little conscious recognition of national exigencies, stimulating a demand that the navy, in types and numbers, should be kept abreast of the times. In most pursuits of life American intelligence has been persistently apt and quick in search of improvement; but, while such characteristics have not been absent from the naval service, they have been confined chiefly, and naturally, to the men engaged in the profession, and have lacked the outside support which immediate felt needs impart to movements in business or politics. Few men in civil life could have given an immediate reply to the question, Why do we need a navy? Besides, although the American people are aggressive, combative, even warlike, they are the reverse of military; out of sympathy with military tone and feeling. Consequently, the appearance of professional pride, the insistence upon the absolute necessity for professional training, which in the physician, lawyer, engineer, or other civil occupation is accepted as not only becoming, but conducive to uplifting the profession as a whole, is felt in the military man to be the obtrusion of an alien temperament, easily stigmatized as the arrogance of professional conceit and exclusiveness. The wise traditional jealousy of any invasion of the civil power by the military has no doubt played some part in this; but a healthy

vigilance is one thing, and morbid distrust another. Morbid distrust and unreasoned prepossession were responsible for the feebleness of the navy in 1812, and these feelings long survived. An adverse atmosphere was created, with results unfortunate to the nation, so far as the navy was important to national welfare or national progress.

Indeed, between the day of my entrance into the service, fifty years ago, and the present, nowhere is change more notable than in the matter of atmosphere; of the national attitude towards the navy and comprehension of its office. Then it was accepted without much question as part of the necessary lumber that every adequately organized maritime state carried, along with the rest of a national establishment. Of what use it was, or might be, few cared much to inquire. There was not sufficient interest even to dispute the necessity of its existence; although, it is true, as late as 1875 an old-time Jeffersonian Democrat repeated to me with conviction the master's dictum, that the navy was a useless appendage; a statement which its work in the War of Secession, as well on the Confederate as on the Union side, might seem to have refuted sufficiently and with abundant illustration. To such doubters, before the war, there was always ready the routine reply that a navy protected commerce; and American shipping, then the second in the world, literally whitened every sea with its snowy cotton sails, a distinctive mark at that time of American merchant shipping. In my first long voyage, in 1859, from Philadelphia to Brazil, it was no rare occurrence

to be becalmed in the doldrums in company with two or three of these beautiful semi-clipper vessels, their low black hulls contrasting vividly with the tall pyramids of dazzling canvas which rose above them. They needed no protection then, and none foresaw that within a decade, by the operations of a few small steam-cruisers, they would be swept from the seas, never to return. Everything was taken for granted, and not least that war was a barbarism of the past. From 1815 to 1850, the lifetime of a generation, international peace had prevailed substantially unbroken, despite numerous revolutionary movements internal to the states concerned; and it had been lightly assumed that these conditions would thenceforth continue, crowned as they had been by the great sacrament of peace, when the nations for the first time gathered under a common roof the fruits of their several industries in the World's Exposition of 1851. The shadows of disunion were indeed gathering over our own land, but for the most of us they carried with them no fear of war. American fight American? Never! Separation there might be, and with a common sorrow officers of both sections thought of it; but, brother shed the blood of brother? No! By 1859 the Crimean War had indeed intervened to shake these fond convictions; but, after all, rules have exceptions, and in the succeeding peace the British government, consistent with the prepossessions derived from the propaganda of Cobden, yielded perfectly gratuitously the principle that an enemy's commerce might be freely transported under a neutral flag, thereby wrenching away

prematurely one of the prongs of Neptune's trident. Surely we were on the road to universal peace.

San Francisco before and after its recent earthquake—at this moment of writing ten days ago—scarcely presented a greater contrast of experience than that my day has known, and the political condition and balance of the world now is as different from that of the period of which I have been writing as the new city will be from the old one it will replace at the Golden Gate. Of this universal change and displacement the most significant factor—at least in our Western civilization—has been the establishment of the German Empire, with its ensuing commercial, maritime, and naval development. To it certainly we owe the military impulse which has been transmitted everywhere to the forces of sea and land—an impulse for which, in my judgment, too great gratitude cannot be felt. It has braced and organized Western civilization for an ordeal as yet dimly perceived. But between 1850 and 1860 long desuetude of war, and confident reliance upon the commercial progress which freedom of trade had brought in its train, especially to Great Britain, had induced the prevalent feeling that to-morrow would be as to-day, and much more abundant. This was too consonant to national temperament not to pervade America also; and it was promoted by a distance from Europe and her complications much greater than now exists, and by the consistent determination not to be implicated in her concerns. All these factors went to constitute the atmosphere of indifference to military affairs in

general; and particularly to those external interests of which a navy is the outward and visible sign and champion.

I do not think there is error or exaggeration in this picture of the "environment" of the navy in popular appreciation at the time I entered. Under such conditions, which had obtained substantially since soon after the War of 1812, and which long disastrously affected even Great Britain, with all her proud naval traditions and maritime and colonial interests, a military service cannot thrive. Indifference and neglect tell on most individuals, and on all professions. The saving clauses were the high sense of duty and of professional integrity, which from first to last I have never known wanting in the service; while the beauty of the ships themselves, quick as a docile and intelligent animal to respond to the master's call, inspired affection and intensified professional enthusiasm. The exercises of sails and spars, under the varying exigencies of service, bewildering as they may have seemed to the uninitiated, to the appreciative possessed fascination, and were their own sufficient reward for the care lavished upon them. In their mute yet exact response was some compensation for external neglect; they were, so to say, the testimony of a good conscience; the assurance of professional merit, and of work well done, if scantily recognized. Poor and beloved sails and spars—*la joie de la manœuvre*, to use the sympathetic phrase of a French officer of that day—gone ye are with that past of which I have been speaking, and of which ye were a goodly symbol; but like other symptoms of the times, had we listened aright, we should

have heard the stern rebuke: Up and depart hence; this is not the place of your rest.

The result of all this had been a body of officers, and of men-of-war seamen, strong in professional sentiment, and admirably qualified in the main for the duties of a calling which in many of its leading characteristics was rapidly becoming obsolete. There was the spirit of youth, but the body of age. As a class, officers and men were well up in the use of such instruments as the country gave them; but the profession did not wield the corporate influence necessary to extort better instruments, and impotence to remedy produced acquiescence in, perhaps, more properly, submission to, an arrest of progress, the evils of which were clearly seen. Yet the salt was still there, nor had it lost its savor. The military professions are discouraged, even enjoined, against that combined independent action for the remedy of grievances which is the safeguard of civil liberty, but tends to sap the unquestioning obedience essential to unity of action under a single will—at once the virtue and the menace of a standing army. Naval officers had neither the privilege nor the habits which would promote united effort for betterment; but when individuals among them are found, like Farragut, Dupont, Porter, Dahlgren—to mention only a few names that became conspicuous in the War of Secession—there will be found also in civil and political life men who will become the channels through which the needs of the service will receive expression and ultimately obtain relief. The process is overslow

for perfect adequacy, but it exists. It may be asked, Was not the Navy Department constituted for this special purpose? Possibly; but experience has shown that sometimes it is effective, and sometimes it is not. There is in it no provision for a continuous policy. No administrative period of our naval history since 1812 has been more disastrously stagnant and inefficient than that which followed closely the War of Secession, with its extraordinary, and in the main well-directed, administrative energy. The deeds of Farragut, his compeers, and their followers, after exciting a moment's enthusiasm, were powerless to sustain popular interest. Reaction ruled, as after the War of 1812.

To whomsoever due, in the decade immediately preceding the War of Secession there were two notable attempts at regeneration which had a profound influence upon the fortunes of that contest. Of these, one affected the personnel of the navy, the other the material. It had for some time been recognized within the service that, owing partly to easy-going toleration of offenders, partly to the absence of authorized methods for dealing with the disabled, or the merely incompetent, partly also, doubtless, to the effect of general professional stagnation upon those naturally inclined to worthlessness, there had accumulated a very considerable percentage of officers who were useless; or, worse, unreliable. In measure, this was also due to habits of drinking, much more common in all classes of men then than now. Even within the ten years with which I am dealing, an officer not much my senior remarked to me on the great improvement in this

respect in his own experience; and my contemporaries will bear me out in saying that since then the advance has been so sustained that the evil now is practically non-existent. But then the compassionate expression, "A first-rate officer when he is not drinking," was ominously frequent; and in the generation before too little attention had been paid to the equally significant remark, that with a fool you know what to count on, but with one who drank you never knew.

But drink was far from the only cause. There were regular examinations, after six years of service, for promotion from the warrant of midshipman to a lieutenant's commission; but, that successfully passed, there was no further review of an officer's qualifications, unless misconduct brought him before a court-martial. Nor was there any provision for removing the physically incompetent. Before I entered the navy I knew one such, who had been bed-ridden for nearly ten years. He had been a midshipman with Farragut under Porter in the old *Essex*, when captured by the *Phæbe* and *Cherub*. A gallant boy, specially named in the despatch, he had such aptitude that at sixteen, as he told me himself, he wore an epaulette on the left shoulder—the uniform of a lieutenant at that time; and a contemporary assured me that in handling a ship he was the smartest officer of the deck he had ever known. But in early middle life disease overtook him, and, though flat on his back, he had been borne on the active list because there was nothing else to do with him. In that plight he was even promoted. There was another who, as

a midshipman, had lost a foot in the War of 1812, but had been carried on from grade to grade for forty years, until at the time I speak of he was a captain, then the highest rank in the navy. Possibly, probably, he never saw water bluer than that of the lakes, where he was wounded. The undeserving were not treated with quite the same indulgence. Those familiar with the *Navy Register* of those days will recall some half-dozen old die-hards, who figured from year to year at the head of the lieutenant's list; continuously "overslaughed," never promoted, but never dismissed. To deal in the same manner with such men as the two veterans first mentioned would have been insulting; the distinction of promotion had to be conceded.

But there were those also who, despite habits or inefficiency, slipped through even formal examination; commanders whose ships were run by their subordinates, lieutenants whose watch on deck kept their captains from sleeping, midshipmen whose unfitness made their retention unpardonable; for at their age to re-begin life was no hardship, much less injustice. Of one such the story ran that his captain, giving him the letter required by regulation, wrote, "Mr. So and So is a very excellent young gentleman, of perfectly correct habits, but nothing will make an officer of him." He answered his questions, however; and the board considered that they could not go beyond that fact. They passed him in the face of the opinion of a superior of tried efficiency who had had his professional conduct under prolonged observation. I never knew this particular man professionally,

but the general estimate of the service confirmed his captain's opinion. Twenty or thirty years later, I was myself one of a board called to deal with a precisely similar case. The letter of the captain was explicitly condemnatory and strong; but the president of the board, a man of exemplary rectitude, was vehement even in refusing to act upon it, and his opinion prevailed. Some years afterwards the individual came under my command, and proved to be of so eccentric worthlessness that I thought him on the border-line of insanity. He afterwards disappeared, I do not know how.

Talking of examinations, a comical incident came under my notice immediately after the War of Secession, when there were still employed a large number of those volunteer officers who had honorably and usefully filled up the depleted ranks of the regular service—an accession of strength imperatively needed. There were among them, naturally, inefficient as well as efficient. One had applied for promotion, and a board of three, among them myself, was assembled to examine. Several commonplace questions in seamanship were put to him, of which I now remember only that he had no conception of the difference between a ship moored, and one lying at single anchor—a subject as pertinent to-day as a hundred years ago. After failing to explain this, he expressed his wish not to go further; whereupon one of the board asked why, if ignorant of these simple matters, he had applied for examination. His answer was, "I did not apply for examination, I applied for promotion." Even in this case,

when the applicant had left the room, the president of the board, then a somewhat notorious survival of the unfittest, long since departed this life, asked whether we refused to pass him. The third member, himself a volunteer officer, and myself, said we did. "Well," he rejoined, "you know this man may get a chance at *you* some day." This prudent consideration, however, did not save him.

