

Literature, &c.

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FOR AUGUST.

From Hogg's Instructor.

TOM BENSON'S NOTES.

A BRUSH WITH A PIRATE.

It matters not why I went to sea, and it is almost as immaterial to say when, but to sea I did go like many foolish lads, and like the majority of those who have been guilty of the same folly I have paid for it. It is true that I have seen the world, but I have also felt it, and the one advantage has been more than overbalanced by the counter accident. I know the temperature of the waters of Cape Horn, and my body has had several experiences of the indurate character of the rocks of Penguin Island. I have crossed the line in a fever, and have sailed from Pernambuco to Havre upon nothing but salt rations, although loaded with a full cargo of scurvy; I have felt the edge of a New Orleans Bowie-knife, and I have had my pockets picked on the Rialta of Lisbon; I have been bled for puerisy in Liverpool, and I have had a tooth extracted in Canton; I have knocked down a lazy lascar in Calcutta, and I have been knocked down by an Irishman's shillelagh on the quay of Dublin. The alternations of climate and aspect are familiar to me, from the wild luxuriance of the palm clad shores of Cuba to the bare and gloomy promontory of Terra del Fuego. I have been in the California high trade, where work was more familiar than eatable junk, and I have packed spices in Batavia while cholera was creeping into the bedchamber of the proudest mynneers on the island; and lastly, I have been rated carpenter, and have worn a stripe, on board of a man of war. I have always managed to keep myself in burgo, and to be passably rigged, but the savings of eighteen years are either in Davy Jones's locker, or clanking in the purse of old Isaac Solomons in Liverpool, and all that is chalked up on my side of the log, after a lifetime of toil and danger, is a few pages of experience.

When I was a boy at school, I used to read of a Greek called Alcibiades, who was blessed with a wonderful aptitude for adaptation. I have often thought since that time that he must have been a sailor, and I have no doubt that, if I had time to study his history in the original, I should find that he often had grasped a cewline. I have always been remarkable myself for a certain facility of adaptation, which has been of infinite advantage to me. When castaway on the shores of Patagonia, and constrained to live on penguins' livers, I shipped a good cargo of fat while my companions sickened and died, poor fellows. I was esteemed by all the Portuguese loafers in Pernambuco, from having merely muttered the word *agudente* and thrown a few rials among them, and with the French-Canadians I was once likely to have been made a leader of rebellion from giving a few cuts in the air with a walking-stick, and grimacing. I felt quite at home, then, when after shipping my tool-chest and sloop-box, and examining the den which was dignified with the name of my cabin, I went on deck in order to become visually acquainted with the men with whom I was to sojourn on the deep for three succeeding years. The United States frigate Ohio was one of the most beautiful and handy crafts that ever sailed reefed topsail on board of, and as she lay in the bay, with the sun-beams streaming over her clear and brightly painted spars and symmetrical spars, veined and arteried by span new cordage, and her pure white sails reefed and tightly brailed to the yards, I thought the good folks of Boston might will come dancing round her in their gigs and yachts and seem loathe to leave her. There was a smile on the face of the commander, as he cast his little grey eyes over every part of the vessel that denoted perfect satisfaction, and it seemed quite evident that he was wondering what the foreign captains would think when he came amongst them, with his taut and peerless frigate. There had been considerable handsome Yankee frigates in the Mediterranean already, it is true, but the Ohio hadn't been, and all the creation could not fix her, no how. The beautiful trim of our really gallant bark made my duties easy; it is true that the lieutenants were always having alterations in their berths, which my mates executed, and as I had nothing to do 'aloft,' and as little 'alow,' I spent my time while crossing the Atlantic, principally in tattooing the 'greenhorns,' and teaching the 'reefers' sword play. My superior intelligence (pardon gentle reader) and my excellence at handling a cutlass, were the means of ingratiating me with the officers, and although the fat burly old commander would familiarly call me 'Chips,' and rate me soundly when he saw fit, yet, from the first lieutenant to the junior mid, I was always called Benson or Mr. Benson, and treated with something like respect. Our crew of four hundred sturdy fellows was composed of all maritime nations, and it was nothing rare to hear Danish, Dutch, and French, together with English talk in the same mess. It is wonderful how powerful the principle of affinity is on board a ship; we were not three days at sea until Scotchman had discovered Scot, the Connemara fisherman clasped hands with an old Mayo wrecker, and a Rotterdam boatman had found a countryman in a weatherbeaten tar of Nantucket whose father belonged to the Hague. Friendships were soon contracted, and the Babel that might have been anticipa-

ted from such a seemingly incongruous assemblage of men was quickly transmuted into a concentration of clubs.

