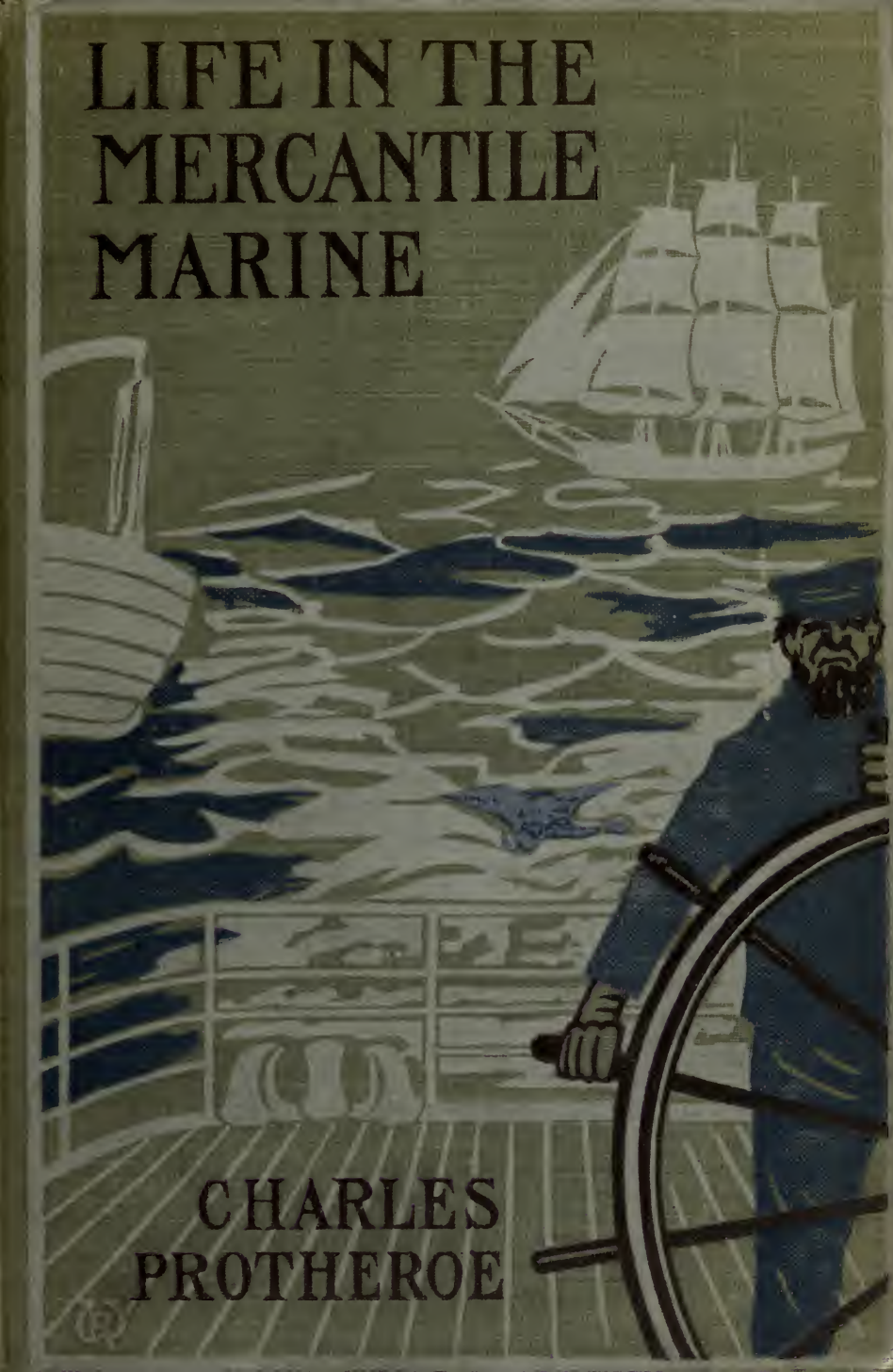
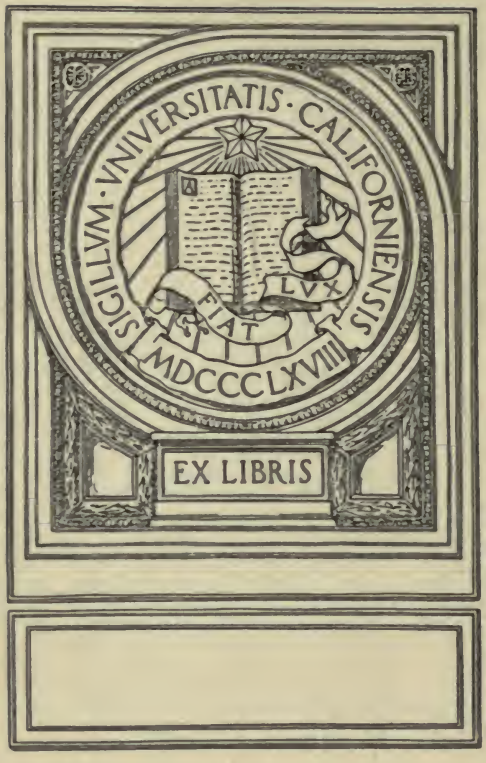
LIFE IN THE MERCANTILE MARINE



CHARLES PROTHEROE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LIFE IN THE MERCANTILE MARINE

LIFE IN THE MERCANTILE MARINE

BY CHARLES PROTHEROE

I love the sailor, his eventful life,
His calmness in the gale, the wreck, the strife,
And though but a wild and reckless ocean ranger,
God grant he reach that port when life is o'er
Where storms are hushed, and billows break no more.

CRUISE OF THE "SUNBEAM"

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD
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LIFE IN THE MERCANTILE MARINE

CHAPTER I

A crave for the Ocean—I gain my Wish—Dirty Weather—Crews exercise aloft—Wonderful Immunity—Uselessness of First-voyagers.

My object in those sketches that pertain to nautical life, is to give my readers a true and faithful outline of the conditions, conditions wonderfully little known, save to sailors themselves, that prevail in the life of men who go down to the sea in ships. And as I am not going to try to write a long preface, I shall begin at once.

To the best of my belief I was christened Robert afterwards abridged by my parents to Bob, they, judicious people, holding the sensible idea that a single Christian name, and a short one at that, was quite sufficient for any one to carry through the world with them.

Although, of course, present at the interesting ceremony, I can't say with any degree of

truth that I have a recollection of the occasion. So, reader, if unacquainted with the topics I write about, please do as I did with regard to my name, and take somebody else's word that it is so.

At an age when I began to think for myself with some method, as to what my occupation in the world should be, the only one that commended itself to my impatience was a life at sea. Not that I knew anything about it, or had any idea of what it was like, except perhaps the unreality gleaned from cheap romance, and the fact that my two brothers had gone to sea before me. Perhaps the blood of some nautical ancestor had asserted itself in our generation, and imbued us with a love for roving.

A trip out to New Zealand, whither we had gone to settle, did not lessen the desire that was so strong within me. When I was fourteen years old, by ceaseless pestering, for my mother had no wish that I should follow in the footsteps of my brothers, I gained permission to apply for a vacancy as apprentice in a shipping company. But month after month passed by, whilst I waited impatiently, without result, every ship that left the port, having me, could

I find the time, as an interested and envious spectator, for to form part and parcel of the crew in one or other of them was the prime object of my life. As with anchor apeak and topsails sheeted home they stood to clear the heads, my heart went with them across the great highway that was to me the only road to fame and honour.

Everything comes to those who can wait, but that same waiting is often the very deuce of a job, and frequently means waiting for something that never comes, or when it does you have no longer any use for.

However, this was not the case with me, for one day I received an intimation to present myself at the office.

Youth is easily pleased, the loss of this faculty for every pleasure one of the penalties of age, and as such, a convincing argument in favour of remaining young as long as you can.

No impecunious barrister receiving his first brief, no struggling author getting his first proof, was half so happy as I. Here was the order I had almost given up the hope of, and I wasn't long in responding to it.

"I suppose your ambition is the main sky-sail

yard," said one of the clerks when the contract was concluded, and in consideration of a premium of fifty pounds I found myself appointed to the *Chatto*. I hastened to assure him that he was right, but as a matter of fact, it was some time before I was any way intimate with my friend the main sky-sail.

The *Chatto* was a full-rigged ship of a thousand odd tons, in reality a wool-clipper, but being winter time, she was now loaded with tallow and grain. As I went off in the tender to join her, she appeared to me about the prettiest picture I had ever set eyes upon. Loaded down to Plimsoll, her side port painted, she sat gracefully on the water, and as I drew near a feeling of elation filled my breast that she was to be my home for the next few years at least. As I knew from after experience, everything was spick and span aboard of her. Yards trimmed neatly and exact, and not a rope-yarn out of place, for the whole time I was on board of her "Irish pennants," as we call loose ends or anything adrift and untidy aloft, were never to be seen. So different from leaving the other side of the world, when after a month or so in dock with no crew on board, everything is in a state of

confusion when a vessel puts to sea—but steady, I have something to say about that later on.

The next morning at daylight it was, "All hands man the windlass," and I lent my little aid to the task of breaking the anchor out, an operation I had often watched attentively from a distance. To the lively chanty, "for we are homeward bound," sung with such hearty goodwill that it must have echoed through the little town and awakened some of the inhabitants before their usual time, link after link of the cable slipped grudgingly in through the hawsepipe. The anchor off the ground, sail was crowded on her, and with many a sailor's farewell, "Good-bye and God bless you" we gathered way and left the little town behind us. As we got outside and met the light swell that came in from the Pacific, the *Chatto* courtesied gracefully to it, like a grand-dame pleased to welcome an old friend. The horrors of seasickness are not for me to describe, for I know them not. When she dipped gleefully into it, as if anxious to lave her bows after being a stranger to it for months, my head went round like a top. To move a few steps for'ard I took the precaution to stretch my hands out in front

of me, for I had a most unpleasant feeling that the deck was coming up to strike me in the face. However, this soon passed off, and left my head as clear as a bell, the only thing I needed badly being sea-legs.

I think I might have reasonably been excused had my first voyage been my last, for the time experienced between New Zealand and the "Horn" was sufficient to knock the bottom out of any romantic ideas I may have formed on the matter of sea-faring, and leave them nowhere.

We had only left a few days, and got chafing gear aloft, which is always the first job after leaving port, although I had no hand in it, not being allowed off the deck, when we fell in with easterly gales, which as it turned out had come to stay.

Day after day, and week after week we pegged away at it under short canvas, the only change being when it blew harder, and we got, as some of the old hands said, two gales rolled into one and working together. A trip to the eastward round the Horn in July is not the sort of thing to look forward to with any degree of pleasure, and the man who would

hanker after it must be fond of dubious luxuries.

Making and shortening sail was an everyday occurrence. No sooner did it ease a bit than the reefs would be shaken out of the fore and main topsails, for the "old man" was making a passage, but we never made sail above them for many a long day.

With a few weeks of this drill the crew became like a crowd of highly trained greyhounds on a coursing field, and the way they handled that canvas was remarkable.

One of the wonders of sea-faring life, is the singularly small proportion of sailors who meet with death or accident by falling from aloft. Whether or no the cherub who is supposed to sit up aloft and watch over poor Jack is responsible for it, I am not prepared to say, but the fact remains. Having to tumble up aloft at all hours and in all weathers to perform acrobatic feats that would almost puzzle a monkey, the saying among sailors "hanging on by the eye-brows," becomes almost a truism. One would think the situation was highly spiced enough by danger without needlessly increasing it. Yet it is not altogether an

uncommon thing to see a man if he happens to be barefooted, run out along the yard, in preference to using the foot-rope placed under it for the purpose, to reach what is a post of honour, the weather ear-ring. I have seen it repeatedly, but never had any sympathy with such foolhardiness, and more respect for my person than to try it myself.

In spite of all this, although not knowing the actual percentage, I make bold to say that not more than one sailor-man in hundreds is killed or injured by falling from aloft. If I use my own experience as a base, the proportion would be less, for in over twenty years of sea life I was never caused the pain of witnessing such a catastrophe.

We hammered away, the skipper and officers taking advantage of every lull that seemed likely to last for an hour, to shake reefs out, only to take them in again.

My acquaintance with the sky-sail seemed further away than ever, but wait a bit, that is incorrect. When the bad weather lasted, the royal yards were sent down from aloft, and of course, the sky-sail with them, and lay lashed on the fore-deck house, like the fifth wheel of

a coach, neither use nor ornament. Think not this course of argument came to me my first voyage whilst battering away towards Cape "Stiff," for at that time the sky-sail yard and I had something in common, both coming under the same catalogue of uselessness. What power of reasoning and seeing things as they are that I may possess, came to me a long time after this, when I had learned to use my hands without my fingers being all thumbs. My particular duties at this period were to hang on to the tail-end of a rope when any pully-haully was going on, and to coil it up when finished with. This, and looking after the time, and announcing it by striking the bell every half-hour, was at that time about the sum total of my utility.

CHAPTER II

Off the "Horn"—Among the Ice—A blowing Iceberg—A dangerous Position and good Seamanship—A missing Ship—Carrying-on Skippers—Free once more.

We were fifty days out before the longitude of the "Horn" was reached, a passage that usually occupied three weeks, and even then were a long way to the south'ard of it. Just before daylight one morning the look-out reported "icebergs ahead," and as the dawn broke we found ourselves surrounded by them. Not a few here and there, but hundreds were in sight, of all shapes and sizes, from pieces the size of St. Paul's Cathedral to immense islands miles in length, the dimensions of which it was only possible to guess at. Fortunately the weather became fine at this time, and we had a glimpse of a cold wintry sun, the first for many a day. It was a welcome change from what we had

been having for the last six weeks, and whilst the daylight lasted, and the sun shone on these ice-mountains, it was a glorious scene, and broke the monotony that had settled on the ship like a pall; and whenever I could forget how exceedingly cold it was I enjoyed it fully, never thinking for a moment of the danger we should be exposed to when night should fall. The captain and officers were not in the same happy frame of mind, realising what it meant with a long night before them of dodging ice. One enormous iceberg, not more than a mile to windward of us, took my fancy immensely. So close was it that we could see every crevice in its huge side, and the wind from it was like a blast of air from a freezing-chamber. There was a peculiarity about this berg which I have reason to believe is almost unique. Every now and again from the extreme top, which was nearly flat, a spray of water would be thrown high into the air; in fact, a natural fountain was at work, and I have never seen or heard of anything like it since. My inquiring mind turned to some of the older hands for an explanation of this curious phenomenon, but with scant result.

I suppose the sailor sees some of the most wonderful sights that nature has to show, but usually he is the most unobservant of men, cause and effect being as a rule a dead letter to him. Sights that some people would give anything to witness are banished with a momentary wonder, the why and wherefore of them having no place in his mind.

Years afterwards I settled to my own satisfaction the cause of that blowing iceberg, but whether you put your faith in my solution, reader, is another matter.

In my opinion, what caused this natural fountain was, of course, in the first instance, a hole through the ice ending at a cavity inside at the base. A bigger surge than usual forced all the air out of this hollow place, which, acting in the same manner as the spear of a pump, had the power to draw a certain quantity of water after it. That is the most feasible explanation I could think of.

Sometime in the afternoon we saw a vessel bearing down upon us on an opposite course to our own. She turned out to be a barque that some fourteen days before us had left the same port as ourselves, so that although our passage

had been a tedious one, we had the satisfaction, if it was any, and I suppose it was, of knowing that hers was even more so, judging by the time she had taken to do the same distance.

As she came nearer we could see that all her head gear was trailing in the water, and that she had been in contact with the ice was evident. Most of the crew were for'ard gathering in the wreck, and as she passed quite close to us some one on her poop, who I suppose was the captain, shouted to us that there was no outlet ahead. Seeing by her damaged condition that this was probably true, and having no wish to investigate as closely as they seemed to have done, we went round on the other tack and followed in her wake.

The pitchy darkness of night descended upon us by three o'clock in the afternoon that would last until nine or ten the next morning. What these long hours meant to the captain and officers I was too inexperienced at that time to understand, and our critical position sat lightly on me. I knew after that those two nights spent in this manner were freighted with sufficient anxiety and responsibility to satisfy

any one with the most gluttonous appetite in that direction.

The captain took up his post of observation for'ard in the knight-heads, and kept it without budging until daylight broke the next day. The watch were stationed at intervals along the deck, forming a certain and sure means of communication with the officer on the poop, so that there could be no mistake or delay in executing a given order from the captain, which might have been fatal. No time for query, "What was that?" an order had to heard and carried out at the same moment. "Hard a port," "hard a starboard," and "up" or "down," as the case might be, would fly the wheel, and then out of the darkness would loom an acre or two of ice, coming so close that it is no exaggeration to say we could have touched some of them with our hands. As we slowly passed by, and they were lost in the night astern, it made one thoughtful with awesome wonder as to what would happen should we fail to clear any of them.

The big fellows were not nearly such a source of danger, for they could be seen in time to give them a wide berth. Pieces the

size of a large house, two thirds submerged, we would be nearly on top of before seeing them, and then it was quick and lively with the helm. It does credit to the seamanship displayed that during those two nights we didn't touch a piece of ice of sufficient size to do any damage to us, although the shaves we had now and again were too close to be pleasant.

On the second day since we had fallen in with the ice, we spoke another vessel. She was a full-rigged ship, the *Ellerdale* if I remember rightly, and was bound for London like ourselves. As she passed us on the opposite tack, she disappeared from human ken for ever, and ours, with the exception of her own crew, were to be the last eyes to look upon her. She never reached her destination, no doubt less fortunate than ourselves, running foul of an iceberg, and foundering with all hands. How many ships are lost by collision with ice, will ever remain one of the mysteries of the sea. The long dreary run of easting from the Colonies to Cape Horn, or from the Cape of Good Hope to the Colonies, is uncomfortable enough in all conscience. The possibilities contained in that part of a trip, with a skipper who has the

reputation of "hanging on," and acts up to it, would make a Mark Tapley growl and be discontented with his lot. In his anxiety to make a passage, the skipper piles more sail on her than she ought to carry, or rather objects to taking it off with reasonable discretion, and the expression, "If she can't carry it she must drag it," becomes a by-word with him. Well, very often she does. Staggering along, a smother of foam like a half-tide rock, small chance of dodging an iceberg should one lie in your track. Unfortunately icebergs don't carry side-lights, and even the Board of Trade, an awesome body to the master mariner, can't compel them to. Going at such a pace and everything white round you, to see an object ahead in time to steer clear of it, is a sheer impossibility, and what happens should it be there I leave to the imagination. It remains an obvious fact that in a case of this sort, 'tis a thousand to one on the iceberg.

A favourite topic with Jack when ashore is the "cracking-on" skippers he has sailed with. To hear him glorify this sort of man, any one not in touch with the profession would really think he liked it. He may tell you he does;

but don't believe him. His liking is simply admiration, inborn with the sailor, for the man who has sufficient nerve, or indiscretion, as it may be, to drive his ship and try to get more out of her than is compatible with reason. He certainly has no sympathy with the operation, which entails upon him discomfort and extra work.

After a run of this sort, as soon as finer weather sets in, and the ship gets on an even keel again, Jack facetiously remarks in the fo'castle: "There's a stranger arrived—the lee cat-head has come aboard."

Have patience with me, dear reader, for this little dissertation, but think not 'tis to be the last, I hope to give you many more before I leave you. But now with your permission we will go back to the *Chatto* and our own particular icebergs.

On the third day we sighted a field of broken ice right ahead of us, and there about half a mile across it lay the object of our desire, the open sea. Only half a mile between us and freedom, but still about as ugly a half-mile as you would wish to see, and running through this broken ice wasn't the sort of thing to

undertake without due thought and observation. At last after backing and filling for the best part of an hour, the captain who was up aloft on the look-out for a likely opening, gave his orders to the officer on deck. Up went our courses and the helm at the same time, and we headed for it with as little way on as possible, the captain remaining up aloft conning her through it. Bump, bump, bump went the ice on her bottom and sides as she slowly forged her way ahead, as if in a last effort to hold her in their icy cordon, and angry to see her slipping through in spite of them. All hands breathed more freely when half an hour later we had left the last piece astern, and were once again at liberty. Sail was packed on her to put as much distance as possible between us and the ice before darkness fell, and with the exception of a few stray bergs, we saw no more ice that trip.

CHAPTER III

Fine Weather—Hawse-pipe Officers—The Key of the Keelson—Sailors' Play-time—Trade-winds and Sea Farmers.

THE atmosphere grew warmer every day, and with finer weather the royal and sky-sail yards were ousted from where they had been lying so long idle and sent aloft. As we ran into flying-fish weather after our long delay in the inhospitable latitudes below, it acted like a tonic on the crew, and made them to all appearance quite different men from what they had been a week or two before. More cheerful and better spirits were donned with their lighter garments, besides, now we were once clear of the dreaded "Horn" and steering to the north, wasn't her head pointing for home? In the mind of some people not conversant with the duties of a seaman, with the exception of making and taking in sail and pulling on a rope occasionally, is associated the

mistaken idea that, when none of these actually necessary things are going on, all he has to do is to sit down and let the wind blow him and the ship along. Now a ship is an institution where lazing forms no part of the programme. From daylight to dark there is always something to be done, and the officer who couldn't find work enough to keep Jack employed all day and every day, from the time a ship leaves port until she returns, would be looked down upon by the skipper, and even by Jack himself, as not worth his salt.

Some officers run this thing to a fine art, and are past masters in the operation known to sailors as "working up." Even at night an officer of this sort gives his watch no rest, and is open to the soft impeachment of slacking away gear with his own hand just for the pleasure of seeing them haul it tight again. Ask him why he does this sort of thing, he will probably answer: "Just to keep the devil out of their minds," and if he is excluded by profanity, I should say the experiment was a highly successful one. Needless to say, this kind of man is not a favourite with the crew, and the imprecations levelled against certain parts of his

anatomy, though not loud are remarkably deep. The worst offender, as a rule, in the direction of "working up," is the man who has been before the mast himself, and through sheer perseverance and ability worked his way aft. Jack calls him a "hawse-pipe officer," the explanation of the term being, that he attained his position by starting at the fore instead of the after part of the ship.

My sea education may be said not to have really commenced until after rounding the "Horn." Prior to this it was "stand by" weather, and it has to be bad even in the best of ships to allow of this order being in force. All were now as busy as bees, and from half-past five in the morning, when it was "wash down," until half-past five in the evening, when it was "clear up," the watch on deck had no idle moments. Rattling down, repairing rigging, painting ship, and a thousand and one other things to make her spick and span was in full swing, and would only cease when the tug-boat had plucked her into the dock.

A favourite joke practised on the "greenhorn" is to send him for the key of the keelson, a continuation of the keel running fore and

aft inside a ship, for which a key is, of course, non-existent. Some one will carelessly ask him to go to the carpenter and borrow this imaginary article. Every sailor is acquainted with this ancient jest, which I believe was handed down from the Ark. The carpenter, after an apparently fruitless search, and a concerned manner to know what he has done with it, will suddenly remember that the bo'sun or somebody else has had the loan of it. So he goes the round of the ship from one to another of the crew in a hopeless search after something that does not exist. Jack gets a deal of amusement out of this harmless little joke, which reaches its climax if he can only induce the verdant youth to interview the captain in his quest.

With the ever ready and kindly offer of aid from one or other of the hands, the elementary mysteries of knotting and splicing were an ever pleasing source of study in my watch below. When some little job aloft, such as making up a gasket that had worked adrift, or other small matter not requiring much experience fell to my share, I was quite proud of myself.

That was all right as far as it went, but my

ambition soared higher, to where the sky-sail was spread, and although from the deck it looked a "mighty long way from home," in the words of a famous advertisement, I knew I should not be happy till I reached it.

Sailors have little stories about almost everything connected with their profession, the first-voyager and his experience aloft being the butt for more than one, such as this:

A boy making his first voyage was ordered aloft by an officer to stow the mizzen royal. When he had proceeded half a dozen ratlines up the rigging his heart failed him, and he stood still looking dubiously up at it. The officer catching sight of him shouted: "Now then, boy, hurry up there, or you'll have the wind blowing that sail away." The boy looking down said piteously: "If you please sir, let it blow away, and father will pay for it when we get home."

We had now picked up the "trades," and had reached from a sailor's point of view the softest part of the voyage. The yards are trimmed to the wind, and neither tack nor sheet is budged, with the exception of an

occasional "sweat up," for a matter of seven or eight days.

The second dog-watch, that is, from six to eight in the evening, is the sailors' play-time, and in the "trades" Jack can settle down to amuse himself without fear of being interrupted to trim sail. Then it is if any of the crew, which is mostly the case, are musical, the instruments are brought out, and a sing-song indulged in. This and other amusements peculiar to seamen, make the time pass all too quickly and appear the shortest two hours of the day.

Fortunately we had no "hawse-pipe officers" aboard the *Chatto*, and in fine weather our jollity forward received encouragement instead of otherwise.

The sensible shipmaster, or officer gifted with a little human nature will promote cheerfulness among those under him. Of course, the men have to do their duty whether contented or not, for the alternative is not pleasant, but how much better the work performed willingly is, than that done with a growl when out of ear-shot, goes without saying.

Our recreation was generally carried on until

two bells in the first watch. I can look back with pleasure now on those evenings spent in harmless amusement, with about the most happy and contended a crowd it was ever my lot to be shipmates with. Pleasant evenings they were, with no note of discord sounding to mar them, save now and again from one or other of the musical instruments.

The trade-winds have many privileges to offer, which Jack is not slow to appreciate. First and foremost is the chance of having a good night of uninterrupted sleep. This is not allowable, as every four hours the watches are supposed to proceed aft for muster, whilst the officer calls out individually the name of each man, and requires an answer from that person himself. But Jack may be trusted to know his way about in a little matter like this, and manages to have his sleep all the same. In a decently manned ship, there are always several men in the watch, who through the night have neither a " trick " at the wheel nor a look-out, of course taking it in order of turn. These are nick-named " farmers," because if the weather remains propitious and there is no work to be done, they will have all night in. The

"farmers" resort to a little artifice to obtain this, or rather, I should say, the rest of the crew do.