Such tolerance towards the unfit, the reluctance to strike the individual in the interests of the community, was but a special, and not very flagrant, instance of the sympathy evoked for much worse offenders—murderers, and defrauders—in civil life. In such cases, the average man, except when personally affected, sides unreasonably with the sufferer and against the public; witness the easily signed petitions for pardon which flow in. It can be understood that in a public employment, civil or military, there will usually be reluctance to punish, and especially to take the bread out of the mouths of a man and his family by ejection. Usually only immediate personal interest in efficiency can supply the needed hardness of heart. Speaking after a very extensive and varied inside experience of courts-martial, I can say most positively that their tendency is not towards the excessive severity which I have heard charged against them by an eminent lawyer. On the contrary, the difficulty is to keep the members up to the mark against their natural and professional sympathies. Their superiors in the civil government have more often to rebuke undue leniency. How much more hard when, instead of an

evil-doer, one had only to deal with a good-tempered, kindly ignoramus, or one perhaps who drew near the border-line of slipshod adequacy; and especially when to do so was to initiate action, apparently invidious, and probably useless, as in cases I have cited. It was easier for a captain or first lieutenant to nurse such a one along through a cruise, and then dismiss him to his home, thanking God, like Dogberry, that you are rid of a fool, and trusting you may see him no more. But this confidence may be misplaced; even his ghost may return to plague you, or your conscience. Basil Hall tells an interesting story in point. When himself about to pass for lieutenant, in 1808, while in an ante-room awaiting his summons, a candidate came out flushed and perturbed. Hall was called in, and one of the examining captains said to him, "Mr. —, who has just gone out, could not answer a question which we will put to you." He naturally looked for a stunner, and was surprised at the extremely commonplace problem proposed to him. From the general incident he presumed his predecessor had been rejected, but when the list was published saw his name among the passed. Some years later he met one of the examiners, who in the conversation recalled to him the circumstances. "We hesitated," he said, "whether to let him go through: but we did, and I voted for him. A few weeks later I saw him gazetted second lieutenant of a sloop-of-war, and a twinge of compunction seized me. Not long afterwards I read also the loss of that ship, with all on board. I never have known how it happened, but I cannot rid myself

of an uneasy feeling that it may have been in that young man's watch." He added, "Mr. Hall, if ever you are employed as I then was, do not take your duties as lightly as I did."

Sometimes retribution does not assume this ghastly form, but shows the humorous side of her countenance; for she has two faces, like the famous ship that was painted a different color on either side and always tacked at night, that the enemy might imagine two ships off their coast. I recall—many of us recall—a well-known character in the service, "Bobby," who was a synonyme for inefficiency. He is long since in his grave, where reminiscence cannot disturb him; and the Bobby can reveal him only to those who knew him as well and better than I, and not to an unsympathetic public. Well, Bobby after much indulgence had been retired from active service by that convulsive effort at re-establishment known as the Retiring Board of 1854–55, to which I am coming if ever I see daylight through this thicket of recollections that seems to close round me as I proceed, instead of getting clearer. The action of that board was afterwards extensively reviewed, and among the data brought before the reviewers was a letter from a commander, who presumably should have known better, warmly endorsing Bobby. In consequence of this, and perhaps other circumstances, Bobby was restored to an admiring service; but the Department, probably through some officer who appreciated the situation, sent him to his advocate as first lieutenant—that is, as general manager and right-hand man. The joke was somewhat grim, and

grimly resented. It fell to me a little later to see the commander on a matter of duty. He received me in his cabin, his feet swathed on a chair, his hands gnarled and knotted with gout or rheumatism, from which he was a great sufferer. Business despatched, we drifted into talk, and got on the subject of Bobby. His face became distorted. "I suppose the Department thinks it has done a very funny thing in sending me him as first lieutenant; but I tell you, Mr. Mahan, every word I wrote was perfectly true. There is nothing about a ship from her hold to her trucks that Bobby don't know; but—" here fury took possession of him, and he vociferated—"put him on deck, handling men, he is the d—dest fool that ever man laid eyes on." How far his sense of injury biassed his judgments as to the acquirements of his protégé, I cannot say; but a cruise or two before I had happened to hear from eye-witnesses of Bobby's appearance in public after his restoration as first lieutenant in charge of the deck. On the occasion in question he was to exercise the whole crew at some particular manœuvre. Taking his stand on the hawse-block, he drew from his pocket a small note-book, cast upon it his eye and announced—doubtless through the trumpet—"Man the fore-royal braces!" Again a pause, and further reference. "Man the main-royal braces!" Again a pause: "Man the mizzen-royal braces—Man *all* the royal braces." It is quite true, however, that there may be plenty of knowledge with lack of power to apply it professionally—a fact observable in all callings, but one which examination alone will not elicit. I knew such a one who said

of himself, "Before I take the trumpet I know what ought to be said and done, but with the trumpet in my hand everything goes away from me." This was doubtless partly stage-fright; but stage-fright does not last where there is real aptitude. This man, of very marked general ability, esteemed and liked by all, finally left the navy; and probably wisely. On the other hand, I remember a very excellent seaman—and officer—telling me that the poorest officer he had ever known tacked ship the best. So men differ.

Thus it happened, through the operation of a variety of causes, that by the early fifties there had accumulated on the lists of the navy, in every grade, a number of men who had been tried in the balance of professional judgment and found distinctly wanting. Not only was the public—the nation—being wronged by the continuance in positions of responsibility of men who could not meet an emergency, or even discharge common duties, but there was the further harm that they were occupying places which, if vacated, could be at once filled by capable men waiting behind them. Fortunately, this had come to constitute a body of individual grievance among the deserving, which counterbalanced the natural sympathy with the individual incompetent. The remedy adopted was drastic enough, although in fact only an application of the principle of selection in a very guarded form. Unhappily, previous neglect to apply selection through a long series of years had now occasioned conditions in which it had to be used on a huge scale, and in the most invidious manner—the selecting out of the unfit. It was therefore

easy for cavillers to liken this process to a trial at law, in which unfavorable decision was a condemnation without the accused being heard; and, of course, once having received this coloring, the impression could not be removed, nor the method reconciled to a public having Anglo-Saxon traditions concerning the administration of justice. A board of fifteen was constituted—five captains, five commanders, and five lieutenants. These were then the only grades of commissioned officers, and representation from them all insured, as far as could be, an adequate acquaintance with the entire personnel of the navy. The board sat in secret, reaching its own conclusions by its own methods; deciding who were, and who were not, fit to be carried longer on the active list. Rejections were of three kinds: those wholly removed, and those retired on two different grades of pay, called "Retired," and "Furloughed." The report was accepted by the government and became operative.

This occurred a year or two before I entered the Naval School: and, as I was already expecting to do so, I read with an interest I well recall the lists of person unfavorably affected. Of course, neither then nor afterwards had I knowledge to form an independent opinion upon the merits of the cases; but as far as I could gather in the immediately succeeding years, from different officers, the general verdict was that in very few instances had injustice been done. Where I had the opportunity of verifying the mistakes cited to me, I found instead reason rather to corroborate than to impugn the action of the board; but, of course, in so

large a review as it had to undertake, even a jury of fifteen experts can scarcely be expected never to err. In the navy it was a first, and doubtless somewhat crude, attempt to apply the method of selection which every business man or corporation uses in choosing employes; an arbitrary conclusion, based upon personal knowledge and observation, or upon adequate information. But in private affairs such decisions are not regarded as legal judgment, nor rejection as condemnation; and there is no appeal. The private interest of the employer is warrant that he will do the best he can for his business. This presumption does not lie in the case of public affairs, although after the most searching criticism the action of the board of fifteen might probably be quoted to prove that selection for promotion could safely be trusted at all times to similar means. I mean, that such a body would never recommend an unfit man for promotion, and in three cases out of five would choose very near the best man. But no such system can work unless a government have the courage of its findings; for private and public opinion will inevitably constitute itself a court of appeal. In Great Britain, where the principle of selection has never been abandoned, in the application the Admiralty is none the less constrained—browbeaten, I fancy, would hardly be too strong a word—by opinion outside. P. has been promoted, say the service journals; but why was A. passed over, or F., or K.? Choice is difficult, indeed, in peace times; but years sap efficiency, and for the good of the nation it is imperative to get men along while in the vigor of life, which will never be effected

by the slow routine in which each second stands heir to the first. P. possibly may not be better than A. or K., but the nation will profit more, and in a matter vital to it, than if P., whose equality may be conceded, has to wait for the whole alphabet to die out of his way. The injustice, if so it be, to the individual must not be allowed to impede the essential prosperity of the community.

In 1854–55, the results of a contrary system had reached proportions at once disheartening and comical. It then required fourteen years after entrance to reach a lieutenant's commission, the lowest of all. That is, coming in as a midshipman at fifteen, not till twenty-nine, after ten to twelve years probably on a sea-going vessel, was a man found fit, by official position, to take charge of a ship at sea, or to command a division of guns. True, the famous Billy Culmer, of the British navy, under a system of selection found himself a midshipman still at fifty-six, and then declined a commission on the ground that he preferred to continue senior midshipman rather than be the junior lieutenant;³

³ This statement when written rested on my childhood's memory only. A few months later there came into my hands a volume of the publications of the British Navy Records Society, containing the Recollections of Commander James Anthony Gardner. 1775–1814. Gardner was at one time shipmates with Culmer, who it appears eventually received a commission. By Gardner's reckoning he would have been far along in the forties in 1790. The following is the description of him. "Billy was about five feet eight or nine, and stooped; hard features, marked with the small-pox; blind in an eye, and a wen nearly the size of an egg under his cheek-bone. His dress on a Sunday was a mate's uniform coat, with brown velvet waistcoat and breeches; boots with black tops; a gold-laced hat, and a large hanger by his side like the sword of John-a-Gaunt. He was proud of being the oldest midshipman in the navy, and looked upon young captains and lieutenants with contempt."

but the injustice, if so it were, to Billy, and to many others, had put the ships into the hands of captains in the prime of life. Of the historic admirals of that navy, few had failed to reach a captaincy in their twenties. *Per contra*, I was told the following anecdote by an officer of our service whose name was—and is, for he still lives—a synonyme for personal activity and professional seamanship, but who waited his fourteen years for a lieutenantcy. On one occasion the ship in which he returned to Norfolk from a three-years' cruise was ordered from there to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, to go out of commission. For some cause almost all the lieutenants had been detached, the cruise being thought ended. It became necessary, therefore, to intrust the charge of the deck to him and other "passed" midshipmen, and great was the shaking of heads among old stagers over the danger that ship was to run. If this were exceptional, it would not be worth quoting, but it was not. A similar routine in the British navy, in a dry-rot period of a hundred years before, had induced a like head-wagging and exchange of views when one of its greatest admirals, Hawke, was first given charge of a squadron; being then already a man of mark, and four years older than Nelson at the Nile. But he was younger than the rule, and so distrusted.

