

## **An address to the officers of His Majesty's Navy / by an old naval surgeon.**

### **Contributors**

University of Glasgow. Library

### **Publication/Creation**

Dublin : William Curry, Junr. and Co., 1824.

### **Persistent URL**

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/b9vgr7gr>

### **Provider**

University of Glasgow

### **License and attribution**

This material has been provided by This material has been provided by The University of Glasgow Library. The original may be consulted at The University of Glasgow Library. where the originals may be consulted. This work has been identified as being free of known restrictions under copyright law, including all related and neighbouring rights and is being made available under the Creative Commons, Public Domain Mark.

You can copy, modify, distribute and perform the work, even for commercial purposes, without asking permission.



Wellcome Collection  
183 Euston Road  
London NW1 2BE UK  
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722  
E [library@wellcomecollection.org](mailto:library@wellcomecollection.org)  
<https://wellcomecollection.org>





(10)

AN

# ADDRESS

TO

THE OFFICERS OF

HIS MAJESTY'S NAVY.

---

BY

AN OLD NAVAL SURGEON.

---

DUBLIN :

WILLIAM CURRY, JUN<sup>R</sup>. AND CO.;

HATCHARD AND SON, LONDON; AND WAUGH AND INNES, EDINBURGH.

---

1824.

ADDRESS

THE OFFICERS OF

HIS MAJESTY'S NAVY

AN OLD NAVAL SONGBOOK

EDITED BY

WILLIAM CHURCHILL AND CO.

LONDON: PRINTED BY WILLIAM CHURCHILL AND CO. 1891

1891



## ADDRESS, &c.

---

HAVING heard of the publication of a Pamphlet addressed to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, on certain immoralities tolerated in the Navy, I was induced to read it; and discovered, that it treated of a very great existent evil, which I freely confess, from its general prevalence in the Service since I embarked in it, never before struck my mind with the full force it has now done; and I cannot but feel it a duty I owe to the Service, as well as to the Country in general, to make some observations upon the present System, which I shall address to the Naval Profession, in the hope that this subject may engage the attention of those officers who are zealously bent upon the improvement of the navy, so that they may give it due and unprejudiced consideration, and be led to use their exertions, in order to remedy the evil.

It is not my intention to approach the Admiralty on the subject, or to presume to inquire why their Lordships have not, at a time like the present, turned their attention to the *moral* improvement of the Navy, while they have done, and are doing, so much for the *material* part of it: in the improved structure of our ships, &c.

Neither is it my intention to review the pamphlet I have noticed. I shall merely observe, that however it might have appeared to me at first sight to be highly-coloured, upon reflection and inquiry, I entertain no doubt of the correctness of the facts adduced in proof of the state of our ships whilst in Port. It might, perhaps, have been more judicious in the Author, to have kept some part of the statement out of sight, and not to have entered into details which I understand have excited a spirit of resentment in some officers, who feel themselves individually attacked, and their characters aspersed as immoral men, by having permitted such licentiousness in the ships under their command; but large allowance, I think, should be made for the good in-



*tentions* of the Author, who evidently is not a naval man.

To officers of all ranks in the navy, I would now appeal, who can, by the power that is vested in them—by their influence in their different grades—and by their example, (especially those of junior rank, whose situation brings them in closer contact with the fore-mast men) do much to effect a reformation in a system which every thinking man must deplore. If any thing I may bring forward should unintentionally offend, my motive (the good of the service to which I have the honor to belong) will, I trust, secure for me a patient and indulgent hearing from every candid person ; and if my suggestions are inconclusive and unsatisfactory, I leave them to be modified and improved by officers of greater talent and superior judgment.

I have always been of opinion, that the Naval Medical Officer should not confine his duty merely to the cure of actual disease on board his ship ; but that he ought also, as far as it may lie



in his power, to be vigilant in searching out the various causes of it; so that, by his representations to those in authority, measures may be adopted for its prevention. It is universally admitted, that whenever a body of people is made *morally* better, it thereby becomes *physically* stronger; and it therefore appears to me that if the attention of Surgeons, as well as of all classes of officers in the navy, were more directed to the improvement of the *moral* state of their subordinates, their condition also would physically improve. A great desideratum would be thus obtained; for, if it be once admitted that, in any collective body of men, there is discovered in its system of government something grossly amiss, the next step to be considered is, how far it is possible to remedy it; and surely it behoves every individual who has the well-being of mankind at heart, to use his influence, in a mild and temperate, but steady and persevering manner, to aim at an amendment.