We began our cruise in the Mediterranean on the 14th of May, 184—, having passed the commodore's inspection at Gibraltar on the 13th, and landed a little bustling official called consul beneath the yawning embrasures of the impregnable pillars of Hercules. Captain Van Worres seemed to consider it the principal part of his duty, for the first few weeks of European service, merely to visit the ports of the Mediterranean and show off his frigate. We gazed upon the towers of Algiers and the minarets of Tunis and Barca, and exchanged salutes with the crack crafts of England and France. Many of our shipmates felt for the first time the effects of the enervating sirocco, and learned to speculate on carpentry, by contrasting our frigate with the feluccas which crawled like snakes along the Moorish coast, with their patched particoloured swallow-tailed sails, and their cargoes of fish and corn; and I now gazed for the first time upon the flames of Stromboli, which sailors call the lighthouse of the Mediterranean, and feasted my eyes on the magnificent scenery of the Bay of Naples. They say that a Newcastle grindstone and a Scotchman are all over the world, and I think they may add a consul, for we never visited a port but the 'old man' manned his gig and pulled ashore to have a talk with one of them long shore gentry. It was after a parley with the American consul at Naples, that old Van Worres came on board with a norwester in his fat cheeks, a thunder storm in his gaze, and lightning in his eyes. The capstan was shortly after manned, and we stood out to sea, and then it began to circulate among the officers and crew that a merchant brig called the Ann Bradshaw, of Boston, had been boarded by a pirate schooner, on her passage from Smyrna, and her crew murdered; the daring buccaneers plying their trade with impunity on account of the weakness of the Greek and Turkish mariners, and their knowledge of the hiding places in the Archipelago.

The old man had riled up considerable when he had been informed of this circumstance; the flag of his country had been dishonoured, and the malevolent might by implication construe this courage to his disadvantage, so that from patriotic and personal considerations, two most important ones to a citizen of our free republic, he felt very wofish, and stumped along the quarter deck like a large jar full of lightning. Every ship we hailed added to his ire, for it had something to say concerning the buccaneers; one had passed within a few knots of a Levantine trader, running large before the wind, and rocking like a Mississippi dugout in the trough of the sea, without a hand to guide her; a Greek prow had seen the keel of a large ship two days after leaving Yanina for Corinth, and a steamer from the Black Sea informed us, that a low, black hulled, thievish looking schooner had kept in her wake during a whole night, but finding that she carried caronades and a strong crew she had reluctantly sheered off. All the information we received only tended to quicken the appetite of our captain, and to heighten the anxiety of all on board; and assuredly the beauty and trim of our frigate were soon sacrificed to considerations of capture. Every disguise that paint and ingenuity could devise was laid upon our floating home; and bales and other adjuncts of a merchantman were piled upon the deck. We entered in this trim the classic Aegean, and passed, on our seeming mission of peace, many of the arid and rocky Isles that dot its sunny waters, but neither pirate nor sleepy Greek seemed to notice us. I had seen the famous Island of Lemaos, and the calcareous shores of Antiparos, and had looked for the twentieth time on the gorgeous sunset of the Mediterranean, but all other causes for excitement were now dying away, and I turned into my berth with perfect indifference as we left the waters of the Archipelago, for the green surges of its mother sea.

'Wheep, wheep, wheep—thump, thump, thump! Turn out, you lubbers—tumble up, tumble up!'

In an instant the dull hole was full of active men. The long deep breathing and sonorous snoring which a moment before had alone broken the silence below, was now exchanged for the hurried exclamations of men, who thrust themselves rapidly into their garments and scrambled up the companion ladders as thick as bees. The night was one of the most magnificently beautiful I had seen in any latitude. The full moon was smiling aloft like a new dollar, and the distant shores to leeward loomed in distinct outlines. When the men had taken their stations, and I had got fixed in the starboard chains, I soon perceived the cause of our turn out. On the quarter-deck, and surrounded by marines, stood a group of picturesque-looking men, whom I took to be Greek sailors, until I perceived that their hands were bound, and that they maintained a dogged silence the interrogatory of the captain. 'You are in the wrong craft, my messmates,' said I, as I became alive to their character, and at last I discovered a low black-hulled schooner, whose spars and rigging were jiggling to the tune of the long caronade which was ever anon brought to bear on her as she was running on a dead track before our gallant ship. She did not forget to return our salutes, however, but kept answering our shot in a manner that kept me and my mates in active employment for hours. I believe that old Van Worres could have pistolled the boat's crew we had captured himself, as they grimly smiled at our protracted chase, and calmly contemplated the fate

of their craft, which they seemed certain would escape, despite the condition of her rigging, which prevented her from rapidly tacking, and the manifest disadvantage she had in position. She had neither the creeks nor the rocky caverns of Scio to afford an asylum for her crew now, and the bulldogs of England kept too good watch for her safety by the Ionian shores.

