

Other Voices



XXIII OTHER VOICES; THE SEA AS RELIGION.

Subsequent to the trial by fire as a Tin Soldier Enlisted in The Conquest of Death, and as alternative to living as a totally Existential being, I had somewhere along the way become imbued with a longing for the selfsame Sea. While spiritually equipped to seek other alternatives to a Living Death, chained, so to speak, to the 'without' (that outside of ourselvesness), I lacked in specific knowledge, and in a seeming necessary training; and having arrived late in the game, I had missed out on the reality and purpose of the involvement, but no less anxious to try my hand at so-seeming a rewarding experience.

What follows, in this variation in vicarious religious experience, are borrowed plumes with little intent of piracy, from others who have taken the time to set forth some of themselves in a way that has appealed to, and inspired me. It is my hope they will find such company amongst themselves as to echo and re-echo thine

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theme. As prelude to some excerpts, I would relate an anecdote regarding the procurement of a particular sea-tale, and as introduction to these Other Voices would propose the Sea As Religion, offering them as Apostles of this selfsame penultimate pursuit, Omega claiming the very last.

I had just finished eating lunch, was tidying-up the house, involved in the droning and monotony of the vacuum cleaner, sort of hypnomesmerized (as I am quite often when using machinery, its droning pedal point somehow awakening strange associations within me), stepping outside momentarily to worry the cat hairs off the door mat with the sucking brush, when I recalled the last person to appear at the threshold - the last person several times consecutively, without another person, besides myself and the animals, to break the spell. It was she, a delivery lady from the Parcel Service; she who has brought to the door, from the great outside world to this cloister, things nautical. Then I remembered, soon a book would be coming by mail, a nautical book that had been recommended to me some two or three years earlier by a friend. Somehow I had been frustrated in even obtaining so much as a glimpse at this elusive publication. I had wondered to myself, 'if this is such a fine work of nautical art, why had it not been republished, why did not the local libraries possess a copy for the general enlightenment?' After all, some 'pretty poor stuff' gets passed off as sea-stories these days; I don't care how fraught with danger they may be. Perhaps this particular book was in high demand after all, but only by a limited number of nautical buffs creating some kind of scarcity, nonetheless, for the extant number published. Everywhere I tried: the libraries, the bookstores; not even as much as the author's name. Finally I availed myself of the University Bookstore's Antiquarian Search, without as much as a reply. Finally I started responding to each of the Nautical Bookstore adds appearing in the different sea-oriented publications that entered the portals of our cloister-home. The first of these advertised copies of the very publication; at least now I was convinced of its reality; I placed an order, and as luck would have it, the bookstore returned my money - SOLD OUT. Popular, indeed!

Then, unknown to me at the time, I had read an excerpt of that selfsame opus, but under another title. As a consequence, at least the author now possessed a two-dimensionality on the printed page. I even Xeroxed (Oh, heinous of crimes, a sacrilege for the purported writer; Xerox CORP[us] is makin' all the moola) a copy of the excerpt to send to the person who first recommended the author, wondering if he had heard of this other publication.

On the second try at the Nautical Sources, another

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bookseller claimed he knew of the nautical work, but also claimed it was published in the U.S.A. under a different title. Well, I didn't believe him, because my friend, to whom I had sent the Xerox copy hadn't mentioned these two were one and the same. Then, from a third Nautical Bookseller came a prompt reply, accompanied with a price quote, for this second (different) title, informing me that it had been published in England under the title I had requested.

Well now - two booksellers against one mum friend; whom should I believe? I began to make certain assumptions: that booksellers are in the business of promoting the sale of books; friends may or may not be in the business of promoting anything, i.e. my friend may have known, but wanted to spare me the 'embarrassment' of having my lack of knowledge exposed; my friend also may not have cared one way or another.

This third bookseller was quoting a price double that of the first bookseller, the one who didn't have any by the time he received my order. Its true, the first bookseller was marketing a later edition that had been printed abroad. Well I wasn't 'into' collecting books - at any price (whatever the market would bear), although I have many books on my shelves; I just desired to read the story, finding that purchasing a copy was perhaps the simplest method of achieving my aim - with 'pride of ownership' added into the bargain.