The vacancies made by the wholesale action of 1854 remedied this for a while. The lieutenants who owed their rank to it became such after seven or eight years, or at, twenty-three or four; and this meant really passing out of pupilage into manhood. The change being effected immediately, anticipated the reaction in

public opinion and in Congress, which rejected the findings of the board and compelled a review of the whole procedure. Many restorations were made; and, as these swelled the lists beyond the number then authorized by law, there was established a reduced pay for those whose recent promotion made them in excess. For them was adopted, in naval colloquialism, the inelegant but suggestive term "jackass" lieutenants. It should be explained to the outsider, perhaps even many professional readers now may not know, that the word was formerly used for a class of so-called frigates which intervened between the frigate-class proper and the sloop-of-war proper, and like all hybrids, such as the armored cruiser, shared more in the defects than in the virtues of either. It was therefore not a new coinage, and its uncomplimentary suggestion applied rather to the grudging legislation than to the unlucky victims. Of course, promotion was stopped till this block was worked off; but the immediate gain was retained. Before the trouble came on afresh the War of Secession, causing a large number of Southerners to leave the service, introduced a very different problem;—namely, how to find officers enough to meet the expansion of the navy caused by the vast demands of the contest. The men of my time became lieutenants between twenty and twenty-three. My own commission was dated a month before my twenty-first birthday, and with what good further prospects, even under the strict rule of seniority promotion, is evident, for before I was twenty-five I was made lieutenant-commander, corresponding to major in the army. Those were cheerful days

in this respect for the men who struck the crest of the wave; but already the symptoms of inevitable reaction to old conditions of stagnancy were observable to those careful to heed.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the benefit of this measure to the nation, through the service, despite the subsequent reactionary legislation. By a single act a large number of officers were advanced from the most subordinate and irresponsible positions to those which called all their faculties into play. "Responsibility," said one of the most experienced admirals the world has known, "is the test of a man's courage"; and where the native fitness exists nothing so educates for responsibility as the having it. The responsibility of the lieutenant of the watch differs little from that of the captain in degree, and less in kind. To early bearing of responsibility Farragut attributed in great part his fearlessness in it, which was well known to the service before his hour of strain. It was much that the government found ready for the extreme demands of the war a number of officers, who, instead of supervising the washing of lower decks and stowing of holds during their best years, had been put betimes in charge of the ship. From there to the captain's berth was but a small step. "Passed midshipman," says one of Cooper's characters, "is a good grade to reach, but a bad one to stop in." From a fate little better than this a large and promising number of young officers were thus rescued for the commands and responsibilities of the War of Secession.

II

NAVAL CONDITIONS BEFORE THE WAR OF SECESSION

THE VESSELS

Less far-reaching, because men are greater than ships, but still of immense timeliness as a preparative to the war, was the reconstitution of the material of the navy, practically coincident with the regeneration of the personnel. The causes which led to this are before my time, and beyond my contemporary knowledge. They therefore form no part of my theme; but the result, which is more important than the process, was strictly contemporary with me. It marked a definite parting with sails as the motive reliance of a ship-of-war, but at the same time was characterized by an extreme conservatism, which then was probably judicious, and certainly represented the naval opinion of the day. It must be remembered that the Atlantic was first crossed under steam in 1837, a feat shortly before thought impossible on account of coal consumption, and that the screw-propeller was not generally adopted till several years afterwards. In 1855 the transatlantic liners were still paddlers;

but the paddle-wheel shaft was far above the water, and so, in necessary consequence, was much of the machinery which transmitted power from the boilers to the wheel. All battle experience avouched the probability of disabling injury under such exposure; not more certain, but probably more fatal, than that to spars and sails of sailing-ships. Despite this drawback, paddle wheel men-of-war were being built between 1840 and 1850. Our own navy had of these two large and powerful vessels, sisters, the *Missouri* and the *Mississippi*. Singularly enough, both met the same end, by fire; the *Missouri* being burned in the Bay of Gibraltar in 1843, the *Mississippi* in the river whence she took her name, in the course of Farragut's passage of the batteries at Port Hudson in 1863. This engagement marked the end of the admiral's achievements in the river, throughout which, beginning with the passage of the forts and the capture of New Orleans, the *Mississippi* had done good work. At the time of her destruction, the present Admiral Dewey was her first lieutenant. Besides these two we had the *Susquehanna*, "paddle-wheel steam-frigate," which also served manfully through the war, and was in commission after it. It was she that carried General Sherman on his mission to Mexico in 1866. As usual, the principal European navies had built many more of these vessels; that is, had adopted improvements more readily than we did. During my first cruise after graduation, on the coast of Brazil, 1859–61, the British squadron there was composed chiefly of paddlers; the flag-ship *Leopard* being one. As I remember, there

was only one screw-steamer, the sloop-of-war *Curaçao*.

By that time, however, the paddlers were only survivals; but it may be noted, in passing, with reference to the cry of obsolescence so readily raised in our day, that these survivals did yeoman service in the War of Secession. It is possible to be too quick in discarding, as well as too slow in adopting. By 1850 the screw had made good its position; and the difficulty which had impeded the progress of steam in men-of-war disappeared when it became possible to place all machinery below water. There were, however, many improvements still to come, before it could be frankly and fully accepted as the sole motive power. It is not well to let go with one hand till sure of your grip with the other. So in the early days of electric lighting prudent steamship companies kept their oil-lamps trimmed and filled in the brackets alongside of the electric globes. Apart from the problem experienced by the average man—and governments are almost always averages in adjusting his action to novel conditions, the science of steam-enginery was still very backward. Notably, the expenditure of coal was excessive; to produce a given result in miles travelled, or speed attained, much more had to be burned than now, a condition to which contributed also the lack of rigidity in the wooden hulls, which still held their ground. Sails were very expensive articles, as I heard said by an accomplished officer of the olden days; but they were less costly than coal. Steam therefore was accepted at the first only as an accessory, for emergencies. It was too evident for question that in battle

a vessel independent of the wind would have an unqualified advantage over one dependent; though an early acquaintance of mine, a sailmaker in the navy, a man of unusual intelligence and tried courage, used to maintain that steam would never prevail. Small steamers, he contended, would accompany sailing fleets, to tow vessels becalmed, or disabled in battle; a most entertaining instance of professional prepossession. What would be his reflections, had he survived till this year of grace, to see only six sailmakers on the active list of the navy, the last one appointed in 1888, and not one of them afloat. Likewise, in breasting the continuous head-winds which mark some ocean districts, or traversing the calms of others, there would be gain; but for the most part sailing, it was thought, was sufficiently expeditious, decidedly cheaper, and more generally reliable; for steamers "broke down." Admiral Baudin; a French veteran of the Napoleonic period, was very sarcastic over the uncertainties of action of the steamers accompanying his sailing frigates, when he attacked Fort San Juan de Ulloa, off Vera Cruz in 1839; and since writing these words I have come across the following quotation, of several years later, from the London *Guardian*, which is republishing some of its older news under the title "'Tis Sixty Years Since."

"Naval manœuvres in 1846. The Squadron of Evolution is one of the topics of the present week (June 10, 1846). Its arrival in the Cove of Cork, after a cruise which has tested by every variety of weather the sailing qualities of

the vessels, has furnished the world with a few particulars of its doings, and with some materials for speculating on the problems it was sent out to solve. The result, as far as it goes, is certainly unfavorable to the exclusive prevalence of steam agency in naval warfare. Sailing ships, it is seen, can do things which steamers, as at present constructed, cannot accomplish. They can keep the sea when steamers cannot. But the screw-steamer, which is reported to have astonished everybody, is certainly an exception. Perhaps by this contrivance the rapidity and convenience of steam locomotion may be combined with the power and stability of our huge sailing batteries."

Under convictions thus slowly recasting, the first big steam ships-of-war carried merely "auxiliary" engines; were in fact sailing vessels, of the types in use for over a century, into which machinery was introduced to meet occasional emergencies. In some cases, probably in many, ships already built as sailers were lengthened and engined. As late as 1868 we were station-mates with one such, the *Rodney*, of 90 guns, then the flag-ship of the British China squadron; and we had already met, another, the *Princess Royal*, at the Cape of Good Hope, homeward bound. She, however, had been built as a steamer. She was a singularly handsome vessel, of her majestic type; and, as she lay close by us, I remember commenting on her appearance to one of my messmates, poor Stewart, who afterwards went down in the *Oneida*. "Yes," he replied, "she possesses several elements of the sublime." They were certainly imposing creations, with their

double and treble tiers of guns, thrusting their black muzzles through the successive ports which, to the number of fifteen to twenty, broke through the two broad white hands that from bow to stern traversed the blackness of their hulls; above which rose spars as tall and broad as ever graced the days of Nelson. To make the illusion of the past as complete as possible, and the dissemblance from the sailing ship as slight, the smoke-stack—or funnel—was telescopic, permitting it to be lowered almost out of sight. For those who can recall these predecessors of the modern battle-ships, the latter can make slight claim to beauty or impressiveness; yet, despite the ugliness of their angular broken sky-line, they have a gracefulness all their own, when moving slowly in still water. I remember a dozen years ago watching the French Mediterranean fleet of six or eight battle-ships leaving the harbor of Villefranche, near Nice. There was some manœuvring to get their several stations, during which, here and there, a vessel lying quiet waiting her opportunity would glide forward with a dozen slow turns of the screws, not agitating the water beyond a light ripple at the bows. The bay at the moment was quiet as a mill-pond, and it needed little imagination to prompt recognition of the identity of dignified movement with that of a swan making its leisurely way by means equally unseen; no turbulent display of energy, yet suggestive of mysterious power.

Before the War of Secession, and indeed for twenty years after it, the United States never inclined to the maintenance

of squadrons, properly so-called. It is true, a dozen fine ships-of-the-line were built during the sail period, but they never sailed together; and the essence of the battle-ship, in all eras, is combined action. Our squadrons, till long after I entered the navy, were simply aggregations of vessels, no two of which were necessarily of the same size or class. When a ship-of-the-line went to sea—which never happened in my time—she went without mates, a palpable paradox; a ship-of-the-line, which to no line belonged. Ours was a navy of single, isolated cruisers; and under that condition we had received a correct tradition that, whatever the nominal class of an American ship-of-war, she should be somewhat stronger than the corresponding vessels built by other nations. Each cruiser, therefore, would bring superior force to any field of battle at all possible to her. This was a perfectly just military conception, to which in great measure we owed our successes of 1812. The same rule does not apply to fleets, which to achieve the like superiority rely upon united action, and upon tactical facility obtained by the homogeneous qualities of the several ships, enabling them to combine greater numbers upon a part of the enemy. Therefore Great Britain, which so long ruled the world by fleets, attached less importance to size in the particular vessel. Class for class, her ships were weaker than those of her enemies, but in fleet action they usually won. At the period of which I am writing, the screw-propeller, having fairly established its position, prompted a reconstruction of the navy, with no change of the principles just mentioned.

The cruiser idea dictated the classes of vessels ordered, and the idea of relative size prescribed their dimensions. There were to be six steam-frigates of the largest class, six steam-sloops, and six smaller vessels, a precise title for which I do not know. I myself have usually called them by the French name *corvette*, which has a recognized place in English marine phraseology, and means a sloop-of-war of the smaller class. A transfer of terms accompanying a change of system is apt to be marked by anomalies.

These eighteen vessels were the nucleus of the fighting force with which the government met the war of 1861. In the frigates and sloops steam was purely auxiliary; they had every spar and sail of the sailing ships to which they corresponded. Four of the larger sloops—the *Hartford*, *Richmond*, *Brooklyn*, and *Pensacola*—constituted the backbone of Farragut's fleet throughout his operations in the Mississippi. The *Lancaster*, one of the finest of these five sisters, was already in the Pacific, and there remained throughout the contest; while the *San Jacinto*, being of different type and size, was employed rather as a cruiser than for the important operations of war. It was she that arrested the Confederate commissioners, Slidell and Mason, on board the British mail-steamer *Trent*, in 1861. The corvettes for the most part were also employed as cruisers, being at once less effective in battery, for river work, and swifter. They alone of the vessels built in the fifties were engined for speed, as speed went in those days; but their sail power also was ample, though

somewhat reduced. One of them, the *Iroquois*, accompanied Farragut to New Orleans, as did a sister ship to her, the *Oneida*, which was laid down in 1861, after many Southern Senators and Representatives had left their seats in Congress and the secession movement became ominous of war; when it began to be admitted that perhaps, after all, for sufficient cause, brothers might shed the blood of brothers.

