

**CROSSING**



**THE  
LINE**

Sea

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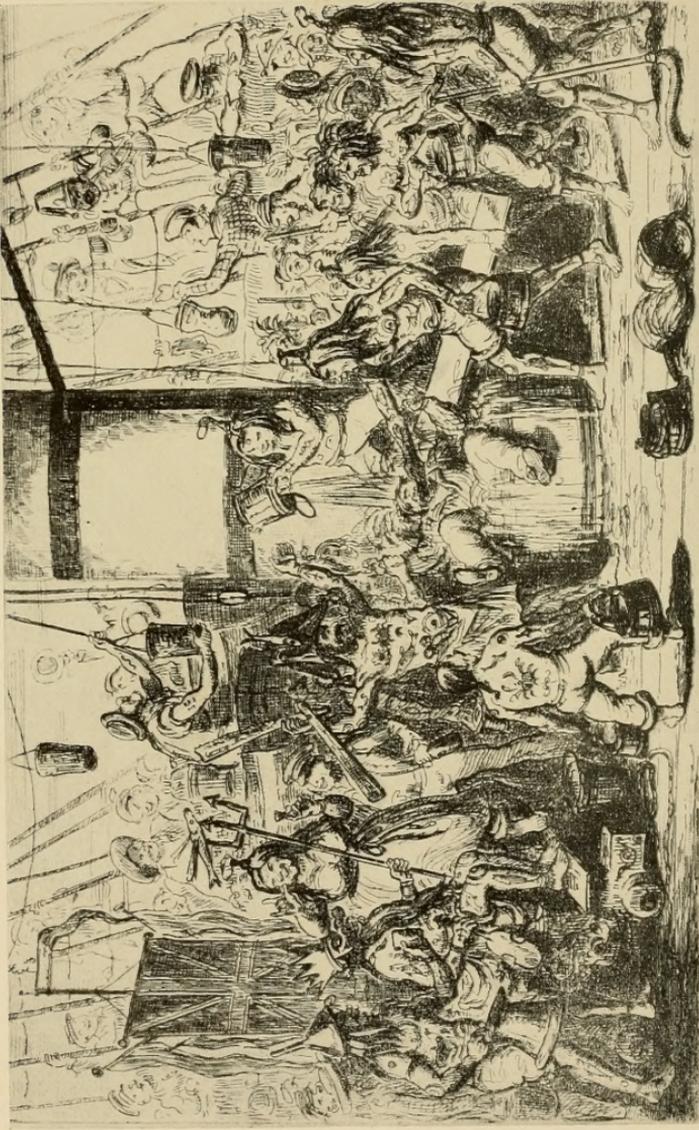




CROSSING THE LINE







Robert Cruikshank

Robert Cruikshank's "Crossing the Line." From Baker's Old Sailor's Jolly Boat, London, 1844.

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# CROSSING THE LINE

*Tales of the Ceremony During  
Four Centuries*

Gathered by

HARRY MILLER LYDENBERG



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TO THE MANY KIND FRIENDS WHOSE  
HELP MADE POSSIBLE THIS  
"GARLAND OF OTHER MEN'S POSIES"



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## Crossing the Line





## INTRODUCTION

WHEN did man first go down to the sea in ships? Who can say? It surely must have been far, far back of grandfather's "good, old days."

What did the sailor think when first he faced that alluring, charming, helpful, inviting, cruel, destructive, devastating, heartless stretch of water, his frail craft set against those buffeting billows?

What more natural than a thought, perhaps even a stop, to "thank whatever gods may be," to offer a prayer for mercy at sea, to promise grateful sacrifice for a safe trip, to give heartfelt thanks and to voice sincere relief when safely landed? Thriftily, might not this sacrifice not only care for the latest voyage but also for the next to come?

What more natural than that on later voyages the seasoned old salt should call on the green shipmates to prove that they could not only stand the terrors and strains and stresses so soon to begin, but that they had also enough of the courage and the good fellow in their make-up to take in good humor the joking and the ragging and the joshing accepted as part of daily life aboard ship?

The field for musing and speculation is both boundless and inviting. So too is it exasperatingly and disappointingly limited and unproductive when a man tries to find something more definite and reliable and rewarding than his own questioning of just when and where and how did travelers tell what they knew or felt about the way the crossing of the equator or any other important stretch on land or sea was marked; when and why did the formula take present shape and form, how much did one nationality take over from another.

Man undoubtedly traveled by sea soon after he came to see the great waters. Such records of those early days as come down to us tell little more than we set out, landed, now and then suffered shipwreck. Egyptians, Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans took to the sea as a thoroughfare so familiar as to call for no comment other than that it was used. Iliad and Odyssey sing about the sea travel, the ships, the sea folk, but I find no mention or suggestion of any particular ceremony connected with the sea, as such. School boys thrill as they hear Xenophon tell in the *Anabasis* how the Greeks shouted "thalassa! thalassa!" when they saw the Euxine on their toilsome homeward plodding; but if they danced with joy or offered prayers or sacrifices we get not one word.

The Psalmist knew what men suffer when they "go down to the sea in ships," and tells us that when they "do business in great waters . . . they cry unto Jehovah in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses, . . .

bringeth them into their desired haven." If his mariners offered any special form of prayer as thanks for a safe landing, we hear nothing about it.

The ship bearing Paul on his way to Rome tried to escape the Syrtis only to run aground on Malta. The record in *Acts* sets the story down quite as something to be taken for granted if not expected. Paul cheers the crew as he tells them that an angel had revealed to him that the ship would be cast ashore with no lives lost; he urges them to take a bite to eat even in the midst of the storm. Of life ashore, however, we hear nothing more than that Paul shook a viper off his hand and later healed the father of Publius. It is all a plain statement of fact, the standard "who, what, when, why," with little need of rewriting for tomorrow's newspaper. Take the dangers of the sea in your stride; no complainings, but no form of prayer for thanks.

Professor Samuel Eliot Morison — also Rear Admiral and naval historian — is as much at home on the sea as in his study or his classroom, is certainly much closer to the "feel" of the seaman than the landsman may hope to be, and certainly knows the sailor's viewpoint as well as he knows how to sail his boat or his ship. In his fascinating *Admiral of the Ocean Sea* he reminds us that "seamen were the most religious of all workers." He tells us of the daily life at sea in Columbus's time, how "at sunset the Blessed Virgin was saluted with her ancient canticle, *Salve Regina*"; also how "in the second dogwatch, just after sunset and before the first night watch is set, all hands are called to evening prayers. The ceremony begins by a gromet [cabin boy] trimming the binnacle lamp: and as he brings it aft along the deck he sings out . . . 'Amen and God give us a good night and good sailing; may the ship make a good passage, sir captain and master and good company.'

"The gromets then lead the ship's company in what was technically called *la doctrina cristiana*. All hands say the *Pater Noster*, *Ave Maria* and *Credo*, and sing the *Salve Regina*. This beautiful hymn, one of the oldest Benedictine chants, was a fitting close to the day. The music of it has come down to us, so that we can in some measure re-create that ancient hymn of praise to the Queen of Heaven that floated over uncharted waters every evening, as the caravels slipped along." \*

Columbus did not cross the equator after 1492. He may have hit south latitude on earlier voyages along the coast of Africa, but we have no proof one way or the other. If, however, the Genoese Columbus, on a Spanish ship, led thus his Spanish crew, is it a wild guess to feel he then followed established

\* Quoted with permission of Professor Morison from *Admiral of the Ocean Sea*, p. 233 of vol. 1.

practice and tradition? Thanks for safety thus far; thanks for a special occasion.

Stop a moment and follow Prince Henry the Navigator's Portuguese seamen as they worked their way down the west coast of Africa. Do we find any special ceremony as they found the sun shift from south to north? We hear that Bartolomeu Diaz rounded the Cape, Vasco da Gama reached India, but the records are silent on the point now of interest to us.

Well into the sixteenth century do we hear Camoëns sing the praises of his native Portugal and his hero as he pictures Vasco da Gama telling the tale of his voyage to the King of Melinde:

And from the Pole familiar of the Bear  
At length in those vast oceans I withdrew,  
For I had overpassed the burning bound,  
Where the limit which divides the earth is found.

Our course across those regions we had ta'en,  
Through the which, passing twice, Apollo makes  
A pair of winters and likewise summers twain,  
What time from Pole to Pole his way he takes.\*

Admitting freely and promptly that poetry may often be more effective than bald prose, I submit that here we fail to learn how or whether any ceremony marked the overpassing of "the burning bound, where the limit which divides the earth is found."

Let us turn to some other of the brave souls that dared to trust their lives to the mercies of Father Neptune, and see what they tell about our story. In 1519 Pigafetta sailed with Magellan on the first circumnavigation. He tells that they passed Sierra Leone "with contrary winds, calms, and rains without wind, until we reached the equinoctial line, having sixty days of continual rain. Contrary to the opinion of the ancients, before we reached the line many furious squalls of wind, and currents of water struck us head on in 14 degrees. As we could not advance, and in order that the ships might not be wrecked, all the sails were struck; and in this manner did we wander hither and yon on the sea, waiting for the tempest to cease, for it was very furious. When it rained there was no wind. When the sun shone, it was calm." †

\* *Lusiads*, Leonard Bacon's translation, 1950, Book V, 13 and 15. Quoted with permission of the Hispanic Society of America, publisher.

† Robertson's translation of the Ambrosian manuscript. Cleveland, 1906. v. 1, p. 35. Ramusio's text, Venice, 1550, p. 380, runs about the same. Not one word do we get about any special ceremony.

Wait just ten years, and later, under 1529, we shall see below the first news about special marking of the crossing, when Jean Parmentier sails from France and sings a Mass, largely if not purely a religious ceremony.

All the writers quoted so far are Latins. How about the northerners? What do we hear when Sir Francis Drake sailed to the South Seas to singe the Spaniard's beard? The Reverend Master Francis Fletcher gives us plenty of detail as to how Drake had been out of sight of land some 63 days before "passing the line equinoctial the 17. day [of February 1577] . . . Wee often met with aduerse winds, vnwelcome stormes, and to vs (at that time) lesse welcome calmes, and being as it were in the bosome of the burning zone, wee felt the effects of sultring heat, not without the affrights of flashing lightnings, and terrifyings of often claps of thunder." \* May one suppose that if any religious ceremony had marked the crossing that the "Preacher in this employment" would have told us?

Accept all this as one more time when writers of books refuse to glimpse beforehand all the questions we later readers of those books may choose to pose, then stop a moment to ask if it is unfair to think that some formal ceremony came with the passing of any well-known landmark or position, such as the Straits of Gibraltar, the Skagerrak and Kattegat, the clearing of the English Channel or the reaching of the Grand Banks of Newfoundland, the Tropics of Cancer or Capricorn, as well as the swinging of the sun from north to south? Indeed, why limit it to the sea? We shall see later that the mouth of the River Platte served as such a point in the westward movement in this country early in the nineteenth century; also the height of land between the Mississippi and Great Lakes systems to the south and the Arctic and Hudson Bay systems to the north. †

Even today do we see a variation of the equatorial version of the ceremony develop in the passing over the 180th meridian or the crossing of the Arctic Circle. The airmen too have their version, as their limits of space and speed must perforce change some details. Records of sea or air voyages to the South Pole seem to say nothing about it. Was the crossing unmarked, or was the tale kept from the uninitiated? Few voyages from south to north mention it, though we shall find one lone tale about it set down below with date about 1910. Several passengers on ships to or from the Cape of Good Hope have

\* *The World Encompassed*, by Sir Francis Drake, carefully collected out of the notes of Master Francis Fletcher, Preacher in this employment, and divers others his followers. London, 1628. p. 12.

† In *The Mariner's Mirror*, May, 1954, v. 40, no. 2, p. 161-162, Henning Henningsen reports he has material showing that for 33 points in Europe some form of baptism was practiced.

told me they obeyed the summons of Father Neptune in due fashion, even if we find little about it in print.

Why should sailor alone take it over? Why never a word from plodding foot traveler or from cavalier on horseback or on camel? Lack of instruments? No astrolabe or sextant is needed to note such a shift in sun.

Few if any travelers by land equal Marco Polo in the distance covered, in the appeal of his tale, in the wealth of information he gives us. Not one word, however, do we get from him suggesting anything like our ceremony. Outward bound, to be sure, he never was in south latitude, but much of the homeward trip was by sea. How could a son of Venice fail to speak of such a thing if any particular notice had been taken?

He does tell us about the monsoons, and when weather held him five months in the kingdom of Samara (Sumatra?) he says: "here again neither the Polestar nor the stars of the Maestro were to be seen, much or little." \* The "here again" harks back to chapter IX, "concerning the island of Java the Less," the passage there running "but let me premise one marvellous thing, and that is the fact that this Island lies so far to the south that the North Star, little or much, is never to be seen!" If Samara is our Sumatra we find the equator cuts it just about in half.

Are Chinese and other eastern annals quite silent on this matter? Or, are we perhaps some day to learn from them that like paper and compass and so many other things and habits, our ceremony really goes back to this or that dynasty of eastern rulers and has been overlooked as to source by unimaginative westerners?

As I scanned tale after tale of travel I found myself wondering if that lively reporter, Henry M. Stanley, noted the shift in position as he worked his way north from Zanzibar to Ujiji. While with Livingstone on Tanganyika he must have crossed the line over and over again, but never do we get a word about its being marked or noted.

Looking at the folklore of the performance reminds us how from early days man has chosen baptisms, the drinking of blood, and similar initiation ceremonies to mark solemn events — the change into adult life, the acceptance of a newcomer into full fellowship in craft or fraternity or other groups. Why should not the seaman originate his own initiation rites?

Neither a folklorist nor a son of a folklorist, I turned to friends and their books, current and older, but found no answer. Is it a mark of superficial or careless search? Two men in particular seemed most promising as first aid,

\* Yule's translation, book 3, chapter X, v. 2, p. 292. London, 1903.

Lafitau and Arnold Van Gennepe, but once more I found disappointment. The good Jesuit, Father Joseph François Lafitau tells us much in his *Mœurs des sauvages Américains, comparées aux mœurs des premiers temps* (Paris, 1724) but in none of his four volumes did I find anything like this, even though they are so full of interest. Much the same must be said about Arnold Van Gennepe's *Religions, mœurs, et légendes: essais d'ethnographie et de linguistique* (Paris, 1908).

Remember that when we shall first hear about a special marking of the crossing the ceremony is purely religious. Not long, however, does it stay so; within a few years it is accepted as normal and natural, hallowed by time and by general observance. Most of the quotations set forth below are first-hand reports, most from men, the handful from women all the more welcome. Few show any curiosity as to what it means, who started it, how far back it goes. My own speculations on such points I knew full well were but tentative, worthy perhaps of passing attention until something more nearly final turned up. As time went on, however, I came to find a few other wonderings about the origins. Below, under 1792, is quoted the lively tale of the scene on an out-bound Indiaman printed in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, and there we find a query as to how far back it goes. Under 1801 we read of a lawsuit in India based on a squabble that ended in a serious fight over a youngster's refusal to submit to the tender mercies of the crew. When Chambers's *Book of Days* talks about the ceremony some years later it notes this trial (with some slight errors in detail), and then goes on to ask when and where and why it began, but gets no nearer the answer than seems the fate of us all.

Another thoughtful and careful study of the whys and whens comes in *France Maritime* (v. 3, p. 281–288) where Jules Lecomte goes into past and present in a way to call for giving it in full under 1837–1844 in the pages which follow.

Whether influenced by Lecomte, or quite independently, *Larousse grand dictionnaire universel du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1867, p. 190–192 of v. 2) under *Baptême* gives elaborate and understanding, sympathetic and extensive, pictures of the sailor's point of view. The entry reminds us that we find nothing in maritime history to fix a precise date for origin, and tells us the rite is generally admitted to go no farther back than the discoveries of the Portuguese in Africa. These first navigators daring to venture into the torrid zone — uninhabitable by tradition, by the teachings of the ancients, by general consent — saw a new world opening before them and felt it was fitting to mark the event by baptism as they began this new life. Since then the sailor has carried it on almost without a break. For some it has come to be “une

source de profit," really a little business affair for the crew, tolerated by the officers, aiming first to screw out of the passengers enough tips to let Jack Tar get some means of extra relaxation and joy out of his life of toil. This is followed by long quotations from Arago and others.

*Larousse du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (1928) and *Nouveau Larousse universel* (1948) follow the earlier edition, much condensed.

Diderot's *Encyclopédie* notes it under *Baptême*, but goes no further than detailed description of the ceremony, quoted below under 1751.

Much the same must be said about the other standard encyclopedias. *Der grosse Brockhaus* (1932) gives a few lines under *Linientaufe*; *Meyers Lexikon* enters it under *Aequatortaufe*; *Enciclopedia italiana* (1938) under *Battesimo* is fuller, admits uncertainty as to origin, nothing being known before the 16th century, tells that the French call the victims "cavaliers of the sea" once they have endured the test for either equator or the 23rd parallel, ends by saying it is probably a breakdown or an inheritance of a forgotten religious ceremony. The Spanish *Enciclopedia universal ilustrada* (c. 1940) gives less than *Larousse* but more than the others, notes also the baptism of ships, thinks we hear less about it now because it has degenerated into a forced shakedown of passengers to pay for drinks for the crew. (The earliest charge of this kind is noted under 1709 when Johann Gottlieb Worm calls it "eine bloss Erfindung der See-Officierer, damit sie nur Geld bekommen, um vor sich und ihre Leute Erfrischungen kaufen zu können.")

Contemporary encyclopedias in English keep safely within the clerical fold when talking about baptism. *Britannica* in the 11th and 1953 editions notes the religious rite. The *American Peoples'*, the *Encyclopedia Americana*, *Collier's*, *Grolier*, the only ones at my present command, follow suit. However, the first American encyclopedia,\* based on the third edition of the *Britannica*, has the following entry:

Baptism, in the sea language, a ceremony in long voyages on board merchant ships, practised both on persons and vessels who pass the tropic or line for the first time. The baptizing the vessel is simple, and consists only in washing them throughout with sea-water; that of the passengers is more mysterious. The oldest of the crew, that has past the tropic or line, comes with his face blacked, a grotesque cap on his head, and some sea-book in his hand, followed by the rest of the seamen dressed like himself, each having some kitchen utensil in his hand, with drums beating; he places himself on a seat on the deck, at the foot of the main mast. At the tribunal of this mock magistrate, each passenger not yet initiated,

\* Encyclopaedia; or, a dictionary of arts, sciences, and miscellaneous literature. Philadelphia, 1798, vol. 2, p. 793-794.

swears he will take care the same ceremony be observed, whenever he is in the like circumstances: Then, by giving a little money by way of gratification, he is discharged with a little sprinkling of water; otherwise he is heartily drenched with streams of water poured upon him; and the ship-boys are inclosed in a cage, and ducked at discretion. — The seamen, on the baptizing a ship, pretend to a right of cutting off the beak-head, unless redeemed by the captain.

The quotations hereafter set forth come largely from French, English, United States sources, with scattering others from Dutch, German, Russian. They show quite soon how far back as to our time and how early as to the date of quotation the ceremony is accepted as established tradition. Noteworthy too is the lack of references to it by Italian or Spanish or Portuguese writers, as compared with the French.

In point of time Portuguese led all, none other like Prince Henry the Navigator. Spain followed hard apace with the change from 15th to 16th century. Venice and Genoa have long maritime experience, with traditions of real importance. Yet, on this point of sea lore we have few references to any such ceremony from them. Italian ships did get to Bruges and to British ports now and then, but the trips were not regular, scarcely occasional.

An Italian naval officer notes that the Saint's day, the Santa Maria or Anna or Trinidad whose name the ship bore, was usually, even invariably, marked by a religious ceremony. Or, if not for the Saint's day, then that of the patron of the home port of the ship. He notes too that the Church and the Inquisition were stronger in Italy and Spain than in France, and we see here how much oftener do we find clerical disapproval or forbidding of the usual ceremony in the quotations from sources stemming from either of the two peninsulas.

Moreover, recall that such notes of the "passaggio della linea" as we find in later Italian sources seem to indicate that the ceremony had been taken over from the English. Italian steamships were made in England at first, manned by British for the engineering force for a long time.

So too comes the wonder why we have so few stories in fiction, so few from whalers. Corbière, writing in the middle 'fifties of the last century, gives in his tale of a slaver set in the time of the Empire, a vivid picture of the crossing. He there pays high tribute to Eugene Sue and James Fenimore Cooper as writers of sea tales, rating Cooper as peer of the craft. Most of us have enjoyed Cooper, will give hearty support to Corbière, but will remind ourselves that Cooper wrote only about scenes he knew and had never been in south latitude.

Melville and *Moby Dick* come to mind of course when thinking or talking about whalers, but when I came to check impressions with the printed page

I found nothing in Melville except the passage in *Mardi* where he tells of the ship's sailing along the line, crossing it over and over again as it vainly hoped for the "Thar she blows" from the lookout. Even if it tells nothing about "our" ceremony the passage is quoted below under 1846, the date of publication.

Whalers' logs are just about as garrulous and talkative as logs of other ships — position, courses, winds, barrels of oil. We do have here sketches by whalers in shape of Haley (1849), Dubarry (1869), Robertson (1950/51). Three pictures by whalers! And whaling voyages must run well into the thousands.

In the quotations let me say that the obvious comment is that English bulks larger than other tongues because more books were at hand in English. I'm not so sure about that, am more than sure the search was keener to find records in other languages. It is perhaps due to the fact that the great swing upwards in English voyages came in the eighteenth and later centuries, with American voyages about a century later. Most entries come from printed books, again because printed sources were more readily at hand than manuscript. Would that time could have permitted going through official navy records at home and abroad; dipping into sources in India House, in Salem or New Bedford or Mystic or Sag Harbor. Personal narratives have I sought from each and every sailor I found, but when it came to telling what happened when Father Neptune made his visit, the usual reply has been a laconic "Plenty," little more.

So too, it may be not unfitting to tell how the "Rambler" in the story entered below under 1792, from *The Gentleman's Magazine* offers this sage remark as excuse and reason for the printing of the letter to the editor: "And as every custom, however ridiculous it may have dwindled into (as for instance, swearing at Highgate) has had a salutary foundation, I should wish some of your numerous readers, or your own philanthropic self; would be pleased to tell me from what occasion it arose. Time that is employed in investigation must be of general utility, for it often draws, if not a satisfactory conclusion of our own, a wise one from a better informed man; so, good Mr. Urban, call upon some of your many friends; and fix an opinion about it."

None of Mr. Urban's many friends, so far as I can find, chose to tell him "from what occasion" this ceremony arose, or to show how much a "better informed" man was that friend on this point.

Let us now, a century and a half later beg our own "philanthropic" editor to pass on to his own numerous readers this new word of good wishes and high hope. If he does, please pray for better luck than greeted this appeal of 1792.

As to arrangement of the entries: quotations stand in order of the crossing (not the date of publication); when the right date for the crossing could not be found, the entry is under date of publication. Crossings by sea come first, by far the largest part; after them, crossings on the Missouri river, then by air, over watersheds between water systems, and last in Scandinavian waters.

Now let us ask a moment for a personal word — nay, two. Working with these tales of life at sea has given plenty of reward, disappointment as well. Rewards show here; disappointment is the memory of how stupidly and callously so many writers have refused to give us one word about when and where they became “shellbacks,” what happened, what they did to the next fellows. Those disappointments, however, were then and will be for the long time to come accepted gratefully as I recall the stories they and the rest told of bravery and endurance and self sacrifice; of how men battled with wind and wave, with careless and poor work by ship builders and outfitters, with discouraging calms in torrid heat, with food and water unfit for humans, and even too little of what was parceled out to them. If you got wet you stayed wet until clothing dried, slept in it, worked in it, endured it as you did the vermin so constant and so ever-present. Yes, and how humanly did human nature show up as the deadly routine added to the physical strain on muscles, the no less wracking annoyance of those same faces, those same habits, those same gestures, those same stories, those same shipmates, watch after watch, week after week, month after month, below deck, on deck, no escaping it all. Can we wonder that nerves broke now and then, with fights among the crew, even with officers and men! Some pulled through, some found relief and went overboard sewed in sailcloth or canvas.

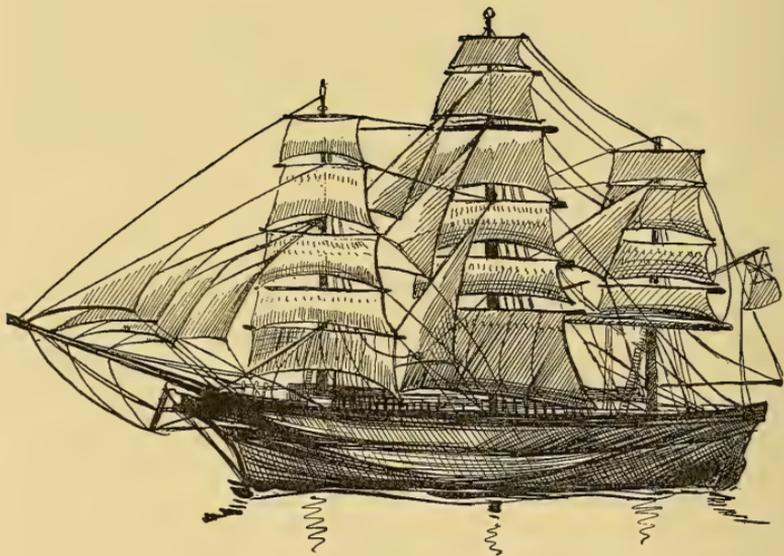
One more personal word. Bringing these notes together has cheered and amused me for many a year, adding plenty of information as well as edification. It must have had a beginning and a reason, somewhere, somehow, sometime, but that first thought about it is too far back in memory to take any kind of shape. It began probably in some “reference question” put to the Library in person or by letter. I did my best to find the answer, failed, promised to bear it in mind and report results. I did bear it in mind. I did have some results to show. Would that they could be given to the man that first voiced the question.

Another cheering and happy memory long, if not forever, to stay with me is the way fellow workers in the Library helped in my pleas for checking quotations, the way they noted stories I had overlooked; so too how those kind friends were matched by outsiders, folk with no more connection with such affairs than that they saw a harmless, if annoying, hobby rider trotting

his steed out on every possible occasion — not to mention impossibles now and then. To them all goes hearty thanks, warm assurance of appreciation, earnest hopes I may some day be able to return those favors and kindnesses. To list them all or even in part would call for more space than even the most soft-hearted or “philanthropic” editor would think of giving, even for a tale more appealing to more people or more important. Without such help these notes would have been shorter, fewer, farther from completeness than they now are hoped for. None of those kindly and ingenuous spirits could have had any idea that such a performance as this would result. On my shoulders alone must rest the blame.

Enough, however, for introduction. The waiter should serve the meal, not force the diner to wait while he spins his philosophy of eating and drinking, reminds the hungry victim where the fruit came from or how the meat is dressed or the salad is planned to fit in with the dessert. Turn now to the meal itself, even if it be far from a feast.





## THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

1529

Le mardy XI<sup>m</sup> jour de may, au matin, furent faits chevaliers environ cinquante de nos gens, et eurent chacun l'acollée en passant sous l'équateur, et fut chantée la messe de *Salve sancta parens* à notes pour la solennité du jour, et prismes un grand poisson nommé albacore et des bonnites, dont fut fait chaudière pour le souper en solennisant la fest de la chevalerie.

(Le discours de la navigation de Jean et Raoul Parmentier de Dieppe. Voyage à Sumatra en 1529; Description de l'isle de Saint-Dominigo. Publié par M. Schefer. Paris, 1883. p. 20. Recueil de voyages et de documents pour servir à l'histoire de la géographie.)

This curtain raiser, by Parmentier, is the earliest — so far as I know now — first-hand report of a ceremony. We see that as the ship crossed the line on the morning of May 11, some fifty were knighted by the usual accolade, a Mass was sung to mark the solemnity of the day, a big albacore caught and with some bonitos was set to help the jollity if not the solemnity of it all by sacrificing itself for the evening meal.

Quite good, but plenty of questions come to mind. Were the fifty chosen from crew alone, passengers excluded? (Does "nos gens" in French ship parlance refer usually to the crew?) How were the fifty picked? Green hands never this far south before, the usual choice? Did none escape, neither crew nor passenger? No suggestion here of buying freedom by paying a fine or offering a gift. Was the singing of a Mass part of the usual daily life or was it sung for this particular occasion on this day? Note how nothing is said as to the ceremony itself except the stroke of the sword on the back, the usual accolade for knighthood. No shaving, no baptising, no pranks? Note too how a ceremony like this is accepted as usual, normal, traditional, no explanation of what it means or why done. Who gave the accolade?

The worthy Parmentier, mathematician, map maker, navigator, scholar, was as devout as he was versatile. Witness the fervor of his *Description nouvelle des merveilles de ce mode, & de la dignite de l'homme, composee en rithme francoyse en maniere de exhortation*, Paris, 1531. Was it beneath his dignity to note such frivolities as an irreverent crew may have staged on this voyage? Did the readers he aimed at frown at mention in formal print of the modes and manners of the lower classes? We shall see later how superior and aloof are some of the nobility and gentry when they have to endure the pranks staged by rude sailors thinking they are doing something amusing or something they feel gives them some fun.

Some three centuries later we hear how young Charles Darwin notes his experience in his diary giving a refreshing tale of the ducking and frolicing, but the official account of the voyage of the *Beagle* says never a word about such things, quite properly for the formal record. And when Cook made his crossing he says nothing when writing as commander of the ship. Some of us, however, are happy that Sir Joseph Banks set the story down in some charming detail in his diary, which, to be sure, had to wait for publication almost to our own day.

French tales usually talk about "baptême" rather than accolades of knighthood, but the Italian encyclopedia in 1938, as already noted, says the French call us chevaliers of the sea once we have endured the crossing of equator or the Tropic.

And it is worthy to note too how the clergy look on the ceremony with approval or disapproval, largely a matter of personality, I suppose. Sometimes they forbid it as sacrilegious, more often they accept it, now and then enter into it all as harmless fun making. The first Russian crossing in 1803 speaks with particular care of the Mass sung then.

The marking of the "solennité du jour" by the "messe de *Salve sancta parens* à notes" does indeed show that Parmentier and his companions felt that something important had taken place, the first step into the new world where the sun stood in the north. So special an event called for special attention, even a high mass. That meant singing. Singing "à notes," my friend Dr. Otto Kinkeldey, learned and wise in musicology, tells me meant that "On this solemn occasion they must have had some among their company who were experienced singers, who could read music. They sang 'from notes.' The composition was not a simple plain song which might have been sung

1529, *continued*

from memory. It was a choral work for 3, 4, or 5 voices by some skilled composer, who made a polyphonic mass-setting based on the traditional plain song melody of *Salve sancta parens*. It was the regular practice in the sixteenth century and earlier to use a piece of plain song or even a tune of a secular song as the basis for artistic elaboration in a complicated contrapuntal or polyphonic composition for several voices."

The "messe" and the "solemnité du jour" fit neatly with the daily devotions of Columbus on his first voyage — and not unprobably on others — as noted already in quotation from Professor Samuel Eliot Morison's inviting *Admiral of the Ocean Sea*. It is well worth keeping in mind his telling how important a part religious ceremony played on shipboard — at least then — day by day. A voyage like this was a real event; the seaman was deeply religious; some formal notice of the step was called for.

An appreciation of "An explorer-poet: Jean Parmentier" by Professor J. C. Lapp (*Modern Language Quarterly*, Mar., 1945, v. 6, p. 83-92) pays fitting tribute to the man, his deeds, his poetry, his devoutness, his feeling about the majesty and the emotional aspects of the sea; one of the earliest minds I think of as noting the beauty as well as the terrors of the great waters.

As to the text M. Schefer writes in his Introduction (p. xviii) that "M. Estancelin . . . a publié en 1832 dans ses *Recherches sur les navigateurs normands*, le texte du voyage de Jean Parmentier à Sumatra, d'après la copie d'un manuscrit appartenant alors à M. Tarbe, libraire à Sens. Ce manuscrit, intitulé *Voyage aux Indes orientales*, Dieppe, 1529, est incorrect et presente des lacunes; j'en ai signalé les principales dans l'édition que je donne aujourd'hui d'après un manuscrit acquis par moi à Paris, il y a déjà de longues années . . . La relation du voyage de Parmentier et la 'description de l'isle de Saint-Dominigo' forment la fin du volume et comprennent soixante et onze feuillets de papier oriental de diverses couleurs, non chiffrés. L'écriture moulée est fort belle et date des premières années du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle."

The text is printed also in *Mélusine*, v. 2 (Paris, 1884-5), column 275, based on the 1832 issue. "Accollée," appears as "accollée," "albacore" as albatore;" also some changes in punctuation.

1557

Cedit iour donques quatrieme de Feurier, que nous passames le Centre du monde, les Matelots firēt les ceremonies par eux accoustumees en ce tant fascheux & dangereux passage. Assauoir, de lier de cordes & plonger en mer, ou bien noircir & barbouiller le visage avec vn vieux drappeau frotté au cul de la chaudiere, ceux qui n'ōt iamais passé l'Équator pour les en faire souuenir; toutesfois on se peut racheter & exempter de cela, cōme ie fis, en leur payant le vin.

(Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre dv Bresil, avtrement dite Amerique . . . par Iean de Léry. [LaRochelle,] 1578. p. 41.)

How long does it take to make tradition? Is twenty-eight years a long or a short time? Parmentier tells us that in 1529, they knighted the landlubbers, sang a Mass, this to mark the solemnity of the day and its happenings. Not one word about horseplay. In 1557 — according to de Léry — the "solemnity" was marked by the sailors following customs well established and recognized, sanctioned by tradition, differing from the performance of our own day only in the time and in the nationality of the players. Ducking, blacking faces, shaving — could the old tar of those days look at the high jinks aboard ship today, he would shake his head gravely and contemplatively as he said "Just as we did it. More men, more machinery. Right in line with the good old days and their ways. Just to give them something to remember. Buy a drink and you're let off!"

Did the twenty-eight years between 1529 and 1557 firmly fix the tradition? If it took more than that space of time, how much farther back is the beginning, and who started it, and when?

De Léry is happily revealing and human in plenty of ways. For instance, he tells how calms and contrary winds held them up, the heat spoiling the biscuits, and the water going so bad they had to hold their noses when they tried to drink it. He marvels at the way ships made of wood can stand the pounding of the sea, even when the storm is so heavy that seamen with long service

behind them dare not try to stand against it. He goes back to the Psalmist and to Job as he talks about seafaring folk and the terrors of the deep. With real glee he tells how Jean de Meun, the pilot, quite illiterate, but by experience wise about sea charts and astrolabes and Jacob's staffs, roundly put to shame a passenger puffed up with and proud of his book learning as he talked about the weather and life at sea.

The same text with minor variations of spelling and punctuation is found in other editions: French at Geneva, 1585, 1586, 1599, 1600, 1611; Dutch at Amsterdam, 1597; Latin at Geneva, 1586, 1594; German at Münster, 1794. A translation into Portuguese "integral e notas de Sérgio Milliet, segundo a edição de Paul Gaffarel com o Colóquio na língua brasileira e notas tupinológicas de Plínio Ayrosa" came out at São Paulo in 1941 as v. 7 of the *Biblioteca historica Brasileira*, edited by Rubens Borba de Moraes.

## 1583

The 24. of Aprill we fell upon the coaste of Guinea, which beginneth at nine degrees, and stretcheth untill wee come under the Equinoctiall, where wee have much thunder, lightning, and many showers of raine, with stormes of wind, which passe swiftly over, & yet fall with such force, that at every shower we are forced to strike sayle, and let the maine yeard fall to the middle of the mast, and many times cleane down, sometimes ten or twelve times every day: there wee finde a most extreame heate, so that all the water in the ship stinketh, whereby men are forced to stop their noses when they drinke, but when wee are past the Equinoctiall it is good againe, and the nearer wee are unto the land, the more it stormeth, raineth, thundreth and calmeth: so that most commonly the shippes are at the least two monthes before they can passe the line: . . .

The 26 of May wee passed the Equinoctiall line which runneth through the middle of the Iland of Saint Thomas, by the coast of Guinea, and then wee began to see the south star, and to loose the north star, and founde the sunne at twelve of the clocke at noone to be in the north, and after that we had a south east [wind, called a] general wind, which in those partes bloweth all the yeare through.

The 29 of May being Whitsonday, the ships of an ancient custome, doe use to chuse an Emperour among themselves, and to change all the officers in the ship, and to hold a great feast, which continueth three or foure days together, which wee observing chose an Emperour, and being at our banquet, by meanes of certaine words that passed out of some of their mouthes, there fell great strife and contention among us, which proceeded so farre, that the tables were throwne downe and lay on the ground, and at the least a hundred rapiers drawne, without respecting the Captaine or any other, for he lay under foote, and they trod upon him, and had killed each other, and thereby had cast the ship away, if the Archbishop had not come out of his chamber among them, willing them to cease, wherewith they stayed their hands, who presently commaunded every man on paine of death, that all their Rapiers, Poynyardes, and other weapons should bee brought into his chamber, which was done, whereby all thinges were pacified, the first and

1583, *continued*

principall beginners being punished and layd in irons, by which means they were quiet.

(The voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies. From the old English translation of 1598. The first book, containing his description of the East in two volumes. Edited, the first volume by the late Arthur Coke Burnell, Ph.D., C.I.E., of the Madras civil service. London: Hakluyt Society, 1885. Works, no. 70. v. 1, p. 15-18.)

Worth more than passing note is this classic in the tales of the expansion of western Europe into the Far East by way of the sea. We get here a vivid picture of the discomforts of equatorial crossings. The "ancient custome" of choosing "an Emperour" and changing "all the officers in the ship" gives more detail about the performance than we get otherwise. So too the holding of "a great feast, which continueth three or foure days together" is unusual, most of the stories saying clearly and plainly that the affair was over quickly with prompt return to normal ship's life and routine. With the good humored give-and-take of the dinner table turning into a drunken brawl, with the captain lying "under foote," it is scarcely surprising to hear that they nearly "thereby had cast the ship away."

This Hakluyt Society edition (p. 17) has the following footnote to the part the Archbishop played in quieting the riot and ordering "euery man on paine of death" to stack his side arms in the Archbishop's cabin:

"This is mistranslated, no doubt for political reasons. It should be: 'Had not the Archbishop come out of his cabin into the crowd with great lamentations and gestures, on which they began to be quiet, and he ordered them, on pain of excommunication, to bring all rapiers, poniards, and arms to his cabin, which was at once done, with which all was again at peace.' The Archbishop's threat of 'pain of death' is absurd, but was probably thought quite correct in England in 1598. Excommunication by Rome was then practically known, and death was a common punishment for trifling offences, and the threat (as really made) would not have made the good Portuguese prelate look so odious. Linschoten's original Dutch is: 'So den Aerts-bisschop met en hadde ghecomen uyt zijn camer onder den hoop met groot ghecijt ende ghebeyr, waerover zy begosten stil te houden, den welcken terstont gheboodt op de verbuerte van den Ban, datse alle Rappieren, Pongiarden, ende al 'tgheweer souden brenghen in zyn Camer, 'twelck terstontd gheschiede, waer mede alle dinck weder in vrede quam.' These foolish doings on crossing the Line continued down to quite recent times.

"The Latin (1599) has: 'nisi Archiepiscopus ex cubiculo erumpens, magnis clamoribus seditionem composuisset, ensesque omnes ac pugiones abstulisset, communitatem excommunicationis notam in eos, qui novas res moliri conarentur.

There is neither need nor space here for anything more than a few notes about early editions of this best seller of four centuries ago. The Dutch original *Itinerario, uoyage ofte Schipvaert . . . naer Oost ofte Portugaels Indien* is dated Amsterdam, 1596, with later issues of 1605, 1614, 1623, 1644. The Latin *Navigatio ac itinerarium in orientalem sive Lusitanorum Indiam* came out at The Hague, 1599; the French *Histoire de la navigation* bears Amsterdam for place and 1610, 1619, 1638 for dates. There are many later reprints in whole or in part.

## THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

1615

[August] The 18. and 19. we lay by the wind, resolving to hold our course for *Sierra Liona* . . . and were forced to lie by the weather, it being then too late to go speedily vnder the Line . . . .

[October] The 19. and 20. about noone we past the equinoctiall line, and had a south east and a south southeast winde vntill the 24.

(Willem Cornelisz Schouten. *The relation of a wonderfull voiage*. London, 1619. p. 5 and 13.)

Thirty-two years before this crossing another Netherlander saw the sun shift in the heaven, and set down then his tale of how the ships "of an ancient custome, do chuse an Emperour . . . and to hold a great feast, which continueth three or foure days together."

Linschoten's sounds of revelry are not rivaled by Schouten of Hoom on this voyage when he discovered and named Cape Horn. We know too little about Schouten to dare venture a guess whether he cared too much for safety of his ship to waste a few moments in sailors' frivolities, or was genial enough to let the crew have its horseplay, navigator enough to log only the essentials and to pass over any mention of trivials. We do find notes of four other crossings by him, all told in as matter of fact fashion as the first, though with the 5th, on 24 April 1617 we get a trifle more of the human interest: "The 24. in the morning, wee were the fift time vnder the Equinoctiall line, and the 28. we saw the north starre, which wee had not seene in 20. monthes before" (p. 82).

The Dutch original "Iovnael ofte beschryvinghe van de wonderlijcke reyse ghedaen door Willem Cornelisz Schouten van Hoom; inde jaren 1615, 1616, en 1617," came out at Amsterdam in 1618. The interest in it and the recognition of its meaning to navigation are shown by the speed of the translations: "Novi freti, a parte meridionali freti Magellanicci," Amsterdam, 1619; "Diarium vel descriptio . . . Jtineris," Amsterdam, 1619; "Journal, ou description du merveilleux voyage," Amstredam (*sic*), 1618; "Iovrnal, ov relation exacte dv voyage," Paris, 1618; and the London issue in 1619.

1642

On the 16th of August, 1642, we sailed from Stockholm, in the Lord's name, for America, on board the ship *Fame*, and on the 17th, we arrived at *Dahlehamn*. On the 3d of September, we left that place, and on the 6th, arrived at *Copenhagen*. On the 8th, we landed at *Helsingör*, and on the 12th, at *Gottenburg*. On the 1st of November, at noon, we left *Gottenburg Castle*; and on the 14th, at about four o'clock in the morning, we were in the *Spanish Sea*. On the 21st, about mid-day, we sailed along the coast of *Portugal*, where the crew performed the ceremony of tropical baptism. It is the custom with seamen, when they cross the equinoctial line, to dip in the water those who have never crossed it before. One may be exempted from that ceremony, by giving a little money to the sailors, and in that case they receive only a little sprinkling.

(A short description of the Province of New Sweden . . . By Thomas Campanius Holm. . . . Translated . . . by Peter S. Du Ponceau. *Memoirs of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania*. v. 3, p. 70. Philadelphia, 1834.)

1642, *continued*

Enough minor variations justify adding the original Swedish as found on page 63 of Kort beskrifning om provincien Nya Sverige uti America . . . utzirad af Thomas Campanius Holm. Stockholm: Tryckt uti Kongl. boktr., 1702:

Anno 1642, den 16. Augusti, begofwe wj oss i Herrans Namn uppå resan ifrån Stockholm til America på Skeppet Fama, och kommo 17. til Dahlehamn. Den 3. Sept. lade wj derifrån och kommo 6. til Köpenhamn. Den 8. kommo wj om aftonen til Hälsingor och 12. til Göteborg. Den 1. November lade wj ut ifrån Göteborgs Slott kl. 12. och kommo 14. i Spanska Siön, om mårgonen kl. 4. wid pass. Den 21. middagstjd seglade wj Portugal förbj, der the skulle döpas (ty Skeppare hafwa en sedwana, at när the komma under *Lineam Æquinoctialem*, pläga the doppa dem uti wattnet som tillförene intet hafwa passerat *Linien*: den som för sådant wil blifwa fri, han måste spändera drikspenningar, så warder han allenast med wattn öfwerstäncker) det låg på vänster sidan om oss söder ut.

Our first performance for the crossing of the Tropic of Cancer rather than the equator. Other references to the variation turn up later.

1645

Je vous diray, Messieurs, comme c'est vne règle infaillible à tous ceux qui n'ont iamais passé les susdits Ras Blanchards, Pic de Cannaries, & Cap de Blanc, ou Tropiques, & Equinoxe, d'estre en chacun de ces lieux ondoyés, ou baptisés d'une tassée, ou sceillée d'eau de mer sur la teste nuë, comme par forme de Baptesme, fief, ou recognoissance à *Neptune*, comme s'il nous calmoit là ses flots, & fauorisast de vents propices, & fauorables à y cingler, & les passer sans aucun danger, bien qu'ils soyent dangereux en leurs approches, & veritablement espineux; & ie trouue que ces susdittes ceremonies sont plustost vn effect d'Idolatrie, qu'un recours à la Diuinité, ayans accoustumé de les practiquer, pour se ressouuenir d'y auoir passé, en y apportant mesmes plusieurs grandes ceremonies, plustost niaiseries, lesquelles toutesfois ie ne dois obmettre, pour estre icelles comme de l'essence d'une longue navigation; me faschant neantmoins de noircir la blancheur de ce papier de semblables extrauagances, lesquelles ne visent, & ne tendent toutes que pour donner du plaisir aux spectateurs, comme Pilottes, & Mattelots, ausquels il faut faire des presens, de quelques bouteilles d'eaux de vie, ou d'autres boissons corrosiues, qui toutesfois par apres nous sont dispersées par brigades, ou plats, esquels on est sept és Nauires François, & que cinq és Anglois, trois Flamans, & autres. Nul ne s'en peut exempter, non pas mesmes le Capitaine du bord, ny les Pilottes, sinon qu'ils y eussent passé; où lors du susdit Baptesme, l'on nous fait vne noirceur au milieu du front, en forme de croix, & ce du suif du cul de la poisle; & pour ceux qui ne font quelque liberalité, en ces occurrences, ils sont comme presque noyés d'eau sur le Tillac, où l'on leur lie & attache le bras avec vne cordellette, ou fil de carret, que l'on leur tire en suite par vne petite pollie, sans faire toutesfois du mal, & alors vn Mattelot, lequel est monté sur l'affut d'un Canon, leur verse vn plein bidon d'eau de mer, goutte à goutte dans le bras gauche; ce qui vient à distiller le long d'iceluy iusques au cœur, & à l'heure l'eau si semble, leur comme congelle le sang dans leurs veines, ce

qui leur cause des frissons, & certains tremousemens sympathiques de tous leurs membres, & tels, que ie ne vous les sçauois verbalement exprimer; quoy que par vn effect de ma curiosité, i'aye voulu subir cette peine; c'est pourquoy, ie ne sçauois consacrer à l'oubly, ce susdit procedé, quoy que risible, & du tout inepte . . .

(Guillaume Coppier. *Histoire et voyage des Indes Occidentales; et de plusieurs autres regions maritimes et esloignées, diuisé en deux liures.* Lyon, 1645. p. 47-48.)

The decidedly rambling text needs no translation in full (almost defies it); may well be summarized thus: I will say, gentlemen, that it is an unbroken rule for all that have never passed the Ras Blanchards [Pointe du Raz], the Peak of the Canaries, Cape Blanc, or the Tropics or the equator, at each of those places to be baptised by a cupful of sea water dashed on his bare head. This form of baptism is in the way of paying homage to or recognition of Neptune as if asking him then and there to calm the waves and give us favoring winds to let us pass with no danger; for these places are dangerous to approach, really prickly. I feel these ceremonies are rather real bits of idolatry than prayers to God. We have grown used to such performances as reminders of our having passed those places; and in our staging of such ceremonies, really tomfolleries. I should not fail to speak about them as necessary on long voyages, though it annoys me to blacken white paper with the tale of such excesses. They are planned and aimed at nothing more than making fun for the participants, to whom you have to give something like bottles of brandy or some other ardent liquor; which with us is divided among the ship's messes by sevens, five by the English, three by the Flemings and others. Nobody can escape, not even the captain or the pilot, unless he has gone through it before. When staging the baptising they blacken your face by a cross smudged on from the soot on bottom of the kettle. Stingy fellows are trussed up tightly with ropes and then a sailor seated on a gun carriage empties on them, drop by drop, on the left arm, a whole tank full of sea water and after an hour or so it congeals his blood, brings on shivers all over and tremblings of all his members too severe for me to tell about. Out of curiosity I wanted to undergo such a punishment, and as result I have something never to forget, even if it is ludicrous and unfitting.

In this account, just summarized, the drop-by-drop torture is unusual, indeed unique, so far as I recall; and I wonder if the text really means to say that whenever you passed the Raz (the exit from the English Channel) or the Peak of the Canaries or Cape Blanche this full ordeal was always inflicted?

1654

La troisième chose, est vne autant ancienne que ridicule & plaisante coustume, pratiquée à l'endroit de ceux qui font de longs voyages sur mer. C'est qu'arriuant sous la ligne du Tropique du cancer (ou deux fois l'année on a le Soleil verticalement opposé, sans qu'à midy il puisse faire ombre à vne chose droite.) On fait de grands preparatifs, comme pour celebrer quelque feste, ou plutost quelque Bachadale [misprint for Bachanale]. Tous les officiers du nauire s'habillent le plus grotesquement et bouffonnement qu'ils peuent. La plupart sont armez de tridents, de harpons, et autres instrumens de marine: les autres courent aux poiles, broches, chaudrons, l'eschefrites, et semblables vstensilles de cuisine; ils se barboüillent le visage avec le noir qu'ils prennent au dessous des marmittes, et se rendent si hideux et si laids, qu'on les estimeroit de veritables demons. Le Pilote les met tous en rang, & marche à la teste, tenant d'vne main vne petite carte marine, & de l'autre vne astrolabe, ou baston de Jacob, qui sont les marques de sa dignité. Cependant, les tambours & les trompettes sonnent en grande alle-

1654, *continued*

gresse, & cette bouffonne compagnie traissaille de ioye, pendant que ceux qui n'ont pas encore passé le tropique, se dépouillent et se disposent à estre baignez: elle fait deux ou trois tours en ce mascarade équipage, apres lesquels le Pilote prend séance sur la damette, d'où il despesche incontinent deux de ses officiers, habillez comme je l'ay décrit, vers le plus apparent de ceux qui doivent estre lauez, en suite le contraignent & tous les autres pareillement, à venir prester serment sur la carte, qu'ils feront observer les mesmes choses à ceux qui passeront en leur compagnie; ce qu'ayant tous iuré, on leur fait promettre de donner quelqu'aumosne aux pauvres, & de contribuer à la bonne chere de deux iours, par quelque bouteille de vin, langue de boeuf, jambon, ou autres raffraichissemens. Ce qu'estant fait, on commence à baigner. Nous fusmes traitez fort courtoisement, et avec plus de ciuilité que nous n'en attendions des gens de mer, ils nous versent seulement vn verre d'eau sur la teste: mais tous les autres passagers, hommes et femmes sans exception, furent tant lauez, qu'en verité ils me faisoient pitié. On les plongeoit trois ou quatre fois dans vne grande cuve pleine d'eau de mer, où on les laissoit assez long-temps boire tout leur saouil; au sortir de là, on leur jettoit une telle quantité d'eau sur la teste, qu'une demy-heure apres ils ne se pouuoient pas reconnoistre, tant ils en estoient estourdis. En fin, toute cette ceremonie se termine par des resiouyssances & débauches excessiues.

Je me suis fort curieusement enquis à plusieurs gens de marine, pour apprendre quelque chose de l'institution de cette coustume, sans en auoir iamais pû tirer vne bonne raison. Les Hollandois tiennent que c'est pour se garantir de plusieurs maladies qu'on pourroit contracter par ce grand changement de climat: c'est pourquoy ils se baignent tous dans la mer, aussi bien ceux qui y ont desia passé que les autres. Cette raison n'est pas conuainquante; car il ne paroist pas que ceux qui ne se baignent point, soient plus tourmentez et affligez que les autres: Pour moi, ie crois que cela vient de ce que ceux qui furent les premiers si hardis, que de pousser leurs voiles iusques dans les Zones torrides, lesquelles iusqu'alors auoient esté tenuës par saint Augustin, & beaucoup d'autres, pour des lieux secs, steriles & inhabitables: Ces gens, dis-je, se voyant comme entrer dans vn autre monde, firent vne sorte d'allusion au baptême que l'on donne aux Chrestiens apres leur naissance: & en effet, on se sert encore du mot de baptiser sous la tropique, pour exprimer cette ceremonie.

(Histoire générale des isles de S. Christophe, de la Gvadeloupe, de la Martinique, et avtres dans l'Amérique . . . Par le R. P. Iean Baptiste dv Tertre, Religieux de l'Ordre des FF. Prescheurs. Paris, 1654. p. 79-82.)

Several things stand out to give particular interest to this. First, the writer is a member of the Order of Preaching Friars. Next, in 1654, almost a century and a half after Parmentier, he calls it "vne autant ancienne que ridicule & plaisante coustume," both ridiculous and amusing. Third, the ceremony then was much the same as today: elaborate preparation, every one in fantastic dress, armed with many kinds of instruments, faces brightened with soot, a grand procession, the head man — pilot, here — on a throne, victims brought before him to swear they would insist on like treatment for all to follow, care for the poor, pay their share by a bottle

of wine or something equally pleasing, then take their duckings, finally "toute cette ceremonie se termine par des resiouyssances & débauches excessives."

Most important, however, is his telling how carefully he had asked for word as to how it all began and what it meant, with no satisfaction. Netherlanders explain it as insurance against tropical disease, the reason for their sea bathing. Dutertre is not convinced, he noting no difference between bathers and non-bathers as to health. For himself he thinks it all goes back to those hardy souls that first dared to venture into the regions deemed by St. Augustine and many others dry, sterile, uninhabitable lakes. When those adventurers found themselves in a new world they worked out a sort of baptism such as is given to Christians soon after birth, "et en effet, on se sert encore du mot de baptiser sous la tropique, pour exprimer cette ceremonie."

That was the best he could do 125 years after Parmentier, and today, 300 years after Dutertre, we can say little more as to documentary or legal proof. His surmises differ little from ours.

Note too how the worthy cleric felt no need to object to the "baptising" as sacrilegious; indeed he is one of the first to use the phrase "baptiser sous la tropique," today more usual in French than the English "crossing the line."

## 1658

Ondertusschen behielden wy noch de gewenste Noord-ooste wint, soo dat verhoopen voorspoedigh de *Linie* te passeeren: alwaer de Schepen somtijts, door stilten ofte contrarie winden, een goet getal van dagen komen te consumeeren, met een gevolg van rasende koortsen en brandige sieckten in't volck, causeerende wegens d'onlijdelijcke hitte, waer door en bloet en geesten nootsakelijck moeten komen te ontstecken. Doch ons belangende, quamen voorspoedigh, en noch in't laetste van May, soo verre in't Zuyden, dat op de middagh de Son begonden in't Norrden van ons te sieh; passerende kort daer aen de *Linie Aequinoctial*; aldaer onsen Macker de *Fluyt Leerdam*, de Cours twee streeken westelijcker setten.

(Wouter Schoutens Oost-Indische voyagie. t'Amsterdam, 1676. p. 4.)

It was another Schouten, Willem Cornelisz Schouten, of Hoorn, who crossed in 1615 and told us nothing more about the event than that he crossed about noon and had a south southeast wind. His discovery of Cape Horn was recognized at the time as of real importance. That seems to justify including it in this gathering, even if it tells us nothing about how or whether the shift in the sun was marked.

Once more does a Schouten, Wouten Schouten this time, sail to the East Indies; once more does a Schouten cross the line and say nothing about it other than to give thanks for his good luck in making speedy passage. Though neither Schouten tale tells of special ceremonies to mark the crossing, it seems well to include them as typical logbook entries of outstanding voyages; though Walter Schouten, to be sure, does talk more about wind and weather condition as affecting health and conduct than we find in the usual log. The 1658 voyage was important enough to call for a German translation printed at Amsterdam the same year as the Dutch original, and by the same publishers, Jacob van Meurs and Johannes van Someren. The German translation done by "J. D." runs as follows for this paragraph:

Inzwischen hatten wir den Nord-Osten Wind stets nach unserm willen, so, dass wir die Hoffnung machten, die Linie glücklich und bald zu erreichen: woselbst die Schiffe bissweiln, aus mangel des Windes, still liegen bleiben müssen, oder durch wiedriges Wetter lange Zeit aufgehalten werden, wodurch allerley hitzige und tobsüchtige Fieber und Kranckheiten verursacht werden; massen durch die unleidliche Hitze, das Geblüt entzündet wird. Was uns betrifft, schiffen wir glücklich under weg, und kamen noch

1658, continued

in dem zu endlauffenden *May*, so weit ins Süden hinein, dass wir am Mittag die Sonne in Norden vor uns, ansichtig wurden: worauff wir kurtz hernach die Tag- und Nacht gleichmachende Linie besegelten; es beliebte aber unserm Mitgefährten in der *Fluyte Leerdam*, seine Fahrt zween Grad Westlicher, als wir, einzurichten.

(Ost-Indische Reyse . . . Alles beschrieben durch M<sup>ster</sup> Walter Schultzen . . . aus dem niederländischen ins hochteutsche übersetzt durch J. D. Jn Amsterdam, 1676. p. 3.)

So too the version in French:

Cependant faisant toujours route, à la faveur d'un vent de Nord-est, nous avançâmes tellement vers le Sud, qu'à midi nous commençâmes à voir le Soleil au Nord, & peu après nous achevâmes de passer la Ligne équinoxiale . . .

On ne peut passer sous la Ligne avec moins d'incommodité que nous fîmes, ce qu'il faut attribuer au peu de tems que nous fûmes dessous, étant poussé d'un vent favorable. Car il n'y a nul lieu de douter de ce que tant de gens ont dit & écrit touchant les peines qu'ils avoient souffertes en la passant. C'est qu'ils y avoient demeuré un tems considérable, étant arrêté par les calmes, ou par des vents contraires. Or la chaleur se faisant encore plus sentir & étant plus incommode par le calme que par un autre tems, il est certain qu'elle met le sang & les esprits dans une trop grande agitation; ce qui engendre des fièvres ardentes, ou cause un relâchement dans toute l'œconomie du corps, d'où s'ensuit l'état dont se sont plaints ceux qui n'ont pas eu, comme nous, le bonheur de traverser promptement un climat si dangereux.

(Voyage de Gautier Schouten aux Indes Orientales. In: [Renneville, R. A. C. de] Recueil des voiage. A Amsterdam, 1702-1707. v. 6, p. 5-6.)

With minor variations of spelling the same text appears in *Voyage de Gautier Schouten aux Indes Orientales, commencé l'an 1658. & fini l'an 1665*. Traduit du hollandais . . . Nouvelle édition. A Rouen, 1725. v. 1, p. 6-7. Note the difference between the second paragraph in the French text and the Dutch or German.

1663

La Chaloupe revenue à bord, nous mîmes à la voile pour continuer notre route, que nous fîmes heureusement, à l'exception de la Ligne, où le calme nous prit. Durant quatre jours, nous y souffrîmes beaucoup, de l'excessive chaleur qu'il y faisoit. Les Matelots eurent le temps de faire le Baptême impertinent, qu'ils ont accoutumé de faire en ce lieu. Cette cérémonie superstitieuse a été décrite tant de fois par ceux qui ont donné la Relation de leur Voyage au Public, que je crois qu'il est inutile d'en parler ici; je me contenterai de dire, que tous ceux qui n'ont jamais passé la Ligne, sont obligés de souffrir qu'on les baptise, c'est à-dire, qu'on les prenne par les pieds, & qu'on les trempe dans une grande cuve d'eau par trois fois; après avoir juré qu'ils observeront à l'égard des autres cette coutume inviolable: en faisant ce serment, ils ont la main sur des Cartes Hydrographiques, ou sur les Registres

du Bâtiment. Pour s'en exempter, on donne quelque chose aux Matelots, qui en ce cas ne vous jettent que quelque potée d'eau sur la tête. Les Aumôniers & les Missionnaires les plus zelez, ont beau Zeur représenter la maniere indigne, dont ils prophanent le Sacrement le plus saint de notre Religion; jusqu'à present ils y ont perdu le fruit de leur exhortation.

(Carpeau Du Saussay. Voyage de Madagascar . . . par M. de V. Paris, 1722. p. 57-58.)

Thanks to calms, the crew had time to do their baptising, quite unfitting but always their custom at this point. This superstitious rite has been described so often by other travelers as to make it hardly worth mention here. Let me say, however, that everyone that has not crossed the line before must be baptised, that is to say, be grabbed by the feet and soaked thrice in a big bath, first having sworn on the ship's chart or register that he will do the same to everyone else that follows him. Tip the sailors, and you can buy yourself off, having only a bit of water dropped on your head. Really zealous clergymen protest it all as a sacrilege on our most sacred religious rite, but so far their protest has no fruit to show.

1666

Wee set sail from *Havre de Grace*, in *France*, in a Ship called *St. John*, the second day of *May*, in the year 1666. Our Vessel was equipp't with eight and twenty Guns, twenty Mariners, and two hundred and twenty Passengers . . . Having stor'd our selves with fresh Provisions at this place, we prosecuted our Voyage, designing to pass by the *Ras of Fonteneau*, and not expose our selves to the *Sorlingues*, fearing the English Vessels that were crusing thereabouts to meet us. This River *Ras* is of a current very strong and rapid, which rowling over many Rocks, disgorgeth it self into the Sea, on the coast of *France*, in the latitude of eight and forty degrees, and ten minutes. For which reason this passage is very dangerous; all the Rocks as yet, being not thoroughly known.

Here, I shall not omit to mention the ceremony, which at this passage, and some other places, is used by the Mariners, and by them called *Baptism*, altho it may seem, either little to our purpose, or of no use. The Masters Mate cloathed himself with a ridiculous sort of garment, that reached unto his feet, and on his head he put a sutable Cap, which was made very burlesque. In his right hand he placed a naked wooden sword; and, in his left, a pot full of ink. His face was horribly blackt with soot, and his neck adorn'd with a Collar of many little pieces of wood. Being thus apparell'd, he commanded to be call'd before him every one of them, who had never passed that dangerous place before. And then causing them to kneel down in his presence, he made the sign of the Cross upon their foreheads, with ink; and gave each one a stroke on the shoulders with his wooden sword. Mean while the standers by did cast a Bucket of water, upon every mans head; and this was the conclusion of the ceremony. But, that being ended, every one of the Baptised, is obliged to give a Bottle of *Brandy* for his offering; placing it nigh the main Mast, and without speaking a word; even those, who have no such liquor, being not excused from this performance. In case the Vessel never passed that way before, the Captain is obliged to distribute some Wine among the

1666, *continued*

Mariners, and other people, in the Ship. But, as for other gifts, which the newly baptized do frequently offer, they are divided among the old Sea-men; and of them, they make a Banquet, among themselves.

The Hollanders likewise do use to baptize such as never passed that way before. And not only at the passage abovementioned, but also at the Rocks called *Berlingues*, nigh the coast of *Portugal*, in the latitude of thirty nine degrees, and forty minutes, (as being a passage very dangerous, especially by night, when, through the obscurity thereof, the Rocks are not distinguishable, by reason the Land is very high,) they use some such ceremony. But their manner of *Baptizing* is much distinct from that we have described above, performed by the French. He therefore, that is to be baptized, is fast'ned, and hoised up three times at the main yard's end, as if he were a Criminal. If he be hoised the fourth time, in the name of the Prince of *Orange*, or of the Captain of the Vessel, his honour is more than ordinary. Thus they are dipped, every one, several times in the main Ocean. But he that is the first dipp'd, hath the honour of being saluted with a Gun. Such as are not willing to fall, are bound to pay twelve pence, for their ransom: if he be an Officer in the Ship, two shillings: and if a Passenger, according to their pleasure. In case the Ship did never pass that way before, the Captain is bound to give a small Runlet of Wine; which if he doth not perform, the Mariners may cut off the Stem of the Vessel. All the profit, which accrueth by this ceremony, is kept by the Masters Mate; who after reaching their Port, doth usually lay it out in wine, which is drank amongst the ancient Seamen. Some will say this ceremony was instituted by the Emperour *Charls* the Fifth; howsoever it is not found amongst his Laws. But here I leave these customes of the Sea; and shall return unto our Voyage. . . .

This uncouthsom weather being spent, we had again the use of very favourable gales untill we came unto the Tropick of *Cancer*. This Tropick is nothing else, but an imaginary circle, which Astrologers have invented in the Heavens, and serveth as a period to the progress of the Sun towards the North-pole. It is placed in the latitude of three and twenty degrees, and thirty minutes, under the Line. Here we were baptized the second time, after the same manner as before. The French do alwayes perform this Ceremony at this Tropick; as also under the Tropick of *Capricornus* towards the South.

(Bucaniers of America: or, A true account of the most remarkable assaults committed of late years upon the coasts of the West-Indies, by the bucaniers of Jamaica and Tortuga, both English and French . . . Written originally in Dutch, by John Esquemeling . . . and thence translated into Spanish . . . Now faithfully rendred into English. London: Printed for William Crooke, 1684-85. p. 1-6.)

Alexander Olivier Exquemelin (made John Esquemeling in the English translation of 1684) must have been a doughty warrior if he carried a sword as effective as his pen. He is the first to tell about the passing of the Ras as place for the ceremony. So too, with Dutertre, he shows more than passing curiosity as to the beginning of it all. Not satisfied with laying it to the credit of

Charles the Fifth, he seems to have gone behind the returns and himself looked at, or got someone else to go through, the "Laws" of the Emperor. He tells too that the French have the same performance at the Tropic of Capricorn. The French translation of Esquemeling adds "sous la ligne Equinoxiale" to the two tropics. (p. 5.) With the Buccaneer interests, aims, hopes, plans, prayers centered in the West Indies it is but natural to find no first-hand word in Esquemeling about the crossing of the equator. The French has another touch, not in the English, when it tells how "Le Contre-Maître du vaisseau s'habille grotesquement avec une longue robe, un bonnet sur sa teste, & une fraize à son col, composée de poulies & de certaines boules de bois appellées en termes maritimes *Pommes de Raques*." (p. 4.)

As with Linschoten and Schouten it is needless to try to give more than an outline of editions of the original text and its translations: *De Americaensche zee-roovers* came out at Amsterdam in 1678. *Die americanische See-Räuber* at Nürnberg in 1679, *Piratas de la America* at Colonia Agrippina in 1681, *Bucaniers of America* at London in 1684-85; *Histoire des aventuriers qui se sont signalez dans les Indes* at Paris in 1686.

Mélusine, v. 2 (1884-5) column 275-6, reprints in part from the Paris edition of 1775 and includes the following: "A l'égard des garçons au-dessous de quinze ans, ils les mettent sous des mannes d'osier et leur jettent plusieurs seaux d'eau sur le corps. Ils en font de même pour tous les animaux qui sont dans le navire. . . Les Hollandois ne font cette cérémonie qu'au passage du *Raz* et des *Barlingots* ou rochers qui sont devant la rivière de Lisbonne, en Portugal, et encore à l'entrée de la mer Baltique, qu'ils nomment le *Zund*. . . Les Hollandais tiennent que l'eau qu'on jette sur les personnes qui doivent passer la ligne les garantit de plusieurs maladies qu'elles pourraient contracter par le changement de climat, et pour ce sujet presque tous se baignent dans la mer, tant ceux qui ont passé sous la ligne que ceux qui n'y ont point encore passé."

Note how under 1690 we get a similar story of the threat to the captain of a ship first crossing the line if he fails to "give something to save the beakhead of his ship." So too, the word about the Tagus river for Portugal and the entrance to the Baltic.

## 1667

Les Portugais ont accoutumé de faire certaines rejoüissances ou Festes pour demander à Dieu l'heureux sucez d'un voyage si dangereux. Ils ne manquent pas aussi d'observer cette ancienne coutume: Ceux qui n'ont jamais esté sous la Ligne sont obligez de payer à ceux du vaisseau quelque argent, quelque chose à manger, ou quelqu'autre marchandise, sans qu'aucun en soit exempté, quoy que ce soient mesmes des Capucins, desquels ils prennēt des Chapelets, Agnus Dei, ou choses séblables, qui estant mises à l'encan, du provenu on en fait dire des Messes pour les Ames du Purgatoire. S'il s'en trouve quelqu'un d'avaricieux qui leur dispute ce tribut, les Mariniers vestus en Sergēs le cōduisent garrotté devant un tribunal où est assis un Marinier en robe, qui faisant l'Office de Juge l'interroge, l'écoute & prononce Sentence contre luy, d'estre plongé trois fois dans la mer en cette maniere. Il y a une polie de fer attachée au traversier de l'arbre: on passe une corde dont le Criminel est lié, & laquelle estant lâchée on le laisse aller trois fois sous l'eau, & il ne manque gueres dy avoir toujours quelqu'un pour servir ainsi de passe-temps aux autres. On pratique encore le mesme au passage du Destroit de Gibraltar & du Cap de bōne Esperāce.

(Michel Ange de Gattine, & Denys de Carli de Plaisance. Relation cvrievse et nouvelle d'un voyage de Congo. Fait és années. 1666 & 1667. Lyon, 1680. p. 10-12.)

This is the story of some fifteen Capuchins sent as missionaries to the Congo under Louis XIV, Alexander VII then Pope. Their privileges are set forth in detail in their "patentes." They may forgive all sins except bigamy and murder, may marry, give Masses, wear secular dress when neces-

1667, *continued*

sary, do various other things. The list ends with the privilege of reading forbidden books — except anything by Machiavelli.

They sailed from Genoa to Lisbon, thence on a Portuguese ship bound for the Congo via Brazil. Favorable winds helped with speedy passage from Lisbon, taking only three months. Calms near the equator, however, held them up and gave unbearable heat, no sleep, worms in food, for fifteen long August days.

As to the crossing, the tale is quite simple: the Portuguese always mark the crossing by prayers for safe passage on so dangerous a voyage; on your first crossing you have to give something for prayers for souls in Purgatory, money, something to eat, anything that can be used or be sold at auction to raise money for the crew; even the Capuchins, sworn to poverty, can give rosaries or other religious objects. Breathes there a soul too stingy to pay, he is bound and brought before one of the crew robed as a judge and seated on a throne, who questions him, listens to him, then sentences him to be ducked thrice in the sea. The victim is bound to a staff and crosspiece, then is bathed and baptised well. Someone always gives the crew this sort of fun. The same ceremony marks the passage of the Pillars of Hercules and the Cape of Good Hope.

A question or two comes to mind in connection with this tale. Does Michael Angelo of Gattine say this is what happened when he crossed the line? Or, does he set it forth here just as a matter of common knowledge? Was it staged this time as he crossed the equator or first when he passed from the Mediterranean to the open ocean?

His whole tale is lively, shows keen interest in the daily life at sea, tells how the flying fish are preyed on by sharks. The preface says the work was translated into French by a "Scavant Historien" too modest to let his name be used.

The book is listed in both Bibliothèque Nationale and British Museum catalogues. The former enters it under "Guattini, Le P[ère] Michel Angelo de." *Viaggio del Padre Michael Angelo de Guattini et del P. Dionigi de Carli da Piacenza . . . dal porto di Genova allà città di Loanda . . . con una fedele narrativa delli paesi del Congo*, came out at Bologna in 1674. The British Museum catalogue lists also an edition of Venice, 1679, and an English edition "translated from the Italian" in 1732 in Churchill's *Voyages*.

1678

BAPTESME du Tropique, ou de la Ligne Equinoctiale. C'est une cérémonie prophane & ridicule; mais d'un usage inviolable parmy les Gens de l'Equipage, qui la pratiquent indispensablement dans la route des Indes Orientales, sur ceux qui pour la première-fois de leur vie vont passer le Tropique, ou la Ligne. Chaque Nation la pratique diversement: & mesme les Equippages d'une mesme Nation l'exercent en différentes manières. Voicy une des plus communes parmy les Equippages François. Pour préparatif, on range sur le Tillac, tant à Stribord, qu'à Basbord, des bailles pleines d'eau de la Mer, & bordées par les Matelots rangés en deux hayes, chacun un Seau à la main. Le Maistre-Valet vient au pied du grand Mats, le visage barboüillé, & le corps revestu de quantité de Cables roulés tout autour, dont il y en a mesme quelques-uns qui luy pendent des bras. Il est suivy de cinq ou six Matelots équipés de mesme, & tient entre les mains quelque Livre de Marine, pour représenter le Livre des Evangiles, & d'ordinaire c'est l'Hidrographie du pere Fourmier, le Flambeau de la Navigation, ou le Journal du Pilote. L'Homme qui doit estre baptisé se vient mettre à genoux devant le Maistre-valet, qui luy faisant mettre la main sur ce prétendu Evangile, l'oblige à jurer solemnellement & de bonne foy, que tout autant de fois qu'il se presentera une occasion de

baptiser d'autres gens, il exercera sur eux les mesmes Cérèmonies qu'on va exercer sur luy; sans qu'il luy vienne jamais dans la pensée de les exempter (*sic*). Apres avoir fait ce serment, l'homme qui doit estre baptisé, se leve, & marchant vers l'avant du vaisseau entre les rangs des bailles & des gens de l'Equippage qui l'attendent avec des seaux tout pleins, il essuye ceét orage, & reçoit ainsi le baptisme.

(Georges Guillet de Saint-George. *Les arts de l'homme d'épée*. La Haye, 1680. p. 323–324.)

The first quotation is entered under 1678, the date of the first French edition, but is taken from the Hague reprint of 1680 as I found no copy of 1678 at hand. Note that the English version sticks to facts when describing the book the victim lays his hand on when taking the oath of allegiance, omitting any reference to the French phrase "pour représenter le Livre des Évangiles;" and in neither case does the oath have the passage binding the man to watch his step when dealing with seamen's wives.

LINE: *Navigators* usually call the *Equator*, or *Equinoctial-Line*, simply the *Line*. And at *Sea*, they have a Ridiculous Ceremony; That when *Sailors Cross* the *Line*, or *Tropic*, that have not bin there before, they must Pay certain Forfeitures Demanded of them, or else be *Duck'd*, or *Baptiz'd* (as they call it,) either from the Main-Yard-Arm, or otherwise: This Custom is inviolably used by most Nations, who practise it indispensably in *East India Voyages*; and each practises it differently: Nay, those of the same Nation puts it in Execution in different manner. It is perform'd, by some, thus, (by way of *Baptism*, as was said before;) The Ship's Company Range themselves in two Lanes, each with a bucket in his Hand, with Tubs of Sea-Water ready by them: Then the *Boatswain's Mate*, or some such Officer, comes to the Foot of the Main-Mast, with Visage all bedawb'd, and his Body all roll'd in Ropes, some hanging down from his Shoulders; and after him, in Order, there follows five or six Sailors dress'd in a like manner: and holding in his Hand some Book of Navigation; he that is to be *Baptiz'd* comes and Kneels before him, and puts his Hand upon the Book, and is obliged to Swear solemnly, and sincerely, That as often as there is Occasion for *Baptizing* or *Ducking* Others, he will exercise upon them, the same Ceremony as they are about to exercise upon him, without ever thinking to exempt them from it. After this, he arises, and goes towards the Head of the Vessel, thorow the Lane of Tubs, and Seamen who Attend with Buckets full of Water, so that as he goes along, they throwing it upon him, he receives his *Baptism* sufficiently.

(The Gentleman's dictionary. London, 1705, part 3, p. Ddd-4.)

1685

Nos vivres & nôtre eau ne se sont point corrompus, nous n'avons même presque pas eu à souffrir du mauvais tems & des calmes; & les chaleurs de la Zone torride ne nous ont gueres paru plus grandes que celles qu'on sent en France

1685, *continued*

au fort de l'Eté. Ainsi nous passâmes la Ligne sans aucune incommodité le septième d'Avril, qui étoit un Samedi, avec un petit vent de Nord-Nord-Oüest vers le trois cent cinquante-huitième degré de longitude. Comme il étoit déjà tard, la cérémonie si solemnelle que les gens de Mer ne manquent jamais de faire en cette occasion, fut remise au lendemain après la Messe. C'est un invention imaginée par les Maîtres, les Pilotes & les autres Officiers mariniens du Vaisseau, afin d'avoir de l'argent & en acheter des rafraîchissemens pour eux & pour l'Equipage, à laquelle ils luy ont donné fort mal à propos le nom de baptême.

