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Title: The Bonadventure: A Random Journal of an Atlantic Holiday

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Release Date: May 14, 2010 [EBook #32371]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Roger Frank and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.fadedpage.net>

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BONADVENTURE: A RANDOM JOURNAL OF AN ATLANTIC HOLIDAY ***

THE BONADVENTURE

THE WAGGONER
and other poems by
Edmund Blunden

JOHN CLARE
Poems chiefly from MSS.
selected and edited with
a biographical note by
Edmund Blunden
and
Alan Porter

THE SHEPHERD
and other poems of
Peace and War by
Edmund Blunden
awarded the
Hawthornden Prize, 1922
Third Edition

THE BONADVENTURE

*A Random Journal of
an Atlantic Holiday*

By EDMUND BLUNDEN

"There ships divide their wat'ry way,
And flocks of scaly monsters play;
There dwells the huge Leviathan,

And foams and sports in spite of man."

Isaac Watts.

LONDON
RICHARD COBDEN-SANDERSON
17 THAVIES INN

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Printed in Great Britain by Butler & Tanner, Frome and London

To
H.W.M.
THIS
"ROUND TRIP"

AUTHOR'S NOTE

A few facts are perhaps needed in this place. The autumn of 1921 found me in bad health, which seemed to me to be gaining ground. The Editors for whom it is my privilege to work were of that mind too, and suggested a sea voyage. I am one of that large class who can afford little more than voyages in ships which are hauled over on chains; but this was allowed for in every possible way by my Editors, in consequence of whose active generosity and that of the owners to whom my case was made known, I suddenly found myself bound for the River Plate. I can but say that when my friends expressed their envy I was well able to understand their feelings and my good luck. 7

For the rest, this little book is not intended for anything beyond the statement on the title page. I am sorry myself that there are no adventures of the blood-curdling sort in it; but I could not go out of my way, nor do tramps find time, it seems, for propitiating cannibals. Of unrehearsed effects on voyages, indeed, my belief is that it is possible sometimes to have too much. Eastward of Madagascar, we read, lies Tromelin Island—a sandbank a mile long. In 1761 the *Utile* was wrecked there, and eighty blacks were left behind; all died except seven of the women, who clung to life for fifteen years, nourished on shell fish and brackish water, until Captain Tromelin landed and saved them. Now I cannot feel sorry that I was not one of that party. 8

There is, naturally, some slender disguise of names and so forth through my journal. There may be, it occurs, a S.S. *Bonadventure* at the present day; if it is so, this is not the ship. My grateful recollections of Captain Hosea, his officers and crew apply to those gentlemen indeed, but they do not sign on by the names which I have for this occasion invented. Thus their own example leads me; how much oftener was I hailed as "Skylark" and "Jonah" than as

EDMUND BLUNDEN.

LONDON,
December 23, 1921.

DEAR BLUNDEN,—

There you are, outward bound and southward ho! Here am I, with the newsboys outside shouting the latest imbecility to the murk, trying to get warm and happy by considering a dull electric heater and the faded memory of another ship (she went downstairs in the war) which, years ago, on a December morning, passed through the lock gates at Swansea for Para and all, while I stood by her rail sorry for the people who had not my luck. Now it is your turn. Make the most of it. It will do something to take away the taste of Stuff Trench. You will find me, when you come home, still over the electric stove listening to the newsboys. I shall call for wine, and you must tell me all about the Fortunate Isles. I am sure they are still there, and that you will see them. 9

O, a Cardiff ship sails down the river
(Blow, boys, blow!)
Her masts and yards they shine like silver
(Blow, my bully boys, blow!)

Sing up, Blunden! And don't forget to take soap, towels and matches. Do you smoke a pipe? You'll

wish presently you knew how to do it, if you have misspent your time and never learned. But I suppose eighteenth-century literature and the baby have absorbed all your energies. A pipe is only fit for the idle-minded.

There's another thing. Don't forget that the ship's master is a greater man than a colonel. You know colonels, don't you? (All right, all right!) Well, make no mistake about it, master mariners, as a rule, are different. It is long odds that your new master will know his job. If you are nice to him, he may even confess to a taste for your poetry; ships' masters are like pie, I have found, to little lost children like ourselves who know nothing about ships, but they are perfectly frightful towards those who know all about ships, and know it all wrong.

A happy Christmas and a lucky New Year.

Yours ever,
H. M. TOMLINSON.

I

On the eleventh of January my uncertainty was ended by the apparition (and in the village of Staizley it is no less) of a girl with a telegram. Her walk of three miles or thereabouts, from our nearest telegraph office, brought her to my gate at three in the afternoon; and with her customary awed speechlessness she gave me her message. It was from "Kingfisher," the decoded entity of which was the great shipping owner to whom I owed my arrangements; and in response I hastily attempted to leave a semblance of order behind me and to seem unexcited. My luggage, no cumbrous affair, had already been packed. By six, the trap of an ingenious neighbour, who lives by all sorts of traps, was heard at the gate, and Mary and myself got in. Determined protest, not at my departure, but at the apparent departure of her mother, was now raised by the youngest among us. My comforting promises were ignored, and the infant's cries redoubled. Nevertheless, off we went.

The evening had been pouring out, with the vigour of an elemental Whistler, sleet and hail, and now though the wind was down our drive lay through fields half whitened with the storm; and the air was livid with the clouded moon and as cold as the ebbing light. With its multitude of pollards, its desolate great fields, its chilling breaths, the countryside might have been Flanders. This aspect seemed incidentally to demonstrate the wisdom of going elsewhere for a month or two.

We now came into Slowe, discussing all the time our past, present and future; the chief result of the discussion was the placing of my unanswered letters at Mary's disposal. The town of Slowe was at peace. Its station wore the familiar air of having nothing to do with the coarse noise of traffic. Here Mary spent some moments in melancholy visions of my funeral at sea. She hoped these were wrong, and I, beginning to be affected also, hoped so equally.

"Good-bye" to Mary! The curve of the track carried her out of sight, and, imagining with resolution that the carriage was comfortably warm, I resigned myself to the journey to Liverpool Street. By way of passing the time, I fell back upon my habit of considering how the Latin poets might render the words, upon which few Englishmen have not been reared:

"The use of this rack for heavy and bulky packages...."

But though the sentiment which they convey is salutary, and though such metrical gifts as "graviora" and "viatores" instantly suggested themselves, the task once again defeated me.

Some such deadening pastime (Tennyson advises it) was necessary. There are many stations between Slowe and Liverpool Street, and the train, the last of the day between those places, stopped at each one. Arrived in London, and shivering with cold, I sought out my relations; reported with a certain amount of pride, which evoked no corresponding admiration at such a late hour, my impending voyage, and was rewarded with a bed.

II

My instructions were to present myself next morning, without fail, at the shipping offices of Messrs. Wright, Style and Storey, in Cardiff. Mary's double accordingly hurried me through my breakfast and led the way to Paddington. I urged myself to realize that I was going upon holiday; but, it cannot be withheld, the thought of this particular pleasure had a serious tinge. Paddington itself, to such an islander as I am, had some of the credit of this. To me, that large terminus is, as a jumping-off position, less human than, for example, Victoria. From Paddington, with its Western propaganda, it may well seem that humanity is travelling out into the round world's imagined corners; but Victoria, with its lesser range in sight, leaves a quieter speculation. From Brighton there is no such press of mammoth liners? Even when the destination was the B.E.F., it was comforting to me to set out from Victoria, whence the way led through a compact, placid, formerly uninternational, still un-Atlantic quarter. A Society for the Suppression of Astronomers

has been mooted by the lazy-minded. I am not sure that geographers should not be included. Distances, no doubt, are as essential to romance as to Copley Fielding's water-colours; but they can rouse in some of us troubling thoughts, which, summed up, say "Leave us alone!" Such thoughts had disturbed me when, with farewells from Bess, I retired to the sporting columns of my newspaper, and the train moved out.

15

In compensation for my experience of the previous evening, the journey went quickly by. A sunny morning, blue and still, lit up the country. So fine was the day, and the country, with its ancient timber, its mole-hilled pastures, its feeding horses and cheerful rooks, appeared so mellow, that the wisdom of leaving it behind was not so conspicuous as, the night before, it had been. Cardiff. I knew nothing about it, except as "Cardiff." I entrusted myself, therefore, to a taxi-driver, who claimed to know more, even to the whereabouts of the shipping office to which I was bound. After meanderings and advice from the police and the public, he made amends for his inaccuracy by setting me down at the foot of a gloomy staircase leading to the rooms of Messrs. Wright, Style and Storey.

And now for a few moments I was in trouble. Thinking that the telegram which warranted my calling at this Cardiff office of the London Company would best explain my intrusion, I handed it over the fateful counter. The clerk took it, assumed a serious air, avoided looking at me, and referred to a superior. I was puzzled. More so, the superior. A murderer, concerned in the atrocity at Bournemouth, was at that time untraced, and I fancy that the official had the mystery in his mind at this point. At any rate, eyeing the wire with doubt for some time, he suddenly advanced towards me and put the question, in stern accents: "Who are you?"

Who are you?

I feel sure that my explanation was unbusinesslike, but he presently divined the truth. Word of my movement had not been sent him from London. He withdrew to the telephone or time-table; then restoring to me my sibylline leaf, told me to go to Barry Docks, where I should find the *Bonadventure*, recognizable by a white S painted on the funnel, lying at Tip Eleven or Twelve, and to go aboard and report myself to the captain. I went, fearing lest the captain likewise might know as little in advance about the trembling suspect before him.

16

Urchins scrambled for my luggage at the Barry Docks Station, an hour or so later, and the two victors hurried it along to Tip Eleven. These coal-tips overhead and the shipping alongside, with knots of workmen passing masked in coal-dust, engaged my mind as we went, and before I was fully aware of it we were aboard a vessel which the boys recognized as the *Bonadventure*. I paid the carriers, who went away at speed, and asked a wooden-faced seaman, who seemed to be alone, where I could find the captain. He at once cut short my search by the tone in which he observed, "The captain! He's having his dinner at the present." I was rebuked, and stood by. (I had still to witness the multitudes who want to find the captain of a ship in port.)

I took a look at the ship, but felt lost as I did so. She was large, and of vague shape. I could not determine where she began and where she left off. A pall of coal covered everything. Heaps of cinders, which a casual glance described as of some seniority, lay against the deck railing. I saw hut-like structures about me where I stood, amidships, as the boys had said; but I feared to explore. At times some one with a plate or a jug was seen stooping swiftly through their doorways—evidence indeed of the captain's dinner-hour. Inaction, nevertheless, grew unpromising; and at last I asked an officer, as I rightly thought him, who had come out to keep an eye on several blasphemous and strongly individual beings with large spades, whether I might see the captain. When he heard my business, he quickly took me to him. I found myself speaking to a quiet, smiling, and enviably robust man who, to my relief, was not mystified by my arrival. He set me at my ease, told me that I should sign on as a member of the crew to-morrow, and allowed me to stay on the ship meanwhile. I was glad of this, being weary of quests for the time being.

17

Not quite at home, as may be gathered, I went out on deck, and watched the tips in action; admired the mimic thunder—first the abrupt and rending, shattering crash, then the antistrophe of continued rollings—which each truckful of coal makes as it is tumbled into the shoot and thereby into the ship's holds. Truck after truck was drawn up, the pin knocked away from the end board and the coal hurled, its dusky clouds fuming out, into the ship: its atmosphere did not seem to strain or irritate the breathing organs of those worthies with the spades, and the pipes, whose vague labouring silhouettes enlivened the gloom. Engines plied constantly beside the docks with long trains of coal. As if expressing itself, one emitted a peculiar twofold groan. All this, of course, ancient history, but I was new to it. It seemed like the beginnings of wisdom.

But the world of iron and smoke could not warm my body as well as it did my mind, and while I was brooding over the increasing bite in the air of that January afternoon, the officer whom I was to know soon as the mate, a young man of clear-cut features and tranquil manner, told me to make use of the saloon. I sat there reading, when another introduction took place. The steward, a weighty old man remarkable at first sight for his brown skull-cap, came in to say he had fitted me up with a cabin. Following him up a staircase, I took over this dugout-like dwelling with no small satisfaction. It was to be my home, he said, for three or four months on this South American run. I unpacked, and washed away the unearned, and unsuspected, film of coal-dust which was to characterize my home for the same length of time.

18

Tea came, and I was mildly puzzled again, when the steward's assistant asked me to choose between a bloater, cold meat, and so on. I was deciding on something slenderer, when I realized that tea included supper, and applied for a kipper. The captain's wife kept conversation alive. The

topic, I remember, was the lamented custom which once permitted captains' wives to make "the round trip" with their husbands.

The coal still rattled into the holds every moment or two, and the same process was going on all round us. The water was bright in the moon, and the reflections of the lamps fastened high over the ships swum like golden serpents in the ripples. In such a light, to such a watcher, there seemed no end to the serried framework and the cordage to the giant sea travellers of steel. The constant clanging and whistling and crash spoke to the work of the machines, an occasional shout to the guiding energies of the men.

III

19

The shipping office itself left no clear impression upon me, the next morning, when I attended the business of signing on; but the visit gave me my first view of the crew of the *Bonadventure*, which was welcome. Many of them were coloured men, as ever, dressed in eye-catching smartness. I reflected on the extent to which the market of boots of two colours must depend on these firemen. Among the others, a Cornishman of odd automatic gait, whose small head balanced a squarish black hat, moved about with an inconsequence suggestive of some clever comedian. He gave, however, no evidence of humorous abilities. The wooden-faced man, to whom I have referred, answered the call of "Cook." Sitting on the bench in the corner, I felt a curious stare upon me, and looking across the room, saw its owner, a tough customer by the expression he wore. For some peculiarity of conduct, this sailor was the next evening removed from the *Bonadventure* by the police, with no passive resistance, as I vaguely heard. The police recovered.

Two youths sat by me, their good nature showing itself in their talk. They painted my near future. The heat we should soon be feeling, 130 in the shade; the troubled Biscay, where "seven seas meet, which causes a great upheaval," chequered the vista. The function of crossing the Line was described as bygone, even in its less inconvenient traditions, such as giving the greenhorn binoculars through which a (hair) "Line" was plain enough.

20

My name was called, and I went to the front. The captain conferred with the clerk. For technical purposes, as I supposed, I was put down "purser." The rank was given, but not the talents.

Now, the hour of the *Bonadventure's* sailing being imminent, the ship's officers who had been away were returning. The chief engineer, obviously regarded as a wise man; the second mate, full of stories; the wireless operator, youthful and brilliant, appeared at the cabin table. The captain's wife drew up matrimonial plans for the third mate, who was not beyond blushing over his late tea—the not impossible, but improbable. She was evidently a recognized memory of Hamburg. The captain was striving to get at the facts when a doctor came in, summoned to see an apprentice; and he left his meal to hear the diagnosis. Reappearing, he said, "The only bit of luck we've had. The boy's got appendicitis." This was not euphemism; what might have happened had the ship left before the boy's illness was known for what it was, both to boy and authorities, he went on to hint. This piece of recognition was due to the mate.

We were not leaving that evening, though loading ceased. I walked into Barry, and found its cinematograph programme somewhat worse than is the average. This, and the change of the weather from keen to mizzling, persuaded me back to my cabin for the rest of the evening; and after the night's rest, broken sometimes by sounds of "mighty workings," I looked through my porthole to discover that the ship had left the tips. She was now lying, under a cloudy, showery sky, well out to the middle of the water, and the buildings round the Docks Station, dwarfed somewhat by the large sign of "WARD, BUTCHER," were in sight. We should soon be away.

21

The solidity of ship's breakfast was an early fact among those I was gleaning. Yesterday, an ample steak, with potatoes—and onions—had been set before me, after the preparatory porridge; this day, two tough sausages, with potatoes—and onions—were provided. Yet I fell to with an appetite, and only hoped I should feel as able in the days to come.

The inert morning seemed suited to the curious quiet of the ship. That quiet was, however, disturbed in undertone. The incessant tramp of feet and sometimes the banging of gear were echoing. The final period, in the main "all serene," could not be without its thousand and one adjustments; though the holds, trimmed, I suppose, even to the steward's satisfaction—he had been in high choler the night before at the attempted delivery of meat to a store just made inaccessible by the delivery of coal—now were covered with tarpaulins. I had time to meditate, and the cold air recommended my cabin as the place.

To the Plate and back again, in a cargo ship! (To the Somme and back again—that had seemed less surprising.) The voyage, no doubt, would be more arduous than that in the leave-boat from Boulogne to Folkestone. Would my resolution be equal to the greater strain on the system? I suspected that the first few days might find me groaning within myself; asking why I had left my draughty study, which was at least stationary? what I had found amiss with the array of books for review—pleasant, unjustly despised labour? Landlord, insurance agent, general dealer, rags-and-bones, watch-and clock-repairer, bricklayer come to fix the chimney, carpenter to take measurements for far-off bookshelves, secretary of football for subscriptions, and many another familiar—in the middle of an attempt to answer the question, "What is Poetry?"—should I be considering them as unhonoured privileges? Repent, repent.

22

From the mild exercise, and a book, I was aroused by the brown skull-cap of the steward, who in some pain of feature uttered round the door a solemn "Well, I declare!" I had disregarded his bell—Jim had rung it; he had rung it—for dinner.

There were friendly visitors afterwards. I was wished a good voyage, and a better room—one more artistic, I think, was in the speaker's mind. But comfort was cordially anticipated. The ship was not one of the older sort that roll. The captain, too, said that his ship did not roll. The shore captain grinned, but said nothing, except that, if I had been over to France, I should find the voyage just the same. It was the captain's turn to grin. Next, the second mate came, book in hand, and entered the name of my next-of-kin.

During the afternoon the funnel of the *Bonadventure* had sent forth smoke, and the hooter, hoots; the cold increased, and, having heard that we were to go out at about six, for all my apprehensions I felt eager for that hour. The surroundings were gloomy. The *Bonadventure* lay in a row of coal-carrying steamers, with something grim about their iron flatness; the *Phryne*, *Marie Nielsen*, *Sandvik*, many another, their cold colours reminding me of the huge blue-painted unexploded shell which once I ventured to help remove from a trench at Givenchy. The grey-green pool swilled sulkily about them: and the red bricks in the background offered no relief to an unprogressive eye. Sooty, hard and bleak, the scene itself urged my impatience to be gone.

A call announced the arrival of the pilot; and, at ten minutes to six, in obedience to a process of which I gathered little, the ship began to move gently out of the dock. The shouts of the pilot on the bridge, his "Hard-a-port," his "Hard-a-starboard," were taken up from the forepart of the ship, where a number of substantial figures were at work with winch and cable. The *Bonadventure* was guided with nice gradation into a channel not much exceeding her own width; on the quay beside men were shouting and scampering; the wireless clerk leaning over against all gravity grabbed a bag of "mail" from one of them; and out we passed. The wind livened. The lights of the town slowly dwindled behind us. Into the channel close after the *Bonadventure* came the green lamp of another ship. Soon the *Bonadventure* was definitely, at a growing speed, running down the Bristol Channel, under a veiled sky through which the moon always seemed about to emerge, and among the scattered lights of other ships going into Barry, or waiting in readiness to go in.

The thing had never occurred to me before, and I may be pardoned for reflecting, while I stood watching, in a manner somewhat grandiose. The energy of Man, maker of cathedrals, high-roads, aqueducts, railroads, was passing before me; and this one manifestation of it seemed perhaps the most surprising. The millions of times that this restless creature Man had weighed his anchor and in cockle-shell or galleon or clipper or tramp set out to ferry over the seas at his own sweet will! This matter was now put in a more prosaic light by the wireless clerk, who, beckoning me to a place out of the wind, informed me that at a charge he could, as soon as the *Bonadventure* was out of touch of land, transmit any message I had for home. With this youngster I tried to speak on his own province, in which I had made some elementary excursions in Flanders times: but this intrusion upon his mysteries appeared to affect him, and I learned only that the modern wireless was different.

The doleful tolling of a bell, later on, with its suggestion of the Inchcape Rock, reached me in my bunk, where, noticing the oscillations of the ship, I had early withdrawn.

IV

My theory of repentance during the first few days at sea was to be fact. At the start, I seemed to myself to be perfectly steady. The breeze blew cold; I thought it even pleasant; and without over-exercise, I took my last views of English coasts, and watched ships ahead of us blackly smudging a vaporous sky. I attended dinner, and began to swell with vanity.

By this time the ship was rolling (after all yesterday's kind assurances). There was no mistake about it: and my vanity and observation were at once cut short by a surprise attack of sea-sickness. A dismal cowardice came on me. The wind seemed changing, or perhaps—I inquired but little—the course of the ship; the effect needed no inquiry. Time and again, lowering my *morale* at each arrival, the seas beat in a great crash upon the ship's sides, and, with the attendant tilt, the scarcely less welcome seethe of the waters flowing down the decks would follow. The ship seemed to be provided with cogs, on which she was raised and lowered with horrible deliberate jolts over a half-circle: then again, the big wave would jump in with a punch like some giant Fitzsimmons. My experience was growing. The sunshine died off the porthole; the breeze was half a gale already, droning and whining louder and louder; and I felt that my breaking-in was to be thorough enough.

Captain Hosea found time, now and then, to look at his passenger. We kept up eloquent discourse, though I was handicapped. The origin of species and the riddle of the universe are topics on which much enlivening debate may occur, and certainly did then; but the floor of the debating society should be made steady and not to lift and lean and recover with a monstrous jerk as a point is being approached. "It's fierce," said he, referring to the idea of infinite abyss. I could agree from the smaller one which I myself seemed to be probing.

Sleep was not easy during these early hours of my holiday. I spent an awkward night or two,

listening to rattlings of all sorts, the battering-ram shocks of the seas, and the thump of the engines, watching the sweat on the rivets of my roof roll like the bubble in a spirit-level, and my towel float out to an apparent unperpendicular side to side. In this state of things I easily came to know the features of my cabin, described on the door-key as "spare cabin port." Amidships it was, between the wireless operator's premises and the captain's. The porthole faced the poop, and more immediately, the ship's squat funnel. Beneath the porthole, a padded seat was fixed; and I had on one length of the room a disused radiator, a chest of drawers and a washstand with mirror, where, despite a ventilator above, light rarely seemed to come. On the opposite length there was a tall malodorous cupboard and two bunk beds, of which I chose the lower one from sound instinct at the beginning, keeping to it from force of habit afterwards. Such was my dwelling; but I must not fail to mention the electric light and fan. The place was painted white, but its past use as a store had variegated it.

27

The steward likewise visited me here, and sympathized. The old fellow talked to me much as if I had known him all my life; he being known well enough, indeed, to the company for whom he was going to sea in his old age. A scarred nose distinguished him for a time. He complained, with a sort of personal visualization of the sea's boorishness, that while attending to some stores he had been blown off a case into a barrel of flour.

Having therefore spent the best part of my first two days at sea in my cabin, which offered no great variety in itself, I was much pleased to find myself able to arise, manfully, the third day. But I avoided breakfast. The morning looked inviting, the black funnel gleaming even richly in the sun, so presently I took the air. First, I had found some difficulty in shaving, even with a safety razor; but it was accomplished.

We were still in the Bay of Biscay, and the *Bonadventure* had not done lurching and wallowing. To my naïve eye, the sea was in considerable commotion. Like ever-changing rocky coasts, the horizon rose and fell. As unsteady as that, the day left behind its sunny comfort and brought clouds and chillier air. I saw the navigators passing on their business, but I could not emulate their equipoise; I attached myself to a rail or fixture to watch them, this one coiling a rope, that trailing a coco-nut mat in the sea—a capital cleanser; to watch the gulls also, so easily keeping up with the plunging brows, amid all their side-shows of wheeling and darting flights. Inured, I presently joined in at dinner in the saloon; ate, and had no serious trouble. A framework, which was described as a "fiddle," covered the table and checked the more mobile crockery; but it could not prevent an accident in the steward's own department, which caused his tone of private feud with Neptune to sound clearly in the apostrophe, "Break 'em all, then, so we shall have none for the fine weather." But fine weather was expected now.

28

V

29

My prospect brightened with the weather. "Things are looking bad," observed the chief engineer with an anxious glance at me. "Why?" I said more anxiously. "There's three teaspoons missing," he answered, satisfied at having played his joke. The morning, though the wind blew hard against us, was sunny and cheerful; the light blue sky flying here and there the streamer of a shining cloud, the moon going down ahead of us, the drove of gulls still pleasing themselves in glistening whims of flight among the waves. Warmer it was, but not yet warm enough for me: and going out on the deck I often sheltered behind the cabins with fingers as of old turning waxen for want of blood. I found the ancient sea a new pleasure in its aspects: I liked to see the wave-tops suddenly become crystalline with a clear green glow. Such a greenness immediately associated itself with, and, I even thought, comprehended, the curious emanation of the old mermaid stories. It is a light wherein the sudden arising of a supernatural might seem natural.

Aboard, less remote interests revealed themselves. The cook, that lean aproned figure, walked slowly between the stores and his stronghold the galley, carrying perhaps a couple of large onions; and the smell of cooking might rise above that of the Atlantic. The tawny firemen emptied their buckets of cinders in long series through the iron chute over the side; or found, by request, work for an oilcan round the funnel. Everything said, in its manner, "No blind hurry, no delay."

30

Hosea invited me to his ampler room for daily conversations over the friendly glass; we talked much, but not about the sea. His active mind, after searching through the files of recent newspapers saved up during his stay in port, had many an opinion on affairs less adjacent; and he had a curious miscellany of reading at his service. Sir Edwin Arnold was one of his few poets, and for him he spoke out most generously. Here I was obliged to watch my behaviour. As a person engaged in literature, I could not precisely admit the ignorance of the *Light of Asia* which I have always enjoyed; and I wished I had read it. The conversation should have run upon the sharks, the hula hula, typhoon and the submarine barrage, by rights; not upon the history in blank verse of the founder of Buddhism. It was some relief to find Hosea turning to Tennyson, whose works he had upon his desk. Shakespeare, he said, he had been advised by old captains to leave alone until he had turned forty.

From his book cupboard he lent me several books, of which I only failed to master one. This was *The Lone Star Ranger*, by Zane Grey; a fiction in which beauty was reached through blood, but not in this world. Far more romantic was a large official treatise styled *North Atlantic Directory*, reading which, I determined never again to leave any book about ships and the sea in the

threepenny tub.

Meals, the important thing in the trenches, began to impress me as furnishing the incidents of seafaring life. They seldom came too soon. Their atmosphere puzzled me in a minor way, until I was acclimatized to the habits of the saloon. Little would be said at them for a long time; then some one would quietly mention some occurrence of technical bearings in the first place, and so educed, a few anecdotes would follow. Phillips, the chief engineer, with his seasoned air and dry ironical ease of speech, was perhaps the narrator of the saloon. I remember his first tale that I heard: it was simple, yet picturesque. "Once we were running in the banana trade. We went to Labrador for some fish. The captain was putting in to Cape Sidney, and he didn't like the look of some of the lights. So he went down to the bottle and got blotto. The second mate—a little Greek, he was—was on the bridge, and he found the captain was blotto, and he'd never been to Cape Sidney before, and he was worried out of his wits. So he came down and asked me what he should do. 'I can't tell you,' I said. 'But if I were you, I should bring her round in circles outside here until daylight comes.' And there he stayed, steering round in circles all night."

