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THE CRUTCH,

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For the Crutch.

The Soldier's Crutch.

BY MRS. M. A. AMBLER ARMSTRONG.

On what shall the wounded soldier lean, When he comes from the deadly strife, To lay his blood-stained sword away, Weary, and maimed for life? ... On the heart of the Nation that proudly weeps, For its shattered but precious throng;— That will write their names on its history's page, And garland them ever in song!

Salt Point, Nov. 8th, 1864.

Phases in the Life of Jack Oakheart.

Phase One—The Cabin Boy.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE LAMPLIGHTER."

"Hard up as that, mother! Then I'm off!" And the poor widow who was "hard up," and whose son's ear had caught the long-suppressed groan of poverty, knew that he meant it. Off to sea! Off to the realization of those hopes and dreams which for years past had had their foreshadowing in mimic ships, wonderful feats at climbing, daring expeditions on impromptu rafts, and once or twice a stolen voyage in a fisherman's dory.

Bit or days are the few that follow to the widow; busy ones to her boy.

Pass over the difficulty of securing a voyage, procuring the outfit, and bearing up under the parting. These things over, and Jack stands on the deck of the good ship Zenobia, having a few last words with a young neighbor and comrade who has come hither from their island home to see him off.

How quickly the red shirt, the leather belt and jack-knife, and the jaunty tarpaulin have transformed the home-bred lad into the professional cabin-boy! But he is the ideal sailor yet—the newness and gloss not taken off.

"You came aboard last night, Jack?"

"Yes, Bob, I wanted to be at work."

"And they put you at it too! You look hot."

"Yes, holystoning: it's hard work," and the boy pushes the tarpaulin back from his damp hair.

"But never mind; I expected that."

"And your hands! O, my!"

"Yes, tarring ropes—'t aint nice," and the hands, thus early defiled, instinctively seek the refuge of trousers pockets.

"What is that—ugh!"

"A bucket of slush. I was just going to dip in. You needn't look so disgusted, Bob—best thing in the world to take off the tar! besides," confidentially, "it don't do to turn up your nose here—wish you could have seen our breakfast—served up in just such a pail as that—didn't look much more inviting, either. I couldn't touch it; haven't eaten a think since I left home yesterday; but don't tell mother."

"Where's the captain?"

"Not come aboard yet. I saw him though at the shipping-office," and the lad's face falls at the recollection.

"D'ye like him?"

"Well, they say he's hard—speaks like—like—thunder."

"What did he say to you?"

"Boy, have you got your eye-teeth cut? If not, you'd better, if you expect to eat salt junk."

"Was that all?"

"Every word."

"Short and sharp. Where's your crew? The ship's only waiting for a tide, you say, but I don't see many of 'em about."

"Look here," and Jack, with his head hung down and a dejected countenance, leads the way to the fore-castle, and pointing into its dismal depths, says gloomily, "there they are."

What a pitiful sight! what a fearful! Are they human, or are they brutes, those bloated, villainous heaps, that cover the floor or lie stretched out torpid helpless in the narrow bunks—now and then a muttered oath, or a fist raised threateningly in the air, alone revealing that those heaps are human; that they are men.

Men—yes, the most simple, the most child-like, the most tempted, the most betrayed of God's erring sons—but His, every soul of them, for all that. A few days, aye, a few hours hence, and they will rise from their drunkenness, awake from their stupor, brave men, strong men, true men, ready to risk life and limb to speed their ship on her course, save her from storm, rescue her from

wreck. God speed the cause of these men, and strengthen the hearts and hands of those who seek to save them from storm and wreck, for they are God's children as well as you and I!

But just now one might mistake them for the friends of the Prince of Darkness. The two lads so mistook them, for they turned away with a shudder, and were silent for some minutes.

"Where will you sleep?" at length asked Bob.

"Down there," replied Jack, with a sort of groan, pointing in the direction of the dreaded fore-castle. "O, Bob, my chest, that sister Lucy packed so carefully, is thrown in there, helter skelter, along with their things! And my bunk is next to that fellow's that's so crazy with rum. You saw him, just now, striking right and left like a pirate. O, Bob, it's—it's worse than—than I thought 't would be!" and the boy gulps down a sob of agony; "but don't—don't tell mother!"

"Hand along that bucket here, lazy-bones!" cries the rough voice of the second mate.

"Ah, that means me!" cries Jack, with a start.

"Ay, ay, Sir," in a response as hearty as that of a veteran mariner. "I must be at work, you see, Bob, we're so short of hands on account of those men below. There comes the captain! that full-faced man. Tide'll soon serve, I hear them say; we shall be off in a jiffy now—they're weighing anchor!" and, grasping the slush bucket in one hand he wrings Bob's hand with the other; "Good bye, old fellow; be sure and tell 'em at home that I went off in good spirits."

Five minutes after, the little green hand was sent aloft to furl the royals, and, when the tide turned, Bob, still waiting to see his friend fairly off to sea, caught sight of a little tarpaulin waving against the blue sky, and heard the cheery "hurrah" which seemed to echo the refrain, "Tell 'em that I went off like a man, like a heart of oak, as I am!"

Yes, tell them that. It will comfort the mother in her long night-watches, and help to dry the little sister's tears. Well that there is none to tell of the boy's hard drudgery, his terrible perils, his heart's sad yearning, his soul's despair. For who hears the cry of fear that is wrung from the sailor-boy lashed to the top-mast, blackest darkness above, fathomless sea below, and the tempest everywhere? Or who is there to pity the child who trembles at the oaths, shrinks from the contaminations, and barely escapes the blows of his task-masters? Who shall save him from becoming at last desperate, spiritless, heart-broken, or, worse still, hardened, reckless, a pray to every form of sin? Ah, who but God?

Some weeks ago a worthy family in Detroit received additions to their household circle in the shape of twins, both boys. A day or two ago the youngsters were baptised, and received their respective names, George Henry, and James William. In order to tell one from the other, both being dressed precisely alike, a blue ribbon was tied around the arm of the former, but a stupid servant-girl, after the fond parents had returned home, removed the mark, and now they are unable to tell "which from which."

Never smile at the expense of your religion or your Bible.