Monsieur l'Ambassadeur ne voulut pas qu'on fit aucune des cérémonies qui ont quelque rapport aux choses saintes. Chacun donna ce qu'il voulut; & les autres en furent quittes pour quelques seaux d'eau, qu'on leur jetta sur le corps; comme il faisoit alors fort grand chaud, l'incommodité ne fut pas considérable.

(Gui Tachard, *Voyage de Siam, des peres jesuites envoyez par le roy aux Indes & à la Chine*. Paris, 1686. p. 46-47.)

15. Mars. Le Nordest revenue. Nous sommes aujourd'hui à 25 degrez 49. minutes; & il ne fait point chaud: tant mieux, nous allons vite; & dans deux jours nous vous dirons deux mots du Tropicque. On baptise d'ordinaire ceux qui le passent: mais pour nous, qui avons bien de plus grandes veuës, nous ne serons baptisez qu'à la ligne. Vous aurez une relation bien exacte de la cérémonie.

(L. D. Choisy. *Journal ou suite du voyage de Siam*. Paris, 1687. p. 13.)

8. Avril. Toujours un petit vent, qui fait faire une lieuë par heure. Ainsi la ligne étant plus que passée, on a fait ce matin la cérémonie. Tous les matelots qui l'avoient déjà passée se sont armez de pincettes, tenailles, marmites & chaudrons. A leur tête un Tambour plus noir que les Mandarins; & pour Capitaine un vieillard tremblotant, qui eust fort bien chanté: *C'est uno charge bien pesante, qu'un fardeau de quatre-vingts ans*. Cette compagnie, après avoir fait l'exercice, s'est rangée au tour d'une baie ou baquet plein d'eau, où selon l'ordre ancien on devoit plonger tous ceux qui n'avoient pas passé la ligne. Monsieur l'Ambassadeur a comparu le premier, & a promis, en mettant la main sur une Mappemonde, de faire observer la cérémonie, si jamais il repassoit la ligne; & pour n'estre point mouillé il a mis dans le bassin une poignée d'argent. J'en ai fait autant, & tous les Officiers, & tous ceux qui avoient de quoi se racheter. Les autres ont esté plongez dans la baie, & inondez d'une vingtaine de seaux d'eau. On a ramassé prés de soixante écus, qui serviront à acheter des rafraîchissemens pour l'equipage. C'est une coutume

inviolablement observée, d'obliger les mousses à se donner le fouet les uns aux autres, & par là finir la fête: mais aujourd'hui on étoit las; & les mousses ont eu repit jusqu'au premier calme, qu'ils seront fouïetez d'importance pour faire venir le vent.

(Choisy, Journal. p. 31-32.)

This voyage of Chevalier Chaumont to Siam and China on behalf of France is one more step in the constant struggles at that time by France, the Netherlands and Britain for temporal control, clerical expansion and for colonies in the Far East. Tachard, a Jesuit father, and the Abbé Choisy (or Choisy) give us two accounts; the latter with more detail of the proceedings. Both tell how Chaumont, the Ambassador, frowned on possible approaches to sacred rites; both emphasize the favoring of the ceremony by the officers and crew alike for raising money for the crew by means of buying freedom from the ducking by a contribution of cash. Choisy is the first to tell how the cabin boys' part is delayed till the next calm, when they get a good whipping to bring on a favorable wind.

Does the trembling old man suggest adoption of an element from northern folklore?

The two ships carrying the party sailed from Brest March 3, 1685. Johann Gottlieb Worm's *Ost-Indian und Persianische Reisen* (Frankfurt, 1745), as quoted later, harks back to Tachard and Chaumont as authority for saying the rite is purely commercial or financial.

### 1690

[Sailing from Brest 24 February 1690] We made great way the first three or four days [after leaving Cape Verde], but the winds beginning to slack as we approacht the heats of the Line, we did not sail so fast as before; being now Passion, or the Holy-week, Father Tachard would omit nothing of the holy exercises practis'd at this time, we sung the Tenebra, we hear'd Sermons, and tho' at sea perform'd all the duties of Christians who have more conveniency . . .

In the mean time we insensibly approacht the Line, the passing of which I don't admire people should dread so much, we had nothing now but faint winds, very inconstant, and almost continual Calms . . .

The way we made this night brought us considerably nearer the Line; which we long'd to pass, almost quite spent with the intollerable heats we had endured for fiefteen [*sic*] days time; only those rains which fell helpt to abate the rageing heats, and were a great relief to us; at length, after a great deal of them, accompanied with Thunder and Lightnings Sunday the ninth of April at ten a clock in the morning we past the Line, which we so impatiently long'd for.

Here the Mariners use an execrable custom of a mock Baptism, which is fitter to be condemned with the utmost severity than describ'd.

([Abraham Duquesne, the younger]. A new voyage to the East Indies in the years 1690 and 1691. London: for Daniel Dring, 1696. p. 22-26.)

One more example of clerical disapproval of the ducking. Note under 1654 that Dutertre made no objection to it, and in 1685 "Monsieur l'Ambassadeur ne voulut pas qu'on fit aucune des cérémonies qui ont quelque rapport aux choses saintes."

1690, *continued*

We crost the Line the 23d of *November*, and were oblig'd to undergoe the impertinent Ceremony of *Baptism*, at least all those who had not assisted at the same Festival before, or would not buy themselves off for a piece of Money.

'Tis an ancient Custom, and will not be abolish'd without difficulty; 'tis also sometimes done when we pass the Tropicks. I shall in a few words report how this fine Ceremony was perform'd in our Vessel. One of the Seamen who had past the Line before, drest himself in Rags, with a beard and Hair of Hards of Hemp, and black'd his face with Soot and Oil mix'd together. Thus Equip'd, holding a Sea-Chart in one Hand, and a Cutlass in the other, with a Pot full of blacking Stuff standing by him, he presented himself upon Deck attended by his Suffragans, drest as whimsically as himself, and arm'd with Grid-Irons, Stoves, Kettles, and little Bells; with which rare Instruments they made a sort of Musick, the goodness of which may be easily imagin'd.

They call'd those that were to be initiated into these Rites and Mysteries one after another, and having made them sit down on the edge of a Tub full of Water, they oblig'd them to put one Hand on the Chart, and promise that on the like Occasion they wou'd do to others what was at that time done to them. Then they gave them a mark in the Forehead with the stuff out of the Pot, wetted their faces with Seawater, and askt them if they wou'd give the Crew any thing to drink, promising them they wou'd in such case let them go without doing any further Pennance. Those that gave were presently discharg'd, and some avoided this unpleasant *Præludium* to what was to follow, by giving 'em something Extraordinary: It cost me but a Crown to have the same Privilege with the Latter. As for those who paid nothing they were thrown into the Tub of Water over Head and Ears, and then wash'd and scrub'd every where with the Ships Ballast; and I believe this scrubbing and washing lasted much longer than those who were so treated desir'd.

Our Frigat and Boat having never past the Line, they were subjected to the same Law. The Captain was oblig'd to give something to save the Beakhead of his Ship, the Seamen alledging, 'twas their Right to cut off the Boats Nose else. The Money the Men got by it, was laid up to be spent on the whole Crew when opportunity offer'd. Every Nation practices this ridiculous Custom after a different Manner.

(The voyage of François Leguat of Bresse to Rodriguez, Mauritius, Java, and the Cape of Good Hope. Transcribed from the first English edition. Edited and Annotated by Captain Pasfield Oliver. London: Hakluyt Society, 1891. v. 1, p. 19-21. Works issued by the Hakluyt Society. v. 82).

The manuscript of the *Relation* was printed and published in London [in 1708] in French and English simultaneously, whilst a French edition was published in Amsterdam, and a Dutch version was printed at Utrecht in the same year. These were followed by German translations printed

at Frankfort and Leipsic in 1709; another French edition was produced in London in 1720, and an abridged edition appeared later in 1792.

Esquemeling in 1666 tells how the crew threatens to cut off "the stem of the vessel" if this is its first trip across the line and if the captain refuses to give "a small runlet of wine." Here we hear of another case of the threat.

Superstitiosa, d'altra parte, profana, ed in certo modo ridicola è la cerimonia, che indispensabilmente osservano tutti quelli, che per la prima volta intraprendono il passaggio del Tropico, ò della Linea equinottiale, per andare nell' Indie Orientali. La chiamano *Battesimo del Tropico*, ed ogni Nazione lo pratica diversamente; anzi li Convogli d'una medesima Nazione l'essercitano in diversi modi. Noi ne riportaremo quì un solo, che è il più commune fra li Francesi.

Collocano sopra il Ponte del Vascello un gran Mastello d'acqua, all'intorno del quale li Marinari stanno disposti con una secchia piena alla mano. Il Vice capitano si porta al piede dell'Albero maggiore col viso involuppato, ed il corpo coperto da una quantità di corde, che attorniadolo tutto, molte gli pendono dalle braccia; ed in capo tiene una lunga berretta. Lo seguono cinque, ò sei Marinari con una Schiavina sopra le spalle; tiene egli in sue mani il Portolano, ò altro Libro di Marina, e gli altri con padelle, e secchie stanno pronti per solennizzare con lo strepito la fontione. Posti poi que' Passaggieri, che non hanno più fatto quel viaggio sopra ad un legno, che attraverso il Mastello pieno d'acqua; il Vice Capitano col Libro alla manno fa la funtione del superstizioso Battesimo, e li Marinari la solennizzano col ripercuotimento delle secchie, e padelle, spruzzando discretamente il Passaggiere con l'acqua, se paga una buona mancia; mà s'egli va ristretto in essa, li Marinari levandogli da sotto il legno, dove stà à sedere, lo fanno cadere nel Mastello, e gli roversciano le secchie piene d'acqua sopra del corpo; onde finisce la solennità con gran patimento del povero Passaggiere [*sic*], persuaso di sottoporsi à così stravagante inventione, per godere, com'essi dicono, e far godere à tutti gli altri il viaggio felice, ed esente da tempeste, e da perigli.

(M. V. Coronelli.) Atlante Veneto. [Venice? 1690.]

Every one crossing the line for the first time must endure this sacrilegious, profane, ridiculous ceremony, called Baptism of the Tropics, staged differently by different nations, even with variations within the same nation. Here we give one, the more common on French ships.

A big tub is set on the bridge of the vessel, and sailors stand by with pails full of water. The mate takes stand at the foot of the main mast, face hidden, body covered with a lot of dangling ropes, many hanging from his arms, a big cap on his head. He is followed by five or six sailors, with slave's garment on shoulders, one holding the Portolano or some other nautical book, the others with frying pans and pails to solemnize it all by their noise. After this the passengers that have not crossed before are put on a plank across the tub full of water. The mate with the book in his hand performs the ritual baptism and the sailors do their solemnizing by beating pails and frying pans; if the passenger pays something he gets just a sprinkling of water, but if any seems a bit hesitant, the sailors dump him from his plank into the tub of water; and thus the function is ended with the long-suffering passengers, victims of so strange a ceremony, to let the sailors have their fun and to insure for all a happy voyage free from storms and perils.

1690, *continued*

Note that this Venice text chooses to give what it calls the standardized French routine. Was there nothing similar in Venetian or Italian tradition? Note that nothing is said about the passing of Gibraltar, nor of a visit from Neptune. The Portolano is part of it all, but not a word as to what is done with it. Probably held out as the Bible to be sworn on? The ducking and the tribute exacting seem general if not universal. Clerical opposition to the "baptising" seems to be lessened by bringing in the phrases calling it all superstitious and profane and ridiculous. Or, was clerical frowning the reason for its non-use by Italian seamen?

1695

Le 26. [of June] sur les 3. heures après minuit nous passâmes le Tropique du Cancer; à la pointe du jour nous reconnûmes la terre de Praya, & après midy se passa à faire les ceremonies du Baptême, que les Mariniers pratiquent en ces sortes d'endroits.

(François Froger. Relation d'un voyage fait en 1695. 1696. & 1697. aux côtes d'Afrique, détroit de Magellan, Brezil, Cayenne & isles Antilles, par une escadre des vaisseaux du roy, commandée par M. de Gennes. Faite par le sieur Froger ingénieur volontaire sur le vaisseau le Faucon Anglois. Paris, 1698, p. 4-5.)

No details about the ceremony, nor mention of repetition at the equator. An English translation was published the same year in London, the reference there being "the Ceremonies of the Tropical Baptism or Ducking, which are commonly us'd by the Mariners in those places."

*Notes and Queries*, London, March 14, 1891, series 7, v. 11, p. 205, quotes the English text in full, and *American Notes & Queries*, v. 1, no. 4, p. 62-3, July 1941, quotes the London version of 1891 as providing "some interesting information from the point of view of distribution of the practice and terminology involved."



## THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

1708

Sept. 25. This day, according to custom, we duck'd those that had never pass'd the Tropick before. The manner of doing it was by a Rope thro a Block from the Main-Yard, to hoist 'em above half way up to the Yard, and let 'em fall at once into the Water; having a Stick cross thro their Legs, and well fastned to the Rope, that they might not be surpriz'd and let go their hold. This prov'd of great use to our fresh-water Sailors, to recover the Colour of their Skins which were grown very black and nasty. Those that we duck'd after this manner three times, were about 60, and others that would not undergo it, chose to pay Half a Crown Fine; the Mony to be levy'd and spent at a publick Meeting of all the Ships Companys, when we return to *England*. The *Dutch* Men and some *English* Men desir'd to be duck'd, some six, others eight, ten, and twelve times, to have the better Title for being treated when they come home.

(Woodes Rogers. A cruising voyage round the world. London, 1712, p. 23-24.)

The earliest account from an English sailor — if Woodes Rogers can be called a sailor. The oldest English description of the crossing of the equator is 1670, of the tropic 1687.

1709

Die Taufe der jungen Matrosen, so die Linie das erste mahl passiren, so, nach Tachards Meldung, der Ritter Chaumont, als einen Missbrauch des Heil. Sacraments nicht gestatten wollen, p. 47. heist nichts, und ist eine blosser Erfindung der See-Officierer, damit sie nur Geld bekommen, um vor sich und ihre Leute Erfrischungen kaufen zu können, der sie gar unrecht den Nahmen einer Taufe beylegen, wie dieser Jesuit selbst redet. Herr Worm sagte, dass man einen Neuling, so nichts darum wüsste, unten am grossen Maste, mit einem blancken Degen, creutzweise Luft-Streiche über den Kopf thun lasse, mittlerweile aber ein ander, der mit einem Gefäss voll Wasser am Maste in die Höhe gestiegen, ihn damit begiesse, und über den gantzen Leib nass mache. Auf Tachards Schiffe gab jeder was er wolte, und die andern kamen frey durch mit ein paar Kubel voll Wasser, so ihnen auf den leib gegossen wurde. Man muss gestehen, dass diese Alfantzerey solchen Nahmen nicht verdiene. Wohl aber verdient ihn die im Pabsthum eingeführte Glocken-Taufe, welche der Jesuiten und anderer Papisten zartes Gewissen dulden kan, ob es gleich ein viel schändlicher Werck ist, eine leblose Creatur im Nahmen der Heil. Dreyeinigkeit taufen, wie rechte Menschen, gewisse Manns-oder Weibs-Nahmen geben, Tauf-Zeugen darzu nehmen, die an den Strick, wie ans Wester-Hembde, greifen müssen, Gebeth und Seegen darbey sprechen, ihm grosse geistliche Kräfte zuschreiben, ut quicumque ad sonitum convenerint, ab omnibus inimici tentationibus liberentur in corpore, & a pravis cogitationibus mudentur in mente, semperque fidei catholicæ documenta sectentur, pellantur insidiæ inimici, fragor grandinis, procella turbinum, impetus tem-

1709, *continued*

pestatum, infesta tonitrua, &c. Pontificale f. 154. Hunnii Apostas. R. Eccl. p. 183.

Sonst ist noch auf den Schiffen die Gewohnheit, dass, wenn sie, nach dem sie über die Linie, das wüste Eyland Abrolhos vorbei, man Gott öffentlich in Betstunden dancket, und dem Schiffs-Volck eine Ergötzlichkeit, oder an jeden Tisch eine Kanne Spanischen Wein giebt, auch frisch Schöpfen- und Schweinen-Fleisch speiset, weil man von dergleichen Vieh allzeit einige lebendig auf dem Schiffe führet. Denn die Schiffer halten es für ein Glück, wenn sie solchen gefährlichen Ort ohne Anstoss vorbei gefahren, weil von der Brasilianischen Kuste. auf die 60. Weilen weit, sehr grosse und gefährliche Klippen in die See hinein streichen, welche gröstentheils unter dem Wasser liegen, und so leicht nicht können gesehen werden.

(Johann Gottlieb Worm aus Döbeln. Ost-Indian und Persianische Reisen, oder: Zehnjährige auf Gross-Java, Bengala, und in Gefolge Herrn Joann Josuä Köteler, Holländischen Abgesantens an den Sophi in Persien, geleistete Kriegs-Dienste, mit auserlesenen Anmerckungen erläutert und nebst anderen besondern Nachrichten, auch doppleten Registern ans Licht gestellet durch M. Crispinum Weisen, Past. zu Mochau. Dresden und Leipzig, 1737. 8vo. Zweyte Auflage. Franckfurt und Leipzig, 1745, p. 18-19.)

The title is longish, I admit, but it seems worth quoting in full because it tells so much about an unusual book. The story of the ceremony differs from most others first in its quoting an earlier writer, and second in telling how once more did the clerical passengers look askance at it all as dangerous profaning of a religious ceremony. The crew is permitted to stage its performance, something by this time accepted as "very meet, right, and" its bounden privilege by the crew as a whole and as individual seamen. But this time the accolade and the baptism must be toned down, be symbolic, free from skylarking and horseplay. Thanks were given for safe passing of the shoals off Abrolhos islands. Extra and fresh rations were also served at the time.

You will search far also before finding any other sea tale with so much information about food rations, about what merchandise, slight in amount, the crew was allowed on the return voyage. Worm has a sense of humor, as when speaking of the weather he tells how the Spanish ambassador to the Court of St. James, when boarding the ship homeward bound, told the messenger sent by the King to give his greetings to the Sun as well as to the King, for he'd not seen the Sun the whole of one month — the entire time of his stay.

Worm was the son of a Saxon merchant, born at Döbeln, thirty or so miles west of Dresden. Trained, as usual, to follow his father, he went to Leipzig and Hamburg for experience, decided he wanted more adventure, at Amsterdam shipped as a soldier on board the Oudenarde, sailing from the Texel October 27, 1709 bound for Java. He was then just 19 years old. Invalided home after ten years, he settled down to take over his father's business, dying at his home in 1735. His diaries were used by Crispinus Weise, pastor at Mochau, as basis for this book brought out in 1737.

The editing by a clergyman is undoubtedly the explanation of the wealth of references to other writers found in the book, some 308 names included in the index of authors cited. It explains too the German Lutheran's asking why a baptism of rookies crossing the Line should be disapproved by the clergy when they have no hesitation at baptising church bells.

### 1712

Le lendemain [6 March 1712] quand on ne douta plus d'être dans la partie du Sud, on ne manqua pas de faire la folle ceremonie du Baptême de la Ligne, coutume en usage parmi toutes les Nations. On lie les Cathecumenes par les poignets sur des funins tendus d'avant en arriere sur le gaillard pour les Offi-

ciers et sur le pont pour les Matelots; & après plusieurs singeries & mascarades, on les détache pour les conduire les uns après les autres au pied du grand mât, où on leur fait prêter serment sur une Carte qu'ils feront aux autres comme on leur a fait, suivant les Statuts de la Navigation, ensuite on paye pour n'être pas mouillé, mais toujours inutilement, car les Capitaines ne sont pas même tout à-fait-épargnez.

(Amédée-François Frézier. Relation du voyage de la mer du sud aux côtes du Chily et du Pérou, fait pendant les années 1712, 1713 & 1714. Paris, 1716, p. 13-14.)

Of Scot descent, Frézier was born in Chambéry in 1682, the family having settled in Savoy in the late 17th century. His report went through several editions in French, was translated into English, German, Dutch in the 18th century. In 1903 at Santiago de Chile a translation into Spanish of the part relating to Chile was made by Nicolas Peña.

The general tone and tenor of the book seems to show that Louis XIV sent Frézier to Chile and Peru as an engineer to plan for defense against possible attacks by England and the Netherlands. He sailed from St. Malo on the ship *San Jose* on November 23, 1711.

### 1713

Early in May we crossed the Line, . . . What takes place on board when a ship crosses the Line is well known, so I shall not describe it at any length. A bell summons everyone on deck when crossing, and tables are placed for judges and attendants. All who have never before crossed the Line are ordered to swear on certain nautical books and maps that they are ready to pay tribute on crossing, and that they will on future occasions exact the same from any others who should cross the Line for the first time, and other promises. Everyone is then taxed according to his means, and, although they pay, they are well drenched, pails of water being poured over them. If any refuse to pay they are condemned to various punishments, some being tied to the yard with long ropes and plunged several times into the sea. The games end with cutting a thin rope stretched between the bow and the stern of the ship. The tribute money is used either for masses or for a festivity on shore. On ships sailing from the Mediterranean to Lisbon, the same ceremony is performed on doubling Cape St. Vincent.

I have often been asked whether it is true that many people die when crossing the Line unless they are copiously bled, and that water and food become putrid and full of worms. Before answering it must be remembered that the Line is crossed twice on going from Europe to India, first from North to South, and then from South to North, and also twice on returning from India to Europe. On crossing the Line the first time on the way to India there are generally several days of absolute calm and great heat, on the second time of crossing it is not nearly so hot.

Although when crossing the Line the first time many people suffer from sickness, insomnia, and languour, caused by the intense heat, there are no mortal illnesses, and there is no need to use the lancet. All bad symptoms dis-

1713, *continued*

appear when the wind rises. It is true that a person who is already ill may be affected by the want of air and die, and water and eatables may suffer, but experience shows that bad jars, or keeping water below deck without air, or even the bad quality of the water, may cause putrefaction. It is well known that water from the Isle of Mauritius will keep good during a long voyage, while that from Martinique soon becomes turbid and full of animalcules. This need not, however, create alarm. Bringing the jars on deck and exposing the water to the air and, better still, filtering it through white linen, will make it fit to drink.

(Ippolito Desideri. An account of Tibet. The travels of Ippolito Desideri of Pistoia, S. J., 1712-1727. Edited by Filippo de Filippi. London: Routledge, 1932. The Broadway Travellers. p. 54-55.)

1720

We past the *Tropick*, attended by the *Tropick*-Birds, a Fowl something bigger than a Pidgeon; but one would think, as it flies, it had an unlighted Candle fix'd in its Tail. I cannot let go the Ceremony of passing this *Tropick*: When you are in the Latitude, the old Sailors ask the rest of the Ship's Crew, Whether they were ever that way before? If not, they must either pay a Bottle and Pound (as they call it) or be duck'd: They that don't pay, are fix'd to a Rope at the Main-Yard-Arm, and duck'd three Times in the Sea; at which the rest of the Crew Huzzal and fire a Volley of Small-shot.

When Admiral *Benbow* went with his Squadron of Men of War, the whole Fleet duck'd, but the Admiral gave 'em Notice, by first firing a Gun, which was immediately follow'd with a Volley of Muskets, and Huzzaing, by every Ship in the Fleet. A Day or two before our Account is out, we send a Man to the Topmast-head, in order to discover Land, where he stays an Hour, and looks about him: He that discovers it first, is rewarded with a Bottle and Pound: that is, a Bottle of Rum, and a Pound of Sugar, which is demanded as soon as the Anchor is cast in a Place where such Commodities are to be had. Now the Bottles and Pounds that accrue from the People that are not willing to be duck'd, in passing the *Tropick*, are reserv'd by the old Sailors for a merry Bout, when safe in Harbour; which must not be touch'd by the fresh Men, as they call 'em.

(Richard Falconer. The voyages, dangerous adventures and imminent escapes of Captain Richard Falconer. London, 1720. p. 11-13. The Library of Congress catalogue notes William Rufus Chetwood as author.)

This time it is of course the Tropic of Cancer that is crossed, and the reference to Benbow is probably to the 1698 expedition rather than of 1708. I find no record that Benbow was ever south of the equator. All accounts of baptism at "the tropic" are for Tropic of Cancer. Henningsen, *loc. cit.*, has three references for crossing at Capricorn, but each is wrong if the chronology of the voyage is to be trusted.

1751

Baptême *du tropique* ou *de la ligne, en Marine*; c'est une cérémonie ridicule, mais d'un usage ancien & inviolable parmi les gens de mer, qui la pratiquent bien régulièrement sur ceux qui passent pour la première fois *le tropique* ou *la ligne équinoctiale*.

Chaque nation s'y prend diversement, & même les équipages d'une même nation l'exercent en différentes manières. Voici celle qui est la plus ordinaire parmi les équipages français.

Pour préparatifs, on met une baille au pié du grand mât pleine d'eau de la mer; le pilote pour l'ordinaire se met auprès, le visage barbouillé, le corps revêtu & tout entortillé de garcettes, dont quelques-unes lui pendent des bras. Il est accompagné de cinq ou six matelots habillés de même: il tient entre ses mains un livre de cartes marines tout ouvert; aux environs il y a des matelots avec des seaux pleins d'eau; il y en a sur les vergues & sur les hunes. On amène celui qui doit être baptisé en grand cérémonie; on le fait asseoir sur une planche tenue aux deux bouts par deux matelots, & posée sur la baille pleine d'eau; on lui fait jurer sur le livre que tient le pilote, de pratiquer sur les autres la même cérémonie, lorsque l'occasion s'en trouvera; & dans l'instant les deux matelots renversent la planche, & font tomber l'homme dans la baille; en même tems ceux qui sont à la hune & sur les vergues lui jettent plusieurs seaux d'eau sur le corps. Les officiers & les passagers se rachètent d'une si ridicule cérémonie, en donnant quelqu'argent aux équipages; mais on ne fait point de grâce à ceux qui ne donnent rien. On demande cependant permission au capitaine pour faire le *baptême*.

Un vaisseau qui n'a point encore passé la ligne ou le tropique, y est soumis: mais le capitaine le rachette par quelques rafraîchissemens qu'il donne au gens de l'équipage, autrement ils couperaient l'éperon ou quelqu'autre partie du vaisseau: mais aujourd'hui beaucoup de capitaines abolissent cette ridicule cérémonie.

(Denis Diderot. Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers. Paris, 1751. v. 2, p. 65.)

Diderot's story ought properly to be ruled out as a secondary source; it is an uncritical mixture of Guillet, Aubin, Coronelli; a typical encyclopedia piece describing older customs than contemporary.

The 11th of April, 8' N.L. In the afternoon we passed the Line. On this occasion the old custom was observed; namely, all the men were called upon the deck, and some pails full of water were thrown upon those who had not crossed the Line before, and those who have very often partake of the bathing. It appears from *Holm's* Description of New Sweden, that this ceremony was usual in 1642, on his voyage to *America*. The first cause that gave rise to it is unknown. It is true, in the neighbourhood of the Line, it is usual to wash the ships every morning and evening with sea-water, that the intolerable heat may be less noxious; which, particularly if the sailors drink brandy, is

1751, *continued*

sufficient to make them mad. But we cannot from hence derive the ceremony of drenching them in water, as it is a practice more likely to occasion diseases than to prevent them.

Afterwards all those who had been here for the first time collected a sum of money among themselves, to serve as a treat at a *Gothenburgh* tavern, in case they should return; and it amounted to three hundred and sixty-four copper dollars, and fifteen oces. Another collection was made for the orphan-house at *Gothenburgh*; every one contributed to it, and it amounted to eight hundred and thirteen copper dollars, and twenty-four oces.

(Peter Osbeck. A voyage to China and the East Indies. Translated from the German [version of the Swedish original] by J. R. Forster. London: Benjamin White, 1771. v. 1, p. 106–107.)

The title of the Swedish original runs: *Dagbok öfwer en Ostindisk resa åren 1750, 1751, 1752. Med anmärkningar uti naturkunnigheten, främmande folkslags, språk, seder, Hushållning, m.m. Jämte 12 tabeller och afstænde skepps-predikanten Toréns bref.* Stockholm, 1757. The Arnold Arboretum has the only copy in this country recorded in the Union Catalogue of the Library of Congress.

The German translation title runs: *Herrn Peter Osbeck, pastors zu Hasslöf . . . Reise nach Ostindien und China. Nebst O. Toreens Reise nach Surat und C. G. Ekebergs Nachricht von der landwirthschaft der Chineser. Aus dem schwedischen übersetzt von J. G. Georgi.* Rostock: J. C. Koppe, 1765.

Osbeck's ceremony came at the equator, the reference to "Holm's Description of New Sweden" is to the quotation from Campanius here given under 1642.

### 1752

At sea, 27 July [1752]. I had nearly missed my post to-night, by attending to our old sea form in crossing the tropic. This is the boundary of what the ancients called the torrid zone. We crossed the supposed line of this boundary to day. On these occasions, all the people on board a ship who have not passed it before are subject to a fine, which, if they refuse to pay or cannot procure, they must be ducked; that is, hoisted up by a rope to the yard arm, and from thence dropped souce into the water. This is such fine sport to the seamen, that they would rather lose some of the forfeiture, (which is usually paid in brandy) than that every body should escape the ducking. And in many vessels they single out some poor helpless boy or landsman to be half drowned for the diversion of his shipmates. But as I do not choose to permit any arbitrary or oppressive laws to be valid in my peaceful kingdom, I always pay for those who cannot pay for themselves.

(John Newton. Letters and sermons, with a review of ecclesiastical history and hymns. Philadelphia, 1797. v. 7, p. 116, 117.)

The letters were written by the Rev. John Newton, rector of St. Mary, Woolnoth, London, on three voyages to Africa in 1751–1753.

1763

Le Jeudi, 10 Novembre, sur les cinq heures du matin, nous passâmes la ligne. [Les anciens qui n'avoient point de boussole, qui ne s'écartoient point des côtes dans leurs plus longs trajets, & qui navigeoient rarement sous les Tropiques, ne connurent pas la cérémonie bizarre qu'on va décrire. C'est un usage qui ne remonte pas plus haut que ce voyage célèbre de Gama, qui a fourni au Camoëns le sujet de la *Lusiade*. L'idée qu'on ne sauroit être un bon marin, sans avoir traversé l'équateur, l'ennui inséparable d'une longue navigation, un certain esprit républicain qui regne dans toutes les petites sociétés, peut-être toutes ces causes réunies, ont pu donner naissance à ces especes de saturnales; quoi qu'il en soit, elles furent adoptées en un instant dans toutes les Nations, & les hommes les plus éclairés furent obligés de se soumettre à une coutume dont ils reconnoissoient l'absurdité; car partout, dès que le peuple parle, il faut que le sage se mette à l'unisson].

Je vais décrire cette cérémonie avec simplicité, cela n'ôte rien du mérite de la relation.

Ce sont les Maîtres, les Contremaîtres & les Matelots, qui ont déjà passé la ligne, qui *baptisent* sans distinction de grade, de sexe & de qualité, tous les nouveaux Navigateurs. Ils se donnent un Président pour la cérémonie, & ils l'appellent le *bonhomme la Ligne*.

Il étoit près de sept heures, & nous étions à souper, lorsque nous entendîmes claquer un fouet qui nous annonça l'arrivée du courier du Bonhomme la Ligne; ce courier étoit le maître Canotier, & on l'avoit habillé très-proprement. Il heurta à la porte de la chambre; on demanda qui heurtoit? C'est, répondit-il, un envoyé du Bonhomme la Ligne, Seigneur & Président de ces parages. Qu'on lui ouvre, dit M. de Bougainville. On ouvrit, l'Envoyé mit pied à terre, entra, & sa monture resta à la porte. Cette monture étoit formée de deux Matelots attachés l'un à l'autre & marchant à quatre pattes. L'un avoit sur la tête un *faubert* \* pour représenter la queue de l'animal; l'autre en avoit aussi un pour former sa crinière, & de plus un masque de carton figuré en tête de cheval. Les harnois étoient le pavois du grand canot, c'est-à-dire, une grande bande d'étoffe bleue, parsemée de fleurs de lys jaunes.

L'envoyé ayant été introduit, adressa la parole à notre Commandant en ces termes: "*Le Président de ces Parages, le Bonhomme la Ligne, ayant appris que le brave Chevalier de Bougainville, Commandant de la frégate l'Aigle, y étoit arrivé, m'a ordonné de venir le saluer de sa part, de lui témoigner la joie qu'il ressent de sa venue, & de lui remettre une lettre, dans laquelle ses sentimens sont fidelement exprimés.*"

M. de Bougainville lut la lettre qui étoit conçue en ces termes: *Brave Chevalier, vos hauts faits ont rendu le nom François très-célebre dans le Canada: votre réputation est parvenue dans les parages de ma domination sur les aîles*

\* Le faubert est une espece de balai, composé de fils de carret, pris des vieux cordages; ils représentent à-peu-près une grosse & longue queue de cheval.

1763, continued

*de la renommée, & votre nom est en telle vénération dans le cœur de mes sujets, que les Dorades, les Bonites, les Thons & les Marsouins, ayant aperçu la frégate l'Aigle que vous commandez, sont venus en bande m'annoncer dès-hier votre arrivée. Ils ont exprimé la joie que votre présence a répandue dans leurs cœurs par les bonds & les sauts multipliés qu'ils ont faits, en passant auprès de votre navire. Je vous envoie cet Ambassadeur pour vous témoigner la mienne; il vous remettra la présente, & j'espère vous dire moi-même demain combien je suis charmé de la visite que vous me rendez. Signé Le Bonhomme la Ligne.*

Il y avoit à la place de la date: *A la 54 minute du 1 degré de latitude, longitude 29 degrés 3 min. de ma domination septentrionale, le 9 Novembre de l'an 1163 de mon regne.*

M. de Bougainville dit à l'Envoyé qu'il comptoit avoir l'honneur de se présenter le lendemain devant le Bonhomme, & de lui faire sa réponse de vive voix. Que l'on donne un coup à boire au courier, ajouta-t-il, & que l'on ait soin de son cheval: il doit être beau, qu'on le fasse entrer, je suis curieux de le voir. On l'introduisit: il fit des cabrioles, il battit du pied & hennit. Comme il pouvoit être fatigué du voyage, on lui présenta un verre de vin: il le but. Le courier dit alors que son cheval avoit deux têtes, l'une à l'avant, l'autre à l'arrière; on donna donc un verre de vin à la tête de l'arrière.

Sur le point de se retirer, le courier présenta de la part du Bonhomme la Ligne, un oiseau au Commandant, comme un témoignage de la bienveillance de l'illustre Président de ces parages. On le prit d'abord pour un oiseau artificiel. Il fit voir en pinçant avec son bec qu'il étoit plein de vie. C'étoit en effet un oiseau d'eau, & la surprise n'en fut que plus grande.

Après souper, on monta sur le gaillard d'arrière, on y dansa au son du tambourin; puis au son de deux violons, des menuets, des contredanses, &c. jusques à près de dix heures que l'on se retira.

Toutes ces cérémonies n'étoient que le prélude du baptême; aussi elles se firent la veille. Le jour de la fête se célébra avec solennité; on commença par disposer sur le gaillard d'arrière une baignoire pleine d'eau de mer & des seaux; ensuite on tendit des deux côtés du vaisseau une de ces cordes qui sert à jeter la sonde, & qu'on nomme la *ligne*. On plaça auprès de l'escalier qui descend à la chambre, un banc couvert du pavois, qui avoit servi, la veille de caparaçon à la monture du courier; & l'on disposa ainsi une espèce de trône, au Président de la ligne, à son Chancelier & au Vicaire qui devoit administrer le baptême.

Tous ces préparatifs achevés, on battit du tambourin, pour assembler tout le monde sur le gaillard. Quand l'équipage fut réuni, on demanda de la grande hune, avec un porte-voix; *Comment nomme-t-on le navire que je vois là-bas dans mes parages? on le nomme l'Aigle*, répondit le Capitaine. — *Qui le commande?* — M. le Chevalier de Bougainville. — *J'en suis charmé; je le verrai avec plaisir dans ma société, avec les cérémonies accoutumées. Je reçus hier*

*de ses nouvelles, & je vais lui en marquer ma satisfaction en descendant dans son navire avec toute ma Cour.*

Dans le moment, parut un Matelot ayant pour tout habillement une culotte gaudronnée & sur les épaules une peau de mouton avec sa laine, le visage barbouillé de rouge & de jaune par placards, un bonnet sur la tête surmonté de deux cornes de bœuf & parsemé de plumes de dindes & de poules; la poitrine, les bras, le ventre & les jambes également enluminés de couleurs détrempees à l'huile, & le menton couvert d'une grande moustache. Ce Matelot ainsi accoutré descendit de la grande hune, ayant une chaîne de fer autour du corps, en façon de ceinture.

Six Mousses le précédoient nuds, peints de jaune & de rouge depuis les pieds jusqu'à la tête, les uns par placards, les autres par bandes croisées à la maniere des Sauvages.

Arrivés sur le gaillard, le Matelot les arrangea, leur fit mettre le pouce sur la corde tendue, & les contraignit de danser, au son du tambourin, pendant un demiquart d'heure. Ils s'approcherent ensuite de la baignoire, & le matelot leur jetta quelques seaux d'eau sur la tête.

Alors on annonça la descente du Seigneur Président de la Ligne, par des haricots blancs que l'on jetta en guise de dragées, de la grande hune sur le gaillard. Le *Bonhomme la Ligne* prit la même route que le Matelot & les Mousses; il descendit lentement & majestueusement. Sa Cour étoit composée du second Maître, des Contremaîtres, du Pilote & du Canonier. Celui qui jouoit ce premier rôle étoit le premier Maître. Il étoit couvert de peaux blanches de mouton avec leur laine, cousues ensemble pour former un habillement d'une seule piece. Son bonnet de même étoffe lui descendoit jusques sur les yeux. Un paquet d'étoupes mêlées avec la laine lui servoit de perruque & de barbe. Il avoit un nez postiche de bois peint. En guise de cordon, il portoit d'une épaule à l'autre un chapelet de pommes de racage, grosses comme des œufs d'oies.

Les gens de sa suite étoient affublés à-peu-près de même. L'un portoit une masse ou casse-tête à la Sauvage; l'autre un arc, celui-la une hache, celui-ci un calumet. Auprès du Président étoit son Chancelier, & il tenoit son sceptre à la main. Le Maître Canotier, habillé en femme & fardé avec du gros rouge à l'huile, se tenoit auprès du Bonhomme qui l'appelloit sa fille. Le Vicaire à son côté étoit vêtu d'une espece de robe de toile gaudronnée; une corde grosse comme le pouce, lui servoit de ceinture. Il portoit un bonnet quarré de carton noirci, un masque de même une étole de toile peinte en rouge, & tenoit un livre à la main. Quatre Mousses l'environnoient, & portoient un encensoir, un réchaut, un arc, & un bassin plein d'eau de mer pour servir au baptême.

Tout l'équipage étant rassemblé, le Président s'adressa au Commandant: *Soyez le bien venu, dit-il, M. le Chevalier, excusez-moi si je ne vous fais pas de longs complimens; j'ai la poitrine si foible, qu'à peine puis-je parler. N'en soyez pas surpris; je suis âgé de sept mille sept cent soixantetrois ans; j'ai*

1763, *continued*

*chargé mon Secrétaire d'écrire, & mon Chancelier de parler pour moi. Je suis descendu de mon Palais exprès pour vous recevoir dans ma société. J'espere que vous ne ferez pas difficulté de vous soumettre à la cérémonie du baptême, usitée dans ces parages.* M. de Bougainville prit la lettre, la lut & applaudit au compliment; il salua ensuite la fille du Bonhomme; & après l'avoir félicité d'avoir une fille si jolie, il s'approcha de la corde tendue. Les nouveaux Officiers l'y accompagnèrent, & le Président alla s'asseoir sur son trône pavoisé, ainsi que sa fille & son Chancelier.

Les Officiers lièrent le pouce de la main gauche de M. de Bougainville sur la ligne avec un ruban rouge; & nous nous plaçâmes à sa suite, Messieurs de Nerville, de Belcourt, Lhuillier & moi.

Le Vicaire affectant un air grave, & son livre à la main, s'approcha de M. de Bougainville. Il étoit accompagné d'un Mousse qui portoit une assiette couverte d'une serviette pliée, pour recevoir le tribut qu'ils appellent *rachat*; car on se contente de verser un peu d'eau de mer sur la tête de ceux qui se rachètent, au lieu de les plonger dans la mer, comme l'on fait quand on donne la cale.\* Au reste, on ne plonge plus maintenant dans la mer pour donner le baptême, parce qu'on a fait reflexion que cette cérémonie deviendroit très-dangereuse à cause des Requins qui pourroient roder autour du navire, & emporter une cuisse ou un bras à celui qui auroit le malheur d'en être mordu.

\* La cale est une punition que l'on fait subir à ceux de l'équipage, qui sont convaincus d'avoir volé, blasphemé, ou excité quelque révolte. Il y a deux sortes de cale, l'ordinaire & la seche. La cale ordinaire consiste à conduire le criminel au-dessous de la grande vergue. Là on lui passe un bâton entre les jambes sur lequel on le fait asseoir, pour le soulager. Il embrasse un cordage attaché à ce bâton, & qui passe par une poulie suspendue à un des bouts de la vergue. Trois ou quatre Matelots hissent cette corde, le plus promptement qu'ils peuvent, jusqu'à ce qu'ils aient guindé le patient à la hauteur de la vergue. Ils lâchent ensuite le cordage tout-à-coup, ce qui précipite le criminel dans la mer. Quelquefois pour augmenter la peine en augmentant la rapidité de la chute, on lui attache un boulet de canon aux pieds. Ce supplice se réitere souvent jusques à cinq fois.

On l'appelle *cale seche*, quand le criminel est suspendu à une corde raccourcie de maniere que, dans sa chute, il ne descend que jusqu'à la surface de l'eau, & n'est pas plongé dans la mer. C'est une espece d'estrapade. Ce châtiment est rendu public par un coup de canon, pour avertir tous ceux de l'Escadre d'en être les spectateurs.

Les Hollandois pratiquent une autre cale, qu'ils appellent *la grande cale*. Pour la donner, on conduit le coupable au bord du navire, on lui lie une corde au milieu du corps. Un bout de cette corde est attaché au bord du vaisseau, ou au bout de la vergue amenée; l'autre bout passe sous la quille, & est tenu de l'autre côté du navire par quelques-uns des Matelots les plus robustes. On met quelque chose de pesant autour du corps, ou aux pieds du criminel, pour le faire enfoncer davantage dans l'eau.

Le coupable étant jetté à la mer, à l'ordre qu'en donne le Quartier-Maitre, ceux qui tiennent la corde au bord opposé, la tirent le plus vite qu'ils peuvent, de sorte que le patient passe rapidement sous la quille. On réitere ce supplice autant de fois que la sentence le porte.

Ces châtimens sont rudes, & dangereux pour la vie même; sur-tout la grande calle. Car le moindre défaut de diligence ou d'adresse, de la part de ceux qui tirent la corde, peut être cause que celui que l'on tire se rompe un bras ou une jambe, & même la tête. Aussi met-on cette cale au nombre des peines capitales. Nos Matelots François regardent les deux autres au-moins comme infamantes.

On a substitué à ce baptême celui de la baignoire, sur le bord de laquelle on fait asseoir celui qui ne s'est pas racheté, ou à qui on veut jouer quelque tour.

Le Vicaire s'approcha de M. de Bougainville & lui dit; "Promettez-vous d'être bon citoyen, & pour cet effet de travailler à la population, & de ne pas laisser chomer les filles, toutes les fois que l'occasion s'en présentera? — Je le promets. — Promettez-vous de ne jamais coucher avec la femme d'un Marin? — Je le promets. — Promettez-vous de faire prendre les mêmes engagements, & d'employer les mêmes cérémonies, à l'égard de ceux qui n'auront pas passé la Ligne, quand ils s'y trouveront avec vous? — Je le promets. Mettez donc la main sur ce livre sacré en témoignage de vos engagements." M. de Bougainville toucha alors une estampe, qui représentoit un Génie & une jeune fille qui s'embrassent tendrement. Au bas de cette estampe étoit écrit: *Quis mihi det te fratrem meum sugentem ubera matris meæ, & inveeniam te foris, & deo-sculer te*. Cantique des Cantiques, ch. 8. Le Vicaire alla rendre compte au Président des engagements de M. de Bougainville; & le Bonhomme répondit: *Dignus est intrare in nostro docto corpore; admittatur*. Alors le Vicaire retourna à M. de Bougainville & lui dit: "Le Président de la Ligne vous juge digne d'être admis dans la société dont il est le Chef, & m'a chargé de vous y recevoir par l'administration de son baptême. Comment vous nommez-vous?" Louis, répondit M. de Bougainville. Hé bien; *Ego, nomine Reverendissimi Domini Domini & Serenissimi Præsidentis Æquatoris, te, Ludovice, admitto in societate ejus*. En prononçant ces paroles, il lui versa sur la tête quelques gouttes d'eau de mer. On délia le pouce de M. de Bougainville, qui mit de l'argent dans l'assiette sous la serviette, on retira le bâton, & le Vicaire l'encensa. On passa à M. de Nerville à qui le Vicaire fit les mêmes questions, & ainsi successivement aux autres Passagers & Officiers avec les mêmes cérémonies.

Quand on fut parvenu à un Garde-Marine, assez mauvais sujet & haï de tout le monde, le Vicaire lui dit que le Président ordonnoit qu'il fût reçu avec toutes les cérémonies en usage. En conséquence, il lui posa un bout de son étole sur la tête, marmotta quelques paroles, & puis lui fit baiser cette étole peinte à l'huile. On le délia de la ligne, & on le fit asseoir sur un bâton posé transversalement sur la baignoire. A peine s'y fut-il placé, que le Pilotin tomba dans l'eau. On avoit de plus ajusté dans la baignoire un lacet; de manière que, quand le Cathécumène tomba, il se trouvasse par le milieu du corps & assujetti sans pouvoir se débarrasser. On profita de sa situation pour lui barbouiller le visage de noir & de rouge. On lui versa au moins cinq ou six seaux d'eau sur la tête, puis on le laissa aller.

On en vint ensuite à deux Demoiselles Acadiennes, & le Vicaire leur demanda naïvement si elles étoient pucelles? Elles répondirent, oui. Promettez-vous, ajouta-t-il de ne pas manquer à la foi conjugale, si vous épousez un Marin? La promesse faite, il la baptisa à-peu-près comme nous. La sœur de cette Demoiselle s'étoit cachée pour n'être pas exposée à subir cette cérémonie. On la trouva, & on voulut la contraindre à venir recevoir le baptême; mais le Vicaire, averti qu'il y avoit des raisons, pour qu'elle ne s'exposât pas au

1763, *continued*

baptême de l'eau, lui dit qu'il se contenteroit de lui mettre des mouches au visage. Elle se présenta, & il tint parole. Deux femmes mariées ne furent pas baptisées, parce que leurs enfans en bas âge, & qu'elles ne pouvoient abandonner, jettoient des cris par la peur que leur inspiroient les figures grotesques des gens de la suite du Président de la Ligne.

Quelques Passagers furent ensuite baptisés & barbouillés de noir & de rouge, mais on ne les fit pas placer sur la baignoire, parce qu'ayant commencé à jeter quelques seaux d'eau sur les baptisés, ceux-ci pour avoir leur revanche en jetterent aux Matelots. Ceux qui avoient été mouillés, voulurent mouiller les autres; le désordre augmenta, & tous ceux qui se trouverent sur le gaillard furent aussi humectés que s'ils étoient tombés dans la mer. Ainsi finit ordinairement cette farce, & on est encore trop heureux quand on en est quitte pour de l'argent & quelques seaux d'eau.

Le baptême dans les navires qui passent la ligne, est en usage chez toutes les Nations de l'Europe; mais il n'y a pas d'uniformité dans les cérémonies. Chaque Nation en imagine de conformes à son génie & à son caractère, & la fête devient plus ou moins gaie, suivant le plus ou moins d'esprit de ceux qui y président. Quelquefois celui qui baptise donne au Cathécumène le nom d'une ville, ou d'un cap, ou d'une mer, & on tâche d'assortir ce nom de manière qu'il exprime le caractère, l'humeur, la figure ou l'inclination du baptisé. On appelle cette cérémonie le *Baptême* ou le *rachat*: le baptême, à cause de l'eau dont on inonde ceux qui passent la Ligne pour la première fois; le *rachat*, à cause du tribut que paient ceux qui ne veulent pas être inondés. Ce tribut est ordinairement volontaire de la part de celui qui paie. Quelquefois ce sont les farceurs même qui l'imposent, en gardant néanmoins la proportion convenable aux facultés des tributaires.

Lorsque le navire dans sa route ne doit pas passer la Ligne, mais seulement le Tropique, les Matelots ne voulant pas perdre leur tribut, supposent que le Tropique est le *filz aîné du Bon-homme la Ligne*, & héritier *présomptif de ses droits*. Ils jouent en conséquence, au passage du Tropique, la même farce que les autres sous l'Equateur. On a même imaginé de faire cette cérémonie, quand un navire double, pour la première fois, le cap Saint-Vincent, pour passer le détroit de Gibraltar. Les navires qui vont à la pêche de la Morue, observent la même pratique, lorsqu'ils approchent du grand banc de Terre-neuve.

(Antoine Joseph Pernetty. Histoire d'un voyage aux isles Malouines fait en 1763 & 1764; avec des observations sur le Détroit de Magellan, et sur les Patagons. Paris, 1770. v. 1, p. 106-124.)

This story of the Bougainville voyage to the Falkland islands and the South Atlantic is the most detailed account of the protocol developed for the ceremony we have so far, and is worth quoting in full on that account. Note its plain statement that the performance does not go back of da Cama's voyage of 1497. A supposition? Or, based on facts not known to us now? Camôens' note of it has been quoted above, but that mentions only the change in position of the sun. Is it not reasonable to suppose that in the long struggle down the west coast of Africa the old salts worked out a tradition to mark such an event?

Henningsen has twenty-one references to a ceremony on the passing of Gibraltar, from 1637 on. The oldest reference to a baptism on reaching the Grand Banks of Newfoundland by the cod-fishers is from Lahontan, about 1690, and le Beau from 1729; the latest is 1880. Vicomte de Chateaubriand tells his tale of the Grand Banks ceremony under 1791.

## 1764

As we now approached near to the Mediterranean, some of the sailors had got a strong new rope, and prepared it for ducking such of the crew as were novices in this sea. They were to be let down from the yard-arm, with their hands and feet tied to two bars of wood, placed at convenient distances; but when every thing was ready they all preferred the alternative, which is a small forfeit to be deducted from their pay.

(Richard Chandler. *Travels in Asia Minor and Greece*. New edition edited by Nicholas Revett. Oxford, 1825. v. 1, p. 2.)

The Reverend Doctor of Divinity was sent by the Dilettanti Society, with Revett, an architect, and Pars, a painter, to study and report on the antiquities of Ionia and Greece, in 1763–1766. Their report appeared in 1769 in shape of two fine folios.

His lively report tells of embarking at Gravesend on July 9, 1764 on the ship *Anglicana*, with a fair wind, "but our pilot, being in liquor, did not sail that evening." Note that the ducking was for "novices in this sea," the Mediterranean. I doubt if the "small forfeit to be deducted from their pay" was put to the expenses of the expedition, even of so worthy a cause.

This is the only account I have found for the ceremony at this place. It all seems, however, to be the accepted and recognized way to mark the event.

Mélusine, v. 3, column 263 (1886–7) prints the text of the French version of 1806, v. 1, p. 3.

## 1768

On the 25th of October we crossed the line with the usual ceremonies in 29° 24', when, by the result of several good azimuths, the variation was 2° 24'.

(James Cook. *An account of a voyage round the world in the years 1768, 1769, 1770, and 1771*. By Lieutenant James Cook, Commander of his Majesty's Bark the Endeavour. Hawkesworth's *Voyages*. London, 1785. v. 2, p. 236.)

So stands the earliest printed record of the first crossing made by the great seaman. The 1785 entry was severely cut down from the original text. Owing to Hawkesworth's idea of propriety or dignity or importance or to lack of space?

Thanks to Admiral Sir W. J. L. Wharton, however, we get the whole log entry in his edition of *Captain Cook's journal during his first voyage round the world made in H.M. Bark 'Endeavour', 1768–71*, London, 1893, p. 13–14, running thus:

Tuesday, 25th. — A Genteel breeze and Clear weather, with a Moist Air. Soon after sunrise found the Variation of the Compass to be 2° 24' W., being the Mean result of several very good Azimuths. This was just before we crossed the Line in the Longitude of 29° 29' W. from Greenwich. We also try'd the Dipping Needle belonging to the Royal Society, and found the N. point to Dip 26 degrees below the Horizon; but this Instrument cannot be used at Sea to any great degree of accuracy on account of the Motion of the Ship, which hinders the Needle from resting. However, as the Ship was pretty steady, and

1768, *continued*

by means of a Swinging Table I had made for that purpose, we could be Certain of the Dip to two Degrees at most. The Observed Latitude and that by account nearly Agree. Wind S. E. by E.; course S. 30° W.; distance 95 m.; lat 0° 15' S., long. 29° 30' W.; at noon, Bonavista, S. E. point, N. 26° E., 358 leagues.

Wednesday, 26th. — First part light Airs and Cloudy weather, the remainder a Moderate Breeze and Cloudy. After we had got an observation, and it was no longer Doubted that we were to the Southward of the Line, the Ceremony on this occasion practis'd by all Nations was not Omitted. Every one that could not prove upon the Sea Chart that he had before Crossed the Line was either to pay a Bottle of Rum or be Duck'd in the sea . . . and the weather was favourable for that purpose, this Ceremony was performed on about 20 or 30, to the no small Diversion of the Rest. Wind S.E. to S.S.E.; course S. 31° W.; distance 77 m.; lat. 1° 21' S., long. 30° 18' W.; at noon, Bonavista, S. E. point, N. 25° 30' E., 385 leagues.

Ships' logs follow tradition, probably, and aside from courses, winds, distance, and such revealing pictures — for the fellow seaman — seem to frown on anything else. On this trip, however, we have one of the scientists, Sir Joseph Banks, setting down in his diary a much more "human side of the news" as he pictures it for us in his *Journal . . . during Captain Cook's voyage in H.M.S. Endeavour, . . . edited by Sir Joseph Hooker, London, 1896, p. 18–20:*

25th. (Oct., 1768.) This morning about eight o'clock we crossed the equinoctial line in about 33 W. from Greenwich, at the rate of four knots, which our seamen said was uncommonly good, the thermometer standing at 79°. (The thermometers used in this voyage are two of Mr. Bird's making, after Fahrenheit's scale, and seldom differ by more than a degree from each other, and that only when they are as high as 80°, in which case the mean reading of the two instruments is set down.) This evening the ceremony of ducking the ship's company was performed, as is always customary on crossing the line, when those who have crossed it before claim a right of ducking all that have not. The whole of the ceremony I shall describe.

About dinner-time a list was brought into the cabin containing the names of everybody and thing aboard the ship (in which the dogs and cats were not forgotten); to this was fixed a signed petition from the ship's company desiring leave to examine everybody in that list, that it might be known whether or not they had crossed the line before. This was immediately granted, everybody being called upon the quarter-deck and examined by one of the lieutenants who had crossed the line: he marked every name either to be ducked or let off as their qualification directed. Captain Cook and Dr. Solander were on the black list, as were I myself, my servants, and dogs for all of whom I was obliged to compound by giving the duckers a certain quantity of brandy, for which they willingly excused us the ceremony.

Many of the men, however, chose to be ducked rather than give up four day's allowance of wine, which was the price fixed upon, and as for the boys

they are always ducked, of course, so that about twenty-one underwent the ceremony.

A block was made fast to the end of the main-yard, and a long line reved through it, to which three pieces of wood were fastened, one of which was put between the legs of the man who was to be ducked, and to this he was tied very fast, another was for him to hold in his hands, and the third was over his head, lest the rope should be hoisted too near the block, and by that means the man be hurt. When he was fastened upon this machine the boatswain gave the command by his whistle, and the man was hoisted up as high as the cross-piece over his head would allow, when another signal was made, and immediately the rope was let go, and his own weight carried him down; he was then immediately hoisted up again, and three times served in this manner, which was every man's allowance. Thus ended the diversion of the day, for the ducking lasted until almost night, and sufficiently diverting it was to see the different faces that were made on this occasion, some grinning and exulting in their hardiness, whilst others were almost suffocated, and came up ready enough to have compounded after the first or second duck, had such a proceeding been allowable.

Almost immediately after crossing the tropic the air had sensibly become much damper than usual, though not materially hotter: the thermometer in general stood from  $80^{\circ}$  to  $82^{\circ}$ . The nearer we approached to the calms, the damper everything grew; this was very perceptible even to the human body, but more remarkable was its effect upon all kinds of furniture. Everything made of iron rusted so fast that the knives in people's pockets became almost useless, and the razors in cases did not escape; all kinds of leather became mouldy, portfolios and trunks covered with black leather were almost white. Soon afterwards this mould adhered to almost everything; all the books in my library became mouldy, so that they had to be wiped to preserve them.

About this time we came into the calms, which we met with earlier than usual: the thermometer was then at  $83^{\circ}$ , and we suffered from the heat and damp together. Bathing, however, kept me in perfect health, although many of the ship's company were ill of bilious complaints, which, however, were but of short duration. This continued till we got the S. E. trade, when the air became cooler, but the dampness continued yet: to that I chiefly attribute the ill-success of the electrical experiments, of which I have written an account in separate papers, that the different experiments may appear at one view.

The air, during the whole time since we crossed the tropic, and indeed for some time before, has been nearly of the same temperature throughout the twenty-four hours, the thermometer seldom rising more than a degree during the time the sun is above the horizon; the cabin windows have been open without once being shut ever since we left Madeira.

Though plenty of this has nothing to do with the "crossing" ceremony, it is set down now with no apology. It does give as lively and as telling a story of daily life at the time of the ceremony as it does of physical conditions facing the company.

1768, *continued*

Other editions of the voyage follow much the same line, in varying degrees of fullness and accuracy, Low about 1900, Lloyd in 1949. And so too such lives as those by Kippis, Kitson, and James Alexander Williamson.

The voyages of 1772 and 1776 are noted below under their respective dates.

### 1772

At length, on the 8th of September, we crossed the line in the longitude of 8° West; after which the ceremony of ducking &c. generally practiced on this occasion, was not omitted.

(James Cook. A voyage towards the south pole and round the world. Performed in His Majesty's Ships the *Resolution* and *Adventure*, in the years 1772, 1773, 1774, and 1775. London; Strahan and Cadell, 1777. v. 1, p. 11.)

On the 9th, having passed the line with a light air, our crew ducked such of their shipmates as had never crossed it before, and did not care to redeem themselves by paying a certain forfeit of brandy. Those who had been obliged to undergo a briny submersion, changed their linen and clothes; and as this can never be done too often, especially in warm weather, the ducking proved a salutary operation to them. The quantity of strong liquors, arising from the forfeits of the rest, served to heighten jovial humour, which is the prominent characteristic of sailors.

(George Forster. A voyage round the world, in His Britannic Majesty's Sloop, *Resolution*, commanded by Capt. James Cook, during the years 1772, 3, 4, and 5. London, 1777. v. 1, p. 48-49.)

### 1774

We are now fairly under the Tropick and are preparing for a farce that is played on this occasion by every ship that goes to or fro under the Tropick. It is, it seems, a sort of Mason word, and till I am admitted in form, I must not appear to know it. I shall therefore only tell you that we have been made to expect a visit from old Tropicus and his ancient dame. He is a wizard and she a witch who inhabit an invisible Island in these Seas, and have a privilege of raising contributions from every Ship that passes their dominions, only however from such as never was that way before. But my account is cut short by the appearance of the Actors, who are dressed for their parts. Tropicus is performed by an old rough dog of a Tar, who needs very little alteration to become a callaban in mind and body, but his wife is played by a very handsome fellow, who is completely transformed. Every body is below waiting, in trembling expectation, and no wonder, for an awful ceremony this Visitation is. Tropick the Island was no sooner seen, than the Jolly boat was taken down, on pretence of going with the Captain aboard it to meet him, but in fact to be filled full of pump water for a use you shall hear by and by. This being done Tropick is spoke to thro' the trumpet, and a hollow voice demands what strangers are aboard. All this the people below hear, and tho' many of the

Emigrants appear sensible, yet all the Highlanders and Islanders are so superstitious, that they may be easily imposed on, in such a thing as this; and they were completely so. The wizard now ordered them to be brought up, one by one blindfolded and their hands bound behind them; such was their fear, that they suffered this to be done without dispute. In this situation, they were to answer certain questions which he put to them; if they spoke strictly truth, then he shaved them, took a small gratuity for his trouble, gave them his benediction, and let them pass. But if they disguised or concealed the truth, which he was supposed perfectly to know, then he tumbled them into the Sea, where they perished. Prepossessed with this idea, a poor lad was brought before the infernal Judge: "Answer me," said he sternly, "answer me truth; what made you leave home?" "O troth sir, I dinna well ken:" "but you must know," said he, "so answer me instantly." "O Dear, O Lord! I think it was, because so many were going, I did not like to stay behind," "And pray what are you good for in this world, to prevent me sending you to the next?" "Truth, an please your honour, e'en, very little." "What," said he, with a voice like thunder, "are you good for nothing?" "O yes, yes, I am no very ill at the small fishing." As this young man did not seem to overrate his own merits, the wizard was satisfied, placed him on the side of the boat, which he believed was the ship, being still blind folded and bound. The wizard began to shave him with a notched stick and pot-black. The sharp notches soon brought blood, and the poor devil starting from the pain, tumbled into the boat amongst the water, and thinking it the sea, roared with terror. And in this consisted the whole wit of the entertainment. He was now unbound and restored to the light and as keen to bring in his neighbours, who one by one, went thro' the same operation. As soon as it was over, the custom licences the sailors to treat the officers with every degree of freedom, nor do they fail to take the opportunity. The Cap<sup>t</sup>, mates, supercargo, and all were chaced round and round, and drenched in the water from the boat, which they threw at them in bucket-fulls.

We had now gone to the Cabin, and believed all was over, when a loud screaming on deck brought us up to see what was the matter, and we found our Cap<sup>t</sup> had begun to act a tragedy after our comedy, and to oblige these poor ruined creatures to pay five shillings for each, or be pulled up to a mast and from that plunged down to the Sea. This was a sum impossible to be raised, and the poor women were running with what remained of their cloths to give in place of it to save their husbands and fathers. Amongst others Marion was going with all speed, with her aunt's popline gown; but it was needless, for John Lawson now stood at bay, his fist clinched and swearing by the great God, that the first man that touched him had not another moment to live, nor was there one hardy enough to encounter a fist, which had not its fellow on board. But this was not the case with others, and they had one man tied, and only waited to see, if his wife had as many moveables as to save his life, for he was a poor weak old man, and would not have agreed

1774, continued

with this method of bathing. I never in my life saw my brother in such a passion; he swore solemnly, that the moment he got to land, he would raise a prosecution against the Cap<sup>t</sup>, who pleaded that it was the custom, and only intended as a little drink money to the sailors. If that is the case, replied my brother, let them give up their cloths, and they shall be satisfied. This was complied with cheerfully, he gave them what they were satisfied with, to which they returned three cheers, as he went to the cabin and serenaded us with the favourite song,

O grog is the liquor of life  
The delight of each free British tar.

(Journal of a lady of quality; being the narrative of a journey from Scotland to the West Indies, North Carolina, and Portugal, in the years 1774 to 1776. Edited by Evangeline Walker Andrews, in collaboration with Charles McLean Andrews, Farnam Professor of American History in Yale University. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922. p. 69-72.)

A footnote to "jolly boat" runs thus: "The jolly boat was generally swung at the stern of the vessel. Regarding the 'awful ceremony,' the author of *A Brief Account of the Island of Antigua* (1789), who made the voyage from the Downs to Antigua in 1786, says, 'I had almost forgot to observe that on passing the tropic of Cancer, the old custom of ducking and shaving such as have not before crossed it, was performed by the seamen with some humour on one man and two boys. The passengers waved the ceremony by a liquor fine (p. 5).'"

A footnote to "satisfied" in the last sentence: "Evidently meaning that if the sailors would give up their claim to the clothes of the emigrants, he (Mr. Schaw) would pay for their grog."

The original manuscript is Egerton 2423 of the British Museum.

Join Janet Schaw of Edinburgh, the "Lady of Quality" here, with the writer of the letter reprinted below under 1792 from the text in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, and all of us will certainly wish that we had more reports from women. Each tells the facts accurately enough to satisfy the most insistent Gradgrind, each tells her tale with a liveliness markedly absent in most of the reports by her male "superiors." Plenty of variations in detail show themselves here, nothing of any great importance, though it is worth noting perhaps that not since Linschoten in 1583 do we find any such a brawl as seems to have broken out here.

The ship slipped along easily. One day was like another, but each evening found them nearer the Leeward Islands. The captain began to predict that they would reach St. John's, the chief town on Antigua, about the end of the week. One morning, after he had calculated the latitude, he told the passengers the ship would reach the line and pass into the Torrid Zone late the next morning or early in the afternoon.

At noon the ship crossed the Tropic of Cancer. Since it was not to cross the Equator and have the time-honoured celebration of that, the captain allowed the old hands to hold an initiation ceremony for those first entering tropic waters. It seemed wise to encourage anything that would relieve the tedium of the voyage. The ceremony was a rude mummerly with a sailor in an oakum wig playing Neptune, come aboard to welcome the ship into his tropic kingdom. Neptune sat as a judge on each candidate for initiation. Some he ordered

shaved. They were lathered with a mixture of kitchen grease and pot black and scraped with a notched stick for a razor. Others, blindfolded, he ordered pitched into the sea. They were tipped backward into a tub of water. Though it was only horseplay, some of the more superstitious Highlanders believed the big sailor was in truth Neptune and his judgements frightened them badly.

There were many new-comers to the tropics and Neptune was still at his work judging them in the late afternoon when the lookout reported a sail on the horizon, to the south. As the stranger came closer it revealed itself as a light schooner. Both vessels changed courses to pass close by.

(Inglis Fletcher. *The Scotswoman*. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company [1954] p. 217.)

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The "Scotswoman" is Flora MacDonald, and here we are told of one day on the voyage the family made to settle in North Carolina after the troubles of "the '45." It is particularly welcome because it gives one more of the few times when the tale is found in fiction.

### 1776

On the first of September we crossed the Equator, in the longitude of 27° 38' West, with a fine gale at South East by South; and not withstanding my apprehensions of falling in with the coast of Brazil in stretching to the South West, I kept the ship a full point from the wind.

(A voyage to the Pacific Ocean . . . in the years 1776, 1777, 1778, 1779, and 1780. By Captain James Cook. London, 1785. 2. edition. v. 1, p. 34.)

A footnote to the "September" tells how the editor of this posthumous report felt about such performances:

The afternoon, as appears from Mr. Anderson's Journal, was spent in performing the old and ridiculous ceremony of ducking those who had not crossed the Equator before. Though Captain Cook did not suppress the custom, he thought it too trifling to deserve the least mention of it in his Journal, or even in his log-book. Pernetty, the Writer of Bougainville's Voyage to the Falkland Islands, in 1763 and 1764, thought differently; for his account of the celebration of this childish festival on board his ship is extended through seventeen pages, and makes the subject of an entire chapter, under the title of *Baptême de la Ligne*.

It may be worth while to transcribe his introduction to the description of it. 'C'est un usage qui ne remonte pas plus haut que ce voyage célèbre de Gama, qui a fourni au Camoens le sujet de La Lusiad . . . Car, partout, dès que le peuple parle, il faut que le sage se mette à l'unison.'

The introduction to the British account fills 89 quarto pages, sumptuous in real eighteenth century style as to composition and typography, but never a word there about "the old and ridiculous ceremony."

The Bougainville chapter is entered under 1763 above.

### 1780

Juillet. Nous arrivâmes près du tropique du Cancer où en passant pour la 1<sup>ère</sup> fois il est d'usage de recevoir le baptême du Bonhomme Tropicque, c'est un droit qu'il faut payer au matelot, et la manière singulière, et pittoresque de cette cérémonie, mérite d'être lue une fois.

1780, *continued*

Le 17 qui était la veille de notre passage sous le tropique du Cancer, le vieux Bonhomme Tropicque envoya un courrier avec une lettre prévenir le Cpt. du navire de se préparer à faire recevoir son baptême à ceux qui n'avaient pas encore entré dans son royaume.

Lettre du Bonhomme Tropicque au capitaine du vaisseau.

Monsieur, l'honneur de votre connoissance depuis que vous naviguez dans mon royaume, a fait que je me suis informé de vous et je n'ai pu savoir de vos nouvelles qu'il n'y a environ 15 jours par la *Garonne* et la *Princesse d'Hénnin* qui ont passé dans mon royaume et dont je suis très satisfait, tant pour la réjouissance qu'ils ont fait, que la bonne conduit qu'ils ont tenue à mon égard. Je vous envoie mon courrier pour vous annoncer ma visite. J'irai vous voir demain, ou après, je ne puis pas assurer, parce qu'il y a une frégate du roi, mais comme vous êtes second commandant, vous serez le deuxième, je pense que je serai content de vous comme de coutume, et de tous ces messieurs qui sont surtout gens de cœur, et qui vont combattre et soutenir l'honneur de la couronne française; vous avez à bord Mr. . . . qui s'est conduit avec rapinerie en passant dans mon royaume, ne soyez pas surpris de ma vengeance à son égard, il faut pour m'adoucir qu'il profite de l'occasion qui va sa présenter, car sachez que mes soldats n'épargneront personne, de ceux qui ne rendront la satisfaction qui m'est due, vous avez à baptiser, le navire, chaloupe, canot, ainsi que Mrs Berthier et d'Ottecan que je ne connois pas, n'ayant jamais passé dans mon royaume il faut qu'ils se préparent à recevoir mon baptême ainsi que Mr. votre fils. Rien autre chose à vous marquer pour le présent sinon que je suis votre ami le Bonhomme tropique du Cancer.

Le 18 nous passâmes le tropique à midi et à 4 heures après-dîner la cérémonie commença ainsi:

Nous entendîmes dans la hune de misaine les cris d'un vieillard tremblant de froid, et le bruit d'une grande quantité de chaînes, un instant après descendit un capucin, plusieurs archers barbouillés, un tambour, et le Bonhomme Tropicque presque nu, peint en rouge, noire [*sic*], couvert seulement d'une peau de mouton sur les épaules avec une chaîne au milieu du corps, une très longue barbe, un bonnet de peau, et son fils, à califourchon sur ses épaules, tout nu, peint en rouge, bleu et goudronné, et roulé dans les plumes de poules, ils avaient l'air de grelotter de froid.

Cette compagnie arrivée en bas, le bonhomme monta sur un matelot à 4 pattes faisant l'âne, et toute la cohorte se mit à faire la procession autour du navire.

A chaque canon de gaillard d'arrière était attaché un mousse culotte bas, et le cul à l'air tourné de notre côté; lorsque la procession fut revenue vis-à-

vis la dunette, le capucin monta dessus, et nous débita un sermon, dont le sens était de nous faire bien comprendre que nos bourses devaient jouer le principal rôle dans la cérémonie. Ce sermon fini on se rendit auprès du grand mât, où était une cuve pleine d'eau, sur laquelle il y avait une planche au travers pour s'asseoir; au-dessus était suspendu un panier, et deux hommes avec des seaux, prêts à puiser de l'eau dans 2 tonneaux qu'ils avaient à côté d'eux. Le Bonhomme Tropicque était assis près d'une table où était son secrétaire enregistrant les noms des baptisés, toute la garnison garnisonnée entourait cet appareil.

On me fit l'honneur de me venir chercher le premier, je m'assis sur la petite planche au-dessus de la cuve, et le capucin me demanda, si je promettais de respecter toutes les femmes des marins absents, je l'assurais, que j'avais de tout temps respecté les dames, en mesure que leur âge m'inspirait ce sentiment, j'accompagnai mon discours d'un louis que je mis dans le plat, et on me jeta un peu d'eau sur les mains pendant qu'une pompe arrosait successivement le derrière de tous les petits mousses attachés aux canons et l'on me renvoya; tous ceux protégés par le capitaine passèrent ainsi. Ensuite la cérémonie se fit dans toutes les règles, à l'instant où le patient était assis sur la petite planche, elle se retirait, et un crochet mis à la ceinture de la culotte par derrière tenu à une corde qui passe par le milieu de la cuve, les faisait tomber et les tenait dedans, pendant que les deux hommes, jetaient de l'eau à plein seau, dans le panier suspendu au-dessus de la cuve, la cérémonie du cul des mousses avait toujours lieu.

Mon domestique m'avait demandé de payer pour lui, je lui accordai, mais comme je promis au Bonhomme Tropicque, de ne payer qu'en raison de la manière dont il serait bien mouillé, il peut assurer, qu'aucun de sa famille n'a été aussi bien baptisé.

La cérémonie finie, chacun se jeta de l'eau pour son compte, et nous fûmes tous bien mouillés.

(Louis-Alexandre Berthier. Journal de la campagne d'Amérique, 10 mai 1780 – 26 août 1781. Printed here from the original manuscript in Princeton University Library. In 1951 the Institut Français de Washington printed the entire text (76 pages), edited with an introduction by Professor Gilbert Chinard.)

Note that it is "le vieux Bonhomme Tropicque" who rules here, not Neptune. At this era the ceremonies are divided into the two quite separate parts of the French Père (or Bonhomme) la Ligne (or Tropicque) and the English Neptune. In the 19th century the two personalities slowly melt together, both Bonhomme and Neptune appearing in some French references, with Neptune ultimately quite the winner. This is one of the most interesting and astonishing facts in the history of the baptism.

The oath to respect the wives of sailors is first mentioned in 1702, then in 1714, and from then on it is fairly common until our own days. Note the clever and perfectly safe reply of Berthier. Note also the special baptizing of the cabin boys; the shivering and the chattering with cold, possibly if not evidently taking over a tradition from northern sources; all in all the proof that here "a good time was had by all."

Berthier, officer, and therefore of rank, entered into it fully and showed nothing of the superior and condescending tolerance of pranks by the lower classes we find in some of the reports from British travelers.

1785

On the 16th [of November] we crossed the Line, our latitude being 22 miles South . . .

Sailors on crossing the Line, have a custom of plunging every person on board, who have never been to the Southward of it, over head and ears in a tub of water. This ceremony being but ill relished by some of our people, Captain Dixon promised all hands a double allowance of grog if they would desist: this was very willingly accepted, and harmony was soon restored: but alas! grog and good humour soon were at variance, and some of the people grew so quarrelsome and turbulent, that they were put in irons: this brought them to reason in a short time, and they were set at liberty on promise of better behaviour.

(George Dixon. *A voyage round the world . . . 1785 . . . 1788*. London, 1789. 2. ed. p. 29-30.)

The British Museum catalogue enters the first edition (1789) under B., W., and after George Dixon as author inserts this note: "or rather, a series of letters signed: W. B., i. e. William Beresford, edited by G. Dixon." No such note appears on the title page of the second edition as cited above.

Ambassador. A trick to duck some ignorant fellow or landsman, frequently played on board ships in the warm latitudes, it is thus managed: a large tub is filled with water, and two stools placed on each side of it, over the whole is thrown a tarpawlin, or old sail, this is kept tight by two persons, who are to represent the king and queen of a foreign country, and are seated on the stools. The person intended to be ducked plays the Ambassador, and after repeating a ridiculous speech dictated to him, is led in great form up to the throne, and seated between the king and queen, who rising suddenly as soon as he is seated, he falls backward into the tub of water.

Arthur; King Arthur, a game used at sea, when near the line, or in a hot latitude. It is performed thus: a man who is to represent king Arthur, ridiculously dressed, having a large wig made out of oakum, or some old swabs, is seated on the side, or over a large vessel of water, every person in his turn is to be ceremoniously introduced to him, and to pour a bucket of water over him, crying Hail, king Arthur! If during this ceremony the person introduced laughs or smiles (to which his majesty endeavours to excite him, by all sorts of ridiculous gesticulations), he changes places with, and then becomes, king Arthur, till relieved by some brother tar, who has as little command over his muscles as himself.

(Francis Grose. *A classical dictionary of the vulgar tongue*. London, 1785.)

A variation of, or a substitute for, the tradition by now so well established? I dare not say, do dare to add that this is the only reference to Ambassador or King Arthur I have found, though Henningsen finds one in 1708.

Neither Ambassador nor Arthur with any such meaning is included in the Oxford Dictionary, first series or supplement.