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The ship was reckoned, by those in higher authority, to do ten knots to the hour, but for a week or so her average was no more than eight. This circumstance was never far away from our table-talk. The playful interrogative "Ten?" would welcome Phillips to his place at dinner, as the second mate handed him the slip giving the results of the midday observations.

As the ship's officers and the sailors became better used to me, and I to them, my voyage began to assume its intended holiday character. The southward progress of the *Bonadventure*, disappoint her chief engineer as she might, was felt in the improving weather; and as sea weather was still a new world to me, I was never for long without some variation of amusement. The colours of the rainbow in the waves leaping up at the ship's side and in the veils of spray that they flung to the whisking wind were soon reflecting themselves in my remembrance. On dark blue ridge of surly water and on snowy coronal, the broken arc of the rainbow was for ever flickering, just beyond the uncertain shadow of the ship. The lively wind, meanwhile, as if by a sudden stronger impulse, would whirl the green toppling seas over the lower deck, and the light cold spray as high as the bridge. Here, I thought, was a lyric indeed; and so, it looked, thought the gulls that disported about the ships, and the shoals that, I fancied, like those of any small stream, would be up to enjoy the sun.

32

Swabbing was going on aboard at a great pace. The boatswain, a sort of combined walrus and carpenter, seldom allowed his swabbers and his hosepipe to rest. The flow of dirty water from the cabin roofs made the deck dangerous ground. So perish all accumulated dust! The *Bonadventure* began to look clean, even resplendent.

When Hosea joined the merchant service, he tells me, old hands would often make a disparaging comment upon the decline of sailing days. "I'm giving up going to sea. I'm going in steamers." True, in the very names of the old sails, up to their skyscrapers and their moonrakers, there lingers yet the elemental dignity of the earlier sort of argosy. Even the same metaphorical fountain of description seems to have ceased to flow with the falling asleep of the famous clippers: and I doubt whether the author of *London River*, that rich reverie, kindred with an essay which has weathered a hundred years' storms—Charles Lamb's *South-Sea House*—would write of the sea to-day in his translucent classical revivings:

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"The model of this Russian ship was as memorable as a Greek statue."

And yet, once or twice already, I was indistinctly aware of an antique look about the ship forward, with her dark beak and all her shrouds and spars and winches; as I watched her at twilight ploughing a grey sea and still driving afield towards a horizon of sad vapours, braided with the sunset's waning red, and, from time to time until darkness settled, creviced with a primrose gleam, calm, clear and sweet amid its shadows.

VI

34

A swell running in its long undulations accompanied us until we had passed Madeira, beyond its horizons. Mugs of tea slid suddenly and swiftly across the saloon table; complaints were made at every meal, and the mate hinted, with dreadful implications for my benefit, that a special memorandum would be presented to Father Neptune, expected on board shortly. Other hints of the passenger's future trials were made. We were bound for the Plate, but we might be sent thence to Australia. That addition, as a possibility, to my holiday perturbed me somewhat; I envisaged the bailiffs in at home before I got back.

The second mate, Bicker, and the third mate, Mead, invited me to see their observations and their watches. Bicker, a fine audacious spirit, dark-haired, dark-eyed, four-or-five-and-twenty years old, had my company in the afternoon, the days being warm and inviting. The typical scene below the bridge was of Mead in his singlet rigging up a line, whereon towels, socks and other properties were soon in the sun; while mattresses aired over the cargo-hatch tarpaulin. Other toil at this hour, save that of the engines and the man at the wheel, was not noticeable. The boatswain and his wrinkled party, who actually did leave a sea-salt impression in their stocking-turbans and greasy rags and roomy sea-boots, had left the midships white, and had changed their ground for hose and scrubber to the neighbourhood of the engines and the galley; but the

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afternoons heard them not. An occasional whistle from the bridge would summon hurrying feet up the ladder; the striking of the bell made Time's pace perceived. Bicker would sometimes interrupt his large stories to show me, or to try to show me, remote or tiny curiosities floating past the ship. Perhaps a shoal of young porpoises bobbing along portended a slight squall, its approach yielding those ever remarkable lights that mark broken rain, lily-of-the-valley green, and on the waters a silver glitter, while a shadow drooped over all. The third mate's drying-ground was speedily cleared at these times.

Mead's watch occupied the four hours before noon, and the four before midnight. At noon he would join with Bicker in "Shooting old Sol," a process which, with its turning-up of pages packed with figures, reminded me of old trouble in a famous mathematical school of severe traditions, where hung on the walls a symbolic picture—a youth swimming for dear life from a gigantic shark. In the evening I would find Mead on the bridge, uttering to himself as likely as not his talismanic motto: *Quo Fata Vocant*. He was a rover; from China he had gone to Australia to join the Army in 1914; thence had seen Gallipoli, Egypt, and, I believe, Palestine; went into the Navy with a commission after that; and now had returned to the life in which he had been apprenticed a dozen years before. As these evening colloquies with Mead became a rule with me, and as it was Mead whom I came to know better than anyone else, other matters relating to him will be found in their places.

There was no lack of good spirits aboard. Reminiscences of a humorous tinge came up in almost every conversation; and conversation was an earnest and frequent affair. Indeed, there was observable a certain rivalry (as with those who supply the fashionable memoirs of the past twenty or thirty years), who should remember the most: and each speaker showed a vigorous faith in his own tale, which he scarcely extended to his predecessor's. The mate, the clear-headed Meacock, with his blunt serenity—embodying qualities in which I could not help seeing the English seaman of the centuries—was eloquent one evening about examiners. Examinations lie thick in the navigator's early way. He recalled one well-known figure of these inquisitions, who, at a time when no dinner interval was allowed to the candidates, used to bring out frying-pan, steak and the rest, and tantalize every one by cooking himself his dinner. (I wondered if this suggestion might be passed on to the Universities.) Another original, Meacock went on, warming himself with the recollection, had a preference for ordinary, that is seafaring, words.

Examiner. If I carry this barometer up a mountain, what happens?

Candidate. The mercury in the barometer subsides.

Examiner (purple with disgust). You silly idiot, if you were sitting on a table and I knocked you off, would *you* subside?

Bicker was about to put in a reminiscence of his at this point, but Meacock was already giving another instance of this examiner's zeal for pure English.

Examiner (producing a piece of wood). What colour's this?

Candidate. Chocolate.

Examiner (purple once more). Chocolate! Chocolate be dam'd. Chocolate's something to eat—What COLOUR is it?

The chief engineer, seeing me somewhat handicapped by temperament from wandering about as inquisitively as I ought to have done, came up one afternoon to take me into "his little slice of the ship." I am sorry to think how vague my imagination and how inactive my gratitude had been up to that first descent down the iron stairways and crossings to the engine-room. The stifling air and the throbbing roar, of course, kept my notions vague, but the degree of vagueness was not so disgraceful as it had been. He pointed out all things to one comprehending scarcely anything, except a chalk legend on the wall which ran:

Aston Villa
Celtic
Manchester U,

and so on, which I noticed for myself. The ruling passion—(passion at the referee's ruling, says the cynic).

I was aware, meanwhile, of vast steel rods and arms in violent motion, named severally by the chief in a mighty voice, which nevertheless was too much of a whisper for me. The gangways round them, it was easier to learn, were narrow and greasy. The cool skill with which an engineer was anointing these whirling forms, his hand dapping mothlike with the tapering can above them, was enough to amaze me. Under a strange construction like a kiln, by way of a low red door, we went into the vault where the dusky, glowing and actually grinning firemen were tending the furnaces. (It happens all day, every day in thousands of ships!) Above, we had looked in at a dark hole—I rightly thought, over the boilers—and breathed for a moment a most parching element, so that the heat of the stokehold did not frighten me. The chief introduced me to the third engineer, Williams—we roared out cordially; and then he inducted me to the mysteries aft, where, along the shaft which revolves the propeller, a specially greasy passage runs. Here, as throughout this cavernous region—I remembered Hedge Street Tunnels, which to the initiated will be a sufficient allusion—might not E. A. Poe, to-day, have set a story to rival the *Cask of Amontillado*? I suggested it to the chief, but he saw no adventurous, unusual quality in his tunnel. Right aft appeared a long vertical ladder, ascending to a manhole—a safety appliance, he explained it, of the war, but to me it resembled a danger appliance.

Having gone as far as we could, we turned back to the engine-room. I was now accustomed enough to notice that the sultry air of the place was occasionally tempered by a draught of the cooler kind. But I found it hard to realize how man could tolerate surroundings so trying as these in order to earn a wage which in a comfortable employment would be nothing out of the way. I pictured myself as an engineer on a steamer. I feared that, in time, the approach of each watch of four hours down among the machinery, fume, sweat and thunder would become a formidable problem. "Use" no doubt explained the nonchalance of pallid Williams as he groped with his slush-lamp to his work. But I thought of the war, when, after a while, useful "use" began to desert the soldier and to leave him on tenterhooks worse than the apprehensions of the unused.

39

We were climbing upstairs again-up from the underworld of battle headquarters?

I had appreciated the handful of cotton waste which the chief had given me at the first: and now went off to read poems. The man to whom this "divelish yron yngine"-if I do not misquote Spenser-is given for control (and is controlled), returned to his outstanding labour-that of filing part of a curious patent electric torch which the captain had asked him to restore to life.

VII

40

The *Bonadventure* entered the tropics, calm, hot, blue expanse. I do not know why, but our passing into that zone was for me contemporary with an access of wild and vivid dreams. These were odd enough to cause me to record what remained of them in the morning, and as they still seem prominent in my recollections of my sea-going, I make a note of some of them. Now, it was no other than the great Lord Byron, pursuing me with a knife, applauded by two ladies. The basis of actuality, at least, was there. Now I was taking my way along weedy rivers, which at first were the innocent shallow streams I once met and knew in Kent. But as the dream progressed a Byronic change came over it; and these streams grew more and more foul with weeds and grotesque in stagnation, until I realized as if with an awakening that they were full of tremendous fish, pike perhaps, often perch, and hybrids of many colours and streakings. These fish lay watching, stretched from one bank to the other; their number, my loneliness, their immensity, my fixity conspired to frighten me unspeakably.

At other times the river was in flood, and I, as before, compelled by the secret of the matter to walk along its towpath, in danger of its torrents; the path itself became unknown, or lay between two huge channels choking with muddy torrents. Ever expecting the worst, I was suddenly at an ancient mill, watching

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Slow Lethe without coil,
Softly, like a stream of oil

gliding under the footbridge. This was sickly phantasm, the very waters breathing decay. The scene swiftly changed. Paddington! and you, dear old friend C., racing with me across the metals to catch a train, and— Then C. is in his grave again, and I am in a trap outside my old home; a stranger stands in the road, cuts his throat; I look on, smile, and shudder, for he races after the trap with his knife; but I outstare his Malayan eyes, and he gives up the chase. By way of respite, I now walked at leisure into a bookshop, and my hand fell upon rarities indeed. *The Church*, by Leigh Hunt-I had never seen that before! "We don't have much time for dinner," said the bookseller, and I took the hint and went out.

And there were other familiar scenes in this phase of nightly alienation. On occasion, though I awoke several times from a haunting, I fell asleep again to return to it. Half-nonsense as these dreams were, there was a persistent force about them. Here was the battalion, expecting to be attacked. Its nerves, and mine, were restive. The attack broke out farther up the line, and we got off with a reaction almost as unwelcome as a battle. Or I was in a town behind the line, into which a number of very small round gas-shells were falling; then, in the cattle-truck for the front; presently, in the wild scenery of great hills and deep curving ravines which I seemed to know so well. (The entrenched ridges in the unnatural light of the flares looked monstrous once.) I was company commander; we were to be relieved; and, God, what had I done? Begun to bring my men out before the other crowd had come up! The mound would be lost, I should be "for it." The company must be halted in the open; and so we waited for the relief. It never came.

42

Still the dreams came: the war continued. S. S. was with me, walking up a big cobbled road, muddy as ever, towards the front. On every side lay exhausted men, not caring whether they were in the mud or not. I was not quite sure, but was not this Poperinghe Station? At that station was-I hope is-an hotel, bearing the legend, "Bifsteck à Toute Heure"; was this gaudy-looking place, perhaps, the same? At all events, S. S. said, "Let's go and have a port." We did, and the drink appears to have gone to my head, for I now found myself alone, walking across a large common or pasture. Here Mary and another woman went by, but I could not at the moment recognize them. There, beyond the common with its dry tussocks, stood a town, flanked by mountains, which I knew to be Barry. A cathedral or abbey of white stone rose in gigantic strength into the sunlight. This place, I soliloquized, so near the line, and yet not shelled! But I was not to escape. I proceeded. The screen alongside was blown down. Better slink along these hedges at the double! It was the support line. Some large splinter-proof dugouts came into sight, and some officers, who told me about an attack. We were going over. I recognized my destined

end.

However, I woke up alive, having again suffered more from fear and the atmosphere of it-in projection-in a few seconds, than I was ever conscious of suffering in a day of the actual war. With weary and aching head, whether these fantasies were to blame or not, I looked out to ask the wireless expert if there had been a storm in the night. He grinned, and going farther I saw outside a sea of pale glow not a great deal more disturbed than a looking-glass.

43

The ashen whiteness soon gave place to a deep blue, and our entry into the tropics became plainer and plainer, the sea fluttering with the sun's blaze. This was unfamiliar also, to be roasting on the water in January. The pith-helmet season began. The third mate could not claim a pith helmet, but he displayed what none of the others could, as he sat washing on the step of the alleyway—a marvellous red and blue serpent tattooed on his arm, by the very Chinaman, he said, who had tattooed King George. It was, I still think, a superfine serpent.

Washing, or "doving," was not Mead's sole recreation. Literature, and even poetry, with limitations, had its power over him. Suspecting me of critical curiosity about his favourite poets, he directly approached the matter. Rudyard Kipling and "A Sentimental Bloke" were satisfactory, but he couldn't bear the others who gave their views on love. Lawrence Hope had done one or two good things—but the rest, as Keats, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, and so forth, might as well be cut out. His approval of Kipling was confirmed by Meacock's saying in the saloon, where books and authors were a favourite pabulum, "H'm—the third mate seems to be getting very interested in Kipling. He brought me a paper with all he could remember of *IF* written out on it, and asked me if I could supply any of the rest."

This literary halo aroused Bicker, who was already known to me as the ship's poet, and had unfortunately left his MSS. at home. He now urged his claims. "The gardener called me Poet when I was about seven or eight, and I often get called that now." The chief, chuckling, brought off his little joke. "I suppose that's what drove you to sea."

44

In connection, no doubt, with poetry, that strange device, the mate looked back to a ship in which he once served, and which was chartered to carry the largest whale ever caught in Japanese waters to New York for the New York Museum. By whale, he said he meant the skeleton, of course; but it had been sketchily cleaned, "and when we got her to New York," he said with a comical frown, "nobody could get near the hatches": and, finding the sequence easy, he added that there was often some peculiar cargo on that New York-Hong Kong run—take for instance those rows of dead Chinamen in the 'tween-deck homeward bound.

The face of the sky often held me delighted. There is nothing, I think, of dullness about this world's weather; and its hues and tones may still be a sufficient testing theme for the greatest artists with pen or pencil. To express the sunset uprising of clouds, many of them in semblance of towering ships under full sail, many more like creatures mistily seen in endless pastures, was an attempt in which my own vocabulary scarcely lasted a moment. One evening, the nonpareil of its race, especially "burned the mind."

At first the blue temple was hung with plumes of cloud, golden feathers. When these at last were grey, a rosy flush swiftly came along them, like a thought, and passed. It seemed as though the night had come, when the loitering tinges of the rose in a few seconds grew unutterably red, and the spectacle was that of an aerial lattice or trellis among the clouds, overgrown with the heavenly original of all roses. "In Xanadu—" From brightness the amassed cloud-bloom still increased to brightness: then suddenly the flames turned to ember. Even now again a ghost of themselves glowed, until all was gone, and Sirius entered upon his tenancy of another glory, and Orion and Canopus, casting a hoar-frost glimmer ahead of the riding ship.

45

Hosea agreed this was a remarkable sunset; then took me off to the friendly tot and talk in his room. He loved to discuss all sorts of theory in art and religion, of which he might have been, with a slight change of circumstance in his boyhood, a student and enthusiast: meanwhile, the sailor in him would be rummaging through the makings of a curiosity shop which crowded his official desk, besides the manifests and ship's articles—his watches, knives, coins and notes of twenty countries, photographs of friends all over the world.

VIII

46

The flying-fishes could have dispensed with the *Bonadventure*. During the night, sixteen or so had come aboard, to be seized by the apprentices for breakfast; I saw with surprise how one had been driven and wedged between the steam-pipes. In looks, when they were out of their element, despite their large mild eyes, their long "wings" closed into a sort of spur, being light spines webbed with a filmy skin, despite too the purple-blue glowing from the dark back, they did not seem remarkable. But under the hot and shining morning, where the *Bonadventure's* sheering bows alarmed the shoals into flight, they were seen more justly. In ones and twos and crescents and troops they skimmed away, sometimes with their dark backs and white undersides appearing as fishes, sometimes in the sun nothing more than volleys of light-curved silvery darts. They turned in the air at sharp angles without apparently losing their speed, which was such that often one heard the water hiss as they entered it again.

The morning that they first came in numbers, it happened that the salt fish for breakfast was relieved by reminiscences.

"You reminded me of Captain Shank just now, chief."

"Indeed-why?"

"When you ran your hand along the table for the treacle.... He used to think the treacle was put aboard for him. He told the second mate off for eating too much of it-said it wasn't really for his use. After that we all began to eat the stuff like blazes."

"You must have had some funny captains in this line."

"He was. He'd come up sometimes on the bridge and sit down in the wheel and start making noises to himself. He'd sit there with his old chin drooping and say, '... I knew it.... Haw, haw.... The silly old b—.... Bless my soul....' for twenty minutes. I'd go away from the wheel for fear of laughing out-and then he'd go somewhere else and do it."

"Davy Jones got him at the finish, didn't he?"

"-And a dam'd fine ship too."

"It was her maiden trip."

"What happened to her?"

"Ran ashore."

"Both the boats capsized."

"She had the most valuable cargo I ever heard of." A pause.

"Old Shank used to ask for it, though. Once in the Gulf of Mexico he was down below, and the ship was on the course he'd given. (He never used to take any notice of deviation.) The second mate heard breakers, you could hear them quite plain, and not very far off; so he turns the ship a little, and goes down to tell Shank. Old Shank jumped up and stormed and stamped, and rushed up on the bridge roaring, '*Am I to be taught after forty-eight years at sea by a set of b—schoolboys?*' and had her put back to the old course again. And then he walked off. You could hear him snapping his teeth. Presently he stopped. You could see the breakers now, the phosphorescence of them. '*What's that?*' he whipped out, '*What's that? My God.*'"

"He was one of the white-haired boys in the office, what's more."

"His officers saved him."

"Well, one night he gave me a course, and the last thing he said to me on the bridge was, 'It's up to you to keep her there.' I soon found we were going to fall on land, and I changed the course. And as it was, we passed three-quarters of a mile inside the lightship. I went down to his room and told him. 'Why, you damn'd fool,' he started off; he nearly went mad. 'But I've hauled her out,' I said, 'I hauled her out.' And then he yelled, 'Changed her course without orders, did you?' and so on."

"Well, the office made a pet of him. Some people get away with it."

"After my trip with him, the whole crew refused to sail with him again. And the mate went up to Shields to join a new ship. And when he got there, he found Shank had joined her as skipper!"

We came into the Doldrums, and I felt none too well. "Cold, worse; heat, worse," became my diary's keynote. The steward also complained of a persistent cold. Six bottles-six-of his own medicine since we left Barry had not cured him. This notable Cardiff Irishman was always pleased to answer questions about this cold of his, and they became suspiciously frequent. Then his solemn face would grow still more solemn, his voice of office would take on a pleasing melancholy, and he would shake his grey head with dolorous realizations. Nevertheless, his stores being just below my cabin, I grew accustomed to his morning rejuvenate roarings from the threshold at the avarice of the modern sailor. It seemed that at such times he was momentarily free of his illness.

He, nevertheless, at present, added his good word to the general approval of the cook. The bread was universally admired, the pea-soup also. This popularity did not cause any alteration in the melancholy orientalism of its deserver. He looked forth from his galley with the same wooden countenance. He was the thinnest man I think I ever saw.

His macaroni, however, appeared to fall under a general taboo. It was "eschewed." Bicker, the most assiduous tale-teller, seized it as the chance for describing an old shipmate's misfortune. It was in Italy: "He was keen on seeing all the sights, so we asked him if he'd seen the macaroni plantation. He said he'd like to. We told him to take the tram out of the town and walk on another mile or so, when he'd see the trees with macaroni growing on them like lace-natural lace. And he went. But the best of it was that he'd sent a card home the day before to say, 'To-morrow I am going to see the macaroni plantation.'" This, which if true was stranger than fiction, elicited recollections of fool's-errands in the shipyards ("Run and get a capful of nailholes," "Ask the storekeeper for a brass hook and a long stay"), which kept us at table until the steward groaned aloud.

I led a lazy life. There was not much reason for being active. My afternoon walk might reach as far as the fo'c'sle, in which lay a kindly miscellany of wire, hemp and manila ropes in coils, and an aroma of paint and tar was never absent. The heat, however, seemed intenser in this house than

in the open. Clouds and a little rain soon vanished, and the sea was one long flame towards the sun. White uniforms were in vogue. For me, the half-closed eye, with a flying-fish or two sometimes glittering to awake its notice, in any corner out of the sun, was an occupation. The unfortunate boatswain and his men were chipping paint, clanging and banging in the heat; or I would see him perching on the bulwarks directing some aerial operation, and a sailor seated in the "bosun's chair" being hauled up the mast. They rested from Saturday noon until Monday morning. Now, more than ever, the lot of the engineers and firemen seemed unacceptable. The blaze, the fierce blue sea, and a flagging breeze became a routine now. The rains of the Doldrums were not much in evidence; a short shower, flying over the clay-coloured water, might come towards evening.

Incidents were few. The sight of the flying-fishes still starting up and skimming, veering and spurting into a safe distance from the intruder, was no longer one for my absorbed watch. I woke up, heavy-headed, one morning to find that Meacock had suspended one of these poor creatures from my roof; there he hung swaying in the little breeze that there was, in parched and doleful manner, and ever and anon turning upon me, who felt much in his condition, his mild and magnificent eye. I threw him out with sympathy. At night the boobies shrieked round the lights on the masts, and appeared at morning flying over the water. Once the sleep of the just was broken by profane language and scuffling in the passage outside—a rat hunt. Boat drill took its turn one afternoon, the siren summoning all hands available to their posts. I was questioned about Colonel Lawrence, at intervals, having seen him in the flesh; and the publisher of his *Life* was expected to be named by me. I said that I believed he himself would write his Memoirs. But this was not the thing. A book about him by some one who knew how to paint the lily and improve on possibility was what was sought. I think I could design a satisfactory coloured cover.

The morning bucket was a transient happiness. To disturb the "gradual dusky veil" now unescapable, since the bunkers were now chiefly filled with coal-dust, was not too simple in a limited space, with limited hot water. My porthole, looking over those fuming bunkers, had to be shut at all hours. According to everybody, the *Bonadventure* was "a dirty ship"; although it seemed unlikely that a carrier of coal by thousands of tons should be clean.

She at least began to please the chief with his coveted "Ten knots"; and at dinner on the seventeenth day out, he asked whether anyone had seen a disturbance in the water. The old gentleman was expected. I was sorry that he did not come, after all, with his "baptism," shave, and medicine (and I believe other rites), when at about four in the afternoon the *Bonadventure* crossed the Equator; but old customs can scarcely be eternal. The steward's cough mixture was the only medicine I got that day. Neptuneless, the ship furrowed a sea almost silent, and evening came on tranquilly among woolpacks of warm-kindled colouring.

IX

Mary, what news?—

 The lands, as I suppose,
Are drenched with sleet or drifted up with snows,
The east wind strips the slates and starves the blood,
Or thaws and rains make life a sea of mud.
You close each door, draw armchairs nigh the fire,
But draughts sneak in and make you draw 'em nigher—
No matter: still they come: play parlour gales
And whisk about their hyperboreal tails;
Bed's the one hope, and scarcely tried before
Next morning's postman thunders at the door.

Meanwhile—if I may gently hint—I wear
But scanty clothes, though all the sun will bear;
A red-hot sun smiles on a hot blue sea
And leaves my bunk to laziness and me:
I read, until a lethargy ensues,
Tales of detectives frowning over clues
And last month's papers; then the strain's too strong,
Man wants but little, nor that little long,
The deck-chair in the shadow now appeals,
Until the next hash-hammer rings to meals.

But not alone in climate may I claim
Advantage; while you feel the slings of fame,
Beset at all hours by the shapes of those
Who volunteer your wants to diagnose,
Who come with merchandise and go with cheques;
No licensed interrupter haunts these decks,
No vans of wares along these highways clatter.
None urges to insure, buy broom or platter.

There is no sheaf of letters every day,
Regretting, and so forth: no minstrel's lay:
Proofs, none: reminders, none-while daily you,
Poor creature, tear your hair and struggle through,
And darken paper till you light the lamps,
And the last shilling disappears in stamps.

Nor weightier cares you lack, it is decreed;
The clock won't go, the chickens will not feed,
The pump, always a huffy ancient, swears,
"Water? if you wants water, try elsewheres":
The infant wonder, she who must inquire,
Investigates herself into the fire,
The playful snowball whizzes through the pane,
In brief, you try to kick the cat: in vain.
Here no such troubles blot the almanac
For me; no day is marked with red or black:
Events-eventicles-are few, as these,
The sighted school of bobbing porpoises,
The flying-fish when first I saw them leap
And flash like swallows over the blue deep;
The rose-red sunset, or the Sunday duff,
Or-but enumeration cries "Enough."

There is no Mary in the Atlantic, true,
Nor cellared bookshop to be foraged through.
But as I said, at least I've found the sun
And idle times-even this will soon be done;
A corner where no rags-and-bones apply,
Nor postman comes, nor poultry droop and die.

X

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The South-East Trade was blowing fresh next day, if a damp clammy rush of hot air deserves the term. The threatened heavy rains of the Doldrums had not come; the heavy heat subdued talk at table. Cloud and sultry steamy haze had hung about us during the morning; at two or thereabouts the first land seen by the *Bonadventure* since her first day's stubborn entry into the English Channel came into view. My view was at first none at all; but encouraged by Bicker and with his glasses I could make out the island of Fernando Noronha, twenty miles away to the south-east. A tall peak and the high ground about it for a space gave the illusion of some great cathedral, a Mont St. Michel seen by Cotman faintly forthshadowed; then, the willing fancy rebuked, I discerned its low coasts of rock, inhospitable and mist-haunted.

This singular crag breaking out of the mid-ocean, I knew, was a convict settlement. "Life sentences" were safely mewed up here. At length we were abeam of this melancholy place, while the sun seemed to make a show of its white prison camp, at a distance of twelve or thirteen miles. It would have been hard not to imagine the despair of men condemned to such a prison. The peak's stern finger might have struck with awe the first navigators to approach it. To see the immutable pillar in every sunset and at every sunrise, surveying all the drudgery, the emblem of perpetual soullessness, must be an unnerving punishment. The constant processions of ships, to whom Fernando Noronha is a welcome mark, with their smoke vanishing swiftly to north or south, could scarcely tantalize more?

