

Literature, &c.

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From Chambers' Edinburgh Journal.

A YARN OVER THE CAPSTAN, IN
THE SECOND DOG-WATCH.

(Continued from our last.)

Strangely enough, said he, 'I remember all this far more clearly than I do last voyage: the first voyage I made, too, is as fresh to me, while most of what has befallen me since is as confused as a bundle of rope-yarns, and I couldn't spin a story out of them that would hold together. I recollect, after we joined Tom Miles, my fellow-clerk, we set of at a pace as if all the town would have been after us in an hour's time; and by seven o'clock or so we were in a new country altogether. We bought some bread and warm milk for breakfast, although we kept away from the towns, lest people might suspect we were runaways by our appearance; and by the afternoon, having got into the spirit of the thing, we were all three quite happy. Miles and I were determined never to go back, though we had no idea what we should take to; for if we did go back, we had a chance not only of being fixed to the desk, which was certain, but of jail to the bargain, for breaking indentures. As for Ned we did not give him time to think of home, and he laughed and talked as much as either of us. At night however, when we were beginning to think of seeking out some shed or other to make ourselves comfortable in, we got a fright which we did not expect. It turned out that we were not so far from home as we thought, and we were sauntering along the public road, forgetful of our former caution, in the dusk, when I caught a glimpse of a man on horseback talking to a woman at the door of a house we had passed at the turning. I am not sure why, but the fancy came into my head of its being my step-brother sent after us. I gave the hint to my two companions, and we immediately scrambled through the hedge, and ran along behind it into a plantation farther on, where we concealed ourselves amongst the underwood. I could not stand the temptation to see him baffled though; so I crept near to the road, and looked through the fence just as he came galloping up. Sure enough it was he, and I can't forget the expression of his features, as I saw them in the dusk against the sky, when he fixed on his hat firmer, and went flying past, as if he was to catch us next minute. I do believe he would have half-killed me, at least, in his passion; I being particularly hateful to him I suppose, from my stubbornness when he domineered over me. We waited a while, expecting him to come back when he found he had missed us; but he did not; and thinking the coast quite clear, we had nearly fallen into a trap. We were quietly walking past the little public-house at the corner again, when our own old house-dog leapt out on Ned, barking for joy and jumping up about us. This would not have troubled us; but we were scarcely past when we heard a shout from the door, and saw one of our father's farm-servants, bareheaded, coming after us full speed, followed by the landlord. We fled, the dog keeping up, and, as it was almost dusk, had little fear of distancing our pursuers, when we were stopped by a gate, over which the other two were climbing, when John, my father's man, seized hold of me, though too much out of breath to speak. I struggled, but it was no use, when his companion came up and laid hold of me too. 'You may as well come, Mr Tom,' said the ploughman. 'I won't—let me go,' said I, renewing my efforts as I thought of my comrades, whom I supposed to be far off by this time. 'You can't get off at any rate,' said he; 'your father's firm on working the devil out of you; and he says you only want to go to sea to be a perfect 'un of a devil.' 'You'll never get me home,' I said; 'and I'll go to sea in spite of any one.'

John laughed at this, and so did his companion the publican; and they had shouldered me half high, to carry me off bodily, when I got hold of the gate, and suddenly Miles, who had been behind the hedge all the while, and was a quick fellow, swung it open against their legs with all its force. The two men stumbled and let me go, and I fell over, with the gate between. 'Run now, Tom,' cried Miles, and off we started again the men after us; but as we were more than their match at running, and the field led down to a shadowy hollow, they gave it up at last. For another hour we struck onward, and across a common, till we reached an old barn standing in a field alone by the side of a brook, where we made a bed of fern, and lay down together as happy as if we escaped a press-gang. How we enjoyed ourselves that night, talking over the adventure! We had turnips out of the field to eat and some apples, with a piece of bread; and we delighted in the very shifts we were put to. We soon fell asleep; but I remember I awoke in the night, and saw the white sky through the open door glimmering low beyond a hill, and Ned was sleeping as quietly as he had done in our little bed at home, with his fair hair tangled in the pieces of fern. I couldn't help thinking how his mother came in, before she went to her own room, to fasten the clothes about him, lest he should catch cold; and it smote me to the heart that I should be helping to lead him away, when she was perhaps at the very moment awake with anxiety about where he was. I was resolved to take the chance myself indeed the apprenticeship to the lawyer could not be undone; but I fell asleep