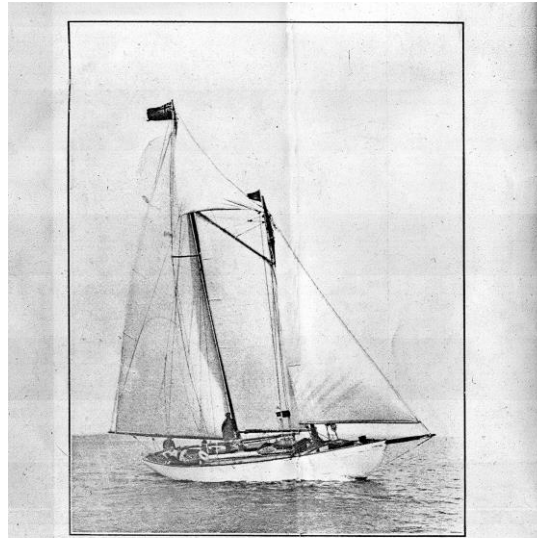
I haven't revealed until now this mysterious publication for I wanted you to do some guessing. Perhaps you too have searched. The fellow who recommended the book supplied the title of "The Southseaman", by Weston Martyr, associating this sea-tale with Yachting Magazine. I made a note of the title, beginning a leisurely search. Then in browsing through Eric Hiscock's 'Cruising Under Sail', I observed listed: 'The Southseaman' by Weston Martyr published by Hart Davis. Although confirming its existence, my search proceeded without success. Then it occurred, chronologically, I noticed, in an anthology of Yachting Magazine sea stories, titled the "Sea Chest", the name of Weston Martyr, as author of "The "Perfect Ship", an excerpt which I read hungrily and greedily. This is the story I had enjoyed so much I had Xeroxed it to send to my odd friend.

The search continued, and now I believe the mystery is solved and resolved, as I believe the assertions of the third bookseller, and eagerly await the delivery of the originally published title "The Perfect Ship" and 'How We Built Her' by Weston Martyr, published by Ives Washburn, New York 1928.

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I ought not reveal the bookseller, nor ought I reveal what the book is costing me; it ought be something private between the bookseller and me, what a willing buyer (sucker) will pay a willing seller (playing his catch) or what I have already characterized as 'whatever the market will bear'.

I expect I shall thoroughly enjoy the story basing this feeling on what I have already gleaned from the anthology. I have paid as much money for other more ostentatious and pretentious nautical books not enjoying them nearly as much as I anticipate the enjoyment of the "Perfect Ship" alias "The Southseaman".



This is the SOUTHSEAMAN. This book was later published in England and called THE SOUTHSEAMAN. I have this one copy with some binding cwear but fairly good. The price is \$28.00 postpaid & insured. You forgot to enclose the \$1.00 check for the catalog. Should you buy the book I will be glad to send the latest catalog along with it at no charge.

Jack Clifton

Yet further developments of an amusing, and perhaps embarrassing nature have come to light involving the aforementioned booksellers. Each of them has advertised in national publications promoting themselves as sellers of Nautical Books; this is precisely how I have come to know of their existence. I have inquired after catalogs of their wares being periodically supplied by them in which is contained such pertinent matter.

As well as my interest in the Perfect Ship (Southseaman) I have wished to acquire other nautical stories not available in the libraries or in the Northwest bookstores or through the Antiquarian search. One or two of the volumes I had located in the libraries I had wished to include in my own limited collection. One of the latter was a sea-tale titled, 'Northern Lights', which I had earlier obtained from the Third bookseller. I was able to obtain said title at a cost in excess of the price of the Perfect Ship, my tastes exceeding my better sense; and somewhat in violation of an ordinary frugality with regard to the expenditure of my limited funds. I grumbled at the bookseller, but paid his price. I enjoyed receiving and possessing the volume which had been advertised as being in good condition. It was indeed in good enough condition, in that it was neither scribbled all over with some brilliant scholar's underlinings and addendums, nor had it

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endured the hieroglyphics of a crayoning infant, nor had it been baptized (doused) in the foc'sle of some wooden sea witch. However, it had obviously received a bead of silicone rubber, applied to heal the wound which had existed as a separation of the front cover attachment site to the binding - not original equipment I'd say, perhaps mended by the nautical bookseller to enhance its saleability. It was MINE.

More recently, at least a year later, the Second bookseller had sent along a flyer advertising his wares, in which I had found listed, Lo and Hehold!, 'Northern Lights', in very good condition, for less than one half the price of the Third bookseller, as well as another volume I had sought for some time, 'Cruise of the Teddy' (a very different 'Teddy' than previously mentioned) priced at an even a smaller figure, and one other volume containing tales of shipwrecks and survivals.