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The rough overhanging pinnacle faded again, and evening fell. Leaning with the third mate over the bridge canvas, while the moon, now waxing, riding through the frontiers of a black cloud, cast a dim avenue over the sea, and from other dishevelled clouds a few quiet drops came down, was a most peaceful luxury. About the bows the water was lit up by sudden flashes gone too soon. These travelling lights-akin to the gem of the glow-worm seen close-were, according to Mead, the Portugee men-of-war which I had seen by day. No name could be less descriptive. These small creatures, at night living lamps of green, by day with their glassy red and blue like the floating petals of some sea-rose, were worthy of some gentler imagist. When, Mead said, you take them from the water, they are nothing but a little slime; evanescent as the rainbow on the spray.

Splendour and fiery heat marked the day still. I had discarded jacket and socks, enjoying the soothing gush of air about the ankles; otherwise even reading was made unprofitable by the drug-like heat. The same sky and seascape, the same condemnations of "a dirty ship" recurred day by day. "The worst ship I ever sailed on, mister. You turn in washed and you wake up black." The bath was still an enjoyable interlude, despite mechanical drawbacks. The bath proper was out of order, owing to some deficiency of the water-pipes. At one end, in substitution, you lodged your bucket in a board with a hole in it. At the other end a crossbar offered the bather a seat. Much splashing transferred the water from the bucket to your coal-dust surface; while, there

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being little air in the bathroom, you breathed sparingly. Yet how well off was the acrobat with his sponge, compared with the fireman who just then was taking bucket after bucket of ashes from the stokehold hoist and tipping them overboard—a job that was never done until the engines rested in port; that punctuated our progress, as did the morning hosepipe on the cabins and the bridge deck.

Not much was said of the country to which we were going. Englishmen were definitely unpopular there, said some one; English sailors, on the slightest pretext, taken off by the police to the “calaboosh.” “You only want to look like an Englishman.” “Well, what about trying to look like a German?” The chief engineer rarely missed a chance to rub in his politics, and he jumped at this one—“Doesn’t the same thing apply at home?”—with eager irony.

Ships were discussed and compared at almost every meal. Some, luxurious.

“But that yacht she was pretty, there’s no getting away from it.”

“That was *my* yacht.”

“They must employ quite a lot of shore labour to keep these yachts from looking like ships.”

“Well, they couldn’t very well make them look like standard ships, if they wanted to.”

“Oh, I don’t know—get the second mate and the chief to co-operate—saw off the funnel halfway, and throw a few ashes about the decks.”

Some, ideal.

“She looked just like the model of a ship—and she was spotless.”

Some, not what they ought to be.

“I looked and saw her name, *The Duke of York*. I thought to myself, I’ll write to him and tell him about the state of his namesake. She looked like a wreck.”

Some, again, like the *Bonadventure*, standard ships, the hasty replacements of submarine wastage. The criticism here, of course, had the severity of domestic familiarity.

“They have these ships made in one piece at the shipyard. When they want one, they just cut off a length, and join the ends.”

“Well, I say the man who designed this ship ought to have designed another and pegged out.”

“Mister, she’s a dirty ship.”

I detected—it was not difficult—a vague prejudice against wireless. The wireless operator was foolish enough to have at his fingers’ ends all the tabular details of shipping companies and their vessels, and to display this dry knowledge in the middle of his seniors’ recollections. His seafaring experience, it may be mentioned, was altogether recent, and among the elders he would have done better *not* to know. It was of course impersonally aired, this prejudice against wireless. First, there was the view that as ships had hitherto, beginning with the Ark, gone to sea without the invention, they could continue to do so. Then, the fact that wireless might save life admitted, the system current was decried. It seemed that the merchant ships of over 1,600 tons carried wireless operators and sets, but that one operator to a ship was the allowance; now one operator watched eight hours out of the twenty-four, and all were off duty at the same time. So it was believed. “There’s nothing in the Bible,” the critic would urge, “to say a ship mustn’t be wrecked when all the operators are off duty.”

I had expected music—chanteys, or at least accordions—aboard a merchantman; but very little was that expectation justified. There had been a gramophone (and step-dancing), but it was out of action after one evening’s protracted use. It was not often, yet, that I had heard even a whistled scrap; occasionally the coloured firemen would sing in falsetto.

An epidemic of hair-cutting broke out. Every time I saw the process going on, the artist was a fresh one; and I was inclined to think that we are a nation of hair-cutters. Among the practitioners, the cook, with his usual severe expression, plied a neat pair of scissors. It was a scene which reminded me of old trench life. I thought of a close support trench opposite Auchy, about the month of June, 1916, where a sickly programme of sniping by field guns, rifle grenades, “pineapples,” and incredible escapes from them did not prevent my being shorn by the steadiest of amateurs. With what outward intrepidity I sat there!

At the captain’s request, the cook advanced to cut his hair. That done, he cut mine. Venturing to talk, I was soon exchanging sallies of the British Expeditionary Force, for he had been thereof, a tunneller. Of his being in a countermined shaft at the wrong moment at Vimy, and his luck in being dragged out by the sergeant-major, he gave some details; but the first evident attack of mirth to which I had ever seen him give way came as he mused over rations supplied by the French for a fortnight at St. Quentin under some temporary arrangement. “Wine, beans, and b—horseflesh,” he said, *staccato*, and with a dry laugh like the rattling of beans. “First we’d all get bound up and then we’d all get diarrhoea. Oh, it was the hell of a go.” “There,” he said, leaving a little tuft over my forehead, “you’ll still be able to have a couple of quiffs there.”

He was not only cook and hairdresser off duty, I found: he was given to sketching portraits. I went once or twice to talk with him in the galley, where the heat was enough to make the famous Lambert himself turn thin. And his work, he pointed out, was continuous, with his assistant’s services; he had to put up double meals to suit the watches. “But why do I stick it?” he said, taking a batch of bread from the oven and standing it on end against the others. “A man can stick

shore jobs all right when there's five mouths depending on him. There's not a lot of shore jobs now."

His drawings were done in the little corner where he and his mate had their bunks. They were pictures of ladies and seamen of his acquaintance; crude, with lips of a bitter redness, and cheeks faintly pink, staring and disproportioned, yet done with such pains, such strivings after "likeness," that when he requested me to help him to a post as artist to *The Times*, I much wished that I could! I had no sooner made the acquaintance of the cook's portraits than a poem was bashfully brought to me by its author, Bicker. I must say that, although his lines had occasionally been eked out with last resorts, there was a heartiness about them which I liked; and, going down presently to his cabin, I got him to show me more. He had already written several rhyming epistles during the trip, which with the retiring instinct of poets he had left to blush unseen. So we had aboard among a crew of forty or so a painter of portraits and a writer of verse.

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We had our philosopher too, Phillips, the chief engineer, veteran of Khartoum, master of machinery, physician less active but more reliable than the steward; but above all, the Diogenes—with a slush-lamp. His philosophy might be no ill store about this time, when in the heat the pitch melted from the seams of his cabin roof and mottled his bed, as he put it: a circumstance not yet mentioned in sonnets wooing tardy sleep, and which of course called upon that nimble sixpence of *Bonadventure* conversation, "She *is* a dirty ship."

XI

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A note of a train of thought forced upon me hereabouts may find a place here, as it was set down.

(*Feb. 4.*) It was nothing more nor less than the appearance at dinner to-day of a bully stew and a sort of ration lime juice, which drove my thoughts, always willing to be driven in that direction, towards a nervous period of 1916, my initiation into trench warfare. The meal was something of a facsimile; and soon after it, by a coincidence, I was sitting under the scissors of a volunteer barber much as once after such a dinner I sat in the alleyway by company headquarters, opposite the red roofs of Auchy. The *Bonadventure's* bridge, I meditated as I endured the shears of a B.E.F. man again, looked not unlike those so-called "communication trenches" in the Richebourg district, those make-believes; and, as the steam-valve suddenly made me jump with its thudding volley of minor explosions, I experienced an echo of the ancient terrors in those same scantily covered ways when cross-firing machine-guns opened upon my working-party.

The lime juice, in the present case, was of a milder disposition than that to which we were accustomed. Yet there was perceptible in it that uncivilized strength which proved it to come of the same honest origin. We were, I must confess—it is not too late—much lacking in our appreciation of that uncompromising, biting liquid which circulated in the trenches, carried in jars which should have been, it was felt, carrying rum. In itself a sort of candid friend, that lime juice lacked advancement through faults not its own. I mean, there was the chlorinated water, which for all its virtues was hardly popular, and there was the sugar, which was half-and-half, associating, very friendly, with tea dust. Moreover, this same *sugar*, in its nocturnal progress at the bottom of a sandbag, while its carrier now stepped into an artificial lake and now lay down for the bullets of Quinque Jimmy to pass by unimpeded, had acquired an interspersed hairy particles; as generally did our loaves of bread, which in some cases might easily be supposed to be wearing wigs. In this manner, the germ-destroyer, the intrusion of tea dust and the moulded coat of sandbags, combined to prevent the lime juice, like crabbed poet, "from being as generally tasted as he deserved to be."

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At Company Headquarters, too, there was often in those easy times a rival beverage. Here and there a messenger might be sent back to an estaminet and return to the war with comforts within a couple of hours.

Yet I myself did my best to cultivate the "lime-juice habit," and to me it remains an integral part of the interiors, gone but not forgotten, of many a Rotten Row in the Béthune Sectors. I see its gloomy and mottled surface, in the aluminium tumbler, besides my platter of "meat and vegetable" or (as to-day) of bully rehabilitated by the smoky cooks; and about me the shape of the lean-to dugout rises sufficiently high for a tall man to enter without going on all fours. Here, is the earth settee, running round three sides of the table, there, the glory hole in which, one at a time, we crawl to sleep, with a fine confused bedding of British Warm and sandbags. The purple typescript of *Comic Cuts*,^[1] in which what imagination and telescope has striven to reveal of the "other fellow," mind, body and soul, is set in military prose, flaps neglectedly from its nail. In their furious tints, the ladies of the late Kirchner beam sweetly upon him who sets out on patrol and him who returns; while in the convenient niches between the walls and the corrugated iron roof above, which as a protection might perhaps amount to the faith of the ostrich, Mills bombs and revolvers and ammunition nestle.

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There, given the noise of shells travelling over, trench mortar bombs dropping short, machine guns firing high—or of shells alighting abruptly on the paradoss, trench mortar bombs thundering into the next traverse, machine guns in spitfire temper stripping the top layer of sandbags—the boyish gay P. would with his subalterns pore over the maps, receive with sinking heart the ominous "secret and confidential" and "very secret" messages brought in by those fine youths the

runners; fill in, not without murmurings, those *pro forma's* which at one time seemed likely to turn fighting into clerkship, or "censor" those long pages of homely scrawl in copying pencil which were to keep up yet a day more the spirits of sweethearts, mothers and wives.

Thus the particular memories of trenches and our times and seasons in them, roused by such a light matter as this which has aroused them now, pass with the greatest emotion before the mind. It is not fashionable to talk of the war. Is the counsel, then, to follow the Psalmist:

I said, I will take heed to my ways: that I offend not in my tongue....

I held my tongue, and spake nothing. I kept silence, yea, even from good words; but it was pain and grief to me.

One has not to follow him very long in that.

My heart was hot within me, and while I was thus musing the fire kindled: and at the last I spake with my tongue.

One wonders, though, how the Psalmist himself, had he been one of us, would have found means to communicate his strange undertones of experience, according to their significance for himself? To whom would it be of interest, if he described such a particle as St. Vaast Keep on the Richebourg road, though he saw daily again in some odd way its sandbagged posts with the fine wood panels from the shell-like house beside built in?-seen once, for a lifetime. Or Port Arthur, that wreckage of a brewery near Neuve Chapelle-why should every yard of its flimsy fortification be coexistent with me? I could lead the hearer through its observation-posts, its emplacements, its warrens for human beings, its relics of other days, with practical and geographical accuracy; but the words would not contain my own sense of the place, which from the very first I never needed nor endeavoured to put into words. And yet it is intense and instant. The reflection of the crazy stronghold as it was, and with what it meant for me, comes in a second when my thoughts lie that way, and it is but one of a series of equal insistency. It is no question, this, of looking back on such a past as in any degree glorious, of shirking the anguish that overcast any adventurous gleam that these scenes awakened. Their memory is as sombre and as frightening as they were themselves in their aspect and their annals.

They come unbidden,

and when they will come, the mind is led by them as birds are said to be lured by the serpent's eye. A tune, a breath of sighing air, an odour-and there goes the foolish ghost back to Flanders.

Even here, I suppose, in the Atlantic's healthy blue, I am at the mercy of a coincidence in lime-juice.

[1] Divisional Intelligence Report.

XII

Following a roaster of day, with a slack wind astern covering the deck forward with showers of cinders like shot, I admired the moonlight and the sweet night air before I turned in to sleep soundly. I woke thinking I heard the usual swabbing of decks beginning, but this was incorrect. It was quite dark, and I began to think with gratitude of a second innings of sleep; but when I looked at my watch it was after seven. The din of water outside, mingled with the rushing of a mighty wind, persuaded me to go to the door. In a few moments the storm was at its height, the sea shrouded in a thick deluge almost to the ship's side, and its waves beaten down by the rain into pallid foam-veined inertia. An ashen grey light was about us, but the clouds of rain veiled the poop from one's eyes amidships, and the siren trumpeted out its warnings; while sheet-like lightning flamed through the vapours, and bursts of deeper thunder than I had ever heard followed hard upon them. The decks were racing with water from overhead covers and stairways, and in each lifting of the storm the awning over the sailors' quarters aft could be seen tearing at its tethers.

This fury soon slackened, and green and blue, pale as yet, returned to the seas as they leapt away from the bows. Breakfast intervened. Attention was requested from the storm by the appearance of a new and experimental kind of ham.

"Yes. What d'ye think of the ham-tinned boneless smoked ham?"

"Well, I like it well enough; but it's boneless. If you take the bone away from ham, you take away the nature of it."

This ham later on became much esteemed, but the ingenious mind was for dissembling the fact: "We'd better not give a too enthusiastic report on it or they'll only give it to the passenger boats" of the same company.

It was blowing still, from the coast of South America. "Smell the mould?" asked Hosea, and I did; a strange frightening fragrance, of the earth earthy, a heavy and swooning smell. It was so strong as to puzzle Bicker even, in his watch; and its most unpleasant manifestation caused him to look about for the carcass of a rat on the bridge deck.

We had come by this time into a highway of ships. The first that passed us, a small steamer, was

not much noticed; nor the next, which passed in the night. "Her lamp gave a blink and then went out," said Bicker, and wished he could have emulated a mate of his acquaintance who likewise signalled to a passer-by in vain. "If you damn'd foreigners can't answer," he sent out as she came alongside presently, "why the hell don't you keep out of sight? Good night!" But, on being pressed, he admitted that the "foreigner" replied: "Thank you. And you're a lady."

Then, however, another ship belonging to the same company with the *Bonadventure* was seen afar through the afternoon. As the two drew level, ceremony took place. The houseflag was dipped and raised and dipped again by both; the red ensign was dipped; and the homeward-bound sounded her monosyllable three times, to which our own whistle replied in equal number. This, as old-fashioned a courtesy as could be wished, excited several others aboard the *Bonadventure* besides the tyro; and as the chief engineer began his tea, he thus referred to the prevailing spirit.

"-Well, so we passed one of *our* ships again to-day! I was lying in my hammock asleep, when the mess-room boy came running up, panting out: 'Sir, here's one of our ships!' And I mumbled out something like, 'All right, John, there's room enough for us to pass, isn't there?' Everybody was seemingly out on deck, peering up at the mate to see if he had forgotten the flags; everybody was staring at the funnel with the eye of expectancy, wondering 'When the hell's that damn'd whistle going?' -I didn't get up for it. I suppose that's equivalent to contempt of court or high treason."

The bland face of the sage lighted up with pleasure as he carefully gave us this impression of his.

After the storm, the air was thunder-heavy all that day. Great dragon-flies, and butterflies in sultry brown and red, and that must have been borne out to sea on the strong breeze, were fluttering over the decks and the water. At night, there was abundant lightning in the distance: most of all on the eastern horizon, with its world of waters, the flashes were of a dusky redness, and of vague mountainous outline. They came fast and furious, until the moon at last seemed to overawe such wild carouse, and in good earnest to govern the night; while in a deep blue darkness, among the folds of white cloud, stars shone with new clearness. Under this celestial content, the *Bonadventure* moved over a gleaming sea.

Mead, on his watch, was troubled. He sought in his mind a life better paid and more exciting. Every few moments, he would add some detail aloud to a scheme for piracy in these waters, which he thought might be made a profitable occupation. He pictured a coaster, duly registered, running with ordinary cargo to and fro, but on the lines of a "Q" boat, a sort of marine wolf in sheep's clothing, armed with torpedo tubes. In all respects, himself being already chosen as captain, its crew should form a co-operative society. The pirate should carry a wireless installation of the noisiest sort. In brief, the whole scheme appealed to him so warmly that he was ready, apart from details to be arranged, especially a financier, to put it into practice. Me he would accept as purser, not so much because I showed any promise as a book-keeper, as that I had been in an infantry battalion in the Line.

The ship was slowing down, and the chief was worried. One morning he offered me employment, "cleaning the tubes. You come round to my place." I went round at about nine, when the ship's engines were stopped, and found that he had as ever been amusing himself in his quiet way. He himself, with the firemen, was now ready to act as the ship's chimney-sweeps. After a full morning's work, masked in sweat and soot, they came up on deck again from the job. I did not regret my earlier "disappointment." Relieved of the clogging soot, the *Bonadventure* ran with fresh speed, against a tough head wind. For the first time for some days, one heard the harsh drumming of the excess of steam escaping through its valve. The wind drove the water, hereabouts of a jade green colour, into long waves and their fine manes of spray, upon which the sun made many a small and fleeting rainbow. With this head wind piping, and the cargo, it seemed, having shifted lately, the ship had an uncomfortable list to port and swayed as she went. "Here, you," cried Meacock to me, "your extra weight on the port side's doing this." "Yes, it's perfectly plain he is the Jonah of the voyage."

A dozen big black birds appeared as travelling companions, white-breasted and easy-going. At a closer view, I found that they were not properly black but of that dingy russet grey towards which old mushrooms grow. They seemed never to clap their wings, but sailed as our gulls do on the wind, wheeling and looping with a leisurely grace, and patrolling the sea as closely as an owl beats a meadow without wetting a wing-tip.

Nor was this the only token of our nearing our first destination. Shore-going suits and boots were out in the sun already. The steward's usual attitude became that of a priest, as he carried the captain's suits gingerly here and there.

But there was still time for trouble. A relapse in the sainted manner of the old fellow occurred one day at breakfast. The most tremendous roarings, himself and the offending donkeyman in turn or in chorus, suddenly broke out, and ended in the steward's ascent with a complaint to Hosea. Then, one evening, after my quiet enjoyment of the pure blue sky after a shower, with its Southern Cross and the false cross and other stars strange to me glittering marvellously keen, I went in to my cabin to write, when I instantly perceived something in the air. A most pungent aroma, indeed, had been instilled through the house; and going to inquire I found Cyrano of Cardiff kneeling on the saloon floor, applying a special kind of red paint. Properly, he said, it was used for the keels of ships. I thought too that that was its proper application.

At dinner, too, events took a serious turn. When I had in previous days heard spaghetti hailed as Wind-pipes, for instance, I had realized the phrase as a humorous hyperbole. But now the tinned meat problem presented itself to me in a more sinister light-I was not so sure! There before me

was a godless lump of briny red fat and stringy appendages floating more or less in a thick brown liquid which demanded the spectacles of optimism. A reinforcement of stony beans did not mend the matter. The meat, as it fell out, wore a portion of skin, remarkable for prickly excrescences, and hinting that I was about to batten on the relics of a young porcupine, or at least peculiar pork. Presently I asked Meacock what sort of flesh this was. He answered: "O Lord, I don't know-it's-well, I don't think you can get beyond tinned *meat*."

Another incident affected the administration. An apprentice, whose stature brought him, beyond the chance of escape, the nickname Little Tich, and who was generally being bantered by someone or other, was cleaning the brasswork of the compass in the wheel-house. Meacock went in to take a bearing. The bearing he got nonplussed him, and he got Mead to try. Mead also found the needle giving strange evidence. Suddenly it dawned upon them that its delusion was due to a tremendous dagger worn by the very small and keenly occupied Tich. 72

The *Bonadventure* maintained her mended pace, and also her awkward list, which conspired with a strong swell; thus it was that the "fiddle" so necessary to the safety of cups and plates in the Bay of Biscay reappeared at this late stage. The nights were beautiful, with their white moon and moonlight far over the water, their stars, few, and of the moon's glowing whiteness, the light veilings of cloud blown in silence about the sky, and little else heard except the subdued measure of the ship's engines, the lapping repulse of waves from the bows, and the sharp call of birds ahead and astern. Well might Mead be glad of his roving temperament, as on his watch we talked and smoked above the expanse of rippled water, and looked towards the sword-like lightnings in the south.

XIII

73

We came into grey waters, and also into a grey sort of day, overcast and moody. In the evening the wind was strong from the land, and laden with that earthy scent which had so surprised me when I first encountered it; a languid, rich and beguiling perfume, that is tomb-like and unnerving in its suggestion, rising over us. It made out for me the spirit of Tom Hood's last song, if it was his last song; the one beginning "Farewell, life, my senses swim"; its first verse ending "I smell the Mould above the Rose," and its second, "I smell the Rose above the Mould."

Hosea engaged me in discussion of Tennyson and Edwin Arnold. He had been carrying out a lively campaign in his room, where an unwelcome insect had appeared lately; one would have doubted whether any insect, however irrepressible, could have existed in the atmosphere of cigar smoke which he daily thickened in that room of his. But there it was, the bug had been seen, and the whole room was overhauled.

This did not in any way deflect him from his evening pursuit of the abstract. His resolution in following a problem through its own difficult aspects, combined with his control of the *Bonadventure*, often made me wonder whether he was typical of his fellow-captains. Though, as he said, the roaring-bull style of master mariner was almost extinct, I could not help thinking him singular. 74

I woke at about four, following an inquiry into some remote subject, from a dream of roaring thunderbolts, out of whose red and whizzing track I was crouching on the lee side of barns and cowsheds. I looked out; there was a loud wind much like that which brought the storm of the other Sunday. I went back to bed a little disappointed. This squall left the makings of a very good breeze blowing and moreover lowered the temperature. The mate complained of his khaki shorts; the second mate had had to bring out another blanket, although it was a sunny morning. The colour of the sea was changing as we went at a striking rate; but prevailing, in those shallower roads turbid with silt or sand was a greenness as of horse-chestnut leaves at their prime. Here and there were dark acres of discoloured water drifting by, contrasting magnificently with the green and its bright white-crested waves. The afternoon brought into sight the dim shapes of coastline with those now less familiar things trees and houses. This advance was welcomed by Mead and the apprentices who lived in his alleyway with spirited but not spiritual songs.

The next day, Hosea was very early at the door of the wireless operator's cabin, endeavouring to get a reply from the ship's agents in Monte Video, to questions sent some days before. I do not think he succeeded. There was, however, much buzzing, and I got up to enjoy the time of day. It was still keen outside—"a nipping and an eager air"—the sky being blue and the sun unclouded none the less; over the drab green sea, a seagull or two in their lordly fashions flapping against the wind; to starboard, in a gentle haze, a view of rugged shore. This point was one of mountainous eminences, rolling like larger Downs, with white cliffs or sandy beaches under their light red masses. Other steamers were in our neighbourhood, on the same course out or home, some bright with new paint, others scarred and rusty. Probably they were having tripe in batter for breakfast like ourselves, the prose part of me suggested; and I felt with gratitude that I must have become a new and better man, who could now face and even look forward to a food which had hitherto only interested me as a favourite with C. Lamb. 75

The continued cold caused me to return to socks; but I delayed the reinstatement of the collar, which I had found no such necessity to human happiness.

It seemed no time at all before we had passed Flores Island, and Monte Video came into view.

Bright sandy shores gave place to a parched sort of greenery, as it looked, with large buildings here and there; the town beyond lay terraced on rising ground, its square monotonous buildings hot in the sun, whose fervour the roofs returned in dazzling mirror-glare. The spires and minarets of its more pretentious architecture, something scantily, relieved the greyness of the formal rows, barracks, warehouses and whatever else. Farther on a rough squat cone of barren-looking ground surmounted with another heavy square-cut building caught but scarcely charmed the eye. As the heat was dreary, so at a casual glance through the smouldering air this town of flat roofs and tiers.

Hosea, very smart, with his telescope under his arm, and the second mate beside him, stood on the bridge. Hosea was giving orders, the second mate passing them on to the engineer below on the ringing telegraph, and by megaphone to Meacock, who with the carpenter stood to the anchor forward. Flags were run up announcing the *Bonadventure*. No answer, in the form of a launch, was vouchsafed so early, although other ships moored round about us were being visited by agents or doctors. The word was given to let go the anchor. "Forty-five on the windlass!" The cumbrous chain unwound and ran down with a cloud of rust. The *Bonadventure* lay still, even the cocoa-like mud which her propeller had been diffusing in a few moments thinning away.

A gangway was let down over the side. Firemen and engineers came up from the underworld and all-not only the passenger-looked towards a motor launch which now appeared making swiftly towards us. She was tied up a moment later with ropes at the foot of the gangway, and an Englishman emerging from her small beautifully polished saloon, asked in supercilious fashion for the captain. "Come aboard." "No, I can't," Hosea stalked forth with successful dignity, as if unaware that anyone should be calling; then, going back for the ship's papers, boarded the launch, and we heard that we were going on to Buenos Aires. The papers were quickly seen and restored; letters-general gloom!-were absent, probably with some other agents; and the launch and the young man in his beautiful suit, raiment for a diplomat, departed.

We stayed here at anchor through the afternoon; telescopes sprang up on all sides, even if to unacquainted, non-cubist eyes the view was rather interesting than pleasing. Every half-hour or so, some tramp would leave the harbour. Curiosity in their case was small. Every half-hour, launches puffed along to take back their pilots. The purlieus of Monte Video with their apparent but distant gaiety, even, were soon disregarded.

Bicker and Meacock exchanged humorous history by the engine bunkers, in holiday mood. The steward, who had lost little time in putting out a fishline, leaned over the rail in meditation, not knowing that his misanthropic look was being almost to a line caught by Bicker behind him. Bicker also illustrated in dumb show the action of heaving the poor old man overboard. And, meanwhile, it was hot: no doubt of that! Presently the doleful patience of the steward was rewarded with a foolish-looking fish perhaps three pounds in weight, which was soon cut into sectors and salted.