At muster, if the night is dark, the "farmers" are invisible being comfortably stowed away somewhere handy. Others of the crew answer to their names for them, knowing that the same will be done for themselves some other night. This sort of thing, of course, only goes on in very fine weather, the trade-winds for instance, for ninety-nine sailors out of a hundred, as I know them, would scorn to do it at any other time, and Jack can balance things very nicely as to whether there is likely to be any work going on or not. To see five or six men answering the muster roll for a dozen is rather funny, as they alter their position and tone at each answer, "yes, Sir."

Woe betide the watch should the officer grow suspicious and saunter among them with the intention of counting heads. Then in all probability they will have a lively time for the next hour at least, and the prospect, to ensure their attendance, of a pull on the weather fore-brace for the following week or two whenever the watches are being relieved.

The "farmers" themselves often furnish a bit of fun much against their inclination. Sleeping on deck, the familiar two whistles, which means, "lay aft the watch," has power to awaken them more effectually than a good shake would do. The instinct of habit being second nature with them, the blanket is cast aside, and they hurry aft to join in the work going on, half asleep and quite unaware that they are working with the opposite watch, who, as a rule, seeing the humorous side of the affair say nothing, knowing they will have some merriment out of it when the mistake is discovered. The different manner of intonation peculiar to each watch whilst pulling on a rope, will be the first intimation conveyed to them that they are out of place, and the truth dawns upon them that in reality it is their watch below. Dropping any rope they may have been pulling on, as though it were a red hot potato, they peer into the faces of the men with whom they have been working, and with a disgusted grunt seek their blanket again, followed by a laugh from all hands on deck.

CHAPTER IV

A budding Sea-lawyer—Sharks and Shark Stories—
Deep-sea Fishing.

THERE were four of us boys, in all stages of apprenticeship, living by ourselves in a house on deck. The elders who, by two or three years' sea-service had attained to the dignity of a regular "trick" at the wheel, and "look-out" in fine weather, were objects of envy and admiration to us younger members, whose most important duty embraced nothing nearly so responsible as this. One of them in particular was never weary of talking about "his wheel," and his "look-out," until in my innocence I eyed him with awe, wondering what would happen to us all if the ship by some means or other were unhappily deprived of his services. In the course of time, with riper judgment I concluded we were quite safe even should this happen, and that if ever a youth was qualifying

for the unenviable position of sea-lawyer (of which more anon) it was he. Two years at sea was the limit of his experience, but taken at his own estimate it started somewhere away back in the dark ages, and had been accumulating ever since. His name was, —— well, I had better call him Brown, one can't be too careful in a case of this sort, for should he be alive now he might consider himself libelled, and haul me before a court of law, marine I should think for preference. If this were to happen, and he have fulfilled the promise of his youth, I shouldn't have a leg to stand upon, or the ghost of a chance, provided he argued his own case, as I have no doubt he would. The general impression that it takes two or three persons to get up an argument proved faulty in his case, for he would talk away by the hour, differed with or not. No topic was beyond him, and I verily believe he would have disputed whether Noah's Ark was carvel or clinker built. This made no difference to us in his own watch below, but it was quite another affair when the positions were reversed, and we wanted to sleep, but were prevented by his incessant argument. Courageous in the

justice of our cause, or perhaps our numbers, we put our heads together with the object of suppressing him. The remedy was an application of wet swab, which cut short his discourse, and made him beat a hasty retreat on deck, but it was some time before we successfully induced him, by this means, to save all his argument for his own watch below.

The south-east trades had been gradually falling lighter, and we now lost them altogether, our portion being for the next few days, what sailors detest, the doldrums. There were no points in being "farmer" now, the man at the wheel and on the look-out, having at this period rather the best of it. The yards were constantly being braced round from one point of the compass to another, and sails trimmed to meet every little cat's-paw that came along, the prime object being to work the ship through this calm belt, and pick up the north-east trades that were blowing merrily and waiting for us a few degrees north of the equator. All day and night this went on, the trimming of yards and sail claiming precedence over any other work that was being done. Even this weather had its bright side, to me at least, for

only when the ship is becalmed, or going very slowly through the water will the scavenger of the ocean visit you. This favours the prevalent idea that the shark is a slow fish, for under these conditions alone do you see anything of him, and his chronic hunger makes the question of how he manages to sustain life in mid-ocean unanswerable. When the captain one day called for the shark-hook and line, we knew at once that there was some sport in prospect. I was requisitioned to bring pork with which to bait the hook, and had, much to my satisfaction, a good view of the whole proceeding. He certainly did not give me the impression of being a slow fish as he came up suspiciously to the bait, and then darted away, leaving a streak of white water in the depths behind him. Two or three times he did this, and at last apparently satisfied, turned on his back, his white belly gleaming in the sunlight, and pork and hook disappeared down his capacious throat. A jerk on the line and we have him fast. No good his trying desperately to break away, as he lashes the water to foam with his tail, a new piece of eighteen-thread ratline stuff is fast to that hook, and defies all

his effort to sunder it. His struggles only imbed it more firmly in his jaws, and foot by foot he is hauled nearer until close under the stern. A running bowline is slipped down the line holding him over his head and under the fins, and then he is doomed beyond the possibility of escape.

Sharks are supposed to be gifted with a large amount of vitality, and this one we had captured was no exception to the rule. The captain put nine shots into him at the close range of a few yards, mostly in the head, and when he was hauled on deck he still had a kick, or to be correct, a wriggle left in him. A familiar fish story at sea, is of the shark that was disembowelled and thrown overboard, his inside being passed over after him. The story goes that the shark immediately turned round and swallowed them again. America is the forcing house for tall yarns, and by the flavour of it, I imagine this one must have originated aboard an American ship.

Sharks differ from most fish in the matter of bringing forth their young. On one trip we hooked a shark and hoisted it on deck. After the *coup-de-grâce* had been delivered by chopping

the tail off, the usual dissection followed with a view to saving as curios the jaws and backbone. Cutting the fish open, inside were found two white-looking bags. One of the hands ripped his knife through them, and out jumped a dozen small sharks about eight inches long, which started jumping and wriggling about the deck as active as crickets, giving us a lively minute or two before they were eventually captured. This was not a case of the mother swallowing her young, as they are said to do in any sudden danger, but a case of premature birth, for the bags until cut were perfect.

Although in the South Sea Islands the shark is an article of diet, and curing the fins for exportation to China a small industry, Jack will have none of him in this respect, but, minus jaw and backbone, dumps his carcass overboard with disgust. I had the curiosity to taste the flesh of one about two feet long, being assured by its size that there was no danger of becoming a cannibal in the second degree, for he was too young so far to have put in practice the nasty habit of occasionally dining off a human being.

The flesh was not so nice that I hankered

after it, and was the first and last time of tasting, but the crude manner in which it was cooked may, to some extent, have been answerable for that, being simply placed in a tin with water, and put in the oven until done. Served up in a proper manner, for all I know, it may be as good as turbot.

The young ones, born before their time, I was speaking about just now, were not allowed to go to waste. We had emigrants on board at the time, and the crew turning up their noses at the fish, they were gathered by the passengers, who cooked them in the galley, and finally devoured them with gusto.

The advent of a school of porpoises causes a greater amount of excitement than the appearance of a shark, at least in the fore part of the ship, for Jack knows that if lucky enough to secure one it will provide him with several fresh messes, and be a welcome change from his usual scanty sea-fare. The flesh underlying the fat of the porpoise, or sea-hog, is capital eating, having the appearance and flavour of beef-steak, and not at all, let me tell you, to be despised after a month or two of tinned and salt provisions.

His presence, sporting and gambolling under the bows, is the signal to bring the harpoon out. A snatch-block is hooked on to the bowsprit, a line rove through it, and the end made fast to the harpoon. One hand goes out with this, and waiting his opportunity, strikes a porpoise as it passes under him, whilst the others immediately run him close up to the block, from where he is easily landed on the fo'c's'le head. The blubber being stripped off, he is hung up, and steaks carved from him as per requirement.

Another highly exciting sort of fishing is Bonito. For this a breeze is necessary, as the ship must be moving through the water to ensure any notice being taken of your bait. The usual way is to go out and get astride the jib-boom, or better still on the martingale stays, which are some distance lower down. A line and hook covered with red and white rag is kept bobbing on top of the water, but never allowed to sink beneath it. The fish jump for this readily, and if you have had knowledge enough to take a bag out with you to pop him in as soon as you haul him up, and thus curtail his activity, the rest is easy. But if you

have not taken this necessary precaution, then you are in for about as lively a five minutes as you have ever experienced in your life. Although not large, the muscular power of this fish is simply incredible, and unless you have your legs firmly round something you are quite liable to be shaken off the boom; and even if secure in this respect the strain put on every nerve and sinew in the endeavour to hold him might well be compared with the sensation of clasping to one's breast a highly charged electric battery.

CHAPTER V

Different Ships different Fashions—A contemptible Trick—Anxious for News—Critical Sailors—Fast Ships.

After dodging in the doldrums for the best part of the week, during which time the wear and tear of sails with their continual flap against the masts would have broken the heart of some of the shareholders could they have witnessed it, we at last picked up the north-east trades.

Close hauled on the starboard tack, her head was pointing for somewhere in America, but that was nothing, the object of the navigator in these latitudes being to make all the northing he can, and trust to the good westerlies that blow across the Atlantic, to give him the required easting later on.

In some ships the custom prevails of keeping all hands on deck throughout the day

in fine weather. Jack resents this, as needlessly working a willing horse to death, but is, perforce, obliged to put up with it and say nothing. On occasion, such as making a fast passage and being behindhand with the work of cleaning ship, this otherwise useless regulation is unavoidable. The crew, to do them justice, in an instance like this, turn to willingly and without a murmur, knowing that as soon as they get ahead of the work this innovation will cease, and they will have their watch below again as usual. It is a horse of quite another colour when he knows that, no matter how hard he may work, the conditions will remain the same until the fine weather comes to an end, simply because it is the fashion of the ship. "Different ships, different long splices" (meaning fashions), is a trite saying at sea, but I have only been in one ship where keeping both watches on deck in the fine weather was a standing order. The conditions were much the same, and for the life of me I could never see that we got any forrader than the others. The explanation was easy. The crew went about their work in a leisurely manner, the elementary thought in their minds

being, there was nothing to be gained by hurry and that there was another day to-morrow. What an immensity of power has a little encouragement! Seaman or landman, how much better his work if he knows that by doing it well he will gain appreciation from those above him. With a task-master who takes of his best and gives nothing in return, what matter should his work be good, bad, or indifferent, he does it simply because he has to, with the "humdrumity" of a machine.

The chief mate is the man who issues all orders for work to be carried out, the officer under him, chiefly the bo'sun, seeing that it is performed in a proper manner. The principal object of the mate's existence is to see that his ship arrives in port looking, both on deck and aloft, as smart as paint can make her, for on his shoulders rest the credit, or otherwise, of her appearance.

Except for a few mild suggestions now and again, if the work of cleaning ship is going on satisfactory, the captain is not supposed to actively interfere, and should he do so to any great extent, the relations between him and the chief officer are liable to be strained, for the

mate if he knows his business, objects to it as a slur on his ability, which may lead to little scenes conducive to anything but peace and quietness.

Some masters of sailing-ships are incorrigible in this matter, and for the want of something to occupy them drive their officers to the verge of despair by unreasonable interference. To this man the accompaniment of plenty of noise is essential to all work, and the officer who can provide it, by howling loud and often, even though by so doing he may hide some of his deficiencies, is the man to find favour with him. Later in life it was my luck to be in such a ship as this, where the bo'sun, a big Irish-American carried on to such an extent, "hazing" the crew, and shouting at them with his rasping voice from daylight to dark, until at last he was nearly furnishing a mutiny. Yet, strange to say, this man was upheld by the captain, who swore by him, and declared against the better judgment of his officers that the man was just what he should be.

In one ship that had better be nameless, the boot was rather on the other foot, and I was witness of as mean and dirty a trick as it were

possible to imagine. When we got into fine weather, the chief mate, having an opinion of his own on the matter, wanted all hands on deck through the day. The captain—sensible man—seeing that it was quite unnecessary, set his face against it, which was gall and wormwood to the mate, who, however much he disliked the proceeding on the part of the skipper, had to bow to his decision. Being about the coolest place I could find, one night I selected one of the boats on the for'ard skids as a sleeping-place. I was awakened some time through the watch by a sound I could not account for. With the exception of this noise everything was as quiet as possible, the ship with a light breeze just slipping easily through the water at about three or four knots an hour. Curiosity induced me to stretch my neck over the gunwale of the boat, and then I saw what was causing the disturbance that had awakened me. The mate was walking along with a strand of rope-yarns in his hand, every now and again lashing viciously at the bulwarks with it. I didn't trouble to think what it meant, and soon dropped off to sleep again. In the morning there was the deuce to pay, and then I knew

what was meant by the pantomime I had witnessed the night before. The bulwarks had been cleaned a day or two previously, but to look at them now made it hard to believe that it was so. They presented a piebald appearance, being streaked with tar, applied by flicking them with a strand of tarry rope-yarns. This was pointed out by the mate to the skipper as soon as he arrived on deck, for that was part of his plan. We were all mustered aft, whilst the captain justly angry, talked to us like a Dutch uncle, vainly trying to find out who had done it. Not being successful in this, for only the mate and I knew anything about it, from that time out all hands were kept up through the day on the principle that, punish everybody and you reach the offender. I could have thrown some light on the matter, but then, if I had, my life wouldn't have been worth living for the rest of that voyage, and I didn't relish the idea making a martyr of myself. Another thing, I had sense enough to see that the skipper was unlikely to believe my unsubstantiated evidence, and in all probability would have jumped to the conclusion that I was the culprit. With this in my mind I remained silent, but like the

parrot that couldn't talk, I thought all the more. So, through a scurvy trick that would have disgraced a Hottentot, leave alone a white man, the mate obtained his wish, but if he had a conscience, and was given to thinking in the quiet watches of the night, I didn't envy him the possession of it.

There was nothing of all this I have been yarning about aboard the *Chatto*. Although discipline was maintained in her to rather a high degree, the captain and officers, when the interest of the ship was not concerned, could be blind, as a better sailor than themselves had been on occasion before them.

When I joined the *Chatto* some of the crew were making their fourth voyage, which as one ship is so much like another to Jack, speaks volumes in her favour. If a sailor is contented to wait a couple of months for a ship, running into debt (for of course all his money is gone in the first fortnight) you may depend that ship has something to commend her. I hear some of you nautical people say: "Ah, yes, I suppose there was no discipline, and he could do pretty well as he liked." Not at all, I've been aboard a few ships myself, but never one where

you had to toe the line quite so evenly as aboard the *Chatto*, and yet every man was as happy as a sand-boy, simply because he was treated like a human being.

There is an old saying at sea that, after a man has been some years aboard the same ship, he may be said to own some part of her. What special portion the old stagers called their own aboard the *Chatto* I never found out, but I often heard the newer hands jokingly ask them which particular timber-head they laid claim to.

It now became an everyday occurrence to speak one or more "outward bounders," always a pleasure at sea. As they come gleefully along to meet us, with every stitch drawing, many were the critical remarks passed on their appearance, and on the character of their owners, for Jack knew most of them when miles away by the colour of their paint, and could tell without hesitation if they were comfortable ships to be in, or as he inelegantly but truthfully terms them, "floating workhouses, where you get your pound and your pint, and you get nae mair."

We had a good number of passengers, among them a military officer. When we left New

Zealand in '78 England and Russia were on the verge of war, and having no means of information since we had left, as we drew nearer home he was extremely anxious to know how the matter had progressed. One of our stock questions in passing ships related to this, and I think the skipper and officers were relieved to find hostilities had not broken out, and that their responsibility was not increased with the chance of being picked up by a Russian cruiser. One day we sighted a vessel, a mere speck on the horizon astern of us, and the way she came into view it was evident she was travelling much faster than ourselves. "Bringing the wind up with her" was remarked on board, and that seemed the only feasible conclusion to arrive at, and account for the manner in which she overhauled us. In a few hours she was alongside us, and proved to be the famous British clipper *Cutty Sark*, one of the fastest ships afloat. She passed us going two feet to our one, and in a short time was hull down ahead of us.

Fast ships are always a fruitful source of conversation with sailors, and this was not an opportunity to be lost by Brown, who, in our

domicile for the next few watches held forth about them with his usual volubility, the remarkable features about his "arguments," I have found out since, being their inaccuracy. A fast ship is not necessarily a vessel that travels at a higher rate of speed than another in a strong breeze of wind. A ship that earns and deserves the term "smart" is the one that can make the most of light weather, and slip through the water at the rate of three or four knots an hour, where another vessel would be almost at a standstill with hardly steerage way on. I had a chance of looking at the *Cutty Sark* some years later as she lay at Circular Quay, Sydney, N.S.W. She appeared to be just what she was, a "heeler," but not the sort of craft a man would choose if he wanted to keep a reasonably dry shirt on his back. As I took in all her points, I could not help thinking she would be like most fast ships, wet and uncomfortable in dirty weather.

CHAPTER VI

Gulf-weed — A feathered Pilot — A soothing Influence — Engaging a Tow-boat — Jack's foolish Generosity.

We ran out of the north-east trades, followed of course, by the almost inevitable calm. By this time all the dirty work was done. The bright-work (teak-wood), a cause of so much solicitude to most chief officers, had been cleaned, smoothed, and smoothed again, and now only awaited a coat of varnish. Everything was putting on a smart appearance under the paint brushes wielded by the crew, even the captain's dog, no doubt under the impression that as part of the ship he should have his share, had rubbed some off on to his coat, and was the only object not improved by it.

About this time we ran among large patches known to the seaman as Gulf-weed. Bright yellow in colour, it has a most striking and

picturesque effect, with the deep blue of the Atlantic as a background forming a contrast vivid and pleasing to the eye. Homeward-bound ships to the United Kingdom only skirt the edge of this vast field of weed, which thickens and becomes more plentiful to the westward. What we did see was a source of great amusement in the watch below, as we fished it up and sought out the queer life it contained. All sorts and conditions of marine life found refuge here, many of them, beyond doubt, unknown to the naturalist. One little creature in particular was to me an object of wonder, a small thing of life about half an inch long, and almost the exact shape of an elephant. Little flounder shaped fish about the same size, and crabs innumerable, their destiny, seemingly, the maw of the larger fish that made this weed their happy hunting-ground. A good many of the hands sought out white glass fruit-bottles, which were in great demand. Filled with sea-water and good samples of the weed, these were corked, sealed tightly, and stowed away as a small offering to their friends at home. Few of them, however, reached the end intended, mostly being left behind as taking up too much

space, or as useless, in the hurry of departure, and for weeks after the crew have gone away, may be fished out of all sorts of holes and corners in the fo'c's'le, mute witnesses of their owners' inconsistency.

On board of a ship, the captain is about the only man who has more time on his hands than he knows what to do with, so that if he has a reasonable hobby wherewith to annihilate some of it, so much the better for himself and very often for those round him. The skipper of the *Chatto* was a devotee of sport, and lost no opportunity of fishing and shooting, two items in that direction sometimes obtainable at sea. The gig was lowered, and being at that time one of the least useful members on board the ship, I formed part of her crew. We skirted round patches of weed, a couple of four-pronged harpoons being responsible for quite a number of fish before we came on board again. We got a good many of the fish bearing the nick-name "leather-jacket." Well and truly named was he, for his hide was as tough and hard as the lee-side of an old sea-boat, and only by literally skinning them did they become eatable.

All hands had been whistling for wind (the

origin of this practice by the way, would be rather interesting to know) and after a day or two of calm, along it came. It was from the west, and her head was pointing directly home for the first time since we had picked up the north-east trades. Steadily it blew as if doing its best to make amends for the unpleasant time it had given us to the south'ard. I think everybody viewed this with satisfaction, for although with the exception of the captain and perhaps the officers, the crew as a rule prefer a long passage, having in their minds the soothing reflection, "more days, more dollars," as he gets nearer to his final port, where his work for that voyage shall be ended, anticipation ousts the financial point of view from his mind, and he is quite as anxious as anybody for a speedy finish. At this time his mind turns to gastronomic pleasures, and ask him what is the first thing he will do when he gets ashore, nine out of ten will promptly answer, "Have a good feed of ham and eggs." Good resolution, but alas! like the bottled sea-weed, often forgotten and left behind when he leaves the ship, and the good feed he has promised himself is abandoned

for something less nourishing, and more liquid.

The water almost imperceptibly changed colour as we got further along, until between the blue Atlantic and the dun-coloured lower Thames we passed over every tint of green known to the artist—but hold on, I am getting ahead of the ship. Far away out of sight of land we were met and welcomed by that inevitable little sea-bird jokingly called "a channel pilot." He is the ordinary gull frequenting the harbours and coast, but a few of them more venturesome than the rest, seeking what lies beyond, are always met two or three days' sail from the land. They are objects of interest to all on board, for is he not a messenger of hope, and a link between us and the land we steer for? As he circles round the ship with his plaintive little cry, no doubt asking us, could we but understand his lingo, where we are from, and what sort of weather we have had, happily, even to the sporting instinct of the captain, to which very little that swims or flies is sacred, he is an object of veneration. So he remains with us until we approach nearer the land, and his identity is

lost among a crowd of others, who join him intent upon picking up any scraps thrown overboard. The presence of the "Channel pilot" was an indication that land was not far away, and at last it hove in sight; with the exception of the earth contained in the flower-pots arranged in the sky-light, the only land we had seen for a hundred and twelve days. What matter the weary months it has taken to reach it, there it is at last, and you live not for the past, but for the future!

Any apathy that may have had existence among the crew is dispelled as by magic, differences of opinion, if any, which have perhaps led to coolness between shipmates, forgotten. Brimming with good nature, he may indeed go so far as to have a good word for his natural enemy, the steward, and is at peace with all the world. The influence of the land must have had a soothing power over the skipper's dog, making him, for the time, forget he was an "afterguard," and tempering his animosity for any one for'ard sufficiently to allow the wheel being relieved without showing his teeth or investigating calves. The dulness of the voyage is lost on entering the Channel, and a new world

entered upon. No more monotony for that trip, the mind and vision being fully occupied with different objects of interest, so long strangers to them. Mail-boats and sailing-ships bound for every part of the world follow one and another in endless procession, giving a better idea than anything else could do of the meaning and vastness of British commerce.

The Scilly pilot boats, whose crew with an eye to business, run up alongside intent upon offering their services, recalling the oft-repeated story of the old lady, a passenger by a ship engaging one of them. Uneasy in her mind, and weak in her geography, she accosted him with the question: "Is it true what they say, that you are a silly pilot?" promptly receiving the answer: "No, m'am, I'm a pilot from Scilly." As we get further along, we come across the fleet of Cornish or French fishing-boats reaping the harvest of the sea, and giving us a ticklish piece of navigation picking our way through to avoid them and their nets—an endless panorama, enjoyed to the full after months of nothing but sea and sky to gaze upon, and last, but certainly not least, a few miles away the good wholesome fresh smelling land.

Then there are the ships being towed down Channel, the little tug-boat ahead, that somehow or other always put me in mind of a very small boy leading a very large horse. "Bright pannikins and sore heads aboard of her," says Jack, for he has been there himself and knows what he is talking about.

As we approached Beachy Head, a bright look-out was kept by all hands for the honour of first sighting a tug-boat. Presently we raised one steaming out from under the land to cut us off. She took up a position on our quarter, and then I heard some *finesse* in driving a bargain that was hard to beat, and would have turned a Petticoat Lane Jew green with envy. Not a word was spoken for some time, the skipper of the tug-boat being engaged taking our measure. The captain of the *Chatto* tramped up and down the poop, but for all the notice he apparently took you would think that such a thing as a tug-boat had no existence.

By-and-by the man in the tug, having summed up the *pro* and *con* of the matter in his mind, shouts, "Do you want steam, Captain?"

The "old man" continues his tramp up and

down, and one would think he must be as deaf as a post for no answer does he make, but in reality the movements of that boat, which he has been watching out of the corner of his eye, is the most important thing he can think of just then.

"Do you want steam, Captain? I'll tow you up for forty pounds!"

Then for the first time the captain pauses in his promenade and looks towards the tug-boat with a surprised sort of expression, that says as plainly as possible, "Hullo! where the deuce did you come from? and what do you want?"

Then in answer to the query again repeated, he replies, "Oh! no! I don't want steam, nice fair wind blowing, don't want you ahead of me to run over you," and then he resumes his walk.

"This breeze ain't going to last, the wind'll go to east'ard as soon as the sun goes down," says the tug-boat skipper, looking as wise as if he had ordered an east wind for our express benefit at the time mentioned. "Tell you what, I'll tow you up for thirty-five pounds." After a bit more fencing on both sides with no

apparent result, he suddenly snatches his binoculars from the companion and looks long and earnestly astern, where, if you follow his gaze, a few vessels are to be seen hull down. He gives an order to the man steering, who puts the helm up, and away she goes under a full head of steam.

"Confound it!" mutters the novice not conversant with the tactics of tug-boat masters. "Now one of those vessels astern will take her, why the deuce didn't the 'old man' close with him?" But the "old man" is not concerned at all, he knows from experience that this is only a little artifice and it troubles him nothing. Watch the tug-boat as she leaves us at full speed with the one object you think to pick up the ship astern. Not a bit of it, he goes about a mile away, and round he comes with a curve until he has overhauled us again, and then the negotiations are resumed.

"Look here! captain, I want to get in for coals and I'll tow you up for thirty pounds."

At last in a tired sort of manner, as if to him it were a matter of indifference, the captain of the *Chatto* strikes a bargain, leaving the impression behind that more out of charity

than anything else he will give him the privilege of towing us up to the docks for twenty-five pounds. That agreement concluded he loses his assumed inertness, and the ship becomes a veritable bee-hive in the matter of work. The crew, whose whole attention hitherto has been with the tug-boat, are now like the captain full of life and energy. Whilst some are clewing up and taking in sail, the remainder "fleet" the tow-rope from the top of the house where it has been coiled against this emergency, and pass the end to the tow-boat. From that time until snugly fast in the basin of the dock there are no idle moments. A homeward-bound ship being towed up the river is the place to see work carried out with despatch. After entering the Prince's Channel, yards are to be sent down, every sail stripped from aloft, the boom to rig in, and a thousand and one other things to keep Jack on the jump. At such times a sharp knife and a clear conscience is the rule, and I think a large amount of gear comes down on such occasion somewhat shorter than it went up.