The steam-frigates were of too deep draught to be of much use in the shoal waters, to which the nature of the hostilities and the character of the Southern coast confined naval operations. Being extremely expensive in upkeep, with enormous crews, and not having speed under steam to make them effective chasers, they were of little avail against an enemy who had not, and could not have, any ships at sea heavy enough to compete with them. The *Wabash* of this class bore the flag of Admiral Dupont at the capture of Port Royal; and after the fight the negroes who had witnessed it on shore reported that when "that checker-sided ship," following the elliptical course prescribed to the squadron for the engagement, came abreast the enemy's works, the gunners, after one experience, took at once to cover. No barbette or merely embrasured battery of that day could stand up against the twenty or more heavy guns carried on each broadside by the steam-frigates, if these could get near enough. At New Orleans, even the less numerous pieces of the sloops beat down opposition so long as they remained in front of Fort St. Philip and close to; but when they passed on, so the first lieutenant of one

of them told me, the enemy returned to his guns and hammered them severely. This showed that the fort was not seriously injured nor its armament decisively crippled, but that the personnel was completely dominated by the fire of many heavy guns during the critical period required for the smaller as well as larger vessels to pass. As most of the river work was, of this character, the broadsides of the sloops were determinative, and those of the frigates would have been more so, could they have been brought to the scene; but they could not. Much labor was expended in the attempt to drag the *Colorado*, sister ship to the *Wabash*, across the bar of the Mississippi, but fruitlessly.

For the reason named, the screw-frigates built in the fifties had little active share in the Civil War. Were they then, from a national stand-point, uselessly built? Not unless preparation for war is to be rejected, and reliance placed upon extemporized means. To this resort our people have always been inclined to trust unduly, owing to a false or partial reading of history; but to it they were excusably compelled by the extensive demands of the War of Secession, which could scarcely have been anticipated. At the time these frigates were built, they were, by their dimensions and the character of their armaments, much the most formidable ships of their class afloat, or as yet designed. Though correctly styled frigates—having but one covered deck of guns—they were open to the charge, brought against our frigates in 1812 by the British, of being ships-of-the-line in disguise; and being homogeneous in qualities, they would, in acting together, have

presented a line of battle extorting very serious consideration from any probable foreign enemy. It was for such purpose they were built; and it was no reproach to their designers that, being intended to meet a probable contingency, they were too big for one which very few men thought likely. At that moment, when the portentous evolution of naval material which my time has witnessed was but just beginning, they were thoroughly up-to-date, abreast and rather ahead of the conclusions as yet reached by contemporary opinion. The best of compliments was paid them by the imitation of other navies; for, when the first one was finished, we sent her abroad on exhibition, much like a hen cackling over its last performance, with the result that we had not long to congratulate ourselves on the newest and best thing. It is this place in a long series of development which gives them their historical interest.

But if the frigates were unfitted to the particular emergency of a civil contest, scarcely to be discerned as imminent in 1855, the advantage of preparation for general service is avouched by the history of the first year of hostilities, even so exceptional as those of 1861 and 1862. Within a year of the first Bull Run, Farragut's squadron had fought its way from the mouth of the Mississippi to Vicksburg. That the extreme position was not held was not the fault of the ships, but of backwardness in other undertakings of the nation. All the naval vessels that subdued New Orleans had been launched and ready before the war, except the *Oneida* and the gunboats; and to attribute any determinative effect in

such operations to the gunboats, with their one heavy gun, is to misunderstand the conditions. Even a year later, at the very important passage of Port Hudson, the fighting work was done by the *Hartford*, *Richmond*, *Mississippi*, and *Monongahela*; of which only the last named, and least powerful, was built after the war began. It would be difficult to overrate the value, material and moral, of the early successes which led the way to the opening of the great river, due to having the ships and officers ready. So the important advantages obtained by the capture of Port Royal in South Carolina, and of Hatteras Inlet in North Carolina, within the first six months, were the results of readiness, slight and inadequate as that was in reference to anything like a great naval war.

A brief analysis of the composition of the navy at the opening of the War of Secession, will bring out still more vividly how vitally important to the issue were the additions of the decade 1850–60. In March, 1861, when Lincoln was inaugurated, the available ships-of-war at sea, or in the yards, numbered sixty-one. Of these thirty-four were sailing vessels, substantially worthless; although, as the commerce of the world was still chiefly carried on by sailing ships, they could be of some slight service against these attempting to pass a blockade. For the most part, however, they were but scarecrows, if even respected as such. Of the twenty-seven steamers, only six dated from before 1850; the remainder were being built when I entered the Naval Academy in September, 1856. Their construction, with all that it

meant, constituted a principal part of the environment into which I was then brought, of which the recasting of the list of officers was the other most important and significant feature. Both were revolutionary in character, and prophetic of further changes quite beyond the foresight of contemporaries. From this point of view, the period in question has the character of an epoch, initiated, made possible, by the invention of the screw-propeller; which, in addition to the better nautical qualities associated with it, permitted the defence of the machinery by submersion, and of the sides of the ship by the application of armor. In this lay the germ of the race between the armor and the gun, involving almost directly the attempt to reach the parts which armor cannot protect, the underwater body, by means of the torpedo. The increases of weight induced by the competition of gun and armor led necessarily to increase of size, which in turn lent itself to increases of speed that have been pushed beyond the strictly necessary, and at all events are neither militarily nor logically involved in the progress made. It has remained to me always a matter of interest and satisfaction that I first knew the navy, was in close personal contact and association with it, in this period of unconscious transition; and that to the fact of its being yet incomplete I have owed the experience of vessels, now wholly extinct, of which it would be no more than truth to say that in all essential details they were familiar to the men of two hundred years ago. Nay, in their predecessors of that date, as transmitted to us by contemporary prints, it is easy to trace the development,

in form, of the ships I have known from the mediæval galley; and this, were the records equally complete, would doubtless find its rudimentary outlines in the triremes of the ancient world. Of this evolution of structure clear evidences remain also in terminology, even now current; survivals which, if the facts were unknown, would provoke curiosity and inquiry as to their origin, as physiologists seek to reconstruct the past of a race from scanty traces still extant.

I have said that the character of the ships then building constituted a chief part of my environment in entering the navy. The effect was inevitable, and amounted in fact simply to making me a man of my period. My most susceptible years were colored by the still lingering traditions of the sail period, and of the "marling-spike seaman;" not that I, always clumsy with my fingers, had any promise of ever distinguishing myself with the marling-spike. This expressive phrase, derived from its chief tool, characterized the whole professional equipment of the then mechanic of the sea, of the man who, given the necessary rope-yarns, and the spars shaped by a carpenter, could take a bare hull as she lay for the first time quietly at anchor from the impetus of her launch, and equip her for sea without other assistance; "parbuckle" on board her spars lying alongside her in the stream, fit her rigging, bend her sails, stow her hold, and present her all a-taunt-o to the men who were to sail her. The navigation of a ship thus equipped was a field of seamanship apart from that of the marling-spike; but the men who sailed her to all parts of the

earth were expected to be able to do all the preliminary work themselves, often did do it, and considered it quite as truly a part of their business as the handling her at sea. Of course, in equipping ships, as in all other business, specialization had come in with progress; there were rope-makers, there were riggers who took the ropes ready-made and fitted them for the ship, and there were stevedores to stow holds, etc.; but the tradition ran that the seaman should be able on a pinch to do all this himself, and the tradition kept alive the practice, which derived from the days not yet wholly passed away when he might, and often did, have to refit his vessel in scenes far distant from any help other than his own, and without any resources save those which his ready wit could adapt from materials meant for quite different uses. How to make a jib-boom do the work of a topsail-yard, or to utilize spare spars in rigging a jury-rudder, were specimens of the problems then presented to the aspiring seaman. It was somewhere in the thirties, not so very long before my time, that a Captain Rous, of the British navy, achieved renown—I would say immortal, were I not afraid that most people have forgotten—by bringing his frigate home from Labrador to England after losing her rudder. It is said that he subsequently ran for Parliament, and when on the hustings some doubter asked about his political record, he answered, "I am Captain Rous who brought the *Pique* across the Atlantic without a rudder." Of course the reply was lustily cheered, and deservedly; for in such seas, with a ship dependent upon sails only, it was a splendid, if somewhat reckless

achievement. Cooper, in his *Homeward Bound*, places the ship dismasted on the coast of Africa. Close at hand, but on the beach, lies a wrecked vessel with her spar standing; and there is no exaggeration in the words he puts into the mouth of Captain Truck, as he looked upon these resources: "The seaman who, with sticks, and ropes, and blocks enough, cannot rig his ship, might as well stay ashore and publish an hebdomadal."

Such was the marling-spike seaman of the days of Cooper and Marryat, and such was still the able seaman, the "A.B.," of 1855. It was not indeed necessary, nor expected, that most naval officers should do such things with their own hands; but it was justly required that they should know when a job of marling-spike seamanship was well or ill done, and be able to supervise, when necessary. Napoleon is reported to have said that he could judge personally whether the shoes furnished his soldiers were well or ill made; but he needed not to be a shoemaker. Marryat, commenting on one of his characters, says that he had seldom known an officer who prided himself on his "practical" knowledge who was at the same time a good navigator; and that such too often "lower the respect due to them by assuming the Jack Tar." Oddly enough, lunching once with an old and distinguished British admiral, who had been a midshipman while Marryat still lived, he told me that he remembered him well; his reputation, he added, was that of "an excellent seaman, but not much of an officer," an expressive phrase, current in our own service, and which doubtless has its equivalent in all maritime

languages.

In my early naval life I came into curious accidental contact with just such a person as Marryat described. I was still at the Academy, within a year of graduation, and had been granted a few days' leave at Christmas. Returning by rail, there seated himself alongside me a gentleman who proved to be a lieutenant from the flag-ship of the Home Squadron, going to Washington with despatches. Becoming known to each other, he began to question me as to what new radicalisms were being fostered in Annapolis. "Are they still wasting the young men's time over French? I would not permit them to learn any other language than their own. And how about seamanship? What do they know about that? As far as I have observed they know nothing about marling-spike seamanship, strapping blocks, fitting rigging, etc. Now I can sit down alongside of any seaman doing a bit of work and show him how it ought to be done; yes, and do it myself." It was Marryat's lieutenant, Phillott, *ipsissimis verbis*. I listened, over-awed by the weight of authority and experience; and I fear somewhat in sympathy, for such talk was in the air, part of the environment of an old order slowly and reluctantly giving way to a new.

Of course I shared this; how should I not, at eighteen? In giving expression to it once, I drew down on my head a ringing buffet from my father, in which he embodied an anecdote of Decatur I never saw elsewhere, and fancy he owed to his boyhood passed near a navy-yard town—Portsmouth, Virginia—while

Decatur was in his prime. I had written home with reference to some study, in which probably I did not shine, "What did Decatur know about such things?" A boy may be pardoned for laying himself open to the retort which so many of his superiors equally invited: "Depend upon it, if Decatur had been a student at the Academy, he would, so far as his abilities permitted, have got as far to the front as he always did in fighting. He always aimed to be first. It is told of him that he commanded one of two ships ordered on a common service, in which the other arrived first at a point on the way. Her captain, instead of pushing forward, waited for Decatur to come up; on hearing which the latter exclaimed in his energetic way, "The d—d fool!" Decatur, however, also shared, and shared inevitably, the prepossessions of his day. I was told by Mr. Charles King, when President of Columbia College, that he had been present in company with Decatur at one of the early experiments in steam navigation. Crude as the appliances still were, demonstration was conclusive; and Decatur, whatever his prejudices, was open to conviction. "Yes," he said, gloomily, to King, "it is the end of our business; hereafter any man who can boil a tea-kettle will be as good as the best of us." It is notable that in my day a tradition ran that Decatur himself was not thoroughly a seaman. The captain of the first ship in which I served after graduation, a man of much solid information, who had known the commodore's contemporaries, speaking about some occurrence, said to me, "The trouble with Decatur was, that he was not a seaman." I repeated the remark to one of our lieutenants, and he

ejaculated, with emphasis, "Yes, that is true." I cannot tell how far these opinions were the result of prepossession in those from whom they derived. There had been hard and factious division in the navy of Decatur's day, culminating in the duel in which he fell; and the lieutenant, at least, was associated by family ties with Decatur's antagonist.