It is perhaps too generally thought, that our sailors need *no* amendment; and with regard to



their moral condition, that were they taught to *think* more than they do, it would unfit them for their several duties; and it has even by some been asserted, that drawing them out of their present state of thoughtless indifference might diminish that fearlessness of danger which constitutes their chief excellence, and gives them, as seamen, their unrivalled character in the world. But nothing can be more erroneous than this opinion; for it is proved by the experience of all ages, that there is much greater security for the man doing his duty well, who is bound by a sense of moral obligation to its performance, than for him who acts under the guidance of mere animal feeling.

To any reflecting and benevolent mind, it must be evident, that hitherto sailors have been too much considered as machines to perform a given service, without any reference to their moral powers; their bodily wants and comforts, in almost all things, have certainly been most amply and faithfully provided for; they have been well fed, and well paid; but the utter neglect of them, in other not less important points, forms a strong and lamentable contrast. Nothing, or next to



nothing, has been done for the improvement of their minds ; and it is the more remarkable, that some decisive steps have not been taken to form their moral character, when it is remembered that English sailors are the most thoughtless and improvident beings alive, accompanied with all the weakness and helplessness of children, in respect of their own concerns ; so that often the steadiest, most orderly, and most resolute seaman, on board a ship, becomes, when in Port, the most irresolute being imaginable—he is generally the easy dupe of the Prostitute and Jew, frequently squandering large sums of money in an unaccountably short space of time, without any adequate profit or pleasure ; and, in short, in every sense, a sailor on shore, although a most interesting, is a most pitiable object. When at sea, he is treated as one unable to manage himself. In every well-regulated ship, he is watched over as boys are watched over at school ; his person is examined, and kept clean ; his clothes are counted over periodically ; and the officer of the division he belongs to reports at general musters every article of his dress which is discovered to be missing. Added to this minute care of his



person at sea, the very ample allowance of every necessary for his comfort, from a liberal government and country, leaves him nothing to think of, and nothing to complain of. Would that the same paternal care were extended to him, in all respects, when the ship is transferred to the harbour!—but unhappily, all restraint is then instantly taken off. Officers too often set a bad example in receiving improper women on board *to themselves*,\* whilst a large number of the most disgusting prostitutes are admitted to the men,† which invariably tends to disease and to enervate, and unfit them for duty. I have often been struck with the great contrast between the healthy appearance and sound state of the men when they return from sea, and the condition of

---

\* I believe that there are fewer instances of officers setting this bad example than formerly, still, however, prostitutes have not been excluded either from the ward-room or the midshipmen's birth.

† The number of women which infest a ship varies, according to circumstances; if it be known that much pay or prize money is due to the men on board a ship, when she arrives, there is more avidity shewn by prostitutes in hurrying on board.



the very same men, when the ship, after any continuance in harbour, is again ordered out; their bloated countenances—the effect of drink and debauchery—their emaciated frames, and their deterioration altogether, occasion the remark I have often heard Captains make, that a long continuance in port so disorganizes their ship, that it requires a considerable time, with all their exertions, to bring her back to the order and discipline she was in when she arrived from sea. Every officer or man in the navy will admit, that it has long been a general custom, to receive on board our ships of war, a mass of the most abandoned women, who are domesticated with our men and boys. When the men have permission to go on shore, *they* accompany them; and when the men return to the ship, *they* also return with them; each woman being perseveringly watchful not to leave her man, so long as he has any thing to excite her cupidity. I mention this fact, to shew how next to impossible it is for the sailor to reflect upon the course he is pursuing, while he has not any respite whatever from the entanglements of the locust which, with so much in-