again, intending to ask Ned if he would go home. The bright morning and the cheerful country put it out of my head again, or, if I did think of it, I couldn't make up my mind to part from Ned. As long as he was with me I felt myself at home still, or all that was best of it. So we went on in the same way for another day, winding through the sequestered by paths, and coming out now and then at a farmhouse, where we got milk and bread for the asking, however surprised they looked at our wandering air. I noticed Ned rather duller as the second night drew on, but he said nothing. We took shelter in an open shed, where several carts put up, near a farmhouse, and found the straw and sacks more comfortable even than the fern. 'Tom,' said Miles to me, as we sat here eating our supper, and looking out, the late moonlight in which the country was spread far and wide, with a church tower and some house-tops peeping over the trees—'Tom, d'ye think it was such a bad idea that of your going to sea? What do you say, shall we all three go and try our fortunes in that line? We'd sail together of course?' Ned looked up and smiled, as if he thought it a good joke, but he saw me grave enough. 'Tom,' he whispered at last, 'shan't we go home now? Father won't say anything by this time you know; and mother'll be getting anxious. 'I'm not going home at all,' I said, and Ned burst into tears. 'Tom Miles,' said I, 'my brother Ned must go back, either by himself, or I must go with him. Could you find your way alone, Ned, my boy, or not?' 'Oh yes, Tom,' answered he. 'Let me go to my mother—I hate the sea, and I know mother would break her heart to think of it. I don't mind going back myself, if you won't come too.' 'Then you shall, as soon as we wake in the morning,' said I; 'so let's go to sleep.'

'Many a time I have blessed God that it was so; when I've been up on the royal yard alone in a squall, and the sails thundering about my head, with the yard perhaps swinging loose, and I could not get the brace hauled taut from below, in a dark night, where the sea was one sheet of foam, and the wind went through one like a blade of ice. Poor little Ned's fair face would have pined whiter and whiter under a sailor's life and his gentle heart would never have borne up against hard usage and hard words; for the sea isn't the best school for pity, save that a man who did his duty well is missed. For my part I was somewhat hardened by my father and my brother, and my nature was more obstinate. I never think of that parting without pain no words can tell. We went back two or three miles with Ned, gave him all our money but a shilling, and then bade him good bye at a sign-post; after which we struck out boldly for Plymouth, about twenty miles off. I may say it was a parting-place for all three. Ned grew to be a man, but I never saw him again save once, and shouldn't have known him; and now he's gone down into his grave before the time. Poor Tom Miles too!—it was a bad resolve for him; better had he gone back with Ned. We never parted, indeed till his hour of death, but it was a bitter death to die without a word of 'God speed,' and none to see it, though I was a little farther from him than I am from you two. He had no mother: it was well, or else the very thought of that moment, and the cruel months he had to go through before it under the treatment of a dog would have been sufficient to turn his brain at once I think.'

'Well, we got safe to Plymouth that night, and went straight down to a sailor's tavern on one of the quays, where we paid out our last coin for a couple of pots of beer, and some biscuit and cheese. There we contrived to strike an acquaintance with two seamen, Americans, as we found afterwards, who said they would soon help us to a berth, as their skipper wanted two smart boys to live with him in the cabin, and take a spell now and then at the wheel. That was all, they informed us, which we should have to do; though we soon discovered the difference. The Yankee captain was a long, dark man, with thin lips and huge black whiskers, and an eye which I never saw equalled for devilish meaning, when he looked at you quietly if there was anything the matter. We were so ignorant, however, and anxious to ship, that we noticed nothing more than his fair speeches, and got on board that very night. His brig was laying outside, having put in for a day or two from Liverpool to get a new topmast, in place of one she had lost in the Channel. I shall never forget my feeling and Miles's face when we first saw the Yankee captain on the quarter-deck in the morning, with his shore-going clothes changed, and his land way altered to his saltwater one. The men were beginning to warp the vessel clear of her berth and we were standing together uncertain what to do. His first words were, 'Now, then, you young whelps, see if you can't turn to and tail on to that line, or, by the powers, I'll give you your first taste of hemp-oil. I'm your man; I'll rasp your mother's shell off you, I'll haze you, and bring you down with a double-block purchase.' We both slunk forward, and took hold of the rope in terror; and if I ever had any fine notions about the sea, I may say that moment finished them. The whole of my life was clear to me at once: I saw what was coming; and, if I would have confessed it to myself, I wished I was even standing before my father, or perched on the high office-stool, so be that I had only a home at hand.

