

JACK SPANKER AND THE MERMAID.

BY ELIZABETH OKES SMITH, AUTHOR OF "THE SINLESS CHILD," ETC.

It was a warm, still afternoon in Summer, the waters of Portland harbor were as quiet as if never ploughed by keel or tossed by tempest; the idle flag hung to the mast, and sails, half-hoisted to dry, lay in loose heavy folds. Every object was as palpable below as above the water. Old Zeke was seated on the bench under the ferry-house sign, and nothing was more natural than that we school children should gather about him and ask for a story. It was evident Zeke was in a sentimental mood, for his eye wandered far off upon the waters, and he heaved a deep sigh as we approached and claimed his attention. Then he glanced at the little, low window, where Mrs. Stanford was making pastry, a tumbler half filled with flies standing beside her, the top covered by a piece of bread with a hole in the centre.

"Do you see there?" said he. We all followed the direction of his eyes, and rested ours upon the fatal fly-trap.

"That, accordin' to my way of thinkin', is a picter of the sea. Every shaver with free limbs and a bold heart is crowdin' to it, and ten to one his first cruise is his last one. For, some how, an old salt a'int no man at all, but a kind of part of the ship; and he can't be washed off into Davy's locker unless the ship goes too. But 't is the young ones that a'int got the right cut of the jib that get washed overboard. But as I was sayin', they will go to sea, jest as them are flies crawl into that tumbler, and so fall off, flounder about for a little while, and then it's all over with 'em. But that's all nat'ral like, for some how I dont see how a right down tar could sleep in one of them graves, (and he pointed toward the church-yard,) with the arth and stones crowded down over him, and people walkin' about and tellin' all sorts o' yarns right within hail of him. Oh, 't is hard to think upon;" and he breathed heavily, giving his duck trousers an uneasy hitch. "But, now, 't is nothin' to be drowned in comparison. No boxin' up, no cold arth crowdin' down, but the free water all about, and the wind pipin', and sailors hailin' one another, and singin' the 'Bay o' Biscay,' which, accordin' to my notion, is one of the greatest songs ever sung, always exceptin' the 'Constitution and Gurrier.' But, as I was sayin', it must do a sailor's bones good to hear sich things about them. They'd be kind o' oneasy on the land, and miss the roll they'd always been used to."

Here Zeke arose from his seat and paced back and forth upon the small patch of green, as if suffering from some painful emotion. At length he stopped

before our little group, and fixing a tremendous quid within one jaw, he said very solemnly, as one who had become nearly desperate—

"I tell you what, children, 'taint no fault o' mine that I'm keeled up here like a useless old hulk; I never wanted sich moorings, I can tell you. Why it does seem as if the sea would n't take me in; I've been shipwrecked something like twenty times, off and on. I've been on short allowance nigh about as many times as there's ropes in a ship, till I was about the leanest dog you ever see; I've been washed overboard, have been taken by privateers, have been scuttled, capsized, and, somehow, I've always got off. There's the good ship Morgiany, I loved the wheel o' that ship as if it had been my own child, and every cable, rib and spar in her. How prettily she'd answer to her helm! how sort o' nice she'd come round to the wind; no yawing, no creaking, but sarcy like, and easy, jest as little Kate used to turn her head one side and sail to the leeward when I told her I should n't object to tryin' the flavor of them lips of hern. Well, the Morgiany went down one night in about the ugliest gale I ever weathered; and the poor thing cried and moaned jest as if it could feel for poor Zeke that could n't go with her. Well, she threw up a spar, and I clung to it for twenty-four hours, and then a ship picked me up, but not till I had chopped off a piece from one end to make a tobacco box of."

Here he took a wooden box from his pocket and held it up before us. It was curiously carved with nautical devices, exhibiting no small skill in the graver. Anchors, cables, hearts and ships were everywhere intermingled.

"That's all my work. I took comfort in doin' it, for 't was all I could do to show my respect for the poor Morgiany, and little Kate into the bargain."

"Wont you tell us about Kate?" I whispered, drawing quite near him.

"Not now, child, not now," and he drew his hard, red hand across his eyes. We were all hushed.