As we tow up the river after leaving Gravesend, every familiar place and object is pointed

out one to another by the crew. Even the smell from the chemical works on the river bank, although anything but odoriferous, received the welcome of an old friend. The gates are swung open as we arrive at the dock we are bound for, and the ship warped into the basin, where for Jack, to all intents and purposes, the voyage is over. The last rope fast, the chief mate simply says, "That will do, men," and they are free to enjoy the pleasures looked eagerly forward to for the last few weeks.

By-and-by as he emerges from the fo'c's'le dressed in his shore-going clothes, creased and crumpled from long lying idly in his chest, their harpy, the boarding-house runner, is waiting for them, and almost forcibly pounces on their belongings. The majority of them are whirled away to shady boarding-houses, and the dubious pleasures of Ratcliff Highway. Here he is made much of for the time, preyed upon by the loafer and boarding-house runner who trade on his generosity until in a short time his money is done. It is then a case of "get up, Jack, let John sit down," for his harpies have no more use for him now that his cash is finished, so he

has to take a back seat and make room for a new comer, who goes through the same process in his turn.

A week or ten days of this pleasure—save the mark!—and he finds himself in the same position as the man whom he pitied only a few days before, bound down channel with a sore head, and a stocking round his neck for a muffler, because he hasn't money enough left to buy the real article. His advance-note, which is a month's wages given at the time he signs articles, and payable three days after the ship has left, being mortgaged up to the hilt for value received while looking for another ship, he handles a few shillings of it at the outside, and has a full month of work in front of him after he goes to sea before he can start with a clean sheet. Ample time it gives him, this "working off the dead horse," as he calls it, to think and see the error of his ways. But if he does ruminate upon them it is only a transitory sort of affair and soon forgotten, a thousand pounds to a penny the next voyage seeing him in the same predicament. Heaven send the time when sailors, who earn their money like horses, will exercise a little reason, and decline to spend it like

asses, to benefit a class of people who live in comfort on the sweat of his brow. He need not be a saint, that would be expecting too much of him, for saint-ship as I know it is often a melancholy profession, and 'tis a poor heart that never rejoices, but for heaven's sake, and particularly his own, let him spend his money in rational enjoyment and get the best out of it. Sailors will talk by the hour of London, but to take him west of Aldgate pump is to lose him, his horizon is bounded by Ratcliff Highway on one hand and the docks on the other and what lies beyond, in nine cases out of ten, is a dead and unexplored country to him. This, I am happy to say, is not so true a bill as it used to be a number of years ago, and Jack is marching with the times towards his own redemption. Some there are, unfortunately, who will never look for anything better, but give months of their lives for one week of unprofitable debauchery, preyed upon by the extortioner, whose living but for them would be gone, to the end of the chapter, and the time comes when ships shall be no more.

CHAPTER VII

A Dummy Suicide—An interrupted Argument—We sail again—A new Use for River Thames—Picking Watches—A Retrospect of Plymouth—A live Freight.

AFTER all the crew had left, this being an off day, we boys were allowed to go on shore to the house provided by the company, where we lived during our stay in London. Idleness was not our portion, for although we lived and had our meals here, with the brief exception of a week or two in which to see our friends, work all day and every day was cut out for us on board the ship. With sometimes thirty or forty boys, whose ages ranged from fourteen to eighteen, living in the same house, it is not hard to imagine that the scenes, putting it mildly, were sometimes lively. I have one of them in my mind just now.

A few energetic spirits thought it would be a

good joke to hang a dummy from one of the third-story windows. An old uniform having been commandeered, the question arose as to what the stuffing should consist of. This for a time was a caulker, but at last a genius suggested the bed-clothes and pillows as being just the thing required. They were not squeamish, and soon collected enough material for the purpose, but left their own beds severely alone, thinking good-naturedly, no doubt, that the others should participate in the joke, if only to the extent of lending their bed-clothes. When finished it was a work of art even down to the boots, and altogether was the most serviceable and ship-shape dummy I ever remember seeing. A rope was made fast to the neck, and it was quickly lowered a few feet out of the window, whilst we stood by for developments. They weren't long coming. The first person passing in the street to observe it soon had an eager crowd round him, gazing at the unusual sight of a lad suspended by the neck from a window. To make matters a bit more lively a few of the boys had mingled with the crowd, and, looking up at the figure with surpressed excitement, remarked: "Why, that's young

Baker; I've noticed he's been rather queer in the head for the last few days."

One of the easiest things of this world is to gather a crowd in a London street. All you have to do is to gaze earnestly at the heavens, and that alone seems to act like a magnet, and draw the passers by round you. That sort of joke is best left alone, the next best thing is to be a good runner.

Trams and 'buses stopped, and in about ten minues every condition of humanity were standing six deep in the road, the only person conspicuous by his absence being a policeman. I suppose even he would have come along in time, but just then some one leaned out of the window and pulled the dummy in. The crowd seeing they were "had," moved about their business, and left us to revel in the thought that we had given them and ourselves a lively ten minutes. More by good luck than by good management we escaped the attention of the authorities, and so were spared the painful experience of finding how the law connected a dummy hung from a window with an obstruction in the street. That dummy served many a useful turn, but its end came when it was

discovered one night hiding behind the door in the housemaid's bedroom. She shrieked, and help arriving, it was torn ruthlessly asunder, the pillows and bed-clothes eventually being restored to the place intended for them at the time of manufacture.

Brown sat one night on a bed airing his views of things in general. Said he: "You've seen the notice up in some shops, *umbrellas recovered*. Now that's nothing more nor less than a fraud. I have an uncle who lost his umbrella and went to one of these shops to have it recovered. The man laughed, and told him to go to Scotland Yard. My uncle lost his temper as well as the umbrella, which cost a guinea, and gave that fellow a bit of his mind, and told him he could go, well . . . not to Scotland Yard. Then again you see, *Boots repaired while you wait*. Well, of course you have to wait, they can't repair them while you don't wait. You see what I mean, don't you? A man"—but here some one bonneted him from behind with a pillow, and the rest of his argument was lost in a duel.

Work aboard the *Chatto* was hurried along, for she was required to be in New Zealand

for the wool season. Three weeks from the time of our arrival we lay in the basin, outward bound and ready for sea. We left at daylight in the morning, some of the crew arriving on the scene just in time for a "pier-head jump." The end of the tow-rope being passed to the tug that was waiting for us, she gave a blast on her siren that echoed through the silent dock like the wail of a lost soul, and slowly we started down the river. Some of the old crew were back with us, but not many. Even three weeks was too much strain for their pockets, and the rest of them were no doubt across the Bay of Biscay by this time.

What a difference there was between leaving London and the other end of the world. Then, having the crew on board all the time, everything was in its place. Now, all the work having been done by the riggers, she was like a midshipman's chest, "everything on top and nothing handy." I realised more fully what Jack had meant when coming up Channel, by this remark applied to outward bounders; "bright pannikins and sore heads." A good many of the crew were intoxicated, and quite incapable of work, and after being

deposited on board by their friend the boarding-house runner, retired to the seclusion of the fo'c's'le, the officers knowing it was no use to rout them out, to do work that, just then, was to them impossible. The brunt of the work fell to us boys, and the old stagers who were sensible enough to keep their heads level.

I've often wondered what London would be like without the Thames. Certainly not what it is, for the river is the heart's blood of London, and by that only is she able to maintain her proud position as the biggest shipping port in the world. But it has another use, trivial in comparison certainly, and undreamt of in the philosophy of most landsmen, yet useful to the men who have charge of ships. When Jack comes aboard with more liquor inside him than he can comfortably carry, which is the rule and not the exception, he has twenty-four hours' good tow ahead of him before fairly at sea, and he is called upon to have all his wits about him in the exercise of his calling. This long tow gives him a chance to pull himself together, and when the time comes to make sail, with

the exception of a sore head, which he seems so conversant with, Jack is himself again.

Now is the time, whilst towing down, for every officer to keep his eyes open and settle in his mind by observation who are the best men aboard, so that when the watches are picked by-and-by he may have something up his sleeve and be able to choose the most likely men for his own particular watch. When the tug has cast off, somewhere in the vicinity of Beachy Head, or perhaps even lower down, according to the wind, and everything is cleared up, the crew are mustered aft for the purpose of picking watches. The chief mate being senior officer has the first pick, and so it goes on alternately until the whole are disposed of. Keen rivalry exists as to who shall have the best watch, and the officer who understands his business will take the trouble to find out which men he would like a long time before he has to make his actual selection.

"Not much time to judge a man in," you say.

Ample time for anybody who knows from experience how to go about it. A much shorter and easier proceeding to judge a good sailor,

than it is to judge a good horse. The way and manner, not so much as the execution, he goes about some little job will tell unerringly whether he is a smart seaman, or as his shipmates would call him, a "salt-water impostor." Here I think it only fair to make the same remark about sailors that the soldier made about beer, all are good, but some are better than others.

Although aboard the *Chatto* watches were picked, we didn't cast off the tug-boat for she was to tow us to Plymouth where we were to take on board a few hundred emigrants. That was the reason why we had such despatch in London, for whilst the lower hold was being filled carpenters were at work in the 'tween decks fitting up accommodation for our passengers. We lay in the Sound for a day or two practising boat- and fire-drill, until every man and boy on board knew exactly his duty and station in the event of such an appalling necessity arising.

What an interesting place to the sailor especially, or ought to be, is Plymouth, fraught with brave memories that will never die. As you lean over the rail on a quiet evening and

let your mind go back a few hundred years, not so hard a matter if you have a little imagination, you can almost persuade yourself that in the distance you see the Spanish Armada. Turn your eyes towards the Hoe, and you can see again gallant Sir Francis Drake leisurely finishing his game of bowls before sailing forth to make history, and to scatter death and destruction among them.

On the fourth day after arrival our passengers were sent off to us in tenders. What a crowd they were! Scotch, Irish, Welsh, every denizen of the British Isles was represented, not one in a hundred perhaps ever having seen a ship before, and as Jack quaintly remarked, "You could see the hay seed still in their hair." Some sick already, some gazing tearfully on a land that would know them no more. Every stage of humanity trooped up the gangway, from the baby carried in arms to the old man with one foot and part of the other in the grave, that made one wonder what had induced him to leave the land of his birth, for a country that at the best he could hope to see but little of. Then the different dialects. All one had to do was to shut the eyes, and it was easy to imagine

yourself in a foreign country where English was unknown. All these, bound for New Zealand "the working man's paradise." After the tedious job of getting them under hatches was finally accomplished, the anchor was hove up, and the tug towing us clear of the land, sail was made, and with our human freight we stood away to the south'ard.

CHAPTER VIII

Broaching the Slop-chest—We pick up some Cast-aways — Live Bait — The Procession of the dead Horse—Chalking—Observances that are dying out.

Those of the crew who have spent their money ashore unwisely and too well, and in consequence have come to sea with insufficient clothing, look eagerly forward to the time when the slop-chest shall be broached. This usually takes place after clear of the Channel, and things have shaken down into their proper places. In the meantime he has to do a perish, and should it be the winter season he has every reason to call himself extravagant names, and curse his improvidence.

The steward sends word for'ard that at a certain time slops will be served out should any one require them, which, needless to say, is always the case. Well, they are "slops" to be sure, but at the same time, a Godsend to

some of the crew, who but for them would have to make the trip with about as much clothes as you'd naturally take to church with you. At the time appointed they troop aft, and select what they most require, the slop-chest furnishing anything from sea-boots to soap. The price of these is deducted from his wages, but is not allowed on the outward trip to exceed a month's pay. The captain has in his mind the temptation that assails Jack, and to which he very often succumbs, of deserting his ship, and disappearing some fine night up country, where, handy man, he is always welcome and sure of a job in the wool season.

We were three weeks out, when one day, whilst up aloft overhauling gear, I sighted what I took to be a piece of timber. I went higher up to get a better view of it, and then I saw it was a boat. I reported it to the deck, and the officer on watch swung himself into the rigging, and was soon up alongside me. He in turn reported how it bore to the captain, who was on the poop, and soon we were heading directly for it. As we drew nearer the fact that some humanity was contained in her became evident, for a man was standing up and waving

some garment frantically to attract our attention. When about a quarter of a mile from her the main topsail was backed and the gig lowered away, which, being the boat I was stationed in, I had the pleasure of going in her. We pulled down, and as the second mate, who was steering, gave a shear to come up alongside, I noticed there were four men in her, gesticulating and simmering with excitement. Another thing I noticed was the splashing that was going on round her, and was at first puzzled to know the meaning of it, but catching sight of several triangular back fins, knew they could only belong to sharks. I've seen a few sharks since then in my travels round the Pacific Islands, but never anything like that. It is no exaggeration to say there were hundreds of them, and they raged round that boat like tigers in their endeavours to reach the occupants, and I verily believe in time they would have succeeded. As we took a curve round the stern one of the poor wretches on board lost his head completely and jumped overboard, making for us hand over hand. We pulled him on board, but he left the calf of his leg behind; the only thing to wonder at was that any part of him

reached us. The second mate made a rough *tourniquet* with a strand of rope-yarns that happened to be in the boat, tightening it up with one of the thole-pins, and partially stopped the bleeding until he was placed in the hands of the doctor. The others were taken off and brought aboard the ship, the boat hoisted on deck, and the name on her, *Morning Light*, New Bedford, told us as plainly as if she could speak, that she once belonged to a Yankee whaler.

The men whom we had picked up were Portuguese, or, as Jack calls him, "Johnny Porty-goose," and in a day or two we had their version of how they happened to be in such an awkward plight. According to their yarn the boat had been lowered to pick up a man who had fallen overboard, and a squall coming down on them they had lost the ship. Five days had passed before we hove in sight and picked them up, and the way they managed to keep body and soul together during that time was rather a novel one. Being without food, but having several harpoons in the boat, when the sharks started to come round, one of the men would hang his legs over the side to attract

them. Before the shark had time to turn on his back and seize what was offered him, he would draw them in again, and another man standing ready would drive the harpoon into him, so instead of being the eater, he was the eaten, live bait with a vengeance. Of course they could not have kept their reason on such a diet as that, and were in a weak state when rescued, but it was sufficient to keep them from actual starvation for some days at least. We found the harpoon and a partly devoured shark in the boat, so that portion of the story was true. Although I swallowed the other part at the time, I have since had a theory of my own regarding how they came to be reduced to such an emergency, and the fact of them being all Portuguese, and in the vicinity of the Cape Verd Islands, lends the colour of probability to it. An American whale-ship, as a rule, is not the place where a man is entitled to have a soul of his own, much less to exercise it. These men, in my opinion, had lowered away and gone in chase of a whale. Getting out of sight of the ship, or perhaps darkness coming on, the temptation to give her the slip altogether, and steer for their own country, had proved too

much for them, and they had made to the best of their ability for the Cape Verd Islands. In the end they lost both the ship and the islands, and but for our fortunate appearance would have lost the number of their mess. As to what became of the rest, for four men do not comprise the crew of a whale-boat when fishing, is beyond me.

What a long month that first one is, because Jack has drawn a month's advance, in many cases (as I have said before) mortgaged before he touches it. When the last day of that long month arrives it is celebrated by leading the dead horse, which represents the month Jack has worked with no material advantage to himself, out on deck, and burying him with all due honours. There had been an air of suppressed excitement about the fo'c's'le for the last week, and a sort of manner with the crew that said quite plainly, no admittance except on business. As a matter of fact the horse was in course of construction, and no alien eyes were allowed to look upon it until the time arrived for the final obsequies. No time or trouble is considered too great whilst he is being manufactured, and the result when finished is a really first-class

animal. The second dog watch, from six to eight, on the last day of the month, is the time chosen for the ceremony, so that all hands may be able to take part in it. As the horse is brought from the fo'c's'le, with his canvas hide, long tail and mane, made from teased manilla rope-yarns, it seems a pity that the hours of such a fine animal are numbered. A man mounts on his back, for he is a most substantial creature, and the procession starts round the deck, one of the crew singing:

I say old man your horse will die,
CHORUS.—For we say so, and we hope so.
I say old man your horse will die.
CHORUS.—Oh! poor old man.

Then the man riding, in his turn sings:

If he dies I'll tan his skin,
CHORUS.—For we say so, and we hope so,
And if he lives I'll ride him again.
CHORUS.—Oh! poor old man.

This goes on with different words, the chorus being always the same, telling all about the horse and his rider, until having made the round of the ship, he is finally pulled up on the quarter-deck.

The spokesman, hat in hand, advances to the officer of the watch, and says, "If you please, sir, we have a fine animal here and wish to sell him." Having gained permission, the horse is brought forward and sold by auction to the highest bidder, and may fetch from a couple to five pounds, or even more, according to the liberality of the saloon passengers. Although sold, the horse does not become the property of the purchaser, for which I should think he was thankful, not being quite clear in his mind what to do with him. Quite another fate is reserved for it. A rope having been rove through a block, it is made fast to the horse, and all hands tailing on to the other end, he is hoisted with a run up to the main-yard arm, his faithful jockey going with him and clinging to the saddle to the last. Arriving at the yard-arm his rider climbs on to the foot-rope, and the steed having previously been saturated with kerosene is set light to. When fairly burning, a knife is passed through the rope, and the horse falls with a splash into the sea and is lost astern. This is the last act, "grog o'" is sounded, and Jack's emancipation is accomplished.

Another old-established practice is known as chalking, in which the passenger plays (and often pays) his part, furnishing fun and liquid refreshment for the crew. After a week or two at sea, when the first-class passengers have recovered from sea-sickness and begin to take some interest in life and the goings on in the ship, a watchful eye is kept upon them. The object of this is to catch him on the fo'c's'le head, which the crew consider their own particular part of the ship, any one else but the ship's company being made to pay for the privilege of using it. As soon as the passenger reaches there the word is passed along, and one of the hands steal quietly up behind him, placing a circular chalk mark on the deck round his feet. Should he be dense enough not to understand the meaning of it, some one among the crew may be found with sufficient indiffidence to explain that it represents a bottle of grog for each watch. Of course, he may question the legality of this proceeding, and flatly refuse to do what is required of him, but few, to their credit, are mean enough for this, the liquor, with the captain's consent, being usually forthcoming, and receiving Jack's ap-

proval as entering into the *spirit* of the thing. After this the passenger is free to come and go at will, and very often keeps his experience to himself, so that by using a little guile, and on the plea of showing them something, persuades others to make the journey with him. Older travellers who have been on board ship before know this little dodge of chalking too well to be easily caught. Many and ingenious are the plans made to lure him on to the forbidden ground which will end in his downfall. A sudden rush by some of the crew to look at an imaginary object over the bows will sometimes disarm his caution, curiosity to witness what is claiming their attention often ending in the result required.

The amateur sailor with a taste for investigation aloft may find himself under the same penalty. Allowing him to reach a certain height where escape is impossible, two of the men mount after, provided with a couple of gaskets (lengths of small rope for making sails fast) with which to tie him should he not prove amenable to reason. Seldom is it necessary to proceed thus far, for here his position is much more critical than on the fo'c's'le head, and

being completely at their mercy he falls an easy prey. Mostly he accepts the inevitable at once, having no head for argument at that altitude, and anxious to have something as solid as the ship under his feet again with the least possible delay. These are some of the institutions that the steamer has done violence to and destroyed, not only by lessening the number of sailing-ships, but also by taking away the passenger trade they at one time enjoyed. Not many years ago to reach the Colonies, New Zealand in particular, there was no alternative but to go in a sailing-ship, most of them being built with that end in view, to carry a full complement of passengers. I was speaking to a modern sailor only a few months ago, and mentioned some of the little customs, such as the dead horse and others. He knew little or nothing about them, only having heard them spoken about and had never seen them enacted. In these days of bustle and hurry few people choose a sailing-ship for voyaging in preference to the steamer, and so these interesting observances, that caused many a laugh and broke the monotony of a long trip, and which I hope have been made clear to you, are nipped in the bud, and will

apparently soon be as dead as the poor horse itself. No time for them on the steamer, and the "wind jammer" now carries no passengers, who were necessary to the performance of most of them. For the want of an audience to give zest to, and make them profitable, Jack has forsaken and apparently consigned them to the limbo of forgotten things.

CHAPTER IX

Jack's scanty Provisions — Futility of asking for more — Sailors' Side-dishes — A venial Sin — An undignified Ambition—The Danger of Scudding.

BEFORE crossing the line, the funny member of the crew took advantage of the occasion to go among the emigrants warning them to keep a bright look-out for it, as the last time he was in the vicinity he had left some washing hanging there, and now wished to recover it. On this trip Father Neptune did not visit us, some of his satellites, no doubt, carrying the news that a ship was passing over with such a crowd on board, that to exact his dues would be too much for even his well-known energy, so the old fellow, seeing it was too big an order to execute all at once, had perforce to wink the other eye and let them over toll free.

The emigrants had by this time settled down to ship life, and were as happy and comfortable

as possible, and well they might be, most of them never having fed so decently in their lives before, and knowing that when they left the ship they would leave a home for an uncertainty. In comparison with the sailors they lived like aldermen (I mean Dickens' aldermen), soft bread and tinned vegetables in plenty being served out to them every day, often looked upon with envious eyes by the crew.

A big lump of an Irishman with a brogue as thick as buttermilk, put the question to me one day: "How do yez like the mate?"

I was in the mate's watch, and liking him very well, said so.

"Sure I don't mane that, I mane the mate you ate."

Now, I didn't hate the mate at all, but what he meant was "how did I like the salt meat." Some people, I reflected, are allowed to speak three times, some until they are understood.

Why is the sailor so badly fed? that is a condition that will have to be remedied, for surely he is worthy of good tucker if any man is. Not only is it the plainest possible fare, but sometimes he doesn't get even enough of that. He knows from experience, as a famous

character found out before him, the fruitlessness of asking for a larger portion, for that bloated autocrat of the food department, the steward, would probably tell him he gets his whack, and he'll get no more. For example, he is allowed soft bread twice a week, and in some ships he doesn't even get that. This ridiculously small roll that he calls a "rooty" (*pain rôti*) is devoured at one meal, leaving appetite for another, but if not satisfied he can fill up with "crackers" which after bread he thinks playing it low down on his stomach.

Many are the little yarns told in the fo'c's'le at the expense of captain and steward, regarding their niggardliness with food. A sample is of the crew who complained, whilst lying in port, that they were not receiving their proper allowance of potatoes. The captain promised them amendment. Next morning as he was going over the gangway on his way ashore he suddenly turned round, and in the hearing of all hands shouted for the steward. "Look here," said he, holding up two fingers and shaking them threateningly at the steward, "remember what I told you, and see that the men have plenty of potatoes too." The

steward understood him and so did the crew, but not until dinner-time when the potatoes panned out just two per man.

Sailors perpetrate little atrocities on the culinary art, in the way of side-dishes that find no place in the scale of provisions. By the names he gives them he has evidently very little respect for them himself, their chief recommendation being something soft to get his teeth into.

Biscuits, or as they are familiarly called at sea "pantiles," is the only item of food, to which there is no limit, served out with a liberal hand. To make a satisfying meal of these would occupy all the watch below, for being as hard as nails mastication is necessarily a slow operation. To obviate this difficulty they are placed in a small canvas bag, and by dint of much pounding and hammering reduced to powder. Sufficient liquid, sometimes pea soup that is left over from dinner, is mixed with this until it becomes a paste. A few pieces of fat pork stuck here and there over the surface to give flavour, this by the indulgence of the cook is allowed in the oven, and when browned is known as "dog's-body."

"Dandy-funk" is another dish much of the same kind, the substitution of a little molasses furnishing the excuse for another name. The staple ingredient of both, as being plentiful, is powdered biscuit, and although useful to fill up broken stowage, neither is tasty or appetising.

Weird names, "dog's-body," and "dandy-funk," but Jack is noted for that sort of gift, and is never at a loss to apply a quaint name to anything. Most of his sayings are as old as the hills, but that he adds to them occasionally is evident, when he suggestively calls tinned meat, "Harriet Lane."

It behoves the cook to keep his eyes open, for he need be a very Argus, when at the strike of the bell the crew visit the galley to obtain their pint of concoction called tea or coffee. There would be no hesitation in lifting a tart, or any unconsidered little trifle intended for the cabin, should half a chance present itself of getting away with it, and should it once reach the fo'c's'le 'twould be an easier task to find the lost tribe of Israel than to recover it. This sort of thing is looked upon even by men who would scorn to steal a pin as no fault at all,

but rather reflects credit on him who is able to carry it through often and successfully. Jack has no qualms of conscience in this little matter, but looks at it in the same light as some people, not you, dear reader, view evading the Customs, and passing property ashore without paying legitimate duty, in fact, as rather meritorious, and certainly not attaining the magnitude of a sin. Even the captain and officers if reasonably decent fellows, do not look upon it as a very heinous offence, for in all probability they have been there themselves at some time or other of their lives, and should the culprit unhappily be discovered, and for the sake of discipline punished, the skipper will probably tell him with a twinkle in his eye: "I don't punish you for taking it, I punish you for being found out." The boys are the chief offenders, not because they are worse than the others, but simply because they have more opportunity. I have no wish to argue the right and wrong of the proceeding, for I am afraid I could not bring an unbiased mind on the matter, having lively recollections of dainties that found their way into our house which were certainly never intended for us. The point I do feel justified

to argue upon is, that sailors should be better fed and by so being leave no need to discuss the other at all.

We were now down in the rolling forties, the region of the brave west winds, and the habitat of the sea-bird. The number of these increased every day and hundreds of them circling round the after part of the ship, provided a welcome addition to the scenery of sea and sky. All were represented, from the majestic albatross, without apparent effort everlastingly describing a circle, to the tiny mother Carey's chicken (stormy petrel) with their queer little action of snatching at the water as they hover on the crest, or down the side of a wave. The captain's gun was never silent, but barked viciously whenever an albatross poised itself for a moment overhead, for he had conceived the idea of stuffing a pillow with the soft down that lay underneath the feathers. Senseless vanity, accomplished at last, but at the price of the lives of hundreds of sea-birds, surely no more created for making pillows than are the bright plumaged birds made to adorn the hats of fashionable ladies. From sea-faring to hat

trimming is a long cry so I had better stop before I get out of my latitude.