'We were soon standing down the Channel with a spanking breeze, but we hadn't even but time to look at the Lizard Point fading into the sky. Not a kind word had the captain for us now, though he plied them liberally to persuade us on ship-board. I daresay he was

so much the worse for being forced to do that before we were in his power. We had got rough jackets and trousers, and some red shirts, for our own clothes, at a slop-shop, and now we did our best to learn, and show the men we were willing, in order to make the easiest of it. At first they had treated us roughly, but as we fell into their ways, they grew kinder; though, as we had been surprised to find, we had to do all their dirty jobs, bring their food, and obey them like slaves. We were comparatively happy, however, in the fore-castle. On deck our lives were miserable: the captain used us like dogs, and so did his mate, who followed him in all things; only he was, if anything, not so bad. The men themselves hated them both bitterly; but whether because we were the only English hands, or just that we were boys, we were the chief objects of tyranny. Tom Miles in particular, the captain seemed to wreak his malice on, although Tom never once answered him a word. He rope's-ended him several times because the binnacle-lamp burnt ill, or went out, when it was the bad oil that was to blame; and he would keep him an hour aloft often after the watch was gone below at night till he was like to drop from the yard for want of sleep. Miles and I were not in the same watch, and the captain hated to see us together; but when we did contrive to speak at meals, or on a Sunday, or for a short time at night, the poor fellow, with tears in his eyes. 'Tom, I'm glad indeed we did not take little Ned with us; and I thanked God we had not. Oh, how he would talk of the fields and woods and say he had never noticed how sweet they were till now! Even the dull office and the cross attorney were beautiful in his eyes and mine also, although I cannot say I laid it all so much to the fault of the sea itself as he did. I had begun to take some pride in acquiring dexterity, and but for the captain, should have been cheerful enough; but Miles, while he went on as well as he could in the meantime, detested it altogether, and cherished it as his dearest hope to get back to the land, and never leave it more. His heart not being in it, this kept him always back, and he was the worse off for it. At other times a gloomy fit would come over him, and he would shake his head, and say, 'I don't think I shall ever see the land again: I feel as if that tyrant cowed my spirit so, that I loose hope. The sea has got hold of me, Tom, and I know in my sleep that it'll keep me forever. Wasn't it so pleasant, Tom, going out in the mornings to shoot the wild-ducks, or up to the old castle, where the trees were so full of rooks? It wasn't so bad that old office neither, after all.' However, long as the hateful imprisonment seemed, and bad weather as we had across the Atlantic, in about eight weeks we got into the gulf-stream, saw the coast of Cuba, and the blue peaks beyond it, and at length ran through the Gulf of Mexico into Mobile. We had little more of land than to see it, for the captain made us live on board, and let only one of us away at a time, lest we should give him the slip. In a month we left Mobile with the same crew, for the long voyage round Cape Horn to Lima.

'The old system of ill-usage began again, chiefly to Tom Miles at first, though I had my share of it, and afterwards all on board began to murmur, when the length of the voyage was added to it. But the captain was a strong man himself: the mate was with him at least; and he took care to let all know that he had six pair of loaded pistols always at hand. One day, while we were still in the trade-winds, and the fine weather gave him nothing to vent his bile on, he got into one of his worst moods with Miles, watched him for a pretext, and whenever he had it, he knocked him down, kicked him, and treated him so brutally, that I was only held back by the cook from rushing aft and striking him.

'He'd flog you within an inch of your life,' said one of the men; but I saw, as my poor friend came slowly forward, that they felt it, and only wanted a little more to make them turn upon the villain with a vengeance. There was an elderly man, a Norwegian, amongst the foremast men, whom the captain hated too, though he was the best and most experienced seaman in the brig. I observed him start when he saw Miles fall, and his dark eye glittered for a moment as if he would have sprung upon the captain, he being at work on the mizzen shrouds at the time.

'I remember it was soon after this that the rough Cape weather began to come; and when it did we had it dreadful. For many weeks we had not a dry stitch of clothes, and scarce could get our food cooked. The topgallant sails were never loosed. We got out of it at last though: the royal masts were sent up, the gallant sails loosed and sheeted home, jib set and the last reef of the two topsails shaken out. We stood westward on a wind all that day, the sea going down round us with a long roll in the pale yellow sky, when we went below at eight bells of the first night-watch, and we were glad to have seen the sun set once more. When we came on deck in the middle watch, however, it was beginning to look black again to the windward. The captain was standing at the hatch of the half-deck, where Miles and I had our hammocks slung then, when I came up the ladder alone. 'Where's Miles?' said he to me fiercely. 'He's very unwell, sir,' said I, 'and hasn't been out of his hammock all day.' 'Call him up, d'ye hear,' shouted the captain; 'call him up this moment I won't have no skulkers on board. I'll doctor the lubber, call him up.' Miles put on his trousers, trembling with fear, and came on deck; but the poor lad could scarcely stand for weakness, and the wind seemed to go through