dust, adheres to him ; and if it be asked, why does he not shake off this loathsome being, which it is natural he should do, after his appetite has been gratified and he has been satiated with her society ? I reply, his inclinations would lead him to do so, if he had the power to follow them ; but he cannot do it of himself. I have no doubt my medical brother officers will support me, when I affirm, that upon a ship's going to sea, after refitting in the harbour, the list of sick is sometimes frightfully enlarged from the intemperance the men have continually indulged in with these women, from the diseases which they have contracted from them, and from the atmosphere being so deleterious, in their sleeping places. When it is contemplated what a population occupies the lower deck of a ship of war, where a man can only be allowed 14 or 16 inches breadth for his hammock, and that to this is added, in port, a great increase of women, and those of the most uncleanly habits, it is obvious, that the fetid impure air inhaled under these circumstances must have the most pernicious effect on the health of the crew, inducing a series of



diseases. Hence also convalescent patients recover very slowly, while the ship remains in harbour. In fact, the great quantity of filth, generated by women of the most abandoned description, renders it impossible for a senior Lieutenant, with his best exertions, to preserve the ship in that clean wholesome state which he would otherwise wish to do. His difficulties in cleansing the ship are increased by the multitudinous duties which devolve upon him in refitting; and these women may fairly be said to present an insuperable barrier to the attainment of his object.

There would not be any necessity to mention further prejudicial consequences arising from this continual cohabitation, were it not for the purpose of reminding those officers, who having been long removed from the disgusting scene, may naturally forget what they have formerly witnessed. A few perhaps will charge me with a want of delicacy, in exposing to the view of the Navy, a part of its system which (allowing for all that is otherwise to be admired) disgraces it. I nevertheless entertain a sanguine hope, that



many officers will, upon fair consideration, fully coincide with me in opinion, and seriously search out a suitable remedy for this great evil. However disagreeable it may be, to discover for the first time, any grossly *defective part in our family*; until it is made known to the head and branches no reformation can be accomplished; but if, as soon as they are acquainted with it, a reformation is determined upon, the unpleasant feeling excited at the disclosure of the moral disease soon wears off, and is forgotten in the improved order of things. On the other hand, if it be decided that all shall remain as before, rather than that the pain of an open and momentary exposure of what is faulty should be submitted to, that family must be considered to have abandoned all anxiety for moral rectitude, and can only be left to pursue its own errors.

When the French General Junot commanded at Lisbon, he wished to do the inhabitants a real service, by clearing the streets of the piles of filth which had so long accumulated in them; but the people preferred that they should remain as



they were, rather than undergo the momentary additional effluvia which the exposure would subject them to, notwithstanding their removal would have bestowed upon them a purer atmosphere, with many concomitant advantages. The Authorities, therefore, petitioned the General to *leave them in their filth!!!*

I think I have thus clearly proved that the admission of prostitutes is most detrimental to the sailor, from disease contracted, from the insalubrity of the air he is compelled to breathe, and from the dirt with which he is surrounded. I would next observe, (what I have witnessed myself) that the practice of domesticating prostitutes with the sailor is injurious to his health, by inducing habits of drunkenness. It is true, orders are given and measures taken against the introduction of liquor by the women; nevertheless, they do constantly contrive to elude the vigilance of the officers appointed to guard against it, and bring spirits to the men. From the drunkenness which is thus promoted, it will naturally follow that the blood becomes inflamed



and predisposed to disease ; it also excites discontent, quarrels and fighting, through which contusions and even dislocations of limbs occur from falls and other accidents, and the black eyes and disfigured faces of the women as well as the men, frequently proclaim the scene of vice and riot which has taken place below.\* Indeed, it is a general observation, that our men of war seamen are lamentably prone to drunkenness, and that there is considerably more punishment inflicted upon seamen for this than for any other crime whatsoever.† It is notorious that much of this ruling propensity in our seamen is fostered by their continual intercourse with these women, who are themselves so habituated to it, that it constitutes one of their chief gratifications ; and I hesitate not to affirm, that bad liquors and bad women have a greater tendency to debilitate, debase and injure the men, both morally and

---

\* It is quite impossible that the most correct First-Lieutenant can, if this evil be permitted, prevent these disturbances.