King Arthur, with slight changes in punctuation is printed in *Mélusine*, v. 5 (1890-1891), column 191, following the 1796, London, edition.

1787

[July] 14th. About five in the evening we crossed the equator, without any wish or inclination being shewn by the seamen to observe the ceremony usually practised in passing under it.

(John White. Journal of a voyage to new South Wales. London, 1790.  
p. 37.)

Even if nothing more marked the crossing than the reference to "the ceremony usually practised," the passage is worth noting. The book is a sumptuous quarto so typical of its time, with paper stock of a quality to remember, the engravings of natural history matching the other admirable features. The text is a revealing picture of life aboard ship, in those days, troubled with scurvy — and this even after the days of Cook! — drinking water, bilge water, to say nothing of the control of the convicts.

1791

Le vent nous força d'anordir et nous accostâmes le banc de Terre-Neuve. Quelques glaces flottantes rôdaient au milieu d'une bruine froide et pâle.

Les hommes du trident ont des jeux qui leur viennent de leurs devanciers: quand on passe la Ligne, il faut se résoudre à recevoir le *baptême*: même cérémonie sous le Tropicque, même cérémonie sur le banc de Terre-Neuve, et quel que soit le lieu, le chef de la mascarade est toujours le *bonhomme Tropicque*. Tropicque et *hydropicque* sont synonymes pour les matelots: le bonhomme Tropicque a donc une bedaine énorme; il est vêtu, lors même qu'il est sous son tropicque, de toutes les peaux de mouton et de toutes les jaquettes fourrées de l'équipage. Il se tient accroupi dans la grande hune, poussant de temps en temps des mugissements. Chacun le regarde d'en-bas: il commence à descendre le long des haubans, pesant comme un ours, trébuchant comme Silène. En mettant le pied sur le pont, il pousse de nouveaux rugissements, bondit, saisit un seau, le remplit d'eau de mer et le verse sur le chef de ceux qui n'ont pas passé la Ligne, ou qui ne sont pas parvenus à la latitude des glaces. On fuit sous les ponts, on remonte sur les écoutes, on grimpe aux mâts: père Tropicque vous poursuit; cela finit au moyen d'un large pourboire: jeux d'Amphitrite, qu'Homère aurait célébrés comme il a chanté Protée, si le vieil Océanus eût été connu tout entier du temps d'Ulysse; mais alors on ne voyait encore que sa tête aux Colonnes d'Hercule; son corps caché couvrait le monde.

(François René, Vicomte de Chateaubriand. Mémoires d'outre-tombe.  
Edition du Centenaire par Maurice Levaillant. Paris, 1948. v. 1, p. 266-267.)

The wind compelled us to bear to the North, and we came alongside of the bank of Newfoundland. Floating icebergs roamed in the midst of a pale, cold mist.

The men of the trident have sports which are handed down to them from their ancestors: when you cross the Line, you must make up your mind to receive "baptism;" the same ceremony occurs beneath the Tropics, the same

1791, *continued*

ceremony on the bank of Newfoundland, and whatever the spot, the leader of the masquerade is always "the Old Man of the Tropics." To the sailors, tropical and hydropical are interchangeable terms: the Old Man of the Tropics therefore has an enormous paunch; he is dressed, even when beneath his native Tropics, in all the sheepskins and all the furred jackets that the crew can supply. He sits squatting in the main-top and roaring from time to time. Every one looks at him from below; he begins to climb down the shrouds, moving heavily like a bear, and stumbling like Silenus. As he sets foot on deck, he utters fresh roars, gives a bound, seizes a pail, fills it with sea-water, and empties it over the chief of those who have not crossed the Equator or who have not reached the line of ice. You fly beneath the decks, you spring upon the hatches, you clamber up the masts: Old Father Tropics is after you; all this ends in a generous gift of drink-money: games of Amphitrite which Homer would have celebrated, even as he sang Proteus, if old Oceanus had been known in his entirety in the time of Ulysses; but, in those days, only his head was visible at the Pillars of Hercules: his body lay hidden and covered the world.

(The Memoirs of François René Vicomte de Chateaubriand. Translation by Alexander Teixeira de Mattos of the Mémoires d'outre-tombe with illustrations from contemporary sources. London, 1902. v. 1, p. 200.)

If we mean zero latitude by "crossing the line" this tale is ruled out. If, however, we are willing to admit that the ceremony marks the crossing from one region to another supposed to bring with it dangers inevitable unless certain vows are made and certain actions taken, then this — hitherto — most northerly record may rightfully claim and demand a place. The dress in "all the furred jackets that the crew can supply" fits in well with tradition harking back to northern, cold climates. We have seen something like it before when the King comes on deck shaking and trembling. The one constant and universal element is the "generous gift of drink-money."

Henningsen says the custom is common today on Danish ships sailing to Greenland.

1792

By such means as these [ventilation, cleaning, attention to good food, etc.] the men gradually recovered; and were prepared to enjoy the festivities usual on the passage of the Line. No doubt, the entrance into another hemisphere, when it was first made, must have been an event arresting the attention, and filling the minds of those, in every station, who were witnesses of it. And the commander who, for the first time, had the good fortune to cross the Line, probably indulged his crew in testifying a joy he must sincerely have felt himself. The lower orders of mankind, who know little of life except its labours, are not easily forgetful of any occasion, recurring to them so seldom, of enjoying a momentary gleam of happiness and independence. It reconciles them to subsequent subordination, and, even, suffering. They seldom abuse the indulgence thus allowed them; and frequently tire, in a little time, of what they entered upon with so much eagerness, and conceived to be productive of so much pleasure; and feeling that idleness ceases soon to be

enjoyment, return with resignation, and real comfort to their wonted occupations. The amusements, on this occasion, consisted chiefly in dressing up a sailor, of a good figure and manly countenance, in the supposed proper habit of the sea god, Neptune, armed with a trident, and his garments dripping with the element submitted to his power. He stood at the ship's head, as if he were rising out of the ocean, and demanded, with an audible voice, what was the ship thus encroaching upon his dominions? An answer being given from the quarter-deck, where the Ambassador, Sir Erasmus Gower, the officers and passengers, all stood, announcing the ship's name, and purport of the voyage, Neptune, with his attendants properly accoutred, stepped with great solemnity towards them, and, with some words of compliment to his Excellency, presented him a fish (lately caught) as part of the produce of the deity's domains. His godhead was treated by all with great respect; and becoming offerings of silver were voluntarily made to him, for himself and his companions, by those who had crossed the Line before: but were exacted as a just tribute from those who attempted it for the first time, under penalty of going through ceremonies, not a little ludicrous, and promotive of much broad laughter among the initiated into those mysteries. They concluded with a plentiful repast, accompanied with the music of the bagpipe, and copious, tho not excessive, libations of exhilarating liquor.

(Sir George Leonard Staunton, 1st Baronet. An authentic account of an embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China. London, 1797. v. 1, p. 145-146.)

Sir George Leonard Staunton, first baronet, went to China as secretary of Lord Macartney's mission, sailing from Portsmouth September 26, 1792. The "authentic account of an embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China" was published at London in 1797 (reprinted at Philadelphia in 1799). It tells of the illness among the crew and of the calms that delayed the cruise as they came into the doldrums; it adds nothing new as to the ceremony except perhaps the joyful news that the "libations of exhilarating liquor" were "copious, though not excessive." The crew had perhaps been fortified by bitter experience for such ordeals, and proved their rights thus to membership in the Order of True Temperance Performers.

He does provide the twentieth century readers with a delicious picture of the point of view of the diplomat and the nobleman choosing to condescend to give passing attention to some of the feelings and emotions of "the lower orders of mankind, who know little of life except its labours." Some of us may venture to wonder what Sir George Staunton, bart., would have said when he read about the visit in 1920 by the Prince of Wales to Australia and New Zealand, and how when "Neptune came on board" and "demanded the royal victim with glee" the orders were "carried out with brutal precision."

4. On distingue le baptême de la ligne & de celui des tropiques & l'un des trois n'exempte pas des deux autres conformément aux principes de cette institution.

(Charles Romme. Dictionnaire de la marine française. Paris, 1792. p. 63. Reprinted with minor variations in: *Mélusine*, v. 2 (1884-5), column 276.)

Mr. Urban, *April 23*. As I never remember reading in any of your Magazines an account of the fun usual on board ships on crossing the line; I will extract

1792, *continued*

from a letter on board an Indiaman, giving an account of it; and as every custom, however ridiculous it may have dwindled into (as for instance, swearing at Highgate) has had a salutary foundation, I should wish some of your numerous readers, or your philanthropic self, would be pleased to tell me from what occasion it arose. Time that is employed in investigation must be of general utility, for it often draws, if not a satisfactory conclusion of our own, a wise one from a better informed man; so, good Mr. Urban, call upon some of your many friends; and fix an opinion about it. A RAMBLER.

“But I must tell you the fun above board, &c. and for which preparation had been making all the morning; it is customary to play tricks upon all water travellers that have never been in South latitudes, and the sailors look upon it as a privilege to make themselves as merry as they can. Passengers generally, by a moderate quantity of liquor, avoid the honour of the ceremony; but, should an unfortunate one prove restive, the watery gods would become very boisterous. A sailor representing Neptune, curiously rigged with a trident and stock fish at the top of it, with thick oakham to burlesque flowing locks, is mounted upon one of the ship’s gratings, by way of a triumphal car; on his left, Madam Amphytrite, bedizened in the full fashion of Portsmouth Point; with this distinction, she appeared big with child, which we should suppose rather unusual with the Point ladies; they were dragged (I beg pardon) they were drawn upon the quarter deck by two Africans, and attended by a numerous retinue of inferior Gods; and, what was unexpectedly well timed,\* Amphytrite insisted on freedom being given to the Africans, swearing that the Gods would never countenance the inhuman Slave-trade. On approaching the captain of the ship, Neptune congratulated him on his quick passage, and told him, in consequence of his good treatment of his children, the British sailors, he had given him a Southerly wind, and should continue to look to him the rest of his voyage; at this moment the ladies came on the quarter deck, which induced Mrs. Amphytrite to dismount from her car, and tottering towards them, leaning on a piece of old broomstick, thus began:

“Sweet young damsels I greet you; I’ve conducted many of you to India; be of good cheer; its what we must all come to [stroking her belly]; never fear, sweet young damslets; India’s the place for Nabobs and arrack; and if old fogrum [turning to Neptune] should

\* You will not be surprized at this, when I tell you, I have often since seen this honest tar with a volume of Shakespear.

offer to do any thing to discompose you, I will [shaking her stick at him]—d——n me tight, if I don't."

"Neptune, who perhaps knew the force of stick argument, gave her a kiss, which produced a most engaging leer, from a pair of as squinting eyes as, you ever saw; not upon the God, but upon the fair dame: — But, damslets of my heart, you have not seen our *Wallet de Shavre*; \* we never travel without him; look at him?" A sailor with bushy spun yarn, half flowered, with three large horse combs, and a rusty piece of iron to shave with, made his advance. If you had seen the figure, and the extended broom-stick, turning him round to advantage, you must have laughed most heartily.

"The captain told them the quantity of grog they were to be regaled with, and that he hoped they would conduct themselves with propriety; *Amphytrite* † wielded her stick, and swore by her power they should; she then remounted the car, and the procession moved slowly on by beat of drum; but not before the Goddess had sung to the ladies with great humour: "When I was young, I could bill like a dove," &c.

"They proceeded into the waste, where a large tub of water was placed with a plank over it, in order to introduce the new-commers to a Southern latitude; on catching a novice, he was brought before the judge, who was too arbitrary to hear an answer, but ordered the *Wallet de Shavre* to proceed; in an instant his face is covered with the hard-to-be-rubbed-out mixture of tar and grease, and the rusty iron rasped over it; he is then asked, if he had ever crossed the Line before; on answering "No," he is in hopes they have finished with him; they bid him say "God save the King," which obliging him to open his mouth, the wit then is to stick a piece of tarred rope in it; in the confusion, the seat is easily drawn from under him, and souse he ducks into the tub; in this "buck-basket" situation several buckets of water are thrown over him, and he is pushed forward amongst his laughing comrades. This ducking across the Line, as it is called, frees them for ever after; and I could not help observing, how anxious and active the first sufferers were to get others into the same situation. After the sailors had finished, the soldiers began, and I do not believe one escaped; they did not seem at first to relish it, but seeing others as dirty as themselves, it ended in general laughter, and in two hours Neptune and his wife dwindled into mortals. They do say, the lady is already very drunk; I believe it, for she has met with

\* Why should not sailors as well have their *Wallet de Shavres*, as beaus their *Valet de Chambres*?

† This man is not only a compleat humourist, but has a cast of countenance that immediately tells it: he often when singing reminds me of Edwin.

1792, *continued*

a great deal of applause, and a copious quantity of grog, and I hear her stammering away in the steerage.

"She has done me the honor of calling in my cabin, and drinking a stiff glass of grog; at the same time assuring me, by a mortal squeeze of the hand, that she was sure, "I loved a sailor dearly," and that she hoped, "sailors and soldiers would always fight hard and drink hard together." I shewed my approval by another glass of grog; and, I am very well assured, we parted friends; and where was the harm of it? For when sailors and soldiers have the privilege (of the day) to do their best to be happy, it is the duty of every man (that is only an allowed superior) to endeavour to make them so.

"I wonder from whence this curious custom arose; but I am sure it is so rooted a one that, if a ship was not to be granted it, it would occasion a dangerous cabal amongst the crew. Who knows but Vasco de Gama, who was always so happy in a ready thought, might have been the framer of it, to keep up the hearts of his men, previous to his doubling the Cape in his great perilous voyage? But, whoever he was, he had a wise head; for long voyages require a bustle every now and then to keep the devil out of the sailors heads. Trade winds are pleasant, but too insipid; a ship is sometimes a month without having occasion to touch a rope; and sometimes so becalmed, as to be almost as long without advancing a degree; of course a languor ensues; which is a time for bad men to be thinking evil themselves, and working it up in others. In foul weather they have enough to do; but it would be a good practice on a calm evening to pipe all hands to drum, fife, and dance; for what can be more harmless than kicking bad thoughts out of the head than the cheerful sound of the drum, exhilarated with a well-timed glass of grog, or more salutary callibogus \* (which is never spared in this ship). When they are tired with dancing, they should be encouraged to sing and tell tales; there are always some capital fellows in this way, and I have often listened with delight to the rude unlettered songs of the forecastle, and to the brave soldiers upon nightly guard.

"Thus, my friend, have I endeavoured to describe, as faithfully as I can, what I have now twice been an eye witness of; and I am persuaded (though I have often heard it ridiculed), when conducted with the laugh and manner of this day, it is not only useful amongst the men, but as well worth seeing as a farce, and was performed by characters as valuable as any in the world — by British

\* So called by sailors, spruce-beer mixed with grog.

Sailors! — As to dirty faces, there is an Ocean around us, to wash them clean; and there is never danger of taking cold from an immersion in salt water.”

(Gentleman's Magazine: and Historical Chronicle. London, 1792. v. 71 [62], p. 412-414.)

Sylvanus Urban ranks high as an editor closely in touch with the public taste of his day. Witness the 137-year record of his London publication that gave commoners as well as the gentry and nobility so many things they liked to read, light in touch as well as impressively serious and profound and informative.

He spread this story before his readers, as requested by "A Rambler" in May, 1792, (vol. 62, p. 412-414) headed "Ceremony used on board ships crossing the Line." So far as I know he never told how happy he was when *The Daily Advertiser* newspaper of New York lifted the story entirely, though with a few minor changes of no real importance, on the 30th of April, 1793 (v. 9, no. 60, p. 2, col. 2) and with never a word of acknowledgment, not one bit of thanks to Sylvanus.

George Laurence Gomme thought the story worth including also in the "Manners and Customs" volume of his *The Gentleman's Magazine Library: being a classified collection of the chief contents of the Gentleman's Magazine from 1731 to 1868* (p. 178-180) with no changes except for modernizing the spelling and using our round "s" instead of the long.

This sprightly tale seems probably — undoubtedly? — from the hand of a woman writing to family or intimate friend on her second trip to India on one of the John Company ships carrying troops, passengers, cargo.

"Calibogus" may send some of us to our dictionaries. The Oxford dismisses it summarily as "American beverage," with 1785 and Grose's *Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* as source, nothing beyond that. Grose's use of it seems to show that the "vulgar" knew it well for some time before he printed it. And one would think that the letter writer would scarcely have used it here so casually and as so well-known if it had not rung a familiar note to her ears and those her letter went to.

The Chicago *Dictionary of American English* goes back to 1758 under "Calibogus" and Nathaniel Ames in *The Dedham [Massachusetts] Historical Register*, v. 1, p. 16, 1890, as giving 1758 for the almanac birth date of the "Calabogus" Club.

"A Rambler" in his introduction asks "from what occasion it arose," meaning custom arose . . . whoever he was, he had a wise head; for long voyages require a bustle every now and then to keep the devil out of the sailors heads . . . it would be good practice to pipe all hands to drum, fife, and dance; for what can be more harmless than kicking bad thoughts out of the head by the cheerful sound of the drum, exhilarated with a well-timed glass of grog, or more salutary callibogus . . . ?"

The speculation of 1792 is quite as much speculation in 1955 as when first voiced, is it not?

"Swearing at Highgate" is explained in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11th edition (v. 13, p. 455): "In the time of stage-coaches a custom was introduced of making ignorant persons believe that they required to be sworn and admitted to the freedom of the Highgate before being allowed to pass the gate, the fine of admission being a bottle of wine."

### 1796

In the afternoon of this day [27 January] we passed the tropic. In the course of the morning saw several tropical birds, and in the afternoon a ceremony, with which the sailors always treat their brethren that have not passed the line, was performed. It is a very old custom, and practised by, I believe, all nations. One of the sailors is made to personate Neptune, who is supposed to rise from the sea, accompanied by his wife Amphitrite. They are clad in a

1796, *continued*

most ridiculous manner, in order to represent the high and mighty god and goddess of the ocean. These dieties have two attendants, one of which is supposed to be a very humble inhabitant of the deep, on earth yclept a barber. Mister Neptune greets you with a welcome to the tropic and an offer of a *bottle of milk* and a newspaper that he is supposed to have got a few days before from ashore, adding that he shall order a prosperous gale to carry you to your intended port. This is what passes in the cabin and with the passengers, who order according to custom some rum, etc., by way of treat to Neptune and his party for his visit. But the ceremony observed to the poor devils of sailors who have never passed the line is not quite so courteous. One of the Neptune's attendants seizes the unfortunate man, and after blind-folding him, they place him on a pole put across a large tub of water. The attendant then puts the small end of a speaking trumpet in his mouth, which obliges the poor wretch to stretch it open pretty wide. Some questions are then asked, such as, 'What countryman are you?' 'Where are you bound to?' etc. etc. On his making the reply a quantity of salt water is poured down the trumpet, a part of which of course finds its way towards the stomach. An oath is then administered purporting that he is never to suffer any person to pass the line without undergoing the like ceremony. As the person initiated into these Deistical mysteries of the tropical latitudes is obliged to repeat this oath, he is the whole time saluted with libations of the god's element, which very much against his inclinations he is doomed to partake. Then comes on the barber's work, who after daubing the face and head of the fastbound stranger with the vilest of all possible compositions, of tar, grease, etc. etc., proceeds to shave him with a piece of old iron, which not only takes away the sweet-scented fine oily lather, but scrapes the face (carrying some particles of skin with it) to that degree to cause howlings most hideous. The barber and attendant, by way of *cong e*, and considering it absolutely necessary that the face, etc., should undergo a washing, on a sudden pull away the pole on which the victim was seated, and souse he goes into the tub of water; thus ends the ceremony. The god and goddess take no share except being spectators of the mischief they have made. The master of the transport told me that in some ships, instead of letting the man fall into the tub, he has seen a rope made fast round a sailor, and the poor mortal thrown over the side and towed for some yards. This part of the ceremony the watery god did not execute from our ship as she was travelling rather too fast — going at least seven knots an hour. This same business was repeated on five of the sailors, to the no small amusement of the redcoats. Barbarous as the ceremony was, I own I laughed most immoderately.

(William Dyott. Dyott's diary, 1781–1845, a selection from the journal of William Dyott, sometime general in the British army and aide-de-camp

to His Majesty King George III, edited by Reginald W. Jeffery. London, 1907. v. 1, p. 87-89.)

1797

And in another letter on shipboard, Audubon refers to crossing "the line" for the *second time*, and the memories it awakened of his "high birth." (p. 50)

By further deduction, it would appear that one of the destinations of these two Audubon travelers was Jean Audubon's mysterious estate on the Ile à Vaches, off Saint Domingue, on which trip John James Audubon "crossed the line" for the *first time*. If this be true, it would identify John James Audubon's later and enigmatic reference to his crossing the line for the *second time* and the memories it evoked of his first crossing, of his youth, and of his high birth. (p. 65)

The unpublished letters of John James Audubon follow, in one of which he writes:

*June 4, 1826, At Sea*

We are a few miles south of the line for the second time in my life. What ideas it conveys to me of my high birth and the expectations of my younger days. (p. 67)

(Alice Jaynes Tyler. I who should command all. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, cop. 1937, 1942. *passim*.)

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The book sets out to prove that Audubon was really the Dauphin of France, the son of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, who, the author writes, was said by the French Government to have died in the Temple on June 8, 1794. The writer notes that "This unpublished Audubon material came to me from Maria Audubon. When Maria Audubon was working on her monumental compilation of her grandfather's journals, she copied into a little black notebook certain transcripts, which, in her opinion threw light on her grandfather's identity. This little black notebook she willed to my husband and me." (p. 15.)

What happened to the original manuscripts, where these transcripts are to be found now seems to get no mention.





## THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

c. 1801

A travers quelques accidens ordinaires aux voyages de mer, notre goëlette approchait du Tropique, et l'équipage entrevoyait avec délices le jour où le capitaine Niquelet lui permettrait de solenniser la cérémonie consacrée, dans une des phases les plus intéressantes des grands traversées. Le jour des saturnales maritimes arriva enfin pour nous. Le navire, dès le matin, prit un air de fête. L'équipage et les passagères revêtirent leurs habits de dimanche, et ces derniers se disposèrent, avec ceux qui n'avaient pas encore vu le *Bonhomme-Tropique*, à recevoir le copieux baptême qui devait les initier à ces burlesques mystères des pontifes équatoriaux et tropicaux. Une petite chapelle recouverte de draps de lit et ornée de fleurs empruntées aux chapeaux de nos passagères, fut dressée sur le gaillard d'arrière. On commença, comme chose obligée, par faire voir, à la longue-vue, le cercle du Tropique du Cancer à tous nos voyageurs, en plaçant un cheveu sur l'objectif de la lunette. Chacun d'eux s'étonna, comme d'habitude, que l'on pût apercevoir ainsi une des lignes circulaires de la sphère céleste. Jamais ils n'avaient voulu ajouter foi à ce prodige, qu'on leur avait annoncé bien à l'avance; mais il fallait bien se rendre à l'évidence. On apprend tant de choses en naviguant! A terre, il n'y a que des illusions. C'est à la mer qu'il faut aller pour commencer à faire connaissance avec les réalités.

Un gros gabier, affublé d'un robe blanche sur le collet de laquelle descendait une copieuse barbe d'étoupes, grimpe sur les barres du grand-mât, brandissant un harpon en guise de crosse épiscopale ou de trident neptunien. Un matelot travesti en postillon était venu le fouet à la main, enfourchant un de ses camarades transformé en ours blanc au moyen d'une peau de mouton, apporter au capitaine une lettre à lui adressée par le Dieu dont on allait célébrer la fête. Le capitaine avait remis au courrier du *Bonhomme-Tropique*, la liste des marins et des passagères qui allaient pénétrer dans la redoutable zone soumise à sa céleste domination. Toutes les bailles et tous les seaux avaient été remplis sur le pont de l'eau qui coulait le long du bord. La pompe d'étrave jouait depuis le matin, et faisait ruisseler à longs flots cette onde régénératrice réservée aux ablutions du baptême. Tout nous annonçait enfin que les aspersiones ne seraient pas plus épargnées que les instructions relatives à notre initiation à ces grotesques mystères. Dès la veille aussi, on avait eu la précaution de barbouiller de peinture noire les deux petits mousses du bord, destinés à devenir non pas ses séraphins ou les anges, mais bien tout simplement les *diablotins* du Dieu; et le grand jour venu, les deux diablotins enduits de goudron avaient été roulés dans la plume qu'on avait fait arracher aux oreillers de nos passagères. Cela fait, à midi, le *Bonhomme-Tropique*, perché sur les grandes barres, cria dans un long porte-

c. 1801, *continued*

voix, en faisant mine de grelotter de froid, malgré la peau de mouton dont il était recouvert sous une température de vingt-cinq degrés Réaumur:

- Hol du navire, ho!
- Holà! répondit aussi, au porte-voix, le capitaine, en moutant gravement sur son banc de quart.
- D'où vient le navire?
- De Saint-Malo.
- Où allez-vous?
- A la Martinique.
- Comment se nomme le susdit navire?
- La goëlette la *Gazelle*.
- Quel est le nom du capitaine?
- Jean-Baptiste Niquet.
- Ta goëlette, Jean-Baptiste Niquet, a-t-elle déjà pénétré dans *mon Empire*?
- Jamais encore, *Bonhomme-Tropique*.
- Consens-tu à payer pour elle le tribut, ou à voir sa figure abattue par la hache des sapeurs-pompiers de ma garde?
- Oui, *Bonhomme-Tropique*, je consens à payer le tribut légitimement dû à ta *sacrée Majesté*.
- Que veux-tu donc donner pour que les susdits sapeurs de ma garde n'abattent pas la figure de ta *Goëlette* et pour racheter le bâtiment des coups de hache qui en feraient un paquet d'allumettes?
- Double ration à l'équipage, et quelque chose de sec pour te réchauffer de ton tremblement de froid.
- As-tu beaucoup de gens à ton bord qui ne seraient pas venus sur mes états?
- Douze. En voici la liste que je me suis fait déjà l'honneur de remettre au courrier que ta Majesté m'a expédié ce matin.
- Le capitaine nomma les douze néophytes, au nombre desquels je me trouvais nécessairement inscrit. — Le *Bonhomme-Tropique* reprit, toujours en grelottant et en se récriant sur l'extrême abaissement de la température.
- Consent-ils tous à être baptisés?
- Tous!
- A la bonne heure! Avance l'escouade des prêtres et des curés de ma Majesté!

Alors, les pontifes du Dieu, ou tout au moins les chambellans du roi tropical allèrent le chercher en cérémonie dans les haubans où il s'était nuageusement juché. On jeta quelques gouttes d'eau de rédemption sur la figurine de la *Gazelle*, et les haches, qui avaient été levées sur elle, pour le cas où le

capitaine se serait refusé à payer sa rançon, quittèrent les mains des licteurs goudronnés pour faire place à des seaux remplis jusqu'aux bords. Une grêle de pois verts et de haricots blancs tomba des barres sur nos têtes, au milieu du sifflement des vents simulés par une demi-escouade de Tritons et de Néréides, armés de tous nos soufflets de cuisine. Après l'explosion de ce météore ou de ce cataclysme artificiel, chaque néophyte les yeux bandés, fut invité à s'asseoir sur une planche mobile, soutenue aux extrémités par les rebords d'une grande baille d'eau, et à se laisser raser le menton par le barbier ordinaire du Dieu. Chaque aspirant au baptême, retenu sur ce siège chancelant, faisait sa confession à l'oreille du *Bonhomme-Tropique*, et lui promettait *de ne jamais faire la cour* à la femme d'un marin. Un *filet* de goudron, bien liquide, lui était passé sur le menton, qu'on lui essuyait bien délicatement avec un tampon d'étoupes, et qu'on lui râclait ensuite avec un sabre de bois. C'est alors qu'une messe était dite en l'honneur du nouveau baptisé; et au mot *Amen!* la planche qui lui servait de siège manquait, et il se trouvait plongé le derrière le premier dans la baille, où une douzaine de seaux d'eau de mer lui étaient lancés avec l'accompagnement obligé du jet d'une pompe de lavage. Nos deux dames furent seules un peu ménagées par nos arroseurs, et moyennant quelques pièces blanches et une entière soumission, tous les nouveaux catéchumènes en furent quittes pour cette épreuve, qui n'est désagréable que pour ceux qui ne veulent pas se prêter de bonne grâce à cette burlesque initiation, source de gaieté, et prétexte de petits profits pour des malheureux qui n'ont que trop rarement l'occasion de se réjouir, et d'oublier leurs fatigues et leur cruel isolement.\*

(Édouard Corbière. *Le négrier*. Paris, 1855. 4. ed. p. 254-259.)

This tale of a slaver is placed in time of the Empire. In the "confidence d'auteur au public," Corbière pays tribute to Fenimore Cooper and Eugene Sue for their sea tales. Of Cooper he says he had no wish to be the weak copyist of a great master. Sue, he says, is more brilliant than true, more a colorist than a thinker, more a sceptic than a philosopher. Trying to escape the danger of following either, he decided to "revêtir d'une forme quelque peu littéraire, ces reminiscences de ma jeunesse et de ma profession."

"AT sea they have a ridiculous ceremony," wrote the Sieur Guillet de Saint George in the year 1678 — "prophane et ridicule" are the words in the original — "that when Sailors cross the Line or Tropic that have not been there before they must pay certain forfeitures demanded of them or else be ducked or baptized (as they call it) either from the main yard-arm or otherwise" — adding that each nation making voyages to the East had a different form of initiation. Ducking "the baptized" from the main-yard must have been the most drastic form — "as if he were a criminal" as Esquemeling, writing about the same time of Dutch methods, had observed. Other commentators, such as Osbeck, merely mention that the men having been called on deck, pails of water were thrown over those who had not crossed the line

\* Les Anglais nomment le *jour de grande barbe*, celui où ils passent le Tropic ou la Ligne.

c. 1801, continued

before — a variant so pleasant under the Equator that those who were exempt by the rules of the game often, he says, voluntarily “partook of the bathing.” There were doubtless also seamen who enjoyed, even as victims, the rough-and-tumble described by Falconer, the dressing up as Neptune and Amphitrite, and the shaving and ducking which came to be practised in English ships, as every schoolboy has heard. But when Neptune laid hands on passengers it happened once or twice that they were so deficient in the saving grace of humour as to take legal proceedings as soon as they got ashore. I have not found any record of such a case having been tried in England, but separated by an interval of fifty years, there were two in India, and perhaps the uncommon nature of such an action at law may justify a brief recital of the facts in those forgotten suits.

Mr. Nathaniel Castleton Maw was a young man who, having obtained a cadetship in the military service of the East India Company, was in 1801 proceeding to Bombay to commence his duties. The ship in which he sailed together with some seven or eight other young gentlemen destined for the same profession was called the *Scaleby Castle*: and when she was nearing the line the sailors in accordance with custom announced that the passengers would be expected to undergo the ceremony of shaving and ducking at the hands of Father Neptune. Mr. Maw from the first declared that he would not submit to it: the others were disposed to treat the matter as a joke, though that was before they knew how far it would be carried. There was a particular reason why Maw should have an objection to horseplay of the kind usual on such occasions since he was afflicted with a withered arm or some deformity of the kind. It could hardly have been of a serious nature or it would have stood in the way of his soldiering, and as a matter of fact he was made a lieutenant before 1802. But however slight his infirmity it was natural that he should shrink from anything likely to call public attention to it. Besides this private reason another and a more general one was stated to have weighed with him in resisting from the outset the threatened attack upon his dignity. With the exception of the few British seamen who were intent upon the accustomed ceremonial the whole of the crew were natives of India, and Mr. Maw thought that the spectacle of an English officer being shaved and ducked by the fore-castle would be liable to be misunderstood by orientals.

Now it was usually a pleasing feature of the shaving and ducking rite that exemption might be purchased for a pecuniary or a spirituous consideration — possibly always much the same thing: at all events the English practice so far as I am aware shows nothing similar to the pious use mentioned by Osbeck of devoting a portion of the “collection” on these occasions to “the Orphan House at Gothenburgh.” Mr. Maw offered to pay the customary tax and one can only suppose that he must either by excess of dignity or angry words have rendered himself so obnoxious to the crew that they put him, so to speak, out of court. Certain it is that on the morning of the 28th September when the line was crossed, Maw was walking about the deck armed with a

cutlass and pistols and breathing defiance; and this notwithstanding that the Captain had given notice that any passenger who disliked the impending pastimes of the crew might retire into his (the Captain's) cabin. It is not clear why Maw did not do so, and without in the least excusing the violence to which he was subjected one can see that a different demeanour on his part might probably have avoided the whole affair.

Perhaps he took a youthful pride in tilting at established custom, though it is impossible now to say exactly how the matter came to a head; but after the display of the cutlass and the touch-me-who-dare attitude, further offers of liquor to be supplied on arrival at Bombay, even when backed by the suretyship of Mr. Patterson, the fourth officer, were of no avail. Father Neptune was evidently roused and determined to vindicate his importance, for Mr. Learmouth, the first officer, when Maw asked if he might go into his own cabin during the ceremony, told him that he would not be safe there. Maw, however, went, barricaded the door with boxes and trunks, and even took care to close his port to prevent invasion from without. But the stubbornness which led him thus to deprive himself of light and air in a stuffy cabin under the Line during the hottest part of the day was matched by that of the other side. Learmouth was right, and Raymond, the third mate, now gave countenance to the proceedings of the crew, and suggested, if he did not actually direct, that the door should be forced and the port opened. Maw does not seem to have known how to fasten the latter properly: and whilst one contingent of Neptune's party took the carpenter below to unscrew the hinges from the door, a seaman named Edwards was let down the ship's side to negotiate the port. This worthy, who had a drawn cutlass in one hand, succeeded in lifting up the port to a certain extent with a stick which he carried in the other, and he proceeded to make thrusts with the more lethal weapon through the aperture. Mr. Maw was probably not placed in much jeopardy thereby, and his military instinct no doubt rejoiced in the clash of steel upon steel as he parried with his sword. How long Edwards, precariously thrusting from outside, and Mr. Maw, fencing in the semi-darkness inside, continued this comical combat does not appear: but the former bore in mind the superior armament of Mr. Maw in having two pistols and did not venture further through the port-hole until he heard them fired off. Then he leapt into the cabin at the same moment as the other myrmidons of the sea-god burst open the door. Apparently they had all been waiting for the pistols to go off, not aware that Mr. Maw with a restraint and care for theatrical effect alike creditable to him had only loaded them with powder. Once Mr. Maw's barriers were down he was an easy victim and quickly disarmed of his cutlass. His assailants then dragged him up on deck, where he managed for some time to delay his execution by hanging on to the door-post of the cuddy, calling out lustily meanwhile for the Captain. That officer, however, remained discreetly in his cabin during the whole performance and afterwards professed to have heard nothing either of the shouts or of the struggle. Messrs. Learmouth and Raymond, the first and third officers, were on deck, but so

*c. 1801, continued*

far from interfering with Maw's tormentors, considerably took care of his watch for him. He was at length torn from his hold, and in spite of all his attempts to escape — his advocate in the action for assault subsequently brought gravely stated that at this juncture his client tried to jump overboard — was taken along the quarter-deck to the waist and forcibly held down in a boat placed there half-full of dirty water for the business of the day. His eyes were bandaged with something not too clean, tar was rubbed upon his face and scraped off again with the usual piece of rusty hoop-iron, and he was duly ducked in the dirty water, all in the most orthodox fashion.

Mr. Maw brought his action of assault and battery against Learmouth and Raymond, joining as defendants a number of the seamen, members of Neptune's gang, whom one would have thought hardly worth legal powder and shot. The case was tried in March, 1802, in the Recorder's Court at Bombay. It was not alleged that the plaintiff had been in any way differently treated from the other six or seven young gentlemen, except in so far as he had himself accentuated matters by refusing to "come quietly." But consent being of course the crux of the whole matter it could not be denied that a violent assault had been made upon him. The sea custom was merely mentioned by the defence as some palliation of what had occurred, and it is of interest to note that in 1802 it was stated to have been "put a stop to from a sense of its impropriety in nine ships out of ten." It is rather surprising that Captain Gardiner of the *Scaleby Castle* was allowed to escape responsibility for what was going on in his own ship by simply remaining below. He was called as a witness to testify to the impropriety of the plaintiff's treatment and was permitted to say that he (the Captain) would not have allowed it had he been present, but he was not made a defendant, and the Judge at the hearing contented himself with the mild observation that he wished Gardiner had been on deck. The responsibility of the first and third officers was patent: they were in charge of the deck the whole time, and according to one witness Learmouth had himself thrown a bucket of water over the plaintiff. Thus encouraged by their officers not very much blame perhaps attached to the seamen: and the 400 rupees, which were awarded as damages against all the defendants generally, were no doubt levied against Messrs. Learmouth and Raymond, as the Recorder suggested.

In the later case — or rather cases — heard in the Small Cause Court at Madras in September, 1851, the Captain and First Officer of the *True Briton* were separately sued by a passenger named King, a ship's steward, who had been lathered with a mixture of flour and water and well drenched in salt water in a "crossing of the line" diversion on board that ship. Some week or two before the hearing twelve saloon passengers advertised in the *Madras Spectator* a testimonial to Captain Roe's "unremitting endeavours" to promote their comfort during the voyage, and signified their intention to present him with a piece of plate. Whether this public eulogium had any effect or not, or whether King's excitable behaviour — he was said to have broken the

cuddy window in revenge — told against him, the court was evidently reluctant to mulct the Captain in damages. But the Judge was obliged to lay it down that passengers were entitled to the protection of the Captain, whom he described as a magistrate on board. An interesting article, by the way, might possibly be written on the legal position, illustrated by instances, of the merchant skipper as the depository on the high seas of the sovereignty of the state whose flag he flies. But to return to Madras; the case of Maw against Learmouth was cited, being apparently the only known precedent but it was distinguished from the case then before the court inasmuch as King had not sought the protection of the officers as Maw had done in vain. A suggested arrangement between the parties coming to nothing, R. 100 damages were awarded. Then immediately afterwards the claim against the First Officer was called on and the point was raised (by the same advocate who had defended the Captain) that it could not be proved that the Defendant resided within the jurisdiction of the Court. This technical contention was upheld, the Judge remarking that had the objection been taken in Captain Roe's case he would have decided it in his favour. Truly the course of justice in the Small Cause Court of Madras seems that day to have zig-zagged a little; but if Captain Roe had to pay his R. 100 it is to be hoped that his piece of plate "with a suitable inscription" more than compensated him.

The above stories are abridged from the Indian newspapers respectively reporting them. Both are briefly mentioned in Prendergast's "Law Relating to Officers of the Navy," published in 1852, but he only gives as a reference for Maw v. Learmouth a scarce book of which the British Museum appears to have no copy and for the *True Briton* case no reference at all. The scarce book, Medland and Weobly's "Remarkable Trials," when found, contains only the *Bombay Courier's* report reprinted. I ought to add that by the courtesy of the Librarian at the India Office I have been able to consult both that newspaper and the *Madras Spectator*. If the result, as here set forth, cannot be called archaeology, it at least chronicles the small beer of a bygone order.

(W. Senior. Neptune as defendant. In: *The Mariner's Mirror*. London, June 1914. v. 4, p. 162-167.)

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Note the later reference under 1851.

Among the festivals of the old Roman calendar, in pagan times, we find one celebrated on the 3d of December, in honour of Neptune and Minerva. In connection with the former of these deities we may here appropriately introduce the account of a well-known custom, which, till recently, prevailed on board ship, and was regarded as specially under the supervision of Neptune who, *in propria personâ*, was supposed to act the principal part in the ceremony in question. We refer to the grand marine saturnalia which used to be performed when 'crossing the line:' that is, when passing from north to south

c. 1801, continued

latitude, or *vice versâ*. The custom, in some form or other, is believed to be very ancient, and to have been originally instituted on the occasion of ships passing out of the Mediterranean into the Atlantic, beyond the 'Pillars of Hercules.' It had much more absurdity than vice about it; but sometimes it became both insulting and cruel. When the victims made no resistance, and yielded as cheerfully as they could to the whim of the sailors, the ceremony was performed somewhat in the following way, as related by Captain Edward Hall, and quoted by Hone: "The best executed of these ceremonies I ever saw, was on board a ship of the line, of which I was lieutenant, bound to the West Indies. On crossing the line, a voice, as if at a distance, and at the surface of the water, cried: "Ho, ship ahoy! I shall come on board!" This was from a person slung over the bows, near the water, speaking through his hands. Presently two men of large stature came over the bows. They had hideous masks on. One represented Neptune. He was naked to the waist, crowned with the head of a large wet swab, the end of which reached to his loins, to represent flowing locks; a piece of tarpaulin, vandyked, encircled the head of the swab and his brows as a diadem; his right hand wielded a boarding-pike, manufactured into a trident; and his body was smeared with red ochre, to represent fish-scales. The other sailor represented Amphitrite, having locks formed of swabs, a petticoat of the same material, with a girdle of red bunting; and in her hand a comb and looking-glass. They were followed by about twenty fellows, naked to the waist, with red ochre scales, as Tritons. They were received on the forecastle with much respect by the old sailors who had provided the carriage of an eighteen-pounder gun as a car, which their majesties ascended: and were drawn aft along the gangway to the quarter-deck by the sailors. Neptune addressing the captain, said he was happy to see him again that way; adding that he believed there were some "Johnny Raws" on board who had not paid their dues, and whom he intended to initiate into the salt-water mysteries. The captain answered that he was happy to see him, but requested that he would make no more confusion than was necessary. They then descended to the main-deck and were joined by all the old hands, and about twenty "barbers," who submitted the shaving-tackle to inspection'. This shaving-tackle consisted of pieces of rusty hoop for razors, and very unsavoury compounds as shaving-soap and shaving-water, with which the luckless victim was bedaubed and soused. If he bore it well, he was sometimes permitted to join in performing the ceremony on other 'Johnny Raws!' See engraving on the following page.

It was not always, however, that neophytes conformed without resistance to such rough christening ceremonies. A legal action, instituted in 1802, took its rise from the following circumstances. When the ship *Soleby Castle* was, in the year mentioned, crossing the equator on the way to Bombay, the sailors proceeded to the exercise of their wonted privilege. On this occasion, one of the passengers on board, Lieutenant Shaw, firmly resisted the performance of the ceremony. He offered to buy off the indignity by a present of

money or spirits; but this was refused by the men, and it then became a contest of one against many. Shaw shut himself up in his cabin, the door of which he barricaded with trunks and boxes; and he also barred the port or small window. After he had remained some time in this voluntary imprisonment, without light or air, during the hottest part of the day, and 'under the line', the crew, dressed as Neptune and his satellites, came thundering at his cabin-door, and with oaths and imprecations demanded admission. This he refused, but at the same time renewed his offer of a compromise. Mr. Patterson, the fourth mate, entreated the crew, but in vain, to accept the offer made to them. The men, becoming chafed with the opposition, resolved now to obtain their way by force, regardless of consequences. They tried to force the door, but failed. Mr. Raymond, third mate, sanctioned and approved the conduct of the men; and suggested that while some were engaged in wrenching the door off its hinges, others should effect an entry through the port. A sailor, armed with a sword and bludgeon, was lowered by a rope down the outside of the ship; and he succeeded in getting into the cabin, just at the moment when the other sailors forced open the door. Lieutenant Shaw defended himself for a time with his sword, and fired off his pistols — more for the sake of summoning assistance than to do injury, for they were not loaded. The whole gang now pressed round him, and after wresting the sword from his hand, dragged him upon deck. There he clung for some time to the post of the cuddy-door; and, finding the first and third mates to be abetting the seamen, he called out loudly for the captain. The captain's cabin-door, however, was shut, and he either did not or would not hear the appeal. So impressed was the sensitive mind of the lieutenant with the indignity in store for him, that he actually endeavoured to throw himself overboard, but this was prevented by Mr. Patterson. Unmoved by all his entreaties, the crew proceeded with the frolic on which they had set their hearts, and which, after the resistance they had encountered, they resolved not to forego on any terms. They seized the lieutenant, dragged him along the quarter-deck to the middle of the ship, and placed him sitting in a boat half-filled with filthy liquid. His eyes being bandaged with a dirty napkin, a nauseous composition of tar and pitch was rubbed over his face, as 'Neptune's shaving soap,' and scraped off again by means of a rusty hoop, which constituted 'Neptune's razor.' He was then pushed back with violence into the boat, and there held struggling for some seconds, with his head immersed in the noisome liquid. Injured in body by this rough treatment, he was much more wounded in his mental feelings; and when the ship arrived at Bombay, he brought action against the first and third mates. The fourth mate bore witness in his favour; and the captain, as a witness, declared that he did not hear the cry for assistance; but it is known that captains, at that time, were mostly unwilling to interfere with the sailors. The damages of 400 rupees (£40), though more than the mates relished to pay, could scarcely be deemed a very satisfactory recompense for the inflictions which the lieutenant had undergone.

c. 1801, continued

The improvement wrought among seafaring-men during the last few years, has tended to lessen very much the frequency of this custom. Not only naval officers, but officers in the mercantile marine, are better educated than those who filled such posts in former times; and the general progress of refinement has led them to encourage more rational sports among the crew. The sailors themselves are not much more educated than formerly; but improvement is visible even here; and the spirit which delighted in the coarse fun of this equatorial 'shaving,' is now decidedly on the wane.

(Chambers' Book of Days, v. 2, p. 653-654. Edinburgh: W. & R. Chambers, 1864.)

Admittedly general in scope, but with enough emphasis on the Maw case to seem to call for inclusion as an account largely on his case.

### 1802

[July 26, 1802, on board *La Victoire*] Cependant, depuis quelques jours, notre équipage faisait de grands préparatifs, pour la célébration du fameux baptême du Tropic — sorte de carnaval autorisé sur les navires de l'État, afin de maintenir la gaieté, qui est un des éléments de la santé.

La fête devait avoir d'autant d'éclat que beaucoup d'entre nous se trouvaient dans le cas d'être soumis à la classique ablution tropicale.

Le 24, dans l'après-midi, une grêle de pois secs et de gargousses tomba, des hunes, sur le gaillard. Elle annonçait le courrier du Bonhomme, ou Roi du Tropic.

Ce courrier, faisant claquer son fouet, descendit de la grande hune. C'était un gabier, très joliment vêtu en postillon. Il avait la veste galonnée, la plaque, la culotte de peau, les bottes et les éperons réglementaires, sans oublier la grosse queue ou catogan, qui symbolise la coiffure des vrais braves enfants de la Poste.

S'avançant vers notre commandant, il lui remit une lettre, de la part de son souverain. Cette lettre réclamait le tribut d'usage, payable par tous ceux du bord qui entraient, pour la première fois, dans ses états.

Gravement, M. de Péronne répondit:

— Je suis trop bon marin et trop vieil ami du Bonhomme Tropic, pour lui refuser une si juste réclamation. Que votre maître veuille bien venir demain à mon bord, il aura pleine satisfaction.

— Sa Majesté se présentera, accompagnée de toute sa cour, répondit le courrier.

Le lendemain, 26, par 36° 96, de longitude occidentale, nous coupâmes, effectivement, le Tropic du Cancer.

Dès le matin, tout avait été préparé pour la fête. Une tente avait été plantée, au pied du grand mât. Sous cette tente, se dressait un autel surmonté d'une croix, et de tous les attributs de la navigation: cartes marines, compas, octant . . .

A droite de l'autel, le trône du Père Tropicque. A gauche, une grande cuve, remplie d'eau, sur laquelle une planche était posée en travers.

Le bruit de la foudre et une grêle analogue à celle de la veille, annoncèrent l'arrivée du roi Tropicque.

Il descendit de la grande hune. Il avait une barbe blanche d'étoupe, et, bien que couvert de fourrures, feignait de grelotter, en dépit d'une température de 26°. Derrière lui, descendit sa cour, composée de la moitié de l'équipage.

Les déguisements étaient fort ingénieux.

C'était, d'abord, un tout jeune homme imberbe, au joli visage, qui représentait Amphitrite, épouse du vieux Tropicque. Des mousses, en tritons, lui faisaient cortège.

Derrière ce groupe, Neptune, son trident à la main, traîné sur un char fait avec un affût de canon. Ensuite, les esclaves du Tropicque, barbouillés de différentes couleurs.

Voici une troupe de guerriers, vêtus à l'orientale, grâce à tous les pavillons et signaux mis à leur disposition. Voici les gendarmes et l'aumônier du Père Tropicque; des paysans bretons, un ours dansant au son du fifre. A clore le cortège, le diable avec ses cornes et sa fourche.

Après avoir défilé sur le gaillard et fait le tour de la tente, le Bonhomme y pénétra, et le cortège se rangea autour de lui.

Son secrétaire commença l'appel de tous ceux qui devaient recevoir le baptême.

Il appela, tout d'abord, M<sup>me</sup> Jablonowski, et la femme du chirurgien-chef de l'armée, dont le nom m'échappe. Galamment, notre commandant, les conduisit, par la main, jusqu'à la cuve.

Toutes deux avaient revêtu une toilette de bal, très élégante. La coquetterie féminine ne désarme jamais, même pour une fête de matelots. Ce n'est pas moi qui l'en blâmerai. Quelques gouttes d'eau furent jetées sur leurs blanches mains.

Puis le défilé des hommes commença.

Voici la formule du baptême:

— Jurez que vous respecterez, en toute circonstance, les femmes des bons marins.

— Je le jure! répondait le néophyte.

Alors, il était assis sur la planche fatidique: Un page du Père Tropicque lui présentait un bassin. S'il y déposait une offrande, il recevait, dans la manche de son habit, quelques gouttes d'eau. Si non, il était saisi, brusquement, par la ceinture de sa culotte, et plongé, dans la cuve, pour la plus grande joie des spectateurs.

Comme il eut été trop long de baptiser, individuellement, tous les soldats, ils le furent, en masse, avec la pompe à incendie.

La cérémonie s'acheva par des danses et des chants, exécutés sur le gaillard d'avant. Bientôt, sur la dunette, grades, âge, rang, tout fut confondu. On se bousculait, on se lançait de l'eau, on se faisait mille farces.

1802, *continued*

Finalement, nous terminâmes la fête par un punch des plus copieux et des plus épicés. Il fut bu, en trinquant à la santé du Tropicque.

Telle fut — vraie bacchanale — notre fête du Tropicque. A quelques variantes près, elle se célèbre ainsi, à bord de tous les navires qui coupent le cercle.

L'origine de cette burlesque cérémonie remonte très loin. Elle fut imaginée par les navigateurs portugais et espagnols, qui osèrent, les premiers, à la fin du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle, s'aventurer sur l'infini de l'Atlantique.

(Christophe Paulin de la Poix, chevalier de Fréminville. Mémoires du . . . capitaine des frégates du Roi. Edited by E. Herpin. Paris, 1913. Bibliothèque de la revolution et de l'empire. v. 7, p. 30-33.)

In *Man*. v. 18 (1918), p. 187-188, is given a condensation in English by H. A. Rose, with the following comment:

De Fréminville ascribes the origin of this ancient rite to the Portuguese and Spanish navigators who ventured at the end of the fifteenth century upon the boundless Atlantic. He also says that it was allowed on State ships in order to maintain cheerfulness, one of the elements of health.

This account differs a good deal from that given in the Book of Days, in which no mention is made of the 'Old Tropic.' As practised by English sailors, shaving the novice was a principal feature, and by far the roughest part of the ordeal. The Book of Days says the custom, in some form or other, is believed to be very ancient, and to have been originally instituted on the occasion of ships passing out of the Mediterranean into the Atlantic, beyond the 'Pillars of Hercules.' Could anyone give references to classical Portuguese or Spanish authorities on the origin and history of the rite?

So far as I know this appeal "to classical Portuguese or Spanish authorities" made in 1918 has brought no reply. Let us hope that voicing it nearly forty years later may be more fruitful.

But, as said before, almost all openminded listeners to the tales here set forth must probably have found ourselves wondering if it all does not go back, far back of "classical Portuguese or Spanish authorities," for word about how primitive man struggling with the inviting and the threatening ocean must have felt he had to ask for protection and favor when he faced the waves, must have felt he should show in some way how he felt in face of that accepted higher power?

Is it fair to ask once more if the business of shivering by the Old Man of the Tropic as he came down from the main top, all aquiver with the cold, even though well covered with furs and even if the ship was right in the midst of tropical heat, may not hark back to a part of a rite of northern origin?

Another account of the ceremony set down by Fréminville is found under 1822.

### 1803

We had parted company with the frigate only a few days, when the cry of *Neptune! Neptune!* resounded from every part of the ship, and, on looking forward I, to my utter astonishment, beheld the venerable Monarch of the waves ascend the bows with his trident in his hand.\* I ran towards the fore-castle to receive him, and give my hand to his wife *Amphitrite*, together with her attendant goddesses, who were climbing up the cutwater in succession.

\* It is in this manner a *Sailor* comes first on board ship; always at the bows, never through the cabin-windows.

*Neptune* recognized me in a moment. In fact the motive that incited him to come on board, was to impart something to me in private. We were old acquaintance. I had been introduced to him on the Line in my very early youth, and caroused with him in the cabins of a dozen or more ships.

Having retired to a convenient part of the deck, the god of the sea thus addressed me.

"It has not escaped my notice that certain persons living on the island whose ships maintain a supreme ascendancy in my dominions, have, in certain books of extensive circulation, drawn such monsters as a ship never saw, and presumptuously called them sailors. Certain authors by profession, named *Cumberland* and *Pratt*, have atrociously offended in this particular. *Godwin*, with more judgment, has confined himself in his last work to the telling of lies through four volumes, and *Saint Leon* is not once to be found in my dominions. But *Holcroft* has incurred my wrath. While *Holcroft* continues to dress his characters invariably in leather-breeches and boots, and does not invade my sea-weed, it is for the woollen-drapeer and shoe-maker to call him to an account; but when he makes his personages to swear more than a swab-ringer, or a boatswain's yeoman, he robs my sailors of their oaths.

"To caution these men against a repetition of their crimes, is my motive of visiting your ship in this unusual latitude. My sprite *Ariel* informed me you were again on the ocean, and I have come since last night from the *Tropic*, with my wife and her nymphs, to put into your hands a proclamation, which, as you value fair winds, clear skies, and smooth water, I enjoy you to publish. And I impose that you make it first known in a certain city of your island, where, in one of the principal streets, the inhabitants have erected a statue to me, which, in majesty of countenance, dignity of mien, and symmetry of limb, is not to be exceeded by the *Belvidere Apollo*."

Having concluded his speech, *Neptune* again stalked forward to the bows of the ship, followed by his goddess and her attendant nymphs. He ordered his car to be brought under the bows. But in passing the foremast, it ought not to escape mention, that he levelled his trident at our horseshoe, and cut it in twain. Still the horse-shoe adhered to the mast, and *Neptune*, with some confusion, committed himself and his family again to the deep.

...  
 He mounts the car, the golden scourge applies,  
 He sits superior, and the chariot flies:  
 His whirling wheels the glassy surface sweep:  
 Th' enormous monsters rolling o'er the deep,  
 Gambol around him on the watery way;  
 And heavy whales in awkward measures play:  
 The sea subsiding spreads a level plain,  
 Exults and crowns the monarch of the main:  
 The parting waves before his coursers fly;  
 The wond'ring waters leave his axle dry.

POPE.

1803, *continued*

## PROCLAMATION OF NEPTUNE

"Whereas a number of book-wrights by trade, have undertaken, without being qualified for the task, to introduce into their pages the characters of sailors, and instead of exhibiting my legitimate children, have produced a bastard race; I do hereby declare, that the time of impunity is at an end; — and that henceforth should any man who has never been out of soundings, or never beheld blue water, repeat the offence, — I will strike the timber-head of his skull a blow with my trident, that shall dispatch his soul to the deepest receptacle of *Davy Jones' Locker*, whose bottom no deep-sea-lead line could ever yet reach. Signed, NEPTUNE.

Latitude 44° 35' North.

Longitude 51° 19' West."

(True Copy.)

(John Davis. Travels of four years and a half in the United States of America. London, 1803. p. 421-424.)

The comment of one man runs: "It's a horrible deformation of the primitive rite, but the whole account of the sea journey has a distinct Rabelaisian smell."

In 1909 Henry Holt & Company brought out a reprint "with an introduction and notes by A. J. Morrison. The last section of the 1803 issue, "Voyage from Baltimore in Maryland to Cowes in the Isle of Wight," was omitted in the 1909 reprint.

Though bypassing the record of the ceremony, the crossing is mentioned again thus:

As we increased our longitude, the priest, in examining his barrels of white biscuit, found one of them emptied by other hands than his own. Suspicion fell on a sailor, whom he one day accused before the passengers, as he was standing at the helm. 'Did you not steal my biscuit, sirrah!' said the parson. 'I did, Sir,' answered the fellow. 'And what, pray, can you say in defence of yourself?' 'Why, Sir, I can say that when I crossed the Line, Neptune made me swear I would never eat brown bread when I could get white; and *your* barrel of *white* stood next *my* barrel of *brown*.' (p. 14.)

On the 26th of November, 1803 (new style) at 10:30 a. m., we crossed the line into the Southern Hemisphere at 24° 24' Western longitude, after a voyage of thirty days from Santa Cruz. To the accompaniment of a salvo of eleven guns, we drank a toast to His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor Alexander I, during whose glorious reign the Russian flag was raised in the Southern Hemisphere for the first time. We couldn't have the usual celebration in honor of Neptune because there was no one aboard beside myself who had previously crossed the equator. However, one sailor, name of Pavel Kurganov, was such an accomplished actor and speaker that, trident in hand, he played his part like an old dedicated servitor of the sea god, and congratulated the Russians with sufficient decorum on entering Neptune's Southern domain for the first time.

Puteshestviye vokrug sveta v 1803 – 1804 – 1805 i 1806 godakh . . . na korablyakh Nadezhde i Neve, pod nachal'stvom . . . Kruzenshterna, (Voyage around the world in 1803 . . . on the ships Nadezhda and Neva . . . under the command of Captain Krusenstern) Sanktpeterburg, 1809. v. 1. p. 70-71.)

The translation was made by Dr. Avraham Yarmolinsky, former chief of the Slavonic Division, The New York Public Library.

This is the earliest and shortest report of this crossing; two others follow in order of publication; all three are by first hand participants.

The equator was crossed at 10 in the morning [November 26, 1803, new style]. After having made sure of it, I immediately ordered the pennant and jack-staff flags to be raised on my ship, and congratulated my associate [the captain of the sister ship *Nadezhda*] upon his safe arrival into the Southern Hemisphere. At that time my seamen were placed at the shrouds and shouted "Hurrah" several times. The same was done by the crew of the ship *Nadezhda*.

Yesterday's ceremony was only the introduction to the celebration today. In the morning, after the parade the church service included a divine mass and prayers of thanksgiving. Then the entire ship's personnel assembled on the quarter-deck. I congratulated them on the safe crossing into the Southern hemisphere, and drank with all of them a toast to His Imperial Majesty, calling three times: "Long live Emperor Alexander II"

Since no other Russian ship except *Neva* and *Nadezhda* had crossed the Equator, I wanted to mark this unusual event. I issued instructions to have two ducks roasted for each squad ("artel"), make a pudding, cook fresh soup with potatoes, pumpkin and other vegetables, which we secured at Teneriffe. To all that was added a bottle of port for every three men. We sat down at the table at 3 p. m., and at the end drank a toast again to our emperor. At that time we raised the flag and fired salutes from all the guns. In the evening the whole crew expressed their pleasure in singing, while we passed the time in pleasant conversation and reminiscences about our relatives and friends.

(Puteshestviye vokrug sveta v 1803—4—5 i 1806 godakh na korable NEVE, pod nachal'stvom Yuriya Lisyanskovo. Sanktpeterburg, 1812. v. i, p. 37—38.) Voyage around the world in 1803—4—5 and 1806 . . . on the *Neva* under the command of Yuril Lisyanski.

The translation was made by Dr. Avrahm Yarmolinsky.

November 26, 1803 [new style] at 10 a. m., we had the good fortune to cross the line into the Southern hemisphere in clear weather at a speed of four knots.

This happy moment when Russians for the first time followed in the footsteps of the great seafaring nations, was the cause of triumph for all of us. Now we too have crossed the equator. Now, the Russians too, at long last have arrived in the other hemisphere, everyone exclaimed. A new epoch for Russian glory! With deep joy plainly showing in everyone's face we felicitated each other. We were grateful to our emperor who had granted us the means to achieve such glory, a glory which, as time goes on will achieve immortality for Alexander I. For it is he who has made it possible for his subjects to sail the farthest waters of the ocean.

The *Neva*, sailing ahead of us, reverses its course and coming alongside of *Nadezhda* (our ship) congratulates us on crossing the line. The *Neva* sailors, standing at the sailyards and shrouds, shout "hurrah" thrice. Our sailors, joining them, also shout "Long live Alexander!" Already this name, so dear

1803, continued

and sacred to Russians, is uttered and resounds, in the air of another hemisphere, under the sun at zenith, casting its rays vertically upon Russians rather than warming them obliquely in the ice-bound countries of the North. In order to heighten the festive mood and raise the men's spirits, the captain, in the name of the Emperor, presented each sailor with a Spanish piastre and issued a double portion of vodka.

Nor did we forget the ceremonies which since time immemorial seamen had practiced at the crossing of the equator. All the sailors bathed in the ocean while the captain poured a little water on the heads of the noblemen (officers?) from a bowl handed to him. Then, one wag of a sailor, oddly accoutered, impersonated Neptune, wearing a long grey beard tied under his chin and carrying a trident in his hand. Freedom to enjoy themselves and the double portion of vodka allowed Neptune and his retinue to make merry the whole day. At the dinner table, as we toasted His Imperial Majesty, the author of our triumph, and the whole Imperial family, eleven gunshots were fired. Then nine shots were fired to honor the Minister of Commerce as well as the Company's Directors and all those who contributed to the success of the Company and of this expedition.

(Zhurnal pervavo puteshestviya rossiyan vokrug zemnovo shara, sochinennyi . . . Fiodorom Shemelinym. Sanktpeterburg, 1816. ch. 1, v. 1, p. 45-47. (Journal of the first Russian voyage around the world . . . [by] Fiodor Shemelin.)

The translation was made by Dr. Avrahm Yarmolinsky.

Adam Ivan von Krusenstern, the commander brought out his report at Saint Petersburg between 1809 and 1814, 3 volumes with a folio atlas of 104 maps and plates in the Russian original. Translations into English (London, 2 v., 1813), German (St. Petersburg, 3 v. 1810), French (Paris, 2 v., 1820) show the widespread interest in the expedition and the appreciation of its meaning. The commander had served in the British navy between 1793 and 1799, his crossings on voyages to America, China, India qualifying him as a "trusty shellback."

He tells of gun salutes, toast to the Emperor, the "usual ceremony" being passed over because he was the only shellback, though one sailor, Pavel Kurganov, "was such an accomplished actor and speaker" that he played the part of Neptune quite fittingly.

Lisyanski tells of the church service, the first we have had for a long time. The ship was dressed, crew on quarter-deck, toasts drunk, extra drinks and rations issued, the crew sang, officers passing "the time in pleasant conversation." No baptizing on the *Neva*. Those of us fortunate enough to hear Russian soldiers or sailors sing can never doubt that real volume and heartiness marked this first time south of the line.

Shemelin is sure of the immortality the memory of Alexander I will gain by this event. Whether the crossing is engraved on the Emperor's tombstone I can not say. The "Spanish piastre" Shemelin tells of is the equivalent of the traditional "piece of eight," eight York shillings, our dollar. He dressed ship, fired salutes, issued extra rations, poured a little water on the heads of his officers, tells too that the government expenses had been shared by a company or corporation.

Note later how von Kotzebue in 1823 justifies the celebration for its keeping up spirits on long voyages. His words "Diversion is often the best medicine, and used as a preservative, seldom fails of its effect," being quoted with warm approval by Fitz Roi a few years later in his report on the voyage of the *Beagle*.

The German translation of Krusenstern in the Library of the American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, came to the Society in July, 1823. Note the letters about it in "The American Philosophical Society and Early Russian-American Relations" by Eufrosina Dvoichenko-Markov, in the *Proceedings of the Society*, v. 94, no. 6, December 22, 1950. Krusenstern was elected to the Society in April, 1824.

1808

As we were now approaching the equinoctial line, being in 12° north latitude, the wind became lighter, and I heard a faint buzzing among the old salts about the visit of old Neptune to his children, which I then believed was no farce, until ocular demonstration convinced me otherwise, as will hereafter be shown.

January 3. . . . We braced up our yards on the larboard tack; and as we expected to cross the line the next night, preparations were being made for the reception of old Neptune such as dressing two of the oldest sailors to personate him and his wife; throwing over a tar barrel on fire; and hailing the sea-god from on board.

All this buffoonery was performed after dark, and so managed as to be kept a secret from the green hands.

And here I must not omit stating, that this foolery was sanctioned by the captain and officers, very much to their mortification afterwards, as the scene of confusion which ensued had like to have closed with a mutiny. On the next morning, the 8th, the play began; the green hands were confined in the forecabin, one at a time being sent up blindfolded, who was then received by his majesty of the sea, and the operation of shaving commenced.

The lather consisted of slush mixed with the dirty water of the grindstone tub; the razor was a piece of old iron hoop: the face being well besmeared with this lather, the work of shaving commenced, during which his majesty puts some interrogatories, such as, "Do you intend to become a member of my family, and a faithful subject of my realm?" &c. When the mouth is opened to give the answer, it is crammed full of odoriferous lather. This done, he is well scraped with the hoop, and ducked with salt water, and then let off to enjoy the remainder of the farce. I recollect, when they were about to cram the delicious lather into my mouth, I struck the man who held it, and in the bustle the bandage fell from my eyes, and I discovered the whole trick. A scene of confusion here took place; the green hands all sided together, and determined not to submit to the operation, and the old sailors attempting to force us to yield, a riot took place, which was not, without much difficulty, quelled by the officers. Order being at length restored, and the crew having returned to their duty, all was soon forgotten.

(George Little. *Life on the ocean; or, twenty years at sea*. Boston, 1846. 12. ed. p. 42-3.)

The earliest story by an American, so far.

1809

I'm not sure, Fred, that there is not that same shaving process they practise on the line occasionally performed for us by parents and guardians at home; and I'm not certain that the iron hoop of old Neptune is not a pleasanter acquaintance than the hair-trigger of some indignant and fire-eating brother.

(Charles Lever. *Charles O'Malley: the Irish dragoon*. Chapter 96, "The Confidence," in the original edition; Dublin; 1841; v. 2; p. 162.)

The period is the Peninsular War, rather than 1841, the date of first publication of the novel. In the midst of their attacks and counterattacks on the field of battle, O'Malley and Fred Power find time for lighter if not more vital things to talk about, Power sadly turning to O'Malley for consolation over his being turned down by the girl in Portugal he had fallen in love with. Power says "You adventure upon love as upon a voyage to India . . . Happy were it for us that in our courtship, as in our voyage, there were some certain Rubicon to remind us of the miles we have journeyed!" Mention of the "certain Rubicon" brings forth this sage and experienced comment by our Irish dragoon.

One more welcome note of our ceremony in fiction.

1812

On the 23d [of November, 1812], we were honoured by a visit from the gods of the ocean, accompanied by Amphitrite and a numerous retinue of imps, barbers, &c. &c. in his usual style of visiting, and in the course of the afternoon all the novices of the ship's company were initiated into his mysteries. Neptune, however, and most of his suite, paid their devotions so frequently to Bacchus, that before the ceremony of christening was half gone through, their godships were unable to stand; the business was therefore entrusted to the subordinate agents, who performed both the shaving and washing with as little regard to tenderness as his majesty would have done. On the whole, however, they got through the business with less disorder and more good humour than I expected; and although some were most unmercifully scraped, the only satisfaction sought was that of shaving others in their turn with new invented tortures.

(David Porter. *Journal of a cruise made to the Pacific Ocean by Captain David Porter, in the United States frigate Essex, in the years 1812, 1813, and 1814*. Philadelphia, 1815. v. 1, p. 17-18.)

1814

A few days before the last storms, we crossed the tropical line. On crossing it, the usual ceremonies were gone through with on board our schooner. I say usual, because the practice was one which was never omitted; but I learn that it is now not so common on board of American vessels — and I hope that the good sense and intelligence of all masters, will lead them to do away with the cruel and barbarous practice. It is a custom more honored in the breach than in the observance.

As we drew near the line, a hoarse, rough voice hailed us, with the salutation of 'Schooner ahoy! What schooner's that!' To this our captain replied,

giving the name of the vessel, where from, where bound, and the name of the commander. The same rough voice then commanded us to heave-to, and he would come on board of us. The sails were then laid to the masts, and Neptune, his wife, barber, and a numerous retinue, came up over the bows, and passed along into the waist, where the captain stood ready to welcome them on board. The ocean-god and the fair Amphitrite, were rigged out in the most grotesque and fantastical manner possible. The whole was a burlesque on the description of Spenser:

“First came great Neptune, with his three-forked mace  
That rules the seas, and makes them rise or fall;  
His dewey locks did drop with brine apace.  
Under his diadem imperial;  
And by his side his queene with coronall,  
Fair Amphitrite.”

The imperial diadem was made of duck, covered with oakum; the three-forked mace was a fish spear; his majesty's robe of state was a red baize shirt, and on his shoulders were a massive pair of epaulettes, made of tarred oakum. The fair Amphitrite was a strapping great sailor, rigged out in the queerest toggery in which female grace and loveliness were ever burlesqued. The landsmen were all placed in the waist; and his majesty, with a nice discrimination, remembered the faces of all who had ever been welcomed into his realm. But the old god was for once in his life at fault. It will be perceived that I had crossed the tropic and also the equator before; but my first captain was a man of too much good taste, and gentlemanly feelings, to permit old Neptune to come on board his ship. I had heard the ceremony of shaving so often described by sailors, that I was *au fait* to the thing; and my answers to the queries that had been propounded to me for several days before we reached the tropic, were very satisfactory. I had secured the silence of an old weather-beaten and rum-loving tar, who was with me in the ship, by giving him, during the whole cruise, my allowance of grog. I passed, therefore, for an affiliated and matriculated one.

The candidates having been selected, the process of shaving was now to commence. Our boat was placed on deck, half-filled with water, and a plank placed across it, but in a ticklish manner. The candidate being blindfolded, was conducted to, and made to seat himself on the plank, when several questions were propounded to him, which, if he was indiscreet enough to answer, as soon as his mouth was open, a brush, filled with tar, blacking, slush, and all manner of filth, was thrust in. After they had worried their poor victim for some time in this manner, they proceeded to lather him, by smearing his face all over with the same detestable compound; and he was then scraped with a piece of iron hoop, notched to make it more effective, until his face was lacerated to such a degree that the blood oozing out, mingling

1814, *continued*

with the tar and filth, gave the poor ill-used landsman a most deplorable appearance. To conclude the ceremony, one end of the plank was slipped away, and he received two or three severe duckings in the not over cleanly water.

Those who betrayed any signs of resistance or indignation, fared the worst — while those who took the thing quietly, and passed it off as a good joke, got off with a light penalty. One of our young landsmen, with a regard to the economy of his dress, which he rightly enough anticipated would not be very sacred against the lathering of the rough barber, had stripped himself to his trowsers; but while he preserved his shirt and jacket clean, his raw hide had to suffer; for he was lathered and shaved from his head down to his waist; and it was many days, by the application of grease, and soap and water, assisted by a stiff scrubbing brush, before he got his body again in a decent plight. No one, save myself, who had not before been shaved, escaped — but some who were so liberal as to bribe high with grog, got off with little annoyance.

Our little craft, for a while, presented the picture of a Pandemonium, in which the demons were holding a Saturnalia; and it was not until the next day, that the actors in this rude ceremony were sober enough to do their duty.

After all had been thus roughly welcomed, and Neptune and his retinue had spliced the main-brace with all the grog they could get, they retired the same way they came — the royal Amphitrite as unamiably drunk, as was her loving spouse, They wished us a successful and happy cruise — and we kept on our way.

(Benjamin Frederick Browne. *The yarn of a Yankee privateer*. Edited by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Introduction by Clifford Smyth. New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1926. pages 60-64.)

### 1815

On the 23rd [of November, 1815], at eight o'clock in the evening, we crossed the line, in longitude  $26^{\circ} 26''$ . I had determined to keep this day as a holiday, for which purpose preparations were made in the morning; towards evening, when the ship was washed, and every thing put into order, it was brilliantly illuminated, the officers and crew being in their best clothes, the passing from one hemisphere into the other was expected in profound and solemn silence; at the stroke of eight the flag was hoisted, and we saluted the southern hemisphere with eight guns, and drank to each other in our best wine; the sailors had excellent punch. Upon this Neptune appeared, and bid us welcome to the south: he baptized every one that had not passed the line before, and I was the only one that had not to undergo that ceremony. The rejoicing was general, and continued the whole evening and part

of the night. Half a degree more to the north, and under the equator itself, we found the current N.W.  $86^{\circ}$  47 miles in twenty-four hours.

(Otto von Kotzebue. A voyage of discovery into the South Sea and Beering's Straits . . . undertaken in the years 1815-1818, in the Ship *Rurick*. London, 1821. v. 1, p. 110-111.)

The preparations for the ceremony were unusual. How lucky Kotzebue was with weather good enough to let the ship be "brilliantly illuminated" and the whole crew be "in their best clothes." Did they take the baptism in those "best clothes" by a token drop of water on their heads, or thus clad be ducked, or have time to change?

Later crossings by Kotzebue are noted under 1818 and 1823.

[September] 23d - 25th. The west wind still continued, to our great astonishment; it was a sort of phenomenon in these regions, and had hitherto been very much in our favour. But with regard to phenomena, chance produced one of a much more extraordinary kind on the 23d, when we crossed the Line in  $0^{\circ}$  latitude,  $0^{\circ}$  longitude, and  $0^{\circ}$  declination. This is a circumstance which chance alone may perhaps renew only once in a century, since it is necessary to arrive precisely at the first meridian about noon, in order to pass the Line at that same hour, or to arrive there at the same time with the sun.

This was a day of great merriment and disorder among the crew: it was the ceremony which the English sailors call *the Christening*. The sailors dress themselves up in the most grotesque way; one is disguised as Neptune and all persons on board the ship who have not previously crossed the Line, are formally presented to him; an immense razor is passed over their chins, with a lather made of pitch; buckets of water are thrown over them, and the loud bursts of laughter which accompany their retreat, complete their initiation into the grand mystery. No one is spared; and the officers are generally more roughly used than the lowest of the sailors. The Admiral, who had previously amused himself by endeavouring to alarm us with the anticipation of this awful ceremony, now very courteously exempted us from the inconvenience and ridicule attending it. We were with every mark of attention and respect presented to the rude god, who paid to each of us a compliment after his own fashion; and thus our trial ended.

The Emperor was scrupulously respected during the whole of this saturnalian festivity, when respect is usually shewn to no one. On being informed of the decorum which had been observed with respect to him, he ordered a hundred Napoleons to be distributed to the grotesque Neptune and his crew, which the Admiral opposed, perhaps from motives of prudence as well as politeness.

(Emmanuel Augustin Dieudonné Las Cases, Comte. *Memorial de Sainte Hélène*. Journal of the private life and conversations of the Emperor Napoleon at Saint Helena. London, 1823. v. 1, p. 189-190.)

Three months before the 23rd of September the divinity that "doth hedge a king" would have left no doubt as to how the Emperor of France was to be treated when his ship crossed the line.

1815, *continued*

This time he, the Emperor to Las Cases, was still hedged about with "divinity" to the ship's crew, enough at least to need special mention as to his escaping Neptune's attention.

Las Cases was sent away from Saint Helena in 1817, crossed the line from south to north on the 20th of September "almost at the same time as the sun, which was going down towards the south on our larboard tack," but the crossing gets no more notice than that these few words.

The French and English texts of the *Mémorial* were brought out in London at the same time. The variations are slight, but perhaps have enough difference to call for printing the French below:

23 – 25 [September]. Le vent d'Ouest continuait toujours, à notre grand étonnement; c'était une espèce de phénomène dans ces parages: il nous avait très favorisés jusque-là. Mais, en fait de phénomènes, le hasard en combina un bien plus extraordinaire encore le 23. Ce jour-là nous traversâmes la Ligne par zéro de latitude, zéro de longitude, et zéro de déclinaison; circonstance que le seul hasard ne renouvellera peut-être pas dans un siècle, puisqu'il faut arriver précisément au premier méridien vers midi, pour passer la Ligne à cette même heure, et y arriver en même temps que le soleil.