Of course I chuckled rather sardonically and ruefully to myself, immediately placing an order for the second copy of Northern Lights, as much out of curiosity as desire, wondering if the Third bookseller might also attempt to procure the same volume only to resell it at three times his cost to another sucker (or some idiot with a *malaise de papier*), not unlike myself. As well I ordered the other two volumes expecting to receive only the last which had been thrown in for padding. To my amazement I did receive all three, each in excellent condition, still equipped with their original dust jackets. I exclaimed some oddly satisfied sounds, although being mindful of stricter accounts, that I had been fleeced for a good deal of money in my desire for these tales of nautical wanderlust. However, the second copy of 'Northern Lights' was a pleasure to behold; the first copy will undoubtedly be relegated to that honorable place of an expensive loaner. Perhaps I ought, in a fit of humor, propose to sell it back to the Third bookseller, offering him a small discount if he would buy 'with return mail'.

It all goes to say that some bold, dubious types function in the marketplace, and, in addition, the twin principles (or verities) of the business world and the free enterprise system are once again affirmed, in that 'there (must needs be) a sucker born every minute' in order to sustain 'whatever the market will bear'. ***Caveat Emptor!***

I began this particularly lengthy narration upon the threshold of our home with the vacuum cleaner in hand - a long way from the sea. While remembering I had this wondrous literary and nautical adventure in store for me I began recalling

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some of the other stories of men and the sea, of individuals, of what an array of individuals approach the sea; and for a host of differing reasons. Some are old 'sea-dogs' married to the oceans like **Joshua Slocum**; some are poets like **Rockwell Kent** or **Desmond Holdridge**; some are imbued with a singular spirit like **Bernard Moitessier**, **Robin Knox Johnson**, **Vito Dumas**, **William A. Robinson**, or **John Guzzwell**. Then there are the derring-dos like **Francis Chichester**, **Chay Blyth** or **David Lewis** trying to be the fastest or first in something. There are those who crack under the strain like **Donald Crowhurst**. Then still a whole host of others, nonchalant as the **Hiscocks**, enduring as the **Smeeton**s and still more wondrous as we recede in time through Captains **Vancouver** and **Cook**; **Magellan**; (Gud help us) **Columbus**; to **Odysseus** in the Mediterranean and **Jason and the Argonauts on the Black Sea**; and all those vast in between, **Richard Henry Dana**, **Jack London**, **Maurice Griffiths**, **Count von Luckner**, **Erskine Childers**, **Warwick Tompkins**, **The Voyage of the Beagle**; and never to discount the narrators of the Sea, **Robert Louis Stevenson**, **Daniel Defoe**, **B. Traven**, **Farley Mowat**, **Joseph Conrad**, and the greatest narrator of them all, **Herman Melville**. Oh!, how it goes on; names upon names, and lives upon lives - unnamed - who shipped as Captain and crew on the myriad ships or barks, having taken to the Sea from the time of the Phoenicians onward. And others who would go to sea as they would conduct a very private affair with their God or Gods, not to proselytize, not to profit, not to seek acclaim or publicity, but only to 'commune'.

What of The Sea as A Religion?

Posiedon said, "Seafaring is the Opiate of the People".

Moses thought seafaring took too much time, thus he parted the waters.

Why Man would ever consider this consummate indifference (The Sea) as his awfully wedded partner defies one's sensibilities.

Some romanticizing perhaps, that the righteous might adjudge as 'escape' or 'dereliction', beckons and steers one towards this 'alien' environment.

But, is not the whole earth an alien, inhospitable place? Because one, through abject necessity, adapts, does not signify that 'Mother Earth' is a more hospitable place.

All those other religions - what are they but some vanity, some vain hope - even some forlorn hope?

Yes, perchance one's insufficiencies, imperfections and insecurities do require some 'catching at straws'.

Is this not in reaction to the chill felt amongst one's fellow men? Are not the clutchers at straws desperate people doubly

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alienated, first by an indifferent Universe, and secondly by an indifferent humanity? Is not the soul of each individual some tiny presence in this immense world? Is not that tiny presence in addition, some nebulousness locked within itself?

Whose spirit would not reach beyond such a cold milieu?