† Drunkenness is a crime that can seldom be forgiven at sea, where sobriety is of such vital importance ; therefore every thing that will tend to check the one, and promote the other, ought surely to be resorted to.



physically, than hardships, privations, climates and all other means combined. With respect to the injury which the service sustains from this practice, I would observe that this class of women greatly obstruct the officers in their duty on board ; indeed so much so, that it has been remarked by many officers, that they would prefer fitting out a ship with a much smaller proportion of men without this nuisance, than with a whole crew, as things are. This custom must also cause very disagreeable feelings in men of sober and cleanly habits, who were never before accustomed to such a life ; especially as many of our best petty officers and seamen, who are from the north of England, are remarkable not only for being sober, steady and orderly men, but also for being more thinking than the generality of our sailors.\* But when I reflect upon the humiliating situation of married men and their wives on board our ships, this evil appears in a peculiarly grievous point of view.

---

\* North countrymen are held in such estimation, that a draft of men from Leith is sought for by Captains with anxiety.



On a ship's arrival, the men's wives naturally come on board to their husbands, when they must either submit to witness the most disgustingly indecent language and scenes, or be satisfied to return to the shore. When they remain, it too often happens, that a modest woman, (the mother of a family) after being brought into such close contact with the most infamous of her sex, becomes nearly as bad as they are, through their contaminating influence. I have known many a decent seaman choose to forego the satisfaction of having his wife on board, rather than submit to the degradation of seeing her domesticated with prostitutes. It may fairly therefore be presumed, that many good men are on this account induced to desert from the service,\* an evil which certainly ought to be guarded against. It may

---

\* Such men would surely be a much greater loss to the service, than those (supposing there should be any) who might desert, from not being allowed to have prostitutes on board; but with proper management of the officers, I do not believe that a single man would leave the service on this account. Seamen are influenced more than is usually supposed, by the opinions and conduct of their officers, and whenever they shew a disposition to benefit the sailor, he generally feels most sensible of it.



be said, in objection to those who desire the expulsion of prostitutes from our ships, that it is an indulgence which sailors have enjoyed of long standing; that any innovation of this kind might therefore be attended with unpleasant consequences, possibly desertion. I am confident, the effect of a change would be entirely the reverse; the married men, and those who had never partaken of this *indulgence*, or desired to have them on board, would certainly not complain, but they would evidently feel themselves more comfortable and more contented with their ship. The permission that can surely be given at all times (almost under any exigency) for a proportion of the men to go on shore, at once closes this argument, and supposing a fourth (or even a third) of a ship's crew were absent, there would, I imagine, be quite enough of hands remaining for all the duties\* attendant upon refitting her, when rid of this nuisance, so that on shore, the men

---

\* The great number of hands, comprising the crew of our large ships, is intended to have the guns well manned in battle, as not near that number is requisite for ordinary duties.

would be free to act as they pleased.\* A great good would also result to those on board, by the absence of the beings in question, from the additional room (and consequently better air) in the sleeping decks, and it would then be possible to give the married people double births, which (although a custom of the service) cannot now be acted upon.

Another difficulty, or rather false alarm, has been thrown in the way—the dread of greater enormities being committed, if the men are debarred from having bad women on board. What I have just observed is a reply to this; for if the men are permitted to go on shore, (and it is the opinion of the most experienced officers, that for the actual good of the service, they should not be confined to the ships) they really are not debarred from them; but to officers of right and enlarged views, I would say it is acknowledged,

---

\* It is not here presumed that seamen would never run into excesses, but if tempted to do so while on shore, that they would not unfrequently be glad to return on board their ship, as to a well regulated home.



that the unrestrained and unlawful gratification of sexual intercourse tends, more than *any other* (or perhaps than *all other*,) vice to the destruction of the moral principle in man,

In fact, the more a man indulges his licentious desires, the more readily will he gratify any unnatural propensity that presents itself to his debased appetite, when he has no moral guide to direct him.\* It has occurred also to some, that if married women only were permitted to be on board, it would induce the men to marry their prostitutes to entitle them to this privilege; but what so likely to effect the apprehended evil as a *domestication*, which affords the most favorable opportunity to the woman of gaining an ascendancy over the seaman's mind, and bending it in all things to her will. I am convinced, that on the contrary, after a short time, (particularly if allowed to go on shore) they would discover and