him, till I heard his teeth chatter in his head. In a short time the captain turned round from the weather gunwale, where he had been watching the cloud gather, and looked for a moment at the compass. The squall was coming down fast upon us, sure enough, and a long white line ran through the sky, above the black edge of the sea in the distance. 'Stand by let go the to'gallant halliards,' cried he to the men: 'let go both; brace round the yards; clue up the to'gallant sails. Go aloft you two boys, and furl the fore to'gallant sail.' I sprang into the weather shrouds; Miles lingered for a moment; the captain looked at him, and he followed me as fast as he could. It was dark as pitch; the wind was upon us, like to blow one out of the rigging; and the sea had risen into mountains before the brig had time to rush on as she would. Her fore-castle was washed clean at every pitch, and all who remained below were back on the poop. I was glad they had hauled the braces taut, so that the yard kept steady. I heard Miles's breath behind me, and told him to go out on the starboard yard-arm; for I could not see him, it was so dark, and he only heard me shouting at his ear.

As for windward and leeward, the vessel rolled so much, though slowly, that now one end of the yard and now the other, was uppermost, and getting hold of the sail I felt myself leaning out above the boiling sea far underneath. I had got my part of the sail fast and held on, waiting for Miles with his, as I knew, by it's not flapping, that he had mastered it. I thought he was long of coming into he mast again, however, and I leant down straining my eye to see if I could see his figure. A horrible fear crept into my heart: it was in vain to look where there was no light to see him again; until one little faint patch of white came out for a moment on the sky, and I knew the yard-arm lifting against that would show me what he was doing. It rose up slowly. I thought that interval an age; but oh, who can tell my pang when, as the yard-arm crossed that streak of light for an instant, I saw its dark end bare—bare as the sky itself; and the sail broke anew, and flapped in the wind, as if he had just gone! Poor Tom Miles! the sea had a hold of him—a strong hold indeed; and afterwards I thought of his own saying, and of the night when he and Ned and I sat purposing what we should do. It was with a heavy heart I made the sail fast again after a fashion, and got down on deck, scarcely caring whether I went with him or not.

[To be Concluded.]

From Hogg's Instructor.

THE OCEAN.

THOUGH different parts of the large body of fluid matter on the surface of the globe are, for the sake of convenience; distinguished by different names, it is, properly speaking, a continuous mass, interrupted by continents, islands, and promontories. The ocean is computed to cover about three-fourths of our planet. It is chiefly remarkable, how unequally it stretches round the land which forms only one-fourth of the terraqueous whole. This is very observable on rectifying a common terrestrial globe for London, which is easily done by nothing the latitude of London, and raising the pole as far above the horizon as London is distant from the equator, and then bringing London to the meridian. It appears that all the land, with the exception of New Holland and a small part of South America, is above the horizon. When the globe is in this position, London is the pole, or, what may be better understood, if the northern hemisphere were projected on a map, London would be the centre, and consequently it is the centre of almost all the land of the globe. Every person is ready to admit that Britain's greatness is in no small degree owing to its insular situation; but does not the fact of its central position impress the mind with something like conviction, that as it seems best adapted for being the focus of commercial enterprise, so it must be destined to become the radiant point whence is to proceed the light which will one day pierce the dread darkness of superstition and idolatry? The distribution of land and water appears to be no less unequal, if we consider the arrangement in the northern and southern hemispheres formed by the equator, as fully three-fourths of the land is in the north, and scarcely one-fourth in the south. A knowledge of this fact led many about the middle of last century to conclude, that there must be a great extent of land towards the south pole, in order to counterbalance that in the north. It has been proved by the voyages of Cook and others, that such is not the case, and that in high southern latitudes there are only a few islands. As it is impossible to ascertain correctly the general depth of the ocean, so it is extremely difficult to find its exact depth in any particular place. In consequence of the under currents and increasing density of the water, no lead can be made so heavy as to sound beyond a certain depth. It is believed that the bed of the ocean very much resembles the land in inequalities of surface, and that it also consists of hills and valleys. The depth of the sea along the coast generally corresponds with the height of the shore; where the land is high and rocky the sea is found to be deep, and shallow where the other is low and level. Accordingly, from analogy, it has been supposed, that as the highest mountains extend to a height of nearly thirty thousand feet, the extreme depth of the sea may not be less than four or five miles. Scoresby states that, in the North Sea, he sounded 7200 feet, and this is the most that