"Well, well, you see I was n't to go down with the Morgiany, much as I loved her, so here I am, keeled up like a great lubberly land turtle that's lost his reckoning. But come, that's nothin' here nor there. I'll tell you the story of Jack Spanker and the Mermaid, which was, take it for all in all, about the strangest story I ever heerd tell. Jack was a real sailor, and *would* tell about the toughest yarns of any sailor I ever heerd. Many's the time I've heerd him tell this story over in the long watches,

slow and airnest as if every word was true as the four gospels. Jack had a Christian mother, who taught him the truth, and made him promise never to swear to the day of his death. This came mighty hard upon Jack, for he was up to all kind of fun, and had a free, easy way of speakin'. I don't know how he managed it, for swearin' is as nat'ral to a sailor as grog or salt water; and, somehow, I never felt anywise oneasy about it, considerin' it a part of the profession, a kind of edication that a tar can't do without, and meenin' jest nothin' more than that he is wide awake, and knows which way the wind sets; and then, in case of a flaw, it serves to cool off with, for when the blast is once blown out there's nothing more to be said about it. Well, Jack always told the story in the same words, and though it did sound sort of oncredible at first, yet we got to believin' it, cause we'd got used to hearin' it. That mermaid must have been a putty nice gal, and as to Jack, he was about the trimmest splice I ever see; not too tall, for that's awkward aboard ship, nor yet short, and when he walked he brought his foot down square, and moved jest as the ship did, as if he'd grown up out of her. Then he'd a regular swab of brown curly hair, and a dimple in each cheek, and one in the chin. He laughed with his eyes and mouth too, and had teeth as white and even as a shark. Then, you should a heard him roar out the songs, some of them of his own makin' too. He had a sweetheart named Nelly Spaulding, and 't was surprisin' the way he used to praise her. Venus and Diany, and Neptin's wife herself, was jest nothin' at all 'long side of her. I don't believe Jack ever cared to look at any other gal, and couldn't a loved any thing else, savin' his mother, the ship, or a mermaid. When he was out on the yards splicin' a rope, or reefin' a sail, you'd hear his voice, clear as a trumpet, singin' as if nothing was to pay. He used to make up songs about the mermaids that set us all laughin'.

"O, mermaids, is it cold and wet
Adown beneath the sea?
It seems to me that rather chill
Must Davy's locker be."

Old Zeke sang the foregoing with a comical mixture of sentiment and jovial reminiscence, bringing out the words full and round in true nautical style. We all gave a shout, and begged for more.

"No, no, I was only showin' how Jack did it; but then you know he was young and handsome, and had a voice to be heard a mile. Well, you see, 't was these same songs that had like to bin the ruin of poor Jack. Had Old Nick come in any other shape he couldn't have made any thing out of Jack, but how was he to know he'd covered his cloven foot and black ugliness in the shape of a pretty mermaid? 'T was n't in his log that sich a thing could be.

"Well, the winds had been light, and every little while there came a dead calm. We hadn't much to do but tell long yarns, sing songs, and other fair weather work not worth tellin'. Jack had bin two hours out on the jib-boom, doin' something he might have done in half the time, and we'd been laughin'

at his songs, and then forgot all about him; so I must tell the story jest as he told it to me."

"I'd been singin'," said Jack,

"My mermaid's eyes are diamonds bright,
Her cheek like the blushing shell,
And were it not for Nelly's self
I might have loved her well—"

when I heard an amazin' soft-like sound, right under me, and I stopp'd workin' to see what it meant. I heard a little voice singin'

"I have come from under the sea,
For thy voice beneath it rung,
And I would see the sailor boy
That hath so sweet a tongue."

"That you shall, said I, lookin' over into the water, and I must say, I don't object lookin' at you. But never mind singin', I only sing myself on very particular occasions.

"With that I heard a kind o' ticklin', and my faith, I never did see jest sich a pair of eyes. They wa'nt black, nor blue, nor green, nor—I can't tell what, but they was wonderful bright, and went through and through, that sort of a thing that always has a skewer or arrow run through it.

"I won't deny, says I, you're a nice lookin' gal, but what colors do you sail under, how do you hail? I've no notion bein' fool'd by any heathenish critter, bred a Christian as I've been.

"You should a seen her laugh. 'You may call me what pleases you best. Won't you give me a name, Jack?"

"No, faith, I mean to do that for Nelly. Howsomever, I do n't object to call you Nelly jest one v'yge.

"The critter laughed agin, and I don't know how it was, she did look like Nelly Spaulding. I rubbed my eyes over and over agin, but there she was growin' more and more like her every minit. After awhile, says I,

"Do n't you find your berth down there rayther cold and wet?"

"O, not in the least. We breathe the water as you do air. I wish you would come and see the way we live under the water."

"Get thee behind me Satan," said I, remembering my mother. No, no, I've no notion drownin' myself. You must try that trick upon the marines."

"And I went to work, takin' no notice of all her singin'. But 'twas no use, I couldn't help lookin' down agin, and there she was, lookin' more like Nelly than she did before. Faith, says I, I do n't see how 'tis you contrive to look so much like Nelly Spaulding.

"Do I?" says she, 'well I dare say I do, though Nelly is called the prettiest girl along shore.'