When towards seven in the evening the anchor was got up and the ship began to move up the River Plate to Buenos Aires, the scene was one to be remembered. Astern lay Monte Video with its lines of lights, and from its hill one great light glowed out momentarily; ahead lay the buoys of the channel, flashing first red and then white in reassuring alternation along our course; and the moon overhead, pale with a stratum of thin cloud, or lost at times behind echelons of stormier vapours, gave light enough to hint at the look of the shores. At first the captain, the mate and the anchor appeared the three forces acting on the ship, the anchor especially, which was loath to come aboard. At last it came, and the *Bonadventure* went steadily up the river to the pipe of a rising wind.

Hosea, well satisfied, sat down in his room with his "purser" to theorize in our wonted way. The beauty of the commonplace, it was; then we were considering the simplicity of seafaring men. They must be simple, he said, to have done what they had done, including Columbus. Seafaring in sailing ships, he described in the powerful phrase "fighting against your God"; a phrase which I suppose the early mariners in their piety might have applied to steamers.

Those trim skiffs unknown of yore-

I condense Coleridge-

That fear no spite of wind or tide!

Phillips joined us. "We're discussing nautical history, chief." Being assured that this really was so, Phillips said he was uncertain about the true story of the *Golden Hind's* boatswain, but he felt certain about our not reaching Buenos Aires in the morning. If he were not a moral man, he would "bet you, sir, two pence on the point."

The pilot, a tan-brown moustached little man, came in-not for his black straw hat, but for his oilskins and goloshes. "That's right," said Phillips with malevolent sympathy, "that's right, pilot, always keep your feet thoroughly dry." The pilot had at least the excuse that it was drizzling outside.

It blew hard and harder all night; and the next morning, Sunday, one thought of the collapse of an English October. About half-past seven we dropped anchor in the "roads" outside our promised port; on all sides bleakly lapping and passing the pea-soup waters of the River Plate. Father Prout's whimsical haunting old lines pervaded my mind as I stared and warmed myself with pacing up and down:

With deep affection and recollection

I often think of the Shandon bells,
Whose sounds so wild would, in days of childhood,
Fling round my cradle their magic spells.
On this I ponder, where'er I wander,
And thus grow fonder, sweet Cork, of thee,
With thy bells of Shandon,
That sound so grand on
The pleasant waters of the River Lee.

Not far from his old loves, how did some of us once for a brief stay, with those whirlpools in Flanders still roaring more hungrily in our destiny, hear other bells ring in enchanting coolness over the gliding boat, borne on the bosom of wooded Blackwater!

But these bleak and turbid waters turned the ringing song to parody, nor did the *Bonadventure's* bell, a war product, sound particularly grand upon them as those past bells on their importal streams. The outlook and the chilliness made breakfast unusually welcome. The pilot came in, but having no English to speak of (or with) he could not tell us his real views on the weather and such important matters. The chief loudly—for more clarity—pressed him with such questions as “When does your next STRIKE begin?” but he smiled and ate on.

About dinner-time a fine white launch came out to us; and a number of authorities, including some doctors, came aboard. The ship's company assembled aft like an awkward squad, and the doctors came along the line feeling pulses; a task which they did genially and without strain. That done, and no one being set aside for a further examination, all dispersed. The authorities (a generous allowance of them) proceeded to Hosea's quarters, no doubt to wind up the morning's work in comfort. I listened meanwhile to Mead, who leaning over above their launch, amused himself with making noisy and scandalous observations upon its crew, their careers and their faces. Why this fury? I really believe it was his way of expressing fraternity.

So there was nothing to do but wait for our new pilot on Monday morning: to play cards with a pack whose age had given each card characteristic markings besides those upon its face; to “yarn.” At tea, Bicker was in his most assiduous narrative mood. “We were in the West Indies in a boat bringing the bumboat woman aboard—well, she started to climb up the rope ladder and this fellow thought he'd lay his hand on her ankle. So he made a move to do so. Just then” (his broad grin grew almost incredibly broad), “the boat gave a roll, and as he had one foot on the gunwale, and one on the rope ladder he fell into the water. Well, he went down past rows and rows of plates, and we looked out for him to come up.—First a hat, his black hat, came up. And then, a newspaper came up”—[*Chief (ignored)* “To say he wasn't coming up?”]—and then, *he* came up. Stern first. We dragged him on deck, and there he was all spluttering, and then he said as solemn as a judge:

“That's the fruits of Blacklegging.”

This closed the proceedings.

Under the sunset the river's dingy current began to take on a strange glory, and changed into a tawny golden wilderness moving down to sea. Then presently it was full moon and pale splendours. A great quiet prevailed; but led by the moon, like the tide and the poets, Mead and myself paced the decks for hours recalling the local colour of war apart from fighting.

XIV

A most placid morning. The sky ahead was silvered with the smoke of unseen Buenos Aires, the water so gleaming that the flat coast lined with trees, to starboard, appeared to be midway suspended between one mother-of-pearl heaven and another. The new pilot arrived in this early tranquillity, and the ship resumed her way up the channel marked out by buoys of several shapes.

The sun increased in power all too fast. I stood on the bridge to hear the pilot and the mates giving their directions: we came to a couple of tugs told off to escort the *Bonadventure* in. Ropes leapt aboard us, tossed up in the adroitest way and caught as cleverly by our sailors; the bigger cables were attached to them, drawn aboard the tugs and made fast; and so we went on with tugboats fore and aft. The peculiar beauty of the morning mist over Buenos Aires soon began to thin away and disclose great buildings. And now we were almost at our journey's end; and in hurrying ease, drew past fishing boats and small sailing craft into the harbour mouth. On our port side, on a sort of palisade running out into the estuary, a host of sea-eagles perched yelping, their lean black bodies sharply designed in the white light. Their motto I took to be: Multitude and solitude. Beyond their grand stand appeared a green grove of downward foliage, the gaudy precinct of what, I was informed by the wireless operator, who began to act the guide-book, was a destructor for the frozen meat industry. He went on to specify the number of animals daily converted and to give other details which interested him, as an ex-wielder of the pole-axe; but my attention was distracted by the ships swinging into an approach crowded with dredgers and their ugly barges swilling mud, with motor-boats and lighters and as it looked to me every sort of medium for water traffic, bright and drab, proud and lowly in a confusion.

The waterway divides. To our left, a channel lies under giant steel bridges. Our course is not

there: we are piloted towards a dock for passenger and cargo ships, and entering it in a hot glare, and colouring that almost sears, of sky and water and paint, we make our berth, wallowing once over the water's breadth to the anger of lesser navigators, who go by in their boats bawling at the bridge in general. The handsome passenger boats with their great paddle-wheels and their red awnings lie opposite our plebeian resting-place: beside a grimy wharf, where small cranes and coal carts seem to multiply.

Of an expectant company there on Wilson's Wharf, the chief feature was by immediate common consent recognized in an old lady in a heliotrope dress, tightly girdled—and she was of mountainous shape. The demure inch of petticoat revealed below the hem of her well-hitched skirt was not overlooked. Beside this beldame, a long thin youth, a very reed straw by comparison, puffed at a cherry cigarette-holder, vacantly but fixedly eyed the ship and seemed to await her instructions. A laundry cart, with an insufficient animal in the shafts, stood behind them and showed what they too stood for, emblems peculiar.

83

Scarcely had the *Bonadventure* come to rest before a swarm of anxious sallow ruffians were aboard for the "ship's orders." The rooms of Hosea himself were not free from their invasion; not free that is, for a moment. Their intruding faces caused him to roar in the most frightful fashion; at which, hesitating as if before an injustice, they got out, but still hung about the gangways. When, presently, he went ashore to pay his official respects to the ship's agents, we saw a trail of these indefatigables close on his heels, and on his return he said that four of them had followed him all the way. I now perceived quite plainly why, when I a stranger appeared aboard the *Bonadventure* at Barry Dock and desired to find the captain, there was no eager answer to my query. Tailors, bootmakers (one with a motor-tyre or a piece of one over his shoulder), engineers and I don't know who else formed the polysyllabic cordon.

Meanwhile, the *Bonadventure* was hauled in close to the edge of the quay, and a gang of dock hands came on deck bearing ropes and pulley blocks. The ship's derricks having been lifted, these made the first preparations for discharging the cargo. The hatches were laid open, and the planks covering them pitched aside much as though they were so many walking-sticks. I was not the only one deluded by this despatch into thinking our discharge likely to be over in a few days.

Buenos Aires; a tremendous town, a "southern Paris," a New-World epitome. So much, so little I knew of it. It lay here, its heart not a half-hour's walk from our mooring. But the vastness of the rumoured hive, the heat, I daresay indolence too, prevented me from taking this first opportunity for walking into the strange streets. It was excessively hot, and that settled the matter. There was plenty to watch on the river and alongside: it would have been odd, if it had not proved so. So, swollen somewhat with the feeling that I was now a considerable seafarer, and not unpleased to be mistaken for one by the miscellaneous visitors who had by this examined the decks and accommodation—all doors locked—somewhat fruitlessly, but still loitered, I stayed idle.

84

Trenches will recur to their old inhabitants. The small coal in the yards here stood walled in with a breastwork of sandbags, built with tolerable skill upon the old familiar pattern of headers and stretchers and as I happened to be remarking upon this fact to the wireless man, interrupting his propaganda about a strike in which he personally would resist to the last, a little launch chanced past with the name *Ypres* on her bows.

She was but one of an endless to and fro of small craft. The tall and airy passenger boats, at intervals, came by in brilliance. When there was a pause in this coming and going, and nothing more happening on the water than the snapping of the small yellow catfish at bread floating below the ship, I still felt a quiet and languid gratitude for the novelty of being where I was.

That gratitude was to be tempered soon. The plague of the mosquitoes of the docks had been painted dark enough for me during the days of approach; and when I got to bed, the threatened invasion had begun. Determining not to consider the question at all, I read deep in my pocket copy of Young's *Night Thoughts on Life, Death and Immortality*, as in worse quarters many a time, and duly went to sleep like a philosopher.

85

XV

86

Could this be Saint Valentine's Day? Here in a dreary looking dock with a surplus of sun but a seeming lack of oxygen, and only a sort of amphibious race as company? Newspapers were at any rate valentine enough. They were read with real care, football results being perhaps the consolation most sought.

Hosea showed me the way into the town. We turned out over the docks, out at last from a kingdom of coal-dust, over a swing bridge; took a tram, and were soon at the shipping agents' offices. He spent some time in earnest conference here, and the visit ended with a visit to other agents' offices, and that again with an adjournment with a serene member of the staff to a bar. In this excellent place, my ignorance of a kind of drink, saffron in colour and with a piece of pineapple submerged, was soon dispelled. The collection of olives, biscuits, monkey-nuts and flakes of fried potato which the waiter brought with the drinks was to me unexpected. We went, with our good-natured guide, to lunch in a huge hotel. Gaining the top of the building by the lift, we sat at a table near the windows of a luxurious room filled with luxurious people, and had the pleasure of looking as we ate over the less celestial roofs of the town to the calm flood of the

River Plate beyond. Distance lent enchantment to this view also. The conditions were good for eating, our friend's romantic tales apart.

We departed from this commendable place, and, there being still engagements for Hosea with the shipping agents, we went there. Emerging, he had to go to the British Consulate. We hired a taxi. The traffic of Buenos Aires, or practice and precept differ, was free from irksome restrictions of speed; and we were whirled over the cobblestones and tramlines and round trams, horsemen, wagons, rival cars and everything else in a breath-taking rush. "I get in these things," said Hosea, "saying to myself, If I don't come out of this alive, then I shan't." We got out alive. The Consul's workshop (it was perhaps known by a more dignified name) was in a scrubby street; and the young man in charge had my sympathy. However, it was not my fault that he was being slowly roasted.

That call left Hosea at liberty to explore the town. We walked on and on, looking at the shops, and be it acknowledged at the beauties who went by, until we arrived at the small park over which the Museum rises to that southern sun, ornate and massy. Here we entered to spend the afternoon among a few visitors and as many official incumbents. We entered solemnly resolved to find a Palace of Art-Hosea putting away from him all his connection with ships and the worries of that next necessity, the "charter party."

Plaster casts and original statuary were plentiful in the Museum. The eye of the weary mariners rested none too long upon these. The multitude of paintings, however, were considered gently and methodically: Hosea would stand before the weakest trying to comprehend the artist's intention, and to claim something in his daub as a virtue. Sometimes he would put on his eyeglass to survey the subject. To me, there seemed no such quality here—I speak as a scribe, without authority—as there was quantity.

There have been many energetic and accomplished administerings of paint, but to what purpose? The eternal allegory, demanding one nude figure or more, and justifying by the general level Hosea's praise of a well-known picture called "September Morning," or sweetened description of evening, with its cows coming home under its warped moon, its ploughman in a vague acre, and the rest. Was this the southern genius?

One or two modern pictures here revealed a strength and idiosyncrasy beyond almost all the rest. A portrait of six youths, drawn with fierce intensity of colour and of line, expressing distinctions of character in subtle vital sharpness, long detained me. Another untypical picture, as recent as the last, was based upon a rustic festival or ritual with which I of course was unacquainted; but the epic lives of peasant men and women in their long combat with the stern giver of grain were legible in the strange georgic faces and the mysterious melancholy glory of their assembly.

-Seemed listening to the earth,
Their ancient mother, for some comfort yet.

Among the many harmless little pieces representing vases of flowers, woodland melody, and other conventions, I caught sight of a portrait of a young girl ("My lady at her casement" type) drawn with mild ability. The signature, very large and clear, was

CH. CHAPLIN.

On referring to the minute brass plate beneath so innocent a vanity, we learned that Charles Chaplin, 1825-1891, was a painter of the "French School." Pictures must run in the family.

The first afternoon, Hosea and myself could find no specimen of an English artist among the multitude: but returning another day to make certain (and once again we had the gallery more or less to ourselves) we found a small and typical study by Wilkie, and a portrait by Sir Thomas Lawrence. Before this last, a work of the loftiest morality—in its subject I mean—and of a colouring delicately fine, Hosea stood in enthusiasm. "I'm not sure," he said, and once again drew an impression before proceeding, "that that isn't the finest thing we've seen." The spectacle of King Arthur in his bronze near the exit, in his bronze but somehow devoid of his grandeur, ended our artistic adventures. The business of criticism, no doubt, is to keep cool: but this we had scarcely been able to do. I should have given up early, but for the determination of Hosea; and even he began to feel the scorching heat above the æsthetic calm.

The ship's football was brought out in the evening, and on a patch of waste ground alongside, flanked by thickets of rank weed, and ankle-deep in sand and coal-dust, we enjoyed ourselves most strenuously. There were one or two real drawbacks. A vigorous and unwary kick was apt to send the ball into the river, and to recover it meant clambering up and down the slanting wall of the wharf, which was coated with black grease, fishing with a pole, anxiously watching the currents, and quickly becoming as black and greasy as the masonry. And on the other hand, there was here a depôt of large drain-pipes, which might equally receive the erratic ball; then arose the questions: Whereabouts in the pipes had it bounced? Would the drain-pipe on which you were standing really roll from under you and bring down a dozen others? Meanwhile the watchman of the depôt would be there uttering untranslated dissatisfaction with the whole affair.

We had not been in the South Basin many minutes when the chaplain of The Missions to Seamen was among us with his witty stories and, I believe, his put-and-take teetotum. At any rate, the latter became as well recognized a part of his equipment as his quips. At his invitation, I went several times to the Mission, which was quite the rendezvous for the crews of British ships in the port. Its concert room, its billiard room and other comfortable places were generally very lively, the two chaplains apparently possessing an inexhaustible reserve of cheerfulness. English ladies

too came there to brighten the evenings, to sing and join in at cards and conversation; their generosity, I believe, furnished the other refreshments of these evenings.

Next door to the Mission, a dingy annexe to a sort of grocery, labelled the "British Bar," was not neglected. Talk and beer and smoke prevailed here until midnight and afterwards: indeed, I had scarcely sat down before a vast mate from some other ship had challenged me to name a better Test Match captain than Mr. Fender. Other patrons of the Oval soon took up the cry, but I resisted for the rest of the session.

The discharge of coal began, a monotonous process however considered; down in the hold one saw through the busy dust a small but growing mine-crater done in coal, at the foot of which were lying, stooping, chattering, the nearly naked figures of the labourers. Negroes they looked down there, but were white unofficially. They shovelled now from this side, now from that into a great iron bucket: above, at a sign, the man with his lever set the winch working and the derrick hoisted the bucket up and over, then down into the lighter that lay alongside. And so with intervals through the day. Then at night, the dock's aboriginal mosquitoes came forth; as the mate said, like a German band, all the most agonizing shades of musical audacity emanating from them. They drove not only me but old hands out on deck at night, where a chilly autumn wind was blowing, which drove us indoors again. But as the light grew, our tormentors lessened. The sun ariseth, and they get them away together, and lay them down in their dens.

To avoid these visitors as much as possible, I refrained from exploring the town over tiringly during the day, and went off with Mead in his shore suit after the evening's football on the dust-patch: and stayed as late as meanderings in the town could make it. We certainly departed from the usual haunts of sailors the first night; went on and on, until even the adventurous Mead had to say: "This is rather a depraved kind of street." And more, there was something in the air—some way off, we heard the interrupted fire of (what roused imagination converted into) a machine gun. The slatternly folk sitting, with white gleams of face or dress in the shadows, by their doors; the herds of unaccustomed faces in the large threadbare bars; the many groups of folk standing expectantly about the street, and our own alien solitude—all gave this sensation of disquiet. In a manner enjoying it, we proceeded, past an orator roaring out in fine fury to a small but intent crowd, and presently found ourselves in a large square with its many lamps, its glossy cars stealing swiftly by or waiting on the rank, its fountains playing like mists among deep green of trees.

Magnificent, and nearly empty, was the café into which we went; brilliant its interior; attached to the gilded columns, how eloquent of drinking as a fine art, its scoreboards announcing the many specialities! We stayed until midnight. Then, having roughly found out our way home, we set out for the docks, and, pausing to divine the sense of a poster giving details of a "Radical" demonstration for the next day, saw the police come hurrying up to a gathering of people round the next bar door. One of the police as he passed us at speed caught his toe against a stone and with his sword and fine feathers came down flat on the pavement. The gathering at the bar door were so absorbed in their topic that no one looked, much less laughed at his loud discomfiture.

Sometimes I found an occasion to leave the *Bonadventure* in her noisy dishabille, during the day. There was one walk with the wireless operator to a smaller tramp in a distant dock, aboard which somewhat shapelier ship than the *Bonadventure* he had an acquaintance. Walking over the irregular cobbles and among the railway lines of the wharves in the heat was a sufficient exercise. We left our ship carpeted with coal-dust; passed cattle pounds, grain elevators glaring white, and on the opposite side steamers in process of being loaded or discharged; went along a rail track where the grains which had lain longest had sprung up in unavailing green, and under chutes where sacks of corn were sliding down to the holds of ships. The mate of the *Primrose* whom we had come to see was thoroughly happy, and resembled almost to a hair my sergeant observer of years before. Putting on a record—his gramophone was actually in order—and offering cigars, he produced an extraordinary picture of his ship, in needlework. The ancient art of the sampler had passed to him. He seemed, I noticed, of his ship: its mahogany-lined saloon and more domestic style were congenial with his paterfamilias air and "Not to-day, thank you" mildness to various business callers. The wireless operator, also, seemed to be less interested in the regulations of his calling and more in photographs of ships and sailors. With these kind spirits in my mind, I was somewhat preoccupied as we walked back the way we came among the pigeons and the dock labourers stretched out under every railway truck and crane for their siesta.

Then there were one or two more rounds of the town with Hosea, chiefly in the busiest neighbourhood. I began to know the tall statue of Columbus as a landmark. All the morning, perhaps, Hosea would be going from one office to another, seeking to define the ship's future and to hasten her discharge, while I kicked my heels in entrances under the suspicious eyes of the janitors. Kindness was readier in the frowsy offices of the ship's chandlers; whence the delectably dressed youth the firm's son soon led the way to a table and vermouth in the Avenida de Mayo. We went again, with a new companion, to the Florida restaurant for our lunch: but the new companion and myself having been contemporary in the Ypres salient, our excessive reminiscences began to pall upon the long-suffering Hosea. One day Hosea entrusted to me, for transport to the ship, the sailors' wages in notes, and the letters. He was staying ashore, and did not fancy the prospect of carrying so much money about with him. Neither did I; but it is hard to say whether the responsibility for the pay overshadowed that for the letters. I was pleased to climb aboard the *Bonadventure* with both, after passing through the knock-off rush from the docks. But I seemed to be blamed for not bringing letters for every one; such is the lot of the volunteer.

There was a feeling (based on observation) aboard the *Bonadventure* that the discharge of the ship was not being carried out with all possible speed, owing to the prevailing mysterious influences of the offices in the town. Delays were many. This augury of a long sojourn in our present berth depressed many of us: I had already observed, or judged, that whatever the earlier mariners may have thought of seafaring, the modern sailor's idea in sailing is to get back home as early as possible. We soon heard that four days of public holiday, the Carnival, would be added to our term. It was evident that one must make the best of it, and be thankful on those days when some actual progress was made.

Mosquitoes, as I have said, were a great subject here. We had opportunities to study them. With *Macbeth* in hand as a convenient weapon., I nightly reduced the horde, but these

Stubborn spearsmen still made good
The dark impenetrable wood.

The heat grew sickly sometimes at night, and the cabins were black with flies and mosquitoes alike. To sleep there was to be slowly suffocated, let alone the folly of sleeping among man-eaters. An outdoor faith was forced upon me, and yet the deck was no real enclosure from the enemy: the faith would end at four or so in the morning, a time of day to which I was becoming as accustomed as of old, and when the riverside gave off a smell which I remembered noticing in the trench regions east of Béthune. Then, still hopeful, I would face my cabin and soon after swathing myself in the brief sheets of the bunk would be asleep. That interim unrecognized, here I was awake again in a world where chisels chip paint and steam-driven machines tip tons of coal. The great buckets were now being strung over to railway vans, which were shunted duly by a small engine. Winches clattered and wrenched, the clanking engine bustled almost ludicrously up and down the wharf, and all seemed in a great hurry, but the hurry was only on the surface. The yellow river, the coal-dust, the glaring sun, the dockside streets and warehouses and of course the eternal mosquito began to play upon me. My body was in pain from the innumerable bites and want of rest, and generally I was in as low spirits as I could be.

The ship was daily haunted by newsboys, fruit-sellers, and others. The news was difficult to discover from the queer columns of short cabled messages, and yet we never sent the newsboy away unless, perhaps, our only means was in English coppers. Sixpences he (not unwisely) was willing to take. The fruit-sellers gave better value for sixpence, even though their open panniers seemed always liable to the predatory paws of the water police. The shoemaker with his motor tyre put pieces of it upon my shoes, grunting out a satisfaction with the job which I hardly shared. A thin gentleman with furs, puzzle boxes, and other cheap-jack gear was not much called upon though called at.

Two Englishmen came also, sellers of furs; one, of my own Division in France. They were very warm in their praise of Buenos Aires, and besides bringing good furs with them they brought good spirits.

Football flourished. In red-hot sunlight, we met the team of another ship. Grim determination was in the game and its afterthoughts; and by a happy accident my foot scored the first goal of our victory. It was counted unto me for righteousness. The form of address "Passenger" acquired a respectful significance. There was immediately arranged a return match. But

Antres et vous fontaines!

The hart desireth the waterbrooks; and so did we. Again, on such a summer afternoon, we went at it, upon the field we had hired for the ordeal. This time we lost, but still the blood of the team was up; the *Bonadventure's* fair name was in jeopardy. Again there was immediately arranged a return match for the following evening. We lost, and it was hotter still. This nevertheless cooled the ardour of the footballers, and did not finally ruin the reputation of S.S. *Bonadventure*.

The evening form of this game continued upon the original ground, but my connection, like Mead's, soon declined. The main cause was that the ball, or Ball-its importance aboard requires the capital letter-flew off one evening as usual into the dock, but there by some conspiracy of wind and current sailed along at a merry rate until it was carried under the framework of piers upon which the coal wharf was built-a noisome place, a labyrinth of woodwork. If it stayed here, it was generally out of sight and beyond reach; if it was swirled out, it would go on out, into the middle stream, and doubtless into the Atlantic. We groped along the filthy piles of the tunnel, and the darkness was imminent; when the ball suddenly appeared, decidedly going out into the middle stream. At this crisis, Mead with a war-cry plumped into the evil-looking water and brought off a notable rescue.

Cricket would have seemed the more seasonable sport. Twice Mead and myself joined the Mission XI for grand matches in the suburbs, and said to ourselves, "In the midst of football we are in cricket"; but twice we met with disappointment, the rain choosing the wrong days altogether.

I had naturally observed silence over my journalistic life of the remote past, but one evening at the British Bar I was asked, was it not true that I was a relation of Kipling? and at the Mission "your book" was several times alluded to. It was, I think, taken for granted that being a penman I

should be *writing up* my adventures, as though I were on a voyage to Betelgueux or Sirius. I was asked to recite some of my poems, also, by a lady, but I was churl enough to ask her pardon on that score. She evidently felt this the basest ingratitude. "Why? Why not give us a recitation? I'm sure you can." I tried to explain that my attempts were frequently, almost invariably, of a meditative cast of mind, not suitable for the platform. At this she sniffed and I felt that my explanation was disgraceful in the highest degree.

Entertainment was not lacking there at the Mission. It was a hearty place. One evening Tich, the pride of the *Bonadventure*, who in his uniform cut a most splendid figure, went into the ring and laid about him magnificently. Or there might be a concert, local talent obliging. A passenger ship's varieties drew a large attendance both from the ships and the shore; there was much funny man, much jazz band, much conjuring, much sentimental singing-in fact plenty of everything which is expected at popular concerts, and every one departed with reflected pride. Mead and myself, however, quarrelled over the amount which I subscribed to the whip-round. It was that or nothing-I had but one coin; and its removal robbed us of our wonted refreshment. We walked somewhat moodily down the road to the docks, unsoothed by their thick coarse greenery, which the night filled with the incessant buzzing of crickets and a loud piping whistle perhaps from a sort of cricket also, while here and there a fire-fly went along with his glow-worm light.

We tried the cinematograph's recreations, once or twice. How strong is habit! We could not settle down to these performances of single films; nor to the box-like halls. A cowboy film of eight acts comes back to my recollection from those evenings. It was full of miracles. The operator believed, like the hero, in lightning speed. The hero on horseback was far too speedy for the villain who dragged off the heroine into his car and did his best to break records. These heroes will one day assume the proportions, in the dark world, of the pleiosaurus in natural history.

But we had our reward. In a more expensive theatre, we found *The Kid*. We had come out to see a much trumpeted film of a bullfight-Mead for one set of reasons, I for another; but it was of yesterday, and we had no difficulty in consoling ourselves. One Chaplin, we acknowledged, was better than many toreadors.

And then, we had a glimpse of the Carnival. In our wonted quarter of the town, that where the seafaring man mostly rested, it took the form of some processions of hobbledehoyes and urchins, beating as their kind do on drums and things like drums. The next evening we took the same dreary cobblestone walk as usual, but did not limit ourselves to that. We took a tram, indeed, to more fashionable haunts and at last came into the great Avenida and all its garish illuminations; its paper ribbons were as multi-coloured as the lights, and, flung from the upper storeys of the hotels, in some places they were thick enough to form a fantastic and absurd cascade. Here the Carnival was in mid sprout. We got what we came for-a diversion.