Ce fut un jour de grosse joie et de grand désordre dans tout l'équipage: c'était la cérémonie que nos marins appellent le baptême, et que les Anglais nomment le jour de *grande barbe*. Les matelots, dans l'appareil le plus burlesque, conduisent en cérémonie, aux pieds de l'un d'eux, transformé en Neptune, tous ceux qui n'ont point encore traversé la Ligne; là un immense rasoir vous parcourt la barbe, préparée avec du goudron; des seaux d'eau dont on vous inonde aussitôt de toutes parts, les gros éclats de rire dont l'équipage accompagne votre fuite, complètent l'initiation des grands mystères; personne n'est épargné; les officiers même sont, en quelque façon, plus maltraités en cette circonstance que les derniers des matelots. Nous seuls, par une grâce parfaite de l'Amiral, qui jusque-là s'était plu à nous effrayer de cette terrible cérémonie, échappâmes à ses inconvéniens et à ses ridicules; nous fûmes conduits, avec toutes sortes d'attentions et de respects, aux pieds du dieu grossier, dont chacun de nous reçut un compliment à sa façon: là se bornèrent toutes nos épreuves.

L'Empereur fut scrupuleusement respecté pendant toute cette Saturnale, qui d'ordinaire ne respecte jamais rien. Ayant appris l'usage, et le ménagement dont on usait à son égard, il ordonna qu'on distribuât 100 Napoléons au grotesque Neptune et à sa bande, ce à quoi l'Amiral s'opposa, autant par prudence peut-être que par politesse.

(E. A. D. Las Cases, Comte. *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*. Journal de la vie privée et des conversations de l'Empereur Napoléon. Londres, 1823. v. 1, pt. 1, p. 202-204.)

### 1816

Quand il s'agit du baptême d'un vaisseau, sur les ordres du bonhomme Tropicque, les charpentiers armés de leurs haches, &c. se portent à la pou-

laine et menacent de la démolir, si le capitaine ne le rachète, menace prévue et que l'on a soin de détourner par un copieux pour-boire.

(Annales maritimes et coloniales, 1816, 2<sup>e</sup> part, p. 84. Reprinted with minor variations in: Mélusine, v. 2 (1884-5), column 279.)

This might perhaps be taken as quite possibly part of the ceremony for the launching of the ship were it not for the entry below under 1855.

### 1816 - 1819

Baptême sous la Ligne. Le vaisseau *l'Achille*, parti de Brest, ayant ordre de porter un consul à Madagascar. C'était en . . . Je ne me rappelle pas l'époque; mais la date est assez indifférente ici.

Le consul avait avec lui sa femme, ses filles et une domestique. Quelques autres passagers étaient aussi sur le bâtiment: un officier général qui allait à Bourbon; un vieux professeur qu'on devait débarquer à Batavia; enfin une respectable sœur hospitalière de Saint-Thomas de Villeneuve, qui se rendait à Madras, pour recueillir un héritage dont les fruits devaient revenir aux pauvres; la sainte fille l'avait l'avait déclaré sans affectation et on pouvait la croire. . . .

Le professeur était un assez étrange personnage. Il allait à Batavia enseigner, disait-il, la langue française; mais, en réalité, il était maître danser . . . On le remarquait en effet pour en rire, et il ne s'en apercevait pas. Il était devenu la fable des matelots et surtout des jeunes dames que cette caricature d'un autre temps divertissait fort . . . Un trait manquerait à cette portraiture fidèle, si j'oublais d'ajouter que M. Chaupin était gascon, de Pézenas.

Je n'ai rien à dire du général que le vaisseau menait à Bourbon. C'était un homme comme tout le monde; ni gras ni maigre, ni vieux ni jeune, ni beau ni laid; parlant peu, mangeant beaucoup, fumant pour donner à croire qu'il avait fait la guerre, jouant à l'écarté comme un fou, se fâchant tout rouge quand on prononçait devant lui le nom de Bonaparte; car il était émigré, rentré en 1815 . . .

Le consul était un brave et honnête homme, digne du poste qu'on venait de lui confier . . . Sa femme, encore fraîche, *grasse moute*, comme en dit en Basse-Bretagne, alerte, avenante, plaisait beaucoup à M. Chaupin qui lui faisait une cour assidue; comédie très-amusante pour l'état-major et le consul, qui s'y prêtait de bonne grâce, en jouant la jalousie, de manière à rendre le professeur très-fier. Les filles du consul, jolies, bien élevées, parlaient plusieurs langues, dessinaient agréablement; elles étaient les objets de l'attention de tous les officiers du vaisseau . . . Rose et Eugénie surent être adorables et se faire respecter.

Quant à Françoise, paysanne des environs de Rouen, au service de la famille du consul, un jeune élève la trouva fort gentille, et, sous prétexte qu'elle était sa compatriote, il abaissa jusqu'à elle l'orgueil de l'aiguillette d'or . . .

1816-1819, *continued*

Ce n'est pas seulement par manie d'artiste que j'ai esquissé les portraits qu'on vient de voir; j'ai fait pour vous ce que les matelots avaient fait pour eux. Ils s'étaient appliqués à étudier, pendant les premiers jours du voyage, tous leurs passagers, parce qu'on devait changer d'hémisphère et que le moment arrivait où chacun de ses personnages étrangers à la marine serait acteur forcé dans la farce du *baptême* de la ligne. Un homme surtout s'était mis en observation pour bien connaître les néophytes qu'on devait initier au culte de Neptune; bientôt il les sut par cœur en causant avec les domestiques du général et du consul; et c'est en quelques mauvais traits vifs, saillans, grotesquement caractéristiques qu'il les peignit aux matelots, arrangeurs futurs de la comédie bouffonne dont la représentation allait avoir lieu à bord de l'*Achille*. Cet homme était un jeune novice de la timonnerie, garçon de vingt ans, d'une famille respectable qu'il était au moment de déshonorer quand on l'embarqua pour le dépayser et rompre ses habitudes. Marin par contrainte, son caractère avait fini par fléchir sous la discipline (car il était à sa troisième campagne), et il ne restait plus guère à l'ancien mauvais sujet qu'une grande liberté d'esprit, un dévergondage de paroles assez gaies et une passion prononcée pour la *charge*. Au sortir du collège, il avait fréquenté les ateliers de peinture de la capitale et il s'était étudié là à ces plaisanteries dont les artistes ont l'admirable instinct; aussi était-il, à bord, le centre autour duquel on se réunissait avec délices. Heureux le *quart* dont il faisait partie! Il était conteur, chansonnier; on lui avait donné le nom d'*Arthur le Farceur*, et chacun bénissait la mère qui l'avait si bien gâté qu'à la fin son père avait été obligé de prier le ministre de donner au jeune fou un vaisseau pour maison de correction.

Dans la distribution que les matelots se firent des rôles pour le baptême, dont le moment approchait; — car c'était le lendemain, vers dix heures du matin, qu'on devait passer de l'hémisphère nord dans l'autre, — Arthur ne fut pas oublié. Un contre-maître lui dit:

— Ah ça, farceur, nous comptons sur toi pour la lettre du bonhomme La Ligne. Tu es-tu un savant; t'as-t-étudié-z-à Paris; tu ne peux pas manquer de nous faire quelque chose de bien.

Arthur voulut refuser par modestie l'honorable emploi d'interprète du dieu poli de l'équateur; le contre-maître lui signifia positivement que ce serait manquer d'égards à tout l'équipage que de ne pas se rendre à son désir.

— T'as la plume en main comme un officier, et de l'esprit comme un ci-devant garde-marine; — c'était des fameux plaisans que les garde-marine! — T'écriras donc la lettre, et puis demain tu feras le diable ou le prêtre, à ton choix.

Le timonnier obéit. Il se décida pour le personnage du diable, et il alla écrire la lettre, qui devait être portée le soir au commandant du vaisseau; pendant ce temps-là chacun prépara son costume pour la fête.

Les cuisiniers de l'état-major et du capitaine faisaient, depuis le matin, les galettes et les autres pâtisseries qu'on offre avant l'ondoisement aux cathé-

cumènes; ils apprêtaient les viandes qui devaient être mangées en pâtés ou en longs ragoûts, après la cérémonie. Un mouton avait été haché avec de gros quartiers de lard et de bœuf salé; c'était de quoi remplir une quarantaine de vastes puits, faits d'une certaine pâte grossière qui ne ressemblait pas mal à celle dont les paysans français et les bourgeois espagnols se régalaient les jours de solennité domestique.

Tout était mouvement à bord de *l'Achille*; le gaillard d'arrière lui-même avait perdu sa gravité officielle; on y préludait aux jeux bruyans du lendemain par de gais mystifications dont M. Chaupin était la victime, comme on peut croire.

Sur le bord de la dunette, Arthur, qui venait d'achever sa lettre, avait l'œil dans une lunette attachée à un point fixe du ceil. De temps à autre, il se disait à lui-même:

— Je la vois; c'est bien elle; la voila; nous en sommes encore loin, mais demain matin nous passerons dessous.

Vous savez ce plaisant qui s'arrêta un jour sur une place publique de Paris et se mit à regarder les nuages en se parlant et en gesticulant, comme un homme qui soutient une thèse imaginaire; un individu s'approcha de lui, l'examinant et portant ses regards dans la direction où il voyait ceux de cet homme; puis vint un second, puis un troisième; enfin, après un quart d'heure, la foule était autour de lui. La meme chòse arriva à Arthur; au bout d'un moment, tous les passagers l'entouraient.

— Qu'observez-vous donc avec tant d'attention? lui demanda le général.

— Mon général, répondit le timonnier, c'est la ligne équatoriale que je vois un peu au-dessus de l'horizon.

— En vérité! Ah! parbleu je serais bien aise de voir cette ligne dont j'ai tant entendu parler!

— C'est très-facile, général; tenez, mettez-vous bien à ma place. Bon . . . fermez l'œil gauche et approchez le droit du verre de la longue-vue que je vais tenir moi-même, afin qu'elle soit dans la position convenable.

— Ah! mais c'est étonnant, messieurs! Ce jeune homme a raison; voila la ligne; je la vois très-clairement . . . elle est noire, et à en juger par la distance, elle doit avoir la largeur de mon grand cordon de Saint-Louis.

M. Chaupin se tirait les yeux à chercher; il avait beau se faire un abat-jour de sa main gauche, un corps de lorgnette de sa main droite, il ne découvrait rien.

— Après vous, s'il vous plait, monsieur le comte; j'ai ouï raconter beaucoup de choses sur la *barre* équinoxiale dans les gazettes et les romans; je suis curieux de savoir si les auteurs n'ont pas menti; ils mentent si souvent les auteurs!

Le général se retira et le professeur se mit au petit bout de la lunette. La ligne, ou plutot la *barre*, comme il l'appelait par l'heureux emploi d'un synonyme naïf, lui apparut tout comme au noble comte.

1816-1819, *continued*

— Je la vois aussi distinctement que je vois les grosses échelles des mâts du vaisseau; mais elle ne me semble pas noire comme au général; elle me fait l'effet d'une espèce d'arc-en-ciel plus *conséquent* que celui des temps de pluie.

— Elle est noire, dit avec autorité le général.

— Elle est de cent couleurs, reprit le danseur.

Mademoiselle Eugénie, qui ne pouvait être trompée par une si grossière invention, prit la longue-vue et dit à M. Chaupin:

— J'en suis fâchée pour vous, monsieur; mais le général a raison, la ligne est noire; voyez plutôt.

Et elle retourna la lunette, sur l'objectif de laquelle Arthur avait placé un fil noir tenu par ses deux extrémités au cercle de cuivre, à l'aide de petites gouttes de cire.

Pendant que le général et le maître à danser s'assuraient de la tromperie, le timonnier s'échappait par le second escalier de la dunette pour éviter la colère de ses victimes; le général se fâcha tout de bon.

— Quelle insolence! cria-t-il. Un matelot se permettre des plaisanteries de la sorte avec un lieutenant-général des armées du roi!

— C'est une horreur! Prendre pour jouet un homme comme vous! Car la mystification était dirigée contre vous particulièrement, ajouta M. Chaupin.

— Il me semble, monsieur le professeur, que vous en avez été dupe aussi.

— Oh! dupe si vous voulez; dupe sans l'être. A vrai dire, je n'ai rien vu du tout; mais c'est pour ne pas vous désobliger que j'ai dit que je voyais quelque chose.

— Franchement, dit en riant Mlle. Eugénie, ces messieurs ont été également trompés. C'est bien mal de la part de M. Arthur de s'être moqué d'un officier général et d'un professeur aussi distingué.

— Certes, c'est bien mal, et je prierai le commandant de le faire jeter dans un cul de basse-fosse ou aux fers, comme on dit ici.

— Aux fers pour une plaisanterie, général!

— Et la veille du jour où l'on passe la ligne, reprit un aspirant qui était pour quelque chose dans l'idée mise à exécution par le timonnier. Vous savez que ces vingt-quatre heures sont accordées à l'équipage pour la saturday.

— Et d'ailleurs, reprit avec malice Mlle. Eugénie, comment ce matelot pouvait-il supposer que ces messieurs se laisseraient prendre à une espièglerie dont La Fontaine a donné le secret dans sa fable *d'Un animal dans la Lune*? Le fil noir de M. Arthur, c'est le rat du fabuliste.

Le général descendit fort mécontent, suivi de M. Chaupin, pour aller porter plainte au commandant du vaisseau. Le capitaine arrivait sur le pont en même temps qu'eux, attiré par la discussion qu'il avait entendue, et empressé de la faire cesser.

— Commandant, dit le professeur, nous avons à nous plaindre . . .

Le claquement d'un fouet qui se faisait entendre au sommet du grand mât vint couper la parole à M. Chaupin.

— Ah! voila le courrier qui nous arrive.

— Le courrier, commandant, reprit le général; est-ce qu'il nous apporte des nouvelles de la cour?

Tous les passagers et les officiers qui se trouvaient sur le pont ne purent s'empêcher de rire à cette étrange question; le maître à danser lui-même comprit ce qu'il y avait de naïf dans cette supposition de l'arrivée par mer, à cheval, d'une estafette ou du courrier de la malle.

— Celle-ci est un peu forte, dit-il à l'oreille du général; comment voudriez-vous que le commandant punit un matelot qui s'est moqué d'un homme qui demande de pareilles choses. Parole d'honneur, c'est pain bénit que des mystifications si bien placées!

— Monsieur, vous m'insultez, je crois, dit le général au danseur; c'est probablement parce que vous sentez que, gentilhomme et lieutenant-général des armées du roi, je ne puis pas vous demander raison . . . !

Le capitaine de *l'Achille* s'interposa bien vite entre les deux vieillards qui faisaient la plus drôle de figure en se regardant. Chaupin se redressait; le général soulevait d'un air méprisant les coins de sa bouche, en tournant avec affectation dans ses doigts la croix de Saint-Louis, qui pendait à sa boutonnière à l'extrémité d'un long ruban.

— Messieurs, dit le commandant, pas de querelle à bord, je vous supplie.

— Mais, monsieur! . . . répondit le général, dois-je me laisser malmener par un routurier qui fait des pirouettes?

— C'est bien, monsieur le général! répartit le danseur; j'écrirai au ministre, qui est presque mon beau-frère, et vous aurez de ses nouvelles.

— Par grâce, messieurs, laissez cela.

— C'est que . . .

— Si cela continuait, je serais forcé de vous ordonner les arrêts dans vos chambres.

— Un colonel, les arrêts à un lieutenant-général!

— Un colonel, les arrêts à l'oncle d'un ministre!

— Oui, messieurs. Ce colonel est maître à bord; ainsi . . .

Un homme arriva sur le gaillard d'arrière.

— Commandant, on voit venir là-bas un courrier extraordinaire.

Extraordinaire, en effet. Et le matelot qui l'avait annoncé se mit à rire en regardant le postillon grotesque que le jeu de mots caractérisait convenablement. Tout le monde se retourna pour voir arriver l'émissaire du *Bonhomme La Ligne*; car c'était la qualité de ce personnage qui descendait en courant le long du grand étai, comme un funambule descend sur la partie oblique de sa corde, qui va du chevalet au parterre du théâtre. Il était parti de la grand'hune, où l'on avait entendu tout-à-l'heure son fouet claquer, ainsi que, dans un vent fort, les gabiers entendent bruire et siffler à la tête du mât de perroquet la flamme du vaisseau. Son costume était étrange; sur sa veste

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bleue étaient cousus des morceaux d'étamine rouge transformant le collet et les paremens, pour donner au vêtement du bord l'air de l'uniforme des postes royales; des bandes de toile blanche, empruntées à un vieux pavillon, en galonnaient les poches et les retroussis; de larges bottes de carton, éperonnées avec deux grands clous que le maître charpentier avait prêtés, embarraisaient les jambes du porte-nouvelles; son chapeau ciré, où s'étalait une large cocarde de papier, recouvrait une perruque d'étoupe artistement composée, d'où pendait par derrière une énorme queue flanquée de tresses à la hussarde; — c'est le boulanger qui l'avait coiffée, et il n'avait pas épargné la poudre; — d'épaisses moustaches, faites d'un morceau de corde détordue, couvraient la moitié de la figure du courrier, et il aurait fallu être bien habile pour reconnaître là le visage un peu féminin d'Arthur. C'était lui cependant. Il arriva en caracolant sur le bastingage et en agitant son fouet, dont la mèche aiguë manqua d'éborgner M. Chaupin, le plus mal chanceux des passagers qu'ait jamais portés navire; car soit hasard, soit dessein prémédité, aucun matelot ne faisait une gaucherie à bord qu'elle ne trouvât pour victime le futur professeur de Batavia. Quand Arthur fut descendu sur le pont, et cela d'un saut qui le porta, comme par malheur, sur un des pieds de notre pauvre danseur, il remit poliment au capitaine de vaisseau un paquet que le commandant décacheta tout de suite. Le postillon se mit à fumer pendant la lecture qui fut faite de la lettre du Bonhomme La Ligne, dont je ne rapporterai que le préambule:

“Par 0° de latitude, en mon palais de la ligne, moi, le roi de l'équateur, au commandant du vaisseau qui arrive, salut et protection . . .”

Le rest de cette missive était plus bouffon que comique. Le capitaine de *l'Achille* qui, tout de suite, l'avait parcourue des yeux, ne crut pas devoir en donner lecture aux dames; je dois imiter sa réserve. Arthur s'était complètement trompé et ce fut un effet perdu. Cet incident lui fit quelque tort dans l'esprit de ses admirateurs.

— Eh bien! monsieur le commandant, dit le postillon, que dois-je annoncer au roi mon maître?

— Que je me conformerai avec plaisir aux usages, et que demain j'aurai l'honneur de recevoir S. M. le bonhomme La Ligne si elle daigne nous visiter.

Le postillon se retira après avoir fait au grand galop le tour du gaillard d'arrière, se contorsionnant de la manière la plus bizarre; il fut applaudi par tout l'équipage grimpé dans les haubans, sur la drôme et dans les embarcations, pour assister à ce prologue du spectacle qui devait être donné le lendemain.

Le moment de la fête se fit bien attendre! La nuit parut longue aux matelots impatients de jouir enfin de cette liberté d'un jour que leur assure le passage de la ligne. Il était déjà dix heures, et tout roulait à bord de *l'Achille* comme à l'ordinaire; quelques hommes seulement n'avaient pas paru sur le

pont, et l'on avait hâte de les y voir, parce qu'ils étaient les acteurs de la farce. Cependant un bruit sec et léger, comme celui du grésil qui frappe en hiver contre les vitres de votre chambre, attira l'attention des promeneurs, et l'on entendit un *ah!* de contentement, parti de deux cent bouches à la fois sur le vaisseau, semblable à l'exclamation qui part de tous les points d'une salle à la fin du long entr'acte par lequel l'intérêt du drame a été coupé. Une averse de pois, de lentilles et de haricots tombait des hunes. — Jupiter se fait annoncer chez Danaé par une pluie d'or; l'Apollon classique fait répandre sur la terre par la jeune Aurore des roses fraîches épanouies; le dieu de l'équateur donne pour dragées de joyeux avénement tout ce qu'il a, haricots, pois et lentilles; car il n'a ni fleurs ni or, le Bonhomme La Ligne! Et il en aurait qu'il n'en donnerait pas, parce qu'il ne cherche ni à séduire ni à flatter. Ce n'est point une largesse qu'il veut faire, mais un avertissement qu'il prétend donner; ses légumes secs, il les jette comme pour dire au marin: "Tu auras beau changer d'hémisphère, ta cuisine ne changera pas; ton avenir au sud est comme ton passé au nord; des fayots, toujours des fayots! absti-nence, privation, pois et gourganes."

Les pois tombaient, ricochaient sur le pont, roulaient sous les pieds des officiers et des passagers. — M. Chaupin faillit tomber vingt fois! — Une voix grave et forte parvint des hauteurs du petit mât de hune, grossie par un grand porte-voix de combat:

— Oh! du vaisseau!

Le chef de timonerie répondit. — Holà!

— D'où venez-vous?

— De Brest.

— Où allez-vous?

— A Madagascar.

— Comment vous nommez-vous?

— L'Achille, capitaine Prior.

— Je connais le capitaine; il a déjà traversé mes états; mais c'est la première fois que je vois le vaisseau, et je serais bien aise de le visiter. Voulez-vous me permettre de descendre à votre bord avec la reine mon épouse, mon fils et toute ma cour?

— C'est trop d'honneur que vous voulez nous faire; nous serons charmés de votre visite, et nous ferons tout notre possible pour vous bien recevoir.

— A la bonne heure!

Le dialogue d'introduction finit là, et des pois tombèrent encore sur le gaillard.

— Voila de drôles d'usages, dit le général: cela est très-ridicule. Si c'est une moquerie de la royauté, comme je le suppose, je ne le souffrirai pas. Ce n'est pas en présence d'un lieutenant-général des armées du roi qu'une chose semblable pourrait avoir lieu impunément!

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— Mon général, répondit le commandant Prior, n'ayez pas d'inquiétudes; tout se passera convenablement. Il s'agit ici d'une vieille tradition à laquelle nous ne saurions toucher; le respect dû à la monarchie n'a rien à en redouter.

La bonne sœur Marie qui était montée sur le pont avec tous les autres passagers, et qui se trouvait à côté du capitaine, le tira modestement par le bras, et, lui montrant le coin du gaillard d'arrière à babord, lui dit à demi-voix:

— Et le respect dû à la religion, capitaine!

M. Prior sourit et s'empressa de rassurer l'hospitalière de Saint-Thomas qu'il trouva aussi émue que le général, mais non pas de cette émotion affectée à laquelle le vieux courtisan se laissait aller chaleureusement, comme s'il y avait eu sur le vaisseau quelqu'un qui pût aller, un moment après, aux Tuileries témoigner de sa sollicitude monarchique.

Ce qui avait affligé les regards de la religieuse excitait vivement, depuis le matin, la curiosité des marins et des passagers; c'était une chapelle. La timonerie avait mis tous ses soins à la décorer avec goût. Des pavillons de diverses couleurs en formaient l'enceinte. Une grande table, sur laquelle étaient placées quelques caisses, recouverte comme elle d'un pavillon blanc, faisait l'autel. Tout ce qu'on avait trouvé de chandeliers chez le capitaine et les officiers du vaisseau, y figurait en pyramide et sur plusieurs rangs; chandeliers et bougies brûlaient en grand nombre, comme les lampes au saint tombeau de Jérusalem; un crucifix ingénieusement fait avec deux cabillots en croix sur lesquels était étendue une figure de pâte cuite au four, assez burlesquement modelée, dominait tout cet édifice. Des tableaux ornaient l'intérieur de ce petit temple; non pas tableaux d'église, car excepté une grossière image de sainte Barbe qui appartenait au second maître canonnier, vieux Breton qui jurait toujours par le nom de la patronne des artilleurs, il n'y avait à bord que des gravures peu édifiantes; mais qu'importait? Quelqu'un avait bien fait observer au décorateur qu'il n'était pas bien décent de mettre dans une chapelle catholique *Pâris et Hélène*, *Mars et Vénus*, *Psyché*, et l'histoire amoureuse de Louis XIV; Arthur avait levé tous les scrupules: "J'ai vu, au mois de juin dernier, pendant mon congé à Paris, la famille royale processionner pour la Fête-Dieu, de Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois aux Tuileries, entre deux haies de tapisseries où étaient représentées Didon, Calypso et un tas d'autres farceuses du temps; ça n'étonnait personne. Il faudrait être bien ambitieux pour vouloir être plus dévot que le grand amiral; et quand le grand amiral ne se scandalise pas, je voudrais bien savoir quel marin aurait la prétention de se scandaliser." A la porte de la chapelle était un large baquet rempli d'eau, traversé par une planche, et recouvert d'une nappe.

Le clergé avait commencé l'office pour la bénédiction des pâtisseries qu'on devait distribuer aux personnes considérables du bord. Un prêtre et deux acolytes étaient à l'autel, tous trois affublés de chemises blanches passées

par-dessus leurs vêtemens, tous trois coiffés de bonnets pointus en papier que la suie de la chaudière du coq avait noirci. Ils psalmodiaient une espèce de latin macaronique d'où ne ressortaient clairement que certains jurons qui faisait rougir et trembler sœur Marie.

Le cortège du Bonhomme La Ligne fut annoncé alors par des claquemens de fouets, des chants, des cris poussés dans des porte-voix et descendant du haut de la mâture. On vit partir dans ce moment de la grand'hume le roi de l'équateur, suivi de sa femme, de son fils et d'une cour nombreuse; ils arrivèrent au gaillard d'avant par la voie oblique du grand étai. Un char, et quelques autres acteurs les attendaient là. Bientôt on entendit rouler le carrosse de leurs majestés équatoriales, et des bravos, des *vivat* partis des haubans signalèrent son approche aux spectateurs de l'arrière.

Quatre gendarmes, précédés d'un officier de gendarmerie, ouvraient la marche. Neptune venait ensuite. Ce Neptune était un homme grand, gros, fort, musculeux, nu de la tête aux pieds, ceint au-dessous des hanches d'une large étamine bleue, le menton garni d'une épaisse barbe d'étope, la tête couronnée de deux épineux squelettes de poissons. Le croc à trois branches du maître-coq, qu'il portait gravement à la main, représentait le trident du dieu des eaux. Ce matelot, à la poitrine et aux bras tatoués de cœurs enflammés, d'ancres, d'aigles, de fleurs-de-lis et d'autres emblèmes, était d'une incroyable gravité; il marchait au pas ordinaire, le poing sur le côté, comme un sapeur à la parade, un suisse de cathédrale à la promenade des rogations, ou un de ces grotesques sauvages qui précèdent notre boeuf gras.

Une espèce de diable, qui avait la prétention de représenter Pluton, voltigeait, avec quelques diabolins, autour de Neptune, et oubliant une antique fraternité pour ne se rappeler peut-être que l'antipathie du feu et de l'eau, le harcelait avec une petite gaffe, au risque de recevoir quelques coups du trident que vous savez. Le costume du diable et de ses suivans était hideux; les matelots et les mousses qui jouaient les rôles infernaux s'étaient enduit le corps d'une couche de goudron, puis s'étaient roulés dans des plumes de poules et de canards, conservées soigneusement pour ce grand jour, depuis le moment du départ, par les cuisiniers du vaisseau. Des chaînes, traînées et agitées par les diables, auraient suffi à les faire reconnaître pour de méchans esprits; mais de peur qu'on ne s'y trompât, de grandes cornes ornaient le front de ces acteurs emplumés qui pensaient être tout-à-fait dans l'esprit de leurs personnages, en allant tourmenter les prêtres à la chapelle, et en proférant des juremens continuels.

Après ces figures empruntées à l'Olympe classique et à l'enfer chrétien, marchait un homme déguisé en meunier; il jetait des poignées de farine aux curieux que ses plaisanteries d'ivrogne attiraient auprès de lui, et fumait son brûle-gueule en faisant des mines bouffonnes qui amusaient beaucoup l'équipage. Quel symbole parodiait ce farinier? Personne ne le devina. Était-ce le père nourricier du jeune enfant que portait dans ses bras l'épouse du bonhomme La Ligne? Était-ce la caricature de Cybèle? Mais que serait venue

1816-1819, *continued*

faire là Cybèle? Pourriez-vous dire ce qu'y faisaient les gendarmes à côté de Neptune, le meunier à côté du diable, le diable à côté de prêtres catholiques? Si quelque chose doit étonner, c'est que dans la mascarade il n'y eût ni Turc, ni paillasse; — car il n'est guère de mascarade sans paillasse et sans Turc! — Il n'y en avait point. En effet, derrière le meunier arrivait immédiatement un char portant la glorieuse famille du souverain de l'empire équatorial. Le char était composé d'un affût de 12 sur ses roues; deux chevaux le traînaient, et ces chevaux, c'étaient des matelots cachés sous des couvertures, marchant à quatre pieds à l'aide de petits bâtons qui égalisaient les bras avec les jambes; d'informes têtes de chevaux en carton ou en papier leur servaient de masques.

Mais voici le bonhomme La Ligne! L'attention des spectateurs redouble. Le vieux monarque qui régné sur le ciel et la mer, de l'un à l'autre tropique, est courbé, voûté, cassé, chenu. C'est un calier hâve, maigre, âgé d'au moins soixante ans, qui porte le sceptre de l'équateur; un rideau de cotonnade bleue qu'on a emprunté au poste des chirurgiens se drape sur sa peau ridée; sa longue perruque et sa barbe, qui ne ressemblent pas mal à un faubert usé, sont poudrés à blanc; il a au dos des ailes, comme le temps; par décence, il porte un pantalon de toile qui n'est pas trop sale, bien que déjà le vieillard l'ait mis plus d'une fois dans sa cale, d'où il n'était pas sorti encore depuis que *l'Achille* a quitté Brest, et où il redescendra après la cérémonie pour ne la plus abandonner jusqu'à la première relâche. La reine est un jeune matelot gras, vermeil, bien portant, ayant les joues et le menton frottés d'un beau rouge qu'on a trouvé dans le jus d'une conserve de betteraves donné par le maître d'hôtel du commandant; une veste de laine blanche à larges raies de couleur sert de corsage à sa majesté, dont les formes féminines sont fortement accusées au moyen de deux de ces paquets de cordages nommés *valets*, que les canonnières mettent dans les bouches à feu pardessus les boulets pour les empêcher d'en sortir. Les appas de la reine sont du calibre de 36! La Rouennaise Françoise a fourni le reste de la toilette de Mme. La Ligne. Un jupon rouge, une cornette, un fichu complètent l'ajustement, d'ailleurs fort pudique, de la nourrice divine qui porte sur ses bras le plus petit des mousmes travesti en amour. L'enfant joue avec le diadème de sa mère, — sa mère a un diadème! — le hausse-col d'un officier, attaché autour du bonnet et renversé, figure assez bien le bandeau royal; l'ancre d'argent qui brille sur le fond doré est du meilleur effet. La reine obtient un très-grand succès; quand elle passe, on bat des mains, on rit, on fait des plaisanteries sur cette Vénus qui berce Cupidon; elle salue de fort bonne grâce, elle s'abstient de parler, dans la crainte de se trahir par la voix; que ne s'abstient-elle aussi de rire? Sa large bouche ouverte laisse voir . . . Mme La Ligne a oublié de jeter sa chique!

Derrière le char venaient les grands officiers de la couronne, burlesquement affublés de pavillons aux bandes éclatantes. Ils fermaient la marche.

Quand le cortège eut défilé aux acclamations de tous les assistans, le roi, la reine, Neptune, le diable, le meunier et les autres travestis vinrent auprès de la chapelle pour assister au baptême. Au moment où l'on allait commencer, le diable ayant déjà pris par la main le général pour aller le présenter au prêtre, on entendit un grand bruit vers la poulaine. Des tritons, armés de haches, menaçaient de briser la statue d'*Achille*, qui décorait la proue du vaisseau, si le commandant Prior refusait de payer le tribut que doit tout bâtiment pour son premier passage sous la ligne. C'était le premier voyage, en effet, que le navire faisait vers l'hémisphère sud; la guerre l'avait retenu dans les ports de l'ouest depuis sa naissance, et s'il était allé de Rochefort à Lorient et de Lorient à Brest, malgré le blocus anglais, c'est en côtoyant la France de très-près, comme font les enfans qui jouent aux quatre coins et se glissent le long du mur pour n'être pas pris par le guetteur du centre, qu'ils appellent le *chat*. Le capitaine ne se fit pas prier; il envoya de l'argent aux tritons, qui épargnèrent la figure et baptisèrent *Achille* avec quelques seaux d'eau de mer, laquelle le rendit plus invulnérable que n'avait pu faire l'immersion dans le Styx, imaginée par *Thetis*. Tête et talons, tout fut trempé. L'échafaud qu'on avait dressé auprès de l'éperon pour abattre l'image du héros fut enlevé, et toute l'attention se concentra sur le gaillard d'arrière.

Le général était au pied de l'autel, entre le capitaine de gendarmerie et le diable.

— Que va-t-il m'arriver, commandant? dit à M. Prior le général, dont la voix était singulièrement effrayée.

— Allons, allons, pas de commentaires, répliqua tout de suite le diable; on va laver ta vieille perruque et autre chose encore que le front bilieux qui la porte, si tu ne te soumet pas de bonne grâce aux épreuves terribles du baptême.

Le général repoussa avec colère le personnage qui lui parlait ainsi.

— Quel est ce bélître qui me tutoie et me menace, monsieur le commandant? Ayez la bonté de rappeler ce mal appris au respect qu'il me doit, ou je rendrai compte à la cour. . .

Le prêtre l'interrompt:

— Voulez-vous être baptisé selon la religion du peuple goudronné?

— Non, certainement, je ne le veux pas; adressez-vous aux gens de votre sorte; je ne plaisante qu'avec mes pareils.

L'officier fit un signe, et à l'instant les sabres des cinq gendarmes, le trident de Neptune et la fourche du diable firent autour du général un cercle menaçant. La victime poussa un cri d'effroi qui ne trouva pour échos sur le bâtiment que de longs éclats de rire. Une ronde diabolique commença, au milieu de laquelle le *voltigeur*, comme tout le monde appelait le vieil officier-général, faisait la plus étrange mine.

— Commandant, disait-il, vous répondez sur votre tête de tout ce qui m'arrivera; songez que ce ne serait pas en vain qu'on manquerait à ce qu'on doit à un lieutenant-général des armées du roi!

1816-1819, *continued*

M. Prior s'avança et dit tout bas à l'émigré quelques paroles auxquelles il répondit vivement:

— Non, non; je ne capitulerai pas avec ces marouffles.

Le prêtre fit un nouveau signe; le diable et Neptune saisirent le récalcitrant et le firent asseoir sur la planche du baquet.

— On me violente, commandant; vous et les vôtres vous en repentirez!

Le néophyte malgré lui ne pouvait plus faire un mouvement. Le diable lui dit à l'oreille: "Vous savez l'usage, monsieur; payez et tout finira bien." Plus avare encore que peureux, le général ne voulut pas dénouer les cordons de sa bourse. Tout aurait été fini pourtant s'il l'avait voulu; car dans l'église équatoriale on connaît aussi les dispenses, et pour une ou deux pièces de monnaie on se rachète des obligations imposées par la tradition.

Une grosse voix entonna alors sur un air infernal:

— Baptisons, aspergeons et plongeons!

En tout ce qui entourait la chapelle répéta ces trois mots avec des hurlements effroyables. On leva en ce moment le bras gauche du patient, et quand le prêtre eut fait un grave salut au bonhomme La Ligne, qui le lui rendit avec le même sérieux, il jeta un pot d'eau dans la manche du général, puis un autre sur sa tête; puis la planche fut retirée précipitamment, et le siège manquant tout à coup, on ne vit bientôt plus en l'air que deux pieds et deux mains qui s'agitaient comme pour demander du secours. Le derrière était au fond de la cuve, et c'est tout au plus si la face du baptisé se trouvait à fleur d'eau; on le retira pestant, menaçant, ruisselant et plaignant sa qualité de gentilhomme et de lieutenant-général indignement méconnue. On allait recommencer, quand il se décida à jeter au diable vingt francs pour l'apaiser. Les bravos, les sifflets, les hueés accueillirent cette résolution tardive. M. Prior ne put sauver ce charivari à son illustre passager; l'équipage usait amplement de son droit, et peut-être le capitaine n'était-il pas très-fâché, au fond, qu'on bernât le ridicule successeur des généraux de la république et de l'empire.

M. Chaupin avait assisté à la moitié de la cérémonie, et quand il avait vu qu'elle devenait désagréable pour le général, il avait jugé prudent de se retirer, afin d'éviter, s'il était possible, un traitement pareil; des matelots s'étaient aperçus de sa disparition et avaient couru sur les traces. Le professeur était allé se cacher dans un recoin du faux-pont où il était blotti, soufflant à peine, le nez contre la muraille, ramassé en un tas que trahissait seulement dans l'ombre sa queue blanche. Ce fut de là qu'une main puissante le tira, non sans qu'il eût une grande frayeur; car, en le suivant à la piste, les marins étaient allés à pas de loup, et il n'avait pu les entendre avant qu'un jeune quartier-maître, lui frappant sur l'épaule, lui eût dit en riant:

— Eh bien! monsieur le bourgeois, que faites-vous donc là? On dirait que vous vous confessez pour recevoir le baptême dans de plus saintes dispositions!

S'il y a là quelqu'un pour vous écouter, ce ne peut être qu'un vieux rat; et prenez garde, dam, pommadé comme vous êtes, vous seriez un morceau friand pour un de ces mangeurs de beurre rance et de chandelle. Ne jouez pas avec eux, non! On en a vu manger des passagers comme des noix sèches . . . Si vous êtes paré, le prêtre vous attend à l'autel.

Le maître à danser ne répondait pas. Redressé par le matelot qui l'avait tiré de son petit coin, il était debout, immobile, effrayé et cherchant sans doute dans son imagination un moyen pour sortir d'embarras. Il se résolut enfin à parler; ce fut d'abord pour invoquer le pouvoir de son neveu le ministre du roi: peine perdue.

— Le ministre du roi et le roi lui-même seraient ici qu'on les baptiserait. La loi de la ligne est pour tous, mon brave homme; mais le roi et son ministre s'en tireraient bien s'ils voulaient.

— Et comment cela? reprit M. Chaupin, qui entrevoyait un amendement à sa position!

— En crachant au bassinet, comme on dit. Ils donneraient vingt-cinq louis, mille francs, plus ou moins, et une goutte d'eau en ferait l'affaire.

— Ainsi, pour de l'argent. . .

— Sans doute, vous donnez quelques louis et on vous fait bon marché de la cérémonie.

— Et combien faudrait-il donner, monsieur le matelot?

— Dam, dix pièces d'or à la face du roi, ce n'est pas trop.

— Dix louis de vingt francs! mais c'est exorbitant.

— Ne vous plaignez pas, on aurait encore le droit d'exiger les quarante francs de différence.

— Et ne pourrait-on rien rabattre? Je suis un simple professeur, un artiste.

— Vous êtes l'oncle d'un ministre; vous le disiez tout-à-l'heure pour nous faire peur. Le ministre vingt-cinq louis, son oncle dix; c'est le prix au plus juste.

— Mais, le ministre n'est pas tout-à-fait mon neveu, parce qu'il n'a pas tout-à-fait épousé ma nièce.

— Bien, je vous comprends. Alors c'est un peu moins cher, on vous passera ça pour six louis.

— Mais, peut-être, au moment où nous parlons, le ministre ne m'est plus rien du tout; ma nièce m'a déjà donné tant de neveux!

A force de marchander, le tarif s'abaissa jusqu'à dix francs pour l'oncle de la danseuse. Le quartier-maître lui promit qu'on l'épargnerait et qu'il n'aurait pas plus d'un verre d'eau dans la manche de son habit. Il remonta sur le pont, content, gaillard, sûr de lui-même et heureux, pardessus toutes choses, de penser que le général enragerait au fond du cœur de la préférence dont lui Chaupin allait être l'objet. Pendant qu'on discutait dans le faux-pont, on continuait à baptiser à la chapelle. Mesdemoiselles Rose et Eugénie étaient ondoyées quand le maître à danser arriva par l'escalier du grand mâât. Tout

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s'était bien passé pour les jeunes filles; leur mère, qui avait déjà traversé plusieurs fois la zone torride, s'était arrangée avec le diable moyennant quelques pièces d'argent. Elles furent à peine mouillées, et ce n'est qu'à regret qu'elles se virent privées du bain, tant il faisait chaud sous la tente du vaisseau. Au moment où l'on vit paraître M. Chaupin, suivi quartier-maître et d'un autre marin qui le ramenaient, tous les matelots partirent d'un: bravo la tête à perruque!

On comptait sur un épisode amusant. Le professeur s'avança hardiment vers le prêtre, et en passant il dit au diable:

— Mon cher, j'ai payé.

— Il faut alors que le prêtre gagne son argent; car, s'il vit de l'autel, ce n'est pas pour que l'autel le nourrisse à rien faire. La cérémonie aura lieu avec pompe, ajouta tout haut le diable.

Cette phrase contenait un calembourg auquel personne ne fit attention d'abord, et ce calembourg était un signal. Une pompe à bras du vaisseau avait été mise sur la dunette; son tuyau, caché dans un angle de l'autel, fut saisi par le prêtre pendant que le diable prenait celui d'une autre pompe placée sur le passavant de babord. On assit sur la planche M. Chaupin qui cherchait de tous ses yeux le général pour le narguer. Le général était allé caoher son dépit et le profond mécontentement qu'il avait de la conduite du capitaine Prior à son égard.

La prière, parodie inintelligible des oraisons catholiques, commença; on chanta, dans je ne sais quel patois, un hymne qui se termina par ces paroles: "Mouille, mouille au grand bénissoir." Deux douches violentes attaquèrent au même instant le corps frêle du danseur, qui se débattait en vain contre ces jets dont il était inondé. Un crochet, attaché à son habit, le retenait par derrière; et quand il voulut fuir il en fut empêché, non-seulement par là, mais encore par le plongeon qu'il fit dans le large baquet et où le retint un instant le déluge d'eau tombant sur lui. Tout ce qu'il put dire pour protester contre cet acte de félonie fut cette phrase: "J'ai payé, rendez-moi au moins mes dix francs." Le chérubin sortit singulièrement décoiffé de la fatale cuve; et quand on le vit se redresser, les faces collées aux tempes, la poudre faisant sur sa figure de longues traînées blanches, personne, pas même la bonne sœur Marie, ne put s'empêcher de rire. M. Chaupin ne se fâcha point, on l'avait pris pour dupe et pour jouet, il se donna un air d'esprit en feignant la gaieté. L'amour-propre lui fut un bon conseiller, cette fois; il ne voulait pas ressembler au général, c'était tout le secret de sa philosophie. Il s'essuya, se mit au soleil qui l'eut séché bientôt, et pour toute récrimination dit au bonhomme La Ligne: "J'avais pourtant mis au tronc pour les frais du culte!"

Il ne restait plus que deux personnes à baptiser, Françoise et sœur Marie. Françoise passa la première; ce n'est pas elle qui donna le spectacle, mais l'élève de la marine qu'on regardait comme le protecteur de la jolie fille de

Rouen. Il était dans une grande agitation qu'il ne savait pas assez dissimuler; il allait, venait, faisait des recommandations à certains matelots et des signes au prêtre. Enfin, il tira à part le diable qui se disposait à faire quelque farce plaisante à la belle paysanne.

— Arthur, lui dit-il, ménage Françoise, ou je te promets qu'à la première occasion je te ferai donner solidement sur le dos. Ta peau ne sera pas toujours celle de Satan; ce soir la farce sera finie, veille donc au grain! D'ailleurs, le docteur a dit qu'il ne faut pas que cette jeune personne. . .

— A la bonne heure donc, monsieur Justin, cette raison vaut mieux que l'autre, et on y aura égard.

Le diable alla dire un mot au bonhomme La Ligne, qui se leva et prononça ces paroles qui embarrassèrent très-fort l'aspirant et ne furent comprises que d'Arthur:

— L'Océan doit respect à sa sœur d'Arabie; que le prêtre soit discret.

Françoise en fut quitte pour une goutte d'eau sur la tête. Le diable alla alors en gambadant prendre la sœur de Saint-Joseph par la main, elle résista: "Je ne me déciderai jamais, monsieur, ditelle avec douceur et conviction, à jouer un rôle dans cette moquerie du sacrement qui m'a fait la fille de Jésus-Christ."

Les matelots rirent aux éclats.

— Elle a raison, dit Neptune, ça la vexe qu'on la rebaptise, elle ne sera pas rebaptisée. Je me battraï avec un quiconque qui voudrait lui faire de la peine; je vous chamberderai plutôt tous que de souffrir qu'on la chagrine. Je la respecte, moi, sœur Marie, et il faut avoir bien peu de cœur pour ne pas la respecter! Elle m'a soigné quand j'étais mourant-z-à l'hôpital, j'ne suis pas un ingrat. Ainsi, assez causé; que celui qui ne sera pas content vienne me le dire.

Et le colosse se mit dans la posture d'un homme qui défie son ennemi. Il avait jeté son croc au commencement de ce discours, et, les poings fermés à la hauteur de sa ceinture, attendait une réponse.

— Je vous remercie, mon ami, répliqua la sœur hospitalière. Je souffre à voir une telle profanation; mais plutôt que de causer ici le moindre trouble, je me soumettrai. Baptisez-moi, monsieur, ajouta-t-elle en s'avançant vers le prêtre.

— Non, non! cria-t-on de toutes parts. Jean-Pierre a raison! C'est une bonne dévote celle-là! N' faut pas qu'on la contrarie.

Cet incident termina le baptême individuel; mais l'inondation générale commença. On avait monté de l'eau dans les hunes, elle tomba par larges nappes sur le pont; les pompes firent leur jeu, et tout le monde fut mouillé, excepté Françoise que Justin avait soustraite aux amusemens des matelots. Le soir, tout rentra dans l'ordre à bord de l'*Achille*; la cour du bonhomme La Ligne quitta ses travestissemens. Le général reparut sur le gaillard d'arrière; le commandant l'aborda pour excuser la licence autorisée de l'équipage, on lui dit séchement: "J'ai écrit au roi, monsieur, et nous verrons s'il entend

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qu'on traite aussi indignement ses lieutenans-généraux!" Le dîner copieux préparé par les ordres du commandant Prior fut servi dans la batterie de trente-six. Tous les passagers allèrent visiter les matelots à table; des toasts furent portés, dont quelques-uns avaient un ton railleur qui fut accueilli par des houras bruyans mais inoffensifs. La tempérence fut peu gardée; aussi toute la nuit, pendant que le général, M. Chaupin et la famille du consul dormaient tranquillement, sœur Marie veilla.

Elle acquitta auprès de Jean-Pierre la dette de la reconnaissance qu'elle avait contractée la veille avec Neptune.

### Notes

La farce de la ligne est un ancien mystère maritime dont le sens échappe aux plus scrupuleuses recherches. Pourquoi sous les tropiques et à l'équateur cette parade demi-païenne, demi-catholique? Que le christianisme ait enté une de ses fêtes sur une fête païenne, ou qu'il ait modifié celle-ci, ce n'est pas merveille; mais dans quel but la fête a-t-elle lieu par telle latitude plutôt que par telle autre? Je l'ignore complètement, et je n'ai rien trouvé qui me donnât la raison de cette singularité. Faut-il voir dans cette mascarade, en usage encore aujourd'hui, un souvenir de la fête du vaisseau consacré à Isis, vieille patronne de la navigation, ou du navire *Baris*, consacré à Minerve? Mais, comment est-ce seulement dans la zone torride que ce culte antique est conservé? il semble que le soleil soit pour quelque chose dans la solennité du baptême. Le soleil commence l'année dans le signe du verseau: Apollon sort des bras de Thétis pour commencer sa carrière, etc.

Il est probable que la première fois que les anciens franchirent les colonnes d'Hercule, et passèrent de la Méditerranée dans l'Océan, qu'ils ne connaissaient point, et dont la physionomie terrible put les effrayer, ils offrirent à Neptune un sacrifice; l'usage a dû s'en perpétuer, et à chaque pas nouveau qu'on fit sur cette vaste mer la cérémonie dut être renouvelée. Ce n'est peut-être pas trop hasarder de dire que la fête des tropiques et de la ligne date de là. C'est à Neptune ou au soleil qu'on aura sacrifié d'abord; et, soit pensée chrétienne, soit nécessité d'ablutions dans un climat brûlant, le baptême ou l'aspersion aura suivi. Entrant dans un monde inconnu, le chrétien aura voulu se purifier comme il fait quand il sort du sein de sa mère, et la célébration de ce renouvellement des vœux aura peu à peu dégénéré en une comédie que les matelots ont fait tourner à leur profit.

\* \* \*

Les Provençaux apportent au baptême de la ligne beaucoup moins d'appareil que les marins du Nord. Plus un navire est grand, plus la cérémonie a d'importance. Chacun s'évertue à se travestir et à faire des extravagances. La discipline perd ce jour-là de ses rigueurs; il y a liberté complète, et presque égalité, comme autrefois aux fêtes de Saturne; l'injure, la raillerie, sont permises ainsi qu'elles l'étaient à la fête des fous, dont Lyon et Grenoble ont gardé la tradition sacramentelle dans leurs mascarades du dimanche des *Brandons* (le dimanche qui suit le mardi-gras). Le tribut payé aux matelots par les passagers qui veulent s'affranchir des ennuis de la cérémonie, ou au moins les abrégier, est une spéculation dont l'origine est probablement le tribut jeté à Neptune et recueilli ensuite par les prêtres dans les sacrifices offerts aux dieux des ondes pour le passage des colonnes d'Hercule, ou pour celui de Charybde et Scylla.

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Les déguisemens de la ligne et des tropiques ne sont pas les seuls qui se pratiquent à bord des bâtimens. Quelquefois, au carnaval, les matelots portent en procession un mannequin représentant Mardi-Gras, et le pendent à l'extrémité d'une des basses-

vergues, où il reste jusqu'au mercredi des Cendres. Ce jour-là la procession recommence et on immerge Mardi-Gras; on le *mouille*, comme disent les marins. La manœuvre pour cette cale, donnée à l'image du Carême-Prenant, est la même que pour le mouillage d'une ancre; elle est commandée avec gravité, comme s'il s'agissait d'une opération sérieuse. Les travestissemens des matelots sont bizarres, grotesques, incompréhensibles pour la plupart; c'est tout simple; les élémens des costumes de caractères leur manquent tout-à-fait; ils se changent donc, se barbouillent, se défigurent, tout cela avec de la farine, de la suie, du goudron, et surtout les pavillons de signaux dont les couleurs éclatantes leur font de riches turbans, de belles ceintures, ou de longues tuniques bariolées.

(A. Jal. *Scènes de la vie maritime*. Paris, 1832. v. 1, p. 295-345.)

Following this comes a description of theatricals on shipboard, full of interest, but beside the point here.

In the first few paragraphs noted above some of the original text has been omitted, parts sketching various passengers, but I hope it may be accepted that in this saving of space nothing essential to the picture is left out. Details omitted may add to the extent of sketching but they are little more than repetition. Omissions are marked by the usual three dots. Later in the dialogues dots are used in the original to show hesitation by the speaker, and here they have been followed with care.

A. Jal, truly a lover of the sea, of its life, on the surface or below, is most of all in love with the sailor and his ships. *Scènes de la vie maritime* gives a series of snapshots — no, that is too informal a term, but “essays” or “interpretations” would perhaps fail to show how intimate and revealing are the various “chapitres,” and so suppose we let it stand — of the men, the vessels, the rigging, the desertions, the frolics, all in all an instructive picture of life at sea as French mariners saw and lived it in the early 19th century. He dates his book from Paris, July 1, 1832, the year of its publication; he gives 1816-1819 as the date of chapter on “Baptême sous la Ligne.”

He dedicates the *Scènes* to Vice-Admiral de Rigny, pays tribute to other writers in the same line, most of all to James Fenimore Cooper, whom he rates highest, adds other French and British writers, but of all fixes Cooper as “leur maître et le notre.” He opens his preface with “voici un essai dans un genre de littérateur qui a déjà ses chefs-d'œuvre,” Cooper easily first; sums his own story up in “Si vous ne trouvez pas la exactitude absolue, j'espère que vous y trouvez vérité.”

In this particular chapter he carries the tale along with artistic suspense; says not one word as to how much is fiction and how much factual enough for evidence in court of law. It stands out among the quotations about the “crossing” already given, and to follow, by taking time to picture the passengers and to say plainly that in this case, at least, Jack Tar sized these gentry up and gave each the treatment he felt was rightly deserved when time came for initiation; is alone, as I recall it, in telling how a chapel and a priest in clerical garb were provided for the baptism; is worthy of note too as being the first, early in this second decade of the century, to tell how some of the landlubbers agreed — with a little help and suggestion — that they saw clearly just what that “line” of the equator really looked like, a bit of fooling that seems to have had to wait for its counterpart until the last decade of the century when Mark Twain tells us how he followed the equator.

The whole tale calls unmistakably for delving into the records of the French navy to tell us more about Captain Prior and his *Achille*, about the rating of this French naval vessel, about its crew and its later history, enough at least to satisfy Sir Anthony Absolute.

Or, does it?

1817

Du 1.<sup>er</sup> au 5 novembre, plusieurs hommes de l'équipage, ainsi que quelques personnes de l'état-major, furent pris presque instantanément de coliques assez fortes: ces indispositions durèrent de vingt-quatre à quarante-huit heures. Nos médecins ont été obligés d'en chercher la cause dans le passage brusque d'une zone atmosphérique dans une autre qui contenoit des principes morbides. Insensiblement cependant nos malades se rétablirent; nous n'en

1817, *continued*

avons même plus qu'un seul, retenu sur les cadres par une chute, lorsque nous coupâmes l'équateur, dans la nuit du 20 novembre, à 31° environ de longitude occidentale du méridien de Paris.

L'équipage se livra, selon un usage fort ancien chez les gens de mer, aux folies qui se pratiquent au passage de la ligne, et qui souvent ont été décrites par les voyageurs. La journée fut très-gaie, et terminée par des réjouissances auxquelles l'état-major ne dédaigna pas de prendre part. Quelque ridicules que puissent paroître à des hommes graves les mascarades qui ont lieu à cette époque, comme elles contribuent sans aucun doute, par la joie qu'elles font naître, à entretenir la santé parmi l'équipage, je pense que les capitaines prudents feront toujours bien de les permettre, et même d'y exciter les matelots.

(Louis de Freycinet. Voyage autour du monde . . . Exécuté sur les corvettes de s. m. l'Uranie et la Physicienne, pendant les années 1817, 1818, 1819 et 1820 . . . Historique. Paris, 1827. v. 1, part 1, p. 27.)

Freycinet (1779–1842) was sent to this expedition by France primarily to take pendulum measurements in Brazil but also to observe and report on natural history and other sciences.

Once more does illness for some on board mark the crossing, the ceremonies incidental. "Passage brusque," however, seems to show no calms or other inclement weather as cause of the illness as the ships made their southing.

And here again do "homes graves" and "état-major" feel they stand above such frivolities as mark Neptune's visit, though we found that the British with Cook, one and all, took their medicine even if they could hardly be charged with keen joy over what they endured. Yes, and at the same time remember as not untypical of a British point of view the superb disdain we found on the quarter-deck when Sir George Staunton tells about the Macartney mission sent to China by George III in 1792, and the genial condescension shown by the gentlewoman writing the letter printed in *The Gentleman's Magazine* of 1792.

Another version of the performance on this same voyage follows, one text in the original French, a second in a translation published in London in 1823.

Quelques heures plus tard, nos observations nous plâsèrent presque sous la ligne, et les incidents de la veille furent oubliés dans les préparatifs d'une fête solennelle et bouffonne à la fois, consacrée par l'usage de tous les peuples de la terre, et de laquelle la gravité même de notre expédition éminemment scientifique n'avait pas le droit de nous affranchir. Rien n'est despote comme un antique usage.

Le passage de la ligne est une époque mémorable pour tout navigateur. On change d'hémisphère, de nouvelles étoiles brillent au ciel, la grande Ourse se cache sous les flots, et la Croix-du-Sud plane éclatante sur le navire. Lors des premières conquêtes des navigateurs du quatorzième siècle, le passage de la ligne était un jour religieux de terreur et de gloire; il devint plus tard un sujet de raillerie et de mépris. L'art nautique, agrandi par l'astronomie, science exacte et féconde, fit justice du merveilleux dont on avait coloré les phénomènes rêvés sous des zones jusqu'alors inconnues. Dès ce moment aussi la peur s'évanouit, et les dangers furent bravés avec insouciance; dès qu'on les supposa moindres, on osa les supposer nuls. Cependant

des obstacles restaient encore à vaincre et d'autres lutttes devaient se préparer plus tard; les périls soumis donnaient de l'audace, et des cris de joie retentissaient alors que le *cap de Bonne-Espérance*, le *cap Horn* et le détroit de *Magellan* n'avaient pas encore appris aux Colomb, aux Cabral, aux Dias de Solis, aux Vasco de Gama, que les mers les plus tempêteuses leur restaient à vaincre. Ainsi ce fut d'abord la frayeur qui institua la cérémonie du passage de la ligne, dont il faut bien que je vous parle un peu, puisque c'est un des *plus graves* épisodes de notre longue campagne.

Dès la veille, un bruit inaccoutumé retentissant dans la batterie nous disait que les héros de la fête *savaient* les us et coutumes des *anciens*. Les caronades résonnaient sous les coups précipités des marteaux qui façonnaient avec de la tôle les chaînes des diables, la couronne du monarque, son sceptre et son glaive sans fourreau. Les matelots-poètes (et ils le sont tous plus ou moins) improvisaient des refrains joyeux et gaillards.

Cependant l'heure est venue, la batterie est déserte, le pont se peuple, les visages sont gais et rayonnants. Tout-à-coup les fouets sifflent, les trompettes sonnent; et de la grande hune descend un luron botté, éperonné, s'avançant avec gravité vers le banc de quart et demandant d'un ton impérieux le chef de l'expédition.

— Qu'il accoste sur-le-champ! ajoute-t-il; j'ai affaire à lui, ou plutôt il a affaire à moi.

Notre commandant, humble et soumis, se présente bientôt revêtu de son grand uniforme.

— Que voulez-vous? dit-il au courrier.

— Te parler.

— J'écoute.

— Que viens-tu faire dans les parages du roi de la ligne?

— Des observations astronomiques.

— Bêtise!

— Et compter les oscillations du pendule pour déterminer l'aplatissement de la terre dans toutes ses régions.

— Que c'est plat!

— Etudier aussi les mœurs du peuple.

— On s'en bat l'œil, des mœurs à étudier! Qu'est-ce que peut te rapporter tout ça?

— De la gloire.

— Et la gloire donne-t-elle du vin, du rhum, de l'eau-de-vie?

— Non, pas toujours.

— Alors je me fiche de ta gloire comme d'une chique usée! Au surplus, c'est votre affaire, à vous tous, pékins de l'état-major, qui vous dorlottez dans vos cabines quand nous sommes trempés comme des canards. Mais il s'agit d'autre chose en ce moment. Maître Fouque, roi de la ligne, t'écrit; je suis son courrier, voici sa lettre. Sais-tu lire?

— Un peu . . .

1817, *continued*

— Mon neveu. Tiens, j'attends ta réponse.

L'épître était ainsi conçue :

Capitaine, je veux bien que ta coquille de noix aille de l'avant, si toi et ton piètre état-major consentez à vous soumettre aux lois de mon empire. Y consentez-vous? Largue tes voiles, hisse tes bonnettes et file tes douze nœuds. Si tu n'y consens pas, paravire, lof pour lof, et navigue à la bouline!

*Signé:* FOUQUE, second maître d'équipage de la corvette, actuellement roi de la ligne.

— Je connais mon devoir, répond le capitaine; dès ce moment je suis le sujet du roi ton souverain.

— A la bonne heure! Sais-tu marcher la tête en bas, les pieds en haut?

— J'apprendrai.

— Rien n'est plus facile. As-tu mangé du phoque et du pingouin?

— Pas encore.

— Tu en mangeras, je t'en répons; aiguise tes dents, et après cela, si le vent t'est favorable, si aucune roche ne t'arrête en route, si ton navire ne sombre pas au large et si tu ne crèves pas, tu reverras ton pays; c'est moi qui te le dis.

— Je vous remercie de vos prédictions.

— Ce n'est pas encore tout; il fait bien chaud.

— Ah! c'est juste, j'oubliais . . . Vite une carafe d'eau filtrée à l'ambassadeur!

— Tu te fiches de moi!

— Alors du vin.

— Merci! aujourd'hui je ne bois que de ce qui soûle.

— Voici une bouteille de rhum.

— C'est mieux; mais on boîte avec une seule jambe, et il m'en faut deux.

— Les voici.

— C'est faire les choses en vrai gabier; tu arriveras. Adieu, à bientôt.

Les fanafares recommencent, le courrier remonte triomphant vers la hune où l'attend le roi, entouré des meilleurs matelots; et tandis que l'équipage impatient et joyeux se rue sur le pont, le nez au vent et l'oreille aux écoutes, maître Fouque fait tomber sur lui un déluge d'eau salée, faible prélude des ablutions plus complètes qui auront lieu le lendemain. Pour nous, gens à privilèges, placés au gaillard d'arrière, nous reçûmes sur les épaules une violente grêle de blé de Turquie et de pois chiches, qui, sans nous blesser, nous força à la retraite.

Mais le grand jour est arrivé, et de la batterie enjolivée monte par les écouteilles la mascarade la plus grotesque, la plus bizarre, la plus hideuse que jamais imagination de Callot eût pu jeter sur la toile. Les peaux de deux moutons écorchés la veille servent à vêtir le souverain; son front est paré d'une couronne et son cou desséché est orné d'un double rang de pommes

de terre taillées à facette. Son *épouse*, le plus laid des matelots de l'équipage, voile ses appas sous des jupes fabriquées à l'aide de cinq ou six mouchoirs de diverses couleurs. Deux melons inégaux que convoitent les yeux amoureux de l'époux monarque embellissent sa poitrine velue et ridée. Le chapeau tricorne de M. de Quélen, notre indulgent aumônier, coiffe le chef du notaire (je ne sais pourquoi il y a des notaires partout). Deux ânes portent le roi, leur rôle a été vivement disputé, et on ne l'a obtenu qu'après avoir donné des preuves éclatantes de hautes capacités et d'entêtement. Lucifer, avec son bec fourchu, ses cornes aiguës et traînant de longues chaînes, est vigoureusement fustigé par une badine de trois pieds de long et de deux pouces de diamètre. Il feint de vouloir s'échapper, mais, épouvanté par l'eau sacrée dont l'inonde le prêtre, choisi parmi les moins sobres des matelots, il ronge ses fers, fait entendre d'horribles rugissements et pousse du pied la fille du monarque, qui se jette sur le sein de sa mère et le mord avec voracité. Huit soldats armés ferment le cortège, qui prend des bancs, des tabourets ou des fauteuils, selon la dignité de chaque personnage.

— Vous avez donc froid? disions-nous à sa majesté la Ligne, qui gelottait.

— Hélas! non, répondait maître Fouque, j'étouffe, au contraire, sous cette épaisse fourrure, mais l'usage veut que je tremble, que je frissonne; et mes gens sont tenus de m'imiter en tout point, sous peine d'être privés de leur emploi. C'est bête, j'en conviens, mais ainsi l'ont ordonné nos *anciens*, qui apparemment étaient plus frileux que nous.

Cependant le trône est occupé, les grands dignitaires prennent gravement leur place autour d'une énorme baille de combat sur le bord de laquelle est adaptée une planche à bascule où doit s'asseoir le patient. La liste de tout l'équipage est entre les mains du notaire, qui se lève et lit à haute voix les noms et prénoms de chacun de nous. Le premier appelé est notre commandant.

— Votre navire a-t-il déjà eu l'honneur de visiter notre royaume? lui dit le monarque.

— Non.

— En ce cas, grenadiers, à vos fonctions! . . . A ces mots, quatre soldats armés de haches s'élancent sur le gaillard d'avant et font mine de vouloir abattre la poulaine à coups redoublés. Deux pièces d'or tombées dans un bassin placé sur une table arrêtent l'ardeur des assaillants, qui reprennent leur poste d'un air satisfait: ce diable de métal fait partout des prodiges. L'état-major est appelé nominativement, et chacun, à tour de rôle, se place à califourchon sur la planche à bascule qui domine l'énorme baille à demi pleine d'eau salée. Là, on doit répondre d'une manière positive et sans hésiter à la formule suivante et sacramentelle, lue à haute voix par le notaire.

“Dans quelque circonstance que vous vous trouviez, jurez devant sa majesté la Ligne de ne jamais *faire la cour* à la femme légitime d'un marin.” Le patient doit répondre: *Je le jure!* sous peine d'immersion, et jeter dans le bassin quelques pièces d'argent réservées, pour la première relâche, à un gala général où les rangs et les grades seront confondus. La décence (car

1817, *continued*

il en faut même dans les choses les moins sérieuses), la décence ne permettait pas qu'un seul de nous reçût l'ablution totale; on se contentait d'ouvrir une des manches de notre habit et d'y infiltrer quelques gouttes d'eau en prononçant les paroles d'usage: *Je te baptise*. Mais quand vint le tour des matelots, nul ne fut épargné. Plongés dans la baille, ils ne parvenaient à en sortir qu'après les efforts les plus inouïs, les contorsions les plus grotesques; et les énergiques jurons frappaient les airs, et les éclats de rire se mêlaient aux jurons, et les bons mots de cabaret se croisaient sans que pas un martyr eût osé se fâcher. C'était une joie bruyante, tumultueuse, une joie de matelot en délire qui oublie que là et là, sous ses pieds, sur sa tête, il y a une mer et un ciel dont le caprice et le courroux peuvent le broyer et l'engloutir aujourd'hui ou demain. Hélas! ces heures sont si courtes à bord, que je ne vis pas sans un vif regret l'horizon se charger de nuages et la cérémonie près d'être close par une bourrasque ou une tempête.

Mais un incident inattendu devait varier encore les émotions de la journée. Un nom répété plusieurs fois reste sans réponse; on se questionne, on s'émeut, on s'agite, on fouille de tous côtés, dans les hunes, sous les câbles; on descend dans la batterie, et l'on apprend enfin qu'un profane, fier de son état de cuisinier, est décidé à tout prix à s'affranchir de la règle commune. — Tout le monde à la batterie! . . . crie une voix formidable. Et la batterie est aussitôt envahie par les écouteilles et les sabords. — Sur le pont! sur le pont! . . . à cheval sur la bascule! Point de grâce! point de merci! Que la noyade soit complète! s'écrie-t-on de toutes parts, qu'il perde la respiration!

Dans la batterie, en effet, était un héros, cuisinier de l'état-major, lequel avait juré en partant de ne pas recevoir le baptême, et qui aurait regardé comme un grand déshonneur qu'une seule goutte d'eau salée vint outrager l'harmonie de ses cheveux bouclés avec une coquetterie dont il tirait une si ridicule vanité. Son front ruisselant est coiffé du bonnet blanc de l'ordre, où voltigent çà et là quelques légères plumes, dépouilles ensanglantées de ses victimes du jour; ses yeux sont rouges de colère, sa mâchoire contractée, ses lèvres violettes, crispées et frémissantes; un grand couteau de cuisine pend à son côté; de la main droite, il tient serrée une longue broche où est empalé un chapelet de pigeons à demi consumé; son pied, chaussé d'une pantoufle verte, presse fortement une caronade; et, bien disposé à se défendre, il adresse d'abord la parole aux plus audacieux de ses ennemis.

— Que me voulez-vous? qui vous amène dans mes *foyers*?

— L'ordre de notre roi.

— Obéissez, puisque vous êtes esclaves; moi, je n'ai pas de roi et je trône seul ici.

— Tu dois être baptisé comme nous.

— J'ai reçu mon baptême de feu, et cela me suffit.

— La loi est pour tous.

Vous êtes des renégats qui adjurez votre première religion pour une religion nouvelle. Ici est mon domaine, mon empire; ici sont mes dieux et ma croyance; ces fourneaux, ces casseroles, ces broches, ce sont là mes armes, les insignes de mon indépendance. Qui vous a donné le droit de m'attaquer, de me poursuivre, de me traquer comme une bête fauve? . . . Oh! je ne vous crains pas! car je ne serai pas baptisé. Il dit et plante dans le bordage sa broche aiguë.

— En avant les pompes! dit Marchais de sa voix rauque et caverneuse; en avant les pompes!

Et mille jets rapides inondent de l'avant et de l'arrière l'intrépide cuisinier. Celui-ci reste cloué à son poste d'honneur, pareil au roc battu par la tourmente; et il sort, sinon vainqueur, du moins invaincu, de cette lutte acharnée, à laquelle un grain violent, pesant sur le navire, vient mettre un terme.

L'orage dura quelques heures, l'effervescence des matelots se calma avec les vents, une nuit silencieuse et douce plana sur la corvette, et nous nous vîmes jetés de nouveau sous les zones des vents alizés, qui, soufflant également dans des deux hémisphères, devaient voyager avec nous jusqu'au Brésil.

(Jacques Arago. *Voyage autour du monde. Nouvelle édition expurgée, précédée d'une introduction de Jules Janin.* [Paris] Librairie Nationale d'Education et de Recreation, [n. d.]

*Promenade autour du monde, pendant les années 1817, 1818, 1819 et 1820, sur les corvettes du roi l'Uranie et la Physicienne, commandées par M. Freycinet, Par J<sup>s</sup>. Arago,* came out at Paris in 1822 in two octavo volumes and one atlas folio. In 1838 at Paris appeared *Voyage autour du monde* in two octavo volumes. The text quoted above is from Janin's edition, dated probably in the 1870s or '80s.

An English version follows, printed at London in 1823.

I have no doubt, that if we were to investigate the cause of all the gay and burlesque ceremonies instituted since the commencement of civilization in Europe, we should find them to originate in fear or in religion. It was religion that gave rise among us to the most tumultuous festival that engages the fickle Parisians. Every body is acquainted with the History of the Nuns of Longchamps, and the motive which drew the curious to that quarter; and we see what has resulted from this habit of visiting the place, which must originally be ascribed to a religious cause.

The navigators who first crossed that imaginary line which is called the equator, alarmed at the distance which separated them from their country, and the dangers to which their audacity exposed them, sought by vows and prayers to propitiate the favour of Heaven. In the narratives of their voyages they devoted a few lines to the record of their fears, and of the consolations which they had experienced. Their successors imitated their conduct in every thing, and especially in the moment of danger. But little reliance is to be placed on promises made at such moments; and all the good resolutions then formed vanish with the fears which gave them birth. When, therefore, the science of navigation had, by new discoveries, and voyagers, by a boldness equally astonishing, diminished apprehensions by smoothing diffi-

1817, continued

culties, the prayers of mariners became less ardent, and their vows less frequent. By degrees they became accustomed to hardships, and surmounted them with greater ease and courage. As soon as they dared to suppose them less formidable, they dared to consider them as next to nothing: a thousand examples of successful hardihood strengthened their confidence. Hence the first institutions were forgotten; and hence the raillery bestowed on the imaginary fears of the first navigators. The day on which they were to cross the equator was expected with impatience. The more the dangers had been magnified, the less they seemed to dread them. This day they devoted in an especial manner to diversion, to the oblivion of their toils; and as all customs over which folly presides are more permanent than those sanctioned by reason and good sense, the consequence is, that the latter have given place to the former, and will, doubtless, subsist so long as there shall be seamen.

The importance attached to our expedition did not exempt us from the rule; and I shall proceed to give you some account of the ceremonies which marked that day on board our vessel.

On the preceding day, the movements of the sailors, who were engaged in studying their respective parts, gave us the assurance of mirth. The serenest atmosphere seemed to promise them a fine day. We were doubly pleased, both in the prospect of our own amusement, and in the likelihood that the efforts of the crew would not be disappointed.

Their costumes are prepared; folly shakes his bells from the tops, and every actor responds by a smile or a nod. . . . . How little is required to gladden the heart of the unfortunate! In the evening, while we were at our dessert, the repeated cracking of a whip announced the commencement of the ceremony. We instantly rose and went upon deck. A gruff voice, swelled by an enormous speaking-trumpet, called the captain. The officer of the watch sent to inform him that he was wanted; and M. Freycinet, previously acquainted with the routine of the ceremony, replied, in a humble and subdued tone, that he was ready to receive the envoy of *his Majesty of the Line*. Fresh cracks of a whip proclaimed the arrival of the messenger, who handed to the captain a letter, a model of eloquence, which his majesty's secretary had previously allowed me to read. More discreet than he was, I shall not communicate it to you; for it is always dangerous to betray the secrets of courts.

M. Freycinet read the letter, bestowed sincere praises on the writer, and asked the envoy whence he came. 'From Toulon,' replied he hastily; and blushing at his blunder, he added: 'I have come a great way, and it is exceedingly hot.' — 'Oh! I understand you; a jug of water for the courier!' — 'Many thanks to your honour; if I accept any thing, it will only be something to drink.' After a slight libation, which the other actors nevertheless

envied him, he gaily returned to the aërial court, carrying to his master the answer of the captain.

An abundant shower from the buckets that were in the tops punished the sailors on deck for their curiosity, while a deluge of hail, represented by Turkey corn, was reserved for us. Our fowls and ducks, which were put that day on short allowance, were the only creatures on board that had reason to dislike the festival.

The great day at length arrived. Very early in the morning the rusty trumpets were scoured, and with their piercing din alarmed the inmates of the deep. The whips cracked; hammers struck the anvil in quick succession, and finished the crown destined for the king, and the chains for his enemies. The skins of two sheep, killed the preceding day, served for the robes of his majesty; and his royal consort, the ugliest man among the whole crew, concealed her charms by petticoats made of five or six handkerchiefs of different colours. Two melons of unequal size, to which the amorous eyes of the monarch were wistfully directed, embellished her delicate bosom. The three-cornered hat of our indulgent chaplain covered the head of the notary; though I cannot tell why there should be notaries every where. Two asses supported the king — their parts had been warmly disputed, and they were not conferred till the candidates for them had given proofs of their capacity. Lucifer, with his crooked beak and long claws, chained and beaten with a broomstick, three feet long and two inches in diameter, strove to escape; but being prevented by the water, with which he was inundated by the priest, selected from among the least sober of the sailors, he gnawed his chains, and terrified with his roaring the daughter of the king, who threw herself on her mother's breast, and bit it with voracity. Eight armed soldiers closed the procession.

'Are you cold?' said we to the man who personated the King of the Line, on observing him shiver. 'No, my lads,' replied he, 'I am almost smothered in my skins; but it is customary for me to tremble.' His wife, his daughter, nay even Lucifer himself, trembled, and we laughed among ourselves at their grotesque costume, and at this practice, which seemed still more grotesque.

All had by this time taken their places; the notary opened the fatal list, in which were inscribed the names of the profane who had not yet passed the line. An enormous tub, half full of water, to which was adapted a swing for sitting in, gave us notice that the ablutions would be frequent and serious.

In vain did the king of the line enjoin silence, which a whistle from the boatswain instantly obtained. The name of Captain Freycinet was proclaimed. He was asked if his ship had already had the honour to pass the line; and on his answer in the negative, four soldiers went up to the windlass, and with hatchets struck the mast near which it was placed. A few pieces of money, dropped by the captain, appeased the wrath of the monarch, and

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stopped the blows of the soldiers. What prodigies this magic metal every where performs!

The other officers came next; and each, as he answered the priest, was required to swear never to *kiss* a sailor's wife. To *kiss* was not precisely the term employed, but I substitute it for a more ticklish expression, used by the sailor-priest, to signify *nearly* the same thing. One of our number, by way of joke, desired the oath to be repeated to him a second time, but without pronouncing it himself, as if apprehensive lest he should break it. 'You run no risk,' said the too indulgent parson to him in a whisper; 'swear at any rate. Oaths have long been in fashion; you know what they are worth by the yard; and when there is need for it, I promise you a total absolution. Swear, to satisfy my neighbours;' added he; 'for my part, I am determined to continue a bachelor.'

Decorum, which must be kept up even in the least serious matters, forbade that any of us should receive the total ablution. Perhaps our liberality abated the temptation to laugh at our expense. Be this as it may, that part of the ceremony was reserved for the sailors, who, seated over the large tub, were in a moment plunged into it, and could not extricate themselves without the utmost efforts and the most grotesque contortions.