To deny that the methods of the Naval Academy were open to criticism would be to claim for them infallibility. Upon the whole, however, in my time they erred rather on the side of being over-conservative than unduly progressive. Twenty years later, recalling some of our Academy experiences to one of my contemporaries, himself more a man of action than a student, and who had meanwhile distinguished himself by extraordinary courage in the War of Secession—I mean Edward Terry—he said, "Oh yes, those were the days before the flood." The hold-back element was strong, though not sufficiently so to suit such as my friend of the railroad. Objectors laid great stress on the word "practical;" than which, with all its most respectable derivation and association, I know none more frequently—nor more effectually—used as a bludgeon for slaying ideas. Strictly, of course, it means knowing how to do things, and doing them; but colloquially it usually means doing them before learning how. Leap before you look. The practical part is bruising your shins for lack of previous reflection. Of course, no one denies the educational value of breaking your shins, and everything else your own—a burnt child dreads the fire; but the question

remains whether an equally good result may not be reached at less cost, and so be more really practical. I recall the fine scorn with which one of our professors, Chauvenet, a man of great and acknowledged ability, practical and other, used to speak of "practical men." "Now, young gentlemen, in adjusting your theodolites in the field, remember not to bear too hard on the screws. Don't put them down with main force, as though the one object was never to unscrew them. If you do, you indent the plate, and it will soon be quite impossible to level the instrument properly. That," he would continue, "is the way with your practical men. There, for instance, is Mr. —," naming an assistant in another department, known to the midshipmen as Bull-pup, who I suppose had been a practical surveyor; "that is what he does." I presume the denunciation was due to B. P. having at one time borrowed an instrument from the department, and returned it thus maltreated. But "practical," so misapplied—action without thought—was Chauvenet's red rag.

An amusing reminiscence, illustrative of the same common tendency, was told me by General Howard. I had the pleasure of meeting Howard, then in command of one wing of Sherman's army, at Savannah, just after the conclusion of the march to the sea, in 1864. He spoke pleasantly of his associations with my father, when a cadet at the Military Academy, and added, "I remember how he used to say, 'A little common-sense, Mr. Howard, a little common-sense.'" Howard did not say what particular occasions he then had in mind, but a student

reciting, and confronted suddenly with some question, or step in a demonstration, which he has failed to master, or upon which he has not reflected, is apt to feel that the practical thing to do is not to admit ignorance; to trust to luck and answer at random. Such a one, explaining a drawing of a bridge to my father, was asked by him what was represented by certain lines, showing the up-stream part of a pier. Not knowing, he replied, "That is a hole to catch the ice in." "Imagine," said my father, in telling me the story, "catching all the ice from above in holes in the piers." A little common-sense—exercised first, not afterwards—is the prescription against leaping before you look, or jamming your screws too hard.

To substitute acquired common-sense—knowledge and reflection—for the cruder and tardier processes of learning by hard personal experience and mistakes, is, of course, the object of all education; and it was this which caused the foundation of the Naval Academy, behind which at its beginning lay the initiative of some of the most reputed and accomplished senior officers of the navy, conscious of the needless difficulties they themselves had had to surmount in reaching the level they had. It involved no detraction from their professional excellence, the excellence of men professionally self-made; but none comprehend the advantages of education better than candid men who have made their way without it. By the time I entered, however, there had been a decided, though not decisive, reaction in professional feeling. Ten years had elapsed since the

founding of the school, and already development had gone so far that suspicion and antagonism were aroused. Up to 1850 midshipmen went at once to sea, and, after five years there, spent one at Annapolis; whereupon followed the final examination for a lieutenancy. This effected, the man became a "passed" midshipman. Beginning with 1851, the system was changed. Four years at the Academy were required, after which two at sea, and then examination. This, being a clean break with the past, outraged conservatism; it introduced such abominations as French and extended mathematics; much attention was paid to infantry drill—soldiering; the scheme was not "practical;" and it was doubtless true that the young graduate, despite six months of summer cruising interposed between academic terms, came comparatively green to shipboard. In that particular respect he could not but compare for the moment unfavorably with one who under the old plan would have spent four years on a ship's deck. Whether, that brief period of inexperience passed, he would not be permanently the better for the prior initiation into the *rationale* of his business, few inquired, and time had not yet had opportunity to show.

Perhaps, too, there was among the graduates something of the "freshness" which is attributed to the same age in leaving a university. I do not think it; the immediate contact with conditions but partly familiar to us, yet perfectly familiar to all about us, excited rather a wholesome feeling of inferiority or inadequacy. We had yet to find ourselves. But there remained

undoubtedly some antagonism between the old and the new. Not that this ever showed itself offensively; nothing could have been kinder or more open-hearted than our reception by the lieutenants who had not known the Academy, and who probably depreciated it in their hearts. Whatever they thought, nothing was ever said that could reflect upon us, the outcome of the system. It was not even hinted that we might have been turned out in better shape under different conditions. From my personal experience, I hope we proved more satisfactory than may have been expected. When we returned home in 1861, just after the first battle of Bull Run, our third lieutenant said to me that he expected a command, and would be glad to have me as his first lieutenant; and upon my detachment one of the warrant officers expressed his regret that I was not remaining as one of the lieutenants of the ship. Both being men of mature years and long service, and with no obligation to speak, it is permissible to infer that they thought us fit at least to take the deck. As it was, in the uproar of those days, no questions were asked. The usual examinations were waived, and my class was hurried out of the midshipmen's mess into the first-lieutenant's berth. Without exception, I believe, we all had that duty at once—second to the captain—missing thereby the very valuable experience of the deck officer. In the face of considerable opposition, as I was told by Admiral Dupont, the leading officers of the day frustrated the attempt to introduce volunteer officers from the merchant service over our heads; another proof of confidence in us, as at least good raw material.

The longer practice of the others at sea was alleged as a reason for thus preferring them, which was seriously contemplated; but the reply was that acquaintance with the organization of a ship-of-war, with her equipment and armament, the general military tone so quickly assimilated by the young and so hardly by the mature, outweighed completely any mere question of attainment in handling a ship. As drill officers, too, the general excellence of the graduates was admitted.

Within a fortnight of doing duty on the forecastle, as a midshipman, I thus found myself first lieutenant of a very respectable vessel. One of my shipmates, less quickly fortunate, was detailed to instruct a number of volunteer officers with the great guns and muskets. One of them said to him, "Yes, you can teach me this, but I expect I can teach you something in seamanship"; a freedom of speech which by itself showed imperfect military temper. At the same moment, I myself had a somewhat similar encounter, which illustrates why the old officers insisted on the superior value of military habit, and the necessarily unmilitary attitude, at first, of the volunteers. I had been sent momentarily to a paddle-wheel merchant-steamer, now purchased for a ship-of-war, the *James Adger*, which had plied between Charleston and New York. A day or two after joining, I saw two of the engineer force going ashore without my knowledge. I stopped them; and a few moments afterwards the chief engineer, who had long been in her when she was a packet, came to me with flaming eyes and angry voice to know

by what right I interfered with his men. It had to be explained to him that, unlike the merchant-service, the engine-room was but a department of the military whole of the ship, and that other consent than his was necessary to their departure. A trivial incident, with a whole world of atmosphere behind it.

III

THE NAVAL ACADEMY IN ITS RELATION TO THE NAVY AT LARGE

1850—1860

Probably there have been at all periods educational excesses in the outlook of some of the Naval Academy authorities; and I personally have sympathized in the main with those who would subordinate the technological element to the more strictly professional. I remember one superintendent—and he, unless rumor was in error, had been one of the early opposition—saying to me with marked elation, "I believe we carry the calculus farther here than they do at West Point." I myself had then long forgotten all the calculus I ever knew, and I fear that with him, too, it was a case of *omne ignotum pro magnifico*. A more curious extravagancy was uttered to me by a professor of applied mathematics. I had happened to say that, while it was well each student should have the opportunity to acquire all he could in that department, I did not think it necessary that every officer of the deck should be able to calculate mathematically the relation

between a weight he had to hoist on board and the power of the purchase he was about to use; which I think a mild proposition, considering the centuries during which that knowledge had been dispensed with. "Oh, I differ with you," he replied; "I think it of the utmost importance they should all be able to do so." Nothing like sails, said my friend the sailmaker; nothing like leather, says the shoemaker. I mentioned this shortly afterwards to one of my colleagues, himself an officer of unusual mathematical and scientific attainment. "No!" he exclaimed; "did he *really* say that?"

This was to claim for this mere head knowledge a falsely "practical" value, as distinguished from the educational value of the mental training involved, and from the undoubted imperative need of such acquisitions in those who have to deal with problems of ship construction or other mechanical questions connected with naval material. His position was really as little practical as that of the men who opposed the Academy plan in general as unpractical; as little practical as it would be to maintain that it is essential that every naval officer to-day should be skilled to handle a ship under sail, because the habit of the sailing-ship educated, brought out, faculties and habits of the first value to the military man. Still, there is something not only excusable, but laudable, in a man magnifying his office; and it was well that my friend the professor should have a slightly exaggerated idea of the bearing of the calculus on the daily routine or occasional emergencies of a ship. What is needed is a counterpoise, to

correct undue deflection of the like kind, to which an educational institution from its very character and object is always liable. That the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath, is a saying of wide application. The administrator tends to think more of his administrative machine than of the object for which it exists, and the educator to forget that while the foundation is essential, it yet exists only for the building, which is the "practical" end in view. The object of naval education is to make a naval officer. Too much as well as too little of one ingredient will mar the compound; and if exaggeration cannot be wholly avoided, it had better rest upon the professional side. This was the function discharged by the critical attitude of the outside service, such as my friend of the railroad; at times somewhat irrational, but still as a check effective after the manner of other public opinion, of which in fact it was an instance.

In September, 1856, when I entered, professional influence was perhaps in excess. The preceding June had seen the graduation of the last class of "oldsters"—of those who, after five years at sea, had spent the sixth at the Academy, subjected formally to its discipline and methods. I therefore just missed seeing that phase of the Academy's history; but I could not thereby escape the traces of its influence. However transient, this lasted my time. It may be imagined what an influential, yet incongruous, element in a crowd of boys was constituted by introducing among them twenty or thirty young men, too young for ripeness, yet who for five years had been bearing the not slight

responsibility of the charge of seamen, often on duty away from their superiors, and permitted substantially all the powers and privileges conceded to their seniors, men of mature years. How could such be brought under the curb of the narrowly ordered life of the school, for the short eight months to which they knew the ordeal was restricted? Could this have been attempted seriously, there would probably have been an explosion; but in truth, as far as my observation went, most of the disciplinary officers, the lieutenants, rather sympathized with irregularities, within pretty wide limits. A midshipman was a being who traditionally had little but the exuberance of his spirits to make up for the discomforts of his lot. The comprehensive saying that what was nobody's business was a midshipman's business epitomized the harrying of his daily life, with its narrow quarters, hard fare, and constant hustling for poor pay. Like the seaman, above whom in earlier days he stood but little, the midshipman had then only his jollity—and his youth—to compensate; and also like the seaman a certain recklessness was conceded to his moments of enjoyment. The very name carried with it the privilege of frolicking.