The pavements, broader here than in the generality of the streets we knew, were chock-a-block with folks, the cafés overflowing, the towering hotels gleaming with bright dresses on every balcony, and all this was the accompaniment of the gorgeous procession that moved slowly along the highway. Its vehicles of every kind, but their kind hidden from passing observation by their curtains and festoons of flowers, trooped along in the unreal glare. Here, ladies of most aristocratic air came by, with the blackest of masks above the whitest of countenances; there was a girl in the dress of a bull-fighter, driving her own light carriage; next, a set of laughing "gipsies" apparently advertising a brand of cigarettes; then, a collection of men with Cyrano disguises and attempting Cyrano humour to the gods-

All these and more came flocking.

But the privilege of gazing unrebuked upon the profusion of beauty, upon raven hair and great deep-burning eyes, upon the pale cheeks of wintry moons, the privilege of hearing the disjointed music of the fu-fu bands and the verbal crackers of harlequins of the moment, was not without its points of misery. The pavements represented a scrum on the largest scale, in the forefront of one battering ram whereof Mead and myself were securely wedged in for an hour or two. In this state of things, the usual individual turned round to ask Mead "who he was pushing?"-the sense of his remarks being obvious though couched in another tongue. Unable to move the arms, and scarcely free to flicker the eyelashes, we were borne compressedly and gradually on, until at last we were beyond the main pleasure-ground; by this time even Mead had had enough of pleasures which we had noticed others than Englishmen taking seriously. We took our ease in our inn, and reflected.

The newspapers reported that the Carnival was declining year by year. Perhaps the reporter, like ourselves, had horns and was caught in the scrimmage.

XVII

I borrowed a Shakespeare from the second chaplain at the Mission to escape from what seemed the dullness of our stay in South Basin, Buenos Aires. Mead had taken over my own copy of the Tragedies, and by this time had most of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* by heart, so that our conversation frequently ran by tags. Of Bicker we saw little. Highly favoured, he would depart on most afternoons to the English suburb, where he had friends; and it was impossible not to regard him, as he regarded himself, as a man of superior rank, who had personal friends in this town. Once or twice in the evenings, nevertheless, he came with us to our accustomed table in that convenient

but inglorious place the British Bar; and while there, he did his best to annoy one of the waiters with the oft-repeated slur, "Yah, Patagonio," or "You b— Patagonian Indian," or "Patagonio no bonio." The fellow bore it at first with grinning patience; but one evening suddenly danced with fury, and rushing out summoned the greasy little proprietor, who came in scowling and snarling, took stock of us—and went out again. The alleged Patagonian was after this understood to be meditating a fearful revenge.

At evening sometimes the autumn sun, going down, a golden ball, behind the great buildings, and dimmed with a calm transition in the distance of that time of day, removed my mind entirely from these and similar matters. An incomplete state of recollection, the more delightful to me from the strangeness of my temporary lodging, a presence felt but understood, a trouble in the pool whose surface bore the evidence of neither windwave's running V nor bubble subtly appearing, took hold of me. Unable to remain aware of this confused echo long, without endeavouring to resolve it into communicable notes, I would soon find myself counting up memories as plainly as the fellow on the other side of the water was tallying the brown hides discharged into river barges by the paddle-wheeler. It was this verging upon a vision, unknown but longed for, and this inevitable falling back to known fact, which perhaps depressed me and made the time pass all too slowly here.

The rattle of the cranes, so often interrupted, was all the more welcome; the news of progress began to assume a better look; the incidents of life in dock, from the angry officiousness of the wharf manager, a crude foreigner, to the arrival of passenger boats and the swarm of gay-coloured families to and from them, became worth attention again. Food, so interesting at sea, lately become a burden, was reinstated; boiled eggs for instance were welcomed, after a régime of steaks, by the whole saloon. The whole saloon—no; Bicker, the man about town, refused his with a criticism, likening them to plasticine. With his put-and-take top, the youthful-spirited chaplain came more often, and often expressed his regret that we were soon to be away.

Orders were not yet forthcoming. It was feared, and often urged upon me with reference to my late troubles, that the *Bonadventure* would be sent up the river to Rosario. I made a great mistake about Rosario and other possible destinations up the river, their names suggesting ancient Spanish romantic traditions to me: I mentioned my feelings to the assembled saloon. All the romance there, it seemed, was hidden behind a cloud of patriarchal mosquitoes.

The discharge of coal was at last over and done. The day following, Hosea sent for me and told me that the ship would shift at two, and perhaps—for all he knew—straight out to sea. I told him I should not be clinging to the stones of Buenos Aires at that hour.

But it was not our fate to depart altogether that day. Instead of going out into the open water, when at three the pilot and the tugs brought the *Bonadventure* out from her Stygian berth at Wilson's Wharf and down to the outer port, we now turned into an arm of the docks called Riachuelo. There, between a steel sailing-ship which gave no sign of life and a great black mechanical ferry or transporter, and further—there was no doubt about this—beside a guano works, we were tied up for a time as yet undefined.

The change was, partly on account of the neighbouring industry, "uncertain if for bale or balm." I felt that we might even miss the lively sight of the passenger boats coming and going, and all their gilded press of friends and acquaintances about the landing-places; their tiers of bright lamps at night rounding the bend between us and the Roads. Perhaps the youths would no longer come by with their ship's stores of macaroni, their jars of wine and panniers of onions and other vegetables; nor the lighters, with their crews glaring in unwashed and unchallenged independence in the whole world's face, and their yellow mongrels scampering up and down the decks. The British Bar with the Patagonian Indian and the giant but amicable cockroaches would be too far away. However, we had the prospect of other monotonous distractions if not those. For there were evidence of benefit; green swampy groves, a sort of common with ragged horses at feed, and farther off the irregular line of a landscape not unlike summer's horizon, gave the eye a pleasant change. Football would now be possible on grass and not a dust-heap. Sailor-town was on the opposite bank—a miscellany of ship's chandlers' offices, gin palaces, untidy trams, and nondescript premises.

The gangway was lowered, the donkeyman was seen at once going ashore with his mandoline, and we ourselves of the football persuasion followed with the Football. We returned in time to see the steward's patience nominally rewarded with a small yellow catfish, who showed the greatest wrath at the trick which had been played on him, stiffening his poisonous fin and actually barking.

The next morning, despite the odour of the guano, was a better one than those in South Basin. For all its mud, the river looked cheerful; its many small craft, as yellow as vermilion or as green as paint could make them, lying quiet or passing by, caught the early sun. Even the dredgers' barges, with their hue of Thiepval in November, showed the agreeable activities of a new day, and breakfast.

But we were not to be long in Riachuelo. About midday it became known that the *Bonadventure* was to leave before evening for Bahia Blanca, a three days' journey to the south. The further orders, what cargo was to be received, and where it was to be delivered, were as yet withheld. Phillips, the chief engineer, was disappointed at this departure—his son would have been able to meet him in town within a day or two. To leave a message for him in charge of the Mission, he proposed that I should go with him in the afternoon, and that I was happy to do.

Meanwhile, awaiting dinner, we strolled along the waterside. It was sultry and glaring. We

passed shipping of all sorts and conditions, old junk, discarded masts, boilers eaten through with rust, anchors imbedded in the ground, even a torpedo-boat gone to ruin, nameless; saw an incredibly old man with his beard done in a knot, whittling away at a piece of wood in the sun, tribes of mongrel dogs, and the casual population of the tin town which rambled here drowsy and malodorous, down to the water's edge. The purple trumpet-like flowers that climbed the ragged woodwork seemed not more gay, nevertheless, than the young men and women who crowded to and from the transporter between this shipping parish and Buenos Aires.

From Buenos Aires itself, what but the hastiest impression could I take away with me? Melancholy it was to me to find so little apparent survival of the town as it must have been in its first centuries. My last walk did not altogether revise my picture of bar-tobacconist-bar-tobacconist; of powdered Venuses, over-dressed Adonises; of shops without display, receding obscurely; of cinematograph theatres crudely decorated with notices of rank buckjumping "dramas"; of innumerable tramways, here, there and everywhere; of green sunny courtyards at the end of passages between dismal shuttered façades; of trees with drooping foliage before flat roofs with flimsy chimneys—mere drain-pipes—at the top of high white dead walls; of bonneted policemen with their hands on their swords; of boys teasing horses; of whizzing taxis, and dray-horses fighting for a start on the inimical cobbles; of pavements suitable for tight-rope walkers; of the power of money; of living for the present, or the day after to-morrow; of a straw-hat existence. But I must admit that my scantiest notions of a town refer in temper to the quality of its second-hand bookshops.

So then, the ship being under orders to leave at four, soon after five the port authorities held a sort of roll-call amidships, and the pilots and the tugs arrived. The port authorities consisted of a young officer who looked likely to trip himself up with his beautiful sword, a lanky humorist, with sergeant's chevrons, at his heels, and one or two other attendants. Soon after these vigilants had gone down the ladder again, the *Bonadventure* began to move, and the bags of guano were a tyranny that is overpast. That channel into which I had been pleased to see the *Bonadventure* come I now watched her leave without remorse. The dredgers fall behind our course, the fishing-boats, and the perches of the sea-eagles. We met a breeze, surprisingly strong, which made even these slothful waters choppy. The sun went out in a colder sky, beyond the outlines of the great chimneys and transporters; and presently a line of dwindling lights, surmounted by one or two more conspicuous, stood for Buenos Aires. Meantime the wind blew hard and loud. When the first pilot went to make his way home, the tug coming up for him was flung against the sides of the ship two or three times, and he was obliged to jump from his swaying rope ladder, "judging the time." We ran on, with many red and yellow lights flashing around our track. The taste of coal-dust, let alone the feel of it as a garment, made me wish the wind an early good night.

XVIII

There were differences of opinion about the precise distance between Buenos Aires and Bahia Blanca, in which it seemed the authority of the steward was not accepted. Travelling light, however, the *Bonadventure* seemed little concerned about fifty miles either way. A current assisted in this turn of speed.

It was enjoyable to be out of sight of land once more, in a morning coolness, with seagulls piping in our wake; although they were yellowish waters that were rolling by. The second pilot went down to the motor boat due to take him home; the blue peter was hauled down when he had gone; and we hurried south. A dove came by, alighted; presumably our course lay at no great distance from the coast: a sail, a smoke-trail here and there dappled the circling scene. The sailors and apprentices set to, cleaning the holds in preparation for a cargo of grain—a black job. Bucketful after bucketful was flung over the side, the wind playfully carrying off the murky clouds. I washed clothes at a safe distance.

It was at this time or near it that an addition to my daily course was made. So long as the *Bonadventure* was at sea, the ship's officers received cocoa and sandwiches by way of supper. To this edible privilege I could not imagine that I had the slightest claim, nor in fact was I anxious to be elected; but when the steward out of his magnanimity conferred it upon me I naturally received it with thanks.

The cocoa indeed was not to be lightly considered when ten o'clock found me, as it mostly did, with Mead on his night watch. The first night after we had left the mouth of the Plate, his mind was full of one matter. Before we had been released from Wilson's Wharf, acting on the advice of the vendor, he had bought a fifth share in a lottery ticket. With this qualification, he began to paint his future in all the colours of £1,166—his possible, or as he wished to be assured, his probable, harvest. A small schooner, in the enchanted atmosphere of his pipe, seemed already to own him master; she would trade for long years of prosperity in South Sea islands, where uncultivated fruits and beauties abound. While we agreed on the plan, the moon went down; multitudes of stars shone out, and meteors at moments ran down the sky. A broad glow to starboard revealed the nearness of the coast. Everything was most still, except perhaps Mead's spirit. There might be some hitch. But no, he felt his luck was in; he was sure, something told him that he carried the winning number.

The day's entries in my diary now began thus, or nearly: "Need I say it again—One mosquito, etc.,

but I killed him; then, one mosquito, etc.” The persistence of these self-satisfied hovering devils was puzzling, for the mornings dawned almost bitterly fresh, and the breeze was always awake. Its direction had now laid, during the night, a carpet of glittering coal-dust along the passage outside the door; and the day being Sunday, which should by all precedent be marked by an increased radiance in the outward as well as in the inward man, it was impossible to keep clean. For the inward man, I once again took refuge in Young’s *Night Thoughts*, which, despite the disapproval of Mr. Masefield’s Dauber, I will maintain to give room and verge enough to annotate, parody, wilfully miscomprehend, skip, doze, and indulge what trains of thought whether ethical, fanciful, or reminiscent.

111

A gentler air, a bluer sea, a sandy coast in view. There was something lyrical about the “dirty ship” as with the buoyancy of her cargoless holds she fled to the south. Mead, his future resplendent with £1,166 and its South Sea bubble, seemed to feel this rhythmical impulse. Every now and then, in his consultations, he would break forth into singing, but seldom more than a fragment at a time; now it was “Farewell and adieu to you, bright Spanish Ladies”—a grand old tune—now “Six men dancing on the dead man’s chest.” But most, he gave in honour of his native Australia a ballad of a monitory sort with a wild yet sweet refrain. It began

I was born in the city of Sydney,
And I was an apprentice bound,
And many’s the good old time I’ve had
In that dear old Southern town.

The apprentice fell in with a dark lady—indeed “she came tripping right into his way.” It was an unfortunate encounter. He became her “darling flash boy.” He could readily put the case against her when, as receiver of stolen goods, he had served some years in jail; and then, like the author of *George Barnwell*, he addressed apprentices on the subject:

So all young men take a warning and
Beware of that black velvet tie.

But yet, and here was the charm of the ballad, and the token of his entanglement by Neæra’s hair, ever and anon came the burden

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For her eyes they shone like the diamonds,
I thought her a Queen of the land,
And the hair that hung over her shoulders was
Tied up with a black velvet band.

When Mead later on gave me a copy of this song, which I shall not forget, duly set out in “cantos,” he was good enough to ornament it with a little picture of the black bow as tailpiece.

The heat became very strong, and as the day declined, a great cloud-bank rose up out to sea, and the air settled to that stillness in which the fall of the ripples from the side sounds most insistent. Dark came on, and from two arches or caverns of smouldering twilight under the extremities of that mighty cloud the lightnings burst; lightnings in whose general wide waft of brightness intense white wreaths suddenly lived and withered, branches of fire stretched forth and were gone; while in the opposite heaven “like a dying lady,” went the horned moon.

Meanwhile the *Bonadventure* not slacking her unusual speed came to a lightship; then (for this was a pilot station) the engines thrashed up the water as she manoeuvred for the pilot’s most comfortable approach. The boatmen came rowing him lustily out to us; our rope ladder was lowered—at these moments I was sensible of a sort of proud anxiety on the part of all aboard, that such a detail should be carried out with all despatch—and up he came. And after him, a rope was asked for, and sent down; up came a great stringful of fish, gleaming like the sea under the moon; and once more the rope went down, and a collection of jars which were at once thought to contain wine was hauled on board. Then, from the boat “Finish!” but she did not depart, making fast to the *Bonadventure*. She circling about the lightship, at length brought her companion within a stone’s throw. Then the boat was cut adrift, and we went on our way towards a line of buoys whose flashes lit up the expanse ahead.

113

We came now close by the misty lights of a town named Puerto Militar and further on those of Ingeniero White, the little port of Bahia Blanca to which the *Bonadventure* was actually bound, began to beckon. About eleven the anchors were let go, and the pilot retired to sleep; but I still stayed with Mead, regarding dully the dull lights of our surroundings, and consuming cocoa, and blessing the exhalation of the continent which had first met me at sea some weeks ago. Already fishing, the steward leaned over the rail close by; he had often painted the angling at Bahia Blanca in enthusiastic colours. However, he seemed to catch nothing.

By this the moon, that had grown almost a giantess as she stooped down the horizon, and had reddened like a glowing coal to the last almost, was dwindling. The orb became a beacon dying on a hill; then dropped below the sky. The lightnings over the quiet sea had almost ceased.

XIX

114

I slept heavily, and when I got up, the *Bonadventure* had moved into the channel towards

Ingeniero White, and was lying at anchor outside that place. The scenery about us was of pleasing ugliness, worthy of George Crabbe's poetical painting. To seaward there lay long stretches of mud, or banks of a sort of grass-long layers of brown and green ending at the frontier of a blue-grey rainy sky; and the land was low, featureless (save for a mountain height in the hazy interior) and dark. Close to our mooring was the assemblage of motley huts and tenements, galvanized iron roofs, tall chimneys, and more notably the grain elevators, under which several other steamers were lying. Above the salt marshes a rainbow touched the clouds, and too soon the sun was pouring upon everything a dazzling sultry heat.

At breakfast the fish which the pilot had brought aboard as a kindly offering during the night were eaten, curried. This mode of serving them displeased the Saloon. The steward, affecting to be in a philosophic doze in his lair, could not fail to have heard such scathing remarks as these:

"The nicest fish I've had down here."

"Yes, spoiled."

"Wasted."

"Why the devil must they go and camouflage it?"

"If it had been high we'd have had it neat."

"Must have curry and rice on Monday morning. Mustn't go outside the routine."

"Well, you see, if they started on the wrong note on Monday they wouldn't be able to pick up the tune for the rest of the week."

"O, it's easy. Steak, steak, steak."

We hurried our breakfast amid these criticisms, as the port authority was expected. Towards nine o'clock, all hands being assembled amidships, his launch came to the foot of the gangway. Eight sailors in white uniform rowed this launch. He divested himself of his sword, came up, and went inside Hosea's quarters to "talk things over"; whereupon, the parade broke up. The next event was, we changed our mooring. As we passed to the new tether, which was among several tramps as ladylike as ourselves, I had my first experience of the groaning, screeching and gasping noise which the machinery of a dredger can make, as its buckets come round on the endless chain and empty themselves into the barge alongside. I wonder these contrivances were not introduced during the Passchendaele operations. They would have served two purposes, that of keeping a good depth of water for the infantry to swim through; and that of demoralizing the enemy.

We remained only a few minutes in this new position. Then we moved into a dock, lined with warehouses as they appeared, under whose grey tin roofs were stacked bags of grain in large profusion. With much shouting and manipulating of ropes, we got in, behind the steamer *Caxambu*; alongside a framework of piles. On these, even the less accessible slanting timbers, many a ship's name scrawled in black or red paint, and often followed by the date of the call, addressed the new-comer's eye. In these inscriptions the S's, B's, D's, and 9's, had a tendency to be reversed. I thought that the exotic poets and others who deny their readers capital letters, apostrophes and so forth might here find another inspiration. The medley of names included such as the *Trebarthan*, the *King Arthur*, the *Alf*, the *Olive*, the *Bilbao*. And the *Keats*; why *Keats*? Apart from this mystery, I could not help contrasting many of the names with those of the figure-head days, and like the posy of a ring, some of them came into my mind, from my reading, the *John and Judith*, *Charming Nancy*, *Love and Unity*, *Lancashire Witch*.

Here, the heat seemed to redouble, and the flies to bite harder accordingly. For some time nothing much happened. The Captain, after being visited by the doctor, ship's chandler and others, but not such a swarm as on our previous berthing, went ashore, leaving Bicker, who prided himself upon his mathematical faculty, to wrestle with the problems of the Customs manifest. I myself had handed over trench stores; this looked a worse job, and there were the familiar dilemmas of one thing with different names.

The ship was not here, it soon showed, to take her time. Loading began after dinner. A leather band or rather gutter working on rollers was lifted out from the wharf over each of several holds, and a spout fixed at its extremity; the gang in charge spread sacking under the feeding band and directed the spout as they wished. Then the machinery behind began to drone, and the grain, like a gliding brook, to travel along the leather band; whence, at the overturn, it leapt into the spout which directed its descent into the hold, while a sort of idle snowstorm of chaff and draff glistened thick in the sunlight. Many heads looked over the rails to see this process at first, but there was a sameness about it and the heads quickly found other occupation. Presently I went to look at the activities behind the scenes, where a gang was taking bags of grain from a railway truck and emptying them through a grating into another travelling conduit, which duly under the flooring of the building bore the wheat to the automatic machines. There, it seemed to my inept wish to learn, it was amassed until a certain weight was registered, and that point reached the heap was flung forward into the feeder which ran up to the spout over our hold. Before the yellow current arrived there, it had been sampled at intervals by a boy who squatted beside, dipping a horn-shaped can on the end of a stick into it, and filling thereby small labelled sacks convenient to him.

The Brazilian steamer ahead of us was receiving the grain in bags, which looked oddly like pigs asleep as they were hurried along the endless band. On this steamer, the *Caxambu*, real live pigs and sheep were routing about over the forecastle. I was told that she was an ex-German. Anyway, though in déshabille, she was a handsome ship. Her bell was the most resonant; the

Bonadventure's was known still more surely for a thin tinkler when that gong rang.

For the settlement beyond, it was not conspicuous. The spires of Bahia Blanca showed up white some few miles inland; the nearer scene was one of tin roofs, of railway coaches and wagons, small muddy decks and mud flats. Naturally the steward was fishing. But nothing was biting. He stood pensively gazing into heaven, even holding the line listlessly, when the third mate having collected a good attendance crept up behind him as quiet as a cat and jerked the line with the hungry violence of a monster, contriving also to make his retreat out of sight before the aged angler had quite decided that he was *not* going to catch a huge bass. This heartless deception was very popular. Something was necessary to while away the evening despite its bright array of dewy-lighted clouds, which suited the coolness of the air. The grumble of the machinery gave place to "Cock Robin" and other classic opportunities for bawling; and cards were brought out.

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The next day, cold enough for every one, and proving that the English climate is not alone in its uncertain habits, went on quietly. The party who brought the sacks of grain to the door of the railway truck, the man who there at singular speed cut away the string from the mouths of the sacks, the lads who swept all loose grain from the truck and its neighbourhood—all were working to load us as if their lives depended on it. Actually, no doubt, this was the case. The *Bonadventure* ceased to tower aloft out of the water.

Bicker, Mead and the passenger-purser passed the evening in the village. We went in and out of shops in a casual manner. There was one whose contents were sufficiently varied for the sailors' fancy. On one wall hung a large collection of crudely cured pelts, the fur of wild cats, foxes, and other animals. From the ceiling hung, unpitied, many canaries imprisoned in yellow cages; under the counters were displayed baskets made of turtle shells, lined with pink sateen. Cigarettes of all nationalities, boot polishes of uncertain price and utility, and in the window a regiment of notes and coins advertising the money-changer's department, caught my eye. There were even old books. As we were leaving two sailors entered bearing a cage wrapped in paper. They accosted the fat and greasy shopkeeper abruptly.

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"Canary eh? died 'smornin' eh?"

(This "eh?" was the mainstay of our Anglo-Argentine intercourse.)

"Ah, Ah, no give monjay!"

"Yes, mucho plenty monjay."

The question in short was, what about giving us our money back?—but we could not stop long enough to see the result. Further along, children's sandals were ranged in a window. Mead thought that he would shine in a pair like them; but the shopkeeper thought his inquiry for sandals size 9 a good joke.

At this stage, when Mead emerged, I was very sorry to have to call his attention to a board in the window, which in his concentration on the sandals he had overlooked. It was a board giving the numbers (announced that day) of the winning lottery tickets. None of these numbers coincided with that owned by Mead.

The disappointment quite naturally led us to the refreshment room at the station and kept us there until the hour of closing. The angry Mead in some measure became reconciled to the injustice which he had suffered, and we all enjoyed the friendliness of the waiters. These, not being over busy, played the fool, except one who behind the bar sat with pen and ink and a folio blank-book laboriously copying an English exercise on the ancient pattern: Have you seen my glove?—Yes, I have seen your glove, &c. One endeavoured to persuade us that he was a Russian, and feigned a horrid interest in a news paragraph about Lenin. The other indulged in an anti-French speech, with gestures. "La Liberté!" he jeered, at the same time grasping vigorously in all directions.

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Our nights were disturbed by mosquitoes, not so ferocious as formerly, and cats. Aboard, it still seemed cold; but ashore there was little breeze, and my walks round the town were warm work. The outskirts of this ramshackle place were dreary, but I liked them better than city streets. They formed a loose encampment of tin, or plaster, or matchboard, in which one would perhaps notice most the open drains, the chickens, goats (some of them of most sheepish appearance), cows, pigs, cats, dogs of the silly sort, sunflowers, and gentlemen in blue cotton trousers, about the thresholds. Grumble as you may at militarism, most army camps would have been better favoured in some respects: since here, despite the prospects of mud suggested by the dust of the present season, no hut seemed to have a raised approach, whether stone causeway or duck-walk. I never walked into Bahia Blanca, though not far short of its tall spires, but found these habitations a sufficient view; the way back to the *Bonadventure* might be over a moorish level, thickly grown over with yellow flowering weed, and all sorts of drouthy "flora of the marsh." Marsh, however, it was not, the soil being thoroughly baked and cracked. Here were a few birds, that seemed to me the thrushes of the place; a few butterflies; beetles, lying dead here and there; lizards in greater number. But the fields hereabouts had all a solitary look. Often the track was inches deep in dust.

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On one of my walks, the wireless operator being with me, we were seen going up from the wharf by the ship's carpenter, who, it afterwards came out, had tried to attract our attention by shouting. The reason for his attempt is interesting. He was, in fact, at that time in "calaboosh," having been haled thither during the night, according to a prophecy of Mead's. Looking too long on the wine (three glasses, by his reckoning) and the beer (one innocent glass), he had succeeded in arriving abreast of the Brazilian next to us. At this point, he had the misfortune to lose the way to the *Bonadventure*; and presently for his safety the police took him to the cells. Thence, the

next afternoon, Chips was released, and that without even a fine. The winter wind is not so unkind as this cadaverous man's ingratitude to the gendarmes for their kindly act. Asked about it, he complained in loud and bitter terms that such things should be, and

with swinish phrase
Soiled their addition.

This episode appeared to please the mate, Meacock, in no small degree. He recounted other imprisonments; told of black sheep among crews newly arrived from Sing Sing and similar haunts, for whose arrest a warrant was always handed to the police as soon as the ship arrived in port; described the difficulty of getting these incorrigibles from the ship to the wharf, the police having no sanction to touch them on the ship; and how the Brazilian police got the upper hand of bruisers towering above them by lambasting them with the flat of their swords.

122

Lethargy and grain dust seemed to hang in our air together. The exploration of Ingeniero White as an amusement became less liked as time went on, and as sometimes the dull sky broke in a drizzle of rain. One hatch was filled with wheat; the gang trimmed it quickly; and the loading of the other hatches continued apace, so that our going to sea again looked close at hand. The sailors and apprentices with pots of paint were perched at various points above and beside the ship; and it was no great surprise to me when one of the boys, much given to recreation, suddenly appeared in a waterlogged state.

The town was not without its Mission to Sailors. It depended upon the energies of a very small English community, of course, but they kept up a comfortable room, where dancing and singing were entered upon in the evenings; the standards of pastime required by Bicker and Mead, however, were not reached. It pleased them to drift about; to call at the refreshment room of the station and throw dice for drinks, to prowls about the town with an independent air. The funds at the disposal of this party were dwindling. It was therefore proposed to take to the vile syrup known as *caña* instead of whisky, and an ingenious logic was discovered in favour of the plan, apart from the great cheapness of the *caña*. As thus: Even at B.A. (did you but know it) you often had turpentine sold you for whisky; in fact, here, if you asked for whisky, ten to one that what you received was *caña* at four times its proper price. Better ask for *caña* straight away. This reasoning in favour of an adopted plan could not be answered except by sudden wealth. These driftings were mainly spent in wondering what to do next. (The only real prospect was, to get back to the ship.) If any decision was made, it was a picturesque one. For instance, the town being abed, we went into a general stores where there was a light showing the proprietor about to close. Somewhat to his surprise, and after the first few moments to his discontent, supper was taken, dog biscuits and cream cheese, washed down with yellow *caña*—a more inflammatory distillation even than the white. And so home.