But an unexpected incident suspended the ceremony, and excited murmurs. Each looked at the other, inquiring what was the matter, and learned with astonishment that one of the uninitiated, proud of the office which he held on board, refused to submit to the established practice; and that, armed with a formidable weapon, he was preparing to repel the attack of all the combined devils and their thousand prongs. All hurried to the spot, and in the kitchen our astonished eyes beheld a hero. Such appeared the great Ajax of yore, when, with javelin poised, he checked the progress of Hector and his victorious Trojans. His left foot was planted on a carronade, which served for a rampart to the culinary hero: the white cap of his profession covered his radiant head, and defended his brow, defeathered with the down of his innocent victims. An apron, of equivocal colour, was gracefully thrown over the shoulder of the pursued warrior, and resembled a drapery *à la Grecque*. His eyes flashed indignation; and his face and attitude expressed impatience for the fight. In his hand he held a pointed spit, whereon was impaled a meagre turkey, which, with his head turned toward the assailants of his executioner, seemed to bid them beware of the traitor, and to fear a fate similar to his own. In vain did the pipes of the pumps drench the unruly cook with salt water, which mingled with the sauces he had prepared, without making them any the worse; in vain were threats pronounced on all sides: firm as a rock amid the dashing billows, his eyes still flashed defiance. 'I will certainly dispatch some of you,' at length cried he, in a voice of thunder: 'and were you twenty times as numerous, you shall not make me submit to the ignominious laws which you have been pleased to

establish, and from the operation of which my resolution shall exempt me. No; I would not have paid obeisance to Gessler's hat or to Caligula's horse; no, I will not be *baptized*. What right have you to attack, on his own hearth, a man whose every moment is devoted to the happiness of his fellows, who delights their palates, who is ever burning for their welfare with a fire which ought to secure him from so unlooked-for an attack, from so gross an insult? And thou, proud Chaumont, thou whom I see the most eager in persecuting me, say, ingrate, canst thou, without blushing, join this coward herd, and fall foul of him whom gratitude should teach thee to respect? How often, in spite of the orders I had received (for who can boast of being the first in the world), how often have I permitted thee to dip thy pitchy fingers into the concavity of my stewpans! Unthankful wretch! is this the reward for my kindness — is this the recompense which thy gratitude reserved for me? Alas! that virtue of great minds has not found a place in thy obdurate heart. Insensible to my favours, thou now burnest with impatience to plunge me in an ignominious tub. In return, I will set thee an example of generosity. Come thou — come all ye, who, like him, have shared my bounty, though not so frequently — come, bind these unresisting arms: I will neither fight nor defend myself. Let him among you, who has not partaken of my profusion, stand forth, and be the first to lay hands on one, whom neither chains nor dungeons can dishonour! He spake, and relinquished his long spit, which quivered, till the rage of Mars and the weight of the turkey had ceased to operate upon it.

The assailants were thunderstruck: they looked at each other, cast down their eyes, blushed, and slunk away. Thus did the great Germanicus of old, by firm and generous language, overawe his mutinous troops; and thus did the Grecian orator move at pleasure the hearts of the Athenians, when, timid and pusillanimous, they were afraid to encounter Philip, their conqueror and implacable enemy.

The crowd has dispersed, and order is restored. Lucifer has again become a good devil; the monarch an active boatswain; the priest a jolly tar, who is fond of good cheer; each of the actors has re-assumed his real character. The atmosphere is covered with thick clouds; they are stimulating each other to the performance of their duties, and counteracting, by their prudence and activity, the violence of the winds.

P. S. LAURI *sacra fames!* to what dost thou not expose feeble mortals! Truth compels me to inform you, that inflated with such glorious success, our illustrious cook, on our arrival at Rio Janeiro, felt his heart inflamed anew with military ardour; and that in the plains of La Plata he is perhaps now seeking nobler victims than those which he has hitherto immolated. How often is it the case that a single moment makes a hero!

(Jacques Arago. Narrative of a voyage round the world, in the *Uranie* and *Physicienne* corvettes, commanded by Captain Freycinet, during the years 1817, 1818, 1819, and 1820; on a scientific expedition under-

1817, *continued*

taken by order of the French government. In a series of letters to a friend, by J. Arago, draftsman to the expedition . . . To which is prefixed the report made to the Academy of Sciences, on the general results of the expedition. London, 1823. p. 29-36.)

Arago was officially "draftsman to the expedition" or, as the French text runs, "en qualite de dessinateur," and he sailed on the *Uraïne*. Note that under his name in the catalogue printed by the Bibliothèque Nationale stand some eighty entries, and one is willing to admit that he showed himself in later years able to rank with journalists, theatre directors, travelers, general writers on many topics, evidently not troubled by restraints on his expression of emotion or opinion. He was the third of four brothers.

Avant de commencer la cérémonie le roi de la ligne envoie au capitaine un courrier qui lit la mission suivante:

Je vous envoie Rafalus-Ouraganus à cette fin de savoir si ta bicoque de coque a déjà visité la — (ligne); si oui, file ton nœud; si non mes gabiers armés de leurs HH, vont abattre ta poulaine, à moins que tu ne t'exécutes en vrai gabier. Je sais que tu es un vrai lapin, qui te f. . . du typhon ainsi que d'une chique; mais comme tu vas marcher le tête en bas, ce qui est gênant pour la soupe, tu as besoin d'appui et je suis à toi.

(Jacques Arago. *Deux océans*. Paris, 1854, reprinted in: *Mélusine*, v. 2 (1884-5), column 279.)

Mélusine in 1884 quotes from *Deux Océans*, thirty years earlier. Just when the messenger of Neptune appeared is uncertain, but it seems fairly probable that the tale refers to the voyage of 1817. It is so ordered and filed.

### 1818

The 8th [of February, 1818], at six o'clock in the morning, we crossed the line in longitude 253° 9'. We saw to the right, at the edge of the horizon, a ship under sail, which, as it came nearer, I recognized by its sails and structure to be a pirate ship belonging to the Malays.

(Otto von Kotzebue. *A voyage of discovery into the South Sea*. London, 1821. v. 2, p. 269-270.)

This crossing in the Pacific from north to south was on the homeward voyage; no ceremony this time as compared with the outward bound frolics in 1815. The second crossing from north to south in the Atlantic is noted under 1823, and Kotzebue's account of the ceremony is quoted by Fitz-Roy in his story of the voyage of the *Beagle*, 1832.

### 1822

[April 2, 1822. pm board *La Nèrède*.] Quel curieux sujet d'études offre un vaisseau, chargé de passagers, lorsqu'il navigue, paisiblement, dans les mers radieuses qui avoisinent les Tropiques!

Presque pas de manœuvres! par suite de la persistance du beau temps. Aussi, chacun essaie t-il de se distraire, suivant ses goûts. Les uns jouent aux cartes, aux dames ou au loto. Ceux-ci font des armes; ceux-là, de la

musique. Sur le gaillard d'avant, ce sont des danses naïves, et, de la grand'hune, fusent souvent des facéties destinées à égayer l'équipage.

Le 1<sup>er</sup> avril, veille du jour où nous devons couper le Tropic, retentirent, au moment où nous sortions de table, des fanfares de trompettes et des décharges de mousqueterie. Alors, une voix rauque et tremblante, tombant de la grand'hune, interpella l'officier de quart. Elle lui demandait le nom de notre navire et de son commandant, son port d'attache et celui de sa destination.

L'officier répondit, complaisamment.

La voix du Bonhomme Tropic reprit :

— J'ai l'honneur de connaître déjà le commandant et les braves officiers de cette frégate. Ce n'est pas la première fois qu'ils viennent me visiter. Quant aux nombreux passagers de ce bord, ils ne peuvent pénétrer dans mes vastes domaines, sans me payer, au préalable, le tribut d'usage. Je vais donc vous expédier mon courrier spécial. Il vous fera connaître exactement mes conditions.

Bruit de tonnerre; coups de pistolet et grêle de haricots tombant de toutes les hunes.

En même temps, le courrier annoncé descend du grand étai. Il monte sur ses chevaux — des gabiers déguisés qui l'attendent sur le gaillard d'avant.

Très joliment costumé, ce postillon, qui fait claquer son fouet, se présente au commandant, et lui remet les dépêches de son maître. Ces dépêches réclament le tribut obligatoire de tous ceux qui n'ont pas encore franchi le Tropic.

Notre commandant promet satisfaction et fait conduire à l'office le postillon et ses chevaux.

Le lendemain, à six heures du matin, nous coupions le Tropic du Cancer.

Tout était prêt pour la cérémonie du baptême. Une tente se dressait au pied du grand mât. Sous cette tente, un autel orné d'une boussole, un compas, une carte de l'Océan, un octant et une ligne de loc. Près l'autel, une cuve d'eau.

Voici la Cour du Tropic qui descend de la grand'hune, au bruit de la mousqueterie. En tête, des diables porteurs de crocs, de chaînes et de fourches. Derrière, tous les gabiers, déguisés en Arabes du désert. Suit la gendarmerie du Tropic. Elle escorte le Bonhomme, sa femme et sa fille. Ces grands personnages sont traînés sur un char que domine Neptune, le front ceint d'une couronne de fer blanc, et le bras armé d'un trident.

Le cortège défile au son de la musique, et fait halte en face de l'état-major.

Le Bonhomme Tropic, courbé sous le poids des ans, a le crâne ombragé d'une perruque d'étope, qui traîne jusqu'à terre. Il salue le commandant et se dirige vers sa tente. C'est l'heure solennelle. Son grand prêtre va baptiser les néophytes.

1822, *continued*

L'un après l'autre, ils sont conduits, au pied de l'autel, sur lequel un tronc vient d'être placé. Ceux qui y déposent une offrande s'en tirent avec quelques gouttes d'eau versées dans la manche de leur habit. Ceux qui oublient cette formalité substantielle, sont plongés dans la cuve.

Quant aux soldats, on se contente de les baptiser en bloc, en braquant sur eux, la pompe à incendie. Finalement, à bord, personne n'eut un fil de sec.

Le soir, quelques jeunes soldats, qui avaient fait partie d'une troupe de comédiens ambulants, nous jouèrent, avec assez de goût, une petite pièce intitulée: *Le Savetier et le Financier*. La fête se termina par un bal, qui se prolongea, jusqu'à minuit, sous un ciel d'une idéale sérénité.

(Christophe Paulin de la Poix, chevalier de Fréminville. Mémoires du . . . capitaine des fregates du Roi. Edited by E. Herpin. Bibliothèque de la revolution et de l'empire. Paris, 1913. v. 7, p. 104-7.)

Another account by de Fréminville is given above under 1802.

August 12th — On Monday, the 12th, we crossed the equator, in long. 26° 42' w. Agreeably to ancient usage on such occasions, we were honoured by a visit from Father Neptune, who courteously bid us welcome into the southern hemisphere; in return for which civility, his health was drunk, if not in ambrosial nectar, at least in beverage which sailors are quite as fond of. The usual ceremony of shaving and ducking the novitiates was then performed with the customary solemnities, consecrated by copious libations. Having by these indispensable rites propitiated the favour of our tutelar deity, he most graciously took his leave, wishing us a prosperous voyage. We therefore advanced with confidence into the southern section of his realm.

(Benjamin Morrell. A narrative of four voyages to the South Sea . . . from the year 1822 to 1831. New York, 1832.)

This, the first of the four voyages, seems the only one thus honored.

### 1823

On the 11th of October we crossed the Equator, at twenty-five degrees west longitude, reckoning from Greenwich. Having saluted the southern hemisphere by the firing of guns, our crew proceeded to enact the usual ceremonies. A sailor, who took pride in having frequently passed the line, directed the performance with much solemnity and decorum. He appeared as Neptune, attired in a manner that was meant to be terribly imposing, accompanied by his consort, seated on a gun-carriage instead of a shell, drawn by negroes, as substitutes for tritons. In the evening the sailors represented, amidst general applause, a comedy of their own composition. These sports, while they serve to keep up the spirits of the men, and make them

forget the difficulties they have to go through, produce also the most beneficial influence upon their health: a cheerful man being much more capable of resisting a fit of sickness than a melancholy one. It is the duty of commanders to use every innocent means of maintaining this temper in their crews; for, in long voyages, when they are several months together wandering on an element not destined by nature for the residence of man, without enjoying even occasionally the recreations of the land, the mind naturally tends to melancholy, which of itself lays the foundation of many diseases, and sometimes even of insanity. Diversion is often the best medicine, and used as a preservative, seldom fails of its effect.

(Otto von Kotzebue. *A new voyage round the world, in the years 1823, 24, 25.* London, 1830. p. 25-26.)

Was the "comedy of their own composition" put on by the sailors a formal bit of drama or merely a continuation of the performances done by Neptune and his followers? Note that in this celebration by sailors from Muscovy, the frozen north, we find none of the chattering and shivering staged by men from more southern regions. Kotzebue tells of no trouble in knowing just what to stage or how to put it over.

An earlier crossing is noted under 1815. This 1823 report is quoted in full by Robert Fitz-Roi in his *Narrative of the surveying voyages of His Majesty's Ships Adventure and Beagle*, noted later under 1832.

At the crossing from the Northern into the Southern hemisphere [on January 8, 1823, presumably new style], the seamen were amusing themselves by bathing in a tub representing Neptune's chariot which was placed on a gun-carriage and pulled by his courtiers.

In order to make this sailor holiday more entertaining, I had previously ordered to prepare for it. They were given paint, flags and everything that would help to make the masquerade more magnificent. At the end, everyone got some light punch, and while they were imbibing it, some of them remembered the Muses. Dancing and various games kept them entertained during the entire pleasant evening.

(Plavaniye vokrug sveta na shlyupke Ladoge v 1822, 1823 i 1824 godakh . . . Sankt-Peterburg, 1832. p. 12-14.) Voyage around the world . . . on the sloop Ladoga. Captain Andrei Lazarev.

The translation was made by Dr. Avrahm Yarmolinsky.

### 1826

[20 July 1826] Nous avons passé la ligne entre trois et quatre heures du matin. L'équipage a célébré joyeusement la fête du baptême, et, malgré quelques libations assez copieuses de la part de certains individus, il n'y a eu ni querelle ni tumulte.

(Jules Sébastien César Dumont D'Urville. *Voyage de la Corvette L'Astrolabe.* Paris, 1830-35. v. 1, p. 65-66.)

The text has a vignette illustration. Let's hope the happy celebration of the *fête du baptême* was in ratio inverse to the space given to telling about it.

1828

Avec un jeune capitaine de trente ans, tu devines bien que le passage de la ligne ne se fait pas sans toutes les cérémonies accoutumées. Un matelot (le plus mauvais sujet de tous, et de l'air le plus bénoit) nous a dit la messe (une messe de sa façon) en surplus d'occasion, sur une autel de circonstance. Il a fait le prône le plus risible, puis les non-initiés ont été gravement rasés avec un rasoir de quatre pieds de long, et, entre les mains du père La Ligne, ils ont juré de ne point coucher avec la femme d'un matelot, et ils ont donné dix francs pour la peine. Cela fait, l'état-major, entre soi sur l'arrière, l'équipage sur le devant, se sont jeté pendant une heure des sceaux d'eau à la figure; la pompe à incendie a même joué avec succès pour tremper au haut des mâts les fuyards qui s'étaient sauvés de la mêlée. Puis nous sommes tous descendus chez nous changer de ligne, et en remontant sur le pont, nous avons trouvé toutes choses dans leur ordre accoutumé: la petite saturnale d'auparavant n'avait laissé aucune trace.

(Victor Jacquemont. Correspondance de V. Jacquemont avec sa famille et plusieurs de ses amis pendant son voyage dans l'Inde (1828-1832). Nouvelle édition augmentée de lettres inédites et accompagnée d'une carte. Paris, 1841. p. 21.)

The entry is dated "Samedi 18 oct 1828 aust. 6°, longit. occid. 29°." No objection this time to the saying of mass, even "un messe de sa façon. After leaving Teneriffe the year before and crossing to St. Dominique with calms and heavy contrary winds, this passage "traversé au galop" was quite different. Jacquemont had four adventurous years overseas, was forced home by ill health, told his tale with real interest and attraction.

1829

I should have informed my reader that our orders were to see the East India convoy as far as the tenth degree of north latitude, and then proceed to Bermuda. This was of itself a pleasant cruise, and gave us the chance of falling in either with an enemy or a recapture. Ships not intending to cross the line usually grant a saturnalia to the crew when they come to the tropic of Capricorn; it is thought to renovate their spirits, and to break the monotony of the cruise or voyage, where time flows on in such a smooth, undeviating routine, that one day is not distinguishable from another. Our captain, a young man, and a perfect gentleman, never refused any indulgence to the men compatible with discipline and the safety of the ship; and as the regular trade-wind blew, there was no danger of sudden squalls. The ceremony of crossing the line, I am aware, has been often described — so has Italy and the Rhine; but there are varieties of ways of doing and relating these things; ours had its singularity, and ended, I am sorry to say, in a deep tragedy, which I shall remember "as long as memory holds her seat."

One beautiful morning, as soon as the people had breakfasted, they began to prepare, by stripping to their waists, and wearing nothing but a pair of duck trousers. The man at the mast-head called out that he saw something on

the weather-bow, which he thought was a boat; soon after, an unknown voice from the jib-boom hailed the ship; the officer of the watch answered; and the voice commanded him to heave to, as Neptune was coming on board. The ship was accordingly hove to with every formality, though going at the rate of seven miles an hour; the main-yard squared, the head and after-yards braced up.

As soon as the ship was hove to, a young man (one of the sailors) dressed in a smart suit of black, knee-breeches, and buckles, with his hair powdered, and with all the extra finery and mincing gait of an exquisite, came aft on the quarter-deck, and with a most polished bow, took the liberty of introducing himself as gentleman's gentleman to Mr. Neptune, who had been desired to precede his master and acquaint the commander of the vessel with his intended visit.

A sail had been extended across the fore-castle by way of curtain, and from behind this Neptune and his train, in full costume, shortly afterwards came forth.

The car of the god consisted of a gun-carriage: it was drawn by six black men, part of the ship's crew; they were tall muscular fellows, their heads covered with sea-weed, and they wore a very small pair of cotton drawers; in other respects they were perfectly naked; their skins were spotted all over with red and white paint alternately; they had conch-shells in their hands, with which they made a most horrible noise. Neptune was masked, as were many of his attendants, and none of the officers knew exactly by which of the men the god was represented; but he was a shrewd hand, and did his part very well. He wore a naval crown, made by the ship's armourer; in his right hand he held a trident, on the prongs of which there was a dolphin, which he had, he said, struck that morning; he wore a large wig made of oakum, and a beard of the same materials, which flowed down to his waist; he was full powdered, and his naked body was bedaubed with paint.

The god was attended by a splendid court; his secretary of state, whose head was stuck full of the quills of the sea bird of these latitudes; his surgeon, with his lancet, pill-box, and his smelling-bottle; his barber, with a razor, whose blade was two feet long, cut off an iron hoop; and the barber's mate, who carried a small tub as a shaving-box; the materials within I could not analyse, but my nose convinced me that no part of them came from Smith's in Bond Street.

Amphitrite followed on a similar carriage, drawn by six white men whose costume was like the others. This goddess was personified by an athletic ugly man marked with the small-pox, dressed as a female, with a woman's nightcap on his head, ornamented with sprigs of sea-weed; she had a harpoon in her hand, on which was fixed an albicore; and in her lap lay one of the boys of the ship, dressed as a baby, with long clothes and a cap; he held in his hand a marlinspike, which was suspended round his neck with a rope yarn — this was to assist him in cutting his teeth, as the children on shore

1829, *continued*

use a coral. His nurse attended him with a bucket full of burgoo or hasty pudding, with which she occasionally fed him out of the cook's iron ladle. Two or three stout men were habited as sea nymphs, to attend on the goddess; they carried a looking-glass, some curry-combs, a birch-broom, and a pot of red paint, by way of rouge.

As soon as the procession appeared on the fore-castle, the captain, attended by his steward bearing a tray with a bottle of wine and some glasses, came out of his cabin, and the cars of the marine deities were drawn up on the quarter-deck. Neptune lowered his trident, and presented the dolphin to the captain, as Amphitrite did her albicore, in token of submission and homage to the representative of the King of Great Britain.

"I have come," said the god, "to welcome you into my dominions, and to present my wife and child." The captain bowed. "Allow me to ask after my brother and liege sovereign, the good old King George."

"He is not so well," said the captain, "as I and all his subjects could wish."

"More's the pity," replied Neptune; "and how is the Prince of Wales?"

"The Prince is well," said the captain, "and now governs as regent in the name of his royal father."

"And how does he get on with his wife?" said the inquisitive god.

"Bad enough," said the captain; "they agree together like a whale and a thrasher."

"Ah! I thought so," said the god of the sea. "His royal highness should take a leaf out of my book: never allow it to be doubtful who is the commanding officer."

"And pray what might your majesty's specific be, to cure a bad wife?" said the captain.

"Three feet of the cross-jack brace every morning before breakfast, for a quarter of an hour, and half-an-hour on a Sunday."

"But why more on a Sunday than any other day?" said the captain.

"Why?" said Neptune. "Why, because she'd been keeping Saturday night, to be sure; besides, she has less to do of a Sunday, and more time to think of her sins and do penance."

"But you would not have a prince strike a lady, surely?"

"Wouldn't I? No, to be sure, if she behave herself as sich, on no account; but if she gives tongue and won't keep sober, I'd sarve her as I do Amphy — don't I, Amphy?" chucking the goddess under the chin. "We have no bad wives in the bottom of the sea; and so if you don't know how to keep 'em in order, send them to us."

"But your majesty's remedy is violent; we should have a rebellion in England if the king was to beat his wife."

"Make the lords in waiting do it, then," said the surly god; "and if they are too lazy, which I dare say they are, send for a boatswain's mate from the Royal Billy — he'd sarve her out, I warrant you, and for half a gallon of rum

would teach the yeoman of the guard to dance the binnacle horn-pipe into the bargain."

"His royal highness shall certainly hear your advice, Mr. Neptune; but whether he will follow it or not, is not for me to say. Would you please to drink his royal highness's good health?"

"With all my heart, sir; I was always loyal to my king, and ready to drink his health, and to fight for him."

The captain presented the god with a bumper of Madeira, and another to the goddess.

"Here's a good health and a long life to our gracious king and all the royal family. The roads are unkimmon dusty, and we hav'n't wet our lips since we left St. Thomas on the line, this morning. But we have no time to lose, captain," said the sea god; I see many new faces here as requires washing and shaving; and if we add bleeding and physic, they will be all the better for it."

The captain nodded assent; and Neptune, striking the deck with the end of his trident, commanded attention, and thus addressed his court: "Hark ye, my Tritons, you are called here to shave, duck, and physic all as needs; but I command you to be gentle. I'll have no ill-usage; if we gets a bad name, we gets no more fees; and the first of you as disobeys my orders, I'll tie him to a ten-inch mortar, and sink him ten thousand fathoms deep in the ocean, where he shall feed on salt water and sea-weed for a hundred years: begone to your work." Twelve constables, with thick sticks, immediately repaired to the hatchway, and sent down all who had not been initiated, guarding them strictly until they were called up one by one.

The cow-pen had been previously prepared for the bathing; it was lined with double canvas, and boarded, so that it held water, and contained about four butts, which was constantly renewed by the pump. Many of the officers purchased exemption from shaving and physic by a bottle of rum; but none could escape the sprinkling of salt water, which fell about in great profusion; even the captain received his share, but with great good nature, and seemed to enjoy the sport. It was easy to perceive, on this occasion, who were favourites with the ship's company by the degree of severity with which they were treated. The tyro was seated on the side of the cow-pen: he was asked the place of his nativity, and the moment he opened his mouth, the shaving-brush of the barber, which was a very large paint-brush, was crammed in, with all the filthy lather, with which they covered his face and chin; this was roughly scraped off with the great razor. The doctor felt his pulse, and prescribed a pill, which was forced into his cheek; and the smelling-bottle, the cork of which was armed with short points of pins, was so forcibly applied to his nose as to bring blood; after this he was thrown backwards into the bath, and allowed to scramble out the best way he could.

The master-at-arms and ship's corporals and purser's steward were severely treated. The midshipmen looked out for the first lieutenant; but he kept so close under the wing of the captain, that for a long time we were unable to succeed. At length some great uproar in the waist induced him to run down,

1829, *continued*

when we all surrounded him, and plied him so effectually with buckets of water, that he was glad to run down the after-hatchway, and seek shelter in the gun-room; as he ran down, we threw buckets after him, and he fell, like the Roman virgin, covered with the shields of the soldiers.

The purser had fortified himself in his cabin, and with his sword and pistols vowed vengeance against all intruders; but the middies were not to be frightened with swords or pistols: so we had him out, and gave him a sound ducking, because he had refused to let us have more spirits than our allowance. He was paraded to the main-deck in great form, his sword held over his head; his pistols, in a bucket of water, carried before him; and having been duly shaved, physicked, and soused into the cow-pen, he was allowed to return to his cabin like a drowned rat.

The first lieutenant of marines was a great bore; he was always annoying us with his German flute. Having no ear of his own, he had no mercy on ours, so we handed him to the bath; and in addition to all the other luxuries of the day, made him drink half a pint of salt water, which we poured into his mouth through his own flute, as a funnel. I now recollect that it was the cries of the poor marine which brought down the first lieutenant, who ordered us to desist, and we served him as hath been related.

(Frederick Marryat. *Frank Mildmay*: or, *The naval officer*. Chapter 12. p. 141-146 of the *Illustrated Sterling Edition*. Boston and New York: Dana Estes & Company. The date of the Introduction by W. L. Courtney is 1896.)

Reference to "the good old King George" and the Prince Regent (1811) fixes the general date of the story, but it seems just as well to set it here under 1829, the date of publication of this first of Marryat's many stories that have held so many of us, young whether in spirit or years.

The "deep tragedy," so long to be remembered by Mildmay has nothing to do with our part of the story: man overboard, Mildmay trying to save him in vain, nearly devoured by sharks, and so on.

### 1831

October 29. A beautiful day, dined at 5 o'clock with Gun-room officers. They amused themselves with giving most terrific accounts of what Neptune would do with me on crossing the Equator. Mr. Earl mentioned that some years ago when after having crossed the Line they fell in with a ship all her sails set. Not a man could they see on deck, but on boarding her & going below they found every body, even the Captain & his wife, so very drunk that they could not move. They had been making merry after Neptune's revels.

(Charles Darwin's *Diary of the Voyage of H.M.S. "Beagle"* edited from the MS by Nora Barlow. Cambridge: at the University Press, 1934. p. 5.)

### 1832

**A MAN OVERBOARD!** The strange and almost savage ceremonies used at sea on crossing the equator have been so often described that a voyager, at this time

of day, may be well excused for omitting any minute account of such wild proceedings. The whole affair, indeed, is preposterous in its conception, and, I must say, brutal in its execution. Notwithstanding all this, however, I have not only permitted it to go on in ships which I commanded, but have even encouraged it, and set it agoing, when the men themselves were in doubt. Its evil is transient if any evil there be, while it certainly affords Jack a topic for a month beforehand and a fortnight afterwards; and if so ordered as to keep its monstrosities within the limits of strict discipline, which is easy enough, it may even be made to add to the authority of the officers, instead of weakening their influence.

In a well-regulated ship, within one hour from the time when these scenes of riot are at their height, order is restored, the decks are washed and swabbed up, the wet things are hung on the clothes' lines between the masts to dry; and the men, dressed in clean trousers and duck frocks, are assembled at their guns for muster, as soberly and sedately as if nothing had happened to discompose the decorous propriety of the ship's discipline. The middies, in like manner, may safely be allowed to have their own share of this rough fun, provided they keep as clear of their immediate superiors as the ship's company keep clear of the young gentlemen. And I must do the population of the cockpit the justice to say, that, when they fairly set about it, maugre their gentleman-like habits, aristocratical sprinklings, and the march of intellect to boot, they do contrive to come pretty near to the honest folks before the mast in the article of ingenious ferocity. The captain, of course, and, generally speaking, all the officers keep quite aloof, pocketing up their dignity with vast care, and ready, at a moment's warning, to repress any undue familiarity. As things proceed, however, one or two of the officers may possibly become so much interested in the skylarking scenes going forward as to approach a little too near, and laugh a little too loud, consistently with the preservation of the dignity of which they were so uncommonly chary at first starting. It cannot be expected, and indeed is not required, that the chief actors in these wild gambols, stripped to the buff, and shying buckets of water at one another, should be confined within very narrow limits in their game. Accordingly, some mount the rigging to shower down their cascades, while others squirt the fire-engine from unseen corners upon the head of the unsuspecting passer-by. And if it so chances (I say chances) that any one of the "commissioned nob's" of the ship shall come in the way of these explosions, it is served out to him like a thunder-storm, "all accidentally," of course. Well; what is he to do? He feels that he has indiscreetly trusted himself too far; and even if he has not actually passed the prescribed line, still he was much too near it, and the offence is perhaps unintentional. At all events, it is of too trifling a nature; and, under the peculiar circumstances of the moment, to make a complaint to the captain would be ridiculous. Having, therefore, got his jacket well wet, and seeing the ready means of revenging himself in kind, he snatches up a bucket, and, forgetting his dignity, hurls the contents in the face of the

1832, *continued*

mid who has given him a sousing but two seconds before! From that moment his commission goes for nothing, and he becomes, for the time being, one of the biggest Billy-boys amongst them. The captain observing him in this mess, shrugs his shoulders, walks aft, muttering, "It's all your own fault, Mr. Hailtop; you've put yourself amongst these mad youngers; now see how they'll handle you!"

Nothing, I confess, now looks to me more completely out of character with our well-starved discipline than a "staid lieutenant" romping about the booms, skulling up the rigging, blowing the grampus, and having it blown upon him by a parcel of rattlepated reefers. But I remember well in the *Volage* being myself so gradually seduced by this animating spectacle of fun, that, before I knew where I was, I had crossed the rope laid on the deck as a boundary between order and disorder, and received a bucket of cold water in each ear, while the spout of a fire-engine, at the distance of two feet, was playing full in my eyes. On turning my head round to escape these cataracts, and to draw breath, a tar-brush was rammed half-way down my throat!

Far different was the scene, and very different, of course, my deportment, four or five years afterwards on the same spot, when, instead of being the junior lieutenant, I was the great gun of all, the mighty master-nob of the whole party, that is to say, the captain himself. I was then in command of the *Lyra*, a ten-gun sloop-of-war; and after the shaving operations were over, and all things put once more in order, I went on board the *Alceste* frigate to dine with my excellent friend and commanding officer, the late Sir Murray Maxwell. Lord Amherst, the ambassador to China, was on board, and in great glee with the sight of what had been enacted before him; for although, as I have always said, these scenes are not of a nature to bear agreeable description, they certainly are amusing enough to see — for once.

We soon sat down to dinner; and there was, of course, a great deal of amusement in telling the anecdotes of the day, and describing Father Neptune's strange aspect, and his still stranger-looking family and attendants. I ventured to back one of my figures against all or any of theirs, if not for monstrosity, at least for interest of another kind. Our dripping Neptune in the *Lyra* was accompanied, as usual, by a huge she-monster representing Amphitrite, being no other than one of the boatswain's mates dressed up with the main-hatchway tarpaulin for a cloak, the jolly-boat's mizen for a petticoat, while two half-wet swabs furnished her lubberly head with ringlets. By her side sat a youth, her only son Triton, a morsel of submarine domestic history ascertained by reference previously made to Lempriere's Dictionary. This poor little fellow was a great pet amongst the crew of the brig, and was indeed suspected to be entitled by birth to a rank above his present station, so gentle and gentleman-like he always appeared. Even on this occasion, when disfigured by paint, pitch, and tar, copiously daubed over his delicate person,

to render him fit company for his papa old Neptune, he still looked as if his ill-favoured parents had stolen him, and were trying in vain to disguise their rogues by rigging him up in their own gipsy apparel.

It was very nearly dark when I rowed back to the *Lyra*, which had been hanging for the last half hour on the frigate's weather-quarter, at the distance of a cable's length, watching for my return. The wind was so light, and the brig so close, that no signal was made to heave to; indeed I had scarcely rowed under the *Alceste's* stern, on my way back, before it was necessary to call out, "In bow!" The rattle of the oar on the thwarts gave the earliest notice of my approach to the people on board the little vessel, and I could hear the first lieutenant exclaim in haste, "Attend the side! Where are the sides-men?"

Scarcely had these words been spoken, when I heard a splash in the water, followed by a faint cry of distress and despair. In the next instant the brig was hove about, and the stern-boat lowered down, accompanied by all the hurried symptoms of a man having fallen overboard. I made the people in the boat tug at their oars towards the spot; but though we pulled over and over the ship's wake twenty times, the water was everywhere unruffled and unmarked by any speck. At length I rowed on board, turned the hands up to muster, to ascertain who was gone, and found all present but our poor little Triton! It appeared that the lad, who was one of the sides-men, fatigued with the day's amusement, had stretched himself in the fore-part of the quarter-deck hammock-netting, and gone to sleep. The sharp voice of the officer, on seeing the gig almost alongside, had roused the unhappy boy too suddenly; he quite forgot where he was, and instead of jumping in-board, plunged into the sea, never to rise again!

There are few accidents more frequent at sea than that of a man falling overboard; and yet, strange to say, whenever it happens, it takes every one as completely by surprise as if such a thing had never occurred before. What is still more unaccountable, and, I must say, altogether inexcusable, is the fact of such an incident invariably exciting a certain degree of confusion, even in well-regulated ships. Whenever I have witnessed the tumultuous rush of the people from below, their eagerness to crowd into the boats, and the reckless devotion with which they fling themselves into the water to save their companions, I could not help thinking that it was no small disgrace to us, to whose hands the whole arrangements of discipline are confided, that we had not yet fallen upon any method of availing ourselves to good purpose of so much generous activity.

Sailors are men of rough habits, but their feelings are not by any means coarse; and, generally speaking, they are much attached to one another, and will make great sacrifices to their messmates or shipmates when opportunities occur. A very little address on the part of the officers, as I have before hinted, will secure an extension of these kindly sentiments to the quarter-deck. But what I was alluding to just now was the cordiality of the friendships which spring up between the sailors themselves, who, it must be recollected, have

1832, *continued*

no other society, and all, or almost all, whose ordinary social ties have been broken either by the chances of war, or by the very nature of their roving and desultory life, which carries them they really know not where, and therefore care not wherefore.

(Basil Hall. *The Lieutenant and Commander*; being autobiographical sketches of his own career, from *Fragments of voyages and travels*. London, 1862. p. 112–118.)

Hall says nothing about the ceremony in his reports on his voyages to the west coast of South and North America or to China, holding his comments until this review of his life at sea. This account was first published in his *Fragments of voyages and travels*, Edinburgh, 1832, ser. 2, v. 1, but the variant text as it appeared in *The lieutenant and commander* is printed here.

[16 February 1832] At sunset that day we were out of sight of St. Paul (or St. Peter), and soon after dark were hailed by the gruff voice of a pseudo-Neptune. A few credulous novices ran upon the forecastle to see Neptune and his car, and were received with the watery honours which it is customary to bestow, on such occasions.

Next morning we crossed the Equator, and the usual ceremonies were performed.

Deep was the bath, to wash away all ill;  
Notched was the razor — of bitter taste the pill.  
Most ruffianly the barber looked — his comb was trebly nailed —  
And water, dashed from every side, the neophyte assailed.

The disagreeable practice alluded to has been permitted in most ships, because sanctioned by time; and though many condemn it as an absurd and dangerous piece of folly, it has also many advocates. Perhaps it is one of those amusements, of which the omission might be regretted. Its effects on the minds of those engaged in preparing for its mummeries, who enjoy it at the time, and talk of it long afterwards, cannot easily be judged of without being an eye-witness.

During the early ages of navigation, before the invention of the compass, somewhat similar, though really ceremonious rites were observed in Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian vessels, when they passed the more remarkable promontories then known. A modern voyager, Kotzebue, notices this subject in a manner which appears to me so sensible, that I shall quote his words without affecting to add another remark. [Then follows the passage from Otto von Kotzebue's *A new voyage round the world* already entered here under 1823 and needing no repetition.]

(Robert Fitz-Roi. *Narrative of the surveying voyages of his majesty's ships Adventure and Beagle, between the years 1826 and 1836*. London, 1839. v. 2, p. 57–58.)

Robert Fitz-Roi, an Admiral when he died, ranks high as a British seaman, navigator, hydrographer, meteorologist. His story of the crossing in 1832 has plenty of interest in itself. Moreover it brings Kotzebue into the picture and shows how closely Fitz-Roi kept in touch with other seamen of his day. For our particular interest we hear too from him that "during the early ages of navigation, before the invention of the compass, somewhat similar, though really ceremonious, rites were observed in Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian vessels, when they passed the more remarkable promontories then known."

Independent and later study of the whole problem leads to much the same belief, though here one may be forgiven for wishing Fitz-Roi had told us just what he based this on. Was it current and accepted tradition in his day? Was it a bit of sealore known to every thinking Jack Tar? Did it go back to some forgotten or not mentioned firsthand story?

Volume two of the set of three comes from Fitz-Roi as noted above. Volume three has half title reading: "Journal and Remarks, 1832-1836, By Charles Darwin, Esq., M.A., Sec. Geol. Soc." Its text is fascinating, charming, amazing as it shows this ship's naturalist reveling in the tropical landscape, carefully noting the geology, the organic life in all its forms, a decidedly revealing demonstration of mental alertness, power of observation and also of expression, accurate and comprehensive. Remember that Darwin had reached the mature age of twenty-three when he sailed in 1832, was thirty when he saw the record published in 1839. His preface notes that "The present volume contains in the form of a journal, a sketch of those observations in Geology and Natural History which I thought would possess some general interest." The text shows that he hewed strictly to the line, felt evidently that mention of so frivolous an affair as the visit of Father Neptune would be out of place. Just about a century later we hear, however, that he did note it all in his diary, edited by Nora Barlow and published in 1933.

10th. [January, 1832] We crossed the Tropic this morning; if our route did not extend further, Neptune would here celebrate the awful ceremonies of the Equator. . . .

February 14th. To day at noon we were 150 miles from the Equator, & have experienced the weather which is so frequent in these regions. . . .

Every one is alive with the anticipation about Neptune's appearance, & I hear of nothing but razors sharpened with a file & a lather made of paint & tar, to be used by the gentlest *valet de chambre*.

15th. In the evening the ceremonies for crossing the line commenced. The officer on watch reported a boat ahead. The Captain turned "hands up, shorten sail," and we heaved to in order to converse with Mr. Neptune. The Captain held a conversation with him through a speaking trumpet, the result of which was that he would in the morning pay us a visit.

February 17th. We have crossed the Equator, & I have undergone the disagreeable operation of being shaved. About 9 o'clock this morning we poor "griffins," two & thirty in number, were put altogether on the lower deck. The hatchways were battened down, so we were in the dark & very hot. Presently four of Neptune's constables came to us, & one by one led us up on deck. I was the first & escaped easily: I nevertheless found this watery ordeal sufficiently disagreeable. Before coming up, the constable blindfolded me & thus lead along, buckets of water were thundered all around; I was then placed on a plank, which could be easily tilted up into a large bath of water. They then lathered my face & mouth with pitch & paint, & scraped some of it off with a piece of roughened iron hoop: a signal being given I was tilted head over heels into the water, where two men received me & ducked me. At last, glad enough, I escaped: most of the others were treated much

1832, *continued*

worse: dirty mixtures being put in their mouths & rubbed on their faces. The whole ship was a shower bath, & water was flying about in every direction: of course not one person, even the Captain, got clear of being wet through.

(Charles Darwin. *Diary of the voyage of H.M.S. "Beagle,"* edited from the ms. by Nora Barlow. Cambridge, 1933. p. 22, 35-6, 38.)

On the 26th of February as they were sailing down the coast toward Bahia, Darwin wrote to his father:

Since writing the first part of the letter, nothing has occurred except crossing the Equator and being shaved. This most disagreeable operation consists in having your face rubbed with paint and tar, which forms a lather for a saw which represents the razor, and then being half drowned in a sail filled with salt water.

### 1832-36

Les nautonniers de la Bretagne sont dans l'usage de baptiser celui qui passe pour la première fois une rivière, un bras de mer, à moins qu'il ne se rachète par de l'argent.

(François Marie Guillaume Habasque. *Notions sur le littoral des Côtes-du-Nord.* Saint Brieuc, 1832-36. v. 3, p. 147. Reprinted in: *Mélusine*, v. 2, column 452 (1884-5).)

### 1833

[1833, after June and before October] On the fourth day the captain came aboard and we resumed our voyage. Touching St. Iago, one of the Cape De Verde Islands, we crossed the equator in longitude 25 degrees west.

#### ADVENTURES WITH NEPTUNE ON THE LINE

As we approached the equator some of the boys were sent aloft to "see the line." One reported that he saw "a blue streak" but was "not quite sure." That evening Old Neptune came on board to pay his respects to his children who were crossing the equator for the first time. All the sailors who had never before crossed the line were assembled on deck amidships. The second mate, who plays the part of Neptune, takes his stand in the mizzen chains, concealed from view, and in a deep voice cries, "Ship, ahoy!" "Halloo!" responds the mate. "Heave to and let me come aboard!" says Neptune. "Hard a leel" orders the mate, and the ship is brought to the wind and Neptune is seen climbing in over the rail. He accosts the mate and inquires if there are any of his boys aboard the ship who have not been initiated.

Neptune wears an old monkey-jacket. His beard is made of Manila and reaches to his waist. On his head is a sou'wester hat fitted for the occasion. He looks more like Old Nick than Old Nep. The boys stand near the deck-tub





Augustus Earle's "Crossing the Line." From *Narrative of the Surprising Voyages of His Majesty's Ships Adventure and Beagle*, London, 1839.

which is filled with water. Neptune shakes hands with them all, telling them that he must perform certain rites to initiate them into his family. Each man is then required to stand in the tub of water and be shaved.

Tar and slush stirred together are used for lather, and a piece of iron hoop six inches in length is used for a razor. The face being scraped the captain's speaking trumpet is brought and the victim is told to hail the ship. As he puts it to his mouth and cries "Ship, ahoy!" a bucket of salt water is turned down into the trumpet, drenching the poor fellow, much to the amusement of the old sailors.

Having been told that I might escape the ordeal by treating Neptune, I procured a bottle of brandy, gave him a drink, and was allowed to go free. The ceremony being ended, Neptune took a solemn farewell of his children and left the ship as he came. Some of the more verdant boys believed Neptune really had visited them.

(Charles Wetherby Gelett. A life on the ocean; Autobiography of Captain Charles Wetherby Gelett. Reprinted from the *Ojai*; a little country California newspaper of the early 90s. With an introduction by Lorrin A. Thurston. Honolulu, 1917. p. 10. The Advertiser Historical Series, no. 3.)

1834

Wednesday, October 1st. Crossed the equator in long. 24 24 W. I now, for the first time felt at liberty, according to the old usage, to call myself a son of Neptune, and was very glad to be able to claim the title without the disagreeable initiation which so many have to go through. After once crossing the line you can never be subjected to the process, but are considered a son of Neptune, with full powers to play tricks upon others. This ancient custom is now seldom allowed, unless there are passengers on board, in which case there is always a good deal of sport.

(Richard Henry Dana. Two years before the mast. Boston, 1840. p. 26.)

Friday, December 19th [1834], we crossed the equator for the second time. I had the sense of incongruity which all have when, for the first time, they find themselves living under an entire change of seasons; as, crossing the line under a burning sun in the midst of December.

(Richard Henry Dana. Two years before the mast. Boston, 1911. p. 61.)

Every now and then we hear how "this ancient custom is now seldom allowed," only to have another example follow hard apace to show how the "ancient custom" refuses to die. A little later, (Colton, under 1845) we shall read that it was abolished aboard our men o' war. There is added in the note to Colton a bit of documentation about its ups and downs, its ons and offs in our Navy.

Remember in this connection how under 1823 we noted the Russian Kotzebue's comment on the ceremony: "These sports, while they serve to keep up the spirits of the men, and make them forget the difficulties they have to go through, produce also the most beneficial influence upon their health; a cheerful man being much more capable of resisting a fit of sickness than a melancholy one. It is the duty of commanders to use every innocent means of maintaining this temper in their crews."

1837-1842

Rien n'indique dans l'histoire de la marine ancienne quelle époque et quels événemens ont pu donner naissance à cette saturnale, que nous ont léguée les traditions maritimes. Est-ce la corruption de quelque cérémonie païenne, sur laquelle le passage du catholicisme a laissé les lambeaux de ses rites mystérieux? est-ce le culte profane d'une religion indécise, se rattachant à un astre dont les bienfaits palpables ont motivé l'adoration? Les initiations successives par lesquelles chaque époque a amené cette cérémonie burlesque, ont peu à peu altéré ses formes. Les traits primitifs se sont effacés dans la nuit des temps, semblables à ces monnaies antiques qui, en passant de main en main, ont perdu leur millésime et leurs caractères.

Le choix des latitudes sous lesquelles la tradition a placé cette cérémonie semble donner quelque poids à notre opinion, que le culte du soleil, ou tout au moins un hommage et une admiration passagère pour l'astre des régions torrides, est le point de départ de ces fêtes nautiques, auxquelles, à leur passage dans ces latitudes, nos marins se cramponnent encore aujourd'hui, comme à ces rares distractions que leur offre parcimonieusement leur monotone existence. N'y a-t-il pas une liaison directe entre les croyances mythologiques des anciens et les besoins qu'éprouvèrent les premiers navigateurs grecs, de se rattacher par la foi à une puissance conservatrice, et par l'espérance à la protection de quelque divinité? Les cérémonies de la ligne n'étaient-elles point l'expression fervente de cette religion? Ceci est une des faces de l'idée qui préside aux recherches qu'on essaie ici de faire sur l'origine des fêtes équatoriales.

Maintenant, quel fil pourrait rattacher une burlesque mascarade, telle que nous la voyons aujourd'hui, aux pratiques consciencieuses et sévères d'un culte ou d'une croyance religieuse! Établissons nettement notre opinion:

L'expérience du grand art de la marine ne s'est acquise qu'après bien des catastrophes et bien des luttes avec les élémens; les moyens de s'abandonner avec confiance à l'Océan et à ses tempêtes, de pauvres et timides qu'ils ont été dans l'enfance de la navigation, ne se sont développés qu'en raison des enseignemens de l'expérience, des progrès de l'art, des développemens de la science. Sans doute à cette première époque de tâtonnemens et de timides essais, passer d'un hémisphère dans l'autre était une courageuse tentative; le besoin de se confier à une puissance protectrice, au moment où une mer inconnue s'étendait devant eux, a dû porter les anciens navigateurs à se purifier par des ablutions et à consacrer un culte au soleil en passant dans les régions qui sont les plus directement soumises à sa puissance. Mais à mesure que la pratique de la navigation aura fécondé les leçons de l'expérience et vulgarisé les moyens de triompher des événemens de mer, la pieuse cérémonie aura perdu de son caractère primitif, et l'usage traditionnel nous est arrivé altéré d'époque en époque, et, à mesure qu'il se rapprochait de notre science nautique, il se convertissait en une simple distraction, bonne pour

remplir un jour dans les jours nombreux d'une occupation uniforme. N'ayant plus rien à redouter des hasards d'une navigation lointaine, lorsque la pratique et la science lui en dévoilaient les secrets, le marin a retiré sa foi de toute protection surnaturelle, mais n'a pas voulu que le privilège de son grade ou de son âge s'étendit jusque sur ceux qui débutent ou ne font que passer dans cette carrière, dont il a payé si cher les prérogatives. Dépouillée de toute idée sérieuse, la cérémonie religieuse se sera convertie en comédie. Le canevas se sera vu peu à peu recouvert par les capricieuses broderies des détails.

Avec son origine voilé d'oubli, la fête de la ligne, telle que le temps en nous l'apportant nous l'a faite, est une mascarade dont pas un détail n'a conservé un caractère sérieux. Comme aux fêtes de Saturne, elle enveloppe dans sa folie d'un jour tous les rangs, tous les hommes, qui oublient leur grade dans le laisser-aller général; plus de hiérarchie, plus de discipline; chacun s'évertue à enfanter mille extravagances; une idée bouffonne est couronnée, les travestissemens se drapent et se griment sous le caprice des imaginations les plus fertiles et les plus originales. Le matelot verse au dehors toute sa sauvage poésie, les plus étranges esquisses se tracent et s'effacent dans chaque partie du tableau. Quel malheur que les femmes, les cabarets et ces mille délices du matelot à terre ne puissent l'aider à clore dignement cette orgie de ses sens et de ses pensées! Comme sa tête, fermentant sous de capricieux désirs, convertirait promptement la saturnale en une bacchanale dévergondée! Que faire après rire et boire? L'amour de l'ivresse fait désirer plus vivement l'ivresse de l'amour; il ne leur reste donc qu'à se battre, lorsqu'ils ont épuisé toutes les ressources que laisse l'Océan. Puis vient la fatigue qui engourdit leurs sens, et le réveil qui leur montre cette bruyante journée confondue avec les rêves que l'exaltation de leur cerveau a tirés de leur sommeil; la hiérarchie s'est rétablie; l'ordre efface le désordre, le bruit de la veille s'est éteint dans le calme du lendemain. Cette fête a passé sur les marins, comme le sillage du vaisseau sur la mer. . . . . .

La scène bouffonne que représente notre gravure appartient au second acte de cette comédie traditionnelle, comédie qui fut d'abord un *mystère* et qui s'est transformée peu à peu en représentation théâtrale; comédie fort peu classique dans son plan comme dans ses détails, car le prologue joué la veille en rompt l'unité de temps, comme le sillage du navire l'unité de lieu. On nous a dit pourtant que certains officiers de la marine anglaise sacrifiaient vingt-quatre heures du temps précieux d'une bonne navigation, aux plaisirs bachiques dont le passage de la ligne était pour eux le prétexte; les voiles étaient en majeure partie serrées sur leurs vergues, afin de n'avoir nul souci de la tempête; comme un grand oiseau fatigué, le navire reployait ses ailes et se laissait indolemment balancer par la houle; l'orgie courait tous les rangs, nivelait tous les grades, hébétait tous les sens; les chefs se mêlaient aux refrains des matelots, les matelots se mêlaient à l'aristocratie des chefs; c'était une ivresse générale au milieu de laquelle le pouvoir, détourné de

1837-1842, *continued*

sa vraie source, tombait aux mains de celui qui criait le plus fort. Puis au soir la chaleur de ces latitudes torrides, la fatigue d'une folle agitation, l'épuisement des forces à grande peine galvanisées par l'exaltation fébrile du vin, l'abattement enfin ployait tous ces corps dans un lourd et fatigant sommeil. Pendant une nuit encore, le navire, que pas une volonté, pas une intelligence n'animait, flottait comme un grand cadavre sur l'abîme de l'Océan, étrange théâtre de ces scènes déréglées. Les oiseaux de mer étonnés, passaient, voltigeaient avec crainte autour du colosse endormi, puis, comme vaincus par la curiosité, s'y posaient timidement sans reployer leurs ailes, toujours prêts à les enlever au large. Tout dormait. Un marin croira difficilement à de semblables extravagances de la part d'une grande nation maritime; comment penser qu'un navigateur enraie ainsi son navire pour s'assoupir dans l'orgie! La mer a des passions soudaines et terribles; son engourdissement apparent n'est souvent qu'un court entr'acte à ses fureurs et à ses orages. Dormir sur l'Océan sans une vigie attentive, bon Dieu! Il y a bien des épaves dans un vaisseau, et la mer les entrechoquerait paisiblement quelques heures après les avoir furieusement détachés du pauvre navire. On ne saurait croire, répétons-le, à un semblable usage de la navigation anglaise; on nous l'a dit, nous le disons, parce que c'était ici la place d'accuser ces étranges choses. Comme les lecteurs, nous faisons nos réserves.

Sur nos navires, le baptême tropical ou équatorial a considérablement perdu de son importance et de son appareil. Ce n'est plus à vrai dire aujourd'hui qu'une petite spéculation des marins de l'équipage, tolérée plus qu'encouragée par les officiers, et qui a pour but d'obtenir des passagers quelques gratifications que leur arrache la peur de ce baptême fantasmagorique. Ajoutons à cela que n'ayant pu encore complètement divorcer avec cet usage, le commandant du navire est placé, par la tradition de cette fête, dans l'obligation d'accorder une sorte de congé à son équipage, de lui faire mesurer quelques rations de vin, de suspendre les travaux secondaires et de détendre un peu les lignes démarcatives que trace la discipline. Le matelot ajoute à tout ce qui lui est permis la liberté de faire tout ce qu'on ne lui défend pas, et cette journée est encore aujourd'hui assez remplie, au milieu des jours monotones qui, dans ces latitudes accablantes, se suivent et se ressemblent. Comme les marins s'en occupent quelque temps à l'avance, et qu'elle laisse des souvenirs qui survivent quelques jours à sa durée, cette fête est une halte pour leur imagination trop inoccupée entre le départ et l'arrivée au port: la tempête ne les distrait guère! toutes les tempêtes se ressemblent, la première qu'on a vue condamne les autres au plagiat à perpétuité.

La veille du jour où se passe la scène que retrace notre dessin, un courrier est descendu, vers le soir, du haut de la mâture; l'accoutrement de ce personnage est assez complet dans son ensemble; il porte une énorme cocarde tricolore sur son chapeau ciré, — ce qui, aujourd'hui, fait présumer que le dieu des tropiques est amateur de la révolution de juillet: c'est possible! — Il est

vêtu d'un frac bleuâtre sur les coutures duquel on a faufilé de larges galons de papier; il a des bottes de pêcheur, des éperons en cercle de barrique, un fouet et une queue. La queue est en étoupe, le fouet est naturel.

On se range en cercle autour de lui, parce que la corde de son fouet décrit un cercle qu'il serait dangereux de vouloir rétrécir. Il marche et s'avance vers le chef du bâtiment, qui, prévenu de l'arrivée, par des régions incon nues, d'un courrier qui le demande, a subitement quitté sa chambre et s'est gravement venu placer sur le gaillard-d'arrière. Le fouet s'est calmé, un mur de têtes superposées s'échelonne autour du messager de haut lieu, et chacun écoute avidement ce qu'il va dire.

“Mon commandant! je viens d'ousque vous savez peut-être, vous annoncer que mon maître, le vénérable sultan des Trois-Piques et de la ligne, a reluqué votre frégate par le trou d'un nuage usé, et qu'il se bichonne pour s'affaler dessus, demain à l'heure de sa commodité et de la vôtre, mon commandant; c'est pourquoi que si vous vuleriez bien me dire ça que vous avez à lui dire pour la chose, à seule fin. . . qu'il saurait pour. . . pour que j' lui répétais. . .”

Les matelots ricanent.

“Pour que je finissons. . . pour que j' descenderions. . .”

Les matelots rient aux éclats.

“Pour que mon patron et sa princesse. . . Enfin suffit, mon commandant, que j' vois bien qu' vous avez joliment compris la chose. . . Congédiez-moi, mon commandant, ça m' juggle q' ce tas de mateluches-la m' embêtent. . .”

Le commandant, d'un coup-d'œil, impose silence à cette foule qu'égayait l'embarras du courrier des célestes régions, et répond mille politesses pour le puissant dominateur des latitudes équatoriales; puis, ayant exprimé le plaisir qu'il éprouverait à recevoir cette noble visite, il ordonne que le digne messager soit convenablement traité à sa propre office, jusqu'à ce qu'il lui plaise d'enfourcher son nuage et de porter à son auguste maître le résultat de la démarche si glorieusement accomplie par l'éloquent postillon.

Il n'en est plus question pour ce jour-là. Le messager s'envole dans la brume, personne ne le voit partir. La nuit est belle et limpide comme dans ces brillans parages; la brise faible, la mer indolente, la frégate peu hâtive.

Venons à la grande solennité, et, pour la décrire, transportons-nous en idée sur la frégate où se trouvaient les originaux groupés par l'artiste:

Dès le matin, le soleil naissant encadra d'un cercle d'or le brillant miroir dont la surface unie s'étendait jusqu'à l'horizon. Des nuages indécis de forme et de marche tamaisaient les rayons de l'astre qui, à mesure qu'il s'élevait, traînait sur l'eau un sillon diamanté; les voiles de la frégate teignirent leur molle superficie de la lumineuse réverbération de la mer et du ciel; la stagnation de l'air était complète: c'était un magnifique calme.

Il y avait à bord de cette frégate, qu'une mission appelait à Maurice, la belle île de nos regrets et de nos souvenirs, quelques passagers dont nous équisserons brièvement les traits et le caractère.

Madame et mademoiselle Paturel.

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Madame Paturel, veuve d'un colonel tué à Waterloo. . . Sa fille ne se rappelle point son père dont on lui a pourtant montré le portrait; elle s'en rapporte en tout à sa mère, — laquelle a pour lieu commun: *feu M. Paturel, ou feu le colonel*, lorsqu'un souvenir lui représente quelque acte de sa vie passée, ou qu'elle juge à propos de rappeler à ceux qui l'approchent la distinction d'une alliance qu'aux yeux de quelques personnes elle est bien faite pour faire oublier.

Madame Paturel est courte, grasse et enluminée; elle est modiste par état. Sa fille est grande, mince et assez chiffonnée; elle est modiste par vocation.

Ces deux dames possèdent des lettres de recommandation pour les élégantes de l'*île de France*. Elles ont dans la cale de la frégate huit caisses dont elles s'occupent beaucoup, comme de marchandises fort précieuses. — A chaque changement de quart, la mère s'informe si l'eau ne les atteindra pas. — Elle a plusieurs fois donné quelques sous à un pilotin pour s'assurer de leur parfait arrimage. — On avait tout lieu de croire sur la frégate que ces caisses contenaient de la toile gommée pour les gigots et des passes de chapeaux de femme.

A un autre: M. Poirot.

Pacotilleur, ancien cuisinier de navire; bas de coton bleu, cols pointus, cheveux clair-semés, souliers à boucles, nez au vent, rédingote de pinchina, et jambes en manches des gaffe.

C'était un créole. Le créole porte beaucoup d'habits de pinchina et de jambes grèles. L'un et l'autre sont légers pour les chaleurs.

A une autre: mademoiselle Esther.

Robe de mérinos puce, passée à l'état chronique; cheveux noirs à *l'Isabelle*, teint de limonadière, très-brillant au gaz ou à l'huile; vingt-six ans, bonne fille, la jambe dure et le cœur tendre.

En plus, et sous son adoption directe, une petite fille de quatre à cinq ans, assez pareille à ladite demoiselle Esther, mais qui n'est bien certainement que sa nièce. Jamais le moindre colonel n'est mêlé par ses souvenirs aux conversations de la grande brune. Pas le plus petit mot non plus sur le but du voyage. M. Poirot est d'une galanterie exagérée avec mademoiselle Esther, et d'une patience modèle avec la petite, qui lui fait par jour mille espérances, que sa tante rachète par des sourires dont se paie le pacotilleur.

Tout ce monde-là a obtenu passage sur la frégate à divers titres. — Mademoiselle Paturel était protégée par un lieutenant du bord, qui a sollicité son embarquement: la mère s'est trouvée prise par-dessus le marché. — M. Poirot est fournisseur adjoint des indigos de l'armée; il se rend à Calcutta. — Mademoiselle Esther n'a pas trop justifié de ses titres. On dit que M. Poirot s'est intéressé à son passage: c'est galant. — Enfin, le jour où nous prenons la frégate était un splendide jour de ces chaudes régions. Les trois dames étaient fort intriguées de la visite que leur avait faite le veille le postillon aérien; c'était le thème duquel découlaient toutes les suppositions possibles

ou impossibles. — M. Poirot, souvent consulté, se rengorgeait dans un vaniteux silence: l'indigotier avait déjà, dans ses voyages d'outremer, subi plus d'une épreuve tropicale. C'était la première fois pourtant qu'il traversait l'équateur; mais, plein de confiance dans ses chevrons de navigation caraïbe, il s'escomptait à l'avance le plaisir de voir les victimes d'une cérémonie à laquelle il pensait bien devoir échapper. Les questions des dames n'entaient donc pas.

Il y avait pourtant à bord du navire une certaine agitation dont la monotonie habituelle de la route n'avait jusqu'ici donné nul exemple.

Il était près de midi à l'horloge de la boussole. Les officiers, les élèves, appuyés sur les bastingages ou sur les caronades du gaillard-d'arrière, s'occupaient, à l'aide de leurs instrumens de mathématiques, à observer la hauteur méridienne du soleil. Les calculs approximatifs du matin faisaient penser au commandant que le résultat des observations serait de trouver une latitude nulle, signe certain du passage de la frégate par l'équateur.

Une brise chaude et molle balançait la voilure, qui battait par intervalles inégaux contre les mâts grinçans dans les jointures de leur échafaudage; la mer, un peu houleuse, roulait par momens, contre le flanc du navire, des lames sourdes qui, brisées par sa masse, se panachaient d'écume et retombaient en palettes brillantées par l'éclat de cette belle journée.

"Attrape huit! sonnez midi!" cria aux timonniers de quart un officier supérieur qui tenait fixée à l'horizon la lunette de son sextant, d'un cuivre si poli qu'il échangeait avec le soleil des rayons éblouissans.

La lourde cloche du gaillard-d'avant répéta les frères tintemens de la clochette de l'arrière; puis, se balançant à toute volée, elle frappa bruyamment ses parois sonores de son infatigable marteau de fer. L'éveil fut donné partout, jusqu'aux coins les plus reculés du navire, aux marins que l'intervalle de leur service avait permis de se livrer au repos sollicité par ces molles températures. Les tintemens assourdissans de la cloche, plus émue ce jour-là que de coutume, en annonçant le diner de l'équipage, parvinrent jusque dans les chambres reculées des femmes qui, plus aiguillonnées par la curiosité que retenues par la crainte, abandonnèrent leur sieste pour s'enquérir par elles-mêmes du sujet de ce bruit innaccoutumé. Madame Paturel arrêta un officier qui traversait la batterie, pour s'informer si ses caisses n'étaient pas en danger. . . . Mademoiselle sa fille grimpa rapidement le dernier escalier, où se cramponnait déjà contre les mouvemens du roulis sa co-voyageuse Esther, également poussée par la curiosité vers les ponts supérieurs de la frégate.

Mais arrivées à produire leurs têtes par l'ouverture, les deux filles s'arrêtèrent; mademoiselle Paturel ne voulait pas monter la première, l'autre non plus. Un élève était près d'elles; il reçut toutes leurs questions; dix questions à la fois, avec les commentaires pour complément.

L'élève apprit à ces demoiselles que l'on allait passer sous la ligne; cette ligne dont il avait tant été parlé; cette ligne, la seule chose au monde sur

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laquelle se tût M. Poirot et dont l'événement de la veille avait réchauffé les craintes et les appréhensions.

"Où donc est-elle, monsieur? dit l'une des filles, en s'élevant d'une marche et en penchant son corps dans la direction d'un sabord voisin ouvert sur la mer; peut-on la voir? Montons donc, mademoiselle, le navire ne remue pas . . ."

L'élève donna la main aux dames, les appuya contre le bastingage, et les pria d'attendre qu'il eut apporté sa longue-vue.

La longue-vue tarda un peu, puis arriva enfin. Le jeune officier avait tendu un fil noir sur son objectif, de manière à partager sa circonférence en deux parties égales; lorsque l'on eut trouvé un point d'appui en rapport avec la taille des deux curieuses, l'élève leur fit appliquer leur œil avide sur le petit verre. Pleines d'une bruyante admiration, elles certifièrent qu'elles voyaient une magnifique ligne noire sur la surface bleue de la mer.

Il n'y eut plus à en douter: une foule de réflexions, que firent tout haut les officiers groupés à l'arrière, convainquirent complètement les passagères; elles se retirèrent rayonnantes de joie en se communiquant toutes leurs pensées sur ce phénomène. L'une prétendait que le navire passerait dessus, l'autre disait dessous. Elles descendirent en continuant cette polémique.

Le maître d'équipage reçut alors les ordres du lieutenant en premier, qui régla les apprêts de la cérémonie, qu'il était nécessaire de préparer avec une certaine pompe, en faveur des passagers et de quelques marins de l'équipage, lesquels, pour la première fois, traversaient ces parages traditionnels.

Le dîner des marins ne traîna point en longueur. A peine fut-il achevé, que les quartiers-mâtres se répandirent dans toutes les parties du bâtiment pour veiller aux apprêts de la cérémonie. Maître Larack se multipliait dans la transmission des ordres qui se croisaient en tous sens. Par ses soins, un échafaudage de barriques vides, étayées et surmontées de planches, s'adossa au grand mât de la frégate. Les caissons de la timonnerie déroulèrent leurs pavillons de mille couleurs, et un autel improvisé s'en enveloppa sur toutes ses faces. Une tente en toile légère mit de l'ombre sur le sanctuaire réservé; des faisceaux de piques, de haches d'armes, se groupèrent en rayons sur le fond de l'autel; des cap-moutons, dans les trois trous desquels on planta les bougies jaunes de la timonnerie, s'échelonnèrent en candelabres sur les marches élevées; deux tableaux empruntés à la cambuse s'adossèrent à la façade principale sur laquelle ils se détachaient: l'un représentant les abords d'une baraque de théâtre forain; l'autre, le valeureux Don Quichotte de la Manche pourfendant, aux ébahissements de son admirable écuyer, un paisible troupeau de moutons, converti en phalange de géans dans l'imagination du preux amant de la dame du Toboso.

Les faces latérales de l'échafaudage n'étaient pas moins heureuses en décorations; c'était d'un goût tout-à-fait original. Deux mâchoires de requin avec des flammes d'embarcation qui en sortaient comme des langues tri-

colores; une queue de marsouin en éventail à moitié frite par le soleil; des tapes de caronades avec leurs étoiles de cuivre, disposées çà et là, dans l'ensemble, avec un tact très-sûr; puis, comme à la façade de l'édifice, des tableaux à maigres bordures noires représentant les quatre parties du monde, toutes personnifiées par un choix voluptueux dans le beau sexe d'Europe, d'Asie, d'Afrique et d'Amérique; puis à droite et à gauche, sortant raide, de derrière un cadre, se courbant sur la queue du marsouin, de brillantes plumes d'oiseaux nuancées de toutes les couleurs qu'offrent les pierres précieuses; des pipes en terre noircie appuyées sur les dents d'une mâchoire; des chaînes d'argent détachées des sifflets des maîtres, se festonnant sur toutes les saillies; et mille autres choses toutes étrangères les unes aux autres, groupées, superposées, clouées à l'envi sur cette étrange arabesque. Ajoutez encore à droite et à gauche, dans les angles, au fronton, des faisceaux de sabres, de pistolets, de baïonnettes brillantes; puis, sur les fonds, de capricieux ornemens en papier découpé, attachés avec des épingles sur l'étamine des pavillons, et enfin le barriolage des couleurs sur lesquelles tous ces accessoires ressortaient avec des physionomies si étonnantes, et en même temps si étonnées. Représentez-vous tout cela et vous aurez une ébauche de cette magnifique construction à l'ensemble de laquelle présida maître Larack, et dont chaque matelot enrichit les détails suivant son caprice, et la richesse ou l'originalité de son imagination.

Sur le devant du grotesque autel, une cuve haute et large, sur laquelle s'étendait une planche d'une médiocre longueur, s'était mystérieusement enveloppée dans un immense pavillon qui en déguisait presque la forme sous ses plis nombreux. Cette cuve était un des principaux accessoires de cette licencieuse parodie de religion, les fonts-baptismaux de la liturgie matelotesque. On distinguait encore sur un des coins de l'autel plusieurs ustensiles d'un usage effrayant et inconnu, tels qu'un énorme rasoir peint avec des couleurs trompeuses, une assiette pleine de farine, une hache et un billot, du noir de fumée, des tenailles et une fêrule de cuir.

Sous un prétexte futile, les passagers avaient été retenus dans les chambres basses pendant les mystérieux apprêts de la cérémonie. Quand tout fut prêt, un vigoureux coup de sifflet en porta l'avis dans tous les coins du navire; madame Paturel frissonna pour ses caisses, M. Poirot trembla pour sa peau.

“Tout le monde en haut! cria maître Larack, de sa voix à casser les vitres.

— Sans doute nous passons sur la ligne, dit un lieutenant à mademoiselle Esther, qui ne pouvait s'arracher à un vague sentiment de crainte depuis le jour où pour la première fois on avait signalé l'approche de cette ligne perpétuellement invoquée; permettez-moi de vous conduire en haut, mesdames, c'est un spectacle curieux et intéressant; on ne voit pas des choses semblables deux fois en sa vie, à moins d'en faire son métier; sans doute nous allons voir à cheval, sur la ligne, le vénérable dieu de ces climats brûlans. Montez, montez, mesdames, je me charge de vous bien placer . . .”

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M. Poirot ayant engagé mademoiselle Esther à céder aux instances du jeune marin, elle donna l'exemple que suivirent les dames Paturel, en arrangeant mutuellement leur toilette avant de paraître par-devant l'équipage et l'état-major assemblés.

Un banc enlevé à la cambuse et que recouvrait un large pavillon rouge était adossé, pour les dames, au cabestan sur lequel s'appuyaient quelques officiers. Il y avait sur l'arrière de la frégate une foule de marins, échelonnés sur toutes les élévations, ricanant entre eux à la venue des néophytes, comme aux apprêts d'un spectacle long-temps désiré. L'ouverture ne se fit pas attendre: ce fut une foudroyante détonation de fusils et de pierriers, à laquelle répondit une explosion d'éclats de rire, de trépignemens, et de huées provoquées par le paroxysme d'une joie bruyante; la foule s'ouvrit, et le cortège du dieu de la ligne apparut.

Des porte-voix venus on ne sait d'où, répandaient dans l'air des accens étrangers; une grêle abondante rebondit sur le pont, sans que les femmes s'aperçussent que le baril aux haricots du *maître coq* en avait fourni les élémens; puis de nouvelles détonations éclatèrent derrière l'autel en l'enveloppant de fumée, et un *houra* général accueillit le cortège qui sortit d'une tente jusque là masquée par les groupes.

Deux gendarmes parurent d'abord; deux beaux hommes, avec des moustaches qui se nouaient derrière leurs oreilles. Madame Paturel prétendit à plusieurs reprises que le brun ressemblait, à s'y fourvoyer, au feu colonel mort à Waterloo. Un gendarme peut très-bien ressembler à un colonel. — On en fait avec.

Les gendarmes firent bravement leur métier en forçant les curieux à reculer. — Moins ceux-ci eurent de surface sur le pont, plus ils s'élevèrent; — les matelots passeraient une journée le pied sur une ficelle ou un bâton, comme les perroquets.

Après les gendarmes s'avança, trainé par deux animaux d'une forme indésirable, un chariot ou affut de canon, pavoisé de brillantes couleurs, et sur lequel trônait une jeune femme élégamment parée en reine, couronnée avec un petit panier d'osier renversé, surmonté de découpures de carton; d'épaisses boucles de copeaux sortaient de la corbeille, et encadraient de leurs blonds anneaux la fraîche figure de la souveraine, fort occupée, par contenance peut-être, d'un nourrisson pendu à sa ceinture; laquelle ceinture soutenait à peine des appas hors de toute proportion imaginable. Un observateur de sang-froid eût facilement reconnu dans cette reine de l'équateur un petit novice de la frégate, frais comme une algue marine, et dont les traits prêtaient merveilleusement à une semblable métamorphose, mais on n'y prit pas garde. Immédiatement après le char, duquel descendit la reine, on aperçut un vieillard complètement perdu dans les peaux de moutons dont se composait son ajustement roussâtre; une longue chevelure, formée de tout ce que l'étope du bord avait présenté de plus convenable en cheveux blancs,

ombrageait son front plissé par l'âge, sa barbe pendante et touffue encadrait sa face rougie, grimaçant la gravité et l'importance. *Le trident de Neptune, le sceptre du monde*, lui servait à appuyer sa marche; ses pieds nus s'entortillaient de bandelettes d'étamine blanche qui se découpaient sur le ton bistré de la peau du vieillard. — Ces pays-là brunissent la peau en diable.

A la suite de ces deux principaux personnages, suivaient, en s'agitant, une foule de gens de cour à l'usage des dieux de la ligne, les damnés du crû, les démons, les valets des dieux marins, tous noircis de goudron, les uns saupoudrés de toutes les plumes mises depuis long-temps en réserve par le grand sacrificateur des volailles, les autres ornés de chaînes de cuisine, lesquelles ils secouaient fort agréablement à la manière des diables de théâtre:

C'était fort bruyant.

Quand madame Paturel eut aperçu cette invasion du navire par tant de gens inconnus, elle se glissa adroitement vers l'escalier principal, et s'en fut prier un marin, que son poste retenait dans l'entrepont, d'aller visiter ses caisses; elle se jura de ne pas quitter le panneau par lequel on les avait introduites, que l'épouvantable visite n'eût abandonné le bord.

Tout le cortège ayant pris place en dedans du cercle formé par l'équipage, le père La Ligne fit un signal, auquel répondit un vigoureux coup de sifflet, qui convertit brusquement en silence les chuchotemens des spectateurs; le dieu marcha gravement jusqu'au cabestan, où se tenait le commandant de la frégate, entouré de son état-major, puis, après avoir passé à plusieurs reprises sa main dans la barbe qui flottait à son menton, il laissa lentement tomber une à une ces énergiques et mémorables paroles:

“Où est le commandant?”

Celui-ci se détacha un peu du groupe, et se montra.

“Oh! c'est vous, M. . . ! vous êtes un vieil enfant de l'Océan, et plus d'une fois déjà vous avez traversé les régions où s'étend ma puissance. . . Soyez le bienvenu; moi, mon épouse, mes officiers, toute ma cour enfin, sommes à vos ordres, mon commandant.

— En effet, vénérable vieillard, il y a fort long-temps que j'ai reçu les saints baptêmes de l'équateur et des tropiques, aussi n'aurai-je à vous demander vos bontés que pour quelquesuns de nos compagnons de voyage.

— C'est bien! mon secrétaire va les enregistrer sur le grand livre de l'équateur; ils déposeront entre ses mains les sermens d'usage, pendant quoi je vais me recueillir un instant, pour leur adresser ensuite un petit discours que j'ai coutume de faire, lorsque, comme ceux que vous m'avez amenés, mes voyageurs sont des personnages de distinction.”

Il y eut un instant de calme. Le dieu se retrancha dans sa peau de mouton, et relut un chiffon de papier, sur lequel la rhétorique d'un élève avait rapidement suppléé à la faconde du vieux loup de mer. Puis les diables secouèrent un peu leurs chaînes, les matelots se serrèrent entre eux, et sortirent leurs oreilles de leur chapeau; les deux dames se rapprochèrent l'une contre l'autre;

1837-1842, *continued*

M. Poirot regarda obliquement la cuve dont il avait enfin deviné la présence sous les pavillons qui la recouvraient.

Un nouveau coup de sifflet se fit entendre, et le dieu ayant étendu les bras, à la manière des beaux prédicateurs, commença comme suit:

“Mes enfans! lorsque naquit le monde, le soleil chargé d'éclairer la terre ne devait d'abord que parcourir une ligne droite qui est l'équateur. Mais . . . mais dès que ç'eût été un peu comme ça . . . comme ça . . . ça n'allait pas bien. Sous la ligne on rôtissait, que la peau s'en fendait au soleil comme du brai sec; sous les pôles, on y gelait, qu'on y avait pas moyen de boire son quart de vin. — Bon.”

Ici le vieux chiqueur fit une pause, attendu que ses souvenirs commençaient à se brouiller, et qu'il ajoutait ses propres idées aux images dont était chargé le discours qu'il avait oublié d'apprendre. Pourtant il reprit:

“Vous n'êtes pas sans avoir entendu parler dans la société, sur mer, sur terre, ou ailleurs enfin, d'un nommé *Phayton*, un vigoureux farceur, fils cru du soleil, qui est censé avoir voulu prendre la barre et conduire la lumière. . . . Alors (d'ailleurs j'ai lu ça dans un livre qui est dans mon sac, et que je pourrai bien vous prêter) la barque chavira, et tout le soleil tomba sur la terre, qu'il grilla beaucoup de personnes qui se promenaient, d'autant plus que l'eau n'est si chaude ici qu'à cause qu'il en tomba beaucoup ici, du soleil. — Bon.”

