

Supplement to The Post.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 17, 1879.

A ROMANCE OF MID-OCEAN.

[CONTINUED FROM FIRST PAGE.]

stood the former to say his employers had given him eight weeks to do it in. I should liked to have said that, had they added another two to that they would still have been imposing enough upon us all to keep us alive. But at this point I quitted the table, giving Coxon a bow as I rose, which he returned with a sort of half-ashamed stiffness, and repaired to my cabin to get my pipe for a half-hour's enjoyment of the beautiful autumn evening on deck.

I don't think tobacco has the same flavor ashore that it has at sea. Something in the salt air brings out the full richness and aroma of it. A few whiffs on the main deck came like oil on the agitation of my mind, ruffled by Coxon's impertinence and temper. I stepped on to the fore-castle to see that the riding lamps were all right and that there was a man on the lookout. The crew were in the fore-castle talking in subdued tones, and the hot air that came up through the fore-castle was intolerable as I passed it. I then regained the poop, and seated myself on the rail among the shadows of the backstays leading from the main royal and top-gallant masts.

The sun had gone down some time now, and only faint traces of daylight lowered in the westward. The light on the South Foreland emitted a most beautiful, clear and brilliant beam and diffused a broad area of misty radiance on the land around. The light-beacons were twinkling along the Goodwin Sands and pretty close at hand were the lights of Deal, a pale, fine constellation, which made the country all the darker for their presence. The moon would not rise until after nine, but the heavens were spangled with stars, some so lustrous that the calm sea mirrored them in cones of silver; and from time to time flashing shooting stars chased across the sky, and with their blue fires offered a peculiar contrast to the eye with the yellow and red lights on the dark water.

There was a little air moving from the southward, but so light as scarcely to be noticeable to any man but a sailor awaiting a change. The vessels at anchor near us loomed large in the starlit gloom that overspread the face of the sea. Lights flitted upon them; and the voices of men singing, the jingling of a concertina or a fiddle, the rumbling of yards lowered aboard some new-comers which could not be described, and now and again the measured splash of oars, were sounds which only served to give a deeper intensity to the solemn calm of the night.

The inmates of the cuddy still kept their seats and their voices came out through the open skylights. I heard Captain Coxon say:

"I should like to know what kind of a fellow they have given me for second mate. He strikes me as coming the gentleman a trifle, don't he, Duckling?"

To which the other replied, "He seems a civil-spoken young man, and up to his work. But I guess there's too much molasses mixed with his blood to suit my book. He wants a New Orleans training, as my old skipper used to say. Do you know what that means, sir? evidently addressing the pilot. "Well, it means a knife in your ribs when you're not disposed to hurry, and a knuckle-duster in the shape of a marlin-spike down your throat if you stop to argue."

The pilot laughed, and said, "Here's your health, sir. Men of your kind are wanted nowadays, sir."

It was plain from this speech that the pilot had exchanged his tea for something stronger. The captain here began to speak, but I couldn't catch his words, though I strained my ears, as I was anxious to gain all the insight I could into his character, that I might know how to shape my behavior.

I say this for a very weighty reason—I was entirely dependent on the profession I had adopted. I knew it was in the power of any captain I sailed with to injure me, and perhaps ruin my prospects. Everything in seafaring life depends upon reports and testimonials: and in these days, when the demand for officers is utterly disproportionate to the immense supply, owners are only too willing to listen to objections, and take any skipper's word as an excuse to decline your services or get rid of you.

Neither the captain nor Mr. Duckling appeared on deck again. The pilot came up shortly after one bell (half-past eight) and looked about him for a few minutes. The tide had swung the ship with her stern up Channel. He went and looked over the side, and then had a stare at Deal, but took no notice of me, whom he

could very plainly see, and returned below.

I lingered three-quarters of an hour on deck, during which time the little sigh of wind that had come from the south-west died out, and a most perfect calm fell. The larger stars burned with amazing brilliancy and power, and I thought it possible that the wind might go to the east-ward. This idea detained me on deck longer than I had meant to stop, as I thought it would do me no ill service if I should be the first to report a fair wind to the skipper, and show myself smart in getting the hands up. Perhaps the moon would bring a breeze with her, and as she rose twenty minutes past nine, I filled another pipe to await her coming.

As I struck a match, the steward came half-way up the poop-ladder to tell me that the sports were on the table.

"Did the captain see you?" I asked.