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XX

124

We did not get away so quickly as had been thought, and as every one seemed to wish. Heavy skies came on, giving the slack waters a leaden look. The air, though it was not hot, was close; and the fine dust from the grain which carpeted all the decks began to sit heavy on the lungs. Among the business outstanding remained that of stowing 7,500 bags in the bunker hatch—slower work, clearly, than the loading in bulk which had until now been the method with the *Bonadventure*. Bicker and Mead, as they supervised the trimming of hatches that had been filled, wore a melancholy look, nor was the entry at breakfast of two young men from the Customs, though pleasant acquaintances, considered a relief. If clouds disappeared, and left the day like a furnace, there was every facility for doing nothing at all. Even at evening the cabins were filled with tepid air and flies: and most of us might be found leaning over the rails in silence, watching sunset's orange red colour to the prime and die away again in the sky and the water below it, scarcely marked with a ripple; and then the moon riding high above our bridge, itself not unexalted, not ungraceful by its proximity to the warehouse. In such a night comes Mead, and a consultation ends in my approaching Mouldytop the steward with respectful petition for ship's biscuits. These soon refreshed in my mind Solomon's choosing a dish of herbs and love over a stalled ox and hatred.

125

The time now arrived when I was honourably appointed to a job of work. I felt proud indeed when Meacock explained it to me. It was, to keep count of the number of bags of grain shipped for the bunker hatch and another one aft. The tallyman employed by the merchants kept his record, shouting out his "Una, dos, tres" until each tally of bags was complete; the ship's representative looked on at the descending bags and made his oblique strokes in his book accordingly. This work in effect was not so simple as it sounds; sometimes after a pause the bags would be let loose suddenly and in quick succession, nor moreover was it possible to question the other tallyman at the moments of disagreement, since he spoke no English and I no Spanish.

This delivery of some thousands of bags was to be completed in the course of a day, but was not. The arrangement of shoots for the bags to travel down was as neat as a scenic railway: they slid down one, were deflected by a fixed bag at the foot of it to another shoot at right angles to it, and so on down to the caverns and the packers. The day's work ended, but some thousands of bags remained to be put aboard, and I felt that I was growing used to times and seasons nautical, "the ways of a ship," in the cook's phrase. When a sergeant-major says, Parade at 8.30, he is

understood to have ordered a parade for 8.15; but I suspect that at sea, should the tramp be expected away this week, next week is the actual time of departure.

Newspapers reached the ship from Buenos Aires, one day old, and by that time having an antiquarian value of twenty centavos, or fourpence. In consequence we generally went without; yet somehow important news, such as the result of Cardiff City versus Tottenham Hotspur, was quickly passed round. Unimportant, such as the latest development in the Anglo-Irish situation, was considered "politics," and its seeker ignored.

126

The wharves were haunted, it goes without saying, by rats; more publicly, by dogs. One grey giant was regarded, especially by the mess-room boy, with romantic fondness. His history, if his, was current. He was "a Yankee," but had lost his passage in the North American ship to which he belonged; and now, it was maintained, he made a complete round of all the docks, boarded every ship that came in, and looked into the alleyways to try and recognize his own. The dog did, I agree, wear a saddened expression. But, discreetly, I did not feel sure about his sentimental journey. It was "Mess-room" too who encouraged a cat to prepare for the homeward voyage, and I cannot say that he at first appeared likely to persuade the animal, which, shut in for the night, like Chips on a recent occasion, gave vent to piercing miaows. Parrots and monkeys, without which surely no sailor should ever return to his native village, were alike scarce.

The subject of my future standing in the village tavern had already been discussed when others failed. It now arose again. The saloon's ideas of rural England were almost as broad as mine of sea life. They could see or affected to see nothing else in agriculture but one large joke; and its communities as so many tribes of gaping lads in smocks, with churchwardens, clustering about the oldest inhabitant. I had told them not once nor twice that no one in my village had any sense of distance, or wish to travel, or to hear of travels. But still it was believed that on my return I should be received at the inevitable "Green Cow" or "Pig and Whistle" with roars of applause, all mouths in the shape of O's, all attentions grappled to my lightest word. More probably, I hinted, if I were to return and mention as a news item a voyage in a tramp to South America, the patronage would preserve a chilling silence, as who should say, "We are too old for these youthful frivolities. We are not amused"; and would then resume the old buzz of 'sheening and jack hares and the riches of the rich' - But I was not heard.

127

Lightning, a passion with me, grew bright and furious towards the end of our stay, about the fall of darkness; in its blue flare, it was startling to see how like a wreck a Swedish motor-ship, which had put in because of a fire aboard, lay lonely at some distance from us. Presently the rain came down and cooled the air; the night grew quiet then, the far thunder dying out, or if there was noise, it was the cricket's cry, and the gruff brief conversation of the ship's watchman with his comrade on the wharf as he passed by.

Sunday came again, day of washing for Meacock and others; day of eggs and bacon for the Saloon's breakfast, and with it special duff and crimson sauce for dinner, tinned pineapple and cake for tea. Fortified thus, Bicker and Mead and myself go a-fishing on the opposite quay, where some Argentines have been catching fine fish. Now it is, to the best of my memory, the fact that I have never yet caught one fish on Sunday; and so I should have been wiser than to have joined in this excursion. Luck stopped dead as soon as we began, and to make things worse, through a sleepy reply of Bicker's I imagined the line to be made fast to the jetty, and threw out the sinker with special success "far out at sea." That line was not made fast. It had belonged to the steward. He, when he heard the disaster, stood in a kind of *rigor*, gazing at high heaven as one insensible to misfortune.

128

And now came our last day at Ingeniero White. Not too soon, it seemed; the scenery of the port having but little of freshness, and the drama of loading again lacking in situations. Mosquitoes here served me well by arousing me in the early morning, as I was instructed to take a hand at six with tallying the bags of grain. I was there to the moment, but my duty proved to be that of standing by, enjoying life. At twelve, all hands were mustered amidships and numbered by the port authority, and one was missing. At length it was found out who, namely, one Towsle the sleepest of the apprentices, and where-in his bath, dozing unaware of the parade outside the door. The pilot came aboard at three, and the tug *Lydia* presented herself to guide the *Bonadventure* out: there was much business with ropes fore and aft, and the ship swinging round was free of the wharf about the top of the tide. The warehouses with their stacks of bags, slippered blue-trousered handymen, surpliced overseers with their sampling hollow bayonets, railway trucks and capstans, ubiquitous dogs and all, began to recede. But we had not come more than a couple of miles from the elevators, nor out of sight of the refugee-like town behind them, when we anchored to await Hosea. At a considerable space from the town, all alone, we saw as we waited the big drab square building euphemistically known aboard as the "variety show." It was a sad sight, and to me in its significance of some people's luck in this world, a challenge to my random cheerful philosophy, which I have not yet been able entirely to dismiss.

129

Presently from the land a storm began to foreshadow itself, and suddenly there was a burst of wild piping wind, like a spiteful cry, that flung sharp rain over us and in scarcely a minute had died down again. Its short career sent every one interested scampering to take in the canvas awnings, and left a breeze which when the captain arrived in a launch, carrying some newspapers, blew them round him like a garment. He was wearing a straw hat. He jammed it on with a will and hurried up the rope ladder. With his return, we were at sea again, though not yet in the open.

The evening was one of strange majesty. One saw clouds amassing in every similitude of mountainous immensity and ascent, and wild lights everywhere burning among them; but most of

all, a tawny lion's colour mantled in a great tract of the sky and below shone dim yet in a manner dazzling from the darkening water. The heat of the day had been oven-like. Lightnings began after a red weeping sunset, sheet lightnings often veined with the fiercest forks of white flame, wreaths of golden fire, volleys, cataracts, serpents; and these danced about the horizon until daybreak, sometimes in silence, sometimes with deep but weary-sounding thunderclaps. The light that these wanderers cast was often of an intensity scarcely credible. A deluge of rain was always imminent, but only towards dawn arrived.

130

The *Bonadventure* had been, under these innumerable lights, making quiet way down an avenue of buoys twinkling in their degree, and came into view of the lightship beyond them. The pilot sounded the siren (for he was to leave us here), and in reply to the second call of the siren the lamp of a boat pulling out towards us appeared. It was good-bye to the pilot and his bag, which on the end of a rope now caused a moment's interest; the engines, stopped to let him depart, were started again, and the captain fixed the ship's course. Mead's watch, as usually it was, shared by the purser, engaged us in more recollections of the great war; and in the glitter first of a swarm of dragon-flies, then presently the surly gleam of the lightning, we talked on until midnight. I admired him for having already forgotten all about his disappointment in the lottery, and begun with new hopes according to his motto; *Quo fata vocant*.

XXI

131

The breakfast steaks were leathery past anticipations. The flies in the cabin were thousands strong. But the *Bonadventure* was homeward bound, and a general spirit of liveliness prevailed. Conversation was running much upon the value of the mark, for it was to Hamburg that we were believed to be going. Base hopes were expressed that the rate of exchange might be a thousand to the pound. No one imagined that this would some day be surpassed by eleven thousand. The Argentine had been expensive; the cheapness of Germany was thrown up all the clearer. As, however, I had no anxiety to buy a safety razor, mouth-organs, clocks, and pocket manicure sets, to which and other articles like them I imagined the German cheapness would be limited, I was not elated on that score.

At any rate, here we were steaming north at a steady speed, with a light breeze ahead, and the coast of the Argentine slipping past, dimly seen. And everything was bent for England. For weeks the chief had expressed a longing for pancakes at almost every meal; and now, auspicious, they came. On the other hand, the cheese was done. Dark suspicions about a certain cake were also whispered; knowing ones, whose information was that Hosea had sent one aboard from Bahia Blanca for the benefit of the saloon, saw villainy in the delay of its forthcoming. When it did appear its pomp of white icing and green and red crescents, and diamonds of fruit ornaments, certainly warranted an anxiety, as for crown jewels.

132

Meacock, the ever-busy and never-flustered, about this time showed me his private notebook, in which he had from time to time copied verses and aphorisms, chiefly from *Nash's Magazine*, which he considered worthy. In this anthology of his I might have seen the signs of a literary revival aboard which shortly afterwards befell. I daresay he would have expanded a remark of his, "Novels were untrue to life, but life was not by itself interesting enough" (during the war he had commanded a trawler in the Mediterranean), had not the slow flash of a lighthouse appeared on the port side. He climbed to Monkey Island to take a bearing. The blurred lights of Mar del Plata past, our course was altered to agree with the set-back of the coast. Mead came up for his watch, eight bells went, and Meacock departed. His "Ay, ay" to the retiring steersman's report, the apprentice's reading of the log, and the forward lookout's shout "The lights are bright, sir," always had a handsome resonance and lingering dignity.

Mead was by this time full of Hamburg, and he kept breaking into songs in very low Low German, and memories of one Helen, not without sighs. That romance was not the first, nor the last, which I heard from him. He would show me Hamburg! and by way of a Pisgah look, he drew gay pictures of that town, omitting however its architectural glories. Like critics of nature poetry, he saw the world in terms of men and women: and Hamburg as the location of dancing saloons and a singular exhibition of waxworks.

133

The evening had at first looked stormy, and sharp fits of lightning lit the low clouds, but all passed by. The clear and cool heaven was left, diamonded with steady constellations, and crowned with the round moon "and a star or two beside"; below like a field of silver lay the sea, and the quiet ship flung by veils of lily foam, and the shadows stealthily counter-changed the glistening decks. In these calm airs and waters, she made such good speed that the next afternoon we came in view of Monte Video. The pilot took over the bridge, and we were soon at anchor in the harbour, which seemed thronged with ships. Our business here was to load bunker coal, and as our coal was at the moment aboard a collier which was to be seen some distance out of the breakwaters, nothing was done this first evening. The news that his coal was yet to arrive at Monte Video was cheerfully imparted to Phillips with the comment, "Well, anyway, chief, you'll get your coal nice and fresh"; but he seemed by no means consoled. Nor did the assurance of the shipping clerk—a somewhat lilified young man in immaculate blue serge—that "Our Cardiff house have let us down badly," act as a charm upon his depression. He told me to stand by for the office of tallying at seven the next morning, and I thanked him. The request implied, perhaps, the

paternal anxiety for my avoiding mischievous indolence which he had shown before.

But meanwhile what was there to do? We lay at a distance from the shore, and had therefore no distraction. I watched the lighthouse on the hill, the buoys, the ship's signals, the trams on the quay, the other illuminant causes all round us; I listened to a brass band which, for whatever reason, was playing close to the harbour until late in the evening; and then, driven to extremes, I sat down to write a "novel" which became my refuge from ennui during what remained of my holiday, but which I fear will never be finished. I spoke to Mead about it. He thought little of my hero. I agreed to have the hero killed in a bayonet fight near Alberta pill-box, but he thought I might go still nearer to propriety and have the hero kill his man, and go through his pockets. There did seem something in this suggestion, and a few years ago such an ending as it conjured up would have been popular, I think:

"The battle was over. Whistling 'Tipperary,' and placing the wallet and watch of his prostrate antagonist in the pocket of his body shield, Arthur strode onward to join his comrades at their evening meal in Houthulst Wood. Here let us leave him, calmly facing the morrow as only an Englishman can.

"THE END."

The next day brought the worst weather that we had met since we left the Channel. At first it was merely cool and mild; but that was misleading. Down came the rain, thick, cold, and steady; and there seemed a sufficient supply to last until we left. I noticed it, myself, with more especial observation, at my post of tallyman.

In the drizzle the lighters came alongside bringing the coal in bags. The stevedore's gang and their own overseers arrived aboard. One of these overseers was an Englishman, who by his manner and speech had evidently been brought up in a widely different setting; but it was none of our business, though Bicker and others considered it a disgrace for an Englishman to be so employed. All I heard was that he came from the West of England, and that he was wild (which appeared sufficiently in his countenance); and I admired his intellect, and tried to make him feel that. The other overseer was a fat old Italian, who tallied with me for the lighter on the port side.

As these men and the poor fellows who were emptying the sacks into the hatches or trimming the coal down below had been at work all the night, it was not surprising that our affairs moved slowly. The winch, steaming and thudding and jerking in a mutinous mood, brought up four bags at a time, on my side. The sling that held them was lowered to the deck, the hands rushed to swing them on to the improvised platforms beside the hatches, with a concerted roaring as if over the capture of a tiger. While these bags were being emptied, the sling would be descending into the lighter again; and so it continued, with a fog of coal particles wrapping the neighbourhood. The gang was a mixed multitude. Nationality might have been anything. The prevailing colour was a sable (unsilvered), under which mask might be distinguished Italian, Portuguese, Japanese, West Indian, and other types. Among the most energetic of those who were emptying the bags, the most vocal of the roarers, there was a tall, thin, humorous fellow who reminded me irresistibly of a brilliant poet and miscellanist of the modern school. I thought of that dazzling smile, that æsthetic face transferred to the surroundings of Chelsea, and what a success, if looks meant anything, he ought to be! So strongly did I feel that in his hours of leisure and coallessness he was a critic of verse and *mœurs* that I almost asked him his name.

My co-tallyman was pleasantly disposed. He asked me if I would give him one of several casks standing near the galley. I referred him to Phillips, who referred him to Meacock, who referred him elsewhere. We disagreed now and then over the tally, but I was able to hold my own. The *lex talionis* was in force. Sometimes I was induced to accept his surplus over my figure as accurate, but then I would take him back at another opportunity, and ignore his doleful "Make it *threeee*." My imagination lagged behind his, which seemed to see occasional slings put aboard by aerial hands, and aerial coal at that, and these went down in his book. But altogether we "made it." Mutual mistrust served the public good.

The chief lent me a boiler suit, for which I was insufficient, and added an old macintosh presently. I soon grew black; even the tallyman, though he seemed to have some natural gift in his stubbled skin which repelled the grime, grew black. Presently I was disguised in the order of things as a film thug, with waterlogged cap sagging over eyes heavily inlaid in blackness. Tired as the labourers must have been, they went on working as if they liked it, grinning, singing, enjoying comments upon each other, and refreshing themselves with cheroots, cigarettes, peaches, or sups from cans containing a brown decoction like strong tea. They ceased at four.

It was by way of variation in the evening that Bicker and Mead fell upon me, with the idea of shampooing the begrimed tallyman. Zambuk (Hosea's trusted salve), lime cream, and talcum powder were employed. There was a struggle, however, which disturbed Meacock opposite. He came to the rescue, but leaping upon the two barbers, who were holding me down, he forgot that I was underneath. "Rough house," the word went round.

When the stevedore's men arrived the following day, they were almost to a man rigged out in the cleanest of suits, or costumes rather. This was, to the best of my information, not the habit with the British trimmer. Their hats were pleasing to the eye. In his jet-black felt, my poetry-critic looked the picture of a member of the *Athenæum* staff (lamented *Athenæum*!). Others wore the type of hat but not the manner. A number of matey caps, check and khaki and indigo, then white wideawakes as though for haymaking, and a few pillbox-like creations in crimson and daffodil, made part of the splendour. Some of the coalheavers wore large sashes amidships, sashes of lurid colour also, violet and plum, extra shade. In the shirts, more colour appeared. Here, like Aurora,

stepped Antonio in salmon pink; there, was a construction of red and green rings on a white background. The bright-blue cotton suits added to the general effect. Curious that these workers should come so clean, only to be coated with coal-dust in half an hour! It spoke well for their outlook.

The work was much as before. Wheelbarrows had to be got to put the sacks beside other hatches which the winch did not command. The chief had some argument with the Italian foreman about the last two hundred bags, which he wished to be shot into the starboard hatch only, to bring the ship up straight. The foreman asked him to withdraw this. "Damn you!" roared Phillips, and put an end to the matter, "when I say NO I mean NO. Don't you understand plain English?"

So that was that, and my job finished. The bosun and his worthies quickly gathered to remove the disgraceful signs of bunkering; they swept and garnished, the stylish shipping clerk came aboard with his final papers to see Hosea and Phillips. Already the pilot was on the bridge; soon we were slowly backing away from our mooring. The blue peter was hauled down, the gangway got in. The *Bonadventure* was manœuvred past the breakwaters and down the marked channel, at whose last buoy, or soon afterwards, the tug to fetch the pilot came alongside. As he withdrew in her she sounded the three blasts or rather hoots meaning a "Bon voyage," and our own burly voice sounded three times in acknowledgment. The many turrets and spires, chimneys and gaunt roofs of Monte Video, distinctly ranged along a rainy sky with shelves of rock-like cloud, lessened duly; the evening came on. Still the coast appeared here and there, its yellow sands, its dark-blue cliffs and hills, and as if shouldering the dull and heavy sky the sun burned out with a golden power before he departed.

Mead bade good-bye for a short time—in all probability—and myself for a long time, to South America, still symbolized by its lighthouses and the night-glow of a seaside town or two. Once again I felt a regret that I had not seen the elder Buenos Aires, whose extinction was no doubt a wise thing, but which surely must have triumphed as a thing of beauty over the present cubic blocks of utility. Mead was not sentimental about going to sea once more. He was too deeply engaged with devising a piece of invective against an enemy for an alleged injury, and immersed in the troubles of rhyme. I thought he was acquitting himself very well.

XXII

I have mentioned a scarcely concealed feeling in the saloon against the omniscience of the wireless operator. That was not all the opposition to which this youth of the glazed locks was subject. He was understood, while the ship was at sea, to receive news issued daily, and frequently when a subject was being discussed by the ship's officers he sat there in possession of the facts but with serene indifference to the general interest. In this, he was carrying out the regulations, I imagine; but his behaviour resembled that of the dog in the manger. To aggravate this sense of injustice, he rashly told some one that the news might be taken at three guineas.

This in the first place affected the saloon only. But it happened that throughout the ship there was a particular desire for information. At home, the football season was at its zenith. Important matches, in the Leagues and the Cup competition, were known to be playing; and one man on the ship when she was out at sea could, and it was believed did, hear the results. But never a word said he. Looking in at the galley during the evening to brew my cocoa, I would find animated discussion of the favourite teams in progress. Kelly, the "Mess-room," would wipe his fist across his mouth and huskily explain. "It's like this, mister." He had known other wireless operators who gladly announced the football results. But this fellow—he was too b— stuck-up, mister—"The Marconi," the term which he used for the offending operator, savoured queerly of the phrase "The Bedlam" in *King Lear*.

Such was the background against which Mead's vision of the unfortunate Sparks stood out, and with the particular unfriendliness which I must briefly describe. Earlier in the trip, Sparks had, in Mead's opinion, adopted a tone of equality and then even of command towards him, in the course of the ship's routine. Mead had immediately resorted to warlike acts. Sparks lodged a written complaint with Hosea, who gave both parties the best advice. But it was a false step in Sparks to send in this communication, which would if forwarded have cost Mead, perhaps, his living; and it was made worse by Sparks's glib defence, "I was doing my duty," since he had been at a safe distance from the war when Mead's duty lay on the Gallipoli beaches. And he still affected to think of upholding his letter.

Matters were therefore strained, and the more they were so the more Mead liked it. "Don't let me catch you ashore," had been his way of passing Sparks the time of day in port; at sea, he growled abuse at him whenever he saw him, and if no better occasion offered itself, would suddenly thrust his face in all the semblance of murderous intention through the open porthole of the young man's room and utter calm, deliberate, and unnatural purposes.

In this feud, my position was not comfortable. Unlicked as he was (up to the present) and devoid of fine points, the Marconi, whose cabin was neighbour to mine, wished me no harm, and even sought my esteem. Mead, whom I did esteem, was discontented with any half-measures on my part, and in any case I felt bound to observe neutrality. But the capers of my angry friend were often amusing, the declarations of duty conscientiously executed by his *bête noir*—Mead had a

weakness for style—were not. And it is scarcely necessary to repeat, the general view of Sparks was not a moral support to Mead even if he had “no case.”

On the occasion that I described, Mead had decided to drive his point well home with the aid of rhyme. I took a copy of his somewhat indecorous production. It had many “spirited couplets,” embodying considerable observations:

To see you promenade the deck
Gives me a pain in my ruddy neck.

Sparks had been unwise, again, in mentioning his pleasure in the slaughterer’s trade, and past experience. Mead did not miss the opportunity.

If the blood of sheep could make you glow
Come and dare to make mine flow.
I am no hero out for gore,
I had the wind up in the war.

Names and menaces came fast and furious.

... Flowers there’ll be which you won’t smell,
You swob, you’ll learn a lot in hell.
Had I been called half these things
Some one or I’d be wearing wings.

This effusion, laboriously printed in CAPITALS so that its effect on the recipient should be the more demoralizing, headed THE ANSWER, and signed in characteristic fashion NULLI SECUNDUS, was to have been handed to its theme in the saloon. Eventually, Mead rejected that as perhaps contrary to tradition, and handed it in at the porthole aforesaid; but its object, the arranging of “a little bout,” was not achieved.

XXIII

143

A literary epoch began. Bicker, our authentic poet, and not an opportunist like Mead, had been proposing a magazine for some little time past. On a Saturday afternoon, he decided to produce the first number for the Sunday following. The circulation was to be six: there being no aids aboard such as the clay or hectograph, each copy had to be written by hand throughout. Into this labour I, with the editor’s satirical comments upon my profession, was at once pressed. Material in prose and verse was given to me, and filled three foolscap pages in a close handwriting. I copied out these contributions, which scarcely stood the test of a second reading, six times: and was rewarded with a vile headache. I hoped the magazine would succeed, but only once. Bicker, like a born editor, copied out his portion without feeling any the worse, and his appreciation of the fare which he was providing grew with every copy.

The final details, however, delayed the appearance of the *Optimist* until Sunday afternoon. Bicker said in self-protection that no Sunday paper is available in the provinces before breakfast. When the *Optimist* was published, there was no question of its being welcomed. It was of the familiar kind, which seems to satisfy enough readers to satisfy its promoters. A fable in a dialect generally considered a skilful parody of the Old Testament, “Things we want to know,” reports of the football season at Buenos Aires, Answers to Correspondents, a poetical libel beginning “It is an ancient Mariner,” and much besides, principally from the editor’s pen, formed the bulk of it. There were columns devoted to Amusements, and Advertisements of the principal business heads aboard. A copy made its way aft to the bosun and his sea-dogs—the gentlemen who were announced in it as the Chain Lightning Gang. Sitting on the poop in Sunday neatness, they gave it a good reception. The bosun himself had been ill, but was better after reading it.

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With some copies a supplement was issued, and collectors will not need to be advised to acquire these rarities. This supplement was a page of drawings, by Mead, of common objects at Buenos Aires. The obese laundress, Mme. Maria Maggi, was perhaps conspicuous among these (on another page a report was printed that she had died, leaving £300,000 to her lean charioteer). The watchman, with a label giving one of his typical blasphemies, “Got-a-d— b—” this, that, and the other, was seen at full length. The altercation between the manager of the wharf (attached to a balloon lettered YOU.ARE.USING.MY.BUCKETS. I.AM.THE.BANDOLIERO) and Meacock, smoking as always and nevertheless replying YOU.BIG.STIFF *ore rotundo*, was chronicled. And considering who the artist was, and his recent poem, it was not surprising to find a malevolent caricature of one still with us.

One afternoon, sleeping within my cabin, I heard the mate altering the ship’s course with “Hard a starboard” and so on, and feeling this to be out of the ordinary I went out to see why. A mile off there was something in the sea, which the apprentices declared to be a small boat with a flag flying. I felt the light of adventure breaking in upon the murky tramp. But as we drew nearer, the castaway proved to be nothing more than a buoy, and visions of picking up a modern Crusoe faded suddenly. The ship was put back to her course.

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The breeze ahead grew stronger, and in the early morning, the sky being quite grey, a slate-grey sea was running in sizable crests and valleys and tossing the spray high aboard. “The devil’s in

the wind already." "And the bread." The cook's reputation was gone at a blow. He, like a wicket-keeper, did well without any notice taken; lapsed a moment, and every one was barking. It seemed he had been unfortunate in the yeast supplied him. There were sallies of wit: "Now's the time to pave the alley," "Pass the holystone," over this doughy circumstance. For some time, in the words of the Cambridge prize poet, the bread "was not better, he was much the same," and ship's biscuits became unexpectedly favourite. They were stiff but excellent eating; would have rejoiced the soul of my late general, the noted "Admiral" H., alias "Monty," alias "The Schoolmaster," and other aliases. Can he ever be forgotten for those diurnal and immortal questions of his, "Did your men have porridge this morning?" and "Why did you not order your cook to give your men duff to-day?" It wanted little imagination to picture him under his gold oak leaves nibbling with dignity at a ship's biscuit and saying, "Very good, Harrison, uncommonly tasty-I shall recommend them to Division."