The old times of license among seafaring men were still of recent memory, and, though practice had improved, opinion remained tolerant. The gunner of the first ship in which I served after graduation told me that in 1832, when he was a young seaman before the mast on board a sloop-of-war in the Mediterranean, on Christmas Eve, there being a two-knot breeze

—that is, substantially, calm—at sundown the ship was put under two close-reefed topsails for the night—storm canvas—and then the jollity began. How far it was expected to go may be inferred from the precautions; and we gain here some inkling of the phrase "heavy weather" applied to such conditions. But of the same ship he told me that she stood into the harbor of Malta under all sail, royal and studding sails, to make a flying moor; which, I must explain to the unprofessional, is to drop an anchor under sail, the cable running out under the force of the ship's way till the place is reached for letting go the second anchor, the ship finally being brought to lie midway between the two. An accurate eye, a close judgment as to the ship's speed, and absolute promptness of execution are needed; for all the sail that is on when the first anchor goes must be off before the second. In this case nothing was started before the first. Within fifteen minutes all was in, the ship moored, sails furled, and yards squared, awaiting doubtless the final touches of the boatswain. Whether the flag of the port was saluted within the same quarter-hour, I will not undertake to say; it would be quite in keeping to have attempted it. System, preparation, and various tricks of the trade go far to facilitate such rapidity. Now I dare say that some of my brother officers may cavil at this story; but I personally believe it, with perhaps two or three minutes' allowance for error in clocks. Much may be accepted of seamen who not uncommonly reefed topsails "in stays"—that is, while the ship was being tacked. Of the narrator's good faith I am certain. It was not with hint one

of the stock stories told about "the last cruise;" nor was he a romancer. It came naturally in course of conversation, as one tells any experience; and he added, when the British admiral returned the commander's visit he complimented the ship on the smartest performance he had ever seen. But it is in the combination of license and smartness that the pith of these related stories lies; between them they embody much of the spirit of a time which in 1855 was remembered and influential. Midway in the War of Secession I met the first lieutenant who held the trumpet in that memorable manœuvre—a man of 1813; now a quiet, elderly, slow-spoken old gentleman, retired, with little to suggest the smart officer, at the stamp of whose foot the ship's company jumped, to use the gunner's expression.

Such performances exemplify the ideals that still obtained—were in full force—in the navy as first I knew it. In the ship in which the gunner and I were then serving, it was our common performance to "Up topgallant-masts and yards, and loose sail to a bowline," in three minutes and a half from the time the topmen and the masts started aloft together from the deck. For this time I can vouch myself, and we did it fairly, too; though I dare say we would have hesitated to carry the sails in a stiff breeze without a few minutes more. It was a very dramatic and impressive performance. The band, with drum and fife, was part of it. When all was reported ready from the three masts—but not before—it was permitted to be eight o'clock. The drums gave three rolls, the order "Sway across, let fall," was given, the

yards swung into their places, the sails dropped and were dragged out by their bowlines to facilitate their drying, the bell struck eight, the flag was hoisted, and close on the drums followed the band playing the "Star-Spangled Banner," while the ship's company went to breakfast. It was the transformation scene of a theatre; within five minutes the metamorphosis was complete. There was doubtless a flavor of the circus about it all, but it was a wholesome flavor and tonicked the professional appetite. Yes, and the natural appetite, too; your breakfast tasted better, especially if some other ship had got into trouble with one of her yards or sails. "Did you see what a mess the – made of fore-topgallant-yard this morning?" An old boatswain's mate of the ship used to tell me one of his "last-cruise" stories, of when he "was in the *Delaware*, seventy-four, up the Mediterranean, in 1842." Of course, the *Delaware* had beaten the *Congress's* time; the last ship always did. Then he would add: "I was in the foretop in those days, and had the fore-topgallant-yard; and if one of us fellows let his yard show on either side of the mast before the order 'Sway across,' we could count on a dozen when we got down just as sure as we could count on our breakfast." Flogging was not abolished until about 1849. No wonder men were jolly when they could be, without worrying about to-morrow's headache.

Part of the preparation was to let the captain know beforehand that it was eight o'clock, and get his authority that it might be so; subject always to the yet higher authority that the yards and sails were ready. If they were not, so much the worse for eight o'clock.

It had to wait quite as imperatively as the sun did for Joshua. Sunset, when the masts and yards came down, was equally under bonds; it awaited the pleasure of the captain or admiral. Indeed, in my time a story ran of a court-martial at a much earlier day, sitting in a capital case. By law, each day's session must end by sundown. On the occasion in question, sundown was reported to the admiral—or, rather, commodore; we had no admirals then. He sent to know how soon the court could finish. The reply was, in about fifteen minutes. "Tell the officer of the deck not to make it sundown until he hears from me;" and, in defiance of the earth's movement, the colors were kept flying in attestation that the sun was up. One other hour of the twenty-four, noon, was brought in like manner to the captain's attention, and required his action, but it was treated with more deference; recognition rather than authority was meted to it, and it was never known to be tampered with. The circumstance of the sun's crossing the ship's meridian was unique in the day; and the observation of the fact, which drew on deck all the navigating group with their instruments, establishing the latitude immediately and precisely, was of itself a principal institution of the ship's economy. Such claims were not open to trifling; and were there not also certain established customs, almost vested interests, such as the seven-bell nip, cocktail or otherwise, connected with the half-hour before, when "the sun was over the fore-yard"? I admit I never knew whence the latter phrase originated, nor just what it meant, but it has associations. Like sign language, it can be understood.

I was myself shipmate, as they say, with most of this sort of thing; for with its good points and its bad it did not disappear until the War of Secession, the exigencies of which drove out alike the sails and the sailor. The abolition of the grog ration in 1862 may be looked upon as a chronological farewell to a picturesque past. We did not so understand it. Contemporaries are apt to be blind to bloodless revolutions. Had we seen the full bearing, perhaps there might have been observed a professional sundown, in recognition of the fact that the topgallant-yards had come down for the last time, ending one professional era. A protest was recorded by one eccentric character, a survival whom Cooper unfortunately never knew, who hoisted a whiskey demijohn at the peak of his gunboat—the ensign's allotted place. To the admiral's immediate demand for an explanation, he replied that that was the flag he served under; but he was one of those to whom all things are forgiven. The seaman remains, and must always remain while there are seas to cross and to rule; but the sailor, in his accomplishments and in his defects, began then to depart, or to be evolutionized into something entirely different. I am bound to admit that in the main the better has survived, but, now that such hairs as I have are gray, I may be permitted to look back somewhat wistfully and affectionately on that which I remember a half-century ago; perhaps to sympathize with the seamen of the period, who saw themselves swamped out of sight and influence among the vast numbers required by the sudden seven or eight fold expansion of the navy for that momentous

conflict. Occasionally one of these old salts, mournful amid his new environment, would meet me, and say, "Ah! Mr. Mahan, the navy isn't what it was!" True, in 1823, Lord St. Vincent, then verging on ninety, had made the same remark to George IV.; and I am quite sure, if the aged admiral had searched his memory, he could have recalled it in the mouth of some veteran of 1750. The worst of it is, this is perennially true. From period to period the gain exceeds, but still there has been loss as well; and to sentiment, ranging over the past, the loss stands more conspicuous. "Memory reveals every rose, but secreteth its thorn."

This is the more apparent when the change has been sudden, or on such a scale as to overwhelm, by mere bulk, that subtle influence for which we owe to the French the name of *esprit de corps*. It is the breath of the body, the breath of life. Before the War of Secession our old friends the marines had a deserved reputation for fidelity, which could not survive the big introduction of alien matter into the "corps." I remember hearing an officer of long service say that he had known but a single instance of a marine deserting; and as to the general fact there was no dissent among the by-standers. The same could scarcely be said now, nor of seamen then. The sentiment of particular faithfulness had been nurtured in the British marines under times and conditions which made them at a critical moment the saviors of discipline, and thereby the saviors of the state. It is needless to philosophize the strength of such a tradition, so established,

nor its effect on each member of the body; and from thence, not improbably, it was transmitted to our younger navy. Whencever coming, there it was. One marine private, in the ship to which I belonged, returning from liberty on shore, was heard saying to another with drunken impressiveness, "Remember, our motto is, 'Patriotism and laziness.'" Of course, this went round the ship, greatly delighting on both counts our marine officers, and became embodied in the chaff that passed to and fro between the two corps; of which one saying, "The two most useless things in a ship were the captain of marines and the mizzen-royal," deserves for its drollery to be committed to writing, now that mizzen-royals have ceased to be. May it be long before the like extinction awaits the captains of marines! Our own, however, an eccentric man, who had accomplished the then rare feat of working his way up from the ranks, used to claim that marines were an absurdity. "It is having one army to keep another army in order," he would say. This was once true, and might with equal truth be said of a city police force—one set of citizens to keep the other citizens orderly. In the olden time it had been the application of the sound statesmanship dogma, "*Divide et impera.*" For this, in the navy, happily, the need no longer exists; but I can see no reason to believe the time at hand when we can dispense with a corps of seamen, the specialty of which is infantry—and shore expedition when necessary. Patriotism, as our marine understood it, was sticking by your colors and your corps, and doing your duty through thick and thin; no bad ideal.

In like mingling of good and evil, the oldsters at the Naval Academy, along with some things objectionable, including a liberty that under the conditions too often resembled license, brought with them sound traditions, which throughout my stay there constituted a real *esprit de corps*. In nothing was this more conspicuous than in the attitude towards hazing. Owing to circumstances I will mention later, I entered at once the class which, as I understand, most usually perpetrated the outrageous practices that became a scandal in the country—the class, that is, which is entering on its second year at the Academy. My home having always been at the Military Academy, I, without much thinking, expected to find rife the same proceedings which had prevailed there from time to me immemorial. Such anticipations made deeper and more lasting the impression produced by the contrary state of things, and yet more by the wholly different tone prevalent at Annapolis. Not only was hazing not practised, but it scarcely obtained even the recognition of mention; it was not so much reprobated as ignored; and, if it came under discussion at all, it was dismissed with a turn of the nose, as something altogether beneath us. That is not the sort of thing we do here. It may be all very well at West Point—much as "what would do for a marine could not be thought of for a seaman"—but we were "officers and gentlemen," and thought no small beans of ourselves as such. There were at times absurd manifestations of this same precocious dignity, of which I may speak later; still, as O'Brien said of Boatswain Chucks, "You may laugh at such

assumptions of gentility, but did any one of his shipmates ever know Mr. Chucks to do an unhandsome or a mean action?—and why? Because he aspired to be a gentleman."

While I can vouch for this general state of feeling, I cannot be sure of its derivation; but I have always thought it due to the presence during the previous five years of the "oldsters," nominally under the same discipline as ourselves, but looked up to with the respect and observance which at that age are naturally given to those two or three seasons older. And these men were not merely more advanced in years. They were matured beyond their age by early habits of responsibility and command, and themselves imbued by constant contact with the spirit of the phrase "an officer and a gentleman," which constitutes the norm of military conduct. Their intercourse with their seniors on board ship had been much closer than that which was possible at the school. This atmosphere they brought with them to a position from which they could not but most powerfully influence us. How far the tradition might have been carried on, in smooth seas, I do not know; but along with many other things, good and bad, it was shattered by the War of Secession. The school was precipitately removed to Newport, where it was established in extemporized and temporary surroundings; the older undergraduates were hurried to sea, while the new entries were huddled together on two sailing frigates moored in the harbor, dissociated from the influence of those above them. The whole anatomy and, so to say, nervous system of the organization

were dislocated. For better or for worse, perhaps for better and for worse, the change was more like death and resurrection than life and growth. The potent element which the oldster had contributed, and the upper classes absorbed and perpetuated, was eliminated at once and entirely by the detachment of the senior cadets and the segregation of the new-corners. New ideals were evolved by a mass of school-boys, severed from those elder associates with the influence of whom no professors nor officers can vie. How hazing came up I do not know, and am not writing its history. I presume it is one of the inevitable weeds that school-boy nature brings forth of itself, unless checked by unfavorable environment. I merely note its almost total absence in my time; its subsequent existence was unhappily notorious.