Un bruit moqueur, précurseur de mille éclats de rire, agita la foule assemblée; remuant ses peaux de mouton, le matelot-dieu parvint à ressaisir au hasard quelques lignes du manuscrit qu'il avait entre les mains, et poursuivit:

“. . . Qui, mes enfans, l'éclystique! on la créa, l'éclystique, avec les deux jumeaux qu'elle eut du soleil, qui sont aujourd'hui les tropiques. Y en a qui disent les trois piques, mais c'est les tropiques ou les cent piques qu'on doit dire, qui signifie que le soleil y pique ferme. . . . Voilà. . . . Qui, mes frères.”

La voix éraillée du vieillard s'éteignit dans l'explosion écrasante d'hilarité que la continuation de son discours provoqua dans la foule. Le commandant lui-même, qui jusque là avait à grand'peine maintenu un sérieux correspondant à celui de l'orateur, le commandant se prit ouvertement à rire. Le dieu, qui, retranché dans son épaisse barbe, n'était pas fâché de la tournure qu'avait prise son allocution, en profita habilement pour se soustraire à la péroraison à venir, et, se retournant vers ses familiers, il ordonna avec empressement qu'on eût à commencer l'application du baptême.

Quelques coups de sifflet résonnèrent; habitué à ce commandement, l'équipage se calma peu à peu, et quand la paix fut rétablie, le père La Ligne alla partager avec son épouse un siège établi pour eux sur l'estrade adossée à l'autel. Les personnages symboliques, revêtus de leurs costumes traditionnels, formèrent une haie à droite et à gauche, ensuite le puissant ordonnateur de la fête fit signe à ses gendarmes de s'emparer de M. Poirot.

M. Poirot voulut réclamer. Il certifia s'être déjà baigné dans les eaux du tropique, et, opposant son entêtement à l'éloquence des sbires célestes, chercha à échapper par la persuasion à l'opération dont on lui offrait l'étrenne. Il ne réussit pas. — Il menaça. — Cela n'eut pas plus de succès. — Il se débattit; — mais deux hommes, habillés en gendarmes, le façonnèrent promptement à leur volonté. — Il fallut en passer par leur caprice; il n'eut que les honneurs de la résistance.

D'abord le pacotilleur ne sut pas trop ce qu'on voulait de lui. L'opiniâtreté qu'on mettait à triompher d'une volonté aussi énergiquement formulée que la sienne, lui fit seule sentir que le but de cette violence devait être quelque chose de peu agréable pour lui, et rendait sa résistance plus entêtée. Quoi qu'il fit, on l'assit sur la cuve: c'était pour le moment un siège assez élégant, et qui ne manquait même pas de jeter une certaine distinction sur celui qui l'occupait, vu qu'il était plus orné et plus extraordinaire que les autres, un peu dur, mais recouvert de couleurs brillantes. Quand il y fut assis, M. Poirot sentit sur chacune de ses épaules la large main de ses gardiens, qui s'appuyait de manière à l'empêcher de se lever dans le cas où il lui en prendrait envie. Un personnage qui jusqu'alors ne s'était pas produit et qu'une couronne hérissée de plumes terminait par son extrémité supérieure, s'approcha de lui, et tenant dans un vieux pot à confitures un mélange de détestables ingrédients de cuisine, brandit un énorme pinceau à barbe, dont il frotta long-temps le menton du pauvre patient; puis le balai à barbe s'éclipsa devant le gigantesque rasoir dont il a été fait mention, et qui par quatre ou cinq fois râcla le bas du visage du passager, lequel était ni plus ni moins barbu que la semelle d'un vieil escarpin.

Quand il fut bien rasé, un autre employé au service du père La Ligne, orné de deux petites cornes naissantes et d'un rabat de sacristain, apporta la fêrule de basane, frottée de blanc d'Espagne d'un côté, de noir de fumée de l'autre; il la lui fallut embrasser, et s'en laisser appliquer un côté différent sur chaque joue; après quoi, on le laissa un instant se reconnaître; puis, avant qu'il eut repris une volonté à lui, la planche qui tenait en travers sur la cuve fut subitement retirée, et la victime du baptême s'enfonça subitement dans le bassin rempli d'eau à dégorger. Ce ne fut là qu'un prélude. Au même instant dix seaux d'eau, préparés à cet effet derrière l'autel, lui coulèrent en avalanche sur la tête. A mesure que le malheureux voulait, en se levant, se soustraire à ce déluge, une nouvelle cataracte, en fondant sur lui, le força à chercher un refuge au fond du cuvier; l'eau amollit son col empesé, appliqua sur ses formes grêles la mince étoffe de son vêtement, colla ses rares cheveux à son visage, et confondit ses traits dans un atroce mélange de noir de fumée, de craie et de vieille sauce, dont à plusieurs reprises on l'avait barbouillé.

L'explosion de plaisir que cette scène provoqua parmi l'équipage serait impossible à exprimer. Haletant, incapable de proférer un son, le pauvre passager se débattait instinctivement contre ce chaos où son esprit se perdait. Ce ne fut qu'épuisés de rire et de noyer ce pauvre diable, que les marins

1837-1842, *continued*

consentirent à le laisser, libre et honteux, sortir de l'effrayante cuve où l'avait amené une puissance infernale. Trempé, ivre, hébété, le pacotilleur put à peine distinguer un passage pour se soustraire aux rires humilians dont il était l'objet; encore lui fallut-il passer devant mademoiselle Esther, qui, à travers une compassion assez naturelle, lui parut éprouver une gaité offensante pour lui, victime de la cérémonie. Pourtant, quelque monnaie eût préservé l'indigotier de cette cruelle avanie; mais, trop fier de ses campagnes ultra-tropicales, il n'eût pas voulu descendre à un arrangement, d'autant moins recherché par les matelots, que la somme qu'ils auraient tirée d'un seul homme eût été trop faible pour compenser la joie qu'ils devaient se donner en le baptisant.

Ce fut là le fait capital de la fête, la scène à effet de la burlesque comédie. Les femmes, pour lesquelles les officiers intercédèrent, s'en tirèrent pour quelques verres d'eau dans le cou et dans les manches. Seulement, l'étoffe légère dont était vêtue mademoiselle Paturel moula coquettement ses formes; aussi le lieutenant, son protecteur, promit-il double ration de vin en faveur de la réserve toute française de MM. les suivants du dieu de la zone torride.

Ce fut après ces opérations préliminaires que, sur l'autorisation du commandant de la frégate, commença dans l'équipage un véritable combat qui ne tarda pas à confondre dans un baptême général les nouveaux embarqués et les vieux marins. Retranchés sur le gaillard-d'arrière les officiers encourageaient de leur propre gaité la joie de l'équipage, qui se dédommageait alors, en s'ébaudissant à son gré, de la contrainte imposée long-temps à ses caprices, par la discipline du service de mer. Jusqu'à l'heure du souper, ce fut un affreux ravage sur l'avant de la frégate; l'eau fut constamment l'arme avec laquelle les ennemis se renversèrent; au hasard, quelques coups du contenant leur noircirent un peu la peau; mais on n'y songeait guère. Le navire était pour ainsi dire entre deux eaux. Au milieu de ce tapage, maître Larack eut toutes les peines imaginables à faire remplacer à tour de rôle le timonnier et l'homme de vigie.

Quand vint le soir, au quart de la nuit, la brise était chaude et molle, le ciel bleu, émaillé d'étoiles qui tremblaient dans les petites lames qui moiraient la mer. La navigation était facile et agréable. — Assis sur l'arrière de la frégate, les passagères plaisaient M. Poirot de son abondant baptême. — Madame Paturel exprimait des craintes pour ses caisses que l'eau avait pu atteindre. — Mademoiselle Esther avait couché sa nièce, et regardait mélancoliquement la mer. — Les officiers que leur service retenait sur le pont se promenaient en livrant au vent la fumée odorante de leurs cigares de contrebande.

Pourtant, si le gaillard-d'arrière de la frégate et la mer sur laquelle glissait doucement sa carène étaient calmes et silencieux, il n'en était pas ainsi de l'avant et d'une partie de la batterie où pêle-mêle se confondaient encore les attirails de la cérémonie, les débris des costumes, les décorations de l'autel,

et les matelots qui s'en étaient amusés; la rigueur de la discipline endormie laissait encore déborder par intervalles quelques trop-pleins d'ivresse, quelques réminiscences de joie éteinte sous le poids de la fatigue. On entendait parfois quelques cris, quelques noms rauques et inintelligibles qu'on se jetait d'un côté à l'autre du navire. — Des danses et des jeux, animés par une distribution de vin de cambuse, avaient bruyamment terminé le jour; puis, peu à peu, l'orchestre improvisé avait assoupi ses notes dans le sommeil de la lassitude, l'étourdissement avait succédé à l'exaltation et au délire de la fête, l'affaissement du corps et de la pensée aux cris et aux trépignemens du ball . . .

Un bal au milieu de l'Océan!

Oh! pour qui a vu toutes les physionomies de cet Océan, pour qui connaît combien sont courts les entr'actes du calme et de la tempête, que de sauvages et sinistres poésies dans cette idée de fête sur un pareil théâtre!

Un bal au milieu de l'Océan! sur les profondeurs de l'abîme des mers, un bal où les hommes croient au plaisir, lorsqu'à chaque moment la voix sourde des lames et les sifflemens ironiques du vent dans les cordages, peuvent produire un effrayant concert avec leurs menaçantes harmonies!

Un bal au milieu des solitudes de l'Océan, lorsqu'en quelques instans les vagues furieuses peuvent étendre leur suaire d'écume sur ces puérils hochets de fête!

(Jules Lecomte. Traditions maritimes: Baptême sous la Ligne. In: La France Maritime, by Amédée Gréhan. Paris, 1837-42. v. 2, p. 281-288.)

Lecomte's tale is illustrated by a plate drawn by de Caudin and engraved by Ruhier.

### 1841

We crossed the line in long. 26° west of Greenwich. The most striking phenomena witnessed during those days were a waterspout and an illumination of the sea at night by vast numbers of phosphorescent lights upon the surface, resembling those of fire-flies and thought owing to animalculæ. When it is dark the above lights give the sea the appearance of being covered with breakers, and some years ago the U. S. *Vincennes*, I was informed, changed her course for two hours from a fear that she was running into them. At the same hour we witnessed the phenomena mentioned, Father Neptune, availing himself of them, boarded the *Delaware*, and aided by many of his elder subjects, began to initiate the younger, never caught before south of the line, into certain mysteries. One novice caught while on his way to the foretop had his face smeared with a compound of tar and grease. A second novice, whose face was white had it painted black; and a third of this colour had his face daubed white. A fourth person, unwilling and refusing to submit to what Neptune had enacted, had a rope thrown around his neck, and dragged from his hiding place and forced to perform the whole ceremony. When the initiated had been shaved with an iron hoop, they were allowed to wash themselves and retire. At a late hour his godship took leave of his children and withdrew to his bottomless and

1841, *continued*

watery couch while the ship moved swiftly on her course — her bows throwing up on each side a cataract of snow-white foam.

(Medical Topography of Brazil and Uruguay: with incidental remarks. By G. R. B. Horner, M.D., Surgeon U. S. Navy; Honorary Member of the Philadelphia Medical Society, And Corresponding Member of the National Institute at Washington. Philadelphia, 1845. p. 24-25.)

No date, but probably late November or early December, 1841.

We had a shipmate once, whom we named "Jack Nastyface," from the fact that his face was as rough as a MacAdemized road. The first time that we crossed the equator in the Pacific, "Jack" was at the mast head looking out for whales. As soon as "eight bells" were struck, and "Jack" was relieved, he was informed that we had crossed the line. "Jack" never would be behind any body in intelligence. "The devil we did!" says "Jack." "Can't ye tell us some news? didn't I see it as well as you did, and better too? wasn't I aloft? I saw the line before any man aboard."

(Richard Tobias Greene, in the *Sandusky Mirror*, January 13, 1855, cited in Clarence Gohdes, "Melville's Friend 'Toby,' *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 59 [1944], p. 53.)

Melville sailed from Fairhaven, Massachusetts, on the *Acushnet* January 3, 1841, and this crossing of the equator came probably later in 1841 or before July 9, 1842, when he and "Toby" Greene escaped from the ship at the Marquesas Islands.

#### 1844

By February 14, we were slowly nearing the equator, a time that always brings well earned sport to the crew. At about seven in the evening we heard them cheering vigorously, "The fire of Neptune! The fire of Neptune!" We made our way up on deck and about a hundred feet distant we descried a column of fire. It was a cask of dried peas and tar which the sailors had set on fire and thrown into the sea. Suddenly, a solemn voice was heard from the topmast:

"Captain, have you any passengers aboard?"

"I have twelve," answered the captain merrily.

"Do they intend to pass the line?"

"Yes."

"Well, tomorrow Neptune in person will administer baptism which is indispensable to all who pass the line."

At ten in the evening, the time for retiring, and also the exact time for us to cross the equator, a huge light flamed out from the topmast. At ten the next morning we heard the cry "Neptune! Neptune!" The Reverend Clergy accompanied the captain on the bridge where Neptune was present with all his court. Had you seen him you would have taken him for his

brother, Pluto. He was clothed in rags; a wig covered his head, and he had a coarse flax beard. He carried a huge wooden compass and a sextant with which he mimicked the captain taking longitude. At his right, stood his wife, as ludicrously attired as himself. His guards surrounded him, each one armed with a wooden sword, a trident and a spear. Their faces were smeared with tar and they presented a hideous aspect.

The monarch of the sea promised the captain a prosperous voyage. He then turned to Father DeSmet and begged to be allowed to shave him. It was useless to refuse, so the good missionary reluctantly consented after being assured by the captain that all would be conducted with propriety. The other priests, too, submitted to the operation. To crown the farce, Neptune demanded that baptism be administered, and immediately they were soaked with a deluge of water from on high, and they were glad to escape to the rear of the deck where they might view the performance without further inconvenience.

A good supper was then served, which the sailors enjoyed as much as they had enjoyed the fun. After supper Father DeSmet thanked them for the entertainment they had afforded.

(Clarence B. Bagley. *Early Catholic Missions in Old Oregon*. Seattle, Lowman & Hanford Company, 1932. v. 2, p. 66-67.)

Lowman & Hanford write (January 26, 1955): "Our firm published *Early Catholic Missions in Oregon* many years ago and Mr. Bagley is long dead. We hold no copyright and cannot say what the position of the Bagley heirs may be. However, while we cannot assume responsibility in the matter, we are inclined to think there would not likely be objection to such quotation as you mention."

Neptune's visit is too stale a thing to need relation; its chief fun seemed to me, who had paid tribute to his dominions years before, to consist in the very vigorous resistance some people, overburthened with sense, made to his myrmidons. This, of course, induced them to let such visitors off much more easily. He hails the evening before his intended visit, when all hands rush forward, and get desperately soused from the tops, by buckets full of water. On the grand day of his visit, everybody is allowed to duck everybody. A poor marine, staunch to the last, was walking his post, cross-belted, and neat enough for parade, when he was caught and washed till his coat bid fair to rival his trowsers in whiteness. The weather is always warm, and really greater misfortunes may befall one than a good washing. To some the novelty of the operation alone must make it agreeable. Of course all the old midshipman jokes were practised, — blowing the grampus, lowering down, &c. Some are such inveterate sleepers as to afford a constant prey, and as ill humour is seldom shewn on these occasions, it really makes every one very much more alert; for, as every man takes advantage of his fellow, so each fears falling asleep on his watch, as his rest is sure to terminate in a cold bath. Geese, from the pens, were sometimes hung round the

1844, *continued*

necks of sleepers. These amusements, with *soirées* on deck, songs, stories, &c., served to get over the time pretty well.

(Frederick Walpole. Four years in the Pacific in Her Majesty's Ship "Collingwood," from 1844 to 1848. London, 1849. v. 1, p. 15-17.)

For several days we had been laying in a continued succession of calms, broken only at short intervals by light and almost imperceptible airs, that carried the ship stealthily along towards the equator. The sails dropped listlessly. . . . The helm had no control. . . . The rain, at intervals, came pouring down in torrents . . . and then the sun would shoot out his intense rays, bringing weariness to the body and a faintness to the spirit. . . . Then came the gentle breeze. . . . All was animation . . . the log was hove, and six knots reported. "Hold on, good wind," said the Officer of the watch, "and before daylight we shall have crossed the line."

It was a glorious night, and onward went the seventy-four, as steady and as majestic as the monarch of the waves. Early dawn was seen streaking the eastern horizon with its lovely light — the seamen were preparing to wash the decks — yet scarcely a sound disturbed the quiet of the hour. Suddenly a distant rumbling noise was heard, and a loud splashing in the water, like a shoal of grampuses at play. Soon afterwards, an indistinct utterance of voices seemed to be hailing the ship, and in a few minutes a single, or it might be a double pair of lungs, vociferated, "Ho, the ship ahoy."

"Halloo," responded the Lieutenant of the watch, through his brass trumpet, and every one stood still.

"What ship is that?" demanded the voice. "From whence came you, and where are you bound to?"

"This is his Majesty's ship B——, from England, bound to Rio Janeiro," answered the Lieutenant. "Who are you, and where do you come from?"

"Jist back your main-yard and stop her way a bit, if you please," returned the voice, "for my sea-horses are getting rusty from good feed, and won't mind their helm. Stop her way, and you shall soon see who and what I am."

The main-yard was squared — the progress of the ship was deadened — and again, amidst much splashing and confusion under the bows, the same voice shouted, "Gee — wohoy — woay — wo — avast there, and be blowed to you — can't you be still? Heave us the end of a rope, some of you grinning lubbers upon deck — what are you all staring at? — why, did you never any on you see a Triton afore?" The rope was thrown. "Well-behaved, my lads; now jump over here, one or two of you, and lend us a hand aboard." This request was also complied with, and presently a most uncouth-looking figure appeared, with half of his naked body above the bulwark, whilst the whole watch, and many who came stealthily from their hammocks, gathered on the forecastle to see what was going on. A huge mass of sea-weed and

twisted rope-yarns formed a covering for the head, in the shape of an enormous wig, with a considerable length of pigtail behind — the body was covered with large fish-scales, but looked, however, very much like tin and pewter — the arms were bare, but ornamented, as was also the neck, with sea-shells and pieces of rock-coral, all of *divers* colours — the face, as much of it as could be seen, was of a dingy snuff-shaded red — the eyes and features displayed a laughter-loving fondness for fun and mischief.

"Here I am, your honour," said he, taking the forelock of his sea-weed covering between the finger and thumb of his left hand, and lugging it a little forward.

The Lieutenant raised his hat in return to the salute. "And what are your commands with us?" asked he.

"I am a Triton, your honour, sent as a messenger by King Neptune, to welcome all hands of you to his derminions," answered the strange-looking being; "and to say as he purposes to pay you a wisit, with Queen Hamper-tight, to muster the ship's company and claim the humbug (he meant "hommage") of his subjects as have never crossed the equiknockshall line afore. And your honour knows as it's of no use to try and gammon him in the regard of the overhauling, for here's a list of names as he expects to see, to do him soot and sarvice, as well to give a friendly hail to owld ship-mates — that is, I means friends and acquaintances."

"And that's kind on him, too," said the boatswain, who just made his appearance; "but I'm saying, my scaly blade, do you think that he'll recollect us all?"

"No doubt in the world, Master Blowbellows," answered the Triton; "you see as I knows you. But there's much in regard of the cut and shape of the figure-head, and yours arn't to be easily forgotten, any how."

A most insubordinate burst of laughter followed this response, for the boatswain had about as ugly a countenance as any mortal would be glad to get rid of; and he slued round, mumbling to himself, "Ho — ho — that's it, is it? — all discipline hove to the devil. But never mind, my fine fellow, I'll pay you off for your joke before many dog-watches are out, never fear."

When order was somewhat restored, the Triton handed the list to the Lieutenant — (who had laughed as hearty as any of the rest) — and again touching his sea-weed, he disappeared. There was the same splashing under the bows — the same "kim up" and "gee wohy," but in a few minutes all was again silent, the sails were filled, and the watch returned to their several duties.

As soon as the decks were washed and dried, a spare topsail was triced up athwart-ships to the after-shrouds of the fore-rigging, so as to conceal every thing forward from those who were abaft; the hammocks were stowed and the boatswain's mate piped to breakfast. During the meal, the past and expected visits of the morning were amply discussed, and most terrific pictures were given to the uninitiated, of the tortures they would have to undergo.

1844, *continued*

The breeze had subsided to a light pleasant air, that just kept the sails sleeping — the water was as smooth as a mill-pond, and the decks nearly as level as a paved yard. None but those who had crossed the line before were permitted to witness the first reception of the liquid deity, but exactly at four bells (ten o'clock) in the forenoon watch, the same distant hail was heard and answered — the splashing and noise was much greater than before, and shortly afterwards the screen was raised, and the procession moved aft along the gangway. First came two Tritons, as *avant couriers*, with harpoons; then followed the band playing "Come, cheer up, my lads;" and next were four other Tritons, two and two. To them succeeded the car (a gun carriage) of Neptune and Amphitrite, drawn by eight most unruly sea monsters, that caused the monarch to sit very shaky and unsteady — his glittering crown tottering on his head — and though his consort appeared to have been very recently close-shaved, yet there was something extremely main-topmanish in her look, and she had either an immense gum-boil or a huge hillock of tobacco in her left cheek; but this latter article admits of a doubt, as ladies, especially Queens, never chaw their quid. Immediately behind the car walked the most important personage of the whole — the Barber, wielding a long tremendous razor, gapped like a hand-saw; and by his side was his mate, with a lather-brush and a bucket, half filled with a compound of abominations. Next appeared Davy Jones, on the back of one of his subordinates, both displaying sprouting horns on their forehead, and

"Such a length of tail behind."

The procession was closed by Tritons and other aquatic attendants, in their proper, or rather improper costume.

The Captain received them on the quarter-deck, and after the usual compliments and ceremonials, they proceeded to a large tub of water abaft the mainmast, over which a piece of plank was placed for a seat. The first name on the list was called, and being brought up blindfolded, he was placed on the plank to undergo an examination by Davy Jones, whilst the Barber and his assistant stood ready to shave him. The first question was relative to his birth and parentage — and if the innocent deared opened his mouth to reply, slap went the brush, well charged, right into it, and this was repeated as often as he answered. The lather was then daubed over his chin, and the razor roughly scraped a portion of it off; the plank was drawn from under him, and he was left to flounder out of the tub the best way he could, whilst numbers stood ready with buckets to repeat the dose as he ran from his tormentors. The shaving occupied three or four hours, and grog flowed in abundance till the whole ceremony was completed; the

decks were then cleared up, and the people indulged in mirthful recreation through the remainder of the day.

(The Old Sailor's Jolly-Boat, laden with tales, yarns, scraps, fragments pulled by wit, fun . . . and steered by Mathew Henry Barker. London, 1844. v. i, p. 452-456. With illustrations by Robert Cruikshank.)

1845

Wednesday, Dec. 10. This morning, with our royals set to a steady south-easter, we dashed across the equator at longitude thirty. . . .

Old Neptune formerly saluted every ship that crossed the line. He appeared in the shape of some tall sturdy tar, in ox-hide mail, with a long beard of yarn falling below his chin, and locks of the same flowing in drenched ringlets down his shoulders. His trident was a huge harpoon, his pipe the coiled hose of the fire-engine; thus accoutred, he hailed the ship over her bows, and mounting a gun-carriage, was drawn aft to the quarter-deck. Here he summoned the green horns to his presence, and after lathering them from a tub of grease and tar, shaved them with a ship's scraper. Having thus introduced the novice into his service, he returned in triumph to his watery realm. This ceremony was found such an infraction of discipline, that it has been discontinued on board our national ships. Our sailors were allowed to splice the main-brace as a substitute.

(Rev. Walter Colton, U. S. N. Deck and port; or, Incidents of a cruise in the United States Frigate Congress to California. New York, 1860. p. 72-73.)

Just when the party was "discontinued on board our national ships" is uncertain. In recent years the decision to stage the ceremony has rested with the commanding officer of the ship or the senior officer afloat. Just how much was included in the substitute function of "splicing the main-brace" is also unclear. Admiral L. P. Lovette comments: "In the wine mess days of our Navy, up until Josephus Daniel's day, officers bought off with a dozen bottles of beer for the enlisted Father Neptune party who put the show on, all called 'shell backs.'" The practice of issuing a spirit ration was abolished by act of Congress July 14, 1862, but qualified by an exemption of "ale, beer, wine, or other liquors not distilled" in Navy Regulations of 1865. Half a century later Secretary Daniels forbade alcoholic liquors "for drinking purposes," June 1, 1914; but on March 21, 1934, shore establishments were allowed to carry liquors for officers.

[After June, 1845] Crossing the line was quite an event in the lives of those who were now making their first voyage. The ceremonies of shaving, ducking, and tribute-exacting, which we read of as being so much in vogue in former days, on occasions of this kind, have gone out of use in this practical age, and I, who had looked forward with delighted terror to the advent of Neptune, and the initiation of us *green hands*, into the mysteries of the sea god, was obliged to content myself with reminiscences of the older tars, most of whom had undergone the ordeal of Father Neptune's razor and bathing tub, and taken the required obligations, "never to eat brown bread,

1845, continued

when you can get white; never to kiss the maid, when you can kiss the mistress; to eschew water, and drink *grog*; hate a *sojer* and love a pretty girl."

(Charles Nordhoff. *Man-of-war life*. Cincinnati, 1856. p. 102.)

The first edition is supposed to be dated New York, 1855, but seems to have disappeared. In all editions I have seen, except the 1941 reissue, *I served in windjammers*, the chapter continues with some discussion of crossing the line in "the *halcyon days* of the sea" when tars "made as familiar with old Father Neptune and the Flying Dutchman, as a half-starved sojer would with a bread-berge." The "captain of the maintop" spins a long yarn of a sailmaker much addicted to foul language who received grim justice on crossing the line "in the bark Sunderland, bound from Hull to Buenos Ayres." When the Sunderland approached the line the sailmaker "declared his intention never to see Neptune, nor submit himself to the usual ceremonies." One Sunday morning he said "that he wished Jimmy Squarefoot might take him off to perdition that minute, if he ever meant to submit to any of their gammon."

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth before an invisible force dragged him struggling and squirming "across to the lee side, and over the fore-sheet, catching and unreeving the lee fore-tack as he went overboard — and that was the last we saw of him, although we heard a shouting and groaning for more than ten minutes afterward." Some time after they had passed the line they heard "a sound as of a heavy body falling on deck, forward." There they found the sailmaker alive, but little more. He gradually recovered but was a changed man, quiet and silent, not noisy nor quarrelsome. Back in Hull he went ashore, talked with the chaplain at the Sailor's Bethel, never went to sea again, made sure that his tale to the chaplain was "to be printed, but not until after his death." Some day this Hull imprint may turn up, though search so far has been unrewarded.

#### 1849

Saw Brava the next day [16 May 1849], and crossed the Equator on the 23rd. It has been one of the rules of the sea, to introduce green hands and passengers to King Neptune on passing the Line. On one of my voyages to India, I had some half a dozen passengers, scions of the codfish aristocracy of Boston; they were a wild set of boys, and I was not averse to the sailors' giving them a taste of old Neptune's baptism on their promising me that they would be careful not to hurt them. We passed from North to South latitude during the afternoon, and when the shades of evening were falling, a hoarse voice was heard ahead hailing "Ship aho-oa," to which one of the old salts who was on the lookout replied, "Halloo-oah."

"Heave your ship to, for I am coming on board."

The seamen now considering themselves under the immediate orders of the Sea God, without any reference to me or the mates, laid the maintopsail aback, and the ship's headway was stopped. The sailors had previously hoisted a barrel of water up into the foretop, leaving two of their number up there with it.

The rest of them were clustered on the forecastle, when old King Neptune was seen rising up over the bows, first his cap (a mess kid [sic] bottom up with a large tar brush for a plume), then a forehead of yellow metal, with

two great holes for eyes and conchshells for eyeballs, a larger conch for a nose, and a mouth slit from side to side, and filled with small yellow shells for teeth. His neck cloth was a mat, with the corners of a tarpaulin standing out for a collar. He was loosely robed in a spare studding sail and his trident was (of course) the shark grain. He seated himself on the windlass and the sailors all made a profound obeisance to his Majesty.

The "B'hoys" on the quarter deck were enjoying themselves in singing "Dandy Jim" and "Old Dan Tucker," when Neptune made his appearance on deck, and they all went forward to see. Just as they came under the foretop Neptune in a speech was saying, "I rule on the sea, I cause the winds, and I order and it rains," and the sailors in the top capsized the barrel and down came a cataract upon the B'hoys.

It is a rule of the Sea King, to initiate all his fresh subjects by shaving them with an iron hoop, having lathered them with a paint brush dipped in the cook's slush barrel, but he sometimes dispenses with this ceremony, in consideration of a fee of a bottle of rum. All the B'hoys but one preferred to pay the fee. That one was a Mr. Hall, a ministerial student, a miserable bigot, who had the *charity* to tell me that I was no Christian because I professed to be a Unitarian. He was a weak, conceited fool, and apparently thought he was going to Calcutta to teach the Bishop. He was a teetotaller from principle, and could not damage his conscience by bribing a god with a bottle of rum.

So by the command of the Sovereign of the Sea, the seamen blindfolded Hall and seated him on a board laid loosely across a steep tub; half full of pure sea water. One of the tars acted as barber, while Neptune questioned the candidate as to his former life, cautioning him to make true answers on pain of his future displeasure. "Where were you born?" but the moment poor H. opened his mouth to reply, the barber lathered his lips with a paint brush, and afterward scraped off the sweet scented lather with his iron hoop. Then at a signal from his Majesty, the board slipped out, and H. slipped into the steep tub and the sailor[s] scrubbed and rubbed him till their sovereign master told them to stop. Neptune then bestowed his blessing upon the novice, with a free permit to traverse any part of his dominion in future.

When this ceremony had concluded, and the bottle of rum had been discussed by all hands, they formed in procession and escorted his Majesty three times around the ship, and amid the noise and confusion of three real hearty sailor-like cheers, the God of the Sea plunged into his own dominions and drifted astern in a blaze of illumination.

Now, all this was a farce got up by the old salts on board, one of them personating Neptune, and a large fender was thrown overboard at the close of the ceremony, accompanied by a number of empty bread barrels, filled with oakum and ready to be ignited as they were thrown overboard. Hall was, however, so weak as to believe for a long while that it was a reality.

1849, *continued*

On this voyage I am at present relating, I thought it prudent to put a veto upon any such demonstration as I have just described, much to the disappointment of the old seamen and some of the passengers.

([George Coffin.] A pioneer voyage to California and round the world. 1849 to 1852. Ship *Alhambra*, Captain George Coffin. Chicago, 1908. p. 17-19.)

Diligent and persistent search failed to bring any connection with publisher or author, and I venture to print this in hope I may be forgiven and excused if thus I seem to break any copyright or other right.

The Weather continued fine and the gentle N.E. trade winds carried us quickly along. The watch on deck during the day were all busily employed, some fitting riggin', some making mats for putting on places in the riggin' and spars where any chafe might occur, some making spunyarn. The rattle of the machine used in making same afforded music for those employed.

One evening as we were about on the Equator, with our watch on deck, the 3d Mate, 4th Mate, the other boat-steerers and myself, standing on the weather side of the deck abreast the mainmast, some leaning against the braces coiled up on the pins in the fife rail, talking and smoking, the 4th Mate proposed having Old Neptune to come on board when we crossed the Line.

"Who is to take the part of Neptune?" said the 2d Mate. "Oh, for that matter, I will," said the 4th Mate. The 2d Mate said, "All right, I will see the Mate and Captain about it, and let you know what they say." The next night we had the middle watch. The 2d Mate told us that both Captain and Mate would help the fun along in any way they could. "I have got a rig most ready, and tomorrow can perfect it. If you say so, we will have it tomorrow night." "There are a number in the forecabin who have been to sea before. We must let them know about this," said the 2d Mate. "All right," said the 4th Mate. "How many are in this watch? Better have them come aft in a quiet way, and the boat-steerers can tell them."

Before the watch was out we had told the five or six able seamen what was up, and for them to tell the able seamen in the Larboard watch about it and be sure not to let the green hands into the secret.

The next day at noon, after taking the observation and working up the Latitude, the Captain said to the Mate in the hearing of the man at the wheel, who was one of the green hands, "By our reckoning we shall cross the Line by seven or eight P. M. I wonder if Old Neptune will come on board?" "Oh, yes," said the Mate. "He has got so now that he will not let any whalermen pass his Empire without stopping them." They knew that as soon as the wheel was relieved and the man went forward, he would carry the news of what had been said.

Just before the men came down from the masthead at sundown, the captain hailed the boat-steerer who had the masthead at the main: "Do you see anything of the Line?" "I think I do," he replied. "Take the glass and see if you can make out anything like Old Neptune's boat." "There is something ahead, but too far off for me to make out what," was the reply. The Mate turned to the Captain, shaking his head knowingly, "That's him, no doubt."

As soon as it began to grow dark the green hands were sent below, about eight or nine of them. The fore-castle scuttle was closed and guarded by three or four of the able seamen, the main hatch taken off, and one of the largest sized blubber tubs hoisted on deck. It would hold about sixteen or seventeen barrels of water. This was placed on deck just abaft the tryworks, about six feet below the top. The tub then was filled to the brim with salt water and two wide boards were run from its edge to about two feet above the after part of the works. A seat was made at this end, just high enough for one to sit on the ends of the boards. This seat was made to swing on its side next the projecting ends of the boards, the feet resting on the lower side or bottom. When this was lifted a person could not help from tipping backwards and sliding down heels over head into the tank of water. Some steps were placed from the forehatch to the top of the works on the forward part of the tryworks, so one could ascend that way.

During the time these preparations were going on, the 4th Mate had put on his rig and come on deck. His feet were encased in two old mats made of spunyarn that had been partly worn out in the jaws of two topsail yards. They were lashed on with rope yarns and came above his ankles. Over his pants in front were two thrummed mats (made of strips of canvas with pieces of strands cut from un-laid rope, say, three inches in length, and sewed by the middle to the canvas just so far apart that when the two ends of each were unraveled they would meet: these were used in stopping the chafing of yards and riggin'). For a coat he had an old short oil jacket that had become quite dark from use. Over it and his shoulders hung down long pieces of spunyarn back and front, to represent seaweed. He had whiskers, reaching down to his waist, made of white Manila yarns, partly un-laid, sewn on a piece of cloth that tied over his face leaving only the eyes, nose and mouth exposed. His head had a wig of frowsy okum and short rope yarns in the way of hair, on top of which rested an immense Turk's-head that had been worked out of 12-thread rattlin stuff. In one hand he held a pair of grains [a four-pronged harpoon], in the other an old speaking trumpet.

All being ready, Neptune worked his way out on the bowsprit as far as the fore-topmast backstays. These went down through cleats each side of it, and the ends led beneath to the bows, where he took his place. As the two stays afforded him good standing and the use of his hands, in which he carried the trumpet (for he had left his trident until he could take his seat on the tryworks), raising the trumpet to his mouth, he bellowed out, "Ship ahoy!"

1849, *continued*

The Captain, who stood on the main hatch with his trumpet in hand, raised it to his lips and yelled back, "Hello!"

OLD NEPTUNE: What ship is that?

CAPTAIN: Ship *C. W. Morgan*.

NEPTUNE: Have you any subjects for me?

CAPTAIN: Yes, a few.

NEPTUNE: Haul aback your mainyard. I will come aboard.

The order was given to haul up the mainsail and haul aback the mainyard. The men shouted the order back at the top of their voices, and with a loud tramping and throwing down of ropes made such a confusion on deck that the poor devils below were about frightened out of their wits.

Neptune got in on deck and mounted the tryworks, sat down on a scrap tub turned bottom up, and sung out loud enough for them in the forecandle to hear, "Bring on the youngsters! I am in a hurry. Have lots of ships to visit tonight. One at a time."

None seemed willing to come first, but when told if they kept Old Neptune waiting it would be harder for them, one ventured up the steps and had hardly struck the deck before he was blindfolded.

He was one of the Smart Aleck kind — should think, by his looks and actions, he had been one of the kind sometimes seen in country villages, swaggering into the country store, with pink necktie, scarlet vest, standup collar, cutaway coat and natty cane, with a damn-my-eyes cant to his hat, thinking every girl who should happen to look at him was dead gone, at least on his bold shape and corkscrew legs.

He came out of the forecandle scuttle with a swing-and-strut air of "Here I am! You cannot play your trick on me, if you do on the common green hands." He objected to having his eyes covered but it was of no use, for three or four of the old hands had hold of him by the arms and body. He had only a glimpse of Old Neptune in the light of the lanterns, which made him a bit quiet, so he was soon blindfolded and led up on the tryworks to the anxious seat.

Neptune spoke to him in a voice that sounded like coming through a cart-load of rasps:

"Young man! There is every reason to suppose by your actions and talk since you came on board this ship, so I am informed, that you are a bad, bad man. But let us hope that when you have been shaved and christened, it will have the effect on you to cause a change in your former ways, make you a good sailor, and learn you how to be a man. I have a few questions to ask before we go on with our mild and soothing initiations. You are expected to answer promptly and open your mouth wide."

By the time Old Nep finished, the young chap had lost some of his bold swagger and began to think there might be more in it than he thought. It could be seen that he was getting nervous.

OLD NEPTUNE: What is your name?

GREEN HAND: Joseph Blake.

OLD NEPTUNE: Hereafter, while on board this ship, you will be called Joe, and to which may be added, "The Lady Killer," on state occasions. I have one more question to ask, and a little advice to give before we make a clean-shaved sailor of you. The advice is this: Never to eat brown bread when you can get white, unless you like it best. Never kiss the servant maid if you can get the mistress, unless the mistress is not so pretty. Did you ever kiss a Negro girl? Answer loud!

GREEN HAND: NOOOOOO-oh-oh-ooo . . .

He seemed quite mad at the last question, and tried to answer loud, as ordered, by opening his mouth to its full extent; but before the "no" could well get out between his teeth, the tar brush covered thickly was rammed halfway down his throat. Gagging, spitting and struggling, he almost cleared himself of the boys who held him. His face was covered with a vile decoction composed of coal tar, slush and softsoap, and scraped with a piece of iron hoop, he groaning at the rough edges. During this time he had been asked by Neptune if he could swim. When he said he could, he was told, "On that perhaps your life will depend before you get done with this ceremony."

A bucket of water in the hands of one of the men, when the shaving was finished, was dashed full in his face, his heels were elevated and he went rolling down the incline, striking the water. He struck out like a man to swim, yelling for a rope, as the boys sung out a "Man overboard!"

Of course two or three strokes brought him to the tub's side, where he tore the bandage from his eyes and crawled out on deck. The wild look he gave Neptune, the tub of water, and the men shrieking with laughter, only made the mirth greater. He soon got over his fright, though, and was just as eager for the next one to show up as any.

The custom of having Neptune on board when crossing the Line is fast going out of date. No doubt, in some instances green hands were roughly used; but in no instance could they have been so dangerously made to suffer as in the old-time initiation of keel-hauling, as it was called, which has caused the loss of lives.

The manner of keel-hauling a victim the first time he crossed the Line was to take him out on the martingale guys — ropes leading from the bows, one off each side, to a spar hanging up and down, one end of the same being fast to the underside of the bowsprit nearly at its end.

A rope was made fast to his feet and another one made fast to his body, under his arms. The one to his feet was led aft outside the rail, clear of every-

1849, *continued*

thing, so it would go under the ship. All being ready, the poor devil was tumbled overboard. He would sink far enough for the ship to pass her bows over him, and the rope aft, being hauled taut, would bring him square under the ship. The rope forward was slacked away, on, just enough to go aft on the ship, as wished for.

As soon as the man came up to the rudder, a dozen or more men would clap on the rope and bowse him over the taffrail in on deck, most often insensible, by bringing him up heels first. A good deal of the water he had swallowed would run out. It was a barbarous custom and should have been stopped long before it was.

(Nelson Cole Haley. Whale hunt. New York, 1948. p. 36-42.)

Noteworthy as one of the rather few stories staged on a whaler.  
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In good time making the desired longitude upon the equator, a few leagues west of the Gallipagos, we spent several weeks chassezing across the Line, to and fro, in unavailing search for our prey. For some of the hunters believe, that whales, like the silver ore in Peru, run in veins through the ocean. So, day after day, daily; and week after week, weekly, we traversed the self-same longitudinal intersection of the self-same Line; till we were almost ready to swear that we felt the ship strike every time her keel crossed that imaginary locality.

(Herman Melville. *Mardi: and a voyage thither*. New York, 1849. v. 1, p. 14-15.)

Once more mention by a whaler, once more a crossing with no ceremony — but worth quoting for the sake of Melville. “Chassezing” is a rather unusual variant, actually closer to its French origin, of the usual “sashy” or “shashy” used by the square dance announcer or by anyone meaning “to dance around” or “to go to and fro.”

Apropos of repeated crossings, Admiral Leland P. Lovette wrote me: “In 1925, when in the U.S.S. *Memphis* returning from Australia and New Zealand, we did much the same thing. For two days we ran eastward along the Line, going back and forth a few times each day, so that all hands could say they had crossed the Line say fifty times. Admiral Harry Yarnell then commanding the Asiatic Fleet, having crossed many times, thought it novel before the U.S.S. *Augusta* crossed on a following day, to be catapulted in a plane and flown over before nightfall. All of this helps for the ‘build up’ with a crew who are to get the works the next day.”

February 27 (*Tuesday*): Today we enter the tropics and last night for the first time the Portuguese Cross became visible above the horizon. Read a little in the hope of reviving my astronomical knowledge, but Spanish makes slow progress.

March 4 (*Sunday*): At 11 a. m. had service by Mr. Fitch. . . . Most of the crew sat grouped bare-headed upon the floor, forming a “toute ensemble”

interesting, picturesque, and impressive, although the pleasurable feelings excited by the spectacle were somewhat marred by the fact of one of the crew being whipped and put in irons in consequence of refusing to wash himself and attend service.

March 8 (*Thursday*): Neptune today made his promised visit, with wife and attendants . . . and having drunk the health of the captain and passengers of the good ship *Panama* in a glass of grog ordered up from the cabin by the captain, he and his attendants retired from the quarterdeck to the fore-castle. Here followed the more serious part of the performance. Upon a long plank reaching from the caboose to the fore-castle were arranged a number of buckets of water; beneath the plank and upon the stock of one of the guns was prepared a not very pleasant seat, while opposite this seat, in all the terrors of absolute authority, sat Neptune and his consort surrounded by his attendants. On receiving an order to that effect, the attendants brought forward one of the crew who had not before "crossed the line;" a bandage was placed over his eyes; two or three men held him in his seat with his head back; a dirty, black piece of tarred sail-cloth, about a yard square was placed under his chin, and the barber stands ready with paint brush and tar pail. Neptune then addresses him some questions and as he opens his mouth to answer it is filled with tar, with which his whole face is painted. The long razor is then produced and his face goes through the operation of being scraped, after which three pails of water are thrown suddenly upon him from the plank above, and he is then at liberty to find his way to the slush barrel and there employ himself for an hour or two in freeing his face from the sticky lather. This operation was performed upon many of the crew besides several forward cabin passengers, and even the second mate himself, who submitted to it quite cheerfully and then exerted himself strenuously in bringing others to the same condemnation. Some surrendered themselves with the resignation of martyrs, others struggled and fought; one secreted himself in the rigging, but was obliged to come down; another poor fellow, a French waiter, appeared frightened almost out of his senses; he begged, cried, entreated, implored, offered his purse and all it contained, if they would but release him, and finally went through the operation belowing like a calf.

(Clarence Blair Mitchell. Mitchell record. [Princeton:] Privately printed, 1926. p. 110-112.)

Clarence Green Mitchell, Columbia 1847, at the age of 23, sailed from New York on the side-wheel steamer *Panama* under command of Lieutenant Porter, son of David Dixon Porter, the naval officer.

The quotations from the privately printed family record are made with permission of the author, who reports that the omissions in the original manuscript (indicated here as in the printed text) are of no importance.

1850

Wednesday, November 6. Crossed the equator at about 11 p. m. "Old Nep" came on board and effectively "shaved" the starboard watch, which was below at the time. The larboard watch being on deck, escaped entirely.

(James F. Munger. Two years in the Pacific and Arctic oceans and China, being a journal of every day life on . . . a whaling voyage. Vernon [Oneida County, New York,] 1852. p. 13.)

Somewhat eloquent understatement.

1851

. . . In the Small Cause Court at Madras in September, 1851, the Captain and First Officer of the *True Briton* were separately sued by a passenger named King, a ship's steward, who had been lathered with a mixture of flour and water and well drenched in salt water in a "crossing of the line" diversion on board that ship. . .

The full text of the story is included in the case of Lieutenant Maw under date of 1801, is referred to here in chronological order, but is better read in the fuller report set forth as integral part of the 1801 article.

1853

April 2nd. The weather hot and salty with frequently showers. To day we crossed the line, that imaginary boundary between the hemispheres called "the line," once the terror of Greenhorns on the accounts of the visits of his aquatic majesty, old Neptune, with the usual accompaniments of shaving and ducking etc.

(Bluejackets with Perry in Japan. A day-by-day account kept by Master's Mate John R. C. Lewis and Cabin Boy William B. Allen. Edited with an Introduction, by Henry F. Graff. *Bulletin* of The New York Public Library. v. 55, no. 1, Jan. 1951. p. 15.)

Did "old Neptune, with the usual accompaniments of shaving and ducking" come aboard on this trip? Or, didn't he?

In 1853, or certainly in the minds of Lewis and Allen on this trip, "Greenhorns" were the "pollywogs" of our day.

c. 1855

On the 13th of December [1860], we crossed the equator in longitude 24° 30' west. The weather was delightful; pleasant breezes and sunshine; the heat not uncomfortable, but just enough to make thin clothing desirable. Old Neptune did not favor us with a visit, although rather fearfully expected by some. This practice, we believe, has become obsolete, and we rejoice heartily at it, for a more barbarous one never was invented.

Barney was very anxiously and busily engaged during the middle and morning watches, and most of the day, in looking for the "line" as we crossed it. He had talked of nothing else for several days, and was keeping a bright

look-out for it, losing his watch below for the purpose. But he was doomed to disappointment. No "line" was visible when we crossed the equator, and poor Barney went below, when the announcement was made that we were south of it, muttering to himself, "It is certainly strange; I have often seen it on the maps, and I can't imagine how we crossed it without seeing it." Barney found out his error before the voyage was up.

(Life and adventure in the South Pacific. By a roving printer. New York, 1861. p. 41.)

Another "roving printer" calling himself Mark Twain tells later of much the same disappointment when fellow passengers failed to find that line they hoped to see if not to feel.

### 1855

La procession fait plusieurs fois le tour du navire; elle fait halte d'abord non loin de la statue de la Clorinde, [nom de la frégate dont il est question dans le roman], placée à l'avant. Le père la Ligne déclare ne point la connaître; en effet, la frégate, nouvellement lancée, n'avait pas encore passé l'Equateur. Un des officiants s'arme d'une hache pour la punir de sa témérité. La figure va voler en éclats. Heureusement, le commandant est prévenu par l'enfant de chœur. Une rançon magnifique rachète la tête de l'emblème. Le senhor Cesar Chifarote, marquis das Penilhas et la senhora Leonarda, marquise da Viração, furent enveloppés simultanément par les diables et par les gendarmes; ils marchèrent de force et prirent place en même temps sur le siège aquatique dont ils ne devaient pas toujours ignorer les secrets; car, au moment le plus pathétique du discours de Coco-Bel-OEil, la planche fut brusquement retirée. Un démon caché s'accrocha au collet du grant sénéchal, qui entraîna sa soeur dans sa chute.

— Horreur! abomination! au secours! criait la marquise.

— Par la sambleul ventrebleul criait le marquis.

— *Parafagaramus! argentibus courtibus! baptemus du Perus la Lignibus!* disait gravement Coco-Bel-OEil, tandis que le barbier, en deux coups de rasoir de bois, noircissait la joue gauche du marquis et placardait de blanc la joue droite de la duègne.

— *Coleratis malsainibus!* ajouta le grand-prêtre en voyant que les deux personnages ne s'apaisaient point et criaient de plus belle.

*Pompibus!!!*

A ce mot du rituel matelotesque un seau d'eau de mer tomba sur la tête du couple infortuné, qui fut ainsi puni de n'avoir déposé qu'une cruzade dans le bassin d'argent, parcimonie qui leur valut le baptême dans toute sa rigueur.

— *Parfaitementé baptisatis!* dit alors Coco-Bel-OEil.

Un rire homérique accueillit le grand sénéchal et la dame d'atours, quand ils s'enfuirent de la chapelle. Ils portèrent leurs plaintes au commandant qui les renvoya sérieusement à Neptune, lequel commandait dans son porte-voix:

1855, *continued*

— Chacun à son poste pour éternuer! Hale les boulines du cabestan! Hisse la cale sur le pont! Attrape à cuire la soupe!

— Vous voyez que j'ai abdiqué pour aujourd'hui, dit le comte; adressez-vous au dieu de la mer.

Neptune entendit et reprit dans son porte-voix:

— Charivari!

— Et pour qui? demanda l'équipage ameuté.

— Pour le marquis et pour la marquise aussi! . . .

(Guillaume Joseph Gabriel de La Landelle. *Les passagères*. Valenciennes, 1855. apud Mélusine, v. 2, 1884-5.)

The catalogue of the Bibliothèque Nationale notes that this novel is "Extrait de l'Impartial du Nord. — Même ouvrage que: Le Docteur Esturgeot," and for the latter gives the imprint thus: "Paris: P. Permain, 1850. 2 v. in 8°."

This first instance of a threat of smashing the figure head of a ship newly entering Neptune's kingdom confirms the second-hand story noted above under 1816.

### 1858

On the 18th of January, 1858 [presumably Old Style], advancing at a creeping pace, we finally reached the equator. The event was celebrated in an appropriate fashion. As luck would have it, it was Sunday. All the flags were turned into costumes. A throne, draped with red pennants, was set up near the smoke stack. At four o'clock, to the accompaniment of a drum, a tambourine and an accordion, a procession started from the crew's quarters. It included a nude "Negro," blackened with soot and wearing a red sash; a Turk; a muzhik with a trained bear which was turning somersaults and cutting capers as instructed by his master. There were also soldiers and a fantastic cook carrying ladles and sieves, and at last, Neptune himself, impersonated by the ship's wag Khudobin. The part of Neptune's spouse was played by Vaska, a stoker. To the accompaniment of the wildest music, the procession made the round of the Clipper. Finally Neptune mounted the throne and was surrounded by his motley retinue. The first one to be presented to him was the captain, who made a contribution only for the ship, since he had crossed the line before. The officers placed coins on a separate tray. All swore that they would never court a sailor's lawful wife. The real fun began when the sailor's turn came. Upon some the sea god's disfavor was visited with special severity. A stream of water from a pump is no joking matter. Clerks and other folk whom seamen are not fond of had to suffer the most. Half a dozen men held the victim down and in spite of all his efforts to avoid it, the water from the pump squirted right into his face and he was forced to swallow a good deal of salt water. The last ones to be thus treated were naturally Neptune himself and his spouse, who played their parts with resourcefulness and wit. They were the worst sufferers of all.

The day ended with songs and an extra glass of vodka.

(A. Vysheslavtzev. *Ocherki perom i karandoshom iz Krugosvetnovo plavaniya v 1857, 1858, 1859, 1860.* [Pen and pencil sketches from the voyage around the world made in 1857-1860.] St. Petersburg, Moscow, 1867. 2nd ed., rev., p. 43-44.)

The translation is by Dr. Avraham Yarmolinsky.

By this time the crossing is but one more day's work, at least we find no mention of "mass and prayers of thanksgiving" nor toasts to His Imperial Majesty as Lisyaniki on the *Neva* reported in 1803.

#### 1864

The Tropic of Cancer was passed with festivities for the amusement of the sailors, — a custom which is usually observed only at the crossing of the equator. Sailors disguised as Neptune, Amphitrite, and other sea gods and goddesses, appeared in triumphal cars upon the deck, made orations to the Emperor and officers, and promised their blessing to the *unbaptized*, whereupon the signal was given for a general showering and sprinkling, from which the ladies only were entirely exempt. The water ran in streams over the lower deck; at the close, the sailors danced merrily to the sound of music, performed by a well-trained band, which afforded us a very pleasant recreation every day.

(Countess Paula Kollonitz. *The court of Mexico.* By the Countess Paula Kollonitz, lady-in-waiting to the Empress Charlotte. Translated by J. E. Ollivant, M.A., Balliol College, Oxford. 2nd ed. London: Saunders, Otley, and Co., 1868. p. 59.)

Crossing must have been in May, 1864 as they sailed from Trieste on April 14, 1864. Preface is dated August, 1866; preface to second edition, Vienna, May 30, 1867; preface by translator, Llandaff, September 25, 1867.

#### 1866

On the 4th of August, 1866, crossed the Equator in about Longitude 1° 27' 21" west, but were not favored with a visit from Neptune, who would have had ample work from the number of green hands on board. As the days of offerings to the Monarch of the Sea are over, he might be excused for a display of ill-temper, but in case our escaping the penalty of weather is due to disagreement between him and the clerk of the weather, we are perfectly willing, from our knowledge of the "Ashuelot's" seagoing qualities, that the difficulty may continue.

(Manuscript diary of William A. H. Allen, assistant engineer, U. S. Navy, in Library of Congress.)

Note how in 1834 Dana says that "this ancient custom is now seldom allowed, unless there are passengers on board," but leaves uncertain whether he is talking of merchant ships alone or of the common custom on merchant or naval ships. In 1844 the tradition is faithfully observed, even to the shaving and baptising of "the Reverend Clergy" in person of Father DeSmet and his clerical assistants on their way to Oregon (DeSmet enough of a good fellow at the end to thank "them for the entertainment they had afforded.") In 1845 Chaplain Colton of our navy reports that "this ceremony was found such an infraction of discipline, that it has been discontinued on board our national ships. Our sailors were allowed to splice the main-

1866, *continued*

brace as a substitute." Seven years later than this 1866 note, we shall see Allen telling of the visit without further comment than that Neptune "came on board and received about a hundred green ones as an addition to his kingdom," on the U.S.S. *Richmond*.

Dana and DeSmet, to be sure, sailed on merchant ships — not on a national. Naval regulations as to liquor are noted under Colton, 1845.

1869

. . . . C'était le soir, à minuit; l'équipage entier respirait le frais au gaillard d'arrière, lorsqu'une grêle de haricots tomba de la mâture.

— C'est le baptême qui commence, dit des haubans une voix de rogomme, gare là-dessous, voici le père la Ligne qui s'avance!

C'était le père la Ligne en effet qui, sous la figure du deuxième harponneur, descendait du grand mât.

Ceux qui n'avaient pas encore payé leur tribut à l'Equateur, se sauvèrent aussitôt, qui dans les chambres, qui dans la cale; le chirurgien épouvanté se cacha dans une barrique.

Le père la Ligne descendit de la mâture, affublé d'une sorte de costume moyen âge en toile à voile; une longue perruque et une barbe en étoupe blanche garnissaient en partie sa tête, de façon à lui donner un air vénérable, car le père la Ligne, comme Mathusalem, ne compte plus ses années.

Le troisième harponneur, pompeusement paré d'un costume de Neptune, se laissa glisser au pied du mât de misaine; il tenait d'une main un harpon en guise de trident.

La déesse Cérès descendit à son tour du mât d'artimon; c'était le plus grassouillet et le moins barbu de tous les matelots: il portait, on ne peut mieux, sa robe olympique, la relevant d'une main comme une lady et portant de l'autre en éventail les attributs de son personnage.

A peine ces trois grotesques eurent-ils touché le pont, qu'une beuglement formidable retentit au bout du grand foc et que le maître tonnelier apparut déguisé en Pluton.

Le quatuor, s'étant réuni, fit trois ou quatre fois le tour du navire, jetant des poignées de haricots au nez de ceux qui les regardaient de trop près, s'arrêta autour du grand mât et tint conseil.

A trois heures du matin, il commanda ceux déjà baptisés pour dresser la tente du suprême aréopage.

Cette tente fut établie à tribord sur le grand panneau.

On y plaça des sièges en gradins, et devant ces sièges, le tonneau à bascule, la peinture, le goudron, la farine, le suif, l'huile, le duvet de poule, etc.

A six heures du matin, on pavaisa le navire.

A sept heures, tout était prêt.

Cependant, avant de commencer, il fallut précéder à la bénédiction du mât d'artimon, ainsi que cela se pratique ordinairement.

On commanda tout le monde sur le pont, on pria le capitaine de s'avancer, et quand il se trouva au milieu du cercle, le maître charpentier, la hache

levée, lui dit qu'il allait à l'instant couper le mât, s'il ne consentait à le faire *border*, ce qui veut dire arroser le gosier de l'équipage.

Le capitaine versa lui-même un quart de cognac à chaque homme et remit pour toute la journée son autorité aux mains de père la Ligne avec lequel il trinqua.

Les officiers burent aussi à la santé de Cérès, de Pluton et de Neptune.

Ces préliminaires terminés, on enferma dans les chambres tous les hommes devant être baptisés, on tira bon gré mal gré le petit chirurgien de sa barrique, on le verrouilla soigneusement dans une cabine, malgré ses lamentations, puis ceux qui devaient faire partie du cortège allèrent s'habiller, chacun suivant son personnage.

A neuf heures tout le monde étant prêt, le carillon de la cloche du bord annonça le défilé.

Voici l'ordre dans lequel il marchait:

Le suisse et sa hallebarde.

Le prêtre chantant dans son bréviaire une macaronée appropriée à la circonstance.

Un enfant de chœur, c'était un novice breton, le plus petit; à ses côtés trottaient le bedeau, le plus rond de l'équipage.

Le père la Ligne et sa vénérable moitié, appuyés l'un sur l'autre.

Neptune et son trident.

Pluton et sa famille.

Le barbier et son garçon.

Puis deux gendarmes traînant, la corde au cou, le malheureux dont le supplice s'apprêtait.

La procession s'arrêta sous le tente.

Le père la Ligne et sa femme prirent place sur les fauteuils de la présidence, les autres dignitaires s'assirent à leurs postes respectifs, et l'on reconduisit les néophytes dans les chambres, à l'exception du chirurgien par lequel on devait commencer.

Le pauvre petit homme criait grâce avec un accent capable d'émouvoir les coeurs les plus endurcis; mais le père la Ligne est d'une orthodoxie féroce; il a horreur des anabaptistes; il les poursuit, les châtie, les baptise, quoi qu'ils fassent et pour franchir l'Equateur sans encombre à l'avenir, il faut absolument passer sous les fourches de sa religion.

Au fond, la pensée du dieu est charitable; il veut, en imposant ce premier sacrifice aux matelots, les soustraire aux flammes éternelles, s'ils meurent pendant la traversée.

Le chirurgien était donc resté devant le terrible tribunal; on lui avait lié les pieds et les mains, puis on lui avait bandé les yeux.

Sur un signe du chef, le prêtre entonna un psaume insensé, et le barbier s'approcha pour faire la toilette du patient, auquel il coupa d'abord les cheveux du côté gauche et la moustache du côté droit. Il lui savonna ensuite la tête et la figure avec un mélange de goudron, de peinture, de coaltar, et le

1869, *continued*

fit mettre à genoux sur le plancher bascule, recouvrant la cuve qui servait de fonds baptismaux.

Cette cuve contenait douze barriques d'eau; elle était pleine jusqu'aux bords.

Le chirurgien voulut crier, on lui imposa silence en lui appliquant sur la bouche un porte-voix dans lequel il devait prêter le serment solennel de ne jamais séduire la femme d'un marin.

A peine eut-il ouvert la bouche pour répéter les paroles du prêtre que Neptune introduisit brusquement dans le portevoix un seau d'eau salée, en même temps que l'enfant de chœur en glissait sournoisement une pinte sur le bras levé du patient, entre la peau et la manche de l'habit.

— Je suis mort, s'écria le chirurgien à moitié asphyxié et toussant de façon à rendre l'âme, tout en cherchant à essuyer l'eau qui lui glissait le long des reins.

— Confessez-vous, mon fils, dit alors le prêtre d'un ton sépulcral, votre dernière heure est arrivée.

— Ma dernière heure?

— Silence! hurla l'enfant de chœur en enfonçant jusqu'au manche, dans la bouche ouverte du chirurgien, un pinceau de goudron qui lui servait de goupillon.

— Hélas! prenez pitié de moi, sainte Vierge.

— Il ne s'agit pas ici de la sainte Vierge, mais du père La Ligne, riposta rudement le prêtre. Allons, pas d'embardees, confessez-vous, si vous ne voulez mourir en état de péché.

Le bedeau lut alors à haute voix une liste des crimes auprès desquels ceux des Sodomites et des Gomorrhéens ne sont que simples peccadilles, et tandis que l'enfant de chœur secouait en guise d'eau bénite son pinceau de goudron, sur le visage du pénitent, le prêtre apprêta l'hostie de l'absolution.

Cette hostie consistait en un morceau de pomme de terre crue, enduit de coaltar et de sciure de bois.

— Ouvrez le panneau (la bouche), cria le suisse.

Le chirurgien obéit comme un automate, le prêtre lui posa délicatement l'amère pastille au fond du palais, Neptune fit jouer la bascule et le néophyte reçut enfin le baptême dans l'eau salée de la cuve.

Quand on le remit sur le pont, il était complètement ahuri; on le délia, on lui rendit la vue, et il reçut pour finir la bénédiction du père La Ligne qui permit d'embrasser son épouse en témoignage de sa haute satisfaction.

Cette dernière humiliation subie, on lui présenta le bidon des offrandes et on lui permit d'aller se débarbouiller.

Ficel devait suivre immédiatement le chirurgien; mais comme il paraissait se prêter de bonne grâce au jeu, le baptême allait être réduit pour lui à sa simple expression, c'est-à-dire qu'après lui avoir versé deux ou trois seaux d'eau sur le chef et lui avoir fait faire un plongeon dans la cuve, le père La Ligne le renverrait des fins de la plainte.

Mais cela ne faisait pas l'affaire du sous-lieutenant, qui ne l'aimait pas.

Dès que ce dernier vit le tribunal disposé en faveur du sculpteur, il insinua que Fichel avait paru braver le père Equateur et qu'il était bon de doubler les épreuves au lieu de les diminuer. Il proposa, en conséquence, de bander les yeux à Fichel, de l'attacher par une drisse en dehors du navire et de lui faire prendre un bain dans la mer . . . L'idée ne fut pas goûtée par l'équipage . . .

Deux heures après le baptême était terminé.

Pendant, comme plusieurs novices demandaient à voir la ligne, Lussan apporta sa longue vue, sur le verre de laquelle il avait collé un cheveu qui simulait assez bien une ligne au soleil.

— Un instant, fit alors le petit chirurgien en s'avancant vivement; j'ai été baptisé le premier, je veux être le premier à voir la ligne, il m'en a coûté assez pour passer dessous.

— Soit, dit avec un grand sérieux le bonhomme Equateur; regardez.

— Je regarde, repartit le chirurgien posant son oeil sur l'optique, bien convaincu que la ligne allait lui apparaître.

— Voyez-vous?

— Oui, oui, oui, je vois, dit-il, émerveillé, contemplant le cheveu placé à l'opposé du verre oculaire.

— Hissel fit alors le père Equateur à Neptune, qui versa un baquet d'eau sur la tête du naif chirurgien.

— Ah! exclama celui-ci en se sauvant; c'est une indignité, je n'en joue plus; le baptême est fini.

— Oui, repartit Cérés; mais on ne prend pas gratis la hauteur du soleil.

Et la déesse administra sur le ventre du petit bonhomme une tape qui le fit ployer en deux.

— J'en appellerai au gouvernement, repartit le chirurgien indigné.

— Le gouvernement, c'est moi, repartit le père La Ligne en se renversant.

— Hourra! hourra! crièrent en chœur les matelots, tandis que Neptune braillait:

— Qui veut voir la ligne?

Bientôt, le père Equateur, son épouse et toute sa famille furent assaillis par une grêle de projectiles; l'eau, la farine, le noir de fumée, les haricots jaillirent d'un bout à l'autre du trois-mâts, au milieu de la gaieté générale. Lussan même ne put se soustraire à cette avalanche, et Cérés étant montée dans la mâture, lui versa sur la tête une seille d'eau qu'elle y avait halée à cet effet.

Seule, la cloche du diner mit fin à la mêlée.

Pour cette solennité, le menu se composait de tout ce qu'il y avait de mieux dans les provisions du navire.

Le repas se prolongea fort avant dans la nuit . . .

(A. Duguay. Le roman d'un baleinier. Paris, 1869. apud Mélusine, v. 2, 1884-5, columns 276-279.)

Another story laid on a whaler.

1870

May 11. From 4 to 6 p. m. At 4.30 called all hands to muster & commenced to read the Articles of War, when the ship was hailed, the engines stopped and the ship boarded by his Oceanic Majesty, King Neptune; when certificates were given to all those who had crossed the line, and tribute exacted from the remainder. Steamed ahead again at 4.40. Weather warm & clear.

(Log of U.S.S. Flagship *Colorado*, 1st Rate, 47 guns. Captain George H. Cooper, U. S. Navy. At sea making passage to China.)

Ten minutes were long enough this time according to the ship's log. At least the engines were stopped that long.

The *Colorado* was commanded by Rear Admiral John Rodgers and bore Frederick Ferdinand Low, our Minister to China, on a mission to negotiate a treaty with Korea.

Thanks to Rear Admiral John B. Heffernan, U.S.N. (Ret.), now Director of Naval Records and Naval History (OP-29), we can quote the text of the certificate from King Neptune, Sovereign of the Seas, Prince of Blowers, thus:

Know ye all by these presents

That R. Adm. John Rodgers A SEA WARRIOR in the service of my beloved daughter-in-law COLUMBIA, having this day (or previously) paid the tribute required by me from all crossing the Equinoctial Line, is now FOREVER EXEMPT from any and all tolls, fines, or taxes that may be levied by me or by my successors; and should he enter our element, by accident or otherwise, I abjure all Sharks, Devil Fish, and Sea Serpents to respect his person UNLESS VERY HUNGRY: Provided he never ceased to uphold the honor of the Flag, which, next to my own, I hold most sacred.

Done on Board COLUMBIA'S War Chariot, the COLORADO, near the Equator on this 15th day of May, 1870.

This voyage brought forth another record of the crossing, *Forecastle Echoes; or, Yarns in verse; treating of noteworthy events in the cruise of the U.S. Frigate Colorado, flagship of the Asiatic fleet, 1870-71*. By Geo. R. Willis. Printed at the *Japan Gazette* office, 87 Main Street, Yokahama. 27 pages. 12mo. Pages 10-12 give us the tale of the crossing:

Bipeds, advance, who ne'er before  
Have passed the Mystic Zone;  
Bow to your Sovereign and proffer  
A tribute to the Throne!

"Ha there's 'fresh fish,'—I plainly mark  
The guilt betraying blush;  
I here proclaim them, one and all,  
Fit subjects for the brush."

The Royal Barber grinned in glee,  
The Shark stretched forth his fin,  
And in his slimy clutches dragged  
The struggling victims in.

Right valiantly they kicked, and fought;  
Resistance proved in vain,  
Old Neptune claimed the beards of all  
New-comers on the main.

And in return he promised us  
Fair winds, and pleasant seas;  
(To verify his words, just then  
Up sprung a pleasant breeze.)

On which the monarch donned his robes  
 And bade the fish avast.  
 "Pray, harness up the Royal Car,  
 Behold! the day wanes fast."

And in those grand, and wave-like tones  
 No mortal can assume,  
 He blessed our ship, from truck to keel  
 And vanished in the gloom.

. . .

Cynics may sneer, and skeptics laugh,  
 And call our King a myth;  
 Yet we who sail his broad domain  
 Are loyal to the pith.

The Sons of Freedom own his sway,  
 And happiest thought of all—  
 Our King stands firm while earthly thrones  
 In angry strife shall fall.

And so we shout, Long live the King!  
 By all good tars adored,  
 And wish the doubters had been there,  
 When Neptune came aboard.

At Sea, May 20th, 1870.

### 1873

On the 19th [of June 1873] we sighted the only steamer we have seen, — standing to the southward. In the evening were hailed by Neptune to ascertain if any of his subjects who had not yet crossed the Line were on board. Receiving an answer, he promised to board us the following day. On the 20th, he came on board and received about a hundred green ones as an addition to his kingdom.

(Manuscript diary in Library of Congress. Kept by William A. H. Allen, assistant engineer, U. S. Navy, on board U.S.S. *Richmond*, crossing about 4 a. m. in longitude 28° 57' 45" west.)

This time, in contrast to Allen's crossing in 1866, nothing is said about the ceremony as anything but the accepted rule of faith and practice. Splicing the mainbrace seems to have lasted until the days of Josephus Daniels as Secretary of the Navy.

### 1875

Einige gute Tage brachten uns schnell vorwärts. Dann kamen wieder einige schlechte Tage. Der grosse Bär und der Polarstern tauchten immer tiefer hinab, und vor uns stieg das südliche Kreuz in die Höhe.

Der südliche Sternenhimmel ist öde im Vergleich mit dem unsrigen, und um sich für die Schönheit des südlichen Kreuzes begeistern zu können, muss

1875, *continued*

man entweder ein kritikloser Mucker oder ein noch kritikloserer Reiseenthusiast ein, den schon der Gedanke an die grosse Entfernung von zu Hause in Ekstase zu setzen vermag. Viel interessanter und merkwürdiger als jene vier unbedeutenden im Trapezoid gestellten Sterne war mir das schwarze Loch neben ihnen, welches die Seeleute den Kohlsack nennen.

Am 20. Dezember [1875] feierten wir das Fest des Passirens der Linie in der altherkömmlichen Weise mit Neptun, Barbiererei und Taufe. Wir hatten zwar seit drei Tagen wieder keine Observation gehabt und wussten nicht bestimmt, ob wir schon so weit waren. Den Himmel bedeckten dunkle Wolken, echt tropische Regengüsse stürzten zuweilen herab, bleiern und todesstill lag der Ozean rings umher, kaum ein Lüftchen regte sich, und wir trieben, hilflos, ohne Steuer, die Spitze des Schiffes rückwärts nach Norden gewendet. Als wir zwei Tage später endlich die Sonne und damit Observation bekamen, stellte sich heraus, dass wir zu früh gefeiert und dass wir noch nicht den Aequator überschritten hatten. Erst nach weiteren vier Tagen gelangten wir am 27. Dezember wirklich und zweifellos auf die südliche Hemisphäre, und zwar ziemlich genau unter dem 29. Grad westlicher Länge von Greenwich. Aber kein Mensch ausser dem Kapitän, dem Steuermann und mir erfuhr unseren Irrthum, vielleicht auch das offizielle Journal nicht.

Schon seit einer Woche waren die Matrosen eifrig daran, die Maskerade für den Neptunzug, einen Dreizack aus Blech und Bärte aus Flachs für ihn und sein Gefolge, einen Fischschwanz aus Pappe und Locken aus Hobelspänen für seine Gemahlin, ein grosses meterlanges Rasirmesser aus Holz für den Barbier und andere derlei Geräthe vorzubereiten.

Einige englische Kolonien haben den äquatorialen Mummenschanz, bei dem es erfahrungsgemäss fast nie ohne Rohheiten und Zänkereien zwischen Mannschaft und Passagieren abgeht, auf ihren Emigrantenschiffen verboten. Neuseeland war damals noch nicht so rigoros, und obwohl ich keinen sonderlichen Werth auf jenes Ueberbleibsel der sogenannten guten alten Zeit legte, so liess ich dasselbe doch seinen Lauf nehmen, aus keinem vernünftigeren Grunde, als um einen rothen Strich mehr in den Bäderdeckel meiner Erlebnisse machen zu dürfen.

Da wir eben trieben, und nichts zu thun war, konnte die ganze Mannschaft an dem Scherz sich betheiligen. Der Aufzug verlief, wie er schon oft beschrieben worden ist. Die phantastisch geschmückte Schaar verfügte sich nach dem Vorderdeck und kletterte vorne am Bugspriet über Bord, um scheinbar aus dem Wasser heraufzukommen. Hinten über der Kajüte stunden der Kapitän und die Offiziere. "Schip ahoi!" rief vorne Neptun durch das Sprachrohr, und der Bootsmann wurde abgesandt, ihn zum Besuch einzuladen. Neptun und sein Gefolge bewegten sich langsam und gravitatisch heran, zu beiden Seiten das dichte Gewühl der neugierig sich drängenden Zwischendecker. Eine zackige Krone aus Goldpapier schmückte das Haupt des dreizackbewaffneten Fluthenbeherrschers, von dem eine mächtige flachserne

Mähne herabwallte. An seiner Seite trippelte züchtiglich die holde Amphitrite, unser ältester Schiffsjunge, der nicht ohne Geschmack zu einem zinnobergeschminkten, hochbusigen und hobelspähnelockigen Frauenzimmer mit langer Schleppe von Sackleinwand herausstaffirt war. Voran schritt als Herold der Barbier, ein seemännischer Anachronismus, mit riesiger Brille und Vatermördern, das gewaltige bretterne Rasirmesser auf der Schulter. Hinterdrein marschirten die Schergen der maritimen Polizei, mehr oder minder gelungen phantastisch geputzt, hölzerne Säbel in den Händen schwingend.

Neptun hielt nun seine Anrede an den Kapitän, und das übliche Frage- und Antwortspiel, wie das Schiff heisse, woher es käme und wohin es gehe, entwickelte sich. Nach diesen Präliminarien, die sehr ledern waren und sowohl dem Neptun nebst Gefolge als auch dem Kapitän so vorkommen mochten, da sie ziemlich verlegene Gesichter schnitten, nahm ersterer auf einem improvisirten Throne hinter dem Grossmast Platz und schickte seine Schergen aus, um die Opfer, diejenigen an Bord, die zum ersten mal die Linie passirten, vorführen zu lassen. Von den Passagieren durften nur solche ergriffen werden, die sich freiwillig dazu erböten, und um mit gutem Beispiel voranzugehen, unterzog ich mich selbst der peinlichen Prozedur der Aequatortaufe.

Ein grosser Bottich mit Wasser stand vor Neptun, ein darüber gelegtes Brett war der Sitz für den Täufling. Ein Gehilfe des Barbiers frug nach Namen und Alter, registrirte solches in ein dickes Buch, profaner Weise eine alte Bibel, dann kam der Barbier, schmierte aus einem Kübel mit vollen Händen Seifenschaum über das ganze Gesicht und kratzte ihn wieder ab mit seiner Rasirkeule. Der ätzende Seifenschaum verbot die Augen zu öffnen, ein plötzlicher Ruck, das Brett wurde weggezogen, man plumpste rücklings in das Wasser des Bottichs, die Taufe war vollzogen.

Ich hatte mir ausgebeten, nur mit der besten und reinlichsten Seife bedient zu werden und als erster zu leiden. Nicht so glimpflich wie ich wurden diejenigen behandelt, die nach mir kamen. Zunächst Mister Ross und etwa zwanzig andere junge Männer von den Zwischendeckspassagieren, zuletzt die Neulinge unter der Mannschaft, unser Ganymed Hannes, der in der Nordsee so Schreckliches erduldet, mittlerweile jedoch mit dem Meere vertrauter geworden war, jener Decksjunge, der sich damals versteckt hatte, und ein Matrose. Diese drei letzteren wurden auf die alte qualvolle Weise barbiert und getauft. Für sie gab es eine eigens präparirte Seife zweiter Qualität, die stark mit Theer versetzt war und noch etliche Tage Mund und Augen verklebte. Beim Rasiren kam es auf einige Stückchen Haut nicht an, und das Taufen wurde ihnen so gründlich zu Theil, dass sie halberstickt, heftig spuckend und hustend, dem Bottich entstiegen. Auch auf die frommen Missionäre hatten es die Matrosen abgeschen und wolten sie vor Neptuns Thron schleppen, aber sie schrieten so kläglich um Hilfe, dass der Kapitän sie zu retten eilte. Raketen und Bluelights und eine Ration Schnaps für die Matrosen verherrlichten den Abend dieses denkwürdigen Tages.

(Max Buchner. Reise durch den Stillen Ozean. Breslau, 1878. p. 46–49.)

1884

The ceremony best known among those practiced among sailors, and concerning which much has been written, is that observed in modern times, "on crossing the line," from north into south latitude, or vice versa, as the case may be.