---

\* It may with as much propriety be argued, that a supply of women should be taken to sea. As to the fear of greater enormities being committed, the experience of history and reason prove the principle to be false.



rejoice that they were released from a bondage to the most wretched, loathsome and depraved of human beings, and that they would not even desire to have them on board again;\* and even if an individual did thus occasionally marry, it would be no more than what has often occurred, when unlimited admission for them into our ships was given; besides, a circumstance of this kind would be soon known in a ship and could be guarded against, inasmuch as that the men might be given to understand that decent and *well conducted* married women *only* would be admitted on board. Thus, so far from the abolition of this outrage against morality and good feeling, producing an indisposition to the service, it will have a totally opposite effect,† and cause

---

\* In the few ships from which prostitutes have been excluded, I understand that the men were generally quite satisfied, confessed the reasonableness of the change, and never once asked for leave to bring them on board afterwards.

† Many of our best officers are of opinion, it would be the means of attaching them more to the service, and preventing desertion and going into the American service, which holds out the temptation of higher wages, and does not sanction prostitutes on board their men-of-war. Indeed in no foreign service can I discover that such a system is tolerated as in ours.



it to be more respected, than it is at present, by seamen in general, from the comfort, regularity, improved state of health and other advantages, which would be experienced in a better state of things. The midshipmen, and other young men, being no longer under the influence of that contamination, which must irresistibly initiate them in vice, and ultimately assimilate them to the fore-mast man, in the same feeling of indifference to all social order and moral obligation—this hope might be indulged, that the excitement being removed, reflection would operate as a salutary monitor to many, in this easy and rapid road to ruin. We constantly find, in a King's ship, young gentlemen, who have been brought up with refined manners and moral principles, but from the state our ships are generally in while refitting in harbour, the good impressions stamped upon their minds are soon dissipated, and, from their being accustomed to see vice tolerated, and made so easy to them, they are generally led into excesses and debauchery. Indeed there are some sad instances of young midshipmen, after embarking in the navy, commencing a thoughtless,



vicious career, and pursuing it from one stage to another, until they have been so diseased in body as well as mind, that it was too late to save them. I have myself known several fine lads die a miserable death, the consequence of the unrestrained facility afforded them to persevere in their debauched habits.\* Perhaps it may be urged, that vice is to be seen every where, on shore as well as on board ship; that many schools (especially public ones) are not exempt from it, and that in seaport towns there is much to disgust the eye and ear of a youth not used to it; and so, I would reply, he would probably *remain thoroughly* disgusted with what only *occasionally* assailed him, if he were not obliged *constantly* to see and hear what was offensive to him in his own home: but there is a plain distinction to be drawn; *on shore* he can retire from vice, and avoid what is improper; *on board* there is no retreat; he is *compelled to live* in the same habitation with the

---

\* It is acknowledged that some captains look after their young midshipmen more than formerly; but whilst in port, when their care is most required, they can least attend to them; at any rate, the midshipmen must inevitably see and know all that is going on, on board.



most notoriously infamous of the human species, and in some classes of ships, on the *same deck* with them; and he must continue to do so, until a stop is put to this demoralizing custom.

I have already remarked upon the covetousness (which is insatiable) of the creatures that are permitted on board our ships, who rob the men of every thing they can, and in fact so impoverish them, that a man seldom leaves the place where his ship has been paid off, with one shilling of the large sum he may have received; consequently, if he cannot get employed in the merchant service, which is averse to taking men of war's men, except the very best, he must either go to his parish and increase the poor's rates there, or become a ragged beggar\* about the country.

I would also remark, that whenever our ships

---

\* How many stout sailors have been seen begging about the roads, since the peace, who, when questioned, confessed that they had received sufficient money to have supported them for a considerable time, all of which they lavished at the seaport on prostitutes.



move from port to port, as they are not allowed to carry the women with them, they follow them across the country. This is continually occurring, and thus a stream of profligacy, consisting of *hundreds*, and in time of war, of *thousands*, passes through the interior, which must contaminate, as it moves along, all, both male and female, who come within its baneful influence. In our great maritime country, it is manifest, that the most injurious consequences must result from the very general degradation of our seamen through the medium of these women,\* as our Navy may justly be considered to give the tone of moral feeling and conduct to a large proportion of our population. Principles engendered in a ship of war, are disseminated by the unceasing change and distribution of officers and seamen, not only through their own body, but among their families, (for what family has not some near relative at sea?) and to all with whom they associate on shore. Our colonies also are