The job of plucking the birds fell to the boys, and never did I undertake a task less willingly. The uselessness of such destruction for the paltry end in view appealed to me, and I detested the whole thing heartily. The bodies when plucked were thrown overboard, for the flesh is useless as an article of diet, the feet being in request by the crew, to be skinned and being lined with silk converted into tobacco pouches. This, with the exception of a head occasionally mounted on a board was the sum total of their utility, in all conscience little enough to justify their destruction. Most of the birds when shot fell upon the deck, for the captain waited a favourable opportunity with this end in view. Some few fell clear of the ship with a broken wing, to suffer perhaps for days before death overtook them. The inhumanity of the whole proceeding was brought vividly home to us by a melancholy event that happened a few days afterwards.

We had been running with a westerly wind behind us which gradually freshened and increased, bringing up a long roll of a sea that

plainly indicated there was yet something heavier behind it. Harder and harder blew the wind, and higher and higher became the sea, until we were scudding before it under a reefed main topsail and foresail. There is nothing so galling to the master of a ship as having to heave-to with a fair wind blowing, but however annoying it may be 'tis better to be safe than sorry, and do so in time, unless he knows exactly how his ship will behave under such circumstances. The anxiety to make a passage, and the aversion to losing a good wind, are two things very liable to warp his better judgment, until he may find the time for heaving-to has gone by, and the only thing left is to keep her at it, trusting to her sea-worthiness and speed to outrun the liquid mountains that race hungrily after her. Should one of these outstrip her and break over the stern, known as "pooping a sea," the amount of damage done is incalculable, and may, under certain conditions, end in the destruction of the ship.

CHAPTER X

Tricks of the Ocean—Battened down—Man overboard—Jack's proverbial Generosity—Arrival in New Zealand.

THE peculiar sensation of being struck by a sea is almost indescribable. You see it coming, and with arms and legs and every fibre of the body grip something handy and solid. If coming along the deck, as I might say horizontally, it tears you away from this like a rag, as though your hold had no more strength in it than that of an infant, scooting you along the deck until its force being spent you may cling on to some object with a chance of remaining there. If the sea descends on top of you the feeling of annihilation is still more complete, the attempt to remain upright worse than useless. The weight and volume of water flattens you out on the deck like a wet swab from where you may pick yourself up, if

happily it has left you enough breath to do so, spluttering and dazed, with only one thought in your head, and that, "what the devil was it struck me?" A blustering bully is the sea. Always on the look-out, when in a temper, for something weaker than itself to make sport of and destroy. When in a playful mood meeting you with a shower of spray just sufficient to wet and make you uncomfortable, or filling your sea-boots, and then rushing frantically for the scupper-holes, where it gurgles until one might almost imagine it was laughing at you, and saying: "So long, meet you again soon." Strange tricks it plays at times. I was lying hove to once, which means we were "bobbing three times in the same hole and making no headway," under the least possible canvas we could carry. A big sea broke on board, overtaking the carpenter as he ran to catch hold of something and sweeping him over the lee-rail. But the ocean would have none of him, the backwash depositing him on board again as neatly as possible. He made a joke of it afterwards, and suggested that, as the sea had refused him he must have been born to be hanged.

The captain of the *Chatto* evidently knew his ship and kept her running until heaving-to was impossible and beyond skill or seamanship. "Needs must when the devil drives," so we hung on and drove before it.

The emigrants were not enjoying life at this time as they had in the fine weather when, sprawling all over the decks sunning themselves, their knack of settling down just where work had to be done, and the objection or inability to move smartly out of the way called down many a blessing on their heads. They were now undergoing another experience, with the advent of bad weather having been battened down below for the last two days. In spite of ventilators, under these conditions, with between three and four hundred human beings under decks, anything but salubrious was the atmosphere in their domicile, of which we unwillingly obtained a sample whenever we lifted the hatch a few inches at some favourable opportunity, with the intention of improving it. Such was the state of things when a bigger sea than usual came thundering up behind us.

Needless to say that when a ship is running heavily, the most dangerous position she can be

exposed to, the man at the wheel must have all his senses focused on the duty before him, and if possible abstain from looking behind. Awe inspiring indeed is such a sight, not to be viewed unmoved even by the stoutest-hearted, as it comes towering and racing towards the ship looking as if only by a miracle can she lift her stern in time to let it pass under her and avoid destruction. Unluckily the sound of it roaring up after us was too much for the man steering, who, turning his head to look, got frightened and just for one second lost his nerve. She swerved, and although lifting sufficiently to escape "pooping" it broke like a deluge in the waist, catching one of the crew who was making his way aft at the time, and carrying him overboard like a cork. From his point of vantage the officer of the watch had seen it, and instantly seizing a lifebuoy, threw it to him as he passed astern, which unfortunately he secured. I say unfortunately, because it was only a means of prolonging his agony, and far better had he missed it. Had the ship been lying hove-to there might have been some hope for him, but as it was no mortal power on earth or sea could save him. The ship was driven

before the remorseless sea, and to bring her to the wind, which would be the first operation before lowering a boat away, was out of all question, madness. We had no choice but to leave him to his fate, watching impotently as he rose on the summit of each wave, the sea-birds swooping round him chanting a death wail in his ear, until at last he was lost to the eye, and left alone with his God and the deep sea. What his thoughts may have been who can say? Being a seaman he knew directly that rescue was impossible, that however willing might be his shipmates watching him, they were powerless, and that, under the circumstances he was inexorably doomed. The terrors of the inquisition held no torture such as this. If he could have thrust the lifebuoy from him he would have suffered nothing in comparison, but I believe no healthy-minded man could do it, and so I suppose he held on to the last.

I remember falling overboard once myself, happily under conditions quite different. I knew I should be picked up in a quarter of an hour at the outside, and being a fair swimmer there was nothing to be alarmed at. But even

then, I could not help thinking, "suppose they go on and leave me," and that horrible sinking caused by "funk," which I expect most of us have experienced at some time or other, is not easily forgotten. The ship I had unwillingly left, and which constituted a world to me, was such a tiny atom compared with the ocean that surrounded her, providing a most efficacious lesson, which I believe did me good.

To lose a man from among the small community of a ship's company in this manner is one of the saddest events that can happen at sea. A gloom is cast over the ship not easily or hurriedly shaken off, for the scene of the calamity is always present. The empty bunk, the omission of his name at muster call, are eloquent reminders that one of your number in the full enjoyment of life and health has suddenly been snatched from among you, a victim of the insatiable ocean.

As a rule, a day or two after a man is lost overboard, his effects in the shape of clothing are brought on to the main-hatch, and for the benefit of those concerned disposed of by auction. Then is seen to advantage the proverbial generosity of the sailor, unfortunately

not always displayed in so good a cause. If the deceased is known to be a married man, his belongings may, and probably will, fetch prices out of all proportion to their value, one and another of the crew running them up to such an extent that, an observer with no knowledge of the generous impulse underlying the action, might well be excused if he thought they had taken leave of their common sense.

It was the magic cry of "Land oh!" some weeks later that quite restored again the usual cheerfulness to the ship. Everything else was forgotten but the patent fact, the land of promise was in sight. As it became more distinct, the excitement among the emigrants grew in proportion. Mothers held their children up, fondly hoping to draw their attention to the land of their adoption. There was less sentiment among the men, who, as we drew near enough to see the land sloping down into the ocean covered almost to high-water mark with vegetation, speculated on the value of it for agricultural purposes.

We were bound for Lyttleton, and as we passed through the heads under shortened sail, quite a number of open boats might be seen

coming out to meet us, the occupants, in most cases, curious to see what manner of "new chums," as it was the fashion to call them, we had brought with us.

At this time the sailing-ship was the only means of transport between the old country and New Zealand, her rival, the steamer, not having yet come along (using a bull) to cut the ground from under her. The arrival of a ship was a red-letter day, and a matter of interest to half the town, for mostly she carried a living freight, to cultivate and people the land. Alas! the glory of the sailing-ship has departed, the few that occasionally call are glad to glean cargo the steamer deigns to leave behind her, and for which there is no particular hurry at the other side of the world. The once jaunty wool-clipper is converted into a collier, and for the want of something better has, perforce, to carry coals from Newcastle, N.S.W., to the west coast of America. With the exception of the very large vessel, whose enormous carrying capacity and small crew will always make a dividend-paying concern, the fiat has gone forth against the sailing-ship. Steam has ousted her from the proud position she once occupied, and, indeed, to a

great extent from the ocean. Yet the day may not be far distant when the steamboat likewise may have to take a back seat, and in her turn make room for a cheaper and more rapid mode of propulsion.

CHAPTER XI

Comfortable Emigrants—Handy Man and a strange Bird—A little Joke—The Character of Ships.

WITHOUT undue delay our emigrants were landed, still being under the care of a paternal Government which had by no means finished its contract by landing them in the country. Transferred from the vessel to a depôt erected for the purpose, they would be fed and lodged, and remain under its care until every man or woman had obtained employment suitable to them. Not long, as a rule, after the landing of a batch of "new chums," was the purse of the country subjected to a strain in this matter, a week or two seeing them scattered over the particular province they had arrived at, for in those days the labour was plentiful and the labourer somewhat scarce. Hard to imagine this the same crowd that had come off to us in Plymouth, most of them at the time tearful

and dejected. Now, as they passed into the tenders waiting to convey them ashore, laughing and joking, and all eager to obtain a closer view of the land that was the object of their journey.

We received a noisy farewell as they steamed away, the girls removing the shawl from their heads, the only head-gear to which most of them were accustomed, and using them until nearly out of sight waving us "good-bye." Meet these same damsels a voyage hence it would be rather a difficult matter to recognise some of them. The shawl has been cast aside and its place taken by a befeathered hat, whilst frocks and frills betoken that they have participated in the prosperity of the country. A few months have been sufficient to transfigure them in the matter of raiment, the only original possession that clings to them with any degree of constancy, being the brogue or dialect with which they may be blessed.

I took a trip on the following Sunday, some eight or nine miles away, with the intention of seeing how they fared, and looking at their domicile, or perhaps, well—perhaps the single girls were the attraction. Even by this time

many of both sexes had already left for their new homes, most of the remainder making anxious inquiries regarding the welfare of the good ship that had brought them out, and speaking of her in the same manner they might do of a personal friend. Well off as they had been on the ship, they were here much better so, the commodious premises being as clean as labour could make them, whilst the food was good, wholesome, and plentiful.

Although at no time does it seem to have been the business of anybody in particular to ascertain the quality of food supplied to seamen; and if it was, then all I have to say, they neglected their duty shockingly, and the same rule did not apply to provisions shipped for the use of emigrants. Every cask of beef or pork, and, in fact, every article of diet get-at-able, underwent a rigorous inspection, being opened out on the jetty to see that it was in good order and condition before being placed on board, any article coming under the slightest suspicion being rejected. No praise is too high for the manner in which the emigrant of those days was treated both at sea and ashore, the precautions taken for their comfort and

well-being and carried out efficiently, reflecting credit on those responsible for it.

That the captain of the *Chatto* was sound in his judgment when ordaining that on the outward trip no man should become indebted or draw on the slop-chest to greater extent than one month's pay, was soon apparent after the ship had hauled alongside the wharf. Nearly every morning at "turn to" time one or more of the hands were found to be absent, having the night previously rolled his blanket into a swag, and with the aid, no doubt, of an obliging shipmate to hand it to him over the bows, and a conveniently blind watchman had, with not so much as a farewell, or by your leave, departed up country intent on finding a job on some sheep station until the shearing-season was over.

This is an instance where the lie direct is given to the adage, "a rolling stone gathers no moss." Jack gathers plenty of moss, metaphorically speaking, on these occasions, but unfortunately for himself does not allow it to take root; ten to one the end of his visit to the first township seeing him quite innocent of that necessary article he has been at such pains to

gather. Then he ships again in a homeward bounder, and if not too late in the season may receive three times the amount of wages he had out from home.

Who shall blame him, if he makes hay while the sun shines? His reasonable comfort on board of most ships is a matter of small moment to those above him. If his pay were in accordance with the duties he performs, and his food better, he would not need to lay to heart the perverted motto: "Do as you are done by." So he deserts his ship with a clear conscience and goes up country, where, as I mentioned before, he will always find a job at a certain time of year. What if he has to live on damper and mutton until he is almost ashamed to look a sheep in the face, he has made more money than if he had stopped by his ship, and although certainly no better off in the end, he has handled and had the pleasure of spending it. This sort of thing was made possible in the Colonies by the employment on the shearing-station of any number of men, the object being to finish as soon as possible. After a little experience, Jack with his natural handiness was soon able to do what was required of

him, if not with a degree of excellence, sufficiently well to ensure a welcome. At least half the men trading out to the Colonies at this time may be said to have had a dual profession, sailoring and sheep-shearing. His services were likewise greatly in request by the settlers at harvesting time, his well-known ability to turn his hand to anything giving him a value they were not slow to recognise. There is a little yarn current in New Zealand regarding this matter, verging on the comical. A farmer employing one of these men who had "skipped his ship," took him into the paddock, and pointing to the loose hay scattered about told him to construct a haystack. "Rig a haystack," said Jack, "well, I don't think as I know——." "What!" said the farmer; "you call yourself an able seaman and don't know how to build a haystack!"

This class of sailor would have done violence to his creed had he made a round voyage in a ship at the time of year when he might have been employed elsewhere with more profit to himself, and have made, to some extent, undeserving the title by which he was known, and rejoiced in, "bird of passage." Skippers,

of course, knew and expected this sort of thing, but liked it none the better for that, entailing, as it did, the necessity, and worse still, expense, of engaging other men to fill their place and make up the ship's complement when ready for sea. This was only done by offering, from the skipper's point of view, exorbitant wages, and naturally did not meet with his approval, for he, like the head of any other department wishes to keep expenses as low as possible, having in his mind the patent little fact that, should he not do so, the owners are very liable to give him his walking ticket. Many and varied were the precautions taken to prevent these moonlight excursions, the officers sometimes keeping night watches in turn to guard against it. In spite of all this Jack mostly disappeared just the same, for having made up his mind to go, go he would, until one began to wonder whether the nickname bestowed upon him, "bird of passage," had anything to do with a pair of wings which materially assisted him in making himself scarce, and accounting for his mysterious departure.

The fascination and profit of belonging to this persuasion was very evident. Part of the

crew, on the homeward passage who had shipped in the Colonies, regardless of the money they had made up country (of which, however, they seldom had any to show), might be receiving three times as much as the men alongside of whom they worked. He, by making the round voyages, had to be content with the wages that prevailed in England when he signed articles, that was, a modest two pounds ten. Steam and the increased population of the Colonies have signed the death-warrant of this very little known and peculiar bird, but even now he is sometimes unable to resist the inclination that is second nature to him, deserting his ship, and, like some unquiet spirit, revisiting the scenes of former triumphs, with a much less profitable result.

An amusing incident shows that Jack although kept in his place when aboard ship, now and again whilst ashore gets, as he might remark himself, some of his own back. A deep-water ship lying at Auckland, New Zealand, being in want of some hands, the captain strolled into the sailors' home, that of course being the most likely place to pick up what he wanted. Seated at the table in the reading-room were a

dozen or so of men, all old stagers on the coast, with no more idea of shipping in deep-water ship than they had of flying.

Presently when the skipper had made his want known, four of them who had been whispering together, jumped up, and expressed their intention of shipping with him. Men were at a premium just then, and the skipper plainly showed his satisfaction at getting four good men for the first time of asking, instead of having to put up with anything that came along.

"Before shipping with you, captain," said one of them, "there's one little thing we would like to know."

"What's that, my man?" said the captain genially.

"Well, we'd like to know if you have a good character in writing from your last crew?"

The skipper was struck silent by such an unheard-of request, and looking round the room, jumped to the conclusion, by the suppressed merriment on the faces of the others, that he was undergoing that little operation known as "having his leg pulled." Taking in the situation, he beat a hasty retreat, followed

by a laugh that must have been audible half way down the street.

I suppose the man who is incapable of knowing when he is comfortable and well off may reasonably be dubbed a fool. Yet his name is legion. Sailors in particular, who, as a rule, are privileged to growl at all and everything, so long as they do it softly, and are not overheard, seem to lack this happy knack in a high degree. How comfortable he was in the last ship apparently does not strike him until he has left her, and then he gives one the impression that he could kick himself for not finding it out before, when appreciation would have been of some material value to him. This however, is a peculiarity of the sailor, the last ship by comparison mostly having, according to himself, more to commend her than the present one. Ships are like the men who sail them, inasmuch that they come under the heading of good, indifferent, and very bad. Apart from the fact that captain and officers have it in their power to make them one or the other, ships have a character of their own. What sailor has never heard such terms applied to vessels as, "she's a lucky ship" or the reverse,

and in most cases the vessel referred to has by her consistency in one direction or the other, earned the adjective, sometimes two, applied to her? Some vessels are like a certain condition of mankind, figuratively speaking, always in hot water. Rather a strange parallel this between a ship and a man, but the more I think of it the more sound it appears to me. If a man may be born under an unlucky star, why not a ship launched under one. Always in trouble, losing men overboard, long passage, head winds, and a dozen other things that go to make the term "unlucky" applicable. Again there is the ship proverbially lucky, nearly always makes a good passage, hardly ever loses a rope yarn, and from the time of her build until she is consigned to the scrap heap is one long success. Then there is the vessel with some little thing wrong in her construction makes a dangerous ship, and being built wrongly, like a person with a crooked disposition, to make her go straight is an impossibility. Jack blesses a vessel of this sort in his own particular fashion. After toiling for two hours, the usual spell at the wheel, in a vain effort to keep her head somewhere near her course, especially should

the wind be well abaft the beam, when the time comes for him to be relieved and another hand take his place, you may hear something like this: "By glory! you don't need a coat here, she'll keep you warm enough without it. The last two hours I've been working as hard as I know how to keep her from turning round to look at herself. By jingo! she's a daisy to steer, and no mistake." So after all, the comparison between a man and a ship is not so far fetched, for they are both known by their behaviour.

A vessel has a character in another direction, that has nothing to do with herself, but is made entirely by the person who commands her. One swallow does not make a summer, but one man when he is the master, and a drunkard into the bargain, can make a ship, no matter how good she may be in herself, hotter than any summer this side of Hades.

CHAPTER XII

A drunken Skipper—A sleepy Discourse—Disciples of Morpheus—A mad Accusation.

I BADE farewell to the *Chatto* after five years on board of her, with the verdant idea, having been happy and comfortable, that all ships were alike. This callow delusion received a rude shock on joining as second mate a little barque of eight hundred tons, which although not her name I shall call the *Merivale*.

Her captain had the reputation of being a bully, and to give him his due, he conscientiously lived up to it, his one object in life seemingly, being to bullyrag and make uncomfortable all hands from the smallest boy to the chief officer. A thick set, red-headed man, with a complexion that matched his head to perfection, whilst the addition of slight pock-marks did not add beauty to a countenance that would have

been repulsive enough without it. Although perhaps not always safe to judge a man by his features, in this instance Nature had excelled herself, and set a mark on his face that was a true index of his character.

Intoxicated when he rolled on board at midnight just before we started to tow down the river, I firmly believe he did not know a sober moment for the next three weeks. We didn't see much of him until the pilot had left, and this was the signal for a crusade of bullying and fault-finding. Nothing pleased him, nothing was right, for a man bent on that sort of amusement hasn't far to look for it on board ship whether it has existence or not.

He bellowed at and lashed the crew with his blasphemous tongue, until it was a positive relief to see his red head disappear down the companion, and cause a heartfelt wish that it might never appear again.

I often picture in my mind the life this sort of man led his crew given officers of his own persuasion, at the time he could work his own sweet will upon them without restriction or fear of being called to account, except perhaps, when it led to mutiny, and he sometimes paid

for it with his life. Now, thank God, the Board of Trade has instilled a wholesome fear into the hearts of such men as this, and although even now, some of them sail pretty close to the wind, for prudential reasons few overstep the limit. Jack himself knows that he has a remedy without violence, for if he can prove a bill against him his certificate is cancelled, and the power to make the life of others a burden taken from him.

For his officers the captain of the *Merivale* had a more refined, if I may use the word, sort of torment. I believe he experienced a keen delight in lowering them in the eyes of the crew by firing off offensive remarks apparently to himself, but in reality intended for the hearing of all hands. This is not conducive to discipline, and with the exception of actual violence, nothing I know of is more calculated, with an officer slightly quick-tempered, to create a breach of the peace. However, if he is level-headed, and not too hot blooded, he will suffer a deal of this sort of thing from such a man before the breaking-strain is reached, for he knows that to take extreme measures as a satisfaction for lacerated feelings,

unless fully justified, may probably ruin his career. A blow is another thing altogether, that no man with the spirit of a mouse should or could permit without retaliating then and there. He never went that far, but led us all a dog's life to the best of his ability, so although we didn't grin, we had, as best we might, to bear it. Three weeks of this misery, the only happiness being the watch below when one might go to sleep, and forget if possible, that such a man existed. That he was drinking to excess was evident although he never showed it in his gait, but at times in the behaviour of a madman. Many a time was argued the advisability of taking command from him in the interest of the safety of ship and crew. Not the sort of thing to be done lightly, and without serious consideration, for the King cannot be deposed unless there is good, valid, and sufficient reason. Had prudence been one of the ingredients of his character, he would, looking at it from his own point of view, have had plenty more amusement out of all hands, probably until the voyage was finished. But caution was drowned in too copious draughts of whisky, and the opportunity we

had discussed and might have looked for in vain, he furnished himself.

It had been my middle watch on deck—that is, from midnight until four o'clock in the morning. After being relieved by the chief officer I went below, and in about two minutes was soundly asleep. Not the usual thing for sailors to lie awake thinking, after their watch on deck is over, the object, at night-time anyhow, being to crowd as much sleep in that four hours below as it is possible to get.

From the time an officer takes over his watch he must keep a firm hand over himself, and guard against the inducement to indulge in forty winks. The greatest crime a man can be guilty of at sea is this, and the heaviest horse-whip would be too light a weapon to castigate him with for such an offence. True, there is a man stationed at the other extreme end of the ship, whose duty is to look ahead of him, but the officer will do well to act as if he had no existence, and coin a little adage for his own particular use: "Put not your trust in the man on the look-out." From four o'clock until daylight, the sleepiest hours of the twenty-four, which Jack graphically terms "the graveyard watch," will often put all his

power of resistance to the test. A fine night, or rather morning, the gentle flap of the sails, the soothing gurgle of the water as the ship slips gently through it, all sing a seductive lullaby enticing him to forget responsibility and indulge in criminal slumber. The only antidote to scare away the advances of Morpheus is vigorous exercise. Needless to say, the good officer never by any chance sleeps in his watch on deck, often rousing out the watch, much to their disgust, to do some quite unnecessary work, in order to keep his own faculties on the alert. Although there is no excuse for the officer who forgets his duty and sleeps, the same can hardly be said for the boys, whose only responsibility rests in striking the bell every half-hour. Of course, there are boys and boys, some of them I verily believe would woo the dreamy god effectively in any position, and even accomplish that acrobatic feat known as "sleeping on a clothes-line." I remember being in one ship where a boy had omitted to strike the bell at the appointed time. I started out to find the whereabouts of that boy by the usual method, one shrill blast on a whistle. It had no meaning for him, and by-and-by I had the whole of the watch

searching high and low in every available place, but without result. I was just coming to the painful conclusion that in some mysterious manner he must have fallen overboard, and was thinking of reporting it to the skipper, when one of the hands had the happy idea of taking a binnacle lamp and looking under the wheel grating, about the only place we had not searched. There he was curled up and sleeping soundly through everything, if not the sleep of the just then with a degree of soundness not to be outdone. The remedy for this is to make him shoulder a capstan-bar, and do sentry-go up and down the lee-side of the poop during his watch on deck. Even this is sometimes open to objection, for I have known some of them to fall asleep actually whilst engaged in their parade (making one wonder if a mistake had been committed by Nature, who had intended him for a horse), and to drop the capstan-bar over the head of the "old man" sleeping below, causing the deuce to pay and no pitch hot.

I am afraid, dear reader, this discussion on sleep is not exactly what I intended to give you, and has somewhat put me out of my latitude. "Let me see, where was I? Oh,

yes, I remember, I was asleep myself." I couldn't have turned in more than half an hour when I felt some one shaking me by the shoulder. When I had my eyes properly open I saw the person who had awakened me was the skipper, and that his red face was within three inches of my own. To say I wasn't startled would be an untruth, and I wondered what devilment this rousing out, just as I had turned in for my watch below, portended.

"Get up, Mr. ——, and come on deck at once," said he, and went out, shutting the door behind him.

As I scrambled into my clothes, I pondered in vain to know what on earth or sea could be the matter that he should call me out so soon after my watch on deck was finished. Nothing to do with the ship's business, for the weather was the same as when I came below; and if it had been otherwise I should have known by the motion. When I got on deck the mystery was not explained at once, for the skipper, who was walking in an agitated manner up and down the quarter-deck, gave me the remarkable order to muster all hands, even down to the cook. When they had all gathered aft, sleep struggling

with curiosity for mastery on most of their countenances, the skipper struck an attitude, and started to explain. "Look here, men," said he, "the reason I've mustered you is a serious one. He," pointing to the mate, "has tried to poison me, and I rely on you to assist me in maintaining the discipline of the ship."

Everybody looked surprised, but no one more so than the chief officer himself.

"I'm going to put the mate in irons," he continued, "and I've been communicating with the office on the matter this morning."

I saw two or three sly winks pass between members of the crew, and one whispered quite audibly, "He's got 'em all right."

"That'll do now, men," said he, and they dispersed for'ard, but I would have given something to have heard their conversation for the next twenty minutes.

When they had gone, he took me by the arm as though I had been his greatest friend (I'm glad I wasn't), and stalked on to the poop, walking up and down talking such a lot of rot and rigmarole that all I could make of it was that the mate had tried to poison him, that he had communications with the office that morn-

ing, and the decision was that the carpenter and I were to have the honour of putting the mate in irons.

I tried to reason him out of such an absurd idea, but one can't argue with a madman to any purpose, whose one notion was that an attempt had been made to poison him. Well, he was poisoned right enough, but with strong drink administered by his own hand.