This custom, still observed as a pastime among sailors, is another of those remarkable survivals of ancient practices begun as actual worship of some diety, and finally existing as mere customs, without any significance. Anciently the Greeks sacrificed, on nearing any prominent cape, on many of which temples to the deities were placed. During the middle ages, the present ceremony of receiving a visit from a fictitious Neptune, arose, when it was not, of course, performed at the equator, but on arriving within the tropics, crossing the Arctic Circle, and even in passing certain capes, etc.

Aubin [Dictionnaire Nautique (1702). Art. Bâptême] quotes some older writer concerning this ceremony: "It is a custom practiced from all antiquity, that those who are apprenticed to the sea, and who pass certain places, where they have never passed, undergo this penalty, under the favorable name of Baptism; that is, to be cast from the yard-arm into the sea. The ships also are subjected to this ceremony, so ridiculous (of Baptism). It may be said that is a recompense for the rejection by the Reformers, of that which, among the Roman Catholics, has remained an act of religion; these latter baptizing effectively their ships, the first time they are placed in the sea. When the occasion presented, and the ships arrived in these consecrated places, that is to say, where they had never been, the master was obliged to redeem them; otherwise the crew at once proceeded to cut off the ship's *nose*, or the whole outer part of the prow, or to disfigure or destroy some other part of the ship. Those whom they will to cast from the yard-arms into the sea, could redeem themselves by giving money to the crew. As to the boys, instead of dipping them from the yard-arms, they put them under a basket surrounded by tubs full of water, and each one dipped it out with buckets and threw water on them."

In after times, the ruder features of this ceremony were dropped, while the essential ones, baptism and a penalty, were retained, and a more extended ceremony added.

The same author describes this ceremony as occurring in French ships about the middle of the seventeenth century: "As a preparation, there are ranged on the upper deck, on both sides, tubs full of sea-water, and sailors, formed in two rows, stand near, each with a bucket in his hand. The chief steward comes to the foot of the mainmast, his face fullbearded, and his body attired in gaskets, entirely surrounding him, and ropes' ends hanging from his arms. He is followed by five or six sailors, equipped in the same manner, and holds in his hand some marine book, to represent the Gospels of the Evangelists. The man who is to be baptized kneels before the steward,

who making him put his hand on the book, forces him to promise that whenever an occasion presented itself of baptizing others, he would impose upon them the same ceremonies which were inflicted on him. After this oath, the one to be baptized rises, and, marching between the rows of tubs, and the people who wait for him with buckets full, he reaches the bow, and thus receives what is called the baptism."

A description of this ceremony, celebrated about the same time, and given by M. Jal [Glossaire Nautique, from Oexmelin, Histoire des Flibustiers], shows that the usages of the present time with regard to it were already observed: "The second mate, dressed as *Neptune*, wore a long cap on his head, and a fringed collar of parrel-trucks and small blocks. His long beard, and hair, made of tow, were matted with sea shells, and his face was *blackened*. In his hands he carried a chart-book (such a book was then called a *Neptune*), opened at the chart showing the position of the ship. Each one of the crew knelt before him, and swore by bread and salt that he had previously passed the line. If not, the mate dubbed them kneeling, with a blow of his wooden sword, and the crew then threw water over each victim until he paid a penalty of wine or money."

The same authority tells us that in Dutch ships, during the seventeenth century, the roll was called by the clerk of the ship, when passing these places, and each man answered to his name, and indicated whether he had passed the place before or not. If he had not, he was fined, and compelled to pay fifteen sols, or else was attached to a rope, hoisted to the main yard-arm, and dipped three times into the sea. The officers were fined thirty sols, the passengers mulcted of all they would pay.

These are the earliest descriptions of this ceremony, but we learn that between the voyages of Columbus, in 1492, when no mention is made of it, and 1529, the French created a sort of an order of knighthood, the "Chevaliers de la Mer" (Knights of the Sea), by giving novices an accolade on the shoulder when passing these places, and giving a feast after each ceremony. [Journal of J. Parmentier, in Jal. Glossaire Nautique, Bâptême.]

During the middle-ages, the novice was often terrified at the horrible appearance of Neptune and his crew, and was usually bidden to watch for lights near the chosen spots.

De Plancy [Dictionnaire Infernale] says the Devil was caricatured in costume, in the Neptune ceremony, being brought on board in a cask.

It was especially the custom among Dutch mariners to observe these ceremonies at Capes Raz and Bailonges. Even admirals were compelled to pay these fines. The clerk bought wines for the crew with the money thus gained. So greatly was this privilege abused, that the Dutch East India Company prohibited these fines in 1669, and Charles IX. of Sweden, some years previous to this, abolished the right to claim fines, and allowed to each of the crew a bottle of wine on crossing the equator and the tropic circle. [Jal. Glossaire Nautique, Bâptême.]

1884, *continued*

This ceremony, as performed in modern times, has been often described. It is now observed merely as a pastime among sailors, only on crossing the equator, and officers and passengers are rarely troubled.

Hone [Table Book, Vol. I, 630] describes it as performed on board whaling vessels, early in the present century, on the first day of May, or on crossing the Arctic circle. The novices were kept below decks, and a barber-shop was fitted up, with a sign, "Neptune's Easy-shaving Shop, Kept by John Johnson." Then a procession, consisting of ten fiddlers, dressed in mats and rags, Neptune riding on a gun-carriage, with his usual retinue of tritons, etc., was formed. On reaching the quarter-deck, Neptune interrogated the captain, asking the name of the ship, her destination, and similar questions, and, on three quarts of rum being produced, drank the captain's health. The novices were then brought up, questioned as to their names, ages, destinations, etc., and were then put through the usual rough shaving process.

Chaplain Rockwell [Sketches of Foreign Travel, 1847] tells us that among the usual features of the procession during the early part of the present century, was a trio composed of two bears led by a triton. He says some explain this as a representation of Ursa Major and Ursa Minor, disappearing under the horizon as the equator is crossed, under the guidance of Arctophylax (Boötes).

Marryat gives an excellent description of the modern ceremony . . . [foot-note reference to Mildmay; the Bassett summary is omitted here because it is quoted in full under 1829].

The ceremony is sometimes observed among the fishermen on Newfoundland's banks. [Fish and Men in the Maine Islands. Harper's, May, 1884.] "Practical jokes are played on greenhorns on their first visit to the banks, where Neptune, in a garment of rock-weed, sometimes comes on board the regular passenger boat, on arriving at the whirlpool called Wirbel, the steersman goes about with water in a scoop, which he throws upon the passengers who have not passed before.

(Fletcher S. Bassett, Lieutenant U. S. Navy. *Sea Phantoms: or, Legends and superstitions of the sea and of sailors in all lands and at all times.* Chicago, Morrill, Higgins & Co., 1892. rev. ed. p. 416-420.)

This octavo of 505 pages has an impressive array of authorities — some first hand tales, some second hand. It came to my notice too late to follow the new leads suggested by its footnotes. It is entered here under date of the author's preface. Compare the references here given to Parmentier with the original text as quoted under 1529, and to Esquemeling as quoted under 1666.

1885

[April 23] At 7.30 P. M., the startling cry of "ship ahoy!" was heard fore and aft; there's Neptune! there's Neptune! said all who heard the hail. "Halloo!" was answered from the bridge by the Officer of the Deck; and the questions of the interrogator, of what ship, where bound, etc., were answered by the Officer. . . . Who are you? in a commanding tone . . . : Neptune, King of the

Seas, was answered, followed by a request to heave to . . . In obedience to the request the Officer of the Deck rang two bells, at the same time informing the Admiral and Captain through their orderlies that his Majesty was along side and desired to see them. Call all hands to muster, was now the order from the Officer of the Deck; the Boatswain's mates sounded their calls, and passed the order in a loud tone of voice, the ship's company immediately assembled on the port side, the Admiral, Captain and Officers at their customary stations on the starboard side, of the quarterdeck. Neptune, accompanied by his wife, had by this time reached the quarter-deck; they boarded the ship over the starboard bow, instead of coming aboard by the more convenient way of the sealadder at the starboard gangway, which he was requested to use, if not for his own convenience, at least out of respect for his consort. . . .

[Here Neptune addressed the Admiral and Captain in 24 lines of rimes "composed by John Bezanson, Quarter Gunner," paying respects to Admiral English, Captain Potter, and his "fine ship" with "big guns," recommending that the "good crew" be made better by shaving, introducing "my wife, Amphitrite, the Queen," and promising to be "ready with my razor and lotion" tomorrow at nine when "you'll be crossing my line."]

After finishing his address Neptune engaged the Admiral in conversation for a few moments, in which old times were referred to. Receiving his promise of returning on the following morning, he handed to the Admiral a package containing telegrams from the Equatorial Submarine Telegraph Company (Limited), and a mail bag containing letters for the officers and some of the crew, as well as certificates for all of the officers and crew whom he recognized as subjects; and similar ones, with the name and date blank, which were to be filled out and delivered to all who should on the following day undergo the process necessary to make them children of the sea.

Good night all hands! and he was gone. [All received their mail from the Master-at-Arms — a "Fac-simile of King Neptune's Certificates, (one quarter size.)" is printed on page 3 — and thought of the morrow.]

At 9.00 A. M. on the morning of the 24th, everything was in readiness for the day's sport, all hands were called to muster, and . . . assembled on the quarter-deck . . . [Neptune] before presenting himself to the Admiral and Captain . . . ordered his police, headed by their chief, to form in two ranks in the starboard gangway. As soon as they were in marching order the band, which was stationed on the fore-castle, struck up the Policeman's Song. They stepped out, marched down the starboard gangway to the mainmast, halted, faced to the front and sang: —

When constabulary duties are to be done,  
 You will generally find us basking in the sun.  
 Taking one consideration with another,  
 Neptune's force is a bully one, bully one.  
 When we are sent for any one,  
 You bet your life they come . . . .

1885, *continued*

They emphasized the last word of each line by bringing down their clubs together on deck with a whang; when finished singing, they faced to the right, marched forward, and formed on both sides of Neptune's Chariot, he now being ready to be presented to the Admiral and Captain. . . .

The Chariot, on which he and his wife were seated, was made by lashing two halliard racks together; the motive power, eight of his followers, manned a drag rope secured to it; with his long grey beard of teazed manilla, tin crown on his head, and trident in right hand, he looked every inch a King. His better half, with long blonde hair of the same material as his whiskers, a richly colored calico dress, formerly the property of the ship's minstrel troupe, and stockingless and shoeless pedal extremities, she looked very little the Queen . . . . The Doctor, evidently a renegade from this mundane sphere, under his Majesty's protection, [brought] a grip sack well filled with . . . medicines . . . . The police, "rigged up" in what Neptune's better half had left of the minstrel's property, suppl[ied] deficiencies with gunny sacks, pieces of canvas, and the liberal use of paint . . . .

Neptune, being satisfied with the appearance of his retinue, concluded to move aft; the services of the band were brought into requisition, and to the enlivening strains of a march, the procession moved slowly aft. When the head of the line reached the mainmast, the Signal Quartermaster hoisted and broke at the main his Majesty's Royal Standard, which consisted of a white field sixteen feet by eight feet, bearing the inscription *Neptunus Rex*; in the center of the field was painted a large dolphin, and each of the four corners were ornamented with shell fish painted thereon. On the right of Neptune, manning a stout line secured to the neck of the stuffed effigy of a horse, stood twelve seamen bold, with countenances beaming with pleasure in consequence of the pleasant duty they were about to perform, which was nothing less than celebrating in manner following the death of poor old horse. As Neptune moved aft they at the same instant straightened out taut their line and commenced to drag the horse aft, each one in his turn singing a verse of a "shanty", to which all joined in chorus, the long strong pulls together being regulated by certain emphasized words in each line of song and chorus. Arriving abreast of the starboard gangway, they halted until Neptune's retinue had passed them, then picking up the old horse, they launched him with a shout into the big drink. This little side-show was intended to illustrate an event in the life of a sailor on a long voyage; that is, that he had been long enough on the voyage to work up his advance wages, or as he terms it, the "dead horse", and even in the pure atmosphere that he is accustomed to live carrion is objectionable as company, and so old horse must go not to the boneyard but overboard. Arriving on the quarter-deck, the policemen, bears, and other followers of Neptune halted and formed, faced to the front or inboard. Neptune and wife, followed by the Doctor and Barber on foot, continued on aft until within a few feet of the Admiral and Captain, when he and his wife alighted, bowed to the Admiral and Captain, and without further ado counter-

marched forward to the bridge to commence the shaving. Neptune's wife on the arm of the Admiral, and Neptune himself escorted by the Captain. In their rear followed the Doctor, Barber, Clerk, and Officers of the Ship; the ship's company at the same time rushed forward to secure the best possible places to witness the shaving.

Amidships on the bridge were grouped, standing, the Admiral, Captain and Officers. Neptune and wife were seated on the starboard side of the bridge. On the port side was a large tub containing the lather made of soap, molasses, and flour, over which the Barber and assistants kept a watchful eye. The Doctor stood hard by to render assistance whenever his professional services should be required. Neptune's Secretary, who was an important character, must not be forgotten; he also occupied a place on the bridge; his duties required him to call the names as they were arranged on lists in his possession of the individuals to be shaved. As the names were called, the victims either presented themselves voluntarily, or the ship was searched for them by the police. They reached the bridge by a ladder leading from the starboard side; arriving on the bridge, they received a nod of recognition from Neptune and were hurried across the bridge, turned over to the barber, received a good share of lather, applied with a white-wash brush, had it partly removed by a large wooden razor in the hands of the barber, and then they were carefully lifted from the bridge and dropped into an awning in the port gangway, so secured as to form a large tub, which was filled with water by a hose connected to the steam pumps. While in the awning, the individual shaved was attended to by the bears of Neptune, who were there to receive him; after undergoing a good ducking he was allowed to scramble out, and he was HENCEFORTH considered a bona fide son of the sea. As each new victim received his dose the cheers and laughter of the crew expressed their appreciation of the fun.

[Two further episodes are described: near the starboard gangway appears suddenly the *late* Honorable Secretary of the Navy, Mr. Chandler, who is received with tremendous cheers — and sent to the bottom of the sea by stern command of Neptune; climax of the sport is the discovery that G. Savasta, Chief Musician, has “endeavored to escape shaving by securing a certificate under false pretences,” he now receiving an extra lathering and “both edge and back of the razor.” It was now “nearing the hour of twelve”; Neptune bade all good-bye and a pleasant passage — and returned “to the quiet recesses of the ship, to enjoy the beer received by the payment of the forfeits.”]

(James Brady. King Neptune's visit to the U. S. Flagship Lancaster.  
Written by James Brady, Schoolmaster, Flagship Lancaster, 1885. 8 p.)

At this time the *Lancaster* was flagship of the European Squadron cruising off the west coast of Africa, shifting from north to south latitude on 23 April 1885 and arriving at French Point, River Congo, on the 28th following.

1897

Sept. 5. Closing in on the equator this noon. A sailor explained to a young girl that the ship's speed is poor because we are climbing up a bulge toward the center of the globe; but that when we should once get over, at the equator, and start down-hill, we should fly. When she asked him the other day what the fore-yard was, he said it was the front yard, the open area in the front end of the ship. That man has a good deal of learning stored up, and the girl is likely to get it all.

*Afternoon.* Crossed the equator. In the distance it looked like a blue ribbon stretched across the ocean. Several passengers kodak'd it. We had no fool ceremonies, no fantasies, no horse-play. All that sort of thing has gone out. In old times a sailor, dressed as Neptune, used to come in over the bows, with his suite, and lather up and shave everybody who was crossing the equator for the first time, and then cleanse these unfortunates by swinging them from the yard-arm and ducking them three times in the sea. This was considered funny. Nobody knows why. No, that is not true. We do know why. Such a thing could never be funny on land; no part of the old-time grotesque performances gotten up on shipboard to celebrate the passage of the line could ever be funny on shore — they would seem dreary and witless to shore people. But the shore people would change their minds about it at sea, on a long voyage. On such a voyage, with its eternal monotonies, people's intellects deteriorate; the owners of the intellects soon reach a point where they almost seem to prefer childish things to things of a maturer degree. One is often surprised at the juvenilities which grown people indulge in a sea, and the interest they take in them, and the consuming enjoyment they get out of them. This is on long voyages only. The mind gradually becomes inert, dull, blunted; it loses its accustomed interest in intellectual things; nothing but horse-play can rouse it, nothing but wild and foolish grotesqueries can entertain it. On short voyages it makes no such exposure of itself; it hasn't time to slump down to this sorrowful level.

(Samuel Langhorne Clemens. Following the equator; a journey around the world. By Mark Twain. Hartford, Connecticut [1897] p. 65-69.)

The vocabulary is typical Mark Twain. How much study did he give to the ceremony before settling the question? If the initiation ceremony at the passing of the mouth of the Platte upward bound on the Missouri had ever come to the notice of Sam Clemens, the Mississippi pilot, one would expect mention of it here. And the crossing of the height of land between the Great Lakes and the Pacific and Hudson's Bay watershed would be ruled out here as mere landmen's frivolities.

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## THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

1904

There is an old custom among sailors that if a person has never been across the equator before, he must be ducked in the sea when he first crosses that line. There was some talk in fun among the passengers of ducking two or three of us on board who had never been across, but no effort was made. I think they feared we would make a fight and possibly duck some of the other fellows.

(Richard Alexander Fullerton Penrose. *Life and letters of R. A. F. Penrose, Jr.* By Helen R. Fairbanks and Charles P. Berkey. New York, 1952. p. 343 of the manuscript diary, 18 July 1904.)

*ca. 1910*

On this voyage we had a number of young people on board who were crossing the equator for the first time, so Neptune kindly offered to leave his ocean depths and to board the ship, in the good old-fashioned orthodox style to further these young folks' education. Just as we crossed the Line, the ship was hailed from the sea, her name and destination were ascertained, and she was peremptorily ordered to heave to, Neptune naturally imagining that he was still dealing with sailing ships. The engines were at once stopped, and Neptune, with his Queen, his Doctor, his Barber, his Sea Bears and the rest of his Court, all in their traditional get-up, made their appearance on the upper deck, to the abject terror of some of the little children, who howled dismally at this alarming irruption of half-naked savages with painted faces. I myself enacted Neptune in an airy costume of fish-scales, a crown, and a flowing beard and wig of bright sea-green. Of course my Trident had not been forgotten. Amphitrite, my queen, was the star-comedian of the South African music-hall stage, and the little man was really extraordinarily funny, keeping up one incessant flow of rather pungent gag, and making the spectators roar with laughter. All the traditional ceremonies and good-natured horseplay were scrupulously adhered to, and some twenty schoolboys and five adults were duly dosed, lathered, shaved, hosed, and then toppled backwards into a huge canvas tank of sea-water, where the boys persisted in swimming about in all their clothes. The proceedings were terminated by Neptune and his entire Court following the neophytes into the tank, and I am afraid that we induced some half-dozen male spectators to accompany us into the tank rather against their will, one old German absolutely fuming with rage at the unprecedented liberty that was being taken with him.

(Lord Frederic Hamilton. *Here, there, and everywhere.* New York [copyright 1921] p. 278-279.)

This voyage from Capetown is noteworthy for one of the rare performances on crossing from the south and also for having Neptune and his Queen enacted by the passengers, not the seamen. Date not given, but probably before 1914.

ca. 1910, continued

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### 1911

On the fourteenth of July we approached "the line," said by geographers to be imaginary, but proving to us very real. The first indication of it was at dinner time, when a deep voice from the bow called "ship ahoy, any novices on board?" There were; and we were warned that Neptune would be on board about three o'clock. As six bells struck, sure enough, old grey-bearded Neptune, trident in hand, appeared from the bow, followed by his buxom fair-haired wife, his daughter fresh from a marine ballet, his bibulous doctor, and a crew of minions. After parading the deck, these ancient celebrities mounted a throne on the after-deck and called for the novices. Each man was called up before Neptune, who questioned him as to his purposes in entering his realm. Next we were examined by the "doctor," who always prescribed some of his yellow, pink or blue liquids or watersoaked biscuits, which remedies were administered down the back or up the sleeve. Then the candidate was seized by the minions and taken to the "barber," who lathered with a whitewash brush, shaved with the great two-foot wooden razor, and powdered with soot. During this the victim was seated on the edge of the tank, and as the process was nearing completion, was tumbled head over heels into the water, rising to meet the full force of the ship's hose as he came up. We all went through this with the others, including a couple of sailors and stewards, while the assembled steerage fairly gloated over us; until at the end the hose was turned upon them. Then Neptune and his following, assisted by the initiates, plunged into the water and the ceremony was over. Later each of us received an illuminated certificate assigning us to various fish families, and entitling us to rove at pleasure over the seven seas.

How old the ceremony is I do not know, but a Spanish traveler in the early part of the seventeenth century describes just such a ceremony as the "rescate" or ransom, differing from the above only in that the duckings, etc., were imposed because the novices would not give satisfactory reasons for entering Neptune's domain, and the captain was fined a dinner for the whole crowd. It is doubtless a mockery of the ancient custom of sacrificing to the god of the sea to propitiate him when the early voyagers entered his realm; but it must have been a deep rooted custom to have survived with so much detail and uniformity. It is only on the palatial passenger boats that the ceremony is dying out.

(Frederick Brewster Loomis. *Hunting extinct animals in the Patagonian pampas*. New York, 1913. p. 17-18 with half-tone plate of the ceremony.)

One more unanswered question. Who is the early 17th century Spanish traveler who describes such a ceremony as the "rescate" or ransom?

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1913

The "Crossing of the Line" occurred on August 31st. The event had been anticipated by many with interest and curiosity. One gentleman, speaking about the matter, remarked: "We shall no doubt feel it an hour or two before we get there, and probably an hour or two afterward." As the equator is an imaginary line, what my friend expected to feel I am at a loss to imagine. Another fellow-voyager approached me and seriously inquired "how long I thought it would take us to get over the line." When I told him the feat might be accomplished in about a second of time he looked mystified and even disappointed. I did not press him to explain himself. It would hardly have been polite to do so. To what sort of nautical acrobatics he was looking forward will ever remain a puzzle to me. On the morning of the eventful day a proclamation was read at breakfast, announcing that Father Neptune and his daughter, attended by their court, would appear on board at two o'clock in the afternoon, and then proceed to initiate into the mysterious rites of his realm all those who were for the first time invading his domains south of the equator. During the forenoon of the day there were many conferences between the "committee of arrangements" and the proprietors of a circus, who were traveling as second-class passengers. At the appointed hour a procession took place upon the upper deck. It was headed by Neptune and his daughter. Neptune was clothed in a sea-green robe, held his trident, wore a crown of gilded pasteboard, surmounting his flowing locks which were composed of strands of oakum. The discerning eye detected under the disguise the rounded outlines of the purser; and under that of his daughter the somewhat diminutive form of the second steward.

The reason for the frequent conferences, which had been held with the owners of the side-show in the morning, now became plain. The theatrical properties of the troupe had been brought into requisition. The chief steward arrayed as a ballet dancer, and the barber, wearing the mask of a clown, on his head a fiery red wig and in his hands a razor three feet long made of gilded wood were prominent among the merry-makers. A motley company composed of the ringleaders in "the smoking-room crowd" wearing masks and strange disguises followed. A platform had been erected in front of the swimming tank. On it the chief steward, provided with a whitewash brush and a big bucket of paste, took his place. Beside him stood the barber, stropping his gigantic razor upon a yard of burlap tied to a derrick-boom. The first victim was a young lady who seemed to feel that it was her duty to be initiated. She came forward smiling, wearing a silk gown. She seated herself upon the barber's stool. Her head was anointed with paste, the barber made a few passes with his mimic razor, and then in a twinkling, heels over head, she was flung backward and soused in the tank by the minions of Neptune. The ship's surgeon and the fourth officer were the next victims. They were followed by others until the tank was full. Those who were floundering in the bath now resolved upon reprisals. The first attack was made upon the

1913, continued

chief steward. He was seized from behind and waltzed into the tub, from which he emerged looking like a drowned rat. After him came the barber, from whose pockets, crammed with colored papers, oozed bright green, pink, and yellow dye-stuff. "Beau-ti-ful as the rainbow!" he exclaimed, as he crawled out of the tank and again took his place on the platform, and began to strop his razor. The fun now rose to its height. One by one the company of merrymakers were caught and protesting, struggling, kicking, rolling, were brought to the tank and flung over its sides. It no longer contained sparkling water, but a broth of paste, paint, floating wigs, and other accoutrements. Those who had met their baptism in it had an hour's work before them in their private baths to remove the stains of their experience. Each reveler received a diploma, properly signed and sealed by Neptune, attesting the fitness of the recipient to sail "the seven seas."

(William Jacob Holland. To the River Plate and back. New York, 1913. p. 20-22.)

Another rare instance of passengers or officers portraying courtiers of Neptune. Reprinted with permission of G. P. Putnam's Sons, publishers.

### 1919

[In 1919] We held smokers and Happy Hours en route to Rio, [on U.S.S. *Idaho*, taking down to Brazil the President of Brazil and his party] but the big event of the voyage was "crossing the line" when we ceremoniously converted polliwogs into shellbacks. This was the first of my four round trips over Neptune's mythical frontier, and I was well lathered by the royal barbers, paddled by his pirates and after being tossed into the tank, manhandled by the polar bears — all in the presence of our laughing guests from Brazil. (p. 101-102)

The Fleet visited Valparaiso, Chile, in the summer of 1921. We again staged an elaborate "Neptunus Rex party" when we crossed the Equator, and being a shellback, I found the excitement a great deal more enjoyable than the first time. Lieutenant Commander Daniel J. Callaghan, assistant gunnery officer, paid the penalty for being an especially popular shipmate by being subjected to all the most barbarous forms of equatorial torture. The members of the ship's raceboat crew, enacting the rôle of polar bears in Neptune's royal pool gave Dan what the men called "the works." And Callaghan, since our shipmate days in the *Idaho*, has been a dear friend. (p. 107-108)

. . . I had everything for the book except the pictures and the story of crossing the Equator.

This event at sea was the high light of the cruise. The governor general [of the Philippines, Dwight F. Davis] was a good sportsman, winning the hearts of the men when he pleaded with Neptunus Rex to allow him to substitute for his daughter in the initiation ceremonies. Mr. Davis had already crossed the "line" but he patiently allowed the *Pittsburgh* shellbacks to lead

him to the electrified platform where he danced when they turned on the "juice"; and he let them heave him into the tank where the polar bears "did their stuff." (p. 217)

(William A. Maguire, chaplain. Rig for church. New York, 1942.)

Reprinted with permission of Father Maguire's heirs and representative.

1920

H.M.S. *Renown* moved into the sultry waters of the tropics. Neptune came on board, and he demanded the royal victim with glee. The good fellowship of Osborne was called on now: the British capacity to grin through five minutes of discomfort. The Prince was docile while the courtiers of the Equatorial king sang:

Shave him and bash him,  
Duck him and splash him,  
Torture and smash him  
And don't let him go.

The orders were carried out with brutal precision.

(Hector Bolitho. King Edward VIII. His life and reign. London, 1937.  
p. 101.)

Reprinted with permission of Eyre & Spottiswoode, publishers.

"And whereas in this our time, the minds of men are so diverse, that some think it a great matter of conscience to depart from a piece of the least of their Ceremonies, they be so addicted to their old customs; and again on the other side, some be so new-fangled, that they would innovate all things, and so despise the old, that nothing can like them, but that is new: . . ."

Everybody knows that certain humorous ceremonies are associated with the passage of the Equator, that "imaginary line drawn round the earth equidistant from the Poles." Nobody knows why, or whence the custom was derived. That it is a very ancient custom is undoubted, though its association with the Line in particular is comparatively modern, and cannot be older than the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries. Such investigations as have been made into ancient records have thoroughly established the fact that ceremonies similar to those now practised in "Crossing the Line," were earlier observed in many other parts of King Neptune's domains. The Straits of Gibraltar, and the entrance to the Baltic through the Sound, were long associated with ceremonial observances. In the old whaling days similar ceremonies were observed on crossing the Arctic Circle.

Such records as are available throw little light upon the origin of these ceremonies. There is evidence that, in the case of the Sound, not only were "novices" initiated with amusing frolics (much as now in "Crossing the Line") but the ship herself had to pay a forfeit — which was presumably spent in

1920, *continued*

regaling the crew. We get here a distinct suggestion of a propitiatory sacrifice, of "paying toll to Fortune." And this at once takes us back to very ancient days, long before the Christian era. The name of the King of the Sea, Neptune, which is universal and has survived to the present day, points in the same direction. The Romans had a horror of the sea, and had the more reason to pride themselves on their conquest of the "unfriendly element." Among the public celebrations of the Roman year was that of the "Neptunalia," and we know from Horace how grateful travellers proffered thanksgiving sacrifices to the God of the Sea for their safe arrival in port. The highest test of friendship, according to the same authority, was that he "was ready to accompany his friend even to the Straits of Gibraltar."

To primitive navigators all narrow seas held special terrors. The swift tides, the varying currents and the strong gusts of changing winds usually present in these narrow seas made the passage of sailing ships extremely perilous to the small craft of antiquity. The passage of the Sound, indeed, remained a matter of anxiety, if not very real risk, even to the best-found ships of the modern era of sails. The religions of heathen antiquity naturally suggested offering a propitiatory sacrifice to the Sea Deity to procure safe passage through these difficult seas. Similarly in the old whaling days of our own era the entrance upon an extremely perilous enterprise was made, by the unchanging traditions of the sea, occasion for a like offering, and the Arctic Circle was chosen to make a definite locality for the celebration.

Writing far away from books, it is only possible to suggest that the customs now observed in "Crossing the Line" have come down to us from a very hoary antiquity; that they originated in the idea of propitiatory sacrifice to the Sea-God in present or anticipated perils; and that, when practised by the heathen navigators of the North, they were probably accompanied with human sacrifice, even in the Christian era. We seem to remember having read of a galley slave being thrown overboard in an hour of extreme peril. It is possible that the story of Jonah may lead us in the same direction, even much farther back than the days of the Romans. The superstition of all sailormen, that the presence aboard ship of a minister of any religion rouses the jealous indignation of the Sea-God (presumably as being hostile to the observances traditionally due to King Neptune), is likewise suggestive in this connection. Influences aboard ship supposed to be hostile to the sovereign rights of the ancient Sea-God are still known among sailormen as "jonahs." In the "Crossing of the Line" by H.M.S. *Renown*, the sovereign rights of the heathen Sea-God were, by an amusing little by-plot to the main theme of the celebration, seriously challenged for the first time on record.

It is easy to see why the Line became associated with the same ancient customs. In early days the Line was the threshold to a new world full of unfamiliar terrors. The very heavens changed, the old constellations were no more; the moon herself seemed to face the wrong way about; the ocean held new terrors and unfamiliar denizens; the land was peopled with strange beasts

and naked cannibals, and the coral reefs were an ever-present peril. To the Line was naturally transferred the old association of ideas that linked ceremonies of propitiation with the entrance upon enterprises of difficulty and perils that were novel and abounding.

In these days of rapid steam transit and the nervous hurry of modern civilization, the money-making fever, and the consequent contempt for everything which has no direct bearing upon a practical result, the ceremony of "Crossing the Line" is becoming obsolescent. In crowded liners it is made a show for the amusement of bored passengers who are allowed to escape the personal sacrifice to the Sea-God, or to commute it into a gift for the benefit of the crew. In the usually undermanned tramp, with a crew too often only British in name, there is neither the time nor the inclination for an elaborate ceremony; it is either omitted altogether or sadly curtailed, to save the expenditure of time, money and labour.

But in a British ship of war the ceremony is always observed with that thoroughness which characterises the work of the Royal Navy, and is equally noticeable in its play. The British "matloe" dearly loves a bit of "play-acting" and is an adept at impersonation. There are always in a ship of war twice as many men as would suffice for the needs of the mercantile marine; and, though they are always occupied, their work is in general neither exhausting nor difficult. They are all men in a condition of trained physical fitness — no old men among them, nor any not in the pink of health. Weaklings soon leave the Navy, and sick men are sent ashore to hospital at the State expense. One occasionally hears it said — and there is a modicum of half-truth in the statement — that a dozen longshore workmen would do what it takes a score of matloes to accomplish, and do it in quicker time. But the workman ashore only works a part of his twenty-four hours' day, and cannot be required to raise a finger when his spell of work is over. Sailormen have to fight the elements, which take no account of man's convenience. And sailormen of the Royal Navy have to be "ready, aye ready" to fight a possible human foe as well. They are necessarily, therefore, both more numerous — to make good the inevitable wastage when a ship of war is performing her natural functions — and in finer physical condition (for they must at all times have an immense reserve of strength for the moment of supreme need) than sailormen of the mercantile marine.

(Victor E. Marsden. *Crossing the Line with His Royal Highness, The Prince of Wales in H.M.S. "Renown,"* Friday-Saturday, April 16-17, 1920. Sydney, 1920. p. 5-7.)

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1922

On crossing the equator, we could not have the usual ceremony of Father Neptune and his mermaids, owing to the number of Peruvians, Chileans, and

1922, *continued*

Spanish on board, who would have failed to understand the shaving, dipping in the sea-bath, and other old customs of the solemn occasion.

But the health of Father Neptune was drunk, and we celebrated the occasion with some 1911 Vintage Melnotte champagne in a big electroplated jug, and plenty of ice to cool it, in my cabin with some of our friends on board.

(Frank Hedges Butler. *Round the world*. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company [1923?] p. 89.)

In January 1955, J. B. Lippincott wrote that it had taken over the Stokes Company, had no objection to quoting thus, but could not "grant a clear permission since our records do not indicate that we have the authority to do so." Diligent search followed but brought nothing clearer. The quotation is therefore made with the earnest hope that no rights are now and thus damaged.

1923

[1923, after September] The great day of crossing the line at last arrived, and I was vastly relieved to know that King Neptune had absolved me from going through the ordeal of making my obeisances to his court. My companions explained that although they did not believe my protestations that I had crossed the line before, they would nevertheless give me the benefit of the doubt and let me off the ceremony. To this magnanimous concession I, though inwardly grateful, replied that if the court could not accept my word I would insist on going through the bath. The doctor, who was to receive his initiation this day, rather too enthusiastically seconded my proposal and things were coming to a deadlock when Manager Andersen struck the very bright idea of creating me official photographer to the royal court, an honor I immediately accepted. I informed the doctor that I should have much pleasure in photographing him in the throes of the bath and the clutches of the bears. He did not see eye to eye with me on this matter, but I did my duty.

At the appointed hour the mournful drones of an accordion accompanied by sundry improvised instruments were heard, instruments whose only virtue seemed to be that they kept a strange sort of time.

From my vantage-point on the bridge I saw the strangest procession I ever beheld pass along slowly and with comic dignity, below, to the throne of King Neptune, preceded by his band. King Neptune, dressed with the pomp that befitted his Royal Heaviness, took his post majestically, and was followed by the royal physician, royal barber and assistants, royal bears, royal police, and numerous royal smaller fry whose duties were probably known only to themselves.

The squad of police of the royal household searched diligently for skulkers who might be hiding in the out-of-the-way corners of the ship, and when they did catch one of these misguided deserters, the punishment was dire and dreadful — an extra dose of the royal physician's medicine, according to the victim's capacity to take it.

The first to be initiated was the ship's doctor, who, on account of his undoubted status and learning, was given a double dose, after being catechized by the court, which was of the opinion that he needed a second helping. I rather think that there was malice aforethought behind the decision, for although I never sampled the medicine I was told confidentially that it consisted of tea, coffee, rum, pepper, salt, mustard, beer, and a very small quantity of aqua vitæ.

Though the doctor objected to the concoction, he was forced to swallow it under the threat of suffering worse torment. He was then handed over to the tender mercies of the royal barber. This industrious person had already a pail of soot and whitewash, to serve as lather. With a whitewash brush he slapped (sloshed would be a better word) his victim all over the head with the mixture, which he then scraped off with a huge wooden razor, wiping the razor on the hair of the helpless and speechless doctor, who was then tipped over backward into the royal bath and then left to the bears for further treatment.

These persons dipped and soused their victim until sure that the honors of the occasion had been well established in their favor, after which they released him to make room for the next. Many that day followed the doctor and passed through the torment.

I need hardly mention that after watching the ceremony of initiation I was extremely thankful I had not to go through the bath; but I kept a discreet silence and a very sharp lookout for treachery, in case the royal court should alter its mind, and decide that it might be as well to include me in the list of its initiates.

An extra allowance of rum was issued after these proceedings, as is the custom on such occasions, and so the time-honored ceremony of crossing the line was brought to a conclusion.

(F. V. Morley and J. S. Hodgson. *Whaling north and south*. New York, 1926. p. 131-134.)

The "I" here comes from Hodgson.

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c. 1930

I was in my cabin on the *Maunganui*, half smothered with telegrams from surprised friends, before I could believe it was true. I was really going to Tahiti, beginning a new life!

I intended to rest and meet no one on the ten-day trip down [from San Francisco], but it turned out to be a gay passage. Prime Minister Coates and his party from New Zealand were aboard, so the Captain decided to put on a brilliant pageant when we crossed the equator. He misunderstood the gaiety of my corner and evidently thought me a socially-inclined person. The interested look on the faces of the men and women in that corner and the spontaneous laughs coming out of it were the result of a little trick I always try on

*c. 1930, continued*

shipboard. I start a Tall Story Club — each one tells the most unusual happening in his life. It successfully does away with “that reminds me” stories of hunting in Maine or visiting cathedrals in Europe. Everyone has days and days in which to think up a good one that will top all others. And, believe me, even Davy Crockett would blush at some of the fabulous tales!

So we were the first to our corner and the last to leave it. Observing me among all those story-telling men, as I say, the Captain misunderstood. He sent me a note asking me to be Queen Neptune for the Crossing of the Line Ceremony. Of course, I refused. He thought me rude not to appreciate the honor and was rude in return by saying that it was either the queenship for me or a ducking like all the rest. Evidently no respect for age on this ship.

I had to go through with it. An officer wove me a wonderful costume of rope and everyone loaned me strings of pearls. I was regally costumed for the Crossing. When I saw the others smeared with paint and sent to the ducking stool, I knew I had chosen wisely.

(Mary Sheridan Fahnestock. I ran away to sea at fifty. New York, 1939. p. 27-28.)

No precise date is given, but the crossing was probably in the thirties. The mother sailed to Tahiti to join her two sons who had left Manhasset Bay Yacht Club, Long Island, on a cruise to the Pacific in their thirty-five foot schooner, *Director*.

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### 1936

The voice of the people was loud and distinct in 1936, with only Maine, Vermont, and Dutchess County dissenting. When the vote of confidence had been recorded, we began preparations to transport FDR to the Inter-American Conference at Buenos Aires. . . .

FDR was a frustrated seagoing sailor. He was never so content as when he was on blue water, and the ocean was second only to Warm Springs in restoring vigor sapped by the toughest job in the world. He was in magnificent fettle as we tied up at Rio. He had survived his equator crossing nicely, although he was subjected to a double initiation. He was not only elevated from the lowly state of “polliwog” to “trusted shellback,” but in recognition of his exalted position he was further given what was known as the “Royal Works.” The crew showed no awe for their Commander-in-Chief and gave him full treatment, to his great delight and the Secret Service’s complete horror.

(Michael F. Reilly and William J. Slocum. Reilly of the White House. New York, 1947. p. 108-109.)

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1939

The boisterous ceremonies of "crossing the line" are of such ancient vintage that their derivation is lost. It is well known that ceremonies took place long ago when the ship crossed the thirtieth parallel, and also when going through the Straits of Gibraltar. These early ceremonies were of the roughest sort and were, to a great extent, supposed to try the crew to determine whether or not the novices on their first cruise could endure the hardships of a life at sea. Then, as is the custom at the present time, it was primarily a crew's "party." The Vikings were reported at an early date to carry out these ceremonies on crossing certain parallels. It is highly probable that the present-day ceremony was passed on to the Angles, Saxons, and Normans from the Vikings.

At an early date, ceremonies of propitiation were carried on. Neptune, the mythological god of the seas, was appeased by the seamen, and marks of respect were paid those of his underwater domain. It is plausible that a part of the ceremony grew out of traditions of other days, even though sailors had come to doubt the existence of Neptune. Nevertheless, Neptunus Rex is today the majesty who rules in the ceremonies.

Those who have "crossed the line" are called "shellbacks." These Sons of Neptune compose the cast for the present-day ceremonies. It is a curious fact of human nature, but men will suffer a very severe initiation in order to be permitted to inflict the same on other men.

Sailorsmen treasure the certificate which testifies that "in Latitude 00-00 and Longitude . . .," and usually addressed to

all Mermaids, Sea Serpents, Whales, Sharks, Porpoises, Dolphins,  
Skates, Eels, Suckers, Lobsters, Crabs, Pollywogs, and other living  
things of the sea,

[name]

has been found worthy to be numbered as one of our trusty shellbacks, has been gathered to our fold and duly initiated into the solemn mysteries of the ancient order of the deep.

Usually the ceremonies of the modern Navy are picturesque, and with the exception of the discomfort of a good wetting in the tank, a slight shock of electricity from the "Devil," and the shaving ceremony, the initiation cannot be called extremely rough. I am told that in merchant ships the ceremony is still severe in the physical discomforts inflicted. Officers of the United States Navy could at one time "buy off" by giving the Neptune party so many bottles of beer. Unless the ceremonies are very crude, it is a tradition that younger officers in particular undergo the initiation.

The eldest and most dignified member of the crew is usually selected as Neptunus Rex; his first assistant is Davy Jones. Her Highness Amphitrite is usually a good looking young seaman who will appear well in the *déshabillé* of seaweed and rope yarns. The Court in general consists of the Royal Scribe, the Royal Doctor, the Royal Dentist, the Devil, and other names that suit the fancy of the party. The Bears have the difficult task of rounding up

1939, *continued*

the uninitiated, and also standing "dousing" watches in the canvas water tank.

The night before the ship crosses the line, it is the custom that Davy Jones shall appear on board with a message to the Captain from His Majesty, Neptunus Rex, stating at what time he wants the ship hove to for the reception of the Royal Party, and with particular summons for certain men to appear before him. This reception of Davy Jones usually takes place at night and may be made most impressive. The ship is stopped and, amid a glare of lights and a whirl of water, Davy Jones emerges from the hawse or is hoisted over the bows to deliver his message. He is usually received by the Captain and Officer of the Deck on the bridge.

A part of the customary dialogue follows:

A RITUAL FOR ANCIENT ORDER OF THE DEEP

*Davy Jones comes aboard and hails the bridge.*

Davy Jones to Officer of the Deck: Ship Ahoy!

O.O.D.: Aye, Aye, Sir.

Davy Jones: What ship?

O.O.D.: U.S.S.--.

Davy Jones: What course?

O.O.D.: *State course.*

Davy Jones: Very well, Sir, I have been waiting your arrival. You will notify the Commanding Officer that I, Davy Jones, have a message to deliver to him from His Royal Highness, Neptunus Rex.

O.O.D.: Aye, Aye, Sir.

*Permit a few minutes to elapse.*

O.O.D.: Your Honor, the Commanding Officer awaits you.

Davy Jones (proceeding to place designated): Very well, Sir.

*If the meeting takes place on the quarter-deck, all hands are permitted to follow Davy Jones aft.*

Captain to Davy Jones: Greetings, Davy Jones.

Davy Jones: My congratulations to you, Captain. Some few years since I saw you.

Captain: Yes, it was aboard the U.S.S.--.

Davy Jones: I have a summons to you from Neptunus Rex.

Captain: I will be glad to receive it.

*Davy Jones reads the summons. He then shakes hands with the Captain.*

Davy Jones: I will await your pleasure tomorrow, Sir, and will see you when I return with my Royal Master, Neptunus Rex. Good night, Sir.

*Davy Jones walks forward.*

*On the next day when all is in readiness for the reception of Neptune and Party, the navigator reports the ship is on the "line." Davy Jones appears and reports to the Officer of the Deck that the Captain is to be informed that Neptunus Rex and Party have been sighted ahead. The Flag of Neptune is broken when Neptune and Court appear on deck. The bugle call "attention" is sounded; officers and crew fall in at quarters or where designated. The Royal Party then proceeds slowly aft to meet Davy Jones.*

Neptune (when he meets Davy Jones): Well, well, what a fine ship and what a cargo of landlubbers.

*Officer of the Deck salutes and reports with much dignity that the Captain awaits the Royal Party. Party proceeds.*

Captain: A sailor's welcome to you, Neptunus Rex; it is a great pleasure to have you with us.

Neptune: The pleasure is mine (a short speech). Allow me to present Royal Navigator Shellback who will relieve you. I am glad to be with you again, Captain, and have prepared for a busy day in order to make your landlubbers fit subjects of my great sea domain.

Captain: May I invite your attention to the fact that I have several young officers and members of the crew aboard who have not been in the Service long enough to have had an opportunity to visit your domain and become shellbacks. I beg you to be as lenient with them as possible.

Neptune: Ah! Captain, I will be as severe as I can — as severe as I can.

*Captain then introduces officers who have crossed the line before. These officers converse with the immediate personal staff of Neptune for a minute or so.*

Captain: Neptune, I turn over my command to you for such time as you wish.

Neptune: Very well, Captain, thank you. *Turning to Royal Navigator.* Royal Navigator proceed to the bridge and direct the ship on the course assigned.

*Royal Party is then escorted to the throne. They ascend. Initiation commences with officers first.*

*Dramatis Personae.* — Amphitrite, Neptune, Royal Baby, Davy Jones, Royal Chaplain, Royal Navigator, Neptune's Officer of the Day, Judges, Attorneys, Barbers, Doctors, Bears, Police.<sup>1</sup>

NOTE. — The writer is indebted to Lieutenant Commander T. R. Cooley, U. S. Navy, for an opportunity to examine the original manuscript of dialogue and ceremony used aboard the U. S. S. *Sacramento* and U. S. S. *Pruitt* when those ships "crossed the line." Much fun may be derived from charges and specifications that deal with the peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of the "victims" of the initiation. The *Sacramento* received advance dispatches and letters from Neptune much to the discomfiture of landlubbers.

<sup>1</sup> The U. S. S. *Henderson* and *Chaumont*, which make frequent cruises across the Pacific, have instituted the ritual of initiation into the Realm of the Golden Dragon, when ships cross the international date line on sailing to the westward. The neophytes, both officers and men, are subpoenaed and appear before the Court of the Grand Dragon for sentence and initiation.

1939, *continued**A Sample Summons*<sup>2</sup>

U.S.S.-- ON ENTERING

DOMAIN OF NEPTUNUS REX

NOTICE AND LISTEN YE LANDLUBBER

I order and command you to appear before me and my court on the morrow to be initiated in the mysteries of my Empire. If not, you shall be given as food for sharks, whales, pollywogs, frogs, and all living things of the sea, who will devour you, head, body, and soul as a warning to landlubbers entering my Domain without warrant.

You are charged with the following offenses-----

-----  
 THEREFORE, appear and obey or suffer the penalty.

Registered:

DAVY JONES

*Secretary to His Majesty*

Decorative certificates of distinct nautical phraseology are presented to those initiated. It is customary for the captain to sign the "diploma," also the seal of the ship is affixed thereto. No custom of the sea is better known, for to qualify as a "shellback" is a distinction desired by all sailormen.

As an example of the importance given to the ceremonies of crossing the line, the writer<sup>3</sup> has seen a squadron of ships sail along for days just north of the "line," awaiting a favorable time to head south and cross. . . . This ancient ceremony that we observe is most spectacular and dear to the heart of the seamen of all nations.

Captain Hall, writing a hundred years ago, said of this ceremony,

Its evil is transient, if any evil there be; while it certainly affords Jack a topic for a month beforehand and a fortnight afterwards; and if so ordered as to keep its monstrosities within the limits of strict discipline (which is easy enough) it may even be made to add to the authority of the officers, instead of weakening their influence.

(Lieutenant Commander Leland P. Lovette, U. S. Navy. Naval customs, traditions and usage. United States Naval Institute: Annapolis, Maryland, 1939. p. 42-47.)

Reprinted with permission of Admiral Lovette.

The quotation from Basil Hall is entered in full above under 1832.

<sup>2</sup> The "Summons" given is one of many forms used. They are usually folded and made up in the form of a subpoena.

<sup>3</sup> Chief Boatswain John D. Thompson, U.S. Navy.

1942

Going out, in March, 1942, we were in convoy in the Pacific, five troop ships, one little "gun boat," small destroyer, as an escort. The gun boat stayed so far ahead I think it felt that it was safer there in case of an attack. We knew by observation of the sun and stars that we paralleled the equator for a long time, just when we slipped over we were never told. Some time later we found some old certificates of the pleasure cruise days aboard and these we had certified. There were no ceremonies whatsoever.

On my return trip in April, 1944, in an Alaskan fishing boat that we contended had been retired from that service as unfit, we were alone. We carried, I think, some 500 Australians that were to go to Canada or United States for air training. All the Yank troops that were returning were shellbacks even though they had not been formally initiated going out. By the time of our return voyage the security regulations had been relaxed and so a ceremony had been planned.

On April 7th we crossed. The Aussie neophytes, clad only in shorts, were brought up from below, with the aid of paddles. They were introduced to the Court consisting of King, Queen and Junior. These were garishly costumed as could be expected with what was available on the ship. Junior, I remember, was a small colored soldier and acted somewhat as the court jester. After being introduced, the victim got a mixture of oil and graphite on his head, and then had the joy of a drink concocted of atabrine, quinine, mineral oil, and sea water, served from a thunder jug. A pool had been made by suspending a large tarpaulin or sail between some spars. This was full of sea water and the pollywog was soused into this and made to say "shellback" while under water. Surprising to say, there was a bit of sputtering and choking. All in all, the Aussies didn't take to the whole thing with too much enthusiasm. The Yanks may possibly have used it all as a chance to make amends for some misunderstandings, surprising to say.

(Extracts from a letter from a friend, a medical officer, sailing early and in active service until near the end of the war when he was invalided home.)

1943

There was no question about it: Joe *was* injured during the war. And another fact was indisputable: the injury occurred on June 22, 1943. But the official Navy records show that McCarthy was not facing Jap shrapnel or serving on a Marine airfield at the time. On June 22, 1943, he was on board the Navy's seaplane tender *Chandeleur*, steaming toward the Pacific war area. The ship recorded him as an "officer passenger." It sailed from Pearl Harbor on June 12, but did not reach Espiritu Santo, the destination of McCarthy's squadron, until July 3. And on June 22, the *Chandeleur* was crossing the equator. The details of that day were reported later by one of Joe's shipmates:

The skipper, Commander Albert K. Morehouse, gave the enlisted men permission to have a mild "shellback" ceremony on June 22,

1943, *continued*

the day we crossed the equator. That day the ocean was flat and the sky was clear. We had our "general quarters" moved up to 8 A. M. so the ceremony could be held at 10:00. And at 9:55, the uniform for "pollywog" initiates was announced as pajamas, overseas caps, and bare feet. The war was completely forgotten as we appeared before Neptunus Rex, the enlisted man enthroned on the boat deck. Rank meant nothing, of course, as we were paddled, soaked with hoses, speared by the electric trident, and generally abused. One Marine officer did an elaborate strip tease, and someone else read a long defense, typed on toilet paper. It was comic relief from the war, still hundreds of miles ahead of us.

McCarthy was nearly through his initiation when he was hurt. He was going down a ladder with a bucket fastened to his foot when he slipped. His other foot caught on a lower rung — an iron pipe a few inches from the steel bulkhead — and he fell backwards, injuring his foot. . . . After my initiation was over and I had rinsed the stain from my shaved head, I went to the sick bay to see how Joe was getting along. They had decided that three bones were broken, and I watched them put a cast on his foot.

Joe was in a good humor as he hobbled around on his cast, but he admonished his buddies: "Don't ever tell that I broke my foot in this silly way." They never suspected that, before Joe's war career was over, his prank injury would grow into a "severe leg injury" and he would be cited by Admiral Nimitz for bravely refusing "to be hospitalized."

(Jack Anderson and Ronald W. May. McCarthy, the man, the senator, the "ism." Boston [1952] p. 62-63.)

A United Press story from Washington dated December 29, 1952 reported that Senator McCarthy "received today a Distinguished Flying Cross and an Air Medal with four gold stars for 'heroism and extraordinary achievement' as a Marine Corps officer in the Pacific during World War II." (New York Times, December 30, 1952, page 2, column 4.) Earlier, Time Magazine on July 7, 1952 had quoted the Milwaukee Journal statement on the "shellback" initiation.

When Headquarters of the Marine Corps in Washington was asked by the compiler for word of verification as to accuracy, it replied that the practice of the Corps was not to quote citations, but to refer inquiries of this kind to the principal.

A letter to Senator McCarthy, addressed to him at the Senate Office building April 10, 1954, remained unanswered and unacknowledged, nor was it returned because of mistaken or inadequate address. It asked if he would give a few words about his experience to be included in what was intended to be an objective study of this bit of sealore, as the compiler was trying to gather as many first-hand stories as possible.

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I first crossed the equator aboard an LCI(L) — Landing Craft, Infantry (Large) — in late February or early March, 1943. We had an early type of LCI which in those days were awkward, uncomfortable vessels about 155 feet in length designed to transport some 100 or so troops onto the beach on am-

phibious assaults. Ours had a complement of some 22 men and 3 officers in the ship's company, with two officer passengers, these two being connected with the LCI Flotilla Staff. We were traveling in a convoy of about 32 ships, mostly LCIs, mine sweepers, and submarine chasers. Our point of crossing was on a more or less direct line between the Panama Canal and Bora Bora in the western group of the Society Islands.

We had discovered soon after leaving Norfolk that the entire ship's company was made up of pollywogs. Of the whole gang of us, only one officer passenger, a young lieutenant (jg) in the Supply Corps who had come up through the ranks, had ever been initiated into the mysteries of crossing the line. Needless to say, he filled our ears with all sorts of blood curdling yarns about what we were about to face. We allowed him to have his sport until it became tiresome to us and then pointed out to him that if he felt that he alone was going to play each role from King Neptune down to the Royal Baby while attempting to grease and clip a whole shipload of unwilling sailors, he had his work cut out for himself.

He, being a reasonable man, saw the logic of this, and except for uttering a few dark threats about seeing to it that we would not get our shellback certificates, he subsided and held his peace. Consequently, the day we crossed the line we spent several hours lounging on the deck watching through binoculars the ordeals and torments being undergone by those no more inexperienced than ourselves who were merely unfortunate enough to find themselves aboard ships with strong shellback parties.

Later in the war and in connection with operations in New Guinea and the Phillipines, I crossed the equator several times, but each time was aboard a ship that was criss-crossing back and forth regularly, so that all hands were shellbacks several times over. So by the end of the war, I had crossed the equator about 6 times in each direction, and the nearest I had come to an initiation was a few hundred yards while watching the ceremony through field glasses.

Therefore I was greatly pleased in 1946 in connection with an Antarctic expedition (Operation Highjump) to be on hand for and to participate in a bona fide crossing-the-line ceremony. We crossed aboard the USCGC *Northwind*, an icebreaker, in mid-December on a great circle course from Panama to Scott Island in the Antarctic Ocean. On the leg from Norfolk to Panama, the shellbacks had gotten together and been assigned our roles. Being a Naval Officer aboard a Coast Guard Cutter, I was automatically suspect and was assigned the role of Defense Attorney for the pollywogs — a position of some delicacy in that it sometimes happens that if the Defense Attorney makes too eloquent a plea, things may become so unruly that he finds himself subjected to various indignities along with his clients.

In Panama City, a delegation went ashore and purchased various costumes and trimmings, and the first few days at sea were spent in building a large open canvas water tank below and just aft of the helicopter flight deck. A straight backed chair was secured to the flight deck by hinges on its back

1943, *continued*

legs in such a fashion that an occupant thereof, after being treated by the Royal Barber, could be tipped over backward and into the tank below where two stalwart shellbacks could supervise the ducking and presumably rescue the victim in his last extremity.

Also, a canvas tunnel was constructed about 15 feet long and leading up a well-greased ramp to the flight deck. Into this tunnel was led a series of high pressure water hoses.

The main cast of characters consisted of such standard personalities as King Neptune, his Queen, the Royal Baby (an obese Petty Officer), the Royal Prosecutor, Defense Attorney, the Royal Jury, the Royal Physician and Dentist (with squirt guns filled with a very bitter fluid), the Royal Barber, and various others bounding and howling about.

We were all briefed in our duties by the Shellback Committee and were read instructions from the Navy Department cautioning us against committing any physical violence which might injure the initiates.

On the morning of the crossing, the pollywogs were stripped to their underdrawers and led aft one at a time, the higher officers going first in order to insure their getting well initiated while we were still full of pep and enthusiasm. Each person was first shoved into the tunnel, and as he tried to crawl along it, powerful streams of water harrassed him each inch of the way.

He was then brought before the Royal Court and after bowing to the King and Queen and kissing the Royal Baby, was charged with a series of major crimes the most serious of which was the fact that all during his life thus far he had failed to cross the equator. As Defense Attorney, I took the position that although my client was guilty of everything charged to him and probably more besides, indeed deserved to be tossed over the side without more ado, none the less I reluctantly pleaded for mercy, and asked the court merely to have the unfortunate criminal shorn, greased, baptised.

Officers and Petty Officers received individual attention from the Shellbacks, of course, but by the time the main mass of enlisted men came through (there were probably some 75 or more pollywogs to begin with, representing about half the ship's company) the first bloom of enthusiasm had worn off and the men were run through in groups in rather haphazard fashion.

All in all, everyone had a merry time of it, and it was several days before the grease had been properly cleaned from the decks and several weeks before the ship's barber was able to restore any sort of order to the haircuts of those who had been treated by the Royal Barber.

I should mention that the first to go through the initiation was our Commanding Officer, Captain Charles W. Thomas, USCG. A rather violent initiation was planned for him, but at the last minute the Shellbacks got cold feet and sent a delegation to the "old man" to say that if he preferred, he would be given only a perfunctory initiation. Captain Thomas, a wonderful gentleman and a good sport in every respect, insisted emphatically that he be spared not one whit. Indeed, he entered into the spirit of the game whole-

heartedly, harangued the court, made speeches to one and all, took his initiation in extremely good grace, and after washing and dressing, joined in the remaining festivities — now as a certified shellback — with great vigor and enthusiasm.

Shellback certificates range all the way from florid scrolls all set about with mermaids and various types of sea life to a simple card stating that the holder has crossed the equator. There are similar certificates commemorating such things as crossing the 180th meridian, the Arctic and Antarctic Circles, etc. I have a card certifying that I have been aloft in a helicopter south of the Antarctic Circle.

(Manuscript statement from William Gerrish Metcalf, dated December 10, 1953.)

1944

Aboard a United States Aircraft Carrier (Delayed). — For the officers and men aboard this ship the war almost stopped for about four hours today. At least it seemed to hesitate, and that is because there are some things that are the same in war even as in peace and the crossing of the equator is one.

Many days ago, a few hours after this ship left port, her destination was announced over the public address system and thus it became obvious that there would be a crossing of the line. Almost immediately the shellbacks — those with proof that they already had traversed the world's waistband — began to appear out of those corners where bulkhead meets bulkhead and to crawl out of their sacks and other soft and secluded places to make their presence felt.

There were many nights then when in the crew's quarters there could be heard other sounds in addition to the slapping of the waves against the sides and the resonant snores of the men engaged in their favorite shipboard pastime. There were many mornings, too, when the reasons for these sounds were apparent in the shaved or partly shaved heads of pollywogs who had not been as elusive as is implied by this name for all those who never before have entered into the domain of Neptunus Rex.

The initial climax in the now-rising crescendo of feverish excitement was reached yesterday at 4 P. M., when up over the forward edge of the flight deck there arose, to the accompaniment of firecrackers and the shouts and gesticulations of a group clad in a blending of foul weather gear and light apparel, the figure of Davy Jones. Mr. Jones wore a suit of red winter underwear over which had been casually thrown a souwester and bore (1) a trident and (2) a striking resemblance to Lieut. Lars J. Larsen of 139-26 87th street, Jamaica, L. I.

Actually the crossing of latitude zero was accomplished during the night, but it was not until 8:30 A. M. today that Neptunus Rex, at other times known as Chief Petty Officer Harry Daily of Lomida, Cal., appeared, bewhiskered with shredded hemp and properly berobed as befitted his office. He was accompanied by the other appropriately caprisoned members of the royal court

1944, *continued*

of the raging main, including the queen, the princess, the royal prosecutor, the royal chaplain, the royal doctor, the royal barber, the royal cook, the royal undertaker, the royal baby and the royal musicians.

It was then that the Jolly Roger was run up on the foremast and the court was convened where thrones had been erected on the forward elevator now lowered to the hangar deck. Here justice was meted out to the pollywogs, all of whom had received subpoenas and summonses and many of whom had been ordered to appear in special raiment.

Lieut. (j.g.) John F. Druze of Irvington, N. J., who will be remembered by sports fans as the 1937 Fordham football captain and former assistant to Frank Leahy at Boston College and Notre Dame, was charged with boasting about his prowess as a football player and athletic expert and was ordered to appear in a costume similar to that worn by Charles Atlas in the strength ads. He then was convicted and sentenced to demonstrate in every compartment of the ship the principles preached by that apostle of athleticism.

While Lieut. Druze was demonstrating how to develop from a ninety-pound weakling into 210 pounds of muscle, four messboys, blindfolded and wearing winter underwear, were belaboring each other with boxing gloves on the lowered after elevator. Two officers, dressed as somewhat exaggerated admirals, meanwhile were going throughout the ship with tubs of water and ship models and staging mock naval battles while lecturing on tactics.

On the range-finder platform an ensign, dressed as Mahatma Gandhi, stood with binoculars to eyes and reported all electricity producing clouds. Every hour on the hour a lieutenant, accused of complaining about the food in the officers' wardroom mess, set up a card table with dishes and silver for one and consumed a box of cornflakes without benefit of cream or sugar.

Down on the hangar deck and on the lowered forward elevator, meanwhile, there was a steady stream of officers and men who crept forward on hands and knees to pay homage to his royal highness and then to be hustled through an assortment of treatments. While intermittent equatorial rainsqualls occasionally showered upon the whole piratically garbed assemblage, they first were sent crawling through a forty-foot tunnel of canvas, from the outside of which they were belabored by royal policemen with stuffed canvas clubs.

Then they were seated in an electrically charged doctor's chair to have their mouths sprayed with gentian blue and, after being embalmed liberally with flour-paste, they then were rushed aft to the fantail, where they finally were spilled from an elevated chair into a tank of sea water and became shellbacks themselves.

It probably is true enough that this is not the type of thing which you yourself would want any part of in New York or in River Falls, Wis. You may even wonder why men would want any part of it anywhere, and yet for the officers and men aboard this ship this — and this alone — made the war almost stop for about four hours today.

You say "almost" because always while this was going on there were men on watch scanning the skies and the sea from the bridge and from the gun sponsons and there were others down in the damp heat of the engine room and in the galleys, and when, at 2 P. M., the royal court was dissolved, the whole ship settled back once more into the grim routine of war, but of war that had seemed to hesitate, at least, for four hours.

(W. C. Heinz, Staff Correspondent, *The New York Sun*, Friday, March 17, 1944.)

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Chief Printer Edwin L. Murray, U.S.N.R., 5721 Ninth Street N.W., formerly employed in the composing room of *The Evening Star*, was inducted into the "Ancient Order of the Deep" while crossing the equator in the Pacific recently. He was hailed before King Neptune's court on special charges of selling Shellback certificates to "pollywogs" (neophytes of the order) and "not maintaining the proper and meek demeanor of a chief petty officer pollywog."

In addition to regulation punishment, such as wetting from the Pacific Holy Hose and paddlings by the Royal Guard, he was prodded with an electric fork by the Royal Devil while being paddled hard by the King's Elite Cops, he wrote in a letter. The most spectacular of the punishments was a severe haircut, administered at various points along the gantlet of paddle wielders.

Later, Murray was dumped backward into the Royal Pacific Pool, three times unceremoniously ducked and finally sent down a greased chute to the deck, paddled the while by veteran Shellbacks.

(Washington, D. C. *Sunday Star*, January 7, 1945.)

(R. O. Baumrucker, ed. *USS West Virginia crosses the Equator again*, Oct., 1944. Captain H. V. Wiley, U. S. Navy, Commanding Officer, Commander G. J. King, U. S. Navy, Executive Officer. Cartoons by D. L. Johnson. Entire publication cleared by Fleet Chief Censor. San Francisco, The Trade Pressroom, 1944.)

Opens with photographs of the ship afire at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, another in October 1944, portraits of the Captain and Executive Officer, facsimiles of the Warning of Davy Jones and the Shellback Certificate. There are also texts of the Subpoena and Summons Extraordinary and of the exchange of letters between the Captain and Neptunus Rex, with the proceedings that followed. Many prints of the proceedings, photographs of heads of departments, group pictures of officers and crew, list of pollywogs converted and picture of converted mountaineers. Added is a moving tale of "That Night at Subiago," sure to give the landlubber a lasting impression of a battleship in action. Three pages of small snapshots show less stern views of navy life afloat and ashore.

The book is the work of Robert Owen Baumrucker, Dartmouth College, 1931, with "three years of battleship duty in practically all Pacific actions from Attu through Okinawa," separating from the navy in January 1946 as a Lieutenant-Commander, and later in the merchandising and advertising business.

It was "originally intended as a souvenir of our exceptionally hilarious Shellback ceremonies just before the invasion of the Philippines, but produced under combat conditions — with censorship, no mail for four to six weeks at a time, kamikazes, Second Battle of the Philippines, Iwo Jima, Okinawa and a new and unsympathetic Executive Officer — it didn't get off the press till the following August. Meanwhile it was expanded to include a roster and pictures of the crew,

1944, continued

many snapshots and cartoons, an account of our action against the Japanese fleet and other memorabilia of the spirited crew."

The quotation here is given with permission.

1945

As we approached the equator we got into the doldrums. No breath of wind ruffled the sea, and the sun blazed down fiercely. Weird headgear was devised to prevent burns; my own version of a sun helmet measured a yard across. We organized a ritual for crossing the Line, as sailors of all nations do. Leading characters of Neptune's Court donned fancy dress, made of available rags and tags — Neptune himself, his daughter Thetis, the Chief of Police, the Physician in Ordinary, and of course the Barber. I played Neptune. The Chief of Police beat the wretched initiates with his broadsword, giving hearty whacks.

Just as this celebration reached its height we heard airplane engines. We could see nothing, but the hum was incessant. We leaped to the antiaircraft guns. Thetis took her station by the 3.7-cm. gun, while the Barber and the Physician in Ordinary snatched up machine guns. The whole Court of Neptune took diving stations. Remembering back, I must smile; here was the last uncaptured U-boat crew, all rigged out in fancy dress and poised to fight for their lives. But at the time, it was quite serious, and I am happy to say there was no fight. The drone of engines faded away — a harmless airliner, probably — and we finished ducking Neptune's greenhorns.

(Heinz Schaeffer. We escaped in an outlaw U-boat. *Saturday Evening Post*, November 22, 1952. p. 60-62.)

Many youngsters — no matter whether it is a matter of elapsed time or of spirit — have voyaged twenty thousand leagues under the sea with Captain Nemo in his *Nautilus*, have thanked Jules Verne for the foreglimpse he thus gave them of what was later to be not unusual, have wondered if even they might submerge and tell their children about it. We had to wait for a world war and the dying spasms of a nation to give us the tale of the "crossing" in a submarine. This is the story of Heinz Schaeffer and his crew of the German U-977 that left Kiel in April, 1945. Scarcely were they under way when they heard of the surrender of the German forces. They had to decide whether it was just one more clever ruse of the enemy or a real warning from home. A weighty problem. Schaeffer finally decided to head for the Argentine, hoping to dodge enemy cruisers on the way. It meant running submerged for 66 days. The effect on food, clothing, comfort, spirits of all on board may be imagined, but quite probably the reality was much worse than any outsider can dream of. Surrender to the Argentine police came on August 17, ending a voyage of four months.

But Perry, who never sailed along on one line of argument very long, was off on another tack completely.

"And what provision —" that three-syllable word interwoven into ordinary deck conversation got everybody's attention, and Perry, sensing the effect of it, repeated — "An' what provision is being made for d'crossing d'equator ceremonies —?"

I was amazed at the response to that. Some guys haw-hawed, others slapped their neighbors on the back — evidently that was funny and serious

both to everybody but Mush and me. We looked at each other stupidly. Then I noticed a pale, rangy guy from the black gang who seemed to get paler.

The third oiler (Pat and Birdneck were the other two) spoke up. He was the one everybody called the Maverick.

"Who's d'wictims? Hey, you guy wit d'glasses. You ever been across d'line?"

"What line?"

"D'Equator."

I said, "No. I never —"

"All right. We'll take care of you," and he laughed in that nasty way he had and slapped the pale, rangy guy on the back in glee. "Hey — wait a minute — you ain't eider, have you? You was saying you had dat reg'lar run t'Norway —"

The pale guy gulped and said, "No — I ain't never been South —"

"O-o-h boy! anudder wictim. . . . And you, blubber-mouth." He was talking to Mush. "You too —"

I asked the white-haired guy:

"What's this Equator stuff?"

"Oh — it's nothin' if they ain't rough. . . ."

The Maverick heard that.

"Sure we won't be rough — haw-haw. Wait'll Ol' Fadder Neptune gives him a shave and wait'll Fadder Neptune's red-headed daughter gives him a kiss —"

The Bos'n had come down to the deck. The hilarity quieted down a little, though nothing could hold that Maverick guy now that he had some nasty business planned. He was noisy and swaggered around. . . .

The white-haired guy, Birdneck, and I were assigned to the same station. As we stood there, I took up this Equator initiation ceremony again. Frankly, I was worried. It sounded like the sort of thing I'd read about and expected before I came aboard, but I didn't want any of it now. I liked the quiet uneventful days and pleasant nights as they were.

I nervously asked the white-haired guy, "What do they do — what's this stuff the Maverick was talking about?"

The old fellow said quietly, "Oh, it's nuthin. Just a little fun; don't worry about it. On the big passenger liners they make a whole business of it and everybody has a good time. But on a little ship like this — Some of these fellers sometimes get rough. Yes, I've seen it happen. Sometimes some of the wild fellers do something and somebody gets hurt. I've seen nice boys hurt pretty bad —"

His voice was soothing, and he shook his head slowly.

"Yeah," came from Birdneck, who stood there with his hand on the brass handle of the hydrant to which we'd attached a dry canvas hose. Birdneck was to turn the water on, we to play the hose come the day when the ship burns up.

1945, *continued*

"Yeah, that damn Maverick — It's guys like him that makes trouble. An' you know there's a couple of more guys aboard this ship'd join up with 'im if he started. . . ."

"Yeah, but what do they do?"

"Oh, different things. You know that Maverick guy," he was talking and gesturing at the old man. "He's always stirring up trouble — back there in our cabin —"

Oilers rated separate quarters — they were a step above firemen and wipers. Pat, the Maverick, and Birdneck bunked together.

"Sometimes old Pat — you know he's a good old guy — he's old that's all. This goddam Maverick is always trying —"

I broke in, "Look, can't ya tell a fella what happens? What's this Father Neptune — ?"

"Oh, that's nothing. That's just — well what's hard is if some feller like that gets the idea to try some keelhaulin' — like they used to do in the old days —"

"Well, what's this keelhaulin'? Why doesn't somebody explain some of this?"

I was getting panicky about that damn Equator.

"Well, keelhaulin', that's when they tie a line around you."

The ship's bell sounded again and interrupted his explanation. . . .

Birdneck approached me early one evening. "Would you do my portrayal? I see the ones you did of the blond kid. No kiddin' — if I could draw like dat I'd quit d'sea."

I was flattered and happy to make a drawing of his head. There was still plenty of daylight. I'd draw out on deck. We were only two days away from the Equator, and that damn Maverick hadn't shut up for a week about "Hey you — wait'll Fadder Neptune comes aboard down on d'line. Wait'll dat red-headed gal, dat daughter o' his, gets ya. She's a hot baby. Haw —"

The fat Sailing Man with great relish had explained to Mush and me finally what real keelhauling was. "Well, the way they used to do it in d'old days, they'd tie a line — a long line — around your middle, see. Then they'd tie annuder on the other side of ya. Then a couple of men would throw ya over side, holding onto the line o'course and them what's holding the other line would drag it around and under the stern and they'd haul you down under the keel of the ship and then haul you up. That's all."

"That's all? Hell, didn't that drown the guys?"

"No, not always. They had a line tied to 'em, I tol' you."

"Didn't it hurt — didn't they get caught in the propellers —?"

The Fat Guy took his pipe out of his mouth and spat on the deck.

"Those ships didn't have no propellers. Oh, they might have got scraped a bit 'ginst d'barnacles, but they'd pull 'em up gasping like and half-drowned — if they had any life left in 'em."

Mush and I shuddered and walked off.

"Did you think he meant that? Wonder if that old bastard is kidding us," Mush asked me. . . .

Well, I thought Flip was one I could count on. The least he could do was to cut those lines they tied us with and I'd have a running chance. I could hop about until the ship was safely over the Equator and then shout "Out of bounds" or something else as appropriate when we were safely over into latitude S.01. According to the laws of the sea they shouldn't be able to have anything then. . . .

In the mid-afternoon we crossed the Equator.

Mush, the pale guy from the black gang, and I had arranged to meet before breakfast that day and talk over some sort of all-for-one-one-for-all protective pact. Nothing came of it. We couldn't agree.

All afternoon that day we chipped deck up on the prow — that was tops in in misery.

"We should be hitting the old belt right about now."

I looked up into the sun's glare at the Bos'n.

"What'd you say —?"

He was standing with shimmering waves of heat from the sizzling deck coming up around him, squinting up at the burning sun with his head cocked. His watch was opened in his hand.

"The way I figured it, we should be crossing the Equator right about now." . . .

Mush and I anxiously watched those two doors that led into the purple darkness of the shelter deck. If the Maverick and his bloody Father Neptune brigade came at us, it would be from those doors. Sweat poured down on my glasses and I let it run — I hadn't any clean handkerchiefs. Finally, when the effort of twisting around and watching those ominous holes in the bulkhead got too much for me, I went back to chipping with a bitter indifference.

The hell with them. If they came, they came. Being hauled through that water couldn't be any worse than chipping rust blisters on that burning deck — it would be cool at least — and I decided if that bunch did show up with their keelhauling lynch ropes, homemade splintered wood razors, rusty wire shaving brushes, and buckets of flesh-eating lather (made the week before, the Maverick had told us, from a bucket of Soogie fermented in a mixture of fishoil and crude oil — equal parts), I'd ask the Bos'n to please keep my glasses for me. He was the only one on the prow deck who wore a shirt, and he could tuck them away in his breast pocket. Then I'd be ready for my shave by King Neptune's daughter — or was he to do the shaving and we marry the daughter, before or after we were keelhauled? I didn't know the procedure, and I never found out.

The Neptune brigade didn't show up.

In the hot mess at supper the Maverick and a few others bellyached: What did them lousers up on midships think — the crew was going to carry on the ceremonies on their own time? Nuts! If midships didn't have the decency to co-operate, and cut down the engines and give the crew time off when we

1945, *continued*

hit the Equator — t'hell with them. There'd be no ceremonies. And there wasn't.

(Louis Slobodkin, Fo'castle waltz. New York, 1945. p. 100-119, *passim*.)

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### 1946

In September, 1946, the British Admiralty gave out "Crossing the Line: An Account of the origins of the ceremonies traditionally connected with Crossing the Line, together with a Procedure for the conduct of those ceremonies and examples of the Documents associated therewith." Thanks to the Office of the Chief of Naval Information, we give here most of the text of the document, with brief summary of "I, Origins of the ceremony." The "Foreword" runs thus:

It is not the intention to lay down a hard and fast drill for Crossing the Line. To do so would only be an impertinence, but would ignore such factors as the size of the ship, the local talent available, and the general circumstances prevailing at the time.

With the return to peace routine, however, and the obvious necessity to foster an awareness of the old traditions in the minds of the rising generation, many requests have been received for the promulgation of an authentic order of proceedings.

This pamphlet has therefore been produced on the clear understanding that it represents no more than a symposium of the basic features involved, and in the hope that it may be of practical assistance to those who wish to observe the appropriate ceremonies with the dignity and regard for accuracy to which they are by custom and tradition entitled.

In compiling these notes, considerable reference has been made to "Crossing the Line in H.M.S. Renown," and acknowledgment is also due to Frank C. Bowen, Esq., Commander R. T. Gould, R. N. (Retd.), and to various officers for their assistance.