The sea presently under a brightened sky grew to a rare intensity of blue, that was at its most radiant in the overswirl of water sheered by the bows. Gallant enough the *Bonadventure* looked in the marvellous expanse, having by dint of much early-morning swilling and swabbing thrown the worst of her nighted colour off; but almost every day I heard bad wishes to the designer of her, though on the score of utility, not the pleasure of the eye. My fancy of a full-rigged ship bowing over these rich seas was usually corrected with reference to "wind-bags"-not folks like me, but ships.

Then there came rain, drizzling on doggedly hour after hour. The drops hung on the railings like autumn dew on meadow fences. One of the effects of such weather was that the cat, who had been induced after all to make the trip, was driven to look about for a quiet, sheltered corner, and having found one, was driven to look again. Finally she chose the chart-room and settled upon the chart. South America was sodden with rain and black with paw-marks when the second mate looked in, and that cat, black or not, would have passed over, but for her being shortly to become a mother. That fact also accounted for her worried expression, voice, and manner, which I had misread as symptoms of sea-sickness.

And still the dull and rainy sky. When I went out one morning, the mate leaned over the bridge rail and said, "You're the blooming Jonah! Now look at that damn'd smoke." I looked at the customary coaly vapour flying aft, but was unlightened. "You Jonah," he went on, "you've brought this wind, and it's carrying the cinders all over my new paint." Now, I suspected the cat was the cause of the trouble; but my guilt was urged by the chief also, as a current of a mile an hour was setting us back.

Not only the mariners of the *Bonadventure* lived in suspense, awaiting the football results.

"That fellow was funny this morning."

"Yes, you could see the excitement in his lamp."

"What was this?"

"Why, about four the So-and-so passed us, and the mate on watch signalled us: 'Do you know the result of Tottenham v. Cardiff City?' So we sent back that Cardiff had won but we didn't know the score. This fellow sent back: 'Oh, well done, Cardiff!' but he was that excited, he could scarcely hit out a letter right. His first message had been-well, beautifully sent; now his lamp was all over the place."

"We could almost see him dancing about the bridge!"

Spragg, the assistant steward, sometimes came to swab my cabin. He had been in a battalion of the 38th Division, when my own Division relieved them in January 1917 on the Canal Bank at Ypres; and he had been like myself a witness and a part of the mammoth preparations of that summer, which ended in such terrible failure. His manner and humorous way of telling tales beside which the "Pit and Pendulum" appears to me an idle piece of pleasantries, unspeakably brought back the queer times and places which we had both seen. I saw him in my mind's eye, keen and frank, standing behind his kit with "headquarters company"-those amiable wits-at Elverdinghe Château (Von Kluck's rumoured country seat, for it was never in my time bombarded); or with pick or shovel stooping along in the Indian file of dark forms towards that vaunted, flimsy breastwork, Pioneer Trench at Festubert.

But still my share of Mead's watch was my best recreation. Our talk was disturbed but little; perhaps by the signals of some ship passing by, or by some unusual noise, such as one evening we heard with a slight shock. A succession of rifle-shots, it sounded; and the cause was evidently some great fish departing by leaps and bounds from the approach of that greater one the *Bonadventure*. The interruption over, he would go on with plans for a future in Malay. "This life," he would say, "is killing me." He was quite as healthy, mind and body, as any man aboard. I liked his occasional rhapsodies, in which the smell of burning sandalwood and of cotton trees, the clearings in sinister forests with the jewelled birds, the rough huts, the dark ladies with the hibiscus flowers in their hair, and the lone white settler (ex-digger Mead) thinking his thoughts in the evening, all played their part. He wished the world back in 1860; it had outdistanced him.

It blew from the north-east strong against us always, and we were travelling more slowly. The sun returned, however, among those ethereal white clouds which to perfection fulfil the poet's word "Pavilions"; we ran on into a dark sea ridged and rilled with glinting silver, yet seemed never to reach it, remaining in a bright blue race of waters scattered, port and starboard, with white wreaths, waters leaping from the heavy flanks of the ship in a seethe of gossamer atoms and glass-green cascade.

The immediate scene was one of painters and paint-pots, and linen flying on the lines. "This wind's playing hell with my curls," said one or two. The matter with me was, that my room was almost untenable. I opened the port at my peril; to do so was to entertain billows of coal-dust from the bunkers below. White paint, the order of the day, whether flat white or white enamel, made progress about the ship by an amateur dangerous, too.

The apparition of the steward under the evening lamps dressed in a smock—he was of ample make—and brandishing a paint-brush, was generally enjoyed. In fact, several spectators came to take a careful look at one who was too often denominated "the mouldy-headed old b—."

A more tenuous apparition was heard of, as we ran north. Whether a hoax or not, I do not know. My first information of it came in the form of a drawing by the apprentice Tich, showing the ship's bell being struck by a hand who never was on land or sea, and the apprentice Lamb leaving his hold of the wheel in horror, and even Mead shaking all over and gaping. A poem appended said that the facts were what the picture made out. The *Bonadventure* was so new a ship—her old name, showing her war origin, still stood on the bells and the blue prints in the chart-room and elsewhere—that there seemed every likelihood against the story being the truth. I asked Mead, and he told me what he maintained to be true.

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On the first watch, the voyage before this, he had gone into the wheel-house for a word with the apprentice at the wheel. A shadow, indistinct, yet leaving impressed on his recollection a human shape, slipped suddenly past the wheel-house windows, softly rang the bell once, and swiftly departed. The frightened boy drops the wheel, lets the ship swing round completely out of her course: Mead runs out, but there is nothing to be seen. He sends for the two A.B.'s who might have come up on the bridge, but they say that they have not done so, nor indeed would they come without object. The firemen, if they have to communicate with the bridge, never come higher than the stairway to the bridge deck, and it proved that no one of them had been there. By the wheel-house clock, it was noticed that the precise time of the visitation was 10.15, an hour not hitherto regarded by ghosts, I believe, as preferable to midnight.

And more. Still imagining that some practical joker was at work, Mead brought a big stick with him on his watch. This was no remedy. The ghost appeared again, at much the same hour, on several nights; it was remarked, mostly when the apprentice who first saw it had the wheel. Trying to stop so strange a bell-ringer, Mead was met by a sharp flap of wind, from a dead still night, and the glimmering shadow was gone to the air. All this happened north of the line.

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This was Mead's story, but the boy's seemed to support it; and when in the shadows of the bridge deck, earnestly and without trimming, he told it me, it seemed very true. I glanced about me occasionally after hearing it.

The wind continued, but the heat was becoming intense. Painting went on like the wind. The derricks received a terra-cotta coat and their trellis work looked an amenity, against the general whiteness. The fervour for redecoration even affected me: was not my hutch to share the common lot? But, though the walls needed it, the matter was postponed, on account of the limited accommodation.

The newspaper was to appear again, but its circulation was being cut down. One copy only would now have to serve the public. It was passed to me, and my aid with paragraphs requested. I could not regret the reduction made in the number, even though if that one copy was lost,

We knew not where was that Promethean torch
That could its light relumine.

Bicker, the editor, instead of reviewing his admired literature in his journal, lengthened breakfast by doing so there *viva voce*. He was all for Bœotian situations, and, on occasion, his cold re-dishing was tactfully ended by a relief conversation on religion, the keynote of which was in the unironically meant remark: "He was darned religious, but he was a darned good man." I began to know a certain captain, from talk during the voyage, almost by sight; one who "went in for Sunday Schools, and put on a crown of glory as soon as he reached Wales," but once away again, it appears that "he fell."

152

Another matter for the columns of the *Optimist* was obtruded upon the breakfast table. It was a conundrum:

West was the wind, and West steered we,
West was the land. How could that be?

The answer, apart from such evasions as "You were entering port," was that West was the name of the helmsman. It was understood that the poem went on in this strain, but the chief's protest came in time.

The cat (last heard of in disgrace), which was under the especial care of the mess-room boy, was no doubt pleased hereabouts by our reaching the regions of flying-fishes; but nevertheless continued, on the gospel truth of Kelly, to take a chair in the engineer's mess at the critical hours

of twelve and five. I myself saw her there at twelve once or twice, judging the time, no doubt, by the parade of table-cloth and cutlery.

Without any abatement of the stuffy heat inside our cabins, we ran into a rainy area. The sea was overcast, and the showers splashed us well. Meanwhile, the wind had veered round more to the east, and besides bringing the grey vapours of rain tumultuously towards us thence, set the spray flying over the lower decks and kept us on the roll. Blowing on the beam, however, it seemed to please Phillips, ever anxious about the hourly ten knots, which seemed too high an expectation. Squalls threatened; it was a tropical April mood. The rolling influenced my sleep, in which I fancied myself manipulating the airiest pleasure-boats, overcrowded with passengers who refused to sit down, on an angry flooded river. 153

The peaceful disposition of the four apprentices began to weigh upon Mead's mind. A very happy and orderly set they were, although the current *Optimist* contained an illustrated article on the bosun's tyranny, as:

"YOUSE take them two derricks for'ard."

"YOUSE jes' pick up that ventilator, you flat-nosed son of a sea-cook."

The drawings of the well-known walrus head under the antique, unique grey (*né* white) one-sided sugar-loaf hat, were admirable. But to proceed. The four boys were of the best behaviour, occasionally, indeed, laughing or playing mouth-organs at unpopular hours, or even after the nightly exit of the cook making flap-jacks, otherwise pancakes, from his properties in the galley. When I joined Mead on his watch, one Sunday evening, he began to "wonder what the boys are coming to." They were not like the boys of his time. He delved into his own apprentice autobiography, and rediscovered an era, a blissful era of whirling fists, blood, and booby traps.

A day followed remarkable for the weather. A swell caused the ship to roll with a will all day, but, as was expected in the doldrums, the wind slackened. After a few hours of this lull, there was a piping and groaning through all the scanty rigging that the steamer owned, and from farther out to sea the grey obscurity of violent rainstorm, much as it had done on our way south, bore down upon us. Soon the ship was cloaked close in a cloud of rain pale as snow, which flecked the icy-looking sea, veined white alongside us, with dark speckling bubbles. Then it was time to sound the whistle, and its doleful groan went out again and again (the wind still varying its note from a drone to a howl) until the fiercer sting of the rain was spent, and distance began to grow ahead of the ship. This storm lacked thunder and lightning; and yet, when Sparks invited me to listen to his "lovely X-s," there was a continuous and furious rolling uproar in the phones. Then, as strange again, as if at a nod that din came to a sudden stop, leaving in the phones a lucid calm in which ship-signals rang out clear. 154

At sunset of a day which washed off the new paint as soon as (in the intervals) it had been put on, a thin red fringe glowed along the horizon, making me long for green hills and white spires; at night, the stars from Southern Cross to Charles's Waggon were gleaming, but the sea lay profoundly black, and upon it all round us came and went glory after glory of water-fire. The next day, however, it rained in the same dismal style, and the sun's eclipse and the passing of Fernando Noronha were but little heeded. I was called a Jonah by every one.

A mollyhawk, that evening, created some excitement. He first spent some time in flying on an oval course round the ship, for his recreation, it looked. His beautiful curves must have pleased him as they did me, for he persuaded (or so it appeared) another mollyhawk to make the circuit with him. Meacock and myself heard one of these strike against the wireless aerial, and thought that it would have scared them away; but no, a few minutes later we heard a croaking and a flapping while we stood in the lee of the wheel-house, and there was a mollyhawk. He had struck some low rope or fixture. He was prevented by his webbed feet from rising again, and I had fears for his future which were by no means necessary; for Meacock followed him, an awkward but speedy walker, down to the lower bridge deck, and, fearing the swift white stabbing bill, waiting his chance, suddenly caught at his nearest wing and launched him into the air. If his speed could show it, that bird was relieved. 155

This incident was a welcome verification of some of the saloon's bird anecdotes; and though it was nearly dark and the bird was only aboard for two or three minutes, his release was watched by a very good gathering, representative of engineers, firemen, the galley, sailors, and apprentices.

XXV

156

*Whilst thou by art the silly Fish dost kill,
Perchance the Devils Hook sticks in thy Gill.*
Flavel's New Compass for Sea-men, 1674.

I must have made a good many references here and there to the steward, old Mouldytop, and it occurs to me that he deserves a paragraph to himself. Of this ship, whom her most faithful lovers called a dirty ship, with her short funnel pouring a greasy smoke over her graceless body when even coal-dust rested-of this grimy tramp, playing a sufficient part in the world's daily life, rolling and lurching up and down oceans with fuel or foodstuff, thousands of tons at a time, it may be

safely said that the steward was the feature. In the *Optimist* it was evident that he as an inspiration excluded almost every other. In the round of day and night, should he himself be unseen for a time, his voice would generally claim your notice; if conversation took on dark and prophetic tones, it was, for a ducat, some restatement of the ancient's wickedness, and a realization of the strength of his position against all the world. For behind Mouldytop was the power of Hosea.

The steward was built somehow after the shape of a buoy. It was Ireland, and not Scotland, that his ancestors had left; but there was a doubt about his own dialect. It was, and it was not, plain English. His bulbous, melancholy face was topped with grey hairs, but those he hid under his faded brown skull-cap. Forty-nine years, one understood, had Mouldytop been at sea; and before that, the veil of mystery was thin enough to show him in his first stage, a batman in the Army. This fact led him to deprecate modern warfare, "It's all science, Mister," and those who fought it; he claimed to have been blooded *fighting* in some corner of the desert with spear-brandishing multitudes. At the same time, he reserved his reminiscences; for the refined insult, "You old soldier," needed no encouragement.

He seldom grew cheerful. I suppose that he was happiest when some one (no doubt with serpent tongue) asked how his cold was. Then, his roar softened into a resigned murmur, as he recorded that it was as bad as ever; that six bottles of his own medicine taken regularly had not cured him. This was a pleasure that he shared with the author of one of the most melodious English songs, and it seems to be prophetic of his appearance-

Welcome, folded arms and fixed eyes,
A sigh that piercing mortifies,
A look that's fastened to the ground,
A tongue chained up without a sound,

as of his imaginative affections in his sombre cell-

A midnight bell, a parting groan!
These are the sounds we feed upon;
Then stretch our bones in a still gloomy valley,
Nothing's so dainty sweet as lovely melancholy.

Let but a sailor apply to him at the wrong hour-or even the right hour-for tobacco, and his indisposition was gone in a second; his tongue was unchained. The busy mockers grinned. "He'd tell Davy Jones he'd been to sea before him."

In the Argentine ports he was in excellent voice. Did a native shoemaker come aboard with his repair outfit, or a seller of fruit with his panniers, and did any one propose to deal with these "Dagoes," out skipped our old friend, bellowing: "Too much, man; what," (*crescendo*) "d'ye think we pick up money in the streets?-I wouldn't have your blasted country for all the blasted money there is in it." The charges, I am bound to add, fell down quickly, while the old watchman standing by observed with a respectful grin, "You a good man!"

The advance of age was a sore point with Mouldytop. Consequently, it was one that was brought to his notice as often as it could be effective. One evening, some one told him he was too old to play football. "Too old, mister?" he bawled; "Too old!-why, give me that blasted ball," and he stood there in a prodigious rage, his eyes flashing, his fists knotting. "Too old!"-His calenture ceased suddenly; there was a tug on his fishing line. Up came a yellow catfish. Never have I perceived a livelier disgust than the look showed which he cast upon this victim. It seemed to blame the catfish personally for not being a rock salmon.

So Mouldytop regarded animated nature; which regarded him as a man whose duties implied opportunities. "I'm a poor man, mister."-"The old son of a gun says he's a poor man. You old liar, you've got streets of houses, you know you have."

Some one who knew him at home was strongly of opinion that he was less terrible by his own fireside: that there was a fellow creature under whose guidance he roared like any sucking dove. It might be. Indeed, it was my impression that it could hardly be otherwise. I thought I noticed a certain caution even in his attitude to the large-bosomed laundrywoman who took the ship's orders at Buenos Aires; and his comment on *her* charges had been of the weakest.

XXVI

We crossed the line at six in the morning, and in drizzling rain. There was not much comment, except upon the rain; the good thing about the damp cloudy weather was that we were spared the more furious heat, though the atmosphere had been oily and sultry. With the steamy clouds swarming about us I could picture a past life hereabouts which might justly have aroused man's wrath; the sailing days, when to take advantage of whatever brief breeze might visit the sleepy doldrums, the sailors had to be constantly running aloft in the drenching mist, and afterwards lay down in their sweating glory-holes, in their soaked clothes, week after week.

The painting epidemic was not abated. Meacock and Mead camped out while they made their rooms as white as ivory. Mead looked charming in a round white cap, which he said a V.A.D. had

given him. The steward, with his experience of every sort of ship under the sun, had developed an artistic eye: and, perhaps to relieve the whiteness, he decided upon a dado for the saloon, which hitherto had been from ceiling to floor done in white enamel. The dado was to be grained, in imitation of an actual wainscot. He began his solemn task, applying by way of groundwork a brimstone yellow and other sickly yellows which disturbed us at meals.

Meacock and Phillips varied these days with a discussion of firemen, whether white or coloured firemen were the more difficult to manage? Phillips was for his Africans, the excellent selection aboard at present forming a contrast with his memories of ne'er-do-wells, "doctors, remittance-men and all sorts," of English birth. Meacock was soon hard at work describing with amusing mimicry a refractory negro, one of a number of Somalis who, hearing of labour troubles in England, did their best to be paid off in Africa. If they had succeeded, the ship would have been without firemen for her return voyage; so their efforts were resisted. The particular genius played the hand of "suicidal tendency." Choosing a time when there were several people about the deck, he climbed somewhat slowly up the bulwarks and prepared with gestures to leap over the side. Meacock was a spectator of this piece of acting. The actor was pulled back with some violence, and "about half-past four we got the handcuffs on him. We would have had to turn the cook out of his room aft to lock this fellow up, but I didn't want to do that, so I fastened him up with the handcuffs round a stanchion in the poop. I said, 'And the rats will probably eat you before the morning'; and I really did expect to find him eaten by the morning; for there were some monsters in the poop.

"Next day, he began saying 'Sick.'-'Sick? Where are you sick?-'Sick all over.' I had enough of this after a bit, and went and got the strongest black draught I've yet known. He didn't want to drink it, and I said to him, 'Now drink this up as quick as you can.' And so he did. After that, whenever I looked in at the poop, this fellow would start waving his arms and hollering out. In fact, he was mad; every time I got near him, he was mad. That black draught was not popular, I think. When we got to Cuxhaven, the medical authority put this man through a careful examination. 'He's no more mad,' he said, 'than you or I. He's got a slight touch of rheumatics in the arm. But,' he said, 'when you get to Hamburg, you can satisfy yourself by sending this man to the asylum.' We did. Two days-and he was back."

Meacock's laconic phrases were accompanied with grimaces which told the tale to perfection.

The atmosphere had grown so literary that Mead now took pencil and paper with him to his day watch as a matter of course. The pages of the *Optimist* were beginning to look somewhat laboured. He determined to infuse a new vein. So a series of vividly coloured hoaxes came into existence, the first of which, a harem story, was too much in its full bloom for the editor's acceptance. Not surprised, and not dejected, Mead offered "The Pirate," and it duly appeared. These fictions ended, as did their successors, with a disillusionment:

"And then what happened?"
"The film broke."

It was about the period of hoaxes-April 1 arrived. Bicker appeared at my cabin, where I was reading. "Meacock wants to see you." I went. Bicker triumphed, and went his way convinced that he could beat the intellectual at his own game, as the *Optimist* had already shown him he could.

A brighter sky and cooler wind came on. We were soon expected at Saint Vincent. The new moon and calmer waters brought one evening of strange watery beauty. Towards his setting the sun had hidden himself in black clouds, whence he threw a silver light over sea spaces where sea and sky were meeting: he sank, and left the heavens like green havens, with these clouds slowly sailing through their utmost peace. The change soon came; the head wind brought pale grey turbulent days, with the ship playing at rocking-horses; over the head wind and rousing sea, the healthy sun at length dawned on the Sunday of our arrival at Saint Vincent. Sunday, without the voice of church bells or the sight of people going to worship, seemed no Sunday despite its idle hours: at least, the mood sometimes took me so.

The third engineer was acquiring no mean name as a cutter of hair, and I felt the cold after I had been to his open-air chair, near the engine-room staircase. While I sat to him, a characteristic of the mess-room boy was borne on the air from the chief's room. It was his habit of replying hastily to any observation, "Yes, yes," and this time the chief's voice was heard: "Curse you, John, for a blasted nuisance." "Yes, yes, sir."

As the sun was stooping under the sea once more, land grew into sight far ahead; mountain or cloud? The mountainous coast was mocked indeed by great continents of cloud above, of its own grey hue. The wind blew hard, but at ten o'clock we were running in under the rocky pinnacles of Saint Vincent, against the blustering wind and the black racing sea. A light or two, chiefly from other steamers, told something of the port. The crescent moon, cloaked in a circling golden mist, was now near setting. We anchored and spent the night in quiet.

A mile or so from our anchorage, in the morning's clear air, huddled the pink unsightly little town. At distance the heights of rock looked as unsubstantial as Prospero's magic; the clouds that swam over them and across their steeps might have been solid, so phantasmal were those rocks. Not so with the stony masses overpeering the town; those in their iron-brown nakedness had the aspect of eternal immobility. The air was cold and lucent; the water halcyon blue. Several tramps with rusty black and red, and a sailing ship or two, lay around the *Bonadventure*; barges of a rough old make clustered closer in to shore.

The invasion by natives began early. A dozen boats were tossing on the waves alongside, with

woolly heads and upward eyes seeking what or whom they might devour, and quiet-footed rogues here and there on the decks were trying to sell matches, cigarettes, and red bead handbags. To their attempts, the politest answer was "No good." "No caree?" Nobody seemed to care. Some of our firemen whose homes were here had gone ashore, with the air of men allowing their old haunts to share their glory.

Two lighters, coppered below, bearded with dark green weed, blundered alongside with bags of coal, and soon the gangs, a grimy and ragged collection, were getting the bags aboard, and the winch grumbling away. Yet it was now made known that we were not to pick up much coal here, but to proceed to Las Palmas for the bulk of our wants. This was unfortunate for the firemen who had gone home. All too soon the blue peter at half-mast and the blowing of the hooter recalled them.

Now, too, it was rumoured that our port of discharge was to be Emden, in Hanover: but of such arrangements it became more difficult to feel assurance.

At midday we left. The most valued effect of our call at Saint Vincent was the receipt of some giant flying-fishes, which we got, one apiece, at tea. It was only by virtue of perseverance that a man could consume his ration. They were good, if dry.

If I were a Bewick, I have in mind a little tailpiece for this chapter. It would display, for the careful eye, the hatless Kelly filleting a flying fish, against the bunker hatch, for his friend the cat, who should be gazing up with cupboard love at her unshaven protector. The direction of the wind, in true Bewick style, should be implied in a sprinkling of coal-dust settling on the new paint of the "House."

XXVII

Glittering bright, northern weather outside. "Channel weather," as it was described at breakfast. Whatever it might be, I was Jonah; fine, Jonah bringing a head wind; wet, Jonah bringing the wet; the ship rolling, it was Jonah's additional weight on the port side that was doing it; and so on. The suggestion arose that the villain should be offered to the first whale sighted; but "We should have more respect for the whale," said Phillips. Nor could I be sure that I was not blamed for all finger marks on the new paint. Meacock had been the eye-witness of one crime of mine of the sort. "If you touch that new enamel, your name's mud"—and then the *Bonadventure* obliged with a lurch sideways which left the impression of my hand in a most prominent place.

A more serious disgrace even befel me. Bicker and Meacock involved me in an argument, which was very quickly twisted into the direct question. "Who was England's greatest man?" Some wretched ghost whispered Shakespeare, and Shakespeare I named. There was derision. Shakespeare! Nelson was the man. I was obliged to stick to my choice. "We're talking about fellows that DID something for their country," said Meacock, and I gave up. Bicker was once again *in excelsis* at this evidence of his superior understanding, which he seemed about to back up with physical argument. The shade of Nelson was vindicated; and then, I was informed that the second greatest man was Kitchener. I asked with innocent ignorance what he had effected of particular significance to our own lives? A photograph was produced of the earlier, more Achillean Kitchener, by way of settling *that* point.

Meeting Kelly in the galley one evening as I went along to make my cocoa, I was detained to hear of the wonders of Hamburg; and to watch Tich making a Cornish cake with ingredients mysteriously come by. Kelly was also of opinion that Hamburg's high place among towns was due to a dancing saloon, where birthday suits were the fashion. "Flash society," he said with admiration. I was sorry to hear that in the argument over great men I had missed the sight of one whale. Thus it is with the conversationally inclined: pursuing minnows of our opinion, we miss the leviathans of fact.

Days of reviving fine weather and swaying sea in hills and hollows, flinging proud manes of spray aloft for the sun to gild with rainbows again and again, gave place to one of skies generally overcast. Cold blues and greens came and went above us; the wind blew bleak over a steely sea. Land came into view on the port beam. Above it the clouds hung in dim phantasmagoria; a gleam of silver white below announced the coast, and, now sparkling, now dull, the lie of the land presented itself to our gaze. And this was Grand Canary. The mountain's sides seemed chequered with forest; at its bases white villages glistened; and further on, a conical peak and headlands grew on the eye.

The sea had lately been crowded with porpoises, acre upon acre; and here another vast assembly crossed our track. To a credulous eye, as they leapt along, they might have painted the image of several sea serpents writhing through the waves. Above them wheeled a flock of gulls, intent I supposed on fishing.

The cathedral of Las Palmas appeared in mirage; then the *Bonadventure* rounded the coast until the town came clearly before us. It was to the harbour just beyond the town that we were making. As we approached, boats came rowing ferociously towards us. One crew threw hooks carrying ropes over our bulwarks, and sent a man aboard. His skill would have done a spider credit; but to no purpose did he exert it, for the hooks were thrown back and the invader held

prisoner on the bridge during Hosea's pleasure. When we anchored, a fleet of boats sprang up around us, the chances of any individual one, of course, for the privilege of supplying us with a bum-boatman being smallish. Not long afterwards, the ship was swarming with miscellaneous merchants, and merchandise. Bananas, monkeys, canaries, cigarettes, cigars, photographs (chiefly improper), wicker chairs, matches, field glasses, parakeets and other useful articles were pressed upon every one aboard who could possibly be tackled. Some of the canaries were heard whistling loud and long, and yet Kelly found that the bird which he bought, a seeming musician, was mute.

No cabin was left unguarded. It was pointed out that one gentleman offered plain proof of knavery; on his right foot he wore an English boot, on the left a tennis shoe. They were all tarred with the same brush: "Worse than Port Said." I do not think they found much opportunity to enhance the reputation at our expense.

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A tug, the *Gando*, immediately re-named the *Can-do*, brought out our lighters of coal. At that signal, an interesting enterprise moved nearer to us. When bags are being slung over from hold to hold, a good deal of coal is dropped into the water; and so the enterprise consisted in a small barge, with the men, and material, for sending down divers to rescue the estrays. The diver was a huge fellow, curiously wearing a red tam-o'-shanter. He of course went down in a diving suit to survey the ocean; when he thrust his muzzle out of the water again, up would come at the same time his two bushel baskets; and as these were almost full of coal, presumably that department of salvage had its rewards.