When I was about tired of his refrain, and having perhaps a lively recollection of the manner in which he had treated us prior to this, I told him that if he wasn't very careful the ornaments he intended for the wrists of the mate would in all probability adorn his own.

He pulled his arm from mine and turned on me savagely. "Do you refuse to obey my order and put the mate in irons?" he cried. "Most certainly I do," I answered.

"You may go below now," he shouted, "but we'll talk about it later on," and he set the example himself by disappearing down the companion.

There was no need for further talk on the matter, for before eight o'clock that morning

he was as mad as a hatter, and wandering about the deck with nothing worth mentioning on, and so for his own personal safety he was put under restraint.

No fancy picture this let me tell you, but a veracious sketch taken from real life that happened just as it is put down, only more so, the name of ship and person only being changed or suppressed. Not the rule happily, but the exception this sort of man. Weeded out by the Board of Trade, his sordid propensity must find other scope, and never again, if the facts justify it, will he be allowed to exercise it as commander of a vessel.

No other theme would be needed to the end of this book, were I to narrate all that happened in the next two months. How he provided situations that would have been ludicrous but for the shameful cause of them. How he regained his senses after six weeks of delirium, and could look one straight in the face without a blush of shame, until the question would keep repeating itself: "Can he remember what has happened?" All this, and much more, were my object to finish this book by talking of one man, and exploiting an

unsavoury subject to a close. So having other fish to fry, I rather gladly leave it in the present state, half done, hoping the remainder will furnish a more agreeable odour than the last.

CHAPTER XIII

Nautical Oddities

FORTUNATELY, as I said before, the sort of skipper mentioned in the last chapter, is rare, but many of them like other people have their peculiarities. The weather whilst showing the different points of a ship, good or bad, is often likewise responsible for bringing to light the different sides of character possessed by the man who has charge of her. Few of them can view with patience a long spell of head wind, or what is worse still, a flat, tedious calm. Under these conditions the possession of a hobby is a sheet-anchor that helps to soothe his mind and keep it occupied until weather more to his liking comes along; the man without something besides his professional work to claim his attention at such time, usually being miserable and extending it to those round him.

I was with one old fellow who had very marked qualities in this respect. With a good fair wind blowing, and the ship making progress through the water, he would be as nice and pleasant as could be desired, the one thing necessary to this happy state of mind, being that the ship was travelling in the right direction and leaving a decent wake behind her. That this genial side of his character was entirely dependent on the wind sounds rather queer, yet so it was. With the veering of the wind ahead his disposition changed also, the cheerfulness being superseded by a morose and sullen manner, with not sufficient comfort about it to throw a cheery word at a dog. On these occasions he had a habit of wearing an old wide-awake hat kept particularly for the purpose. The sight of it adjusted tightly to his head, was viewed by those who had dealings with him in the way of ship's business with something of the same feeling, on a lesser scale, with which I should imagine a prisoner, before receiving sentences, sees the man who is to decide his fate donning and fitting to his cranium the black cap. With the wide-awake pulled well down over his eyes, he would mope

and be miserable, finding pleasure in nothing, and even abstaining from visiting the cabin table at meal-times, causing us to wonder how he managed to exist, and making patent that he must be living on biscuits which he devoured in his cabin in misery and solitude. When the wind came fair again, the wide-awake was cast aside, and the cheerfulness asserted itself once more, whilst the hands for'ard might be heard to pass the remark that, "The barometer was rising and the wind fair, for the 'old man' had changed his hat."

Talking about barometers puts me in mind of a stock yarn belonging to Jack. He tells of the skipper who came hurriedly on deck, and ordered the officer on watch to shorten sail. The weather was beautiful, and with no apparent prospect of changing. Every now and again after anxious scrutiny of the heavens, the skipper would vanish below, and reappearing on deck again order more sail to be taken in, until the ship was wallowing under three lower topsails. "Now she's snug," said he, "and she need be, for we're going to get something heavy, and the barometer is lower than ever I remember seeing it since I've been fish-

ing" (going to sea). He went below again, and ten minutes afterwards came up, and said: "Make all sail again, Mr. Smith, that confounded barometer's started to leak, and I've just found the best half of the mercury under the cabin table." This little yarn must have been manufactured before the advent of the aneroid, and when the barometers in use were the shape and size of a banjo, and usually hung over the head of the cabin table, the streak of quicksilver running up what would be the handle in a banjo, indicating its rise or fall.

Americans have the name of being blessed by Nature with a fund of dry humour, and if the following, which happened in Sydney, N.S.W., is a fair sample, they are certainly deserving of it. A few years ago, as may be remembered, an American skipper circumnavigated the world in a small cutter forty feet long, his only companion being a dog (or was it a cat?). Anyhow, in the course of his journey he reached the place mentioned, where he, his vessel, and the dog (or cat) were objects of wide interest. Lying close by was a fine new missionary steamer not long out from home, and used for evangelising the natives of the

South Seas. The officers of her being anxious to view the little craft that had come such a long voyage, one day took the boat and went on board of her. The Yankee skipper did the amiable thoroughly, and showed them over his small vessel, pointing out anything that might interest them even to his navigating instruments. An odd lot these were, the chronometer having been picked up second-hand somewhere in America for a few dollars, the other instruments being of the same antique description. The officers of the steamer looked at them critically, and one of them remarked: "You seem to trust a good deal to providence aboard here, captain."

A day or two afterwards, having received a cordial invitation to do so, the American returned their visit, and was in turn shown over the missionary vessel. There, everything was of the most improved pattern, and quite up to date. More than one valuable chronometer, the best that money could purchase, graced the chart-room; Thompson's patent compasses to steer by, and the minor instruments all of the best and latest make. "What do you think of her, captain?" said one of the

officers, when they had shown him all there was to see. "Wall," replied the skipper dryly, casting his eye over the new and costly instruments used for her navigation, "strikes me you gentlemen don't put your trust much in providence aboard this hooker."

Another skipper I was with had the strange habit of picking up any little trifles lying about the decks, such as ends of twine, spun yarn, and other small things, the amount gathered in this fashion during a voyage would have made a good sized bag of shakings (odds and ends). These were taken down below by him, but what became of them after was a mystery.

All sorts and conditions of skippers are met during a life at sea, among them being the skipper who believes in ceremony, and the skipper who believes in none. Then there is the man who likes plenty of noise from his officers, although he makes little himself, and another who reserves all that sort of thing for his own particular performance, or again the individual who is taciturn and silent, and who never speaks a superfluous word to any one in the ship from beginning to end of the voyage. These may all come within your sphere of

acquaintances should you change ships often enough, but the most whimsical of them all that it was ever my luck to meet deserves a chapter almost to himself, which I shall give you later on.

Some officers have their peculiarities the same as the captain, but have less time, and therefore less opportunity to cultivate them until they become fully fledged skippers themselves. They are represented by all classes, from the man brought up in "crack" ships and kid gloves, who objects to soiling his hands if he can possibly help it, down to our friend the "hawse-pipe" officer, who gives you the impression that he is itching to take his coat off and dabble with tar. The chief officer of the *Chatto* was an elderly man, a medium of the two, and had a most obliging habit that often served us boys, who understood it, a good turn, letting us know half the length of the ship away when he was in an angry mood, and allowed us plenty of time to steer clear of him. He had a slight impediment in his speech, but this was only evident, as is often the case, when something upset his temper and he tried to crowd too many words out at once. Added to this was the knack of

nodding his head up and down when in this condition, which we being well acquainted with, knew as a danger-signal and a sure sign that a squall was brewing.

> Full well we traced as on the deck he trod,
> The sign of anger in his morning nod.

To see him coming along one side of the ship in this state, his head nodding for all it was worth, would be sufficient to induce us to quickly change to the other, leaving those who were not conversant with this, to us, unmistakable omen of wrath, to bear the brunt of his anger.

If there had been any truth in the little joke that, a sailor after being a number of years in the same ship should own a certain portion of her, then, judging by the time he had been on board, the bo'sun should have been the happy possessor of at least half the *Chatto*. As such recompense was only a myth, he owned nothing nearly so substantial as this, but being such a length of time in her, the privilege enjoyed by old servants was extended to him, and he used his tongue with more freedom than would have been allowed in another. The captain one day

condescended to give him a pull on one of the royal braces, no one else being handy at the time. The rope carried away and landed them in a heap on the deck, from where the bo'sun picked himself up, and acridly remarked : "Yes, I know, that's one of your captain's pulls, once a month and darned little at that." He was always ready with some cutting little remark, directed with impartiality from skipper down to the cook's mate. Some few voyages before he had had the misfortune to break his leg, and on the same trip the paint mixed for the use of the ship, which is always under charge of the bo'sun, had been spoiled by some one blending it with the wrong sort of oil. These two incidents were used for a little repartee and furnished the only occasion on which I ever knew him to be at a loss for a reply. He and the carpenter, although really great cronies and living in the same berth, were continually chaffing one another, and little passages of wit often passed between them. "Look here, chips," said the bo'sun one day, referring to some job the carpenter was engaged upon, "why don't you get a move on ? you'll be ashamed to handle your money when you come to be paid off."

"Go on," answered the carpenter, "why you've only done two days' work all the time you've been in the ship, that was the day you broke your leg, and the day you spoiled the paint."

CHAPTER XIV

Shilling-a-month Men—Originality in Swearing—Sea-lawyers — Sunday and Sailors' Pleasure — Unlucky Sailormen—A Word on Sailors' Homes.

After sundry more trips between England and the Colonies in ships that embraced the three orders I have mentioned, good, indifferent, and very bad, both in themselves and the men who commanded them, I grew wearied of the monotony of such long voyages. Tired of scenes that varied no more than did the hard work and little pay attached to them, I seriously thought of making a change that would supply at least one of them.

Sailors are supposed to be familiar with sights and phases of life in all parts of the world, yet strange to say this only applies truthfully to a certain portion of them. A great number get into a groove, and remain in it the best part of, and sometimes all their

lives, hardly ever departing from a certain route. Some affect the Colonial trade, others the Indian, and so on, seldom unless compelled by force of circumstances departing from it, as in the days before steam, a class were known as "western ocean sailors," who rarely, if ever, got south of the equator.

Whatever wavering I may have had about throwing up my position, and in sailor parlance taking a new departure, was banished by a little incident that left no doubt in my mind which course I should pursue. This was a letter received from a brother older than myself, and of whom I had heard next to nothing for some ten years. Therein I learned that he had given up the sea as a profession, and in place of ploughing the angry wave, was now ploughing the peaceful land on a farm in New Zealand. My mother was with him, and failing in health her constant inquiry was of my whereabouts, and he urged me to lose no time in hastening out to him if I wished to see her again before she passed away.

Good daughter! good son! honour thy father and thy mother, and when the long days promised are drawing to a close great shall be

thy peace also! As a small set-off against the sin of omission I had been guilty of in not corresponding as I should have done with home, I made up my mind to go without delay. Two days after receiving the letter, instead of waiting for an officer's berth, which might have been difficult to resign at the other end, I shipped before the mast, at the excessive wages of one shilling a month, in a ship bound out to Melbourne, as the first leg of the long journey before me. I tell this in the hope that it may excuse to some extent what came after.

Although at this time the glory of the sailing-ship was slowly waning, in many situations King Coal had not yet made his irresistible bid for favour, as he did later on, that was to end in her degeneration, and she was still greatly in evidence. Among the crew of most of them trading to the Colonies might sometimes be found as many as half who had shipped for the ridiculously low sum of one shilling a month. The idea of this was that, instead of rolling up what belongings could be comfortably carried when they reached the other end and taking a moonlight trip, like persons who have no desire to pay their rent, when the ship arrived at her

destination their work was done, and they could leave her legitimately through the medium of the shipping-office. Others shipped for the round voyage with no intention of completing it, and the less honest purpose of getting all they could out of the ship before deserting her. The institution of the shilling a month, as far as I can understand, was brought about by the numerous desertions from these particular ships, the object being to give sailors who only wished to make the passage out, a chance to act honestly. If that were so, success was evident by the remarkable number of men who took advantage of it. Still more was it established in the interest of ship-owners, who by this means were to an extent guaranteed against loss for the higher wages that would prevail in the Colonies.

One has to live and associate with a person to know him thoroughly, and I never regretted that trip, giving as it did, in the privacy of his own abode, the fo'c's'le, a point of view never to be obtained from aft.

Among other little failings attributed to Jack is the one of swearing. If he has earned distinction in this direction it is more by the strange and queer oaths he at times uses, than

by his abundance of language. Any ordinary dock-walloper could beat him easily in the common or garden swear-word, but where Jack shines and has gained the name of artist for himself is by his originality in coining words peculiar to himself and his fraternity. So if he is famous in this particular line it is more quality than quantity that has secured for him this dubious honour.

A parson travelling by a vessel was much alarmed by a storm which overtook her. He appealed to the captain to know if there was any danger. For answer he was taken for'ard, and told by the skipper to put his head down the fore-scuttle and listen to the conversation. When you hear language like that you can make up your mind there isn't much danger. Much relieved he went aft again. A few days after another storm came along, and without mentioning it to the captain he went for'ard again, and telling a friend afterwards of his experience, said: "It was a great relief and pleasure to me when I heard them still swearing heartily below."

If any class of man should be awarded the palm for profanity, I think he may be found

in the Australian bullock-driver. His language is of the volcano in eruption order, and is a by-word in the Colonies, beside which Jack's more picturesque effort might be likened to a harmless little household fire in the grate. Having told a little story at the expense of the sailor—or was it the other person;—I think it only fair I should do likewise by the bullock-driver.

A parson, not the same I should imagine mentioned before, in the back blocks came across a bullock-driver whose team was hopelessly fast in a quagmire. According to tradition this is a position where sulphurous language, vigorously applied, is a factor essential to their extraction. In this case the driver was not acting up to the reputation of his class, having lit his pipe and apparently taking things very quietly.

"My good man," said the parson, "I am glad to have seen this. Men of your occupation have a character for strong language in positions of this sort, which I am pleased to see is false. Not even an impatient word have you made use of, and I bear witness that you are the most defamed class of men on the earth."

"It isn't that at all, parson," answered the bullock-driver; "it's like this, I'm afraid to start swearing, and should be ashamed of myself afterwards, for I feel I couldn't do justice to the situation."

Outside the rule of the road, and the law that applies to storms, one might reasonably suppose there was no use for lawyers at sea. Yet there are plenty of them, for who never heard of a "sea-lawyer?" Most ships have one among the members of the crew, the sort of man who knows everything so much better than any one else. Always ready in the seclusion of the fo'c's'le to criticise his officers, and urge that such and such a thing should have been done quite differently, and how much better and easier he would have accomplished it himself. Very amusing this sort of man, if you have a sense of humour. Taking for a precept that everything has its usefulness, he has his also, the utility of such a person being that he breaks the monotony by starting an argument, thus benefiting his shipmates by giving them something to talk about.

Sunday at sea is an off-day, no work being in progress, except, of course, such as steering,

trimming sail, and other things that may be actually necessary for the advancement of the ship. If the morning is fine, the fo'c's'le has an air of bustle about it, each member of the crew being engaged in some occupation having personal cleanliness for its aim. Some are rummaging in their chests for a clean shift of clothing, others performing their ablutions, and getting the most possible virtue out of the least possible fluid, whilst the many excursions to the galley to exchange a small quantity of cold water for hot (a scarce commodity at sea in either state) is liable to call for many a muttered growl from the cook. Later on the more studious, to pass the time away, will take a book into a quiet corner, if happily the limited quantity of literature possible to borrow one from another is not already exhausted. By-the-bye, causing the reflection, what a boon a small library would be on board of all ships for the use of the crew, how little it would cost, and how greatly appreciated. True, some ships do carry them, but like good things supplied to Jack, they are few and far between. Even then, little effort is made to circulate them, for whatever may be thought upon the matter,

Jack is of a somewhat retiring disposition and hates to beg favours of any one. A never-ending source of amusement on Sunday is the time-honoured one of "sailors' pleasure." This consists of turning out the contents of his chest, to overhaul his garments, and gloat over any little treasure he may possess. A lengthy pastime this, occupying more time than might be imagined, every little article undergoing a close scrutiny, and with the go-ashore clothes, which have probably been hung on deck to catch a little sunshine, finally returned neatly to the chest until time and opportunity presents itself to have it all over again. "Sailors' pleasure" is essentially a Sunday performance. In the week-days, if disinclined for slumber in the watch below, which in the fine weather is often the case, especially with the men who have been "farmers" the night before, other methods of passing time are found. For instance, there is the man whose hobby is working wool pictures on a piece of duck stretched over a frame, the subjects mostly depicted being ships surrounded by a remarkably blue sea. Then there is the sailor with a gift for model rigging, who employs all his

spare time in representing on a small scale the ship he is sailing in, and after months of patience and perseverance turning out a miniature of her exact in every detail. That fly in the amber sort of wonder, the ship in a bottle, is sometimes a favourite occupation, and an object of surprise and speculation as to how it got there until you know the secret. Remarkably little time is wasted in a ship's fo'c's'le, and Jack always finds something to employ his busy fingers on. In addition to the above he goes in for mat-making, picture frames, and a dozen other things, the bulk of them all eventually finding a resting-place and adorning the boarding-house he most affects.

I was talking a few chapters ago of the different sorts of luck, if any there be, that attended ships, and I think the same sort of argument applies equally to sailors. Perhaps some occult influence drawing like to like, may be the means of guiding the unlucky sailor to the unlucky ship. However that may be, the fact that some sailors are much more unfortunate than others is beyond question. Like the pitcher that goes often to the well, the sailor who goes often to sea must be wrecked at last

(by the way, one of the moot questions put to sailors by people ashore) is not always borne out by fact. Some will go to sea all their lives and have nothing worse to chronicle in way of adventure than something stopping a long way short of wreck, whilst others are quite intimate with the Shipwrecked Mariners' Society, and for any length of time never seem clear of it.

We had a case in point, one of many I have known, on board this ship bound for Melbourne, a member of the crew having a most disastrous record, which there is not the slightest doubt was true. He had shipped on a vessel bound for the Colonies, but when off Portland was run down by another ship, and the crew being rescued were returned again to London. He then joined the *Duncan Dunbar* (not to be confounded with the *Dunbar* wrecked at Sydney Heads) which was lost on St. Pauls, a pinnacle of rocks in the vicinity, and just north of the equator. Picked up and returned to London once more, one would think evil fortune for a time at least had nothing further to offer in this direction. But not so, pursued by his ill-luck he again signed articles, this time in the ill-fated *London*, which as most people know foundered

in the Bay of Biscay, he being one of the few survivors. After he had told me the story I didn't feel easy in my mind with such a Jonah on board, but took comfort from the reflection that, after three misfortunes in succession, which are said to be the maximum number of such things, we had a good chance of reaching our destination safely.

When we were fast to the wharf after an uneventful trip out to Melbourne, the shilling a month men were free to go ashore on what business intent. Most of them, myself among the number, put up at the Sailors' Home, where it was my intention to stop until a chance offered of getting to New Zealand.

Sailors' Home is a very misleading title to give a place of this description. An outsider naturally thinks there is a smack of charity about such a name, and that here Jack may find board and lodging whilst ashore at a minimum expense to himself, whereas in reality he pays just as much as he would anywhere else, most of them being run on lines to make a profit out of him, to the same extent as any boarding-house where the sailor "is taken in and done for." When his money is gone he must take the first

ship offered him, whether for reasons of his own he is inclined to or not, and no matter where she may be going, rejection entails the painful alternative of being fired out. Of course this opens up the argument that to do otherwise would be to encourage the loafer, but surely the person in charge of such a place should have judgment sufficient to discriminate between the man who is a loafer and the man who is not. That a place of this description can be run on decent lines, and at the same time pay, I have an example in my mind just now. The Sailors' Home in Auckland, New Zealand, is such a place. Here the charges leave the smallest margin of profit. The man who sojourns there is comfortable, and gets value for his money, and the place is a success. But then it was not built with the intention of making it a dividend-paying concern, being endowed by a liberal-minded man with a soft corner in his heart for Jack.

The Sailors' Home in Melbourne was a misnomer in every sense of the term, tenanted as it was with all sorts and conditions of people, to say nothing of vermin, from lumpers to the men who sold latest novelties in the street.

There was only one thing to be said in its favour, that by leaving his money with the superintendent, a man was safe from being drugged and robbed, a thing not unknown in those days in several notorious boarding-houses I could mention were I disposed to, with the addition of being "shanghaied," and on awakening to find himself outside Melbourne heads on board of a ship, with no notion of how he came there, bound for the west coast of America or some other salubrious climate. A man had himself to thank very often for being in such an uncomfortable plight as the above. Imbibing too freely of a vile Colonial beer, appropriately nicknamed "tanglefoot," because, I suppose it has the power to entangle a man's feet, and tie his legs in a knot quicker than any other known brand manufactured, may have a deal to do with his selection of a shady instead of a respectable house of residence.

CHAPTER XV

Some Use in being hard-up—Reckoning without the Host—A happy Chance—Obliging Shipmates—Look before you leap—My Friend in Blue.

I THINK it may be guessed without my holding forth upon the matter that, at this time I was hardly in a state of affluence, for with that riotous shilling per month how could it be otherwise. Ah, well! even that unpleasant state of things, a position occupied by most sailors at some time or other of their career, like the sea-lawyer, has its usefulness. If a man has never known adversity how can he be so worldly wise as the man who has, giving him, as it does, his level, and bringing out his qualities of self resource.

Had I been in a position to do so, I should, of course, have paid a passage to the place I wished to reach and thus ended the matter without delay and the least possible trouble to

myself. As it was I had to make use of this faculty which is more prominent among seafarers than any profession I know of, and made manifest even in small matters, such as the best means of arranging his oil-skins to keep the water out, and known as a "soul and body lashing," or that substitute for a fastening, a small toggle of wood, termed a "Liverpool button."

There was a little barque bound for Napier, New Zealand, to load wool for home, and I shipped on board of her, innocently thinking that after I had worked a couple of months, and she was ready for sea, there would be no difficulty in obtaining my discharge provided I was willing to forfeit the money due to me.

It was not exactly the port I wished to reach, but was another stage of my journey, and I knew from there I could get a passage up the coast in one of the small steamers. Fortunately, as it turned out afterwards, I was well acquainted with the place having loaded there several times before.

Lying two miles from the shore, the wool was brought off in lighters, so necessarily was a slow process.

When I had been two months on board and a few more days would see her a full ship, I resolved to interview the captain, and making a clean breast of everything by telling him how I was situated, trust to his generosity, of which not much was needed, seeing I was content to leave my wages behind, to release me.

Unluckily for myself wages were high in this particular place, and the captain was not the sort of man to play at generosity if it touched his pocket, or the pockets of his owners in the most infinitesimal degree. He figured out minutely on a piece of paper, as if a generous action was to be reckoned in shillings, that if the ship made a long passage home the money I left behind would be insufficient to cover the extra wages of the man who should come in my place, and told me civilly, but none the less decidedly, that the idea was not to be thought of. I reflected quite differently, and as I left the cabin it was about the only thing I could think of. I hadn't come all this way to let the refusal of a man to act decently stand in my light, and determined to leave that ship if I left every stitch I possessed behind me. Much easier to make this resolve than to carry it out,

for the vessel, as I have said, lay two miles out in a bay which was infested with sharks. Swimming was out of the question even could I accomplish the distance, which was doubtful, and the idea of having a shark for companion put that notion out of my head altogether.

On the principle that time is money, instead of having a watchman whose duty it is to keep a look-out all night, on board this vessel each man after working hard all day had to turn out and keep a two-hour watch through the night. This was to save time, for there was nothing wasted on board that ship, and if one man had watched all night necessarily he would be off duty all day, the ship thus losing his services for that time.

The stevedores who loaded the ship, used to come off on Monday morning, not returning to the shore until Saturday afternoon. Their boat was usually taken back by one of the lighters, any communication with the land afterwards being by the ship's boat, that was rigorously hoisted in the davits every evening at sunset.

One Monday night I had turned out to take my usual two hours, and walking aft to see the

time, I looked over the stern. My heart gave a great jump, for there was the stevedore's boat, which for some unexplained reason had not been taken ashore again after bringing the men off. There she was sure enough, and, if I could only utilise her, the very chance I was looking for.

Many a thing looks easy enough on paper, but how deceptive such a view may be is only found out when you try the actuality of the thing. Supposing I could haul the boat up without making noise enough to disturb any one, I still had two miles to propel her before I could effect a landing. No light task single handed with a heavy boat, but there was still worse behind it. The only means of getting ashore was by going between a seawall and a breakwater through which the tide ran like a mill-race, and to get in or out against it would have puzzled Father Peter himself. I knew this from experience, for many a time before had I tackled it with four good pullers and a light boat, but seldom successfully until the tide slackened. This was the difficulty I had made up my mind to overcome almost without a second thought on the matter, and I

often think, now that my pulse is not beating quite so strongly, that the obstacles I had to conquer did not deter me from making the attempt. But to the young nothing is impossible!

I went for'ard and made a brief calculation, the result of which told me that I was in luck, but with little time to spare, for in about an hour it would be high water. I started to bundle together the few clothes I intended to take with me, before I undertook the more ticklish operation of getting the boat up without noise.

Looking up, I saw two of the hands staring at me from over the edges of their bunks.

"What's the little game, what's up?" said one of them in a stage whisper.

I told them.

"How?" said they, almost together.

I explained the how, the why, and the wherefore in the briefest possible sentences I could command. Then they both turned quietly out of their bunks expressing their intention of seeing me ashore, and bringing the boat back. Whatever his faults, and the sailor has many, the want of generosity is not among them.

Always ready to help a man of his cloth even at the expense of himself, which is the true test of the matter, this virtue covers a multitude of sins. This would hardly have been the opinion of the captain, or perhaps, of myself either, had I been in his place and known what was in the wind at that moment. Then I went aft bare-footed, unhitched the boat and brought her for'ard under the bows without a bump—good old boat.

I believe I mentioned something about this obliging shipmate before, and you see now it was not hearsay, for I knew what I was talking about. They insisted that I should take everything I possessed with me, even to my chest, which they lowered into the boat. Then we pushed quietly away and made for the shore, being fortunate enough to catch the slack tide.

Leaving my things where I could call for them later on, I shook my assistants heartily by the hand, and my name was "Walker."

