

Original.

UNCLE ZEKE, AND ONE OF HIS YARNS.

NUMBER II.

BY MRS. SEBA SMITH.

SINCE writing our sketch of Pooduck, which, whatever may be the opinion of certain wiseacres, was truth and not fancy, many have been the testimonials we have received as to the authenticity of our chronicle. All have been recognized; the desolate-looking church, calling from the hill-top for worshippers, the ferry-house, fish-house, and the indecorous school-house. Right glad were we to find our reminiscences awakened the dying interest of others; that those who had looked contemptuously upon the forlorn village, her glory departed, and the dust upon her brow, were conscious of a better feeling arising within them—and even while they beheld, the voice of lamentation sprang to their lips. And now, that Portland sits a queen upon her hills, looking down upon her ruined rival, the sound of triumph should be exchanged for sorrowful relents, in recollection that she hath been the spoiler. But we will cease our reflections, and resume our reminiscences.

A correspondent, who was tempted to visit the site of what had once been the great commercial mart of Maine, gives a melancholy picture of its present aspect. He says, "One house has apparently been painted within a dozen years, several have tumbled down, leaving but a part of a chimney, or a foundation wall standing. There is a little store furnished with a barrel of whiskey, a few fishing-lines and tobacco, nails, etc. The ferry-house showed signs of desolation—the fences about the village were patched with the drift planks of old vessels, and rusty sheathing boards were scattered about amid the rank grass. The wreck of a boat, bottom up, wreathed in dry sea-weed, lay high upon the beach. Hardly a man, woman or child, was visible. All was desolate and barren."

Alas, it is too true, and most sincerely do we thank our correspondent for the interest he has taken in the "Deserted Village." Nothing can be more forlorn than the aspect of a decayed commercial place. The listless and delapidated look of the weather-beaten tar, the grass grown wharves, the wild blossom growing up amid the corroding relics of the "ship yard," the time-worn and empty warehouse, with shutters flapping in the wind; and the ruminating cow, unmolested in the very mart of business.

Pooduck, in its palmy days, had its legends, its ballads, and its Laurent. Our correspondent was at some pains to search out the "Last Minstrel," and to take down his "Lay" from his own mouth. He is now grey-haired and old, yet his eye kindled at the memory of other days, and he sang the history of the "good brig Ariadna," with a dash of his former spirit, albeit the friends, who once joined its chorus, and understood many of its latent meanings, have long since passed from the earth. Peace be to their ashes, and peace be with him who lingers yet, the "last leaf" upon the tree.

The song of the Ariadna is of too local a nature to be transcribed, and it probably owed much of its merit to familiar allusions, and the sympathy existing between a few jovial spirits, who sang in concert of scenes in which each had been a participator—certain it is, "Uncle Barney," the author, on all occasions, was called upon for the song of the "brig Ariadna," which was received with shouts of applause. We will give a single stanza as a specimen of the whole, and of the taste prevalent in Pooduck—

"There was a brig, a brig of fame,
The Ariadna was her name;
She was built in Pooduck fair,
And David Sawyer owned a share."

But let us return to "Old Zeke," from whom we have digressed. Every child is alive at the mention of a mermaid—and who has not found himself speculating upon their possible existence! querying whether there may not be such a link in the great chain of existence—beautiful Undines, with pearly skin, and voices soft as the murmurings of the rose-lipped strombus, dwelling in coral bowers, and luring the sailor boy to the depths below. Certain it is, every sailor has a latent faith in these mysterious perils that beset his path, and when gathered about the fore-castle, many are the tales of marvel recounted of these dwellers of the deep.

Old Zeke was wont to tell many tales to this effect; and in their relation his little grey eyes ceased to twinkle, he threw the quid from his mouth, and his tone and look assumed even an appearance of elevation. He was amid the wild and supernatural of his own element—he lived over former days, and felt again the perils he had encountered. The yeasty deep, the cloudy heavens mingling with the vast beneath, and the solitary ship plunging in the fierceness of the storm; the awe-struck watchers, biding with strong hands, and stronger hearts, the wild battling of the elements; it was then the wrought fancy pictured to itself, amid the glare of lightnings, a beautiful figure upon the bows, singing in low melancholy notes the dirge of the mariner. Old Zeke had a faith equal to his listeners, and not one unreasonable doubt obtruded upon his narrative. To him, Captain Lee was the greatest of commanders, and the most intrepid of men; but when he came to the relation of his having shot the mermaid, for mystery, and low, prolonged utterance, he might have passed for the impersonation of the "Ancient Mariner" himself.

"We had been out to Bermudas—a long cruise—with head winds and squalls, and then calms, as if the sea was one great sky without a cloud. Every sailor on board believed Moll Pitcher had a black cat under the tub, or that some other magical thing had been done to keep us from our course. We examined the horse shoe, on the mast; all was right there; and at last Captain Lee declared he'd shoot the first man aboard that named a woman, or dreamed of his sweet-heart. We all looked at each other, for Cap'n William Lee, somehow, was always findin' a chance to tell of his Mary; and no wonder, for when she came down before the wind, with her stud'n' sails set, and streamers flyin' she was about the tightest lookin' craft a tarpaulin would wish to hail.