"You may well say that, says I, and none of your fish-ending and 'yster kind of critters neither, for you must know I had n't hardly got over her asking me to take a trip to Davy's locker. I hadn't well nigh got the words out of my mouth, before there the critter was a sittin' on the jib-boom, right before me, and two the funniest little feet just peepin' out from under her petticoats. I jest took my fore-finger and touched her little white arm, same as I used to do to

the dough, when my mother's back was turned. And sure enough 'twas soft and warm, and nothing like clam or fish about it. But she didn't mean to stay, for she jumped down agin, laughin' in great fun. Then the mate called out, 'Jack, a'int you done that jib yet?'

"Aye, aye, mostly, sir, but there's been a con-founded mermaid here plaguin' me. Then the men all laughed, as if they thought it a good joke, but I knew it was airnest. But what's the use tryin' to teach poor ignorant critters what wont believe what a man tells them he has seen with his own eyes?"

Here Old Zeke gave a decided yawn and arose from the bench. "O, is that all? is there no more? what became of Jack?" we all cried out.

"No, there's enough more, but that will do for to-day. I can't stop to tell you how poor Jack did rayly go down with that mermaid, for the yarn was always a putty long one."

CHAPTER II.

"The water roll'd, the water swell'd,
This short suspense is o'er,
Half drew she him, half dropp'd he in,
And sank to rise no more."

A real mermaid story—a live mermaid—and that from the lips of one who had the story only second-hand—one who had seen and heard the man who had seen the mermaid. Old Zeke became invested with a strange and mysterious awe—an ancient mariner, speaking words of solemn and deep import. Did he not have the story from the very lips of Jack?—from Jack, who had put his finger upon the mermaid's arm, even as he would have punched into a real doughnut. The next day, we were all standing beside him, with hushed breath, awaiting his revealments.

"One night after this," continued Old Zeke, "giving the story in the words of Jack, I was standing at the wheel, lookin' at the long wake of silver the moon left upon the water, and then up at the stars, for they had a cunning sort of twinkle that made me think of Nelly's eyes. Hap'ning to cast my eyes est under the lee, I see somethin' leap out of the water two or three times—some flounderin' porpoise, says I, or one of them are flyin'-fish. Then there was a little spout of water risin' up and showerin' down, and lookin' like a heap of all kinds of pearls and precious stones. I rubbed my eyes and looked agin' and there right before me, laughin' out of the corner of her eyes, stood that mermaid.

"I held out my hand, encouragin' like, and says I, now, gal, come along side, for you see I can't leave the wheel without loosin' two or three pints, which would bring the captain up in no time. Faith you're so like Nell, that I can't help it, says I, and I gave her a kiss, as natral as if I'd known her a long cruise.

"I wish, Jack, you'd go down and see how nice we live under the water," says she, "you'd never miss Nelly Spaulding."

"Nell would miss me though, I'm thinkin', and 't isn't hardly fair for one gal to try to cut another out. Besides, I'm plaguey suspicious that, if you once got me down there, you'd be for turnin' me

into a great lubberly whale, to be harpooned some-time or other, and then Jack Spanker will be used for ile to light the binnicle. No, no, gal, you do n't catch me that way, and I turned my back square round, and look'd as savage as a shark.

"Arter awhile I jest tip'd a look over my shoulder, and, sure enough, there she stood with the great tears dropping out of her eyes, and falling in a considerable puddle on the deck. Now, the jig is always up with a tar when a woman cries. Avast, there, Nell, says I, let me wipe this drippin' with this splice of a sail hangin' to your flipper, and I said some pretty nice things to stop her cryin'. Did you ever see an apple when a boy drives it into a puddle of water, how it goes down and then comes smilin' like up agin?—well, the mermaid look'd somethin' so, when she looked coaxingly into my face.

"'Jack,' says she, 'let one of my men hold the wheel, there, I want you to see something over the 'side of the ship.'

"I chuck'd her under the chin; your men, Nell, I should like to see one. Presently a little, old man, that look'd as if he'd been dryin' since the time of that old sailor, Noah, pop'd over the taffrail; as much as to say, here's your man, sir.

"Can you box the compass, gray beard? says I.

"'Aye, aye, sir,' says he, takin' the helm.

"Steady, now, steady, says I, and mind, none of your cantrips, or I'll knock you into foul weather, in less than no time.

"We looked over into the water, and the mermaid began to sing,

'Mist of earth away, away—
Veil of waters, deep and blue,
Open to the moonlight ray,
Bring our palaces to view.'

"Presently, the dim outline of things began to appear; and then the pavement of a world beneath the waters, inlaid with gems and gold and silver, and walls of crystal, and gates of emerald, towers of pearl, and bowers of coral.

"That's a nice country of yourn, says I, only a leetle too dazlin'-like, and nothin' like potatoes and inyons growin'.