---

\* We must remember what active allies and agents the prostitutes were, at the time of the great *mutiny* at the Nore.



sensibly affected by the character of our seamen. Foreign nations form their opinion of the religion and morality of our country from their conduct; and it is a lamentable fact, that Heathens instead of being benefited by the visits of our ships, have only been encouraged in their immorality, and strengthened in their vices, by our receiving their women on board. To persons then who hold the fundamental axiom that "whatever is morally wrong cannot be politically right,"\* it surely becomes a positive duty to attempt the abolition of this evil, which we trust we have satisfactorily proved to be injurious to the sailor, the service, and the community at large. There appears to me to be no insurmountable impediment whatever to the effecting this amendment in the moral condition of our Navy, if officers would generally and steadily determine to do so, with the sanction of the Admiralty, His Majesty's

---

\* It is certainly a most mistaken policy, to endeavour to attach men to their ship, by holding out to them a permission for any vicious indulgence; and I have no doubt, that many excellent seamen, of good character and regular habits, have been deterred from entering on board our ships, from the prevalence of the present system.



Proclamation, the Articles of War, and Naval Instructions on these heads. I have no doubt, that in a short time, even the most dissolute seaman, feeling the beneficial consequences of the reformation,\* would join his officers in effecting it.

It is not proposed, nor do I pretend to say, that I aim at any thing so visionary as, that this will succeed in making sailors wholly moral; but it is not presuming too much to assert, that it will, in every respect, greatly ameliorate their condition. Their health will be better preserved; they will be less addicted to drunkenness, thieving, bad language, and swearing; they will be more cleanly, comfortable and steady. When

---

\* When a man is paid off, he then has time for reflection; he can fully appreciate the loss he has sustained by squandering his wages on these women. When he finds himself in absolute want, compared with the great comfort he has been used to, whilst on board a King's ship, where every thing was regularly provided for him, he bitterly regrets that his officers permitted him to receive on board those who pillaged him of his wages and prize-money, which, if taken care of, would have provided him with a comfortable maintenance, in the bosom of his family, for the remainder of his life.



set on shore, they will be richer, and acquire more careful habits, to the advantage of their families and themselves. The married men may enjoy the company of their wives, without exposing them to be domesticated with prostitutes. The country will also be profited, as sailors will no longer be reduced to the necessity of claiming relief from their parishes, to increase the already enormous Poor's Rates. The benefits arising to seaport towns and the neighbourhood around them, will be very great, for the seduction of young women to supply the navy is immense;\* and this will be diminished, from the demand on board having ceased, and *that* on shore being lessened; also, there will be no longer that facility in secreting daughters from their parents, on board ship; and one of the strongest streams of national and domestic moral pollution will be dried up.

---

\* I have been assured that, at one period of the war, there were at Portsmouth, Gosport and the vicinity, no less a number than 20,000 prostitutes. They have decreased at the seaports in numerical proportion to the reduction of the navy, *and no more*; and were the navy to increase, they would no doubt again increase with it, *unless this evil is put an end to.*



I shall now conclude my observations with a sincere and anxious desire, that the officers or the navy will give them a fair and patient consideration; and in full confidence, that whoever (feeling an interest in the service and in a seaman's welfare) will *temperately* but *firmly* make the trial of keeping his ship free from the vicious women in question, will very soon prove that seamen themselves are not insensible to their real interests, or unthankful to those who endeavour to promote them; and that they will not even desire to have prostitutes on board. They will also find more regularity and subordination, and less punishment in their ships; the best faculties of the sailors being improved, they will consequently become a happier and a more valuable body of men to their country.

I will only add, that I do sincerely hope the Admiralty will give this important subject serious consideration; and at so favorable an opportunity as during a peace, that they will be induced, by an act of authority to put down



this great evil. They need only strictly *enforce*  
*the observance of the orders which are already*  
*in existence, and it is at once removed !!!*