"Well, after that, whenever Cap'n Lee jerked his

tobacco out of his mouth, and braced his feet in this way, his head a little sidling, and begun, 'Zeke, there's—I knew what was coming, and before he got out a word about that snug wife of his'n, I would bow low and say, 'Now, cap'n, I know better than to disobey orders,' and then I'd bow again, and turn to the wheel, lookin' straight ahead, as if at somethin' another for'ard. At last, one day, Cap'n Lee, says he, 'Zeke, d'y'e hear, somethin' terrible's goin' to happen. I've dreamed of petticoats three times a night, for the last three nights, which makes, in all, nine times, according to my log.'

"'Twas a clear night—not a whiff of wind—and the moon was lookin' down into our faces like a great bold thing, that made us ashamed. Cap'n Lee's eyes was always black as a hurricane, and now they was larger and darker than ever. He was a tall, proud man, that walked the deck as if made to rule, and one look o' him took the heart out of the ugliest sailor that ever shipped; but now, when I looked up, there was his great black eyes, lookin' as soft as a gall's, and he brought out a half whistle, as if mad that he had to knock a drop out of the corner of his two eyes.

"'Zeke,' says he, 'you a'int the man to finch. I shan't see Mary again. But you go and see her, and tell her'—he couldn't get any farther. I took hold of his hand—'twas cold as an yster, and says I, 'Cap'n, I'll tell her jist what you say; you needn't mind sayin' it; I can guess all about it; jest what I should want you to say to little Kitty, if I was goin' off, you want me to say to Mary.'

"'Ay ay,' said Cap'n Lee.

"Jest then I looked to the wind'ard, and the sky had altered amazin'ly. A white send was coming down upon us all standin'. Cap'n Lee sprang for'ard, and never did I hear such a voice as he gave his orders in. We'd been for some days on soundins, and now we turned the ship's head out to sea, for with a clear coast, and plenty of sea room, a sailor doesn't know what fear means. That was a terrible gale—it blowed forty-eight hours, growin' worse and worse all the time. The mainmast went by the board, the dead lights was stove in, and the bulwarks swept fore and aft. All at once it seemed as if there was a dead pause. The ship shiver'd, and settled down into the trough of the sea—three tall dead lights were burning on the shrouds, and a voice, so sweet, rose above the roaring sea, and sang something—I never could make out what—but we all thought it must be our funeral sarvice, though a sailor doesn't mind that much. We all looked that way, and there, sitting on the bows, was a mermaid, combing her long hair, and singing, as if she liked the state of the weather a vast sight better than we did. I never see whiter faces than the men carried then. They left the ship to take care of herself, and began to call for the grog. Cap'n Lee looked as tall agin as I ever see him before. He went below, and come up again with a loaded gun. He went for'ard, and ordered the men to their duty. Every man went, lookin' all the time, as if expectin' the ball through his head. Cap'n Lee then walked for'ard, slow, and solemn like, and

took aim at the strange critter at the bows. There was a flash, a terrible shriek, and she plunged overboard, leaving her blood spattered all about. A few hours after, our ship struck. Cap'n Lee never spoke. I remember his face was white as chalk, and when we took to the boats, he remained on board 'till all was ready. We saw him about to leap in, when the ship went down, almost carrying us with her in the eddy.

"Cap'n Lee was never seen after. I went, as he told me, to see poor Mary, and said all I could to comfort her. She sat without opening her mouth, a long time, and at last she bust into the awfulest laugh I ever heard. Poor thing, she died raving mad."

Original.

A P O R T R A I T .

BY RUFUS DAWES.

THE rosiest hues of love were on her cheek
Twelve years ago, and every grace that yields
To woman adoration, raised a shrine
For worshippers: and one bowed down before her
Lower than the others, kissing her fair feet,
Like Love's own mantle; but she turned away,
And gave her heart to gold, but not to good.

Twelve years have past; look at her; in her eye
Sits passionless dejection, in her gait
Care hesitates with grace, and in the sigh
That breaks unheeded from her marble bust,
Read the cold habit of unhappiness.
Ambition rules her still, and worldly glare
Charms her beyond control. She would not yield
Preëminence in fashion, for the smiles
Of infants which she has not, nor regrets
Not having; for her heart is swallowed up
In avarice and vanity and self.

She was not always thus; but our life's love,
Unless we rule it in our early years,
Subjecting it to wisdom, will usurp
The throne of our affections, and displace
All honorable feeling. Girls are taught
To crush their tender impulses of love
By their own mothers, and to substitute
Anxiety for fine establishments.
Thus self builds palaces where congregate
The evil-tongued, the flatterer and the false;
And thus the fairest forms that walk the earth,
Flirt in the glitter of a heartless world,
And sell their soul to Mammon.

Of't we deem

Cross accidents in life unfortunate.
But he who loved Eugenia, was most blest
In her unkindness; for he learned to love
More wisely, more intensely; more like one
Who having found the fountain of all love,
Loves not himself in loving.