"No sir," he answered. "I thought I'd let you know; as they'll be cleared away after nine, and my orders are not to serve them again when once they're stowed away for the night. That's the captain's rule. "All right," said I. Another time I should have gone below and had my glass of grog; but I considered it my best policy to keep clear of Coxon until the temper that had been excited by my unfortunate production of the ship's biscuit was cooled down.

I took some turns along the deck, and shortly after nine one of the lamps in the cuddy was extinguished, and on looking through the skylight I found that three men had left the table. There was a man pacing to and fro the fore-castle, and I could just make out his figure against the stars which gleamed and throbbled right down to the horizon. The rest of the crew had evidently turned in, for I heard no voices; and now that the talking which had been going on in the cuddy no longer vexed the ear with rough accents, a profound silence and peace came down upon the ship. Around me the anchored vessels gloomed like phantoms; the sea unrolled its dark, unbreathing surface into the visionary distance; nothing sounded from the shore but the murmur of the summer surf upon the shingle. One might have said that the spirit of life had departed from the earth; that nothing lived but the stars, which looked down upon a scene so hapalpal and elusive as a dream.

At last up rose the moon. She made her coming apparent by paling the stars in the southern sky, then by projecting a white mist of light over the horizon. Anon her upper limb, red as fire, jetted upward, and the full orb, vast and feverish as the setting sun, sailed out of the sea, most slowly and solemnly, lifting with her a black mist that belted her like a circle of smoke; this vanished, and by degrees, perceptible to the eye, her color changed, the red chastened into pearl, her disk grew smaller, and soon she was well above the horizon, shining with a most clear and silvery splendor, and making the sea beneath her lustrous with mild light. But not a breath of air followed her coming. The ships in the Downs caught the new light, and their yards snowed like streaks of pearl against the light. The red lights of the Goodwin Sands dwindled before the pure, far-reaching radiance into mere floating sparks of fire. The heavens were cloudless, and the sea a wonderful calm. I might keep watch all night, and still have nothing to report; so, knocking the ashes out of my pipe, I descended the poop-ladder, and entered my cabin.

Chapter III.

I had slung a cot, although there was a good mahogany bunk in the cabin. No sensible person would sleep in a bunk at sea when he could swing in a hammock or cot. Suppose the bunk is athwart ship; when the vessel goes about you must shift your pillow; and very often she will go about in your watch below and catch you asleep so that when you wake you find your feet are in the air, and all the blood in your body in your head. When I first went to sea I slept in a thwart ship-bunk. The ship was taken aboard one night when I was asleep, and they came and roared, "All hands shorten sail!" down the booby-hatch. I heard the cry and tried to get out of my bed, but my head was jammed to leeward by the weight of my body, and I could not move. Had the ship foundered I should have gone to the bottom, in bed, helpless. Always after that I slept in a hammock.

The watch on deck had orders to call the captain if a change of wind came; also I knew that the pilot would be up, sniffing about, off and on, through the night; so I turned in pro-

perly and slept soundly until two; when, waking up, I drew on my small clothes and went on deck, where I found Duckling mousing about in the moonshine in a pair of yellow flannel drawers, he having like myself come up to see if any wind was stirring. He looked like a new kind of monkey in his tight white rig and immense head of hair. "No wind!" he muttered, in a sleepy grumble, and then went below with a run, nearly tumbling, in fact, head over heels down the companion-ladder.

I took a turn forward to see if the riding lights burned well, and the man on the lookout was awake. The decks were wet with dew, and the moon was now hanging over the South Foreland. The sky was still cloudless, and not a breath of air to be felt. This being the case, I went back to my cot.

When I next awoke, I found my cot violently swinging. I thought for the moment that we were under way and in a heavy sea; but on looking over I saw Mr. Duckling, who exclaimed, "Out with you, Mr. Royle! There's a good breeze from the east-wards. Look alive and call the boatswain to pipe all hands."

Hearing this, I was wide awake at once, and in a few minutes was making my way to the boatswain's cabin, a deck-house on the port side against the fore-castle. He and the carpenter were fast asleep in bunks placed one over the other. I laid hold of the boatswain's leg, which hung over the bunk—both he and the carpenter had turned in "all standing," as they say at sea—and shook it. His great brown hairy face came out of the bolster in which it was buried; he then threw over his other leg and sat upright.

"All hands, sir!" "Yes; look sharp, bosor." He was about to speak, but stopped short and said, "Ay, ay, sir;" whereupon I hurried aft.

"It was twenty minutes past five by the clock in the cuddy. The sun had risen half an hour, and was already warming the decks. But there was a fine breeze—not from the westward, as Duckling had said, but well to the northward of east,—which brought ripe, fresh morning smells from the land with it, and made the water run in little leaps of foam along the ship's side.