Upon the sea, who or what would care if you were the world's biggest asshole; were the lamest, the ugliest, the most deformed, the most unaccomplished, the poorest, the blackest, the palest; the most avaricious or miserly, the most gluttonous, rapacious; the most glandularly or hormonally thwarted and distorted; the most misanthropic; the most vulgar, the proudest or the most demented? Who or what would care? Peradventure you remain unloved, but also uncondemned.

Has one not imagined some friendliness, or confraternity, or conviviality amongst his fellow men, only to feel instead the sting of their casualness, their 'restraint' or cold 'reserve'; and their arbitrariness, their inconsiderateness, their treachery; even their utter lack of humanity? Has one not felt their awful condescending judgments; has one not felt their heel upon his tininess? Do we not always feel his overbearing righteousness? Upon the open sea would not we be relieved of our urge to murder those who forever walk on others, who breed discord; would one not forget the urge to draw them and torture them for their betrayals of their fellow men? Is it not also a safer place for one so outraged?

As I would presume to judge others I must also judge myself - and what I gain therefrom is not a humility, but more an anger and frustration at my own limitations, and horror of horrors, these I must reciprocally ascribe to my fellow man. Is he then so awful as I?

Perhaps these realizations act as flagellant towards some kind of 'betterness', acting more as a warning, requiring the posting of vigilant sentinels alert to the capriciousness and vagaries of his look-a-likes.

Aye!, we might do well to escape the meanness of our fellows; we might do well to escape the precipitant to our own meanness and its needless exposure.

Oh, 'tis not the Sea, necessarily; the Sea is but a symbol or metaphor, as has oft' been stated. 'Tis so, one may learn to live in harmony with the indifference of the Oceans. 'Tis so, one cannot suffer a betrayal by something in which he has placed no hope or trust, the kind of betrayal he has endured from the day of his birth, in his nurtured, impressionable and dependent state.

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Yes, the collective body of humanity is a betrayal of its own expectations; it is therefore suspect and dangerous to our very tinniness, and survival.

To hope to find a Gud (a deity) in the form of MAN must exist as that everlasting absurdity, the most impossible muddle, the most pathetic extravagance, and the most ludicrous tomfoolery in which Man himself could become ever so desperately, vainly, futilely and fruitlessly involved.

That one could, instead, offer the Sea, or this metaphor of indifference, neutrality, coldness and unconcern, as a less absurd solution to the everlasting dilemma, is more a way of relieving the muddle, the pathos, and the desperation, than an encouragement to-wards a proper act of volition, the last of which involves a discretionary power which we do not possess. Hold a referendum within yourself.

This world of man is a first-come, first-served proposition; those who come last, by hook or crook, fill in the unwanted, or unwatched, or unguarded spaces in between. All others are relegated to the wayside. We negotiate our degree of bondage with our fellow man, most of us selling ourselves to one kind of slavery or another, the irony of which discovers our bondage as the perpetuating link in the everlasting continuance of that abasing doctrine of the Dominion of the One Over the Other, especially amongst the 'Christain' Nations.

You may infer how strongly I persuade, proselytize and advocate for the more austere insouciance of the Oceans. I recommend an early departure to them. I recommend a disembodiment of the self from an extended materiality. Travel Lightly!

Then, what is it I would hope to fashion from this raw material of myself, more bitter than humbled, more 'handled' than fondled in my concourse with those familiar two-legged animals?

Do I become the solitary basker, basking in the cold light of neutrality? Do I become that life imbued with the seemingly tireless and timeless rhythm of the Sea? Do I take upon the appearance of inanity, as that of a rock?

What in fact are all these 'sea salts' proclaiming? What indeed? Give us an essay!!

I read their words, hear their summons. I incorporate them into a Gospel; they become voices one learns to understand. They point the way.