Nine days and nights we followed in her wake without changing our relative positions, until at last we brought her to in the Bay of Tunis, where the loss of her mainmast and a dead calm held her as firmly to her station as ever the bower anchor on a muddy bottom could have done.

'Boarders away!' shouted the old commander, in a voice that he had been keeping up for the nine days, as if he intended to give it nine voices power at last; and the sound had scarcely left his lips when officers were at their stations in the boats, and the crews tumbling into them armed to the teeth.

My station was in the chains, and all that I could do was to gaze upon the prize and bite my lips to cool the excitement which I insensibly felt agitating every nerve in my frame. There is a fascination in adventurous danger which those who have never felt it can hardly estimate. My comrades were taking their positions in the burge, which the first lieutenant commanded, and he with a flushed cheek and beaming eye, was giving orders with a calmness that almost maddened me, as I hung from the ships side holding on by the chains and looking into the boat at my feet, which was soon to push off leaving me to excited inaction. I believe that Mr. Bates saw the struggle of my feelings in my face, and was unable to resist the appeal which my eyes made when they met his, for without apparent thought, he exclaimed 'tumble in, Benson,' and in less than a minute I was beside him armed only with a cutlass, and the burge, in company with six other boats was pulling towards the schooner. Ah! she was an ugly alligator looking thing, with her low dark hull and black tapering spars, and every man felt it would be a work of retributive justice to raze her wicked proportions to the keel. Every boat had her allotted quarter by which to board. And our Rhode Island coxwain had hardly fixed his boathook in her larboard bow, when I, all impatience, clambered up her sides with the first lieutenant and his sea dogs at my back. It was the work of a moment to throw my leg over the bulwark, and to gather myself together for a leap on her deck, but before I had time to execute this preliminary manoeuvre, a pistol bullet had grazed my skull, my awkward guard was beaten down by a fierce, black bearded pirate, and I fell forward insensible as the yells of my infuriated comrades died on my ears.

When I recovered from my stupor and opened my eyes, the first impulse that actuated me was to spring to my feet, but I seemed to be battered to the deck by some superincumbent weight, from which a warm fluid was welling and soaking into my clothes. By an almost expiring effort I managed to throw the burden off my shoulders, and stagger to my feet, when the corpse of the fellow who had cut me down and the slashed and torn hat I had worn, met my eye at the same moment, recalling me to thought and action. Our people had driven the enemy forward, and both were plying the work of death with furious energy. The bodies of several already strewed the deck, and the blood was gushing out of the lee scuppers and tinging the peaceful waters of the bay. I did not moralise then, however, for battle is not the place in which morality may germinate. I felt thirsty for water, but as that I could not have I grew wofish for blood. Only three boats' crews had yet boarded, and as there was still a great disparity of numbers to our disadvantage, the fight was protracted with the expiring fury of despairing tigers. I rushed madly forward amongst our men, and shouting furiously, singled out a foe.

I stand six feet one in my stockings, and was reckoned the crack fencer in Annapolis, so that I felt pretty confident of my man; but I found the blood which was flowing from my left eye and down my cheek was likely to deprive me of seeing Anapolis or Baltimore again. My antagonist made his cutlass whisk about my ears like a streak of lightning, & as it hissed like a serpent with the rapidity of its motion, I believed it charged with poison, as I parried each stroke and slowly retired before the scoundrel who so gallantly wielded it. 'Good-by, Tom Benson,' I muttered, as my back struck the capstan, further retreat was vain, 'this rascal will soon finish you now.' Determined to defend myself to the last, I continued to ward off his furious blows, until with a gush of hope and joy I remarked that his strokes began to fall less thick and far more feebly than at first. I made a feint, he threw up his guard, and my anxieties for my safety were soon dispelled. I was scarcely freed from my antagonist when the remaining boats' crews threw themselves over the starboard bulwark and rushed shouting forward, but they were only in time to behold some of the pirates throw themselves into the sea, while about forty threw their arms and squatted in a circle on the bloody deck.

I have seldom looked upon a band of so heartless looking men. They wore white peaked caps with the black skull and cross bones, like a phylactery, in front, and their beards and mustaches were of unusual length in all except one lad, who looked with a longing, sorrowful expression at our first lieutenant, which subsequent events taught me to comprehend too well. Their wide white trousers were bound round their waists by red sashes, and

their striped shirts hung in shipshape, loosely and gracefully from their shoulders.