A general good-humored tolerance, easy-going, and depending upon a mutual understanding, none the less clear because informal, characterized the relations of the officers and students. Primarily, each were in the appreciation of the other officers and gentlemen. So far there was implicit equality; and while the ones were in duty bound to enforce academic regulations, which the others felt an equal obligation to disregard, it was a kind of game in which they did not much mind being losers, provided we did not trespass on the standards of the gentleman, and of the officer liberally construed. They, I think, had an unacknowledged feeling that while under school-boy, or collegiate, discipline as to times or manners, some relaxation of strict official correctness must be endured. Larking,

sometimes uproarious, met with personal sympathy, if official condemnation. Nor did we resent being detected by what we regarded as fair means; to which we perhaps gave a pretty wide interpretation. The exceptional man, who inspected at unaccustomed hours, which we considered our own prescriptive right—though not by rules—who came upon us unawares, was apt to be credited with rather unofficer-like ideas of what was becoming, and suspected of the not very gentlemanly practice of wearing noiseless rubber shoes. That intimation of his approach was conveyed by us from room to room by concerted taps on the gas-pipes was fair war; nor did our opponents seem to mind what they could not but clearly hear. Indeed, I think most of them were rather glad to find evidences of order and propriety prevailing, where possibly but for those kindly signals they might have detected matter for report.

There was one lieutenant, however, the memory of whom was still green as a bay-tree in my day, though it would have been blasted indeed could cursing have blighted it, to whom the game of detective seemed to possess the fascination of the chase; and so successful was he that his baffled opponents could not view the matter dispassionately, nor accept their defeat in sportsman-like spirit. I knew him later; he had a saturnine appearance, not calculated to conciliate a victim, but he liked a joke, especially of the practical kind, and for the sake of one successfully achieved could forgive an offender. Night surprises, inroads on the enemy's country, at the hours when we were mistakenly

supposed to be safe in bed, and regulations so required, were favorite stratagems with him. On one occasion, so tradition ran, some half-dozen midshipmen had congregated in a room "after taps," and, with windows carefully darkened, had contrived an extempore kitchen to fry themselves a mess of oysters. The process was slow, owing to the number of oysters the pan could take at once and the largeness of the expectant appetites; but it had progressed nearly to completion, when without premonition the door opened and – appeared. He asked no questions and offered no comments, but, walking to the platter, seized it and threw out of the window the accumulated results of an hour's weary work. No further notice of the delinquency followed; the discomfiture of the sufferers sufficiently repaid his sense of humor. At another midnight hour a midshipman visiting in a room not his, lured thither, let us hope, by the charms of intellectual conversation, was warned by the gas-pipes that the enemy was on the war-path. Retreat being cut off, he took refuge under a bed, but unwittingly left a hand visible. – caught sight of it, walked to the bed, flashed his lantern in the eyes of its occupant, who naturally was sleeping as never before, and at the same time trod hard on the exposed fingers. A squeal followed this unexpected attention, and the culprit had to drag himself out; but the lieutenant was satisfied, and let him go at that.

I have said that larking met with more than toleration—with sympathy. The once magic word "midshipman" seemed to cloak any outburst of frolicking; otherwise some exhibitions

I witnessed could scarcely have passed unscathed. They were felt to be in character by the older officers; and, while obliged to reprehend, I doubt whether some of them would not have more enjoyed taking a share. They knew, too, that we were just as proud as they of the service, and that under all lay an entire readiness to do or to submit to that which we and they alike recognized as duty. Sometimes rioting went rather too far, but for the most part it was harmless. One rather grave incident, shortly before my entry, derived its humor mainly from the way in which it was treated by the superintendent. One of the out-buildings of the Academy, either because offensive or out of sheer deviltry, was set on fire and destroyed. The perpetrator of this startling practical joke was Alexander F. Crosman, of the '51 Date, whom many of us yet living remember well. Small in stature, with something of the "chip-on-the-shoulder" characteristic, often seen in such, he was conspicuous for a certain chivalrous gallantry of thought and mien, the reflection of a native brilliant courage; a trait which in the end caused his death, about 1870, by drowning, in the effort to save an imperilled boat's crew. The superintendent, a man of ponderous dimensions, and equally ponderous but rapid speech—though it is due to say also unusually accomplished, both professionally and personally—was greatly outraged and excited at this defiance of discipline. The day following he went out to meet the corps, when it had just left some formation, and, calling a halt, delivered a speech on the basis of the *Articles of War*, a

copy of which he brandished before his audience. These ancient ordinances, among many other denunciations of naval crimes and misdemeanors, pronounced the punishment of death, or "such other worse" as a court-martial might adjudge, upon "any person in the Navy who shall maliciously set on fire, or otherwise destroy, any government property not then in the possession of an *enemy, pirate, or rebel.*" The gem of oratory hereupon erected was paraphrased as follows by the culprit himself, aided and abetted in his lyrical flight by his room-mate, John S. Barnes, who, after graduating left the service, returned for the War of Secession, and subsequently resigned finally. To this survivor of the two collaborators I owe the particulars of the affair. How many more "traitors" there were I know not. Those who recall the speaker will recognize that the parody must have followed closely the real words of the address:

"Young gentlemen assembled!—
It makes no matter where—
I only want to speak to you,
So hear me where you are.

"Some vile incendiary
Last night was prowling round,
Who set fire to our round-house
And burned it to the ground.

"I'll read the Naval Law;

The man who dares to burn
A round-house,—not the Enemy's,—
A traitor's fate shall learn.

"And if a man there be,
Who does this traitor know,
And keeps it to himself,
He shall suffer death also!

"'Tis well, then, to tell, then,
Who did this grievous ill;
And, d—n him, I will hang him,
So help me God! I will!"

If anything could have added to the gayety of the fire, such an outburst would.

In after years I sailed under the command of this speechmaker. At monthly musters he reserved to himself the prerogative of reading the *Articles*, probably thinking that he did it more effectively than the first lieutenant; in which he was quite right. It so happened that, owing to doubt whether a certain paragraph applied to the Marine Corps, Congress had been pleased to make a special enactment that the word "persons" in such and such a clause "should be construed to include marines." Coming as this did near the end, some humorist was moved to remark that the first Sunday in the month muster was for the purpose of informing us authoritatively that a marine was a

person. As the captain read this interesting announcement, his voice assumed a gradual *crescendo*, concluding with a profound emphasis on the word "marines," which he accompanied with a half turn and a flourish of the book towards that honorable body, drawn up in full uniform, at parade rest, its venerable captain, whose sandy hair was fast streaking with gray, standing at its head, his hands meekly crossed over his sword-hilt, the blade hanging down before him; all doubtless suitably impressed with this definition of their status, which for greater certainty they heard every month. It was very fine, very fine indeed; appealing to more senses than one.

The shore drills—infantry and field artillery—furnished special occasions for organized—or disorganized—upheavals of animal spirits. For these exercises we then had scant respect. They were "soldiering;" and from time immemorial soldier had been an adjective to express uselessness, or that which was so easy as to pass no man's ability. A soldier's wind, for example, was a wind fair both ways—to go and to return; no demands on brains there, much less on seamanship. The curious irrelevancy of such applications never strikes persons; unless, indeed, a perception of incongruity is the soul of wit, a definition which I think I have heard. To depart without the ceremony of saying good-bye takes its name from the most elaborately civil of people—French leave; while the least perturbable of nations has been made to contribute an epithet, Dutch, to the courage derived from the whiskey-bottle. In the latter case, however, I fancy that,

besides the tradition of long-ago national rivalries, there may have been the idea that to excite a Dutchman you must, as they say, light a fire under him; or as was forcibly remarked by a midshipman of my time of his phlegmatic room-mate, he had to kick him in the morning to get him started for the day.

To return to the shore drills: these were then committed to one of the civil professors of the Academy, a fact which itself spoke for the familiarity with them of the sea lieutenants. As these always exercised us at ships' guns, the different estimation which the two obtained in the outside service was too obvious to escape quick-witted young fellows, and it was difficult to overcome the resultant disrespect. The professor was not one to effect the impossible. He was a graduate of West Point, a man of ability, not lacking in dignity, and personally worthy of all respect; but he stuttered badly, and this impediment not only received no mercy from youth, but interfered with the accuracy of manœuvres where the word of command needed to be timely in utterance. Report ran that on one occasion, advancing by column of companies, while the professor was struggling with "H-H-H-Halt!" the leading company, composed martyrs to discipline, marched over the sea-wall into three feet of water. Had the water been deeper, they might have been less literal. Despite his military training, his bearing and carriage had not the strong soldierly stamp which might redeem his infirmity, and even in the class-room a certain whimsical atmosphere seemed borne from the drill-ground. He, I believe, was the central figure

of one of the most humorous scenes in Herman Melville's *White Jacket*, a book which, despite its prejudiced tone, has preserved many amusing and interesting inside recollections of a ship-of-war of the olden time. The naval instructor on board the frigate is using Rodney's battle of 1782 to illustrate on the blackboard the principles of naval tactics to the class of midshipmen. "Now, young gentlemen, you see this disabled French ship in the corner, far to windward of her fleet, between it and the enemy. She has lost all three masts, and the greater part of the ship's company are killed and wounded; what will you do to save her?" To this knotty problem many extemporized "practical" answers are given, of which the most plausible is by Mr. Dash, of Virginia—"I should nail my colors to the mast and let her sink under me." As this could scarcely be called saving her, Mr. Dash is rebuked for irrelevance; but, after the gamut of possible solutions has been well guessed over, the instructor announces impressively, "That ship, young gentlemen, cannot be saved."

I cannot say that he dealt with us thus tantalizingly; but one of my contemporaries used to tell a story of his personal experience which was generically allied to the above. At the conclusion of some faulty manœuvre, the instructor remarked aloud: "This all went wrong, owing to Mr. P.'s not standing fast in his own person. We will now repeat it, for the particular benefit of Mr. P." The repetition ensued, and in its course the instructor called out, "Be careful, Mr. P., and stand fast where you are." "I am standing fast," replied P., incautiously. "R-R-Report Mr. P. for talking

in ranks." At the Academy, naval tactics were not within his purview; and of all our experiences with him in the class-room, one ludicrous incident alone remains with me. One of my class, though in most ways well at head, was a little alarmed about his standing in infantry tactics. He therefore at a critical occasion attempted to carry the text-book with him to the blackboard. This surreptitious deed, being not to get advantage over a fellow, but to save himself, was condoned by public opinion; but, being unused to such deceits, in his agitation he copied his figure upside down and became hopelessly involved in the demonstration. The professor next day took occasion to comment slightly on our general performance, but "as to Mr. —," he added, derisively, "he did r-r-r-wretchedly."

I sometimes wonder that we learned anything about "soldiering," but we did in a way. The principles and theory were mastered, if performance was slovenly; and in execution, as company officers, we got our companies "there," although just how we did it might be open to criticism. In our last year the adjutant in my class, who graduated at its head, on the first occasion of forming the battalion, after some moments of visible embarrassment could think of no order more appropriate than "Form your companies fore and aft the pavement." Fore and aft is "lengthwise" of a ship. No humiliation attended such a confession of ignorance—on that subject; but had the same man "missed stays" when in charge of the deck, he would have been sorely mortified. His successor of to-day probably never will

have a chance to miss stays. There thus ran through our drills an undercurrent of levity, which on provocation would burst out almost spontaneously into absurdity. On one occasion the battalion was drawn up in line, fronting at some distance the five buildings which then constituted the midshipmen's quarters. The intimation was given that we were to advance and then charge. Once put in motion, I know not whether stuttering lost the opportunity of stopping us, but the pace became quicker and quicker till the whole body broke into a run, rushed cheering tumultuously through the passages between the houses, and reformed, peaceably enough, on the other side. The captains all got a wiggling for failing to keep us in hand; but they were powerless. The whole thing was without preconcertment or warning. It could hardly have happened, however, had the instinct of discipline been as strong in these drills as in others.