I give this secret away here for the first time, dear reader, so that if you buy this book and are not interested in it, for I am aware it might be written very much better, and am

more sorry than ever you can be that it is not so, you still have something for your money. I heard afterwards that the boat being still in her place in the morning, the manner of my disappearance was a nine days wonder to the skipper, and I don't believe he solved it even then.

After travelling all that night, and making the best use of "shanks pony," not aimlessly, for I was no stranger in a strange land, I reached the place, the residence of a friend, that I was steering for. Lying snugly here, it was ten days before I ventured out, taking for granted that the ship was hundreds of miles distant from the place I had last seen her. The little expedition which I took into the town to see what was going on without first finding out if it were safe to do so, was an example, of which we have lately had a surfeit in positions of more magnitude, that with an enemy in the field, to move without reliable information is to court disaster. Luckily a little caution remained with me, and instead of going the more direct way, I followed the beach which would bring me out about a mile from the town, and from where I could

obtain a good sight of the bay. I thanked my lucky stars that I had done so, for when I reached this point I got a fright which if I had still been growing, would have effectively retarded the increase of my statue for the next five years. Lying there at anchor with no indication that she intended to weigh it, was the ship I had left. As it was, the case was bad enough, and if some kind fairy had presented herself (I never remember to have read of them in the masculine gender) and offered to convert me into one of the smallest of God's creatures I would have accepted her offer willingly, for the time being, at least, so that I might have crept into some small refuge to wait until the ship in the bay had taken her departure. I didn't hang about, with my hand on a certain part of my anatomy, waiting for this to happen, for I knew that if I did in all probability it would remain an everlasting patch. Whatever faith I may have had as a youngster, I had no confidence now in a supernatural being, who mostly came along just in the nick of time and saved the situation. Eight or nine miles from the place I had left, I saw I was in a difficult sort of hole, and that to try and get back

while daylight lasted was too dangerous to be thought of. Looking round for a place where I could stow myself, my eye lighted on the cliff, and as at that time I thought it was much better to risk my neck than my liberty, I determined to reach the top. Not without a perilous climb did I do this, but at last I had the satisfaction of throwing myself not down the cliff, but upon the long grass which covered the summit. Here I lay until darkness fell, in fear and trembling at the sound of every footstep that passed along the beach. Although I lay low here until evening, you will see at the same time I was rather high. The people who passed along the beach that day, whose quarry was shell-fish, and not myself, and against whom I had no animosity, will excuse me, I hope, if for that particular day, at least, I looked down upon them. Not until night was well advanced, did I venture to make my way back again, and the small hours of the morning were gone ere I reached there.

I suppose the effect of a fright to nine people out of ten is to make them more cautious in the future. Having done a very foolish thing by running into danger with my eyes open, I

now went to the other extreme, and did a very wise one.

Even after all these years I am apt to grow conceited when I think of it, and when in this frame of mind ruminate: "Had I been Commander-in-Chief, a very different complexion would have been put upon affairs in South Africa," which is probably true. But mind you, this is between ourselves, don't let it go any further. I consider it very bad form for a man to blow his own trumpet, and being a diffident sort of person, this narrative, or whatever you may like to call it, seems to me, by-the-bye, one long blast on my own instrument.

Although when I reached my shelter again I might reasonably suppose I was out of the wood, I didn't trust to it entirely, but made haste to get there. Don't puzzle over this funny sentence, it will explain itself, when I tell you that I gathered together a blanket and sufficient food to last for a day or two, and took my departure into the Bush. It was three or four miles away, and I didn't intend to quit it until beyond doubt the ship had left, and that's the little matter I've been pluming myself on.

That very night Mr. H——, with his blue uniform and big feet, made a descent on the house, armed with a warrant for my arrest, which he fondly hoped to accomplish. Somebody observing me had given information, the reward offered outweighing any other feeling he may have had on the matter. I never found out who did it, and owing to its failure, didn't care, but my friend with the hold upon the country often came in for a good-natured roasting when I met him on his beat after the ship had gone, and I could walk about with impunity. At last when he used to see me coming, his business would take him down one of the side streets, and although I suppose he missed my chaff, I believe it was a relief to him when I took boat to Auckland and he saw the last of me.

I often think now that I made too much of the danger I was exposed to, for he had the biggest feet of any man I ever remember seeing, and had I been in the house and asleep, I am sure, when I come to reflect on the matter, I should have heard him a long way off. If you are ever in the place I have mentioned, and have a wish to prove my sincerity, just ask any

little urchin in the street, and if he does not point him out at once by my description of him, then he isn't there.

Pray, dear reader, don't think by this chapter that I am in sympathy with the man who habitually deserts his ship. In certain cases he is justified, and of course this is one of them. I hope had I been master of that ship I would have strained a point, even at the expense of my pocket, and shown a little fellow-feeling, which is the duty of all men, no matter what their position, one to another.

CHAPTER XVI

An interesting Industry — Forest Giants—Gum Diggers—A Servitude Skipper—His Peculiarities—Gin and Cockroaches—A remarkable Wreck—A defective Invention.

When I arrived at Auckland I was rather dubious about going to the Sailors' Home, my experience of that sort of institution being anything but pleasant in Melbourne. Had I not been in rather a state of hard-upness I should probably have passed by on the opposite side, and in consequence have placed it in the same rating as the other. I'm rather glad I didn't do it this injustice, for there was no comparison between them, but it is not my intention to say more about it beyond the fact that good wine needs no bush, and every sailorman who has used the place, being gifted with an ordinary amount of common sense, must of necessity appreciate it.

My brother making his appearance we departed up country, and it was whilst on our way thither he imparted the painful news that told me my haste was useless and my journey vain. Crushed and humiliated I would have given anything to wipe away the sin of carelessness with which I reproached myself, and would so now, to have it otherwise, but mercifully even sorrow caused by the loss of those we love best, and the want of something done towards them, has no power to hold in thrall for long the spirits of the young and healthy.

This being the case, in time I became interested in my surroundings, and from a most favourable position, the place itself, I obtained an insight of the two staple industries of that part of the colony, Kauri timber and Kauri gum. In the absence of the Kauri pine, king of the New Zealand forest, and only found in the province of Auckland, I suppose the settlers, as they did further south, would have gone in for sheep-raising and wood. But here was a product ready to hand, that had been growing for thousands of years, and although at that time of no use only to what they could put it themselves, to-day established as the chief

source of revenue to the colony, giving employment to thousands of men, and reckoned in millions of money. A soft pine, excellent for building purposes, it finds a ready market both in New Zealand and elsewhere. Australia, comparatively a hard-wood country, is the chief customer, dozens of ships losing their identity under huge deck loads, and looking in the distance like floating timber stacks, carry on the trade year in and year out.

The tree itself is a giant, with a smooth trunk and the average height of a hundred feet, the diameter usually four to eight. I took an excursion one day to view the two show trees of the place, and my journey was well repaid by the result. I didn't measure them myself, but I was assured by a person who had no doubt on the matter that one was nineteen feet in diameter, and the other twenty-four, with a circumference of nearly seventy feet, and their enormous girth giving them a squat appearance, they looked every inch of it. The known growth rate of the Kauri leaves no doubt that these two monsters, still full of life, were flourishing before the era of Christianity. Another valuable product that is part and parcel of the Kauri

pine, or was at one time, is the gum. This is the sap that has oozed from the tree and hardened in the ground. When scraped and cleaned it is exactly like amber in appearance, and only by handling would it be possible to tell the difference. The immense area of country over which this is scattered, although now quite destitute of timber, proves that at one time hundreds, or possibly thousands of years ago, this ground was one vast forest of Kauri. The value of it has gone up by leaps and bounds within the last thirty years, the best samples now fetching as much as, and even more than, sixty pounds a ton.

This peculiar industry provides employment for some eight thousand men, embracing all sorts and conditions, from the man who has known toil all his life to the gentleman spendthrift who has squandered his fortune in riotous living. No skilled labour is required, the veriest novice, providing he can dig, having just as much chance as the older hand. His implements are a spade, a knife, and a spear furnished with a handle like a shovel for a grip. An ordinary corn bag cut down provides a haversack, and slung over his shoulder forms a receptacle in which to carry the proceeds of

his search. With this and the tools before mentioned forming his entire outfit, he wanders over the country prodding the ground with his spear, until the gritty sound caused by it coming in contact with the gum tells him that here is the particular substance he is looking for. The spade then comes into use in the digging out process, and having unearthed it, he carefully ascertains if any more remains in the immediate vicinity by plunging the spear still deeper in and round the hole. Not being successful in this, he gathers up his belongings and proceeds further afield on his quest.

A rough and rude life it is certainly, but has the privilege, which goes a long way with a certain class, of being free and independent. Although it may appear a humdrum sort of existence it has a fascination and excitement of the gold prospecting order about it. When the gum-digger issues forth on his voyage of discovery he has no idea of what luck fortune may have in store for him. With the first thrust of his spear he may locate a deposit of half a ton or more of this valuable resin, although the find of such an amount is now exceedingly rare, the quantity in one place

seldom exceeding a few pounds. However, at this rate the supply is apparently inexhaustible, and if he does not often strike it rich he is always assured of finding a sufficiency to keep him in "tucker," which cannot be said of the gold-digger, who may sometimes prospect for weeks without being cheered by the discovery of a "colour."

On wet days or in the evening before retiring to rest, the gum-digger amuses himself by scraping and cleaning his hoard, by this means giving it a higher commercial value. The importance of this industry may be imagined, the annual output being estimated at between five and six hundred thousand pounds. Packed in cases two feet by four, ships load entire cargoes of it for England and America, where it is used in the manufacture of the most expensive varnish.

Three months of a quiet existence and my instinct for roving again asserted itself until I was itching to be gone. The opportunity came along in the shape of a timber vessel that had been loading at one of the saw mills being in want of a mate.

I walked down to interview the skipper and offer him my services.

When I arrived on the scene I found him sitting on a pile scanning his vessel through one of the telescopes extracted from his sextant, which I ascertained afterwards he always carried in his waistcoat pocket, and was one of the many peculiar habits he was addicted to. There was no pride about him, although he was master and part owner of a timber droger about two hundred tons, and he prattled away about all manner of things except the one uppermost in my mind, as if he had known me for years. He gave me to understand that he had his knife into the directors of a certain bank in New Zealand, detested cockroaches, and was agin the government, and when I left him I wasn't quite clear in my mind which he was keenest on. After several vain attempts, for he was so full of these three topics, I at last brought him to the business in hand.

"Yes, he wanted a mate, rather a pity I didn't understand the trade, but anyhow I was a likely sort of chap, and would soon pick it up."

So a few days after I sailed in her bound for Sydney, N.S.W., with a cargo of sawn timber.

We hadn't been many days at sea before I

came to the conclusion that Captain Cotes had a bee in his bonnet, and long ere I reached Sydney that a whole swarm had found lodgment there.

A decent old fellow in general, he had the foolish idea that an application of dye to his hair and mutton-chop whiskers would bestow upon him the gift of perpetual youth. I know he used dye and a good one, for it was visible and I could smell it five yards away when he came on deck in the morning. That's why I think it was good, for what more could be asked of an article than that it should be its own advertisement. I take no credit to myself for finding this out, for any one was bound to do so who had sufficient acumen to see a hole through a ladder. When by stress of weather he was forced to go shaveless for a few days, the two extremes of black and white were so pronounced and comical that it always suggested to me the side of a ship with painted ports.

When the Board of Trade issued certificates, and made it compulsory for a man to obtain one before he could take charge of a vessel, the man who had been in that position prior to

this was granted a ticket without the trouble of passing an examination. They were called "servitude men," a species of seaman now nearly if not quite defunct. Captain Cotes was the possessor of one of these, but he never advertised the fact, he guarded it as piously as his age, and I only found it out accidentally when engaged on some business at the shipping-office. When he yarned, which was mostly all day and every day, he could talk a Philadelphia lawyer to sleep, and it was mostly about himself and some intricate piece of navigation he had accomplished, but I never saw any of it more difficult than could be done on a slate. As he remarked at our first meeting he was at deadly enmity with the directors of a certain bank, and I didn't wonder at it when he told me that by their rascality he had been cheated out of half a million. With this idea a fixture in his head, one could hardly expect him to be bubbling over with the milk of human kindness towards them. Although he spun a yarn that ran into hours on this particular matter, I must admit that, when he had finished I was as wise as ever as to how it had all come about. This was the feeling he had towards directors,

and there was no doubt about his animosity for cockroaches, both coming under the same heading, he naïvely remarked, as creatures that gobbled up what didn't belong to them. There were plenty on board, the result of an island cruise some time before, since when they had waxed strong and plentiful.

"Struck a splendid idea," said Captain Cotes, coming on deck one morning, his face beaming, "wonder I didn't think of it before."

I thought at least that through the night an inspiration had struck him, which solved successfully the knotty problem of the manner in which he was going to get that half-million back again. Then he proceeded to hail every member of the crew that came in sight, until the whole of them (there weren't many) had assembled to hear what he had to say. He didn't waste time by beating about the bush with a long explanation, but came to the point briefly.

"Look here, boys, any one who brings aft twelve dead cockroaches, there's a glass of gin waiting for him below." This was the brilliant idea he had struck as a means of exterminating them. The crew didn't look

upon it as a joke for they knew his peculiarity in this direction, and I have reason to believe started business right away. Anyhow, the effect of this sporting offer was not long in having a result. They trooped aft the next morning each bearing as a medium of barter twelve dead cockroaches. The "old man" stood on the poop, a black bottle and a glass in his hand, and as each man deposited his offering on the deck he received in exchange a glass of gin. There was a teetotaler among them, and he, frugal man, passed his liquor to one of the others on the understanding that at dinner time he should receive two portions of duff instead of one, so to this man, at least, it was a solid benefit. Instead of having the cockroaches thrown overboard, the skipper with the aid of a piece of stick would arrange them along the deck, and from the manner in which he gloated, I believe they represented in his mind so many bank directors for whose dead bodies he had offered a reward. It became a positive danger at last, to say nothing of the nuisance, the whole crew coming aft by instalments two or three times through the day. "I want to see the skipper, I have some more

cockroaches." I believe they spent all the watch below hunting them, and some of the ingenious traps made for their capture, baited with sugar and other tempting morsels, should have been patented. At night-time a sharp look-out had to be kept on the man who was steering, or he would have the ship all round the compass, but whether it was the effect of the gin, or that his mind had wandered to an imaginary hunt in the forepeak, I never found out for certain. How it would have ended is hard to say, but fortunately when it was beginning to lose the character of a joke, the gin gave out. This settled an awkward business satisfactorily to me, and the beetles, too, if they could have understood the matter, for the crew objecting to give something for nothing stopped their occupation, vowing that if there was no more gin there wasn't going to be any more cockroaches.

We made Sydney Heads a day or two after this, an occurrence I had rather been looking forward to. Much has been written about this magnificent harbour, so it is not my task to describe or dwell on the beauties of this queen of the south.

The heads rising bold and perpendicular three hundred feet sheer of the water, looking as if nature had used the plumb-line in their construction, prepared one, as it were, for what was inside.

The south headland was the scene many years ago of the loss of the *Dunbar*, one of the most remarkable wrecks that ever occurred, inasmuch that the only survivor was saved in a most miraculous manner.

Making the harbour at night in an easterly breeze, which is a lee-shore, she was dashed unto the South Head, the only man saved being found next day in a crevice half way up the face of the cliff, from where he was rescued by a man being lowered from the top with a rope. Nobody ever fathomed, himself least of all, how he reached there, for it was like the face of a wall, the only solution worth accepting being that he was thrown here by a wave. After this lamentable affair the present lighthouse was built—by the way, one of the most powerful lights in the world. The man who was saved in such an extraordinary manner was given a position as one of the keepers, and what more appropriate and fitting than that his

should be the hand to kindle the beacon intended to warn other ships from a like fate?

When our ship was discharged, and the crew had any spare time, Captain Cotes would utilise it by employing them in turning over the ballast in a rigorous search for his natural enemies. The result was nothing like it had been, and the hands nothing like so keen on the job, for there was no liquid reward at the end of it. He stopped that, as he said it was too expensive, and it seemed to make no impression on their number, which was quite true, the only impression produced, as far as I could see, being upon the crew. This closed the incident of gin and cockroaches, but Captain Cotes launched out in other directions, and was continually furnishing some amusing scene. We were lying outside of a big ocean mail-boat one day, large enough to have hung our little bit of a craft on her davits as a long-boat. The chief officer of the steamer put his head over the rail and informed Captain Cotes that he would have to shift out of it, as he wanted that side clear for coaling.

"Who are you?" said the skipper.

"Who am I? I'm chief mate of this boat if you wish to know."

"I'm captain of this one, and if you want me to shift just tell the skipper to come along himself and ask me politely; I don't take orders from inferiors."

In twelve months, as the pickpocket remarked, if one has the opportunity and aptitude a good deal may be picked up; I found this the case, not that I took anything which didn't belong to me, but that in this time I had acquired to some extent a knowledge of this particular trade, and of the men who made it their own. On the return journey most of these vessels brought back a cargo of coal, it being the duty of the crew to discharge her by the tedious operation of shovelling every pound into baskets to be hoisted on deck. No doubt a genius who, by taking part in it, found out what hard and tiresome work this is, concocted the following little story:

As a labour-saving appliance, an iron man was invented, and being wound up by clockwork was guaranteed, in the matter of shovelling coal, to do the work of half a dozen men, of course with the advantage of never getting

tired. All went well for a day or two, but unfortunately about this time something went wrong with the works, and the figure started shovelling at such a furious rate, throwing coal in all directions and making it certain death to go anywhere near, until at last it shovelled a hole right through the bottom of the ship.

To masters of these vessels the excellence of the crew as seamen is a secondary consideration, their ability to bullock timber and shovel coal being the first. The men themselves, although having to work hard, especially in port, have many advantages over their deep-water brethren, being better paid, infinitely better fed, and oftener in port. He has no use for what he slightingly calls the "lime-juicer," that term originating in the fact that every foreign-going English vessel is compelled by law after the first ten days at sea to serve out lime juice to the crew. At noon each day, the steward appears on the quarter-deck with a jug of lime juice and a glass. The hands proceed aft to receive their portion, not with any degree of alacrity, for they have no particular liking for it, something with a grip perhaps being more to their taste.

CHAPTER XVII

Foreign Seamen in British Ships—A Plea for better Food—American Ships *v.* English—Sea Cooks.

A SUBJECT I wish to discuss, and which I would my ability were equal to do justice to, is the question of the foreign element employed in our ships, and to a great extent, the reason of it.

At the present time between twenty and twenty-five per cent. of the men forming the crews of British ships are foreigners. This is bad enough, but when I say they are increasing (as proved by statistics) not rapidly certainly, but slowly and surely year by year, the worst form in which an evil can fasten and foist itself upon one, because in this manner we are not so likely to take serious notice of it. If this goes on, as most surely it will if nothing is done to counteract it, the solution is arrived at by a simple sum in proportion, to which any

moderately advanced schoolboy could furnish an answer.

It is not that the foreign element is cheaper or more competent, for there is no better seaman than the Britisher, but unfortunately as regards the rank and file, for obvious reasons, there is not enough of him. By the foreign element I mean Europeans, for although a great many people class the Lascar (who is a decidedly cheaper article) as a foreigner, they are apt to overlook the fact that he is a British subject, and as such, has a claim for employment quite absent in the case of the other.

In the fo'c's'le of most English ships may be found representatives of at least five or six different nationalities, from the man who has been there long enough to acquire English with an accent, down to the new comer not yet sufficiently acquainted with it to say yes for "ja." At sea little discrimination is used regarding the country they belong to, Germans, Norwegians, Swedes, &c., all coming under the heading of "Dutchman" to Jack, whilst those of the Latin races rejoice or otherwise, in the name of Dagoes. Good sailormen and decent fellows the majority of them, but open to one

fatal objection—they are not Britishers. Whatever we may do in other directions, surely it behoves us to make some effort and keep such a vital institution as our shipping, on which so much depends, in no other hands but our own.

Some men will tell you that the foreigner is more sober, more amenable to discipline, and easier satisfied. In regard to the first matter my experience teaches me that there is not a pin to choose between them, and as for the second, it is a case of the beggar on horseback all over again, for when he has acquired a little English, and as it were, knows his way about, he wants just as much and perhaps a little more than the other. The reason why the foreigner has a preference for British ships is not far to seek. There are no restrictions in the way of his obtaining employment on them. He is much better paid and fed, and comparatively, with his own country ships, in clover and affluent. That this growing evil is a serious one any thinking man will admit, but putting the danger, which is by no means inconsiderable, on one side, does it not seem out of all order of things, that we, who have the sea to thank for our prosperity (and not so much our shop-

keeping capabilities), should have to depend on foreign seamen to man our ships. This sore place in our navigation laws wants doctoring, and if not completely cured then, kept within reasonable limits and prevented from spreading until it constitutes a national danger. We have plenty of material to do away with this mischievous state of affairs, were it properly applied. Hundreds and thousands of boys would go to sea, but strangely enough, although the scarcity of British seamen is more manifest every year, the State takes no trouble to put them in the way of doing so. Having no idea themselves of how to go about the matter, unless very keen on it, ninety out of a hundred end by doing something else. Of course, there is not much difficulty for the boy whose parents are in a position to pay a premium of thirty to fifty pounds for the privilege of working four or five years on board a ship. But it is not every one can afford this, and as I understand it, not altogether the class we are in need of. I hardly ever remember making a voyage to the Colonies without the discovery of stowaways on board. On one occasion seven of them, one after another like Brown's cows, popped up

serenely from below. The shipmaster packs them ashore in the first fishing-boat, should one happily come along, as being neither use nor ornament, but this shows that the inclination is there, the difficulty being a legitimate outlet. More training-ships are wanted, other than reformatories, where boys could receive a nautical education free, gratis, and for nothing. The conditions of life in the service itself must be made more attractive, as an inducement for men when once there to remain, and above everything the food must be better. What was good enough for our fathers, simply because they had no alternative, is not good enough for us, although those responsible for the "Act" evidently thought it was. In this age of invention there is no excuse for a scale of provisions as salt as Lot's wife, and that inevitable "pantile" hard enough to form the foundation of a workhouse.

On certain days a pound and a half of salt beef, and on others a pound and a quarter of salt pork is served out to each man. After being boiled for two or three hours, it comes out of the pot considerably reduced in size and weight. In the way of solids this has to last him until

the next mid-day, the only thing drawn from the galley in the interval being a liquid extravagantly called tea or coffee. Is it reasonable to expect this piece of meat, reduced and shrunk as it is in the cooking, to satisfy a man with a healthy appetite, who is on duty part of the night as well as the day, until the dinner-hour shall come round again? "No!" and that is the reason why Jack, to stay his hunger, concocts those little side-dishes of powdered biscuit and other abominations that I told you about before—"dog's-body," "dandy-funk," and the like. On some ships, few and far between, in the very cold weather porridge is supplied for breakfast. This is a luxury, let me tell you, and not "according to the Act," being an addition furnished by the few captains or owners with sense or inclination to see that the scale of provisions drafted by law is insufficient. If Jack is to continue the mainstay of the Empire, as some people are fond of calling him, then his condition must be improved and this niggardly behaviour cease, or he is telling you in no indistinct voice, proved by the diminution in his numbers, that he refuses to be a stay any longer.

The difference between the dietary scale in American ships and our own is most marked, and provides the only reason why so many English seamen prefer to sail in them.

For instance, that ridiculous biscuit diet that we cling to as if it were a salvation in itself, although at the same time it has not even cheapness to recommend it, is only an emergency ration in American ships, soft bread being issued in its place. Again, nearly all of them carry a large supply of potatoes stowed in properly constructed places, the object being that they may remain good as long as possible. In this manner they are kept sound for months, and while they last are served out daily to the crew. In smaller quantities English ships carry potatoes too, as I know from experience, but the crew, after the first day or two, I was going to say, get not even a smell of them. But therein I should be utterly wrong, for they are usually dumped down in close proximity to their quarters, under conditions quite against their remaining good for more than a week or so, and sooner than distribute them among the crew, allowed to get as rotten as the *régime* under which sailors are fed, two-thirds or more finally

being thrown overboard. After the first few days, and with warmer weather, the stench arising from decomposed tubers is intolerable, so that had I said Jack didn't get a smell of them it would have been a mistake on my part, for that was about all he did get, and if an odour solid and thick enough to be cut with a knife goes to make part of them, then, I can assure you, he has his full and liberal share.

In five out of six English ships the tiny supply of bread allowed at sea is stopped, and with it the butter, as soon as she arrives at the other side of the world. With the exchange of salt meat for fresh (which is dirt cheap), the sole accompaniment, with the exception of potatoes, the scarcity of which constitutes a standing joke, is that absurd biscuit. If it were an article worthy the name the case might not be so bad, but as it is nobody would eat it unless forced to, so any member of the crew who can forego his thirst, spends the few shillings doled out to him weekly whilst in port on "soft tack."

Why does the sailor wear a belt in preference to braces? Naturally you answer, "To allow his body free movement." I don't think so.

The reason the belt is a favourite with seamen is, "he can take up a hole or two when he feels the pangs of hunger and thus relieve them." But joking aside, this conduct towards the men to whom the country is indebted puts me very much in mind of the man who, owning a horse, most essential to his business, with bad policy and a mistaken notion of economy, fed it on sawdust. The horse died.

I am almost afraid to continue this topic for fear you may take me for a sea-lawyer. But still I must risk that, having the conviction that to remedy the evils I mention is a step, however small, in the right direction towards what is very near my heart, the increase of the British seaman. Better food, better pay if possible, and oh! gentlemen, last but not least, give an eye to the cooks. Nine out of ten professors of the culinary art in "wind jammers" are the veriest frauds that ever stepped in two shoes, with no more idea of elementary cooking than a cow has of a musket. That this sort of impostor should spoil what scanty rations Jack is allowed, by turning out messes that a dog with a little self-respect would turn up his nose at, is adding insult to

injury, and he deserves no better fate than to be drowned in his own pea soup. Such cookery ashore would cause a riot in the household, and if the poorest workman's better half were to spoil his food in like manner, the first week of their married life would end in assault and police court proceedings. But Jack is long-suffering in this matter, for goodness knows he has had time enough to get used to it, and only occasionally does he lose his temper, and retaliate by crowning the offender, not with laurel, "but with a kid full of his own concoction." In the direction of a start towards the betterment of the service, wipe out for ever this parsimonious treatment of a class who deserve it not, and as the first dose of an antidote against the evil that is an increasing menace, and under certain conditions, such as a European war, might, and possibly would, place us in a most difficult sort of hole. What may come after this is accomplished, in the way of amendment, is for wiser heads than mine to decide, but the question holds many possibilities :

Every man induced by conditions beneficial to him, to belong to the Naval Reserve, the expenditure entailed being an investment con-

cerning every Englishman, with the advantage of being a good one.