What follows thus does not constitute a popularity contest; it may expose a bent in myself; and it may also reveal some of the

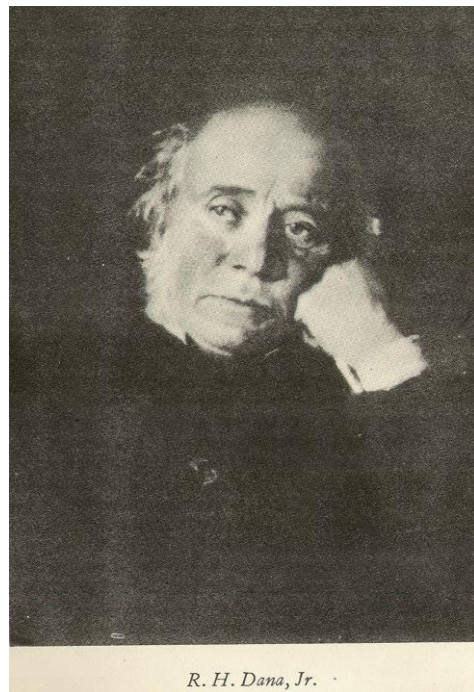
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gaps in my readings. I have necessarily limited myself for what I feel must be obvious reasons. It is understood that all selections of this kind come equipped with appropriate apologies to those who feel overlooked. To alleviate a question of bias in this selection I proceeded chronologically. The length of the excerpt indicates only what I felt was necessary to convey some kernel, essence, or gist of the individual involved, that being my main purpose. For an added bit of variety, I have given thee a brief from a Balloonist; familiar poetizings from the masculine side, and a most eloquent of the Distaff; rounded out with a comment by one most familiar to us all.

Richard Henry Dana in *Two Years Before The Mast* (1840)

The romantic interest which many take in the sea, and in those who live upon it, may be of use in exciting their attention to this subject, though I cannot feel sure that all who have followed me in my narrative must be convinced that the sailor has no romance in his everyday life to sustain him, but that it is very much the same plain matter-of-fact drudgery and hardship, which he experienced on shore. If I have not produced this conviction, I have failed in persuading others of what my own experience has most fully impressed upon myself.

There is a witchery in the sea, its songs and stories, and in the mere sight of a ship, and the sailor's dress, especially to a young mind, which has done more to man the navies, and fill merchantmen, than all the press-gangs of Europe. I have known a young man with such passion for the sea, that the very creaking of a block stirred up his imagination so that he could hardly keep his feet on dry ground; and many are the boys, in every seaport, who are drawn away, as by an almost irresistible attraction, from their work and schools, and hang about the docks and yards of vessels, with a fondness which, it is plain, will have its way. No sooner however, has the young sailor begun his new life in earnest then all this fine drapery falls off, and he



R. H. Dana, Jr.

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learns that it is but work and hardship, after all. This is the true light in which a sailor's life is to be viewed, and if in our books, and anniversary speeches, we would leave out much that is said about "blue water", "blue jackets", "open hearts", "seeing God's hand in the deep" and so forth, and take this up like any other practical subject, I am quite sure we should do full as much for those we wish to benefit.

- - Without any formal dedication of my narrative to that body of men, of whose common life it is intended to be a picture, I have yet borne them constantly in mind during its preparation. I cannot but trust that those of them, in whose hands it may chance to fall, will find in it that which shall render any professions of sympathy and good wishes on my part unnecessary. And I will take the liberty, on parting with my reader, who has gone down with us to the ocean and "laid his hand upon its mane" to commend to his kind wishes, and to the benefit of his efforts, that class of men with whom, for a time, my lot was cast, I wish the rather to do this, since I feel that whatever attention this book may gain, and whatever favor it may find, I shall owe almost entirely to that interest in the sea, and those who follow it, which is so easily excited in us all.

Herman Melville in *Redburn* (1849).

... my imaginations were wonderfully assisted by certain shadowy reminiscences of wharves and warehouses and shipping with which a residence in a seaport during early childhood had supplied me. Particularly I remembered the YO HEAVE HO! of the sailors as they showed their woolen caps above the high Bulwarks. I remembered how I thought of them crossing the great ocean; and that very ship, and those very sailors, so near to me then would after a time be actually in Europe.

Added to these reminiscences my father, now dead, had several times crossed the Atlantic on business affairs, for he had been an importer in Broad Street. And of winter evenings in New York, by the well-remembered sea-coal fire in old Greenwich-Street, he used to tell my brother and me of the monstrous waves at sea, mountain high, of the masts bending like twigs, and all about Havre, and Liverpool and....

- - during my early life, most of my thoughts of the sea were connected with the land; but with fine old lands full of mossy cathedrals and churches, and long narrow crooked streets without sidewalks, and lined with strange houses. And especially I tried hard to think how such places must look of rainy days and Saturdays and whether the boys went to school there and

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studied Geography and whether their papas allowed them to wear boots, instead of shoes, which I so much dislike, for boots looked so manly.