After much criticized anxiety about winches and blocks and guys, our stevedore gangs began their work at good speed. I was again dressed up in a borrowed boiler suit for the duties of tallyman. The weather became burning hot. The coal-dust flew round in copious whirlpool. After an hour I was full of discomfort, and not to be distinguished from any of the coal heavers. Work continued in such hearty fashion that I gathered that it was piece work. The foreman was another giant, with such a belly on him that whenever he gesticulated—that was often—stamping his foot and brandishing his hands, that belly really and truly quaked. His voice was not a success. He would have roared like thunder, but only a feeble croaking left his snapping jaws.

By six our bunker coals had been put aboard, I discarded my honourable discomfort, my mask of grime, and my piratical appearance. The dealers in Constantinople canaries and cork soles withdrew. About the harbour of La Luz, the lights came out in the houses and aboard the shipping; the masts and yards stood out calm against a quiet coloured evening, the water rippled with no skirmish nor much voice to our sides. Beyond the towns, the mountains gloomed with the dreams of romantic journeys.

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An hour or so afterwards, the welcome though broken melody of the anchor's uprising heralded our departure. It had been a colourable interlude. I remember it best by a circular handed out by "Gumersindo Alejandro, Bumboat Business." It ran through the rigmarole of desirable articles, a few of which I have named above, and concluded

"and all kinds of silks suitable
for presents and use."

A harsh description of presents? Perhaps.

XXVIII

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By some mystical means, the mates had charmed away from our Las Palmas visitors at small cost or none an unusual supply of cigars and cigarettes. These brightened up the melancholy purser, who was now approaching the end of his employment. There were still, however, many things to amuse his leisure. How often the table talk had come to the subject of hell and its occupants! The latter seemed to be—after the landlubbers—shipowners, ship's chandlers, ship's tailors, and Customs men. Curious pictures were projected of notorious shipowners of the past, now compelled to wield the shovel next to the firemen late of their employ. As to the unfortunate Customs officials, witness A and B.

A. "... Yes, he quite got pally with this Customs fellow—?"

B (*older than A, hastily interrupting*): "I wouldn't trust any Customs fellow, not if he'd got a pair of b— wings on."

The *Optimist* went on its way with the weeks. Mead added "The Vamp" to his cabinet of tales of mystery; but the strain of discovering subjects apart from the steward and the galley was clearly growing. The prominence of food and meal times upon a tramp was described in a ballad published about this time.

THOUGHTS OF A ROMANTIC.

Ten thousand miles from land are we,
Hark how the wild winds pipe!
What grand reflection swells in me?
This morning we'll have tripe.

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For ever and evermore
These billows rage and swell;
O may I, through their angry roar,
Not miss the breakfast bell.

Here octopi, here great white whales,
Here krakens haunt the Main;
Mad mermaids sing-my courage fails-
Here comes Harriet Lane.^[2]

There, far far down, what jewels lie,
What corals, red enough
To make this sauce^[3] seem pale, which I
Am wolfing with my duff!

To think that one lone ship should thus
Ride o'er the greedy seas!
Alas! what will become of us
Now we've run out of cheese?^[4]

The northern spring came into the air. Scraps of the casual verse of one English poet who never tired of the year afield started up in memory now, where the pondered solemn music of others had no reverberation; and so for the rest of my voyage. The sea for a time grew intensely calm, the swell seeming to swim along under a mantle of pearl or quicksilver. The undulating surface stretched to the horizon, unbroken anywhere by restless foam; and over this calm lay the golden track to the setting sun. When presently a breeze ruffled this strange sleep, it was as though shoals of tiny fishes had everywhere risen to the surface; and in one or two places, those bubbling, flickering shoals were actual and not imaginary.

As if schooled by misfortune, Sparks now posted up in the port alleyway a statement of football results and tables; so that many bosoms aboard needed no longer to feel a heaving anxiety. A turtle lazily floated by, watched by many who could have welcomed him on deck; a whale passed, shouldering and spouting the brine; and shortly, as the midnight moon had portended, the dark green sea began to run in hilly ridges, sometimes sluicing the decks, and tilting the *Bonadventure* to one side or the other. Grey rain-squalls flew over us now and then; but, considering our near approach to the redoubtable Bay, we were in excellent weather. The mate, however, was not one to take chances; and certain barrels, an anvil and a few other heavy movables were shifted from the windward side of the engines.

The steward and his adjutant had now little time certain in which to reform my room, so they fell upon it with paint brushes and "flat white" in vigorous style; it had been my hope to be allowed this labour, but I remembered my "Tom Sawyer," where painting as a recreation was so truly valued. Mouldytop was seldom seen in these days without his pot and brush; he went at it from dawn to midnight and then did overtime. My room was turned into a whited sepulchre, which is better than a sooted one, but as it was a sort of receptacle for coal-dust, which was coal grease withal, even when port, ventilator and door were all closed, it was to be feared, *tamen usque recurret*, it would be black again in a week.

We came into a region of ships, tramps like ourselves for the most part, and the less handsome oil-tankers also. Finisterre lighthouse shone kindly upon us. With a fair wind, the concourse of shipping dwindling away somewhat as we went on, we now entered the Bay. Our angles began to be anything but right, but it was much gentler weather than I had any reason to need. Fair as it was for us, save for the cinders that fell in showers amidships, the vessels running in the teeth of the weather were pitching with vigour. Grey and shrouded the sea met us in hills and valleys, with white ridges and flecked with foaming veins; as we went further into the famous corner, the *Bonadventure* could not but roll and lurch as though she liked it, and the waves were mountainous; yet out there we passed a fishing boat making beautiful weather of it.

The second mate, Bicker, could scarcely get any sleep; but not on any score of weather or discomfort. All his watch below, or most of it, one might see him standing at his sea chest with pen scratching away at the forthcoming *Optimist*. So sweet is journalism when wooed as a casual mistress. Shall I go on? No.

My trouble was not what to write but what to read. Even Young's *Night Thoughts*, buried in annotations reverent and irreverent, began to grow familiar beyond all reason. *Pears' Cyclopædia*, *Brown's Nautical Almanac*, *The South Indian Ocean Pilot*, *Phrenology for All*, and other borrowed books, were all at much the same stage. This ship was not the one recently reported in the newspapers in which the chief read poetry like a passion, the cook chewed Froude with his morning crust, and the cabin-boy needed the help of Hegel. I forget if those were the actual claims, but in any case that was another ship. About now, an accident happened to my Young. It seemed as if a Poltergeist had visited the spare cabin port during the night, for awaking I found my settee, and the *Night Thoughts* thereon, waterlogged. Perhaps the heavy rain had been answerable for this, but I could not see how-my port was closed. Poltergeist had spared my novel, lying next to Young; evidently he thought that already watery enough. Young, immortal, made a surprising recovery.

Now, we were nearing the one country. It needed no drab island of Ushant with its lighthouse to

tell me this; for hardly had I put down in my diary "Much milder," when it became necessary to write "Much colder." The tumults of the Bay were over and gone, and we were under a dun sky dropping rain which obviously belonged to the English Channel.

We swung round Ushant and became more aware of the ups and downs of navigation; these were less noticeable as we ran on. The prospect, or say circumspect of the day was narrowed in by dismal rainstorm, and once more it was a bleak amusement trying to make out the forms of ships through the foggy veils. The wind moaning, the rain splashing, measured out long hours, till all saddened into night with little to notice, save the gulls and divers whom such weather suited well. At any rate we were not unfortunate in our direction. The *Hammonia* going the other way with passengers showed us that by contrast.

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The night elapsed, we came abeam of the Isle of Wight, which showed but indistinctly, though the day was cold and steady. Calm indeed lay the green Channel up which the *Bonadventure* with speed sufficient to please Phillips was making her way. Ships, or their smoky evidences, made the time pass quickly. It was Good Friday, a great day for my childhood in Kent, land of plum-pudding-dogs and monkey-tail trees, a day when I heard, as indeed my elder companions had long foretold, the church bells rung muffled; although I was disappointed in the purple cassocks which, tradition fabled, would be worn by the choir on that day. Lent (and Advent too for that matter) was solemn then and real, outside of churches; and with Good Friday it appeared undeniable that there had been done some thing at which Nature must go in mourning. The three hours' service, like the watch that rang out the dying year and rang in the new, was in every one's thought that we met; such ceremony was not for nothing. The melancholy hymns of the season were more than sung verses.

To-day, at least, we had hot-cross buns to our breakfast. So is the Lord remembered in these years of discretion. The sailors had the day to themselves.

Our course lay more or less east, and brought us a succession of glimpses of shining cliffs and misty downs. Off Dover we saw both coasts at once. In 1919 I hoped I had seen the last of that piece of France. Running out of this strait into the North Sea under a shrewish though a moderate wind, we passed a number of fishermen, and what struck my mind with the strangeness almost of the Flying Dutchman, a three-masted barque under full sail, at a distance. It was sunset at the time. She caught the light and bowed upon her journey, a sweet sight, too quickly lost in the dark. Soon we picked up the flash of a lightship off the Dutch shore, and soon after that the cold to which my wanderings had not made me careless sent me inside.

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Chilly brightness and blue sky saw us making rapidly over the North Sea, visited by thrushes and linnets, while the water seemed crowded with those clever birds, though so gawky upon the wing, the divers. We crossed the wake of an oil-tank, burning the water almost like the witch's oils in "The Ancient Mariner," and scenting the air unlike those abstractions; came to a lightship, where our course was altered; and met the pilot cutter in a calm sea and air vivid with sun and cold about four. The rope ladder went down, the row-boat came alongside, and the pilot was taken up to the bridge. I could not repress odd emotions at thus seeing again "Brother Boche"—he looked a replica of ancient types of my acquaintance—after such a long separation.

The estuary of the Ems received us, a flat sheet of water, with low coastlands only noticed by reason of towers here and there. The tides obliged us to anchor some miles outside Emden at six, and to wait until midnight. The sky darkened and loured into rain. At twelve in a black and gusty night, to the accompaniment of much hooting and shouting, the *Bonadventure* moved up the river, and in the greyness and chill of daybreak berthed in a quiet basin at Emden.

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Through this last movement I had tried to snatch some sleep, but was harassed by the socialism of Bicker and Mead, who considered it but fair that as they were being deprived of their sleep, I should be deprived of mine. They, therefore, visited me at intervals, switched on my fan which was now quite unnecessary, prodded me with toasting-forks, and so saluted the happy morn, like those larks which were now singing and soaring to justify any praise of them that ever was written.

[2] "Harriet Lane." The name of that unfortunate lady is often applied to the curious tinned meat provided aboard.

[3] "This sauce." A pink luxury poured over Sunday's duff.

[4] "Cheese." In these closing lines the poet's hope was to record the actual expression of the saloon in general on receipt of the steward's pronouncement: "That there was no more cheese."

XXIX

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On Easter Day the sun—it was an old proverb—will dance; and this time he was in the mood. We lay in a basin like other tramps; beyond, there clustered red roofs with blessed ungainly angles, a pleasing sight after those southern flat ones of grey. Farther off, the church spire climbed above the trees, and though many people in their Sunday dress were walking that way, more were taking their rounds beside these docks.

It was as certainly good to be here as that spring was here. The chirrup of sparrows, jubilate of

larks, noises of poultry, bleating of lambs from an enclosure of young fruit trees close at hand, and the play of children, were all comely and reviving.

Alas! that the Easter gift of the ship's officers should have been so out of tune. An old gentleman of the same outlook as Polonius, the broker, brought a packet of letters aboard at breakfast, and among these were the wrong kind of Easter tidings—statements of their reductions in wages. They accepted this falling off without murmur, save for a few dry remarks.

A motor-boat came bringing the stores, and, to the disgust of the cook and other watchers, a great stack of long loaves, altogether leathery in external appearance. Most of these were returned. The ship's chandler must have thought we were arriving in force. Our own boat was tied at the foot of the gangway, and the apprentices told off as ferrymen for the time being.

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Next day the larks were aloft again, and their melody, marvellous after long absence from it, came dropping from heaven as undiminished, one would say, as raindrops falling. So clear it sounded there even when they were in the clouds. Meanwhile the bosun and party were getting the winches and derricks into trim, with less silver voices: "H-h-hup, H-h-hup: Let go a little: Here, youse...."

It was not unwelcome when the evening came, and Mead, Bicker, and their friend so soon to be returned to duty set out up the cobbled road to Emden; most bitter was the east wind blowing down the long colonnades of trees, and we hastened into the sheltering streets of the little town. We found it a quiet and beautiful place of ornamentation, and gables and high houses, with a canal in the midst. Masterly seemed its spire, stretching up into the sky with unexpected height and charming ease. It was Easter Monday, and many folks were walking out—we looked curiously about us, and while none were anything but tidy and decent, none had any of the symptoms of much and to spare. They were evidently poor, but far from poor in spirit.

We were puzzled by the Sabbath look of things to find a place to sit down and apply some antidote to the effects of that rawish east wind. We began drifting as usual, when an old fellow in black coat and Homburg hat pushed past us, mumbling something. A light came swiftly into the eyes of Mead and Bicker; the old fellow was fragrant with good beer. We asked him for directions. He was off at once in a loud, hard voice: "By Jesus Christ and General Jackson," he began (and *da capo*), "the two best men in America. You come to my house." Following him, and coping with his repeated invocations of the Messiah and the General, and requests for an opinion of his English speech, we arrived by and by. He was an innkeeper, and (by Jesus Christ) "an old sailing man himself."

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The inn parlour was most excellently warm, free and easy. We set to with hot grog, the brimmer being rebrimmed (if my memory serves me) not once nor twice. The room was not one which depressed. Around it hung daubs of full-rigged ships of Batavia in the fifties and sixties; there was an automatic weighing machine, a most magnificent penny-in-the-slot piano, and another apparatus for extracting copper from the air, dressed up as a blue windmill, but I did not inquire what it was expected to yield. And the wall-paper was tapped with an ample border, in which one saw smooth waters, placid smacks, and more windmills.

The other occupants of the room were the quiet set at the tables, a drunken Finn seaman with one arm in bandages, a dark-haired musician, the landlord and his wife and their good-looking daughter; while from the private house other members of the family came and went at need, as will be seen.

We provided the landlord with grog. He melted with gratitude, rose, and set his horrible piano going, whose wicked hammers champed upon some of the harshest wires outside of the barbed-wire dumps. And what is more, whenever the piano began, our friend the Finn thought his hour had come to shine, and essayed a sort of stamping, stooping dance across the floor. This led to persuasion. The landlord persuaded, the landlady persuaded, unclassified assistants persuaded, and presently the dancer was pleased to be seated once more, exclaiming, "When I come aboard he says to me, he says, 'All right, Captain, all right, all right.'" No sooner did the music begin afresh than this enthusiast would rise up relentlessly as though hypnotized (by the pæan) and perhaps stamp out a bar or two before being replaced by combined efforts. This kept on happening.

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None the less, the landlord, who had apparently spent the day in liquid rejoicings, was swallowing grog and growing taleful. He claimed all sorts of sea service and seemed to know what he was talking about, posed even my expert friends with the sailing-ship question: What's the difference in build between a Scotch ship, a Nova Scotian, and a Yankee? Boxing too was in his line: "Scholar of John L. Sullivan," he assured us, and directed admiration to his fist, which was normal. From taleful he waxed tuneful. "I'm a chanty-man, y'know," and wiping back his gingery-white whiskers he groaned out "Blow the man down," and "The streams of our native Australia," in dreadful style. After these, finding himself strangely appreciated, he offered and began "a real English song, y'know-exchoose me, y'know, if I don't speak the plain English." It was "The Maid of the Mill." His rendering was a strain on our tact, and too much for one of the young ladies of the house, who was smitten with a fit of giggling most right and justifiable. At that, the old villain flew into a ridiculous passion, jumped up, and was for hitting this girl. He was restrained.

After this unwanted diversion, he returned and (with starts of rage) barked out the rest of his song. His wolfhound began, and we began, to find the vocalist a nuisance; and as the evening wore on, I thought the authentic musician, who played the violin, was beginning to resent our presence and success. The daughter of the house foolishly sat at our table. The musician,

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however, was soothed with an honorarium, and with much "Auf wieder-sehen!" we went. Even now, however, it was thought unseemly to reach the ship in one journey, so halts were called twice; and once aboard, the usual arguments kept us out of our beds until four or so in the morning.

The two grain-elevators in the port were still busy with a Greek steamer, so that, apart from painting, the *Bonadventure* was idle, and there was little to do but row over to the canteens and return with undreamed-of quantities of chocolate and cigarettes. Cigars were, to us, as lightly bought as matches. As to the painting, it was again mysterious that two of the apprentices fell off the stage on which they were working alongside; they were soon dressed in borrowed plumage. Suddenly in the evening our discharge began.

Lighters of the local type, very long and narrow, were already alongside when the tugs swung the first elevator into his place. The huge floating turret looked somewhat like a smock mill. The stevedores quickly made fast their tackle: four large drain-pipe tubes were let down into the chosen hold, and the suckers commenced. There was a drumming boom of machinery, mixed with the swish of the ingulfing of the grain and its disgorging through broader conduits on the other side of the elevator into the river barges. It grew dark, the red and green railway lights burned fiercely in brisk air against the last of an orange sunset. But the elevator was kept at work, and arc lights hung over the hold showed the novel scene of the sliding grain and its trimmers. 184

One effect of the late-continued drone and thud of the elevator was to torment me with war dreams. First I was in an attack, among great rocks, under a violent barrage; then, on one of those unforgettable raw, dark mornings, I was at the window of a great ruined house behind the line, watching the bleary effulgence of the Very lights starting up here and there and expecting the worst from a nasty silence, only pierced by single shell-bursts. Then, beside the elevator, an infuriated and intoxicated bargee stood on the landing-stage about midnight bawling for a boat which didn't come. His patience was, however, considerable; he bawled for a long hour. In consequence, I suppose, of these matters I arrived very late at breakfast amid the usual cries of "You Jonah, you!"

The second elevator arrived, and, like some great iron insect with many beaks, began to swallow up the grain from the holds aft. The ship shook with the speed and power of the pumping machinery; the long lighters with their great round-table steering wheels filled up, battened down, and swung away. In one of the holds there were the bags put in at Ingeniero White; under them again lay the yellow grain in mass. The elevator's proboscis dipped into that grain, while the trimmers unstowed, slit and emptied the sacks; so the ship began to lighten, and her bow already stood high out of the water.

The red evening sky was smoky with cold; then the stars sparkled with frost; and a small gathering enjoyed the oil stove in Bicker's room. The steward, in unusual radiance, came in presently, and sang a long song concerning a tramp who was flung off a freight train by a brakeman. "Because he was only a tramp" (*dying fall*). 185

This might have been a comment on Mr. W. H. Davies' Autobiography. Warmed with his singing and other helps, the steward began to recall his acquaintance (on guard) with Royalty, and spun off at tangents with affairs half a century more recent: "That b— flaming butcher— I was going to hit him with a box of matches," and other incidents. I was sorry to hear the lank Chips, the next morning, bawling at the entrance of the saloon a complaint about the toughness of his meat; the steward's new mood deserved anything but that sort of damper.

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With little to do, I fought a sort of pillow fight with Meacock, our weapons being sacks well stuffed; he won, of course, but it was a popular bout. Then there were acrobatic performances on the stays of the funnel. The need I had for training appeared on our last night in Emden Port, when my sleep was nipped in the bud by the entry of Bicker and Mead. Both had the clear spirits raised, in two senses; both thickened voices already thick enough. They were disguised (Mead's fancy, I warrant) as members of the Ku-Klux-Klan; and besides their costume one bore a revolver, the other an air gun impounded from an apprentice. I was ordered out of bed, but wished to stop; we argued about it and by good luck I hung on. After this, insidious, they declared that a lady who knew me and wished to see me had come aboard. This flight of fancy and flow of language went on until they sought variety, which they found in painting the unfortunate Tich in the alley below in several colours.

The German police, green men and true, watched the ship closely. It was rumoured that a shipping clerk and a young woman had eloped and were aboard one of the tramps. "Love in a foc'sle," especially ours, was considered no bad joke.

One more home circle was held in the starboard alleyway towards midnight; gin very prevalent, and the steward also. He fell into a sequence of army recollections, which (as the glass was thrust replenished into his hand) began on this pattern, "Well, I'm telling you, Mister, at three in the afternoon of March the twelfth 1873, we was parading outside the Queen's pavilion...." Once more also Mead and myself made our way into Emden. The old nooks of buildings and the vistas of narrow thoroughfares and lazy waterways, the shops and the folk, all made a kindly picture; 187

after supper, we avoided a downpour of sleet in a café with an orchestra, whose repertory of 4,000 pieces included two by English composers, and his name was Sullivan. On our midnight way home, we stopped at a Dutchman's bar and asked for and got a dozen hard-boiled eggs for a second supper aboard. I was carrying a parcel in hand and two bottles, or rather gas-cylinders, of gin in the lining of my mackintosh when we reached the German sentry-box beside the Quay. He puffed at his pipe as he felt the parcel and saw that all was well.

The iron in the ship began to sweat great drops, and the walls of one's bunk glistened with damp. The glass was falling; the water of the basin no longer lay smooth as oil but beat against the ship grudgingly. In short, excellent Flanders weather ensued the old-established weather, guaranteed to cure rabid individuals of war cant after one hour's trial (unshelled) on sentry-go or at the ration dump. For the worst and even hopeless cases, half an hour's trial on the banks of the Steenbeck was confidently recommended—I was lucky now to have a roof leaking but little. Phillips showed me the one dry corner in his room—a portion of the settee about a foot square.

Hosea's wife joined us in the saloon, and not only by her genial presence itself merited our best thanks, but also by her influence on the steward. As if by magic, Ideal milk was added to our tinned pears (usually, apricots); and the jam changed to strawberry.

At length the elevators ceased from troubling, and the supervisors from dilating in *Platt Deutsch* over the damage in the bilges. The bosun's strangled noise timed the hoisting of the ship's boat, which had had a busy holiday, to its normal place. The little broker made his last appearance round the steward's precincts; and with the heaving up of the gangway, the arrival of the tugs, the return of the wireless aerial to its heights and the smoking funnel-it, no doubt, never looked better—we were ready to depart.

It was twilight when our ropes fore and aft were loosed from the dolphins, and the *Bonadventure* slowly moved into the lock. Here while the port authorities made a swift inspection for stowaways and concluded their arrangements, we stopped a time, listening to the odd mixture of noise from bleating of sheep and hooting of our whistle. Then we moved out to sea, not without bumping into the lock wall and gashing the bow. The air was intensely cold, and the iron frameworks against the last tinges of sunset and the red and white lights were now all there was to see of our port of discharge. That episode was over; after midnight, the ship stopped at Borkum to put down the pilot, and then, on again. My voyage was hurrying into memory.

XXXI

Short seas running and a squally wind abeam made the light ship jerk and roll. The early sun was hidden in the dull purple of a racing sleet-cloud, which passed over the *Bonadventure* and swept on to lash the dunes of Holland lying dim blue along the yellow horizon. The engines beat out a cheerful tattoo and sent the ship, wobbling as she went, at eleven knots through the green water. The wind grew westerly but not sisterly; the melancholy began to expatiate on the short text, "The Longships," but the profusion of fishing smacks out around us seemed to show that no tempestuous weather was at hand.

The next morning, a spiritual Beachy Head was glittering like crystal in the distance; while the head wind fell upon us, and momentarily a great thud like the impact of a great shell shook the ship's sizable frame and lifted her in see-saw style. I watched the south coast sliding by with as much excitement as if I had been coming home on leave again. Meacock was at his most picturesque with his reminiscences of a hard-case ship called the *Guildhall*, but I could not retain what he told me, with this distraction of English shores and skies about us. The general scene recorded itself; of all the magnificent evenings which my voyage had brought forth this was perhaps the nonpareil. The skies were of tumultuous colour, requiring one of the old Dutch masters to observe, let alone to reproduce. A bright brazen sun, throwing at his whim (as it were) his vesture of clouds about him, burnt out below a pavement of light ever seething with the leaping waves, and sometimes hidden, sometimes emerging, lit the sky astern to a tawny glow, or left it sullen as clay. Here, the horizon was an olive green, there, a blue girdle; ships in stippled blackness tilted this way and that against it, or nearer ploughed grey expanses; and above pillars and cliffs of rocky cloud lifted themselves enormously into a firmament purpled or kindled into wild flame.

So we hurtled along, the wind flawing, abeam, ahead. The great prow mounted high against the sunset, or thrust like the head of a porpoise down again into the onslaught of rolling waters. The hand on the lookout paced up and down the foc'sle head in loneliness, the officer on the bridge answered his call as ever, the seagulls followed the ship with their unvarying calm and pride of wing. Presently the fine light of Eddystone was our solace.

The last day of my pursership dawned, a day I welcomed and yet was sorry to find come. How swiftly it stole by! At seven that morning we were midway between the Longships lighthouse and that yet lonelier one the Wolf, with Land's End white with snow to feast the eye. The sun was a Jolly Bacchus, the waves dancing as green as the young leaves sacred to that god, and the happy porpoises ambled among them. Yet still, as we swung round the corner, in a veritable procession of funnels and smoke trails, a squall came down, heralded by a half-seen rainbow, threw us rudely off the poise and chilled the air to winter again. But round went the *Bonadventure* and

coasted beneath moors and tors sullenly green into the Bristol Channel.

The heavy rolling died away as we passed from the Cornish shore (where they are said to eat strangers), and my Emden chilblains felt the weather growing much warmer. Indeed, we had not had so mild a day since we left Las Palmas. Towards three we came abreast of Lundy Island's bluff, and Hartland opposite, a sturdy cliff likewise. The tide helped us well, but the wind was veering. Urged by those officers and engineers whose wives would be at Barry Docks this evening to greet them, and by his own wishes, the chief had promised to bring the *Bonadventure* to the tier in Barry Docks by seven.

Ilfracombe nestling happily under the moors was quickly passed; the *Bonadventure* could move when she had a mind; the mellow green country of Somerset parcelled in such English fashion with such straight hedgerows, faded astern. The coast of Wales revealed the twin lighthouses called the Nash Lights, and still the ship raced on. Then, as if before the time, we were entering the locks at Barry, in a smoky twilight, after an evening shower; were inside, and tied up to the tier.

Not much remains to add. The next day I scrambled down the rope ladder, and bade farewell to the *Bonadventure*, that "dirty ship," not unbeloved; and Mead came next. The boat below carried us to the quay, under the red hulls of ships gleaming with the light from the dancing ripples; then came paying off, a most unpunctual and irritating performance, and good-byes to the old friends, from Hosea to Kelly, of the last few months; and most of all, perhaps, to that gay spirit Mead. My good-bye to these might be, I hoped, no such final one; but my round trip was accomplished and I felt that for me "there would be no more sea," so that the actual signing off of the purser seemed to me a point in my life's course. Then presently, after a hearty last word with Mead—kind be the dog-watch stars to him, wherever his ship carry him—I departed; the last train for Slowe having, naturally, gone out, I made for the nearest town to Slowe, and finishing my journey part on foot, part on a borrowed bicycle, was enabled to awaken Mary while the rest of the parish of Staizley slept the sleep of the just.



*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BONADVENTURE: A RANDOM JOURNAL OF AN ATLANTIC HOLIDAY ***

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