Captain Coxon and the pilot were both on the poop, and as I came up the former yelled out:

"Is the boatswain awake yet?" "Yes, sir," I answered, and dived into the cabin to finish dressing. I heard the boatswain's pipe sound, followed by the roar of his voice summoning the hands to weigh anchor. My station was on the fore-castle, and hither I went. But none of the hands had emerged as yet, the only man seen being the fellow on the look-out. All about us the onward-bound vessels were taking advantage of the wind; some of them were already standing away, others were sheeting home their canvas; the clanking of the windlasses was incessant, and several Deal boats were driving under their lugs among the shipping.

"Mr. Royle," cried out the captain, "jump below, will you, and see what those fellows are about."

I went to the fore-scuttle and peered into it, bawling "Below there!" "There's no use singing out," said a voice; "we don't mean to get the ship under way until you give us something fit to eat."

"Who was that who spoke?" I called. "Show yourself, my man."

A fellow came and stood under the fore-scuttle, and looking up, said in a bold, defiant way:

"I spoke—Bill Marling, able seaman."

"Am I to tell the captain that you refuse to turn to?"

"Ay; and tell him that we'd rather have six months of chokee than one mouthful of his d—d provisions," he answered, and immediately a lot of voices took up the theme, and as I left the fore-castle to deliver the message, I heard the men cursing and abusing us all violently, the foreigners particularly—the Portuguese and a Frenchman who was half a negro—swearing in the worst English words and in the worst English pronunciation, shrilly and fiercely.

Coxon pretty well knew what was coming. He and Duckling stood together on the poop, and I delivered the men's message from the quarter-deck.

Coxon was in a great rage, and quite pale with it. The expression on his face was really devilish. His lips became bloodless, and when he glanced his eyes around and saw the other ships taking advantage of the fine breeze and sailing away, he seemed deprived of speech. He had sense enough however with all his fury to know that in this case no good could

come from passion. He seized the brass rail with both hands and made a gesture with his head to signify that I should draw near.

"Who was the man who gave you that message, sir?"

"A fellow who called himself Bill Marling."

"Do they refuse to leave the fore-castle?"

"They refuse to get the ship under way."

"Is the boatswain disaffected?"

"No sir; but I fancy he knows the men's minds."

He turned to Mr. Duckling.

"If the boatswain is sound we four ought to be able to make the scoundrels turn to."

This was like suggesting a hand-to-hand fight—four against twelve, and Duckling had the sense to hold his tongue. The boatswain was standing near the long boat looking aft, and Coxon suddenly called to him, "Lead the men aft."

I now thought proper to get upon the poop; and in a short time the men came aft in twos and threes. They were thirteen in all, including the carpenter, four ordinary seamen, the cook and the cook's mate. The boatswain kept forward.

There was a captain just abaft the main-mast, and here the men assembled. There was not much in the situation to move one's gravity, and yet I could scarcely forbear smiling when I looked down upon their faces fraught with expressions so various in kind, though all denoting the same feelings. Some were regular old stagers, fellows who had been to sea all their lives, with great bare arms tattooed with crucifixes, bracelets, and other such devices, in canvas or blanket breeches, and dannel shirts, with the invariable belt and knife around their middle. Some, to judge from their clothes, had evidently signed articles in an almost destitute condition, their clothing being complete suits of patches, and their faces pale and thin. The foreigners were of course excessively dirty; and the "Portuguese" wonderfully ugly countenance was hardly improved by the stout silver ear-rings with which his long ears were ornamented.

The first movement of mirth in me, however, was but transient. Pity came uppermost in a few moments. I do think there is something touching in the simplicity of sailors, in the child-like way they go about to explain a grievance and get it redressed. They have few words and little experience outside the monotonous life they follow; they express themselves ill, are subdued by a harsh discipline on board, or by acts of cruelty which could not be tolerated in any kind of service ashore; the very negroes and savages of distant countries have more interest taken in them by the people of England than sailors, for whom scarcely a charity exists; the laws which deal with their insubordination are unnecessarily severe; and of the persons who are appointed to inquire into the causes of insubordination scarcely five in the hundred are qualified by experience, sympathy, or disinterestedness to do sailors justice.

Some such thoughts as these were in my mind as I stood watching the men on the quarter-deck.

Coxon, with his hands still clutching the rail said, "The boatswain has piped you out to get the ship under way. Do you refuse?"

The man named Bill Marling made a step forward. The men had evidently constituted him spokesman.