Cooks who may be trusted to know their business by first obtaining from a school of nautical cookery a certificate of ability, the production of which would be a necessity before they could obtain employment.

A much better and more liberal scale of provisions made compulsory, and if requisite and necessary a subsidy granted by Government to shipowners towards that end. With thought and contrivances these may all come in time, but the removal of the food scandal requires no thought and admits of no delay as the thin edge of the wedge of a reform, both urgent and badly needed.

CHAPTER XVIII

Modern Robinson Crusoes—Lord Howe's Island—
A Reminiscence of the *Bounty*.

I BECAME quite warm over that last chapter, but not, I think, without reason, knowing as I do that it is a fact and not theory which I preach, and that the grievances and want of appreciation referred to have solid existence and are mainly responsible for the decrease of British seamen.

It was perhaps with a feeling of regret that I bade good-bye to Captain Cotes, for in the main he was a decent old fellow enough. Although his mind was full of delusions, they were of a harmless character, pleasing him and actively hurting nobody, with the exception, may be, of a few directors whose self-esteem might have been wounded could they have overheard him. As they didn't, and the worst that could befall them in the matter, if there is

any truth in the assertion of such an occurrence when somebody is talking about one, was to have their ears burning now and again, no particular harm was done to anybody. Had I possessed his hallucination I am afraid they, some of them at least, would have suffered bodily assault, and it speaks volumes for the pacific disposition of Captain Cotes that he never assailed one of them with anything worse than his tongue, and only then when separated by considerable distance. One good reason why I should have been sorry to leave him had I thought of it and been frugally minded, was that a man could save money and had no occasion to spend his cash on comic opera whilst he was about.

With a hankering after the South Pacific Islands, and the means of reaching there limited, for there were no steamers running round them as at the present time, I jumped at the first opportunity that offered. This was a small topsail schooner, engaged in cruising round the Islands collecting produce accumulated by men placed there for that purpose by different firms, who periodically sent vessels belonging to them round to gather it. About a hundred

tons was the usual size of craft employed, the queer holes and corners they sometimes had to go into, making handiness indispensable. These men passed a forsaken sort of existence, their only intercourse being trading operations with the natives, a vessel calling once perhaps in five or six months, to load and carry away the fruits of their labour.

This was composed of *bêche-de-mer*, a valuable sea-slug gathered from the reefs. First boiled in tanks, and then split open and smoked it is much appreciated as a delicacy by the Chinese, and fetching in Australia as much as £100 to £140 a ton according to quality. Pearl-shell as large as dinner plates also fetched a good price, and last, but certainly not least in the matter of quantity, copra, the kernel of the cocoa-nut broken up and dried in the sun.

In some of the island this article was bought from the native in strings of half kernels already cured, for which he received in return a certain amount of tobacco or beads, whichever the currency affected. In other parts the trader bought the nut as it stood, carrying out the drying process himself in houses specially constructed for that purpose.

The *Nautilus* was ninety-nine tons, and looked much smaller by reason of comparison, lying as she was close to a fifteen-hundred tons ship. She certainly looked a frail and miniature craft to trust oneself in. The raised after-part, which the captain exalted by the name of a poop, was what most sailors would call a "fisherman's parade," three steps and overboard. The sort of vessel deep-water Jack would look askew at, declaring playfully that he wouldn't be one of the crew because his life wasn't insured, and with assumed anxiety inquire if she stopped out all night. As a matter of fact there is as much safety in a craft of this description as in the biggest ship afloat, provided, of course, that she is a good sea-boat and properly handled. Although perhaps rather lively in heavy weather, and causing any one with a weak stomach to feel squeamish, a small vessel rides on the top of every sea that comes along, whereas the large vessel burrows her way through it, and naturally makes worse weather.

We were to call at Lord Howe's and Norfolk Islands on our way, but only to drop a small portion of cargo at each place, our real objec-

tive being the New Hebrides much further north.

Situated about four hundred miles E.N.E. of Sydney, Lord Howe's Island was our first place of call, the only communication between the two being an occasional vessel calling in by chance as much as anything, although at the present time I believe, weather permitting, steamers call there regularly on their way to New Zealand. This island, uninhabited until some whites at last took possession, was now a little world of its own, with a population of sixty all told. The fertility of the island easily enabled them to grow sufficient for their wants, and enough to spare for barter with vessels happily calling there, in exchange for necessaries which they were unable to produce themselves. To-day this little island has a small trade in what it produces, chiefly maize, oranges, and bananas, with what might aptly be called its mother, Australia, finding enough work for at least one small craft running different cargoes to and fro. This little community, far from the madding crowd, a tiny spot in the Pacific Ocean, was under the jurisdiction of Australia, whilst Norfolk

Island, only some five hundred miles to the east, strange to say, was under Imperial rule.

One of the islanders came off and piloted us through the break in the reef into a lagoon as calm as a mill-pond, a safe anchorage for small craft, but having only a depth of ten feet at low water, unsuitable for larger vessels. Ashore the well-built houses and amount of cultivation had an appearance of prosperity and plenty about them. A large area of ground was planted with oranges, and to give some idea that they were plentiful one of the settlers told me that if I wanted some to bring a sack ashore and gather them. This was an offer to be taken advantage of, and for once putting my natural diffidence on one side, you might, had you been there, have seen me somewhat later staggering down to the beach with just about as much as I could carry, not in the way of liquor, but in the matter of oranges. I doubt if the offer would be so liberal at the present time, for they were about as good a sample of fruit as I ever remember tasting, and as such, with the improved means of

transport, commanding a ready market in Sydney.

Having put ashore the small amount of cargo for here, and taken on board a supply of oranges and bananas likely to last us for a week or two, we got under way for Norfolk Island. I had a lively feeling of satisfaction some days later when we sighted this island covered on its highest points with trees, known all over Australia as the Norfolk pine. This place has a rather romantic interest, which should be known to every schoolboy, inasmuch that most of the inhabitants are the descendants of the *Bounty* mutineers. Settled in the first instance on Pitcairn Island, and finding in course of time that it was too small for them, or rather that their increasing numbers were too many for it, part of them shifted quarters and took up their abode on Norfolk Island.

What an old story this mutiny of the *Bounty!* It was in every school book at the time I was going to school, and I never grew weary of reading it. It told me how a ship was sent to the islands to bring back a quantity of bread-fruit trees. How the crew became so passion-

ately fond of the fruit itself that they actually went so far as mutiny, and casting their officers adrift in the boat went back and settled there. Nonsense! it happened certainly, but bread-fruit was no more responsible for it than am I. As a matter of fact it was brought about by the harsh treatment meted out to the crew by a man whose name is notorious in Australia to this day for his known behaviour in that direction. This, and perhaps the thought of the dusky beauties they had left behind them, was the cause of it, and certainly not the harmless bread-fruit that is too good and wholesome to drive a man to crime.

A dark race of people the Norfolk Islanders, but they would pass muster anywhere for Europeans. Many still rejoice in the name of Adams, Christian, and others who were ring-leaders in the *Bounty* mutiny. Like the Lord Howe's Island settlers, they principally rely on agriculture for an existence, growing maize, onions, and bananas, part of which form articles of export. Being a whaling-ground, fishing is carried on in the season, and many a ton of whale oil finds its way from there to the Sydney market. Norfolk Island is now, in a certain

sense, quite an important place, being the headquarters of the Melanesian Mission. Here South Sea Islanders are trained, and to some extent educated, before being sent forth as missionaries to preach the Gospel in their own islands.

CHAPTER XIX

Signs of a Hurricane—The Remittance Man—Harveson's History.

LEAVING here our course lay to the north'ard, past the Loyalty Islands and the French convict settlement of New Caledonia. A week of ideal weather, that fully justified the name Pacific bestowed upon this ocean, put us within reasonable distance of our destination. A light wind from the south-east, the sun just hot enough to be pleasant, and no swell to speak of, formed conditions that could not have been bettered had we been on a pleasure cruise and had the ordering of the weather ourselves. On the morning of the eighth day the skipper coming on deck pointed out an island bearing north-east as the place we were bound for. "Not that we can see the place yet," said he, "for we have to round the big land first, and our island lies a few miles north of it."

The sun rose that day dull and angry looking, quite in contrast to its usual genial mood, when the appearance of it above the horizon had gladdened and brightened everything it touched. As it mounted higher in the heavens it assumed the appearance of dull red copper. Several times the skipper stood eyeing it critically, and at last said: "Don't like the look of that, rather early for a hurricane, but the glass has been falling steadily all night and if we're not in for a breeze I'll eat my hat."

It was about mid-day before we arrived at the place he had spoken about, the wind having gradually fallen quite light. The island was protected by a reef on its east side, which broke the swell that was ceaselessly advancing and receding from it, in vain effort, until the tide should be higher, to join the calmer portion inside. It was low water and the sea breaking on it only reached half way across the reef looking like scoured wool as it rushed back again with a hissing sound to add its weight to the wave that should come after. We passed through a narrow channel evidently well known to the skipper, and rounding up, dropped our anchor in ten fathoms on the

other side. On the beach I could see a man struggling with a dinghy, his object being to launch her. I pointed him out to the skipper.

"Oh, yes," said he, "that's Harveson, he's always glad to see us, and I don't wonder at it."

By this time the man I was looking at had managed to get the dinghy into the water, and was now, with an oar over the stern, sculling languidly towards us. "Hullo! Cap.," he said wearily, as he made fast the painter and threw his leg over the rail, "by jove, I'm mighty glad to see you, thought you'd left me in the lurch for not a white face have I seen for the last six months. This cursed dog-hole is enough to kill a man, and talk about solitude, Robinson Crusoe wasn't in it with me."

"You're not looking yourself," said the skipper, "come down below and I'll give you a good dose of quinine."

"Quinine? I've been living on it until my head sings and I can scarcely hear my own voice, a good nip of square-face if you like, but no quinine."

As I followed them below I took stock of Harveson. He was dressed in a faded suit of

pyjamas, and although he gave me the impression of being at one time a good figure of a man, his clothes now hung on him like a scarecrow. A good-natured face under a battered cabbage-tree hat, but in spite of a three months growth of whisker I could not help thinking that the use of a razor would have exposed the weakness of it.

"Well, what's the news?" said the skipper, as he busied himself uncorking a bottle of square-face.

"What news do you expect in a hole like this?" he answered. "I spend a come-day, go-day, God-send-a-ship sort of existence here, and I'm about full of it. Been down with fever about twice a week on an average, and scarcely had strength enough to get my dinghy off the beach, as you may have seen for yourself. News, that's about all the news I have, but hold on a bit, I've something else, I'm going to give this business up for I'm sick of it, and you can make your mind up to take me with you when you go south again."

He reached his hand for the square-face which the skipper had placed on the table, and

pouring out half a tumbler, raised it to his lips and emptied it at a draught.

"That puts new life into a man," he sighed, replacing the glass on the table, "the first blessed 'tot' I've had for two months. I've been thinking lately cap., and I've made up my mind to go home. I'm not very presentable, lost some of my manners, no doubt, but still, I'll pick them up again with every pound of weight I put on. My people won't be pleased to see me, no! but they shouldn't have sent me out dangling a remittance under my nose as a sort of red herring to keep me here."

His hand wandered lovingly and frequently towards the bottle as he helped himself again and again. "Lordy," he murmured, as it warmed his blood, "when I think of the times I've had I could kick myself as a fool for Crusoing myself on a God-forsaken island like this."

From despondency his mood changed until he was boisterously hilarious without a care or trouble in the world. Then he fell asleep on the settee, which if not a sleep of happiness, was the only sort of happiness he had known for many a year.

We went on deck for a cooler after seeing that he was comfortable, and as we leaned over the rail, the skipper told me some of Harveson's history.

"That young fellow," said he, "when I first knew him ten years ago, was as smart a youngster as ever came out from home with extravagant ideas of the Colonies. What I can make out of it, he didn't come out of his own free will, but was sent out by his people, who on condition that he stopped there, allowed him so much a year. He is, or was, a remittance man. My stars! don't I know 'em. Australia teems with 'em. You can meet them at any shearing-station in the season, 'humping bluey,' and trying to keep body and soul together until the time comes for them to touch their remittance. Most of them are sent out for nothing worse than that they are a bit wild and hard to manage, and their folks are so scared that they may bring disgrace on them at some time or other, that they 'ship 'em off to the Colonies.' I suppose they think that, if bent on going to the devil, they'd better do it a long way from home, where nobody will know them and not bring discredit on the family. Not a nice way for a parent to

behave to his offspring, but I believe half or more are ignorant of what they are sending 'em to. With a young fellow who has a spark of good in him, the influence of home counts for something. When he comes to the Colonies even this is lost to him, nobody knows him, there's no restraint, and if he has the inclination to carry on top-ropes he can do so, and none to bid him nay—well, they might as soon send him to hell at once, for the Colonies ain't no place for reformation, if reformation is needed of that sort. That was the way with Harveson. By the figure you've seen him cut you wouldn't think he had had a university education, but that's about the size of it. His people are big pots somewhere the other side of the world, and of course that isn't his real name, but he never lets much out about them, even when he's full up. All the same, I've never seen him forget he was a gentleman the time I've known him, only that he was fond of company and bent his elbow too often. That sort of thing grows on a man, and if he hasn't force of character enough to cut it, will get him down and worry him.

"Our acquaintance started one night as I was making my way down on board. He was

reeling along the wharf, and thinking he might fall over I took him aboard the craft for safety and gave him a shake-down. Well, I've known him off and on ever since, but he never seemed to have his head above water, and was most of the time hard-up waiting to handle his remittance. About three years ago I came in from a trip and found him regularly on his beam-ends. Somehow his remittance had gone 'bung,' but how, he never mentioned. Now, we wanted a man down here, and seeing that he was completely stranded, it struck me that I might lay myself out for a little Christian Endeavour business. So I proposed that he should apply for it, as I thought down in a place like this he'd be able to pull himself together a bit, and be away from temptation. Our people gave him the job at once, for a man was wanted down here badly, and he, poor beggar, was thankful for any small mercy. I landed him the next trip, and after helping to put up a bit of a house, left him to gather what he could from the natives in the way of copra and *bêche-de-mer*. I thought I had done a good thing and put him on the straight road. But, bless you, it was a failure, the devil had his claw on him and

wouldn't let him up. Among the stores we shall put ashore to-morrow are a couple of cases of 'square-face.' He'll serve those the same as he used to do his remittance—get rid of them in a week or ten days, and be miserable and suffer for the rest of the time. It goes against my grain to give them to him, and I'd far sooner dump 'em over the side, but what can I do? I'm not so young as I used to be, and have a wife and family to keep, and also have to obey orders if I break owners, for I know that if I don't, the sack is waiting for me when we get back to Sydney."

It was some time before I fell asleep that night, for I was thinking of a wasted life and the pity of it.

CHAPTER XX

In Search of Sea-room—A deep-sea Anchor—The Tail-end of a Hurricane—Harveson goes Home.

THE next morning the glass still falling, and the sky looking more ominous than ever, the skipper had made up his mind to leave before discharging the ballast we carried, which we should have to put out to make room for cargo.

"Get Harveson's stores ashore, or some of them, at least," said he, "as quickly as you can, unless he likes to come with us, and then we'll clear out of this until the weather looks more promising. I'm not going to be caught in here if I know anything about it, or fifty to one we'll find ourselves up among the cocoa-nut trees, what's left of us anyhow, before it's over if we are. That reef," pointing with his finger towards it, "is a nice sort of breakwater in ordinary weather, but for all the good it would

do us in a hurricane it might as well be in Halifax. We'll have those top-masts housed, and see everything is ready for a snorter, and then get outside and run clear of these islands where there's plenty of sea-room."

We were carrying out these instructions when Harveson came up from below. Early as it was he had evidently freshened the nip, and seemed in a good humour with himself.

"After all, cap.," said he, "there are worse jobs than this," for he was looking at it through the medium of square-face, "and if I could only shake the confounded fever off, I wouldn't mind sticking to it—I mean the job, you know, cap.; but anyhow"—here he stopped suddenly, having for the first time caught sight of the work in progress—"hullo! what's all the commotion?"

"Hurricane," said the skipper laconically.

"By jove, yes, thought so myself yesterday, but 'pon me soul I was so glad to see you that I forgot all about it. Had too many pegs last night, didn't I?"

"You did," answered the skipper, proceeding to read him a homily on the evil of

drink that would have rejoiced the heart of the most rabid teetotaler.

"You needn't throw it at me, cap.," said Harveson, "I know my weakness; the cursed complaint is in my blood, I think. Anyhow, I've made some good resolutions lately, and when I leave here for home, where I intend to go, I'll put my foot on it once for all."

"I hope you will," said the skipper, but his voice had no conviction in it. "We're going to get outside in half an hour until this zephyr has passed, and if you like to come along we can pick your stuff up when we return."

Harveson excused himself on the plea that he must take some precautions against the hurricane or there would be nothing left to pick up when we did come back, and that the house and all it contained would in all probability be scattered over the island in such minute portions that the devil himself would be unable to gather it, even if it were composed of lost souls. So he went ashore on this errand intent, and the last words I heard as he shoved the dinghy from alongside were: "Don't forget, I'm going with you next trip, for I've made up my mind to give this best and go home."

An hour afterwards we had hove up anchor and were standing round the reef. As we drew away, and I looked towards the shore, I saw a tall figure standing on the beach waving good-bye to us frantically with a ragged cabbage-tree hat.

We made very slow progress as we ran away to the west after clearing the reef, before what little wind there was with the object of getting in a good position for the expected hurricane. All hands had been busy passing extra lashings on any object liable to "fetch" away, and making ready for a time that would try to its utmost every rope-yarn in her. The island had long disappeared from sight in the murky atmosphere before the skipper considered we had a sufficient offing, and brought her to the wind. I say brought her to the wind, but as a matter of fact there was no wind to bring her to, it having died away some time before. The only influence for the last half-hour or two that had been of any use in making our distance from the land greater, was the long swell under our stern. This was now on her beam, and with no wind to fill the sails and keep her steady, she rolled and wallowed in it abominably.

"I'll soon stop that caper," said the skipper confidently, and then I saw for the first time what every sailor has heard of, but a good many have never seen in actual working, a sea-anchor. Three spars lashed together in the form of a triangle, and inside this is laced canvas of the same shape and size. A chain is made fast to one of the angles, and on the other end of the chain is secured an anchor. This, when in the water, causes the triangle to tilt up in a perpendicular position, thus causing resistance, and considerably lessening the drift of a vessel using it. A bridle is made with a rope between the other two angles, a line being made fast to this and paid out over the bows. Not only does it make the drift of a vessel less, but it brings her head to the sea and keeps it there, the safest attitude for any craft in heavy weather.

When we had our sea-anchor rigged it was passed overboard, and rope slackened out whilst the vessel sagged slowly away from it. The end was made fast to the fore-mast, and feeling the pull of it as she came to the end of her tether, her head swung slowly round until it was pointing directly for the anchor. She rode so smoothly and easily, that looking up

aloft where not a stitch of sail was spread, one might have almost imagined we were safely at anchor in harbour.

"I wish it would hurry up if it's coming along at all," said the skipper fretfully, "and let's have it over, for we're losing good time here, and are quite ready for it." In spite of his wish the hours dragged along without any change in the weather, and this waiting impatiently for something to happen grew monotonous. The deadly stillness that reigned in the atmosphere was oppressive, and save for the occasional creaking of a block up aloft, or the gurgle of the water as she dipped into a heavier swell than usual, not a sound was to be heard. About four o'clock in the morning I heard a noise, for all the world like the rumble of a train approaching in the distance.

"Here she comes at last," cried the "old man," "and thank God we are end-on to it."

I echoed his prayer when it struck us a minute later, for had she been broadside on to it I verily believe it would have lifted her out of the water and capsized her.

The good-tempered, smiling Pacific, pacific no longer, was now transformed to a fury

under the baneful influence of the hurricane that careering across the ocean in search of some opposition seemed at last to have found it in our little craft, and swooping down launched against her the whole power of its wrath. At the first onslaught she trembled from stem to stern, like some frightened thing of life at her temerity in facing such a blast, then pulling herself together, stood up to do battle with it like the tight little ship that she was. How it howled and shrieked at her, lashing to atoms with its pent-up fury anything amenable to its rage. The sea didn't get up particularly, there was too much wind to allow that, the top of them being cut off remorselessly, and dashed in a smother fore and aft, and in our face with a force that stung like whips, beating the breath out of us in sobbing gasps, until we were fain to hide our heads and escape it. Although we got under the lee of something solid, and stopped on deck, for all the good we were we might as well have been below. With our helm lashed amidships the sea-anchor was doing all the work for us, the only thing to be done was now and again to make a hard fought journey for'ard to see that

the rope holding it was free from chafe. The little craft was behaving admirably, taking no heavy water on board, but buried continually in a deluge of flying spindrift. So we sheltered ourselves as best we could, often breathing the prayer, "Hold on good rope, our only hope." On the third day the sky cleared and the wind departed almost as suddenly as it had come, leaving nothing behind except a heavier swell than usual to indicate that the elements had indulged in such a burst of temper.

With a rising glass and fine weather, we took in our sea-anchor that had served us so well and faithfully, and unrigged it, stowing it away with the fervent wish that its services would not be required again for many a long day. The top-masts that had been housed were sent aloft, but for the next week, as though it had expended itself in one royal burst, there was not enough wind to swear by. With the swell and tide against us, and the light breeze when it did come, ahead, it was three weeks before we again made the place we had left so hurriedly. As we approached, with the aid of glasses, a bright look-out was directed towards the beach to catch sight of Harveson, but the anchor had

been down some minutes and still no sign of him.

"Poor beggar! down with fever again I expect," said the skipper, "as soon as you get a boat out, we'll go and have a look at him."

As we landed on the beach and walked up to the house, I could not help but admire the sound judgment that had induced the "old man" to leave his anchorage, in preference for sea-room. Huge trees were levelled to the ground, their roots pointing helplessly heavenwards, and the cocoa-nuts although still standing, having bent their slim stems to the violence of the wind, were almost completely stripped of foliage and fruit, the latter being scattered round in hundreds, whilst the former had no doubt landed, if the word is allowable, miles away in the Pacific Ocean.

That Harveson had taken precautions for the safety of his house was evident as we came nearer. A couple of light chains had been passed over it, and secured to stakes driven deeply into the ground, and then frapped together with rope.

"That would do credit to a shellback," remarked the skipper, as he scrutinised it

closely, "come, let's go and see what's wrong with him," and we entered the house, the door of which was wide open.

A stretcher bed stood in one corner of the room, and on it a figure was reclining, a coarse blue blanket completely covering it.

"What's the matter old chap," said the skipper, "got another dose of fever?"

There was no answer, and the "old man" walked up and drew the blanket from the face. Then he gently put it back again, for he saw that John Harveson, gentleman, spendthrift, and beach-comber, had indeed gone home at last.

CHAPTER XXI

A make-shift Burial Service—A Land of Unions—
The Coming of the Steamboat—Sail *versus* Steam.

We buried poor Harveson deep enough to guard against native pigs undoing our work, whilst the skipper, visibly affected, read almost inaudibly some sort of a burial service over him. As far as I could make out by the word or two I could catch, it was a repetition of the Lord's Prayer, for having no book handy I shrewdly suspect it was the only form he could think of. Well, it didn't matter much, and I expect poor Harveson rested just as quietly as though buried in a family vault, and an archbishop had read the correct rite over him.

Some individuals have a lively desire to be buried in a certain manner or in a certain place, and would be in a chronic state of unhappiness if they thought it were to be otherwise. For my part I don't see that it makes any difference

to a dead man whether he is buried in sixty fathoms of blue water, or with pomp and ceremony on land. Whether he has the assistance of a big gun (a canon) of the church to read over him, or like Harveson, the simple effort of the skipper and the Lord's Prayer, which, intended by him for the same purpose, was heard, I am sure, just as readily up aloft as the other.

What does matter is the manner of his life, for good or bad, after it is passed, no form of burial service can alter or affect it. We collected all the produce and got it under hatches, taking everything movable on board, but leaving the house standing in case the firm should send another man down. A couple of days later, having gathered sufficient white coral to form a mound, and mark the place where he lay as a last service we could render, we sailed away, his lonely grave forming a vivid spot among its surroundings until lost in the distance.

Arriving at Sydney, and having left the *Nautilus*, a number of years passed before I again visited the "Islands." The interval was spent in the steamers plying in the inter-colonial

trade. These vessel were an example of the rapid progress made by steam. From a couple of boats that had at one time been up to date and fulfilled all requirements, year by year had seen an increase in their number and size that was little short of marvellous. Excellent boats both from the passenger and sailor point of view, for here exist conditions for Jack with which he is content, and ought to be, as a fair recognition of his labour.

Australia is a land of Unions, and although the sailing-ship men never seem to have any inclination or leaning in the direction of unity either there or elsewhere, the same does not apply to steamboat men, who throwing in their lot with the firemen constitute a body to be taken into consideration and reckoned with, which no doubt accounts for their better treatment. Good food, reasonable wages, and hard work, the latter being a secondary consideration with Jack, for in port if he works over and above the time recognised as a day's labour he draws overtime wages, but at the same time earns every penny of it. Needless to say, in the case of the men, with such a happy state of things, he's a "sticker,"

and if you were to put him out on one side of the ship, I verily believe he would come in on the other, for only death or infirmity can shift him, and then there are plenty of other men waiting, as it were, for his shoes.