Part I, "Origins of the ceremony," then follows [summarized here]:

The ceremonies connected with Crossing the Line are pagan in origin. In their earlier forms, they were not even associated with the Equator, but were in the nature of sacrifices to propitiate the gods when entering the unknown. Straits and narrow passages, in addition to representing a transition to hitherto unexplored waters, held very real terrors for seamen on account of the purely physical hazards presented by strong and unpredictable currents, sudden gusts of winds, rocks and shoals.

Early records show that some sort of ceremony was connected with areas such as the Straits of Gibraltar, the Sound and the Skaw. Forfeit was paid by the *ship* rather than by the individual, and there is a suggestion of human sacrifice in the early Viking days. The theory has, in fact, been advanced that the ducking of initiates, now the main feature of the present ceremonies, is derived from the actual throwing of a human body into the sea in moments

of peril. Chaplain Teonge (1675) refers in his diary to the ducking from the yardarm of men entering the Straits of Gibraltar for the first time, or being required to pay one dollar in lieu. By the old laws, the mariner did not remove his clothes from beginning to end of voyage, and Captain Woodes Rogers, referring to the customary ducking "when entering the Tropic," adds that this was of great benefit in enabling many "to recover the colour of their skins which were grown very black and nasty." This *may* be symbolised in the lathering and shaving of novices which is now part of the proceedings, but there is no sort of supporting evidence to this effect. It seems more probable that the lathering and other ministrations have grown up as part of the mummary associated with any form of initiation. In any case, it is clear that much of the traditional ceremony is indistinguishable from the universal custom of "blooding" initiates, and so the final result is probably a combination of this custom and the symbolic remains of the original propitiatory offerings to the sea-god.

In the course of time, both the Equator and the Arctic Circle became the scene of traditional ceremonies, as marking the limits of fresh enterprise, and to those who had not previously crossed them the boundaries of the "unknown."

The custom of paying forfeits, either in money or in kind, in order to avoid the rigours of initiation, no longer obtains.

## PART II

### *Dramatis Personae*

King Neptune	Doctor	
	Barber	
Queen Amphitrite	Barber's Assistant(s)	King's Messenger
		Herald(s)
		Trumpeter(s)
Judge	Policemen	Head Bear(s)
Judge's Clerk	Bodyguard	Bears

### *Notes*

- (i) The above characters are not all essential. On the other hand, certain additions are permissible, e.g. Mermaids, Ladies-in-Waiting, etc.
- (ii) In a big ship, it is sometimes the practice for the principal parts to be taken by Officers or Warrant Officers. When V.I.P.s are to take part in the Ceremonies, this is considered to be essential, a special team of Officer Bears being enrolled to initiate them.

## PART III

### *The Preliminary Function*

The main ceremony of initiation, by its very nature, must rightly and inevitably involve an element of horse-play, but the preliminaries can and should be so handled as to make a lasting impression on those who witness them for the first time.

1946, *continued*

These preliminaries, which represent the approach of the ship to King Neptune's domain, take place after supper on the evening of the day before that on which the ship crosses the Line. The Daily Orders for that day should contain an item in the following sense:—

2030 (About). The ship, being within hailing distance of the Equator, will probably be boarded by an Emissary from the Court of King Neptune. On sighting this Emissary, the hands will be piped forward to witness his arrival.

The setting for the Herald's arrival must of course depend on the size of the ship and the resources available. The following treatment is suited to a cruiser or above.

### *Preparations*

Run two or more old wash-deck hoses across the upper deck just forward of the breakwater, and connect to mains. Hoses should have small holes pierced in them of the right size and number to produce a vertical curtain of water about 6 or 8 feet high when the mains are fully opened.

Rig *green* floodlights, yardarm groups, or "footlights" to illuminate the water curtain, all lights being on a dimmer circuit. Rig spotlights to illuminate figures standing in the eyes of the ship.

If available, rig loudspeakers to sound aft from the forecastle, with the microphone concealed in a conch-shell or on the Herald's staff.

### *Drill*

Pipe: "D'y'e hear there? Ship is expected to be within hailing distance of the Equator in ten minute's time."

When spectators are mustered (all abaft the breakwater), bring up water curtain and floodlights slowly. Under cover of water curtain the following muster as quickly as possible in the eyes of the ship:

Trumpeters

Herald

Bears.

Fanfare on trumpets, followed by a throaty roar of laughter through the loudspeakers.

Herald: "Ahoy — What ship?"

Captain (from the bridge): "Her Britannic Majesty's Ship . . ."

Herald: "Who commands this ship?"

Captain: "Captain . . . Royal Navy" (adding decorations in full, e.g. Companion of the Distinguished Service Order, etc.).

Herald: "Stop the ship — I wish to come onboard."

(Ring down Stop Both)

Captain: "The way is off my ship."

(Lower water curtain, bring up spotlights on Herald and attendants)

Herald: "Whence come you, and whither bound?"

Captain: "We come from . . . and we are bound for . . . We crave permission to clear the Line and proceed southward."

(It is sometimes the custom for the Captain to descend to the fore-castle at this point.)

Herald: "My Royal Master, being advised of your approach, bids me welcome you and those who sail with you. That all things may be done properly and in due order, he makes known his wishes by Proclamation, duly signed, and to which attend ye all."

(Unrolls Proclamation. Fanfare of trumpets. Bears growl and assume belligerent attitudes.)

"Whereas it has pleased us to convene a Court to be held onboard Her Britannic Majesty's Ship . . . on the upper deck thereof at . . . on . . . the said Ship being then on the Equator in Longitude . . .

"By these presents we summon all those who have not heretofore entered our Domains to tender the usual homage, and to be initiated into the mystic rites according to the ancient usages of our Kingdom. Whereof nor you nor any of you may fail, as you will answer at your peril, and to the delight of our trusty Body-guard."

(Short fanfare on trumpets — Bears relax)

Captain: "It shall be done. And now, ere you depart, will you take some refreshment?"

(Captain's Steward serves beer to all. Some apprehension displayed by Bears, who are served last, as to their inclusion in the invitation. They should drink from bottles, the Herald and the Trumpeters from glasses.)

Herald: "I now return whence I came. Pray cause these documents, to be served upon those of your Company who come newly to the domains of my Royal Master. Farewell until the morning."

Captain: "Farewell until the morning."

(Herald hands heavily sealed package to Captain — Fanfare on trumpets, during which cut spotlights and bring up water curtain slowly. As curtain reaches full height and ship gathers way, repeat throaty laughter.)

#### Notes

- (i) It is held by some authorities that Neptune and his full Court should attend the preliminaries set out above, but this procedure is considered to be not only illogical but profoundly bad theatre.

1946, *continued*

- (ii) There is no sort of reason, if space permits, why the Herald should not appear in a nautical chariot drawn by Dolphins, or other symbolic vehicle.
- (iii) In an aircraft carrier, the advantages of using the forward lift for the arrival and departure of the Herald and his attendants will be obvious, and similar remarks apply to the main ceremony on the following day.
- (iv) It is by no means essential to provide an individual Summons for each "initiate," but these documents are frequently treasured by the recipients just as much as the "Crossing the Line" Certificates.

The alternative is to broadcast the terms of the document and post copies on the Notice Boards. Individual Summonses, if issued, should follow the lines of the Herald's Proclamation set out above, the name of the individual being shown on a separate line in substitution for the words: "All those who have not heretofore entered our Domains."

### *The main ceremony*

#### *(a) Preparations*

##### *Routine*

The Ship's Routine should be so adjusted that nothing is done after scrubbing decks. The hands should be piped to breakfast as early as possible, and to clean into skylarking rig.

It is sometimes the practice to get out a completely bogus routine, embracing such items as "Bears to cocoa and wash." The advantage of this procedure is that it provides a useful programme of events and adds one more document for the record.

##### *Rigging*

The essential requirement is a stage, platform or dais, a canvas bath, and a chair or chairs capable of being tilted in such a manner that the occupant is precipitated backwards into the bath. If the number of initiates is sufficient, two or more chairs may be provided, and possibly two baths, side by side. The baths should be placed with the longer side running away from the platform. The water should be about 4 feet deep, and it is well to place some suitable cushioning material under the baths to prevent injury in the event of any initiates receiving an extra heavy "bumping." Arrangements should be made for the water to be changed at frequent intervals.

##### *Properties*

The second requirement is the "lather" for use by the Court Barbers. The essential point is lavish and simple application, and somewhat staggering quantities may be required. The normal recipe calls for a paste of flour and water in white and two other colours, but in these days of food rationing some less palatable substitute may have to be found.

The remaining properties, in the construction of which much ingenuity may be displayed, are as follows:—

Stethoscope	(e.g. Voice-pipe headpiece)
Thermometer	(e.g. Guage glass)
Lancet	(e.g. Cutlass or Javelin)
Medicine	(Sea-water, with a flavouring of quinine, in a large variety of bottles)
Pills	(Dough, "bound" if desired with horse-hair, and flavoured with garlic or other tasty but harmless concoction)
Razors	(Made of carefully smoothed wood)
Shaving brushes	(Whitewash brush size)

Note: The common attribute of all these properties is their exaggerated size.

### *Costumes*

In general, the design of the costumes can be left to local talent and imagination.

The Bears, however, not only have to look something like Bears, but they have to spend the greater part of the day in the bath. There are many ways of meeting these requirements, but the following specification, taken from the account of H.M.S. *Renown* when Crossing the Line in April, 1920, may be of help:

The basic part of the costume was black canvas lightly thrummed with yarns. A fearsome embellishment of teased-out spun yarn, like phenomenal furs of an unknown species, thickly draped their necks, shoulders and waists . . . on their heads they wore navy socks in the manner of fishermen's caps.

The important point is that the "foundation" should be strong enough to withstand the clutching hands of struggling initiates.

### *Identification of Initiates*

There are four methods by which those who have not previously crossed the Line can be identified:—

- (a) By inspection of Service Certificates — laborious and not 100% certain.
- (b) By direct enquiry — not very satisfactory, and tends to detract from the excitement.
- (c) By a detailed enquiry addressed to Leading Hands of Messes, calling for the names of those members of their Mess who have previously crossed the Line, and if more than twice, how many

1946, *continued*

times — a laborious but satisfactory method, giving the names of initiates by elimination, and identifying those old hands who may be entitled to some special distinction by virtue of numerous crossings.

- (d) By direct "hunting out" by the Policemen — traditionally, this is the correct method, but it is not easy in a big ship, and tends to lose its interest and entertainment value if too prolonged. It is, however, desirable that a few volunteer "reluctant participants" should be found to open the proceedings, as described later.

(b) *Procedure*

It is customary for much of the main ceremony, and particularly the earlier stages thereof, to be conducted in verse. Once again, this must be arranged in the light of local circumstances and available talent, but it is worth noting that overmuch doggerel tends to become a weariness of the flesh.

The proceedings open with the assembly, in some suitable spot, of King Neptune and his Court. (Once again, it will be noted that the lift of an aircraft carrier provides an admirable piece of stage machinery.)

Preceded by the Music, Policemen and Bears, and followed by the remainder of their Entourage, King Neptune and Queen Amphitrite, seated in a nautical equipage drawn by Dolphins, then make a processional tour of the upper deck, finishing either on the Quarter-deck or at the Royal Dais, as deemed most convenient.

Here they are greeted by the Captain, and after a formal exchange of amenities those persons qualified by previous multiple crossings of the Line are presented. The ceremony is made the occasion for the investiture of these veterans with Orders and Certificates appropriate to their rank, service and personal idiosyncrasies, the necessary insignia being fabricated onboard. (e.g. "Companion of the Exalted Order of Shellbacks," etc.)

This is a suitable stage in the proceedings to tackle the question of lady initiates. There have been instances when Flag Officers or Captain's wives have been present, and the usual practice has been to grant them honorary certificates and to make them members of an appropriate Order.

For example, the Rev. A. Bloxam, Chaplain of H.M.S. *Blonde* (Captain Lord Byron) notes in his diary for 12th November, 1824, that Queen Amphitrite "addressed a few lines to Lady B." while on the occasion of H.M.S. *New Zealand* crossing the Line on 6th May, 1919, it is recorded that "... At this stage Her Majesty (Queen Amphitrite), with much graciousness and charm of manner conferred the insignia of the Most Unfathomable Order of the Deep Sea Needle, First Class, upon Lady Jellicoe." The account subsequently states that the distinguished novice was graciously excused homage, a few drops of sea-water being sprinkled on her head in token of full initiation.

When these formalities are completed, the whole procession moves to the scene of action, King Neptune and Queen Amphitrite take their seats, the Herald makes a short proclamation, the Doctor, Barbers, etc., report all present and correct, King Neptune orders: "Bears in the Bath," and the business of the day begins.

It is well to open with two or three volunteers, one of whom should be an officer, who will undertake to act as "reluctant initiates." That is to say, they have to be sought out by the Policemen, they resist arrest, and, generally speaking, are put through the hoop. The reading of bogus Punishment Warrants prior to the final administrations of the Barber, Doctor, etc., lends colour to this part of the proceedings and aggravates the apprehension of the remaining initiates.

Events then take their normal course, the drill being as follows:—

- (a) Initiate is produced by the Policemen or comes forward voluntarily.
- (b) His name is announced, and a notation made against it in a massive tome by the Clerk.
- (c) He is seated in the chair, his temperature is taken, heart tested, pulse timed, etc., etc.
- (d) He is lathered and shaved, a pill is popped into his mouth, and he is tipped backwards into the bath, there to be dealt with by the Bears according to his deserts.

### *Certificates*

It is worth taking a good deal of trouble over the layout of the Certificates, and in the selection of a firm to reproduce them in colour.

The essential features are:—

- (a) The ship's crest
- (b) A photograph or drawing of the ship
- (c) The main body of the Certificate
- (d) The seals of Neptune and Amphitrite

With regard to (c) above, there is no hard and fast rule, and the following is merely taken from an actual Certificate by way of example:

Be it Hereby known that . . . has been duly initiated into the Ancient and Mystic rites of our Realm as by our Royal Decree from time Immemorial. Further . . . We hereby require all such as have not yet entered our Domains, to treat the aforesaid with all respect to which our duly initiated and loyal subjects are entitled.

Given at our Court on board Her Britannic Majesty's Ship . . . on the Equator in Longitude . . . This . . . Day of . . . 19. . (Seal)

1946, *continued*

If the ship is on a special cruise or particularly interesting foreign commission, a scroll showing the places visited adds to the ornamentation of the Certificate.

1950/1951

When we left Aruba in the West Indies, our last civilized port of call, and began our long journey south, a deep depression settled over the seven hundred men aboard our ship. In Edinburgh, in Norway, and as we were bunkering at Aruba, they had been gay, reckless, and jovial in manner and conversation. But after we turned southward, despite various attempts at organized fun on the ship in the way of parties, concerts, high jinks at the equator, and the like, we all tended to become solitary and avoid the society of the friends we had made.

(R. B. Robertson. *Of whales and men*. New York, p. 52-53.)

The tale of the senior medical officer on a pelagic whaling expedition to the Southern Ocean in the 1950/1951 whaling season. Mr. Robertson is a Scot, new to this way of life. His story is full of interest as showing the difference between the old sailing ships and the modern mechanized floating factory. It stands out in connection with the present offering as showing how "the high jinks at the equator" played a slight riddle in the listless current of daily life on the way to the field. Just how "the high jinks" were staged is not told here. Left for "another story?"

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1951

After Pearl Harbor, in 1941, millions more Americans went travelling than ever before, and hundreds of them went across the Equator or the Pacific International Date Line. All our servicemen who went to the islands and atolls beyond the "Line" had their bit of fun on board ship, and were admitted to the Order of the Golden Dragon.

The Golden Dragon is to the Eastern waters what Father Neptune is to the Western. Now, old King Neptune's the figure about whom all fuss is made when travellers come into his region for the first time; he's the reason that the victims must be lathered, and shaved and dunked in salt water — following the "custom" of those who had been there before.

Those who don't know that a Pollywog's never crossed the Equator had better not admit it; those who don't know what goes on at the International Date Line (or 180th Meridian), had better keep quiet, too. But here's a slight hint: Watch for the fatal gleam-in-the-eye. It's the sign of someone who knows all about it — and you're in for trouble.

This is the story of the tradition of Neptune — and the "how" and "why" of it all. May it not discourage prospective Shellbacks from leaving home, and may it find favor with the real "shell-headed ones" and with the gods of the Eastern and Western waters.

(Henley E. Combs. *Shellbacks: Sons of Neptune*. Illustrations by Dave Lyons. New York: Pageant Press, 1951.)

The "how" and "why" of it all" are here told in a book of some 23 pages with lively illustrations and some blank pages for autographs. It opens with general remarks about King Neptune, and then goes on to say: "thus begins one of the strangest ceremonies ever recorded in a ship's log, the crossing of the Equator, and the initiation into the royal service of King Neptune. . . . And so the traveller learns that mercy is unknown in the region of the Equator."

Recorded incidents in the long life of Neptunus Rex make up the bulk of this account, with special attention given to the crossings of: van Linschoten in 1583, a Swedish traveler in 1751, Woodes Rogers in 1712, Hauser Martingale in 1817, James Brady on the USFS *Lancaster* in 1877, the Duke of Windsor when Prince of Wales, King George and Queen Elizabeth in 1927, USS *Indianapolis* in 1936 with President Roosevelt on his way to Rio, the Truman family in 1947 (also bound for Rio), the USS *Pennsylvania* in May 1936, etc., etc.

## 1952

## (All Hands: The Bureau of Naval Personnel Information Bulletin, October and November 1952)

The above two issues come to sight with words about the "crossing" well worth noting.

November gives pages 31 through 34 to "Are you a Whale Banger? A Blue Nose?" telling of nearly twenty clubs in our navy with membership more strictly limited than in any Social Register. Half-tones of fifteen or more certificates given the rookie when he crosses the equator or has other like experience on sea or land are all "unofficial, but they carry the weight of tradition and growing customs with them." We know already how the Neptunus Rex certificate is given shellbacks when they cross the equator. Rounding Cape Horn makes you a Mossback. Some of us may not have known, however, that when you cross the line and round the Horn on the same voyage, you become a "Horned Shellback." Crossing the International date line westward bound lets you into the "Realm of the Golden Dragon." An "Arctic Circle" or a "Northern Domain of the Polar Bear" certificate tells that the owner has crossed the Arctic Circle. "The Royal Order of the Blue Noses" is limited to sailors who crossed the Circle in the Operation Nanook of July, 1946. From way down south comes the paper for "The Royal Domain of the Emperor Penguin, Antarctica" entitling one "to all of the privileges of this frozen realm of blizzards, including freezing, starving, shivering, and any other privileged miseries that can possibly be extended during his stay in this land of answer to a Well Digger's Dream."

A "Plank Owner's Certificate" gives the owner "clear and unencumbered title to one plank or section of plank" from the deck of his decommissioned ship if he has been a member of the commissioning crew. A variation is the "Shackle and Grommet Owner's Certificate" giving the owner title to "a half-inch shackle from any ship in which he has served for 15 years or three consecutive enlistments."

Pilots forced to parachute from a disabled plane are members of the "Caterpillar Club." If a pilot must ditch his plane at sea and take to a life raft, he may join the "Goldfish Club"; men forced to spend more than 24 hours on a life raft through no choice of their own may claim membership in "Sea Squatters." If a carrier pilot on his way back crashes into the emergency barrier because he failed to catch an arresting wire, he becomes an honorary member of the "High-floating Hook Bouncing Barrier Crashers," a distinction, it seems, if not an honor, he can scarcely escape. If you fly through a tropical storm whirling at 100 knots or better you may belong to the "Century Club" or the "Not so Ancient Order of Hurriphooners," conceived by hurricane hunters down Florida Way.

The "Royal Order of the Highjump" is for members of the U. S. Naval Antarctic Expedition in the winter of 1946-47, and is in much the same class as the "Royal Order of the Mushroom," open to men who saw the first atomic blast at Bikini atoll in 1946. The "Club of Honorary Submariners" is open to men who have been totally submerged in a submarine, and the "West of Shanghai-Manila Club" is made up of men who took part in the westernmost penetration of Japanese-controlled waters by any American task force since the fall of Corregidor.

Honors and distinctions vary, no doubt, but special note should be made of the "Royal Order of Whale Bangers," limited to crews of ships that track and attack whales mistaken for submarines. And two groups call for further notice: "The Royal Decree for Having Been Stationed

1952, *continued*

in the Port of London" at Headquarters of our naval forces in Europe, and the "Railroaders' Union, the Exclusive Society of Korean Railbusters," this latter being confined to Marines.

Page 22 of the October issue tells the story of how "Shellbacks become Mossbacks on Cape Voyage." USS *Oriskany*, too large to go through the Panama Canal, was shifted from the Atlantic to the Pacific Fleet and made the voyage round the Horn in May, 1952, with USS *William C. Lawe* and USS *Power* as escorts. A halftone shows some of the crew of the *Oriskany* dressed in ceremonial garb on their way to the performance.

1953

Royal liner crosses the equator, Ceremony on escort. Aboard the *Gothic*, Friday the 4th [of December 1953].

The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh on their Pacific voyage to the Fiji Islands crossed the equator at about 11:30 a. m. today.

On a cloudy, overcast morning with a slight drizzle the Royal couple watched through binoculars the traditional crossing-the-line ceremony on the fore-castle deck of the escort cruiser *Sheffield*, two cables length (quarter of a mile) away on the *Gothic's* starboard beam.

The *Sheffield's* crew crowded on to her two six-inch gun turrets on the forward deck to watch "King Neptune," with his consort queen, "Aphrodite," dressed in red and white robes and wearing golden crowns, hold their court.

King Neptune, holding a trident, read a proclamation which was followed by the traditional "shaving" and ducking of those who had not crossed the line before. — Reuter.

(*The Scotsman*, Edinburgh, December 5, 1953. p. 7, col. 5.)

On Board the Liner *Gothic*, Dec. 5, (AP) — The Duke of Edinburgh, togged out in a butcher's apron, cut capers as assistant ship's barber in traditional ceremonies when this royal liner crossed the equator.

Queen Elizabeth II watched the antics yesterday from the bridge as King Neptune came aboard to hold court. Neptune — Inspector Frank Kelley, the Duke's personal body-guard — was quickly doused in the swimming pool, long white beard and all. But his green-robed Queen fought all attempts to snatch her cabbage bouquet.

Charges were read against more than a dozen members of the royal household and staff. The Queen and Duke were exempt from the shellback initiation, however, because they had crossed the equator before.

(*Daily News*, Greenboro, North Carolina, December 6, 1953.)

*The Times* of London seems to have chosen to pass over this incident, but it is a real pleasure to find at least one American newspaper judging it worth a stickfull or so. New York City newspapers were silent because of a strike.

## APPENDIXES

### A — CROSSING THE RIVER PLATTE

1804

[July 21.] Set out early under a gentle breeze from the S.E. . . . at 7 oClock the wind lulled and it Commns'd raining, arrived at the lower Mouth of the Great River *Platt* at 10 oClock . . . This Great river being much more rapid than the Missourie forces its Current against the opposit Shore. The Current of this river comes with great velocity roleing its Sands into the Missouri, filling up its Bead & Compelling it to inroach on the S [*North*] Shore. we found great difficuety in passing around the Sand at the Mouth of this River. Capt. Lewis and Myself with 6 men in a perogue went up this Great river Platt about 2 [*one*] Miles, found the Current verry rapid roleing over Sands, passing through different Channels none of them more than five or Six feet deep, about 900 [*600*] yards Wide at the Mouth, I am told by one of our Party who wintered two winters on this river, that "it is much wider above, and does not rise more than five or six feet" Spreds verry wide [*with many small islands scattered thro' it,*] and from its rapidity & roleing Sands Cannot be navigated with Boats or Perogues. The Indians pass this river in Skin Boats which is flat and will not turn over.

(Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark expedition, 1804-1806. Edited by Reuben Gold Thwaites. 8 vols. New York, Dodd, Mead, & Co., 1904-05. v. 1, p. 86-87.)

Printed editions began with Nicholas Biddle in 1814 and come down to our own days. The original manuscripts are in the library of the American Philosophical Society to which President Jefferson turned them over for safekeeping. The complete text following the spelling and punctuation of the original was first given in the Thwaites edition, and later in the Bernard DeVoto issue of 1953 (the latter omitting a few passages from time to time not needed for his purpose).

Nothing is said here about any ceremony, to be sure, and it may be taken for granted that the few members of the party who had crossed the Platte before had no chance to do any initiating now. This account is set down here because it is the first crossing in recorded history and because the quotations which follow show that the event was duly celebrated in a few years.

1809

A Mississippi *voyageur* who had never passed the Platte was called a *blanc-bec*; and upon his first passing he was subjected to an initiation, such as used to be given to sailors when they first crossed the equator.

(Gen. Thomas James. Three years among the Indians and Mexicans. Waterlook, Illinois: Printed at the Office of the "War Eagle," 1846. Reprinted in: Three years among the Indians and Mexicans, ed. by Walter B. Douglas, Missouri Historical Society, 1916. Footnote reference on page 20.)

1810

On the 28th [of April], they breakfasted on one of the islands which lie at the mouth of the Nebraska or Platte River; the largest tributary of the Missouri,

1810, *continued*

and about six hundred miles above its confluence with the Mississippi. This broad but shallow stream flows for an immense distance through a wide and verdant valley, scooped out of boundless prairies. It draws its main supplies, by several forks or branches, from the Rocky mountains. The mouth of this river is established as the dividing point between the upper and lower Missouri; and the earlier voyagers, in their toilsome ascent, before the introduction of steam-boats, considered one half of their labors accomplished when they reached this place. The passing of the mouth of the Nebraska, therefore, was equivalent among boatmen to the crossing of the line among sailors, and was celebrated with like ceremonials of a rough and waggish nature, practised upon the uninitiated; among which was the old nautical joke of shaving. The river dieties, however, like those of the sea, were to be propitiated by a bribe, and the infliction of these rude honors to be parried by a treat to the adepts.

(Washington Irving. *Astoria, or anecdotes of an enterprise beyond the Rocky Mountains*. Philadelphia, 1836. vol. 1, p. 165.)

1811

Saturday, May 11. The river Platte is regarded by the navigators of the Missouri as a point of as much importance, as the equinoctial line amongst mariners. All those who had not passed it before, were required to be shaved, unless they could compromise the matter by a treat. Much merriment was indulged on the occasion. From this we enter what is called the Upper Missouri. Indeed the change is perceptible and great.

(Hugh Henry Brackenridge. *Views of Louisiana, together with a Journal of a voyage up the Missouri river, in 1811*. Pittsburgh, 1814. p. 226.)

No changes appear in later editions until v. 6 of *Early Western Travels* (edited by Reuben Gold Thwaites, Cleveland, 1904) which adds "for the open bare plains, now prevail" to the last sentence.

Bradbury went up the river about the same time, but his journal notes only his breakfasting "on one of the islands formed by La Platte Riviere, the largest river that falls into the Missouri," on the 28th of April, 1811. Perhaps the good Scot said nothing about such frivolity because he kept his men too busy for trifles, since he stopped here to lay in a new supply of oars and poles, no ash being found on the upper river.

ca. 1811

The mouth of the Platte River was, in these early days, the division point between the upper and lower Missouri. So important a landmark was it then considered that the voyageurs came to treat it as the Equator of the Missouri, and it was a regular thing to subject the uninitiated to the rude jokes which are familiar to the navigator upon the high seas as an incident of crossing the "line."

(Hiram Martin Chittenden. *The American fur trade of the far west*. New York, 1902. vol. 2, p. 768-769.)

*Later*

The mouth of the Platte was to the Missouri what the Equator, the "Line," is to the ocean. River navigators once celebrated the crossing of the Platte as do salt-water sailors the crossing of the Line, and men who had never before been this far up the River were shaved and ducked and treated to other high-jinks; these proceedings were usually well irrigated with whisky. A man who had never crossed the mouth of the Platte was called, in fur-trade days, a "*blanc-bec*," which meant "white nose" or "white-beak."

(Dorothy Gardiner. West of the river. New York, 1941. p. 28-29.)

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## B — CROSSING BY AIR

*1942*

Boys will have their fun too, no matter if you are flying low over the greatest of rivers. As we crossed the equator — old Zero Degrees Lat. at 11:56 a. m., at West Longitude 49 degrees 32 minutes — I saw those of my crew who had been in the South latitudes before take paper cups of water and drop them on the heads of those who were uninitiated, thus making them subjects of the sacred realm of Jupiter Rex as identified from the realm of Neptune Rex on the sea. We crossed the Amazon, from just West of Point Grossa over Bahia Santa Rosa to Mixiana Island, thence to Isla da Marajo.

(Robert L. Scott, Jr. God is my co-pilot. New York, 1944. p. 57.)

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*1944*

Headquarters, Caribbean Command, Mar. 25 [1944] — Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt was initiated into the "Superroyal Order of Hyperterrestrial Hoppers" by Lt. Gen. George H. Brett yesterday as her military [sic] transport plane passed over the Equator off the Ecuadorean coast.

The "order" is limited to persons who have crossed the Equator in a military aircraft.

(Washington, D. C., Evening Sun, March 25, 1944.)

An A.P. dispatch, reprinted by permission. Newspaper head: "Mrs. Roosevelt 'Hazed' In Flight Over Equator."

*ca. 1950*

I had served in the regular Navy 42 years before I had an opportunity to cross the line, and then under unusual circumstances. I was navigating a light plane for my son, who was the pilot. We were on the leg Singapore-Batavia. I made the following entry in my Journal: "0932 crossed the equator

ca. 1950, continued

— Rex boarded plane and christened two pollywogs: J. W. H. Smith and P. V. H. Weems." The christening consisted of a rather generous baptism of water while I was working away on my chart.

(Letter from Captain Weems, May 10, 1954.)

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## C — CROSSING ON LAND

1793

CROSSING THE LINE (6:143 *et al.*). A ceremony similar in many respects to that performed on shipboard when the Equator is crossed was practiced in the northern frontier regions of North America in the late eighteenth century. A detailed account of the affair was given by John Macdonnell in his "Diary" entry for August 11, 1793. (Charles M. Gates. *Five Fur Traders of the Northwest*. Minneapolis, 1933.)

Macdonnell, an employee of the Northwest Company, tells how he was dubbed a "*North man by Batême*." The initiation was performed by sprinkling water on his face with a small cedar branch dipped in water. He had to accept conditions reminiscent of those imposed on sailors at the Equator — not to let any novice pass without practising the same rites on him, and particularly not to kiss any voyageur's wife against her will. The ritual was touched off by the sound of "a dozen of Gun shots fired one after another in an Indian manner." And, naturally enough, the ceremony called for a potation. (An Editor's note says that an initiatory celebration of the kind was customary among voyageurs. The formality of the custom varied from occasion to occasion, but the drink was a constant, an essential.)

*Frederick R. Edwards*

(American Notes & Queries, June 1947. v. 7, no. 3, p. 45.)

When the voyageurs passed from the St. Lawrence into the Ottawa and again when they entered the Mattawa, they performed one of the many rites that were traditional with them on their journeys. They pulled off their red caps and a man in each canoe uttered a prayer. A little later, when they left the Mattawa river, they performed another rite. Up to this point they had used "setting poles" as well as paddles wherever the current was too swift for the ordinary method of propelling the canoe. This system was called "tracking." At Lake Nipissing, however, they left the streams running east and entered one, French River, whose current was with them. For that reason they chose to express their joy of labor ended by going through a formal ceremony of throwing away their setting poles to the accompaniment of loud huzzas.

Another custom had already manifested itself on their trip. Near dangerous *saults* and rapids they had caught sight of tall wooden crosses on the banks. Whenever such a cross was passed, red caps came off and a prayer

was uttered. For were not these crosses the rude but tender memorials of the voyageurs to mates who had perished at these spots, caught in the treacherous swirl and eddies of the stream? As many as thirty crosses on one bank were recorded by a clerk who entered the country in the summer of 1800.

Soon after leaving Ste. Anne's all clerks or *bourgeois* who had never before accompanied a brigade into the interior were given to understand that they would be "baptized" in the chilly waters of the river if they did not moisten the whistles of their men. Accordingly high wines (brandy) was produced, kegs were broached, and soon the red plumes in the Northmen's caps waved at more uncertain angles, and the sorrows of leaving home were forgotten. (p. 40-41.)

Though the clerk could indulge in such luxuries as tea, a voyageur's rations were almost invariably a quart of lyed corn (dried peas were frequently used until Mackinac was reached) and an ounce or two of grease, pork, or bacon. From this last item, called *lard* in French, the class name, *mangeur de lard*, "pork-eater," was derived. (p. 51.)

There were compensations, however, in traveling on Lake Superior. When the wind was soft and light and blowing from the proper quarter, sails were improvised from oil cloths or blankets, and the little vessels sped along while the voyageurs took their ease, smoking, singing, or sleeping. It was *La Vieille*, or "the old woman of the wind," who thus blessed the voyageurs with favoring breezes and lightened their toil; and so, sacrifices to her were always in order. The ritual consisted of throwing a little tobacco into the waters, or scattering a little water from the blades of the paddles, and uttering the formula, "*Souffle, souffle, la vieille*" ("Blow, blow, old woman"). This ceremony was doubtless borrowed from the Indians, whose customs were often appropriated by the voyageurs. (p. 62.)

Grand Portage was left with regrets for the end of rest and conviviality. The carrying place there was nine miles in length, and the voyageurs earned six *livres* extra for every *pièce* carried over the bitterly toilsome way. Now the current was against the voyageurs until the height of land was reached near Rainy Lake. On this eminence, whence water flowed northward to Hudson Bay, east to the Atlantic, and south to the Gulf of Mexico, the voyageurs halted for another of their many ceremonies. Here every novice, be he *bourgeois*, clerk, or pork-eater, must be made a Northwester. The ceremony consisted of sprinkling the candidate with a cedar branch dipped in water. He then gave certain promises, among others, never to allow anyone to pass that way without initiation into the ranks of Nor'westers, and never to kiss a voyageur's wife without her consent. The rites were completed with a dozen gunshots fired in rapid succession and a treat of high wines by the new members.

Another custom practiced in this region was the construction of a lob stick. It was customary to make one of these Maypoles in honor of any gentleman who might be a passenger in a canoe. A tall pine, standing out on a point in the lake, was climbed by one of the voyageurs, who, with an ax, cut off all

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the branches except a tuft at the top, thus rendering it very conspicuous. The name of the passenger was then carved on the trunk, and ever after the spot was called after him. As the crew paddled off, the lob stick was saluted with three cheers and the discharge of guns, the honored passenger, of course, being expected to acknowledge the compliment by a treat at the first opportunity. (p. 66-67.)

. . . not a little of the description of the voyageur in this book has been derived from McDonnell's unpublished diary. (p. 163.)

(Grace Lee Nute. *The voyageur*. New York, 1931.)

The quotations from *The Voyageur* are printed here with the permission of Miss Nute.

## D — CROSSING IN SCANDINAVIAN WATERS

The principal entrance to the Baltic is the Sound (Øresund). It is rather narrow. At Elsinore (Helsingør), where it is only 4 kilometres broad, the Danish kings built the strong castle Kronborg (originally called Krogen) and demanded, after about 1420, a tax or toll from every ship that passed by, the Sound Dues, Øresundstold (until 1857). From the tax rolls, preserved almost complete since before 1500, we can realize what a vast number of ships every year passed along this international sea-street. Until the peace of 1660 both sides of the Sound belonged to the Danish crown; since then Sweden has possessed the eastern side, the province of Skåne.

The Danish coasts are rather low, but at the north-eastern entrance to the Sound a promontory arises directly from the sea, the Cape Kullen (*kulle* = mountain). This mountain can be seen at a great distance over the sea and must have made a certain impression on the sailors who came from the North Sea and the Kattegat going to the Baltic. It caught the eye and got the significance of a distinct signpost or frontier-mark of stone between the Kattegat and the Baltic. We must admit that this place was well fitted for the ceremony of sea-baptism. The young sailors or those who had never passed this important place before had to be initiated, in order never to forget this remarkable point of the voyage and to be introduced into the guild of the old sailors that had passed here before. The sailors and passengers were baptized or, if they did not want this, had to pay a certain amount, for which was bought ale, brandy or wine, in order that the old hands could admit the young ones into their company—generally speaking, for it was of course no real company with written laws and membership, only a fictitious 'company-of-those-who-had-passed-Kullen'. The ceremony was in Danish called *hønse for Kullen*. The word *hønse* (Swedish *hönsa*) means: give a certain amount for drinks and food to the comrades, so that the giver can be admitted to their company. When people have drunk and eaten together, they will be friends and colleagues, and the new ones will be recognized as members with the same rights as the old ones. In the German League of the Hanse the same custom must have taken place (German: *hänselein, hensen*). Travellers on land also

often had to be initiated at certain specially important places: big stones, mountains, bridges, etc.

It is difficult to say how old the ceremony of *hønse* off Kullen may be. There are no written statements from sailors — most of them could not write, and perhaps they also thought it better to be taciturn about their rites. But travellers who described the adventures of their voyages now and then told about them.

The oldest testimony we possess is from the year 1612. A Frenchman, Anthoni de Lybrey, complained to the burgomaster and the town-council of Elsinore about his treatment on board a ship that passed Kullen. The passengers were questioned by the sailors, whether they preferred to be baptized or to pay some money as a ransom. His companions paid voluntarily; but he would not, and all the sailors ducked him forcibly twice in the water.<sup>1</sup>

Three years later a Dutch Embassy passed Kullen on a Dutch war-ship. Anthonis Goeteris tells about it:<sup>2</sup>

The 6th (Sept.) at noon we passed a cliff, called *het Col*, where the people who have not been there yet must be baptized. They are, as soon as this cliff is seen clearly, bound to a rope and ducked in the water from the yard-arm three times and hauled up again. They may ransom themselves by paying a coin to the boatswains, and this the honourable gentlemen, the ambassadors and their attendance, did. But some boatswains who had not been there before could not be released.

Some contemporary notes in a copy of Goeteris's book in Stockholm tell that it cost two barrels of good beer and three hams, and that the king of Denmark (Christian IV) also was baptized, when he went by for the first time (1591?). This statement cannot be confirmed.

Charles Ogier, in 1634, accompanied the French ambassador to the wedding of Prince Christian in Copenhagen on a French ship and wrote an interesting book about his voyage and adventures in Denmark. He also tells us about the ceremony:<sup>3</sup>

At dawn we saw the Cape Kullen which belongs to Skåne and passed by. A gun was fired from the ship, and the sailors gave a shout of joy, which we took part in as we had just arisen from our beds. Here the gay and — for the seamen — rather profitable custom prevails that those who for the first time enter the Sound must, when they pass this Cape, either be ducked in the sea and baptized or ransom themselves from this treatment. For sailors and seamen it is only a pastime, because they love the ocean just as much as the firm earth. All the young ones, both sailors and soldiers, are bound under their arms and breast and hauled up to the yards, — then the ropes are let loose and they fall into the sea, three times up and down. The gunner came to the ambassador and told him smiling about the old custom and asked for a good ransom. All of us in attendance paid a dollar each.

The baptism was in reality a rather solemn ceremony. Another traveller tells, in 1666, that a gun was fired and the flag hoisted in honour of it, as the first novice was ducked.<sup>4</sup> The baptized sailors did not get a certificate;

<sup>1</sup> Laur. Pedersen, *Helsingør i Sundtoldstiden*, Vol. I (1926), p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> *Journal der Legatie Ghedaen inde Jahren 1615, ende 1616* (1619), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Det store Bilager i Kjøbenhavn* (1914), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Fra Arkiv og Museum*, Vol. III (1906), p. 32.

but when they passed by another time, they had to swear a most solemn oath 'on salt and bread' that they had already been initiated there.<sup>5</sup>

From the seventeenth century still more testimonies are known. It is evident that the baptism was performed in almost the same way on Danish, Swedish, Dutch and French ships. Unfortunately I can quote no English statements, but most likely the use would not be different among English sailors.

Also the ship itself had to pay a ransom to the crew, if it had never sailed by before. The pirate Jean Doublet in 1692 had to pay two barrels of wine for himself and the ship; failing which, the sailors threatened to cut off the figurehead of the ship, a lion.<sup>6</sup> The same use was common on crossing the Line.

The ducking from the yard-arm was a rather uncomfortable and dangerous treatment for both sailors and passengers. It was, in fact, also used in the navies of the different European countries as a punishment, not as severe as keel-hauling, but still rather brutal. Its origin goes back to the Middle Ages,<sup>7</sup> and it was still in use in the Danish Navy in 1752<sup>8</sup> and in the French Navy in the 1830's.<sup>9</sup> Little by little a more humane method of baptizing was introduced. In fact a Swedish statement of 1686 says<sup>10</sup> that the sailors in case of stormy weather were not ducked in the sea, but that a big basket was tilted over them on the deck, whereupon the old sailors poured three buckets of sea water over them.

In the eighteenth century the plunging into the sea did not usually take place any more. The novices were bound to the mast and douched with sea water.<sup>11</sup> The sailors fooled their young comrades into looking at the mountain, and, as soon as they looked, they were required to *hønse* or to be soused with water. By and by it seems that the baptism was abolished, too; the novices gave their bottle of brandy or their money-gift of their own free will.<sup>12</sup> Sometimes the captain gave an extra ration of brandy for the crew, so that no one had to pay privately.<sup>13</sup>

On Danish and other West European ships the custom was neglected little by little, but in the nineteenth century, when the countries around the Baltic began to build bigger ships, which left their home-waters, passed the

<sup>5</sup> Peder Syvs *danske Ordsprog* (1944), p. 360.

<sup>6</sup> *Journal du corsaire Jean Doublet* (1883), p. 167.

<sup>7</sup> A. Jal, *Glossaire Nautique* (1848), p. 386; Etienne Cleriac, *Vs, et Coustumes de la Mer* (1647), pp. 115 *seq.*

<sup>8</sup> *Kong Friderich den Femtes Sjø-Krigs-Artikels-Brev*, § 596.

<sup>9</sup> Gréhan, *La France Maritime*, Vol. I (1852), pp. 206 *seq.*; J. Lecomte, *Dictionn. pittoresque de marine* (1835), p. 91.

<sup>10</sup> Sam Owen Jansson: *Ett par 1600-talsuppteckningar om hönnsning* (Budkavlen, 1952), pp. 107 *seq.*

<sup>11</sup> L. Boesen, *Helsingørs Beskrivelse* (1757), p. 47.

<sup>12</sup> *Carl Tersmedens Memoarer*, Vol. I (1912), pp. 143, 146; Rs. Nyerup, *Magazin for Reiseiagttagelser*, Vol. II, p. 366.

<sup>13</sup> *Logbook of Kronprinsesse Maria* 1804, in *Handels- og Søfartsmuseet på Kronborg*.

Sound and went all over the World, the custom was revived on the East-Swedish, Finnish, Baltic and East-German ships. But not quite in the old manner. In the meantime the ceremony of baptism on crossing the Equator or Line had been established in the same manner as celebrated to-day on almost all ships of the most various nations — with the sea-god Neptune, his wife and his gang, with bishop, physician and barber, with shaving and ducking in a tub, etc. And this baptism of the Line (*linjedåb*) influenced greatly the Kullen baptism. Neptune came on board, and the sailors were shaved and ducked in the tub. That is to say, sometimes it was not the God of the Sea who appeared, but instead of him a personification of a local figure, the *Kullemand* (Swedish *Kullagubbe*). Since medieval times people have thought that such a mythical person lived in this mountain — an old, wise man with a long beard, a sort of *troll* or ogre. According to the popular belief and legend all the mountains and hills are the dwellings of the *underjordiske*, the subterranean people of heathen origin. The sailors had to greet this legendary figure, when they saw his mountainous dwelling, and he came on board in almost the same shape as Neptune, but without crown and trident. He is first mentioned in connexion with the baptism in 1852:<sup>14</sup> one of the sailors dresses like the *Kullemand* and demands his tax as a payment for the protection which he gives the ship when passing his domain.

One of the few pictures known from this ceremony shows *Kullabisin*, as he was called on Finnish ships, on board the barque *Mainio* of Lovisa in the 1880's.<sup>15</sup> His face is blackened, he wears a full beard of rope and is adorned with sea-grass; his ragged dress is of sack-cloth. In one hand he holds a small pail with tar and the 'soap' for the shaving, and in the other hand a long wooden razor. His attendant is dressed in a reversed mantle of sheep fur and a broad-brimmed hat. Old Swedish sailors report that on Swedish ships also the *Kullagubbe* came on board, shaved them and cut their hair; if they would not pay, they were thrown into a basin of canvas on the deck.<sup>16</sup>

After 1900 again the sailors would be satisfied with a gift of brandy from the novices, who in fact brought with them the drink from home for this purpose.<sup>17</sup>

An amazing custom, elsewhere unknown on ships, is the following, recorded by a Swedish sailor, in about 1880: <sup>18</sup>

The old sailors spread out a sail on the deck, when the ship passed Kullen. The novice must 'trample the canvas in honour of *Kullagubben*'. He was ordered to stand in the middle of the canvas, whereupon all his comrades seized it and hauled, so that the poor man fell down; they shook the sail, and it was impossible for him to stand upright. He often sustained hurt during the few minutes that this took.

This act is similar to the custom known, e.g. in public schools, where young pupils were thrown up and down in a blanket, tossed by their comrades.

<sup>14</sup> Ljunggren & Richardt, *Skånska herrgårdar*, Vol. I, Krapperrup (1852).

<sup>15</sup> Courtesy of intendent Sven Andersson, Sjöfartsmuseet, Åbo.

<sup>16</sup> Lunds Universitets Folklivsarkiv 3306:20 and 8845:5.

<sup>17</sup> Sven Andersson.

<sup>18</sup> Lund 4353:4.

The best records of the Kullen-baptism are quite modern and have been written down from the relations of Esthonian and Latvian sailors. The sea-trade of these countries began in about 1850 and was highly influenced by German navigation. Probably also the customs of the sailors derive from there. The baptism off Kullen lived longer there than in other mercantile marines; in about 1930 it is said to have been still performed on Esthonian and Latvian ships. I quote an older example, told by an Esthonian sailor in 1898:<sup>19</sup>

Here I want to write about an old custom among seafaring folk that even to-day sailors still anxiously observe, that is the sailor's baptism or, more correctly, the baptism of the cabin boy or young sailor who for the first time sails a larger sea. This baptism, however, is performed only in one place, namely in passing by St Kullen (*Kullisaar* = Hawk's Island),<sup>20</sup> which stands in the sea off Denmark, a little rock of an island. As soon as some ship on which there are young sailors who are for the first time passing St Kullen has approached that island, so that the island can be seen with the naked eye, a curious bustle begins on board the ship. All hands are driven on deck, where they are stood in rows. Now the mate takes an old paper-rag in his hand and bawls forth, as if reading from it the law of the ship, incomprehensible words of some foreign tongue (mostly English). After this the young sailor is dragged from among the rest of the crew, and in front of him steps one of the very oldest sailors of the craft, a tin with the tar-mixed shaving-lather and a wooden razor with one edge smooth, the other toothed like a saw, in his hands, and asks him, 'For how much do you wish to be shaved, for three or for five?' This means that the young sailor must stand the crew drink for three or five roubles, as a fee for the shave and to celebrate his becoming a seaman. But there is another special difference between three and five — if you express a wish to be shaved for three, you are shaved with that edge of the knife that is toothed like a saw. Your tar-lathered cheek is scrubbed with it, to draw blood. But, if you wish to be shaved for five, you are shaved with the smooth edge and scraped fairly gently. Such shaving the sailors call *hentseldus*.<sup>21</sup> No sailor has ever escaped *hentseldus*, since an unshaved sailor is regarded as no sailor at all. The shaving-lather for *hentseldus* is compounded of tar and several other kinds of muck. The process is as follows, —

When the young sailor has said for how much he wishes to be shaved (if he knows the difference between three and five, he will never wish it to be for three, but always for five), a big tub, in which the crew usually wash themselves, full of water, is carried on deck. Across it a round wooden bar is placed. On this round bar the young sailor is made to sit in such a way that he perches lengthwise above the water in the tub. Thereupon the old sailor with the tar-lather tin and the wooden knife steps up to him, lathers his cheeks with the tar-lather, whether he has a beard or not, and starts scrubbing him with his wooden knife. Lucky he who has no beard, for those who happen to have one, especially if it is big, have the devil of a job to clean it of the tar-muck; for the beard, of course, remains full of tar, and naturally the wooden knife removes neither the beard nor the tar.

When the shaving or rather *hentseldus* is done, the baptism of the sailor begins. A big sooty sheet-iron chimney is brought from the galley, stood upright between several men, and held in mid-air above the victim sitting across the tub. Now the young sailor is told to thrust his head right under the chimney-shaft and shout 'Kull huu, kull huu, kull huu!' (= 'Hawk hoo!') The name of the island St Kullen has been identified with the Esthonian word for hawk, *kull* three times up the chimney. No sooner has he shouted for the third time than one of the crew hits the chimney a hard blow with his fist, so that the loose soot in it falls all over the victim's face. At the same time another sailor strikes the round bar the candidate is sitting on another good blow, and the sitter tumbles head over heels into the tub, out of which he climbs as wet all over as a tadpole. Now he has been baptized a seaman, and the whole crew congratulate him, whereupon the

<sup>19</sup> O. Loorits, 'About the Baptism of Novices as Practised by the Baltic Sailors', in *Tautosakos Darbu*, Vol. I (1935), pp. 130 seq.

<sup>20</sup> This is a popular Esthonian etymology based on a misunderstanding, as *Kullen* means 'the mountain'. *Saint Kullen* is of course also false, and it is no island.

<sup>21</sup> From the word *hönse* in the German form *hänsehn*.

baptism is celebrated with good hard drinking for the money the baptized seaman has paid for his shave.

The fishermen of the coast, too, have long known this baptism and therefore come in their boats alongside the ships that pass Kullisaar to sell gin that is rather cheap, but at the same time fairly strong.

The begging for money and the baptism itself were thought rather inconvenient by the victims, and it is not surprising that the laws of some countries tried to suppress the baptism. Already at the beginning of the seventeenth century the Dutch East India Company forbade all such customs on its ships and converted them into a decent festival with extra wine and food for the crew, at the expense of the Company, in order better to control what might arise out of the rude fun. Of course it must have been difficult to maintain such a prohibition, but in reality I know only one record of a Dutch baptism on crossing the Line till the end of the eighteenth century,<sup>22</sup> whereas I have found at least three Portuguese, six English and twenty-three French descriptions of this custom during the same time.

The Swedish king, Carl XI, put the following paragraph, most likely taken from the Dutch ordinance, into his Sea-Law, 1667, *Sweriges Rikes Sjö-Lag*.<sup>23</sup>

*About the baptism of sailors*

When a master in future sails past Kullen or another cape or point where people have been accustomed to baptize those who have not sailed that way before, from this date such baptism will be neither tolerated nor permitted, but the master must give for each sailor, who has not sailed there before, a pot of wine for each table-company (mess) among the sailors, so that every man may get a drink. But other people on board shall be quite free, unless they, of their own good will, are willing to give something for the benefit of the sailors. If anyone forcibly acts against this decree, he will be punished at the judge's discretion.

We find another more severe prohibition in the famous Danish lawcodification, *Christian V's Danske Lov*, 1683. The so-called *hønse*-paragraph (4-1-20) runs:

No one of the ship's crew is from this date allowed to demand money or money's value from those who may be on board a ship, either sailors or travellers, when they come upon a certain water where they have not sailed before, far less threaten them, after old bad uses, with being soured with water and the like, but the master shall at once punish everyone who ventures to do this with water and bread (i. e. severe imprisonment) for three days.

Here the master of the ship is not obliged to give wine or brandy to his crew as in the Dutch and Swedish ships. On the other hand, we know that they have occasionally done it.

It will of course scarcely be necessary to tell that this regulation was not at all obeyed. The Danish sailors continued to *hønse*, in Danish waters, at Berlingas (Portugal) and, after about the year 1750, at the Equator.

Kullen was without doubt the most important *hønse*-place in Scandinavian waters, because the Sound was the international shipping-route of the North. But there were a lot of other places, where the same custom of

<sup>22</sup> *The Voyage of Fr. Leguat* . . . , Hakluyt, Vol. LXXXII (1891), pp. 19 seq.

<sup>23</sup> *Skipmanna-Balken*, § 20.

*hønsning*, paying money for drinks and — less often — being baptized, was in use. Most of these places were only known to the local shipping, and it is therefore very difficult, in many cases quite impossible, to collect material about them in our days. Only by lucky chance a few testimonies have been preserved up till now.

Along the Danish shores we find some place-names, compounded with the word *høns*, e. g. Hønseskollen and Hønserøn (*røn* = shoal with big stones) on the island of Sjælland and Hansebugt (*bugt* = bay) on the island of Fyn. Hønsbroer (*bro* = bridge) are known in Copenhagen, at Elsinore and on the island of Christiansø. From the Hønssepold (*pold* = hill) on the island of Samsø we know that the novices on the local ships who passed by for the first time had to give money (about 1750),<sup>24</sup> and this custom was observed till our days.

The rather flat and sandy northern end of Jutland near the Skaw (*Skagen*), where is the invisible frontier between Kattegat and Skagerrak, was also a remarkable point where sailors often had to pay (mentioned for the first time in 1688).<sup>25</sup> On this dangerous point a light-house was erected in 1561. We hear that, when the Danish East Indiaman *Kronprinsesse Maria* in 1804 passed by the tower, the crew got an extra ration of brandy.<sup>26</sup> Both Danish and Swedish sailors used to *høns* here. Still in our century the young sailors have had to take off their hats, in order to greet 'the Long Man' (the light-house.)

For the ships coming from the Baltic countries the island of Bornholm was a very remarkable place; east of the island the water was so fresh that they could use it for their cooking, but to the west it was too salty. Before 1914 many Latvian and Finnish sailors were baptized here.<sup>27</sup>

Along the shores of the Baltic Sea a lot of local *høns*-places are known. A baptism was rarely performed, but the novices had to offer a drink to the old hands. In many places this has still been observed up till our time. Rather important was the mountainous south end of the island of Gotland, *Hoburgen*, where an ogre, the *Hoburgsgubbe* — a relative of the *Kullagubbe* — was thought to dwell. The sailors were obliged to *hønsa* for him, when they went by.<sup>28</sup>

German sailors — and probably others — paid, when they reached Landsort (south of Stockholm), according to a testimony from the year 1686.<sup>29</sup> The skippers on the Mälars-Lake, west of Stockholm, probably used to *hønsa* near Kungshatt, about 10 kilometres from the Swedish capital.<sup>30</sup> Other Swedish *hønsa*-places were, for example, the island of Stora Karlsö near

<sup>24</sup> Thura, *Beskrivelse af Øen Samsø* (1758), p. 39.

<sup>25</sup> Peder Syv, *op. cit.* p. 360.

<sup>26</sup> Logbook in Handels- og Søfartsmuseet.

<sup>27</sup> Looorits, *op. cit.* p. 137; Sven Andersson.

<sup>28</sup> E. Smith, *Nautisk ordbok* (1914), p. 174.

<sup>29</sup> O. Rudbäck, *Atlants . . . , Tridie Del* (1947), p. 765.

<sup>30</sup> Sam Owen Jansson.

Gotland: the island of Jungfrun in the Kalmar Sound; the south end, Långe Jan, of Öland; and the cliff Utklippan, south of Karlskrona.

Although not Scandinavian we may mention that Esthonian and Latvian sailors baptized novices off Kap Ristna on the island of Dagö, and off Domenäs, Kurland.<sup>31</sup>

In Travemünde, at the entrance to Lübeck, there was a certain tower, where the sailors in the middle of the eighteenth century were baptized.<sup>32</sup>

The ships that steered along the Norwegian coast between the small cliffs and the firm land (the so-called *indenskærs* route) passed, shortly before the entrance from the south to Bergen, the island of Bokn, by the Dutchmen called Buk van Raa. At this characteristic high island was the most famous *hønse*-place in Norway. In 1622 the Icelandic musketeer Jon Olafsson went to Bergen in attendance on the Danish king Christian IV on some warships. He describes the ceremony there:<sup>33</sup>

We then came off a sea-mark, called Buk van Raa. Here it was an old custom and use of the sailors that every one who for the first time sailed by was to be hoisted into the sea from the main yard-arm, unless he ransomed himself by a gratuity. When our king learned this, he mitigated this requirement in the following way: he gave every 4 men in company ('mess') a can of wine, containing 6 *potter* (= 1½ gallon), saying that he knew pretty well that his people preferred to be wet inside than outside. Consequently this sailors' punishment did not take place on that occasion, because of the gentleness of the king.

In about 1750 the sailors still held the ceremony here,<sup>34</sup> but soon after it must have gone out of use.

On the long journey to the Russian harbours in the Arctic Ocean the sailors in the seventeenth century were baptized not only when passing the North Cape (*Nordkap*), but also off Nordkyn, the most northerly point in Europe (about 50 kilometres east of North Cape).<sup>35</sup>

Also the southern point of Norway, Cape Lindesnæs was known to be a *hønse*-place. Swedish sailors observed the ceremony here until our days.<sup>36</sup>

Along the foreign coasts of Europe a lot of other places are known, where the sailors performed the baptism. The most famous places were undoubtedly Pointe du Raz (Brittany, France), the islands of Berlengas off Lisbon and the Strait of Gibraltar, but there were many other places along the British, French, Portuguese, Italian and Turkish coasts.

The sailors' baptism is a branch of the numerous initiation-rites that are known all over the world, among both uncivilized and civilized people. When the boys of primitive tribes are to be introduced into the company of grown-up men, they must show their courage in enduring severe pain and want of food and demonstrate their ability as hunters.

<sup>31</sup> Loorits, *op. cit.* pp. 136, 138.

<sup>32</sup> Boesen, *op. cit.* p. 49.

<sup>33</sup> *Oplevelser som Bøsseskytte under Christian IV* (1905), p. 228.

<sup>34</sup> Boesen, *op. cit.* p. 49.

<sup>35</sup> Peder Syv, *op. cit.* p. 360; O. Rudbäck, *op. cit.* p. 272.

<sup>36</sup> Erik Hägg: *Under tretungad flagga* (1941), p. 98.

From Europe related usages are known. The young apprentices among the artisans were ill-treated by their older comrades when they had finished their education, and moreover they had to pay an abundant amount for a meal with plenty of drink and food for all of them. It will be seen that this is the same symbolic meal, by which a new man is recognized as a real fellow of the others, as on board ship.

The older students at the universities treated the new ones in almost the same way (*depositio*), and in the schools the young pupils were — and still are — baptized by their older comrades.

When a foreign farmer came to a village he had to give a feast for the guild of the other peasants, with beer and abundant food. The boys in the village who wanted to be acknowledged as grown-up men had to carry heavy stones, smoke a pipe, drink a glass of brandy, kiss a girl, etc., and last, not least, to give their comrades a feast.

The sailors and the fishermen used the same ceremonies.<sup>37</sup> The young cabin-boys that came on board were baptized, keel-hauled, ducked, shaved, examined and tried in other ways. On some modern ships in Denmark and Norway — and most likely in other countries — the new sailors are brought to a cabin by their comrades, where they are *mønstret* (mustered); they must take off their clothes, and their genitals are examined in a rather obtrusive way (in order to ascertain that they have no venereal disease, they say). If they let them do it, it will soon be over, but if they make resistance, the genitals are besmeared with a mixture of grease, tar, etc. After this they give a glass of beer and are acknowledged by their comrades as good members of the crew.<sup>38</sup>

It is now more than a century since the first folklore students and scientists wandered over various countries to collect material about the habits and traditions of the people. Millions of records have been collected since then, hundreds of books have been written on account of them, and the science of folklore has won its reputation and place beside other branches of knowledge. But unfortunately most of the records deal with the life and faith of the rural population. Our forefathers forgot almost completely to question other classes of people — the artisans, the population of the towns, the workers, the fishermen and the sailors. This is why we are rather ill-informed with regard to the traditions of the sea. Of course, we know something about them, but not enough, when we want to get to the bottom of them. And now it is too late to start a new collection. We must resign ourselves to admitting that it will be impossible for us to know exactly and in detail the traditions of the old and dead sailors. We must be thankful for the small and casual testimonies that have been preserved for us to use. Our theme, the sailors' baptism, would have been easier to treat in a complete way, if we had known more about it than we do. We can only guess that it has been much richer and more widespread than we know now.

<sup>37</sup> Henning Henningsen in *Handels- og Søfartsmuseets årbog* (1948), pp. 64 seq.

<sup>38</sup> Dr. phil. Svale Solheim, Oslo, and others.

The author is preparing a book on the baptism of sailors in European waters, on crossing the Tropics, the Arctic Circle, the Line, etc., and would be grateful to receive material and references from readers. It would be interesting to have records from English ships of the Kullen-baptism. Address: Handels- og Søfartsmuseet på Kronborg, Helsingør (Denmark).

*Postscript*

Mr J. W. van Nouhuys informs me in a letter that he was baptized himself, on passing for the first time what in Dutch is called the *Kofmanslinie* at Elsinore (Cape Kullen), on 28 July 1882, when on a voyage on board the Dutch bark *Frans* from Schiedam to Riga.

(Henning Henningsen. "Sailors' baptism in Scandinavian waters." *Mariner's Mirror* (London) August 1954. v. 40, no. 3. p. 196-205.)

Dr. Samuel Eliot Morison brought the article by Mr. Henningsen to my attention. A glance showed how closely it was related to our subject in general, though differing slightly as to locality and other details. Careful reading led further to admiration for the thoroughness of research and for the good use made of manuscript as well as printed sources.

With Mr. Henningsen's generous permission his entire article is reprinted here, together with the following discussions of the topic found in the "Queries" columns of the magazine. Four of these notes appeared over forty years ago. Mr. Henningsen's query appeared in the issue which preceded the publication of his article; the note signed "Bridport" appeared in the issue which followed.

**SEA CEREMONIES.** — Jean Doublet, circa 1700, reports that some ceremonies, similar to those practised on board ships crossing the line or the tropic, were indulged in on passing Elsinore. I believe that at one time, probably before 1700, the same sort of thing took place on passing Gibraltar. Can anyone quote instances of such a usage? — L.G.

(*Mariner's Mirror* (London) January 1912. v. 2, no. 1, p. 31.)

**SEA CEREMONIES.** — Jal (*Glossaire Nautique*) gives considerable space to the subject, "Baptême." The mock ceremony of baptism seems to have been undergone by those passing for the first time — in French or Dutch ships — the Ras de Fonteneau, (cap du Raz, the western limit of the English Channel) the two tropics; the Equator; the Barlingots or Barlings (rocks near the mouth of the Tagus) and the Sound. Neither Dutch nor French, however, whose different customs are quoted by Jal from Oexmelin, 1666, seem to have used these ceremonies on passing Gibraltar. The form of the ceremony as described by Oexmelin is very little different from that given by Guillet in his *Dictionnaire du Gentilhomme s.v. Bateme du Tropique ou de la Ligne Equinoctiale*. The victims first took a solemn oath (a book of navigation representing the Gospel) that they would, when the occasion arose, perform upon others the exact ceremony that was to be performed upon them; they were then forced to run forward from the mainmast between two rows of tubs, at each of which men with buckets were stationed, who soured them as they ran and gave them their "baptism." Father Neptune seems not to have had any part in these early ceremonies.

Is it not probable that all these ordeals passed by those crossing a certain point for the first time had their origin in the brutal horse-play with which the Mediæval Hanse merchants initiated their apprentices; the idea being to deter all but the boldest spirits from entering their service? The Bergen trade seems especially to have been kept select by such means, and passing the Sound would have been a necessary part of entering upon it. — R.M.N.

(*Mariner's Mirror* (London) February 1912. v. 2, no. 2, p. 62.)

SEA CEREMONIES. — “Le 29<sup>e</sup> juin (1692) étant proche du cap de Kol où l'on fait la cérémonie de baptizer ceux qui n'ont pas passé au Zund, il se fit un grand préparatif par mon équipage qui étoient tous flamands et que leurs coutumes ainssy qu'à tous les gens du nord est de donner la calle, en guidant les hommes au haut du bout de la grande vergue et de le laisser tomber d'en haut dans la mer trois fois quelque froid qu'il fasse, puis on leur donne un verre d'eau-de-vie et ils payent ce qu'ils ont promis et on l'écrit pour le payer sur leurs apointments. Et cela revestit pour avoir de quoy les régaler tous. Mon navire n'y avoit encore passé ny mon passager ny moy. Je fis présent de deux bariques de vin pour n'estre baptizé que d'un verre d'eau de la mer et empescher pour le navire qu'il n'en coupasse la figure en place du lion, ce qui est d'ancienne pratique.” (Journal du corsaire Jean Doublet, edited by Charles Bréard, 1883, p. 167).

The ceremonies seem of interest enough to justify the quotation of the passage. In a note, M. Bréard quotes from “Les voyages de M. des Hayes en Danemarc, 1664,” p. 30, where the same ceremony is described: —

“Ils sont deux qui mettent un cordeau autour de cou, et un autre qui jette un seau d'eau de mer sur la teste . . . après avoir esté mouillé, il m'en cousta encore une pistole pour le vin des matelots.”

C. de Kol is C. Kullen, at the northern entrance to the Sound. “Il est formé d'un groupe de montagnes qui, au dire du savant Rudbesk, étaient tout simplement les vrais colonnes d'Hercule.” — G.C.

(*Mariner's Mirror* (London) April 1912. v. 2, no. 4, p. 126-127.)

SEA CEREMONIES. — Captain Meuss, I.G.N., writes: — “I remember that when, as navigating officer of H.I.G.M.S. *Niobe*, a sailing frigate for the training of naval cadets, I passed Cape Kullen coming from the Sound in 1885, the captain — now retired Vice Admiral Schroeder, formerly naval attaché in London — ordered the cadets to be baptised with a ceremonial similar to that used in passing the Line. I think the captain told us it was an old custom of Prussian sailors to baptize any new hand when passing Cape Kullen for the first time.”

In the sixties and seventies of the XIX. century, it was the custom on board Riga sailing ships, when passing Cape Kullen, at the entrance of the Kattegat outward bound, that “God Neptune” came on board to “baptize” the ship's boys performing their first voyage. When passing Gibraltar the

same took place with any of the foremast hands entering the Mediterranean for the first time. — W. AUGUSTOWSKY (Riga).

(Mariner's Mirror (London) August 1912. v. 2, no. 8, p. 253.)

**SAILORS' SEA BAPTISM.** In some earlier numbers the ceremony of baptism on passing Cape *Kullen* at the entrance of the Sound has been discussed (*M.M.* 1912, pp. 31, 62, 126, 253). The sailors and passengers on board who for the first time passed those rather impressive rocks had to be ducked three times into the sea from the main yard arm, or to pay a certain sum of money to the old sailors, for brandy, beer, etc. The oldest testimonies of those ceremonies (called *høense for Kullen*) go back to the beginning of the seventeenth century, and sailors from the Baltic provinces still used to baptize each other at this place up till our time, although it has been transformed into a regular baptism of the Line (see my treatise in the year-book of the Handels-og Søfartsmuseum på Kronborg 1928, pp. 58–68).

*Kullen* was the most popular place for sea-baptism in Northern waters during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Another 'international' place, where the baptism was performed, was the Island of *Bokn* (by the Dutchmen called *Buk van Raa*), south of Bergen, Norway. Elsewhere there are a lot of places where local traditions of baptism have been maintained. From other European waters similar places are well-known. The most popular of them were, it seems, *Pointe du Raz* (Brittany), *Barles* (or *Berlengas*, near Lisbon), and *Gibraltar*.

I possess material on the custom from the following places: 1, *Kullen*; 2, *Høensepollen* (Island of *Samsø*); 3, Island of *Bornholm*; 4, Cape *Skagen* (Scaw); 5, *Bokn*; 6, *Nordkap* (North Cape); 7, *Nordkyn*; 8, Cape *Lindesnæs*; 9, *Hoburgen* (Island of *Gotland*); 10, *Landsort*; 11, *Jungfrun* (Island in *Kalmarsund*); 12, *Långe Jan* (south point of the Island of *Öland*); 13, *Utklippan* (near *Karlskrona*); 14, Cape *Ristna* (Island of *Dagö*); 15, *Domesnäs*; 16, *Travemünde* (near *Lübeck*); 17, bridge, *Firth of Forth* (Danish ships); 18, the *Channel* (Baltic sailors); 19, *Dover*; 20, *Scilly Islands*; 21, *Land's End*; 22, *Pointe du Raz*; 23, *Saint-Malo*; 24, *Arguenon* (river); 25, *Raz Blanchart*; 26, Cape *Finisterre*; 27, *Berlengas*; 28, Cape *St Vincent*; 29, *Gibraltar*; 30, *Messina*; 31, *Dardanelles*; 32, *St Goar* (town on the *Rhine*); 33, *Donaus-trudel* (swirl in the river *Danube*).

As I am working on this subject, I would like to ask your readers, if they can provide me with some more material from the mentioned places or from others. References to any literature on the subject are also welcome.

HENNING HENNINGSEN

(Hr. Henning Henningsen's address is: Maritime and Trade Museum, Kronborg, Elsinore, Denmark. — Ed.)

(Mariner's Mirror (London) May 1954. v. 40, no. 2, p. 161–162.)

**SAILOR'S BAPTISM IN SCANDINAVIAN WATERS.** — I do not agree with the conclusion reached by the author of the article under this heading which appeared in *The Mariner's Mirror* of August 1954.

Mr. Henning Henningsen states that the sailors baptism is a form of the world-wide custom of the initiation of youths into the company of grown men. In my opinion these ceremonies are of purification and homage before venturing into the unknown. As they are all similar in form one can, I think, assume that they came into being for the same reason.

The Crossing the Line ceremony is typical of them all and only minor details differ.

After King Neptune and his Queen (Amphitrite) with their attendants have come on board over the bows and the Captain of the ship has granted them permission to hold their court the policemen of the court seek out and bring by force those of the ship's company who have not Crossed the Line before, in front of Neptune. Here the homage and purification (shaving by the barbers and 'ducking' by the bears) ceremonies are carried out. Then a certificate is granted. A typical certificate is as follows:

PROCLAMATION

Be it known on this day\_\_\_\_\_ in Longitude\_\_\_\_\_the  
trustworthy and esteemed

\_\_\_\_\_of  
His Britannic Majesty's Ship

\_\_\_\_\_

Whilst in search of divers conquests, scrap metal and stray mermaids, did pass into my Southern Domain and did pay due respects to Queen Amphitrite and Myself. I therefore declare that in future all whales, dolphins, porpoises, sharks, crayfish, jellyfish, flatfish, and tinfish whom he may encounter, shall treat him in a manner befitting that of one of my loyal subjects, also that he may be exempt from further homage.

NEPTUNE  
Maris Rex

(The above is a copy of a World War II certificate and 'scrap metal' refers to enemy ships, and 'tinfish' to torpedoes.)

It should be noted that not only the young go through this ceremony but all people, both young and old who have not crossed the line before. Also it should be noted that nowhere in the certificate is any mention made to the effect that the recipient can now consider himself a true man or a fully qualified sailor, etc. The certificate, apart from stating that the individual has paid homage, is an order by Neptune to the inhabitants of his domain to grant a safe passage.

It is my opinion that all these baptismal ceremonies of sailors are carried out to obtain protection and to allay the fear of the unknown that lies beyond a cape or headland, or before venturing into a far sea or ocean. They are carried out symbolically before the presiding god of the new unexplored

region; a half frightening half benevolent Old Man such as Neptune or a personification of a local diety such as Kullemand. (Here it is interesting to note that only Neptune is accompanied by a female figure. Also the crossing the line ceremony appears to be the only one where a new recruit is not called upon to pay a fee, such as of drinks or a feast, to his more experienced shipmates.)

On the last page of the article there is reference to the besmearing of the genitals of young sailors with grease tar, etc. Sir James Frazer in *The Golden Bough* writes that the Arcadians had a custom of whipping the image of Pan with squills at a festival, or whenever the hunters returned empty-handed. This was done, not to punish the god but to purify him from harmful influences which were impeding him in the exercise of his divine functions as a god who should supply the hunter with game.

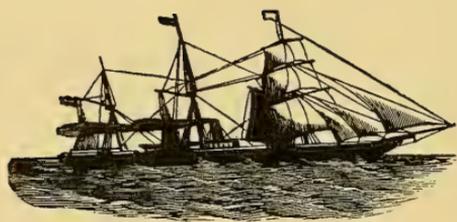
Similarly, the object of beating, etc., the human being on the genital organs with squills and so on must have been to release his reproductive energies from any restraint or spell under which they might be laid by demonical or other malignant agency.

Is it, on my part, too much a flight of fancy to recognize the young sailor, and especially the young fisherman, in this part of the article, as a representative of the creative and fertilizing god of the harvest of the sea, i. e. the fishes?

BRIDPORT

(*Mariner's Mirror* (London) November 1954. v. 40, no. 4, p. 313-314.)





## CHRONOLOGY OF WRITERS BY NATIONALITY

### AMERICAN

Little	1808	Cook	1776
Porter	1812	Dixon	1785
Browne	1814	Grose	1785
Morrell	1822	White	1787
Gelett	1833	Staunton	1792
Dana	1834	<i>Gentleman's Magazine</i>	1792
Horner	1841	Dyott	1796
Greene	1841	Senior	1801
Bagley	1844	Chambers	1801
Colton	1845	Davis	1803
Nordhoff	1845	Lever (fictional)	1809
Coffin	1849	Marryat (fictional)	1829
Haley	1849	Darwin	1831
Melville	1849	Fitz-Roi	1832
Mitchell	1849	Darwin	1832
Munger	1850	Hall	1832
Lewis & Allen	1853	Walpole	1844
"Roving Printer"	1855	Barker	1844
Allen	1866	Hamilton	1910
USS <i>Colorado</i> Log	1870	Bolitho	1920
Allen	1873	Marsden	1920
Basset	1884	Butler	1922
Brady	1885	British Admiralty Account	1946
Mark Twain	1897	Robertson	1950/51
Penrose	1904	Edinburgh <i>Scotsman</i> †	1953
Loomis	1911	Greensboro, N. C. <i>Daily News</i> †	1953
Holland	1913		
Maguire	1919	<b>DUTCH</b>	
Morley & Hodgson	1923	Linschoten	1583
Fahnestock	1930	Schouten, Willem	1615
Reilly	1936	Schouten, Wouter	1658
Lovette	1939	Esquemeling	1666
Scott (by air)	1942		
Anderson & May	1943	<b>FRENCH</b>	
Metcalf	1943	Parmentier	1529
Heinz	1944	de Léry	1557
Wash., D. C. <i>Sunday Star</i>	1944	Coppier	1645
Baumrucker	1944	Dutertre	1654
Wash., D. C. <i>Evening Sun</i> *	1944	Du Saussay	1663
Slobodkin	1945	Guillet de Saint-George	1678
Weems (by air)	1950	Choisy	1685
Combs	1951	Tachard	1685
<i>All Hands</i> Account	1952	Duquesne	1690
		Leguat	1690
<b>BRITISH</b>		Froger	1695
<i>Gentleman's Dictionary</i>	1678	Frézier	1712
Rogers	1708	Diderot	1751
Falconer	1720	Permetty	1763
Newton	1752	Berthier	1780
Chandler	1764	Chateaubriand	1791
Cook	1768	Romme	1792
Cook	1772	Audubon	1797
Forster	1772	Corbière	1801
Fletcher (fictional)	1774	Fréminville	1802
Shaw	1774	Las Cases	1815

\* Account of crossing of Mrs. Roosevelt by air.

† Accounts of crossing of Elizabeth II of England.

*French, continued*

*Annales Maritimes*  
Jal  
Freycinet  
Arago  
Fréminville  
Dumont d'Urville  
Jacquemont  
Habasque  
Lecomte  
La Landelle  
Dubarry

*GERMAN & AUSTRIAN*

Worm  
Kollonitz  
Buchner  
Schaeffer

*ITALIAN*

1816 Gattine & Plaisance 1667  
1816-19 Coronelli 1690  
1817 Desideri 1713

*RUSSIAN*

1822  
1826 Krusenstern 1803  
1828 Lisianski 1803  
1832-36 Shemelin 1803  
1837-42 von Kotzebue 1815  
1855 von Kotzebue 1818  
1869 von Kotzebue 1823  
Lazarev 1823  
Vysheslvtzev 1858

*SWEDISH*

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1864  
1875 Campanius Holm 1642  
1945 Osbeck 1751



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