"We don't mean to work this here ship," said he, "until better food is put aboard. The biscuits are not fit for dogs; and I say that the pork stinks, and that the molasses is grits."

"That's the truth," said a voice; and the Portuguese nodded and gesticulated violently.

"You blackguards!" burst out the captain, losing all his self-control. "What do you know about food for dogs! You're not as good as dogs to know. Aren't you shipped out of filthy Ratcliffe Highway lodgings, where the ship's bread and meat and molasses would be eaten by you as d—d fine luxuries, you lubbers! Turn to at once and man the windlass, or I'll find a way to make you."

"We say," said the spokesman, pulling a biscuit out of his bosom and holding it up, "that we don't mean to work the ship until you give us better bread than this. It's moldy and full of weevils. Put the bread in the sun and see the worms crawl out of it."

"Will the skipper pitch the cuddy bread overboard and eat oorn?" demanded a voice.

"And the cuddy meat along with it," exclaimed a man, a short powerfully built fellow with a crisp black beard and woolly hair, holding up a

piece of pork on the blade of a knife. "Let Captain Coxon smell this."

The captain looked at them for a few moments with flashing eyes, then turned and walked right aft with Duckling. Here they were joined by the pilot, and a discussion took place among them that lasted some minutes. Meanwhile I paced to and fro athwart the poop. The men talked in low tones among themselves, but none of them seemed disposed to give in. For my own part, I fancied that though their complaint of the provisions was justifiable enough, it was advanced rather as a sound excuse for declining to sail with a skipper and chief mate whose behavior so far towards them was a very mild suggestion of the treatment they might expect when they should be fairly at sea, and in these two men's power. I heard my name mentioned among them, and one or two remarks made about me, but not uncomplimentary. The cook had probably told them that I was well-disposed, and I believe that some of them would have harangued me had I appeared willing to listen.

Presently Mr. Duckling left the captain and ordered the men to go forward. He then called the boatswain, and turning to me, said that I was to be left in charge of the ship with the pilot while he and the captain went ashore.

The boatswain came aft and got into the quarter-boat, which Duckling and I lowered; and I then towed her by her painter to the gangway, where Duckling and the captain got into her.

As no signal was hoisted, I was at a loss to conceive what course Captain Coxon proposed to adopt. Duckling and the boatswain each took an oar while Coxon steered, and away they went, souzing over the little waves which the fresh land breeze had set running along the water.

By this time all the onward-bound ships had got their anchors up, and were standing down Channel. Some of them which had got away smartly were well around the Foreland, and we were the only one of them all that still kept the ground. Captain Coxon's rage and disappointment were, of course, intelligible enough; for time to him was not only money, but credit—I mean that every day he could save in making the run to Valparaiso would improve him in his employers' estimation.

The men peered over the outworks at the departing boat, wondering what the skipper would do. There was a tide running to the southward, and they had to keep the boat heading toward Sandwich. Strong as the boatswain was, I could see what a much stronger oar Duckling pulled, by the way the boat's head swerved under his strokes.

I stood watching them for some time, and then joined the pilot, who had lighted a pipe and sat smoking on the taffrail. He gave me a civil nod, being well disposed enough, now that Coxon was not by, and made some remark about the awkwardness of the men refusing work when the breeze was so good.

"True," said I; "but I think you'll find that the magistrates will give it in their favor. There's some mistake about the ship's stores. Such bread as the men have had served out to them ought never to have been put on board, and the steward has owned to me that it's all alike."

"The captain don't intend to let it come before the magistrates," answered the pilot, with a wink, and pulling his pipe from his mouth to inspect the bowl. "He wants to be off, and means to telegraph for another crew and turn those fellows yonder adrift."

"Won't he ship some better provisions?"

"I don't know, sir. Perhaps he's satisfied that the provisions is good enough for the men, and perhaps he isn't. Leastways he'll not be persuaded contrarily to his belief."

"So, then, the police are to have nothing to do with this matter, and the stores will be retained for another crew?"

"That's as it may be."

"There will be a mutiny before we get to Valparaiso."

"Something'll happen I dare say." I not only considered the captain's behavior in this matter bad morally, but extremely impolitic. His motives were plain enough. The stores had been shipped as a cheap lot for the men to eat; and I dare say the understanding between Coxon and the owners was that the stores should not be changed. This view would account for his going on shore to telegraph for a new crew, since sending the old crew about their business would provide a cheaper issue than signalling for the police and bringing the offenders before the magistrates, and causing the vessel to be detained while inquiries

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