Unions are not always right certainly, and mostly viewed with disfavour outside the men who belong to them, being as they are a first and necessary factor in the deplorable strike. Yet until things are arranged differently and better in this direction, how can we blame men who are being "sweated," a state of things no man was born into this world to endure, yet which many a man perforce has to, if having a reasonable and just cause he uses the only weapon within reach (effective or not as it may be) to adjust it. Whatever may be said about Unions, if they secure any of the conditions that prevailed in the steamboats I have mentioned, which were only right and reasonable, then they are an influence for good. War, and of course a strike is a war of labour, sometimes cuts other figures besides those of the combatants. I remember one trip we were bound for Newcastle, N.S.W., and making the Nobbys, the entrance to the river, lay to for the assistance of

a tow-boat. After hours of waiting, one at last came off with the news that we couldn't go inside for the harbour was chock full of shipping. We had to get in somehow by hook or by crook, and finally with an amount of persuasion, and perhaps something more solid and substantial, induced him to take us in tow. How we reached our destination without doing some serious damage, in spite of our manœuvring to that end, is a marvel. A strike had been going on in the collieries for months, and vessels arriving every day and none leaving, except those that took ballast and left in disgust, had at last filled the harbour full up. Crowded it was without doubt, and a man carrying a decent length of plank with him could have walked dry-shod from one side of the harbour to the other.

The coming of the steamboat to the Colonies was heralded by a compromise between sail and steam, known as the "auxiliary." This was really an ordinary full-rigged sailing-ship, with the addition of a screw and machinery sufficient to give her in calm weather the speed of a few knots. With a breeze she became again a sailing-ship pure and simple, relying on sail

alone for her progress through the water. Apparently neither flesh, fowl, nor good red herring, this sort of craft finally after a short existence died a natural death and gave place to the steamer proper.

New Zealand clung to her old friend the sailing-ship, as far as the English trade was concerned, long after the other Colonies had, to a great extent, discarded her. Some of them were fitted up with freezing-chambers to carry frozen meat, necessitating the employment of a couple of engineers and two or three firemen, thus for some time successfully staving off the inevitable. But even the best of friends must part when pressing necessity arises and demands it, so, although dying hard, she too had to knuckle down at last and make room for her more energetic and powerful rival. With all the advantages the steamer has to offer we lose something by the exchange as well, for in her train she brings the deterioration of the sailor. With little work aloft, and his sailorising more of the blacksmith order, he must lose in years to come some of those qualities for which he is famous and which have earned for him the title of "handy-man."

At the time I am writing about the inter-colonial steamer was in full swing, and, with the exception of the timber trade, which occupied too much time in loading to make it profitable to them, and to some degree Newcastle coal, had driven the "wind jammer" completely off the field.

We had an amusing incident on one trip across to Sydney. One morning at daybreak we sighted a sailing-vessel a mile or two ahead of us. Notwithstanding the short distance by which we were separated and that our boat was reckoned decently fast, it was hours before we came alongside of her. She turned out to be an American three-masted schooner, and with a good breeze and smooth water, in the way of speed was making "things hum." The wind was what a sailor would call "jerky," that is, rather unsteady in force, and although we managed to pass her time after time, as soon as the wind strengthened along she would come again with a free sheet and do the same for us. She kept this up for the best part of two days sometimes getting miles in front of us, until at last the wind falling away we were finally enabled to lose her astern.

Somebody, perhaps one of the passengers who had witnessed the occurrence, passed it on for use in a paper, which produced a picture of the event wherein the schooner was leading, the steamer toiling along in her wake. But the comical part was that, the skipper of the sailing-vessel was depicted as standing at the after part of his ship with his thumb to his nose and his fingers outspread in an attitude of defiance. Another incident between sail and steam not nearly so amusing to either crew being to both full of difficulty and danger, was this: We had left New Zealand and after losing the land fell in with a good stiff westerly gale. It brought up such a heavy sea that we were obliged to ease down and go at half-speed, and as it continued for days, as a matter of fact we had a vile trip right across, at the end of that time we were a long way from the position we should have been in, or as a billiard player might remark, a long way behind our points. About three hundred miles from the Australian coast, one day we sighted a vessel right ahead. We weren't making much headway ourselves in such weather, but she was head-reaching under her lower top-sails and a storm spanker, and making none at

all. She had a signal of distress flying at her gaff, the ensign upside down, which I suppose they had hoisted on catching sight of us some time before. That she was a little brig we could see for ourselves, but what was the matter and the cause of her misfortune it took several hoists of signals to find out. Six weeks from the "Kiapara" river, timber laden, she had jettisoned or thrown overboard her deck cargo, of which not a plank was remaining. It had taken all this time to make eight or nine hundred miles, and the cause of her trouble, the stores had given out and they were, or soon would be, on the verge of starvation. Not so bad as it might have been, but serious enough, for although it sounds all right there is no sustenance in the bulwarks. A hurried consultation between the captain and officers as to what could be done in the matter was a risky proceeding, the resolve to put a boat out. In an undertaking of so much danger, it is mostly the rule to call for volunteers, as was done on this occasion. Without the slightest hesitation every man Jack offered his services to make up the boat's crew, as though they had been invited to a picnic instead of taking

on a task full of peril and insecurity. Having selected the most likely men provisions were passed into one of the boats hanging from the davits, and the steamer manœuvred to windward of the brig so that the boat when dropped should have the benefit of her lee.

Fortunately all the boats on the davits were provided with patent lowering-gear, and no delay was caused by having to unhook clumsy blocks that would have ended in the swamping of the boat. Their cork life-jackets donned, the crew took their places, whilst some anxious minutes passed waiting for a good lee-roll. Then the boat was slacked rapidly away, the friction setting fire to the single rope used for the purpose, and sending off a little cloud of smoke. Before the weather roll could lift her from the water again she was free, and half full, which one of the hands started energetically to bail out, pulling down for the brig. After they had gained the vessel and rounded her stern came the most difficult part of the business. To approach her close enough to put on board the provisions they had brought, without coming in contact, which in such a sea

would have crushed her like an egg shell, was an operation requiring both nerve and judgment. That this was accomplished with the trifling loss of one oar, is to say that the boat was handled with a remarkable degree of expertness. Having done what they had started out to do was only the half of an exceedingly nasty job, for now they had to return to their own ship. She in the meantime had steamed away to leeward so that the boat could run down with the wind and sea. All eyes were anxiously focused on her as she came down before it, disappearing time after time altogether from view. When that happened every man held his breath, saving it for a low but fervent exclamation of relief, as she climbed on top of a sea and came into sight again. When near enough to hail her with a speaking-trumpet, the skipper told them to stand by for a jump when round the lee-side, for he had made up his mind that it was impossible to hoist the boat up again, the only alternative being to abandon her as soon as the crew were on board. What a caper she cut, when at last they did get alongside, or as near as it were safe to venture. Now level with the rail until one

thought she had made up her mind to launch herself bodily on board. Now down in the hollow of a wave, looking as the ship rolled to windward, as if bent on disappearing under her bottom. Willing hands stood on the waist with ropes to throw to the men in the boat, and one by one, as she rose on a wave they swarmed up them with an amount of activity only possible to a sailor or an acrobat, until every one had reached the deck. With no one to control her the boat drifted away a plaything for the sea, and the engines working at half-speed again, the steamer's head was pointed once more for her destination.

Having, perforce, to sacrifice the boat, leaving risk of life out of the question, made those provisions, to the best of my belief, the most expensive I ever handled; but wet and damaged as some of them were by a half swamped boat, to the crew of that brig, cheap at any cost, for they were the price of life itself.

Although they gain little recognition, that is the stuff of which sailors are made. Ready at all times to undertake a task such as the above, cheerfully and without a thought of

risk or danger to themselves. The absence of fuss, and the cut and dry manner in which they go about some perilous action, make this trait in their character doubly praiseworthy and deserving of esteem.

CHAPTER XXII

A Question of Safety—The Urgency for twin Screws —Humours of Competition.

I HAVE often been asked by my non-seafaring friends whether the steamer or the sailing-ship was the safest to travel in, and with all due regard for the chance of accident attending both, have invariably plumped for the sailing-ship, as against the steamer provided with the single screw.

The modern passenger steamer, in the matter of comfort, is as near perfection as she well can be. Yet a great many are lacking in one essential to give the people they carry the maximum of safety. I mean the twin screw. The boats furnished with them are only prominent by the fewness of their number, but in the very near future they must become universal, for the travelling public, those at least who give the matter a moment of thought, will

refuse to travel in any other. I cite a case as an example of my meaning. About three years ago the *Fifeshire*, one of the "Shire" line of steamers, bound from Australia to New Zealand, on the way across had the misfortune to break her shaft. Days passed beyond the appointed time for her arrival, and as she did not put in an appearance serious thoughts were entertained regarding her safety. Strict orders were issued for all crossing vessels to keep a bright look-out for her, but for a long time with no result. As week after week slipped by with no tidings of her, the most gloomy forebodings were hazarded, having for their conclusion her loss with all hands. Eventually a steamboat that went a long way out of her course with the express intention of searching for her, and aided by a smart calculation on the part of the skipper regarding tides and her surmised drift, supposing she were still above water, picked her up six weeks from the time of accident, and twelve hundred miles from the position she was in at the time of breaking down, of course the drift being quite in the contrary direction to which she was required to go. If this could happen to a boat on a short voyage, and a fairly well-

beaten track, what, I often wonder, with a fracture beyond repair, would be the fate of a vessel on a long and lonely route, such as, say, New Zealand. These vessels, when in the latitude of the "Cape of Good Hope," go in for what is known to the navigator as "great circle sailing," which means that the course of the vessel is slightly altered each day, so that instead of going in a direct line, by the time she reaches her destination the ship has described part of a circle. To the novice this would have a going-out-of-the-way appearance about it, but in reality, between the time it comes into operation and reaching New Zealand, the journey is lessened by several hundreds of miles. What would happen, I say, to one of these boats if down in these inhospitable latitudes, where meeting another vessel does not occur once in a blue moon, something beyond repair went wrong with shaft or propeller? In that case she would become as helpless as a baulk of timber, as far as directing her course and going ahead was concerned, and the best seamanship would be powerless to do anything with her, so that in all probability they would end by going on an unwilling and indefinite search after the South

Pole, with no chance of finding it. Of course there is the engineers to fall back upon, and a skilful and competent body of men they are, some instances of repairing broken shafts by them being marvels of patience and ingenuity. Still there are times when even his knowledge is of no avail, but only, as it sometimes happens, when the job is impossible.

I was bound out to Australia, *viâ* the Suez Canal, a few years ago in a single-screw boat. In these days of travel it would be presumption on my part to describe an institution so close to home as the "Canal," but it has always seemed to me the most marvellous piece of work in existence. Starting about a mile east of Port Said, by the way, the blackest spot I believe and hope, on God's earth, and running a distance of eighty-seven miles through a desert to Suez, the difficulties to overcome in its construction must have been enormous. I have never passed through without sparing a thought for the able-minded man who nursed it to creation, nor for the pathetic ending of a great life amid the bitterness of failure.

We had safely passed through and were steaming merrily down for the Red Sea, our

next place of call being Colombo. Suddenly she set up such a peculiar motion, for all the world as though we had gone on a soft sand-bank, and the engines were putting every pound of power into her propeller and shaking every plate in the ship trying to force her over it. The vessel was stopped, and it was then ascertained that she had cast one of her propeller blades, as a horse might cast a shoe. We proceeded on our voyage until about midnight, when the engineer flatly refused to take responsibility if it were maintained, and counselled a return to Suez. The uneven motion of three blades instead of four caused such vibration that I believe she would have shaken her rivets out before we reached Colombo had we continued on our way, and when I say that each blade had a weight of seven tons, it may be understood this is no exaggeration. Of course there was not much danger on this route where there was plenty of assistance had we needed it, ships being almost as plentiful as blackberries in August, but had it been in latitudes away down below the "Cape," even this minor accident would have been dangerous. If masts and yards, or any means of showing a

decent amount of sail sufficient to give a few knots of progress in an emergency, is to be sacrificed for speed, then the twin screw is the only thing to take the place of that deficiency. The sailing-ship after passing the Cape of Good Hope likewise makes for higher and colder latitudes, not in the interest of "circle sailing," but simply with the object of picking up strong and favourable winds. True, just the same as the steamer, some calamity may overtake her in these regions, but even if dismasted there are always plenty of spare spars carried by her, which, with the aid of the carpenter, may be converted into the thing required for a jury-rig. If, with the exertions of officers and crew, in a remarkably short space of time she does not put on some semblance of her former self that will finally enable her to reach her destination, or at least the nearest port then, they are not the men I know of and take them for.

Another advantage claimed for the sailing-ship in the direction of safety, is this: The masters of them have no particular desire to hug the land unless obliged to, in fact, they have a decided preference for a distant view of it, and at all times give it as wide a berth as possible.

The steamers do quite otherwise, and being run on time tables, cut things very finely by, as Jack calls it, "cutting the corners off," and in their endeavour to sail up to time, lay courses to clear points of land or dangers, that allow only a small margin of safety. Thus the operation of "cutting off corners" may easily become a literal transaction, some unnoticed irregularity of the tide, absorbing and doing away with the distance allotted by which she is supposed to clear it.

After this rather long discussion on ships in general, I think it about time I came back to what I had not quite finished with, namely, the inter-colonial steamer. As competition is the spirit of trade, it was not to be expected that one company which had had the monopoly of this particular route were to keep it indefinitely without a struggle. Another company appeared on the scene, and starting to run the same lines in opposition to them, caused such a decline in the price of fares that, had it been a question of the market, such as a corner in something or other, would have caused a panic on any stock exchange. First of all the opposing faction came down a matter of ten shillings, the other

replying to this challenge by dropping rates a pound, until at last they were reduced to the ridiculous level of ten shillings for a passage across either way, a distance of twelve hundred odd miles. Whilst this lasted the public rolled up and enjoyed themselves, for if a person, no matter who, can get something for nothing, I have noticed he always seems pleased with himself. I had no means of ascertaining how the shareholders felt on the subject, but it requires a very scant knowledge of human nature to know they could not have been boisterously merry about it, considering that such rates would hardly have paid for tear and wear or lubricating oil. This state of affairs went on for months, resolving itself into the battle to the strongest, which, of course, meant they who could hold out the longest. Sailing-day was a sight worth seeing. Two boats, one belonging to each company would be lying on opposite sides of the quay. An hour or two before the time of departure, when the passengers trooped down the wharf for their cheap trip, men employed by the rival companies for the purpose, would try and persuade them to go in the particular boat he represented by extolling her

merits, mostly at the expense of the other, which put me in mind of nothing so much as an Egyptian donkey boy pressing his services upon you by holding forth on the unique qualities possessed by his animal over any other donkey. The battle raged long, but was at last decided in favour of the old company, the other having no stomach for more, or perhaps it was no purse. However, they retired or remained in such a small minority that it had no effect upon the victors, and the fares went up again with a jump and regained their normal standard.

I had often thought that the affair might have been more quickly settled, and perhaps more cheaply too, had the old company included a free bar in the passage-money, but it may not have worked out so well as it looked, and have entailed the employment of a large number of police to remove the passengers when arriving at the other side.

Another little comedy of the same sort, the outcome of competition, was furnished quite recently by boats running between Sydney and Melbourne. I know for a fact, not that I did it myself, that, while it lasted many people lived

almost entirely on these vessels, paying the passage-money at each end, and going backwards and forwards in them, simply because it was more exciting and much cheaper than living on shore. So it's an ill wind blows nobody good.

CHAPTER XXIII

The "Great Barrier"—Captain Cook Memorials—Ugly Navigation—Pearl-fishing—Reckless Divers—Conclusion.

BEING in search of a new experience in the seafaring line I took charge of a pearling lugger, my duty being to navigate her to Thursday Island and hand her over to the firm for whom she had been built. She was a small two masted vessel of fifteen tons, provided with lugsails and a couple of jibs, the class of boat used for pearl-diving purposes in Torres Straits, for which she was intended. Having picked up a couple of "hard-ups" to form the crew, we finally started, our course lying up the east coast of Australia. This was given a fairly wide berth until we should be able to draw in closer, and go between the land and the most wonderful creation of its kind in the world, "the Great Barrier Reef." Extending twelve

hundred miles along the coast at a distance from it ranging between ten and twenty miles, with remarkably few navigable openings from beginning to end for ships of any great draught, this remarkable formation serves the mainland a good turn by acting as a breakwater, but notwithstanding, there is room enough inside with an easterly gale assisted by the tide, for a sea to get up sufficiently big to please the most exacting. We called in at Cooktown to procure some fresh provisions, and stopped a couple of days to stretch our legs a bit.

Some interest attaches to this place—not that it is picturesque or remarkable in any degree, being like most Queensland towns, a one-horse, sun-dried looking place with little or no vegetation, but that it is particularly associated with the great navigator Captain Cook. The town is called after him, and in the background lies a mountain bearing the name of Mount Cook, whilst the stream, which the natives glorify by the title of river, is made famous by being christened after his hundred odd ton ship *The Endeavour*. It was here she was beached to undergo some necessary repairs, brought about possibly by her near acquaint-

ance with one or other of the numerous and dangerous reefs which abound in these waters, making that part of the coast from Cooktown to Thursday Island the worst piece of navigation on the face of the globe, and for ships a veritable graveyard. Here, between "the Barrier" and the land, the shoals and patches of reef are plentiful and various, many showing bodily above the water, some awash, whilst others lie below the surface like a treacherous enemy lying in wait for the incautious wayfarer. Although, now, to a great extent buoyed and marked and charted, the most careful navigation is required to negotiate them in safety.

One must see some of the scenes of Captain Cook's exploits to have a slight understanding of the nature of the task he set himself, and appreciate the manner of heart he must have been gifted with to carry them through, poking his little ship into holes and corners that would appal the modern navigator even with his exact instruments and charts marked like a high road. With tools that we should now look at with dismay were we called upon to navigate a ship by them from one port to another, his

only chart a sharp look-out, and knowing that should anything happen to his little craft he was cut off and completely beyond the reach of succour, he threaded all these dangers, proving himself by so doing a daring and intrepid man as he was a skilful navigator.

With all the time and labour that has been spent in surveying this dangerous part of the world, there are evidently still some uncharted dangers waiting for the unfortunate vessel that shall find them. Only a few years ago the *Quetta*, one of the British India boats, coming down the coast, struck a rock that was right in her course and fifteen feet below the water, ripping her bottom out and foundering with great loss of life. This danger, hitherto unsuspected, lay directly in the track of ships, and how many of the thousands of them that passed up and down through the years it was undiscovered, and just missed destruction by feet or yards, is a subject for speculation.

Not the least of the wonders of marine life is a coral reef. Splendid material this, on a quiet day, to gaze over the side into the depths below and build castles with. The bottom may be sixty feet under you, but this is decidedly a

case where distance lends enchantment to the view, the blue water acting as a magnifier and making it appear even more beautiful, if that is possible, than it really is. Anything may be constructed (in imagination) from a coral bottom, forests, palaces, or what desired, the fish, every colour of the rainbow, swimming in and round them, giving life to fantastic scenery that might well outrival fairyland. Every sort is here, from tree coral throwing its delicate branches in all directions to the variety known as "mushroom," because it has the appearance in shape, although not in size, being immense, of that edible luxury. Mushroom might also be applied to some of it in the matter of growth, viewing the rapid manner, for such a production, with which it extends itself by piling cell on cell. Not noticeable this, perhaps, if you have no interest in the operation. But should you have, your attention may be rewarded by finding that some reef you remember as always below water, and which you have not seen for years, has in that interval raised its head above the surface, and at certain time of tide is now high and dry.

After leaving Cooktown we pursued our

way still to the north'ard, making a course for Thursday Island. Although we had the latest charts, the difficulties of navigation in these latitudes were very apparent, the tides playing the very deuce with one's reckoning, often, in fact, making it absolutely necessary to anchor until it should turn again, and thus prevent us being carried back to the south'ard. Fortunately there is plenty of anchorage, and even most of the mail-boats, where no time is lost if it can possibly be avoided, and having the services of a pilot who is acquainted with every known danger, are, perforce, obliged to make use of it, by dropping anchor before dark and waiting patiently for daylight to see what is before them. We passed one wreck which looked as though it had occurred quite recently. She was a full-rigged ship, and had settled down in a perfectly upright position, her topgallant and royal yards alone being visible above the water, as square and trim as though she was afloat. We found on inquiry she had been there for months, a long spell of fine weather being responsible for her good condition. No doubt the first gale that came along would alter her appearance considerably, or

perhaps sweep her from sight altogether. She had ventured through Torres Straits as a short cut to an Australian port, a mad proceeding for which her skipper, whoever he was, had evidently paid the penalty. To be knocking about in such dangerous waters with a large sailing-ship, unless forced to, could only be the act of an imbecile.

Having carried out my instructions by handing the lugger over to the owner, my connection with her ceased, and whilst waiting for the steamer that should carry me south again, I had, opportunity to notice some conditions of life going on round me. Thursday Island is the centre of the great pearling industry of Torres Straits, and might aptly be termed the Yokohama of Australia. Two out of every three persons one meets here are Japanese, who own a large number of the pearling-luggers, which is to say, most of the fishing (diving) is in their hands, and what they don't understand about it is hardly worth knowing. With his wiry, dapper little person, full of energy and always polite, I have a liking for the "Jap," which I could never find reason to extend to the more unctuous Chinaman.

The outfit of a pearling-lugger is by no means inexpensive, the pump, diving dresses, and gear, leaving the vessel itself out of the question, running into hundreds of pounds.

The mode of fishing is this: At a certain time, that is, to catch the slack water, for no diving is possible with a tide of any strength running, dozens of boats lift their anchors and proceed out to the different cruising-grounds. Arrived here down goes the anchor once more, whilst the diver about to make the descent, and who has, with assistance, donned the dress on the journey out, now has the helmet screwed on, and waddles like some awkward giant to the side, where a short ladder is placed, from which he sinks to the bottom. Easy enough the latter, the soles of the clumsy-looking boots attached to the diving dress being weighted with lead, his body being balanced with the same metal both back and front. As soon as the helmet is screwed on, the pump is started going in a methodical manner, and air conveyed to him through rubber piping attached to the head-piece. He also has a life-line fast to his body used in the pulling-up process, one man, "the tender," doing nothing else but look out for

this and see that it clears obstructions. It also serves as a means of communication between the diver and his "tender," certain pulls which are understood by the latter meaning he wants more air or wishes to return to the surface, and other things. When he has reached the bottom, the anchor is hove short to allow the vessel to drift slowly, whilst the diver toils along picking up shell as he goes. Should he come across a patch requiring more time, he signals the fact up the life-line, the vessel being stopped by paying out chain, whilst he gathers them. About half a dozen is the average quantity secured at each dip, and anything over a hundred shell is a fair day's work, though, of course, should he have the luck to drop on a patch many more will be obtained. With the number of boats engaged in this industry, and the thorough search the bottom is subjected to, I think many at the present time have to be content with less. Yet, however few are secured, they are always a source of speculation, for any of the shells, opened by some responsible person one by one, may contain a pearl valued from a pound to a small fortune.

Any time within fifteen minutes is mostly the

extent of immersion, the diver then being hauled up from the depths like some marine monster, and climbing slowly and awkwardly up the ladder hanging over the side, is assisted to a seat and the helmet unscrewed to give him a breather. Having obtained this, and the case demanding it, he will descend again, or more likely another diver does so, whilst he sits a swollen-looking and helpless object taking a much-needed rest.

The diver must likewise have regard for the size of the shell obtained, anything measuring less than four and a half inches across to be left severely alone, a heavy fine being the penalty for bringing in any of less dimension. This most necessary statute is imposed in the interest of the industry and the men themselves, for were the boats allowed to gather all and sundry there would soon be none left to pick up, and thus the livelihood of the divers would be gone and the trade ruined.

It may easily be guessed that diving for pearl shell is a most dangerous occupation, although the men who undertake it seem quite indifferent to the risk they run. Considering the hazardous nature of it the proportion of

accidents is remarkably few, the reckless conduct of the men themselves being responsible for most. Diving in reasonably shallow water may be carried on for years with no harmful effects to the diver, at least visible, but where the danger comes in, and the accidents happen, is in deep water, which beyond a depth of fifteen or sixteen fathoms (approximately a hundred feet) is positively suicidal. Yet they do it every day in their desire to reach patches of shell outside the limit of reasonable safety, many of them going a depth of twenty-four fathoms and even more. The pressure on his body at this distance below the surface must be simply enormous, and it is only a question of time for this foolhardiness to end in tragedy. One day he is pulled up, and when the helmet is removed a corpse is found to be the occupant of the diving suit, or he collapses, being stricken with paralysis. This affects the legs only, and he may be a cripple for life, but should he recover after six months or so of suffering and helplessness, in most cases no warning that nature cannot be trifled with is taken to heart, for he will dive just as deeply again by-and-by. Some idea of how these men will foolishly risk

their lives by diving in deep water to obtain a few shells is this : In Torres Straits is situated a place called Darnley Island. So many accidents of the kind mentioned have happened here, owing to the deepness of the water, that the authorities closed it to the diving-boats, forbidding them under fine from fishing in that particular place. But in spite of this they do so by stealth, for unfortunately plenty of shell is to be found there. The Government boat has all her work cut out patrolling round trying to prevent them from diving here, and the owners of one or other of the " pearlers," both white man and Jap, frequently figure on the charge-sheet for this offence.

And now, dear reader, whilst waiting for one or other of the mail-boats that shall land me in Sydney again, I purpose taking leave of you. A good many years that follow were spent in the South Sea Islands, and although I should like to tell you something about them, it must be at a future time, for here is not the place to do it.

In these pages my object is to present to you some of the conditions of a sailor's life, some of his weaknesses and pleasures, a little of his

hardship, and also a few of his virtues. The decrease in the number of British merchant seamen is an urgent question of to-day, and those who read this book may judge for themselves whether the grievances mentioned, which are real, particularly with the sailing-ship man, have anything to do with it. English boys are the same flesh and blood, with the same love of adventure that characterised the men who have had a hand in making the Empire what it is, and 'twill be a sorry day for England if the time ever arrives when they are not so. But some effort is required to gain their services, and the conditions made attractive enough on board ship to retain them when once there. When this happy time arrives, as I hope it will soon do, and British ships are manned once more exclusively by British seamen, every thinking man to whom his country is something more than a name will echo my wish, "May his shadow never grow less."

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