A more deliberate prank was played with the field artillery. These light pieces, being of the nature of cannon rather than muskets, obtained more deference, being recognized as of the same genus with the great guns which then constituted a ship's broadside. On one occasion they were incautiously left out overnight on the drill-ground. Between tattoo and taps, 9.30 to 10 p.m., was always a half-hour of release from quarters. There was mischief ready-made for idle hands to do. The guns were taken in possession, rushed violently to and fro in mock drill performance, and finally taken to pieces, the parts being scattered promiscuously in all directions. Dawn revealed

an appearance of havoc resembling a popular impressionist representation of a battle-field. Here a caisson with its boxes, severed from their belongings, stretched its long pole appealingly towards heaven; the wheels had been dispersed to distant quarters of the ground and lay on their sides; elsewhere were the guns, sometimes reversed and solitary, at others not wholly dismounted, canted at an angle, with one wheel in place. As there were six of them, complete in equipments, the scene was extensive and of most admired confusion; ingenuity had exhausted itself in variety, to enhance picturesqueness of effect. How the lieutenant in charge accounted for all this happening without his interference, I do not know. Certainly there was noise enough, but then that half-hour always was noisy. The superintendent of that time had, when walking, a trick of grasping the lapel of his coat with his right hand, and twitching it when preoccupied. The following day, as he surveyed conditions, it seemed as if the lapel might come away; but he made us no speech, nor, as far as I know, was any notice taken of the affair. No real damage had been done, and the man would indeed have been hard-heartedly conscientious who would grudge the action which showed him so comical a sight.

I once heard an excellent first lieutenant—Farragut's own through the principal actions of the War of Secession—say that where there was obvious inattention to uniform there would always be found slackness in discipline. It may be, therefore, that our habits as to uniform were symptomatic of the same

easy tolerance which bore with such extravagances as I have mentioned; the like of which, in overt act, was not known to me in my later association with the Academy as an officer. We had a prescribed uniform, certainly; but regulations, like legislative acts, admit of much variety of interpretation and latitude in practice, unless there is behind them a strong public sentiment. In my earlier days there was no public sentiment of the somewhat martinet kind; such as would compel all alike to wear an overcoat because the captain felt cold. In practice, there was great laxity in details. I remember, in later days and later manners, when we were all compelled to be well buttoned up to the throat, a young officer remarked to me disparagingly of another, "He's the sort of man, you know, who would wear a frock-coat unbuttoned." There's nothing like classification. My friend had achieved a feat in natural history; in ten words he had defined a species. On another occasion the same man remorselessly wiped out of existence another species, consecrated by generations of blue-books and *Naval Regulations*. "I know nothing of superior officers," he said; "senior officers, if you choose; but superior, no!" Whether the *Naval Regulations* have yet recognized this obvious distinction, whether it is no longer "superior officers," but only senior officers, who are not to be "treated with contempt," etc., I have not inquired. Apart from such amusing criticism of the times past, it is undoubtedly true that attention to minutiae is symptomatic of a much more important underlying spirit, one of exactness and precision running through all the

management of a ship and affecting her efficiency. I concede that a thing so trifling as the buttoning of a frock-coat may indicate a development and survival of the fittest; but in 1855–60 frock-coats had not been disciplined, and in accordance with the tone of the general service we midshipmen were tacitly indulged in a similar freedom. This tolerance may have been in part a reaction from the vexatious and absurd interference of a decade before with such natural rights as the cut of the beard—not as matter of neatness, but of pattern. Even for some time after I graduated, unless I misunderstood my informants, officers in the British navy were not permitted to wear a full beard, nor a mustache; and we had out-breaks of similar regulative annoyance in our own service, one of which furnished Melville with a striking chapter. Discussing the matter in my presence once, the captain of a frigate said, "There is one reply to objectors; if they do not wish to conform, they can leave the service." Clearly, however, a middle-aged man cannot throw up his profession thus easily.

Another circumstance that may have contributed to indifference to details of dress was the carefulness with which the old-time sea officers had constantly to look after the set and trim of the canvas. Every variation of the wind, every change of course, every considerable manœuvre, involved corresponding changes in the disposition of the sails, which must be effected not only correctly, but with a minute exactness extending to half a hundred seemingly trivial details, upon precision in which depended—and justly—an officer's general reputation for

officer-like character. Not only so, but the mere weight of rigging and sails, and the stretching resultant on such strain, caused recurring derangements, which, permitted, became slovenliness. Yards accurately braced, sheets home alike, weather leaches and braces taut, with all the other and sundry indications which a well-trained eye instinctively sought and noted, were less the dandyism than the self-respecting neatness of a well-dressed ship, and were no bad substitute, as tests, for buttoned frock-coats. The man without fault in the one might well be pardoned, by others as well as himself, for neglects which had never occurred to him to be such. His attention was centred elsewhere, as a man may think more of his wife's dress than his own. After all, one cannot be always stretched with four pins, as the French say; there must be some give somewhere.

The frock was then the working coat of the navy. There was fuller dress for exceptional occasions, in which, at one festive muster early in the cruise, we all had to appear, to show that we had it; but otherwise it was generally done up in camphor. The jacket, which was prescribed to the midshipmen of the Academy, had informal recognition in the service, and we took our surviving garments of that order with us to sea, to wear them out. But, while here and there some officer would sport one, they could scarcely be called popular. One of our lieutenants, indeed, took a somewhat sentimental view of the jacket. "There was Mr. S.," he said to me, speaking of a brother midshipman, "on deck yesterday with a jacket. It looked so tidy and becoming. If there

had been anything aloft out of the way, I could say to him, 'Mr. S., just jump up there, will you, and see what is the matter?'" War, which soon afterwards followed with its stern preoccupations and incidental deprivations, induced inevitably deterioration in matters of dress. With it the sack-coat, or pilot-jacket, burrowed its way in, the cut and insignia of these showing many variations. The undergraduates at the Academy in my day had for all uses a double-breasted jacket; but it was worn buttoned, or not, at choice. On the rolling collar a gold foul anchor—an anchor with a rope cable twined round it—was prescribed; but, while a standard embroidered pattern was supplied at the Academy store, those who wished procured for themselves metal anchors, and these not only were of many shapes and sizes, but for symmetrical pinning in place demanded an accuracy of eye and hand which not every one had. The result was variegated and fanciful to a degree; but I doubt if any of the officers thought aught amiss. So the regulation vest buttoned up to the chin, but very many had theirs made with rolling collar, to show the shirt. I had a handsome, very dandy, creole classmate, whom an admiring family kept always well supplied with fancy shirts; and I am sure, if precisians of the present day could have seen him starting out on a Saturday afternoon to pay his visits, with everything just so—except in a regulation sense—and not a back hair out of place, they must have accepted the results as a testimony to the value of the personal factor in uniform. Respect for individual tastes was rather a mark of that time in the navy. Seamen handy with their

needle were permitted, if not encouraged, to embroider elaborate patterns, in divers colors, on the fronts of their shirts, and turned many honest pennies by doing the like for less skillful shipmates. Pride in personal appearance, dandyism, is quite consonant with military feeling, as history has abundantly shown; and it may be that something has been lost as well as gained in the suppression of individual action, now when an inspecting officer may almost be said to carry with him a yard-stick and micrometer to detect deviations.

A very curious manifestation of this disposition to bedeck the body was the prevalence of tattooing. If not universal, it was very nearly so among seamen of that day. Elaborate designs covering the chest, or back, or arms, were seen everywhere, when the men were stripped on deck for washing. There was no possible inducement to this except a crude love of ornament, or a mere imitation of a prevailing fashion, which is another manifestation of the same propensity. The inconvenience of being branded for life should have been felt by men prone to desertion; but the descriptive lists which accompany every crew were crowded with such remarks as, "Goddess of Liberty, r. f. a."—right forearm—the which, if a man ran away, helped the police of the port to identify him. My memory does not retain the various emblems thus perpetuated in men's skins; they were largely patriotic and extremely conventional, each practised tattooer having doubtless his own particular style. Many midshipmen of my time acquired these embellishments. I wonder if they have not since been sorry.

IV THE NAVAL ACADEMY IN ITS INTERIOR WORKINGS PRACTICE CRUISES

1855-60

In the preceding pages my effort has been to reconstitute for the reader the navy, in body and in spirit, as it was when I entered in 1856 and had been during the period immediately preceding. There was no marked change up to 1861, when the War of Secession began. The atmosphere and environment which I at first encountered upon my entrance to the Naval Academy, in 1856, had nothing strange, or even unfamiliar, to a boy who had devoured Cooper and Marryat—not as mere tales of adventure, but with some real appreciation and understanding of conditions as by them depicted. I had studied, as well as been absorbed by them. Cooper is much more of an idealist and romancer than is Marryat, who belongs essentially to the realistic school. Some of the Englishman's presentations may be exaggerated, though not beyond probability—elaborated would perhaps be a juster word—and in one passage he expressly abjures all willingness

to present a caricature of the seaman he had known. Cooper, on the other hand, while his sea scenes are well worked up, has given us personalities which, tested by Marryat's, are made out of the whole cloth; creations, if you will, but not resemblances. Marryat entered the navy earlier than his rival, and followed the sea longer; his experience was in every way wider. Even in my time could be seen justifications of his portrayal; but who ever saw the like of Tom Coffin, Trysail, or Boltrope?

The interested curiosity concerning all things naval which possessed me, and held me enthralled by the mere sight of an occasional square-rigged vessel, such as at rare intervals passed our home on the Hudson, fifty miles from the sea, led me also to pore over a copy of the *Academy Regulations* which the then superintendent, Captain Louis Goldsborough, (afterwards Admiral), had sent my father. The two had been acquaintances in Paris, in the twenties of the century and of their own ages. I have always had a morbid fondness for registers and time-tables, and over them have wasted precious hours; but on this occasion the practice saved me a year. I discovered that, contrary to the established rule at the Military Academy, an appointee to the Naval might enter any class for which he could pass the examinations. Further inquiry confirmed this, and I set about fitting myself. At that date, even more than at present, the standard of admission to the two academies had to take into account the very differing facilities for education in different parts of the country, as well as the strictly democratic method of

appointment. This being in the gift of the representative of the congressional district, the candidates came from every section; and, being selected by the various considerations which influence such patronage, the mass of lads who presented themselves necessarily differed greatly in acquirements. Hence, to enter either Annapolis or West Point only very rudimentary knowledge was demanded. Having grown up myself so far amid abundant opportunity, and been carefully looked after, I found that I was quite prepared to enter the class above the lowest, except in one or two minor matters, easily picked up. Thus forewarned, I came forearmed. There were probably in every class a dozen who could have done the same, but they accepted the prevailing custom without question. I believe I was the only one fortunate enough to make this gain. In some instances before, and in many after, the academic work was for certain classes compressed within three years, but I was singular in entering a class already of a twelvemonth's standing.

About my own examination I remember nothing except that it was successful; but one incident occurred in my hearing which has stuck by me for a half-century. One other youth underwent the same tests. He had already once entered, two or three years before, and afterwards had failed to pass one of the semi-annual tests. Such cases frequently were dropped into the next lower class, but the rule then was that a second similar lapse was final. This had befallen my present associate; but he had "influence," which obtained for him another appointment,

conditional upon passing the requirements for the third class, fourth being the lowest. Examinations then were oral, not written; and, preoccupied though I was with my own difficulties, I could not but catch at times sounds of his. He was being questioned in grammar and in parsing, which I have heard—I do not know whether truly—are now looked upon as archaic methods of teaching; and the sentence propounded to him was, "Mahomet was driven from Mecca, but he returned in triumph." His rendering of the first words I did not hear, my attention not being arrested until "but," which proved to him a truly disjunctive conjunction. "But!" he ejaculated—"but!" and paused. Then came the "practical" leap into the unknown. "'But' is an adverb, qualifying 'he,' showing what he is doing." Poor fellow, it was no joke to him, nor probably his fault, but that of circumstances. When released from the ordeal, we stood round together, awaiting sentence. He was in despair, nor could I honestly encourage him. "Look at you," he said, "as quiet as if nothing had happened"—I was by no means confident that I had cause for elation. "If I were as sure that I had passed as that you have, I should be skipping all over the place." I never heard of him again; but suppose from his name, which I remember, and his State, of which I am less sure, that he took, and in any event would have taken, the Confederate side in the coming troubles. His loss by this failure was therefore probably less than it then seemed.

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