"The mermaid laugh'd; and then I saw some steps of ivory, and long walks with flowers on both sides, and all sorts of fruit and green things growin', and everything amazinly clean, and not a speck like dust anywhere. Then I heard folks talkin', and singin' old songs, and some of them I knew. Presently, long come Bill Marlin, with a mermaid tucked under his right flipper. Now, we'd lost Bill overboard on the last v'yge, and a whole soul'd sailor he was.

"Ship ahoy, says I, how do you like your berth? and before he could speak, and I never could tell how, but there I was down alongside. I looked up, and there was the ship right over head, with her canvas all set, and now and then a fish darting past, and two or three piratical sharks ready for everything that fell overboard. I pinch'd my arm to see if 't was real flesh and blood, and halloed and ran about to see if I was dreaming; but the truth was, I was under the sea, and no mistake. How the little mermen and the mermaids laughed.

"Do you think your man will steer the ship right?" says I.

"O yes, he'll be here directly to give the reckoning."

"In that case, says I, it's time for me to go up again, she would n't go well without a helmsman.

"But you do n't mean to leave me, Jack," says the mermaid, putting her face close to mine.

"To be sure I do; did you think I was goin' to forsake Nelly Spaulding for a fish-woman?"

"Mermaids are just like other women; you abuse their beauty and they are right up about it, and that too when they're no better lookin' than a jury-mast. The mermaid's eyes looked light'ning. She stood a minit, looking fire out of her eyes, and then she burst out a cryin'. Jest then, down came the little gray-beard, and I saw the ship going ahead as if a tight breeze had just took her sails. I was in a terrible fix—there was that gal cryin' tears by the quart, the

ship about to leave me, and I down schooling about in Davy Jones' locker. I looked at the mermaid and began to feel wrathful.

"Now, says I, you've got me into this botheration, gal, and you must get me out of it. I've no notion stayin' down here you see, so you may as well contrive to get me up, or I shall kick up such a rumpus down here that Davy Jones will be glad to get me out of his kingdom.

"Then I see how the poor thing was a cryin', and I felt kind of bad. Nelly, says I, you're a nice gal for them what likes such a nice gal, but you do n't have Jack Spanker jest yet. Howsomever, should I ever get adrift, I should be glad to have you pick me up. Davy Jones' locker aint so bad after all.

"Ship ahoy, says I, throw us a rope, I say.

"They got me on board, where everything was jest as I left it. They all said I must have got to sleep, and so rolled overboard, but I knew better."

THE ATTACK.

BY C. F. HOFFMAN.

[A band of Mohawks, while the Iroquois forces were investing Montreal, attacked the country mansion of the Sieur de M——. That gallant gentleman, wounded in a recent Indian conflict, was confined to his bed by fever. Madame de M—— and her sister Claire were at evening prayers in the hall when the attack was made. An arrow which, entering through the window, nearly killed her little son, so excited the maternal feelings of the former that she was incapable of exertion; but the latter catching a musketoon from the wall, as she heard the strokes of the Indian tomahawks against the door, had the remarkable presence of mind to select the chief of the band, who stood at a distance, for her aim. He fell, and his followers instantly dispersed in confusion.]—*Wars of Canada, MS.*

The Indian whoop is heard without,
Within the Indian arrow lies;
There's horror in that fiendish shout,
There's death where'er that arrow flies!

Two trembling women there alone,
Alone to guard a feeble child;
What shield, oh, God! is round them thrown
Amid that scene of peril wild?

The Book upon the table there
Reveals at once from whence could flow
The strength to dash aside despair,
The meekness to abide the blow.

Already, half resigned, she kneels,
And half imploring, kneels the mother,
Awhile angelic courage steels
The gentle nature of the other.

They thunder on the onken door,
They pierce the air with furious yell,
And soon that plume upon the floor
May grace some painted warrior well.

Oh, why cannot one stalwart arm
But wield the brand that hangeth by?
And snatch the noble girl from harin
Who heedeth not the hellish cry?

A shot! the savage leader falls—
'T was Clara's eye which aimed the gun—
That eye whose deadly aim appals
Is tearful when its task is done.

He falls—and straight, with baffled cries,
His tribesmen fly in wild dismay;
And now, beneath the evening skies,
Those women may in safety pray.

SERAPH AND POET.

BY ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

The seraph sings before the manifest
God-one, and in the burning of the Seven;
And with the full life of consummate Heaven
Heaving beneath him, like a mother's breast,
Warm with her first-born's slumber in that nest:
The poet sings upon the Earth, grave-riven,
Before the naughty world, soon self-forgiven

For wronging him, and in the darkness prest
From his own soul by worldly weights. Even so,
Sing, seraph, with the glory! Heaven is high!
Sing, poet, with the sorrow! Earth is low!
The Universe's inward voices cry
"Amen" to either voice of joy and wo.
Sing, poet, seraph—sing on equally.