'Which of you is commander here?' said Mr. Bates, in a stern voice; but his eye rolled round the silent circle without eliciting an answer. The same question was put in French and received silence. 'Here, Diego,' he shouted to one of our crew, whose fine form and graceful head and neck were an honour to his Andalusian race, 'ask these rascals in Spanish to point out their chief.'

The young man obeyed with no better success than his officer, whose lip at last began to curl with angry impatience, and he turned to our Rhode Island coxwain, exclaiming, 'Patison!'

'Ay, ay, sir,' said the cool, hardy New-Englander.

'Cock your pistol and put it to this man's ear,' and he singled out the largest and fiercest-looking of the band; and if he or any man moves shoot him.'

We found specie and rich merchandize to a large amount, and what seemed strange to me, a canary-bird in the cabin. Ladies' apparel lay about in sundry places and the multitudinous and diverse articles which were stored in coffers too well attested the character of our capture. Everything of value was shortly transferred to the frigate, and the prisoners and their vessel conveyed to Cadiz, where they were delivered up to the civil authorities. The youth whom I had previously observed, on coming on board the frigate, declared himself to be a Scotchman, a native of Glasgow, named M'Lean, and that to save his life he had joined the pirates a month before, when they had boarded his ship on her way to Smyrna. But, alas! the hour of reparation was past: he had been taken in arms and had maintained an unavailing silence when questioned by our lieutenant, and he, too, I saw suspended on a pole on the beach within high-water mark, that mariners might behold him as they passed—a warning against piracy.

Should it concern the reader to know more of my history, there remains little to be added, except that, though comparatively a young man, with a hulk nothing the better for the shivering which it has undergone, I have managed to get spliced, and although still retaining a partiality for sea-port towns, and a glimpse through a telescope at the craft nobly breasting the 'deep blue sea,' I have bid adieu to it for ever, and in order to compensate for the time lost on the raging deep, I am now lending a hand in the transport of land-labbers from one portion of the kingdom to another. I have heard many a yarn, but from having, unfortunately for myself, been always fonder of acting than speaking, I never could do anything in the spinning of one, and in the foregoing narrative have confined myself to what actually occurred.

From Simmonds' Switzerland.

INUNDATION OF THE VALLEY
OF BAGNE.

THE valley of Bagne, long, narrow, unequal breadth, and confined by high mountains, is situated in the canton of Valais, on the left side of the Rhone, and it is remarked of the simple and industrious race who inhabit it, that for a century past there has not been punishable crime committed among them, nor even a law-suit. The torrent of the Dranse, issuing from the glacier of Chermontane, at the upper extremity of this valley, forms one of the outlets of the series of glaciers forty leagues in length, which extend from Mont Blanc to the resources of the Rhone; almost dry in winter, it becomes swollen during the spring by the melting of the snow. The people of the valley, surprised to see it so low during the month of April last, and expecting something extraordinary, ascended to its source, and found that an unusual quantity of ice, fallen from the glaciers of the Getroz, on Mount Plereur, blocked up the valley, and that the waters of the Dranse, accumulated behind this dyke, already formed a large lake. Upon their report, the alarm was spread, not only throughout the canton of the Valais, but even in Italy; travellers feared to take the route of the Simplon, being aware that when the ice gave way there would be a sudden inundation which would overflow the whole country. The government sent an engineer, who found that the dyke across the valley was six or seven hundred feet in length, our hundred feet high, and six thousand feet broad at its base; the lake was seven thousand two hundred feet in length, and six hundred in breadth, and had already risen to half the height of the dyke, that is, two hundred feet. He decided upon opening a gallery through the ice, beginning 54 feet above the actual level, to give himself time to finish the work before the lake rose up to it; its daily increase being from four to five feet, according to the temperature. On the 11th of May he began to work at the two extremities of the gallery; 50 men, relieving each other alternately, laboured night and day, in continual danger of being buried alive in their gallery by some of the avalanches, which fell at short intervals; several were wounded by pieces of ice, others had their feet frozen, and the ice was so hard as to break their tools. But, notwithstanding all these difficulties, the work advanced rapidly. On the 27th of May, a large portion of the dyke rose upwards, with such a frightful noise, that the workmen believed the whole was giving way, and fled precipitately, but soon returned to their labour. This accident happened several times afterwards; some of the floating pieces of ice, to judge from their height out of the water, must have been seventy feet thick beneath the sur-