As I grew older my thoughts took a larger flight, and I frequently fell into long reveries about distant voyages and travels, and thought how fine it would be to be able to talk about remote and barbarous countries; with what reverence and wonder people would regard me how dark and romantic my sunburnt cheeks would look; how I would bring home with me foreign clothes of rich fabric and princely make and wear them up and down the streets, and how grocer's boys would turn their heads to look at me, as I went by. For I well remembered staring at a man who was pointed out to me by my aunt one Sunday in Church, as the person who had been in Stony Arabia, and passed through strange adventures there, all of which with my own eyes I had read in the book which he wrote, an arid-looking book in a pale yellow cover. "See what big eyes he has" whispered my aunt "they got so big because when he was almost dead with famishing in the desert, he all at once caught sight of a date tree, with the ripe fruit hanging on it" he long haunted me, and thought his eyes were grown still larger and rounder; and once I had a vision of the date tree.

In course of time my thoughts became more and more prone to dwell upon foreign things, and in a thousand ways sought to gratify my taste. As years passed this continual dwelling upon foreign associations, bred in me vague prophetic thought, that I was fated one day or another to be a great voyager.

But that which perhaps more than anything else converted my vague dreamings and longings into a definite purpose of seeking my fortune at sea, was an old-fashioned glass ship, about eighteen inches long, and of French manufacture, which my father had brought home from Hamburg this ship, after being the admiration of my father's visitors in the capital, became the wonder and delight of all the people of the village where we now resided, many of whom used to call on my mother, for no other purpose than to see the ship every bit of it was glass and often I used to peep into the portholes to see what was inside, but the holes were so small, and it looked very dark indoors, that I could discover little or nothing - - among those mazes of spun glass I used to rove in imagination till I grew dizzy at the main truck the people they too were all of glass, with hats and shoes on, just like living men, and curious blue jackets with a sort of ruffle round the bottom. Four or five of these sailors were nimble little chaps mounting up the rigging with

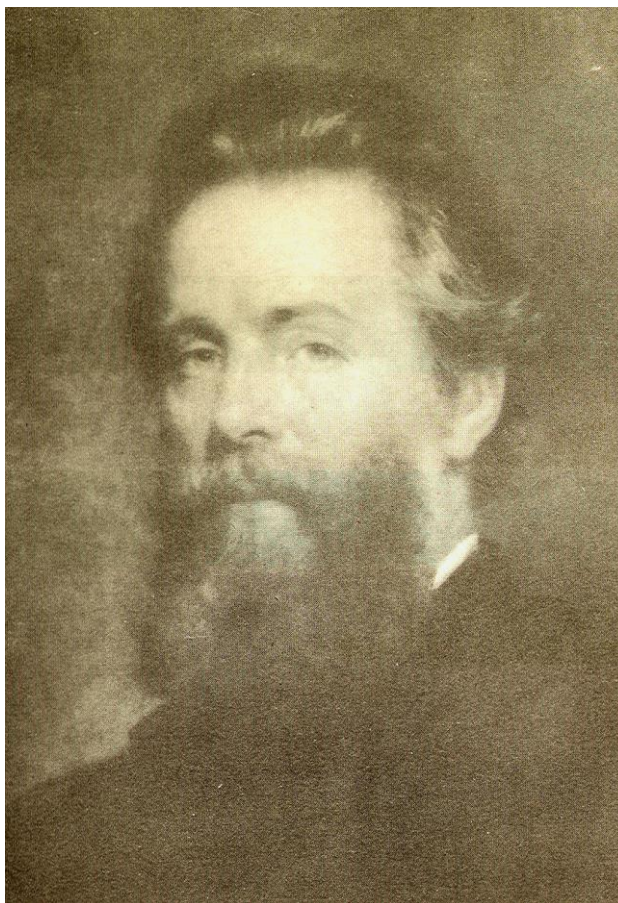
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very long strides another was sitting astride of the spanker-boom with his arms over his head a second was in the foretop with a coil of glass rigging over his shoulder, the cook with a glass ax was splitting wood near the forehatch; the steward in a glass apron with a plate of glass pudding; and a glass dog, with a red mouth was barking at him; while the captain in a glass cap was smoking a glass cigar on the quarter deck. He was leaning against the bulwark, with one hand to his head; perhaps he was unwell, for he looked very glassy out of the eyes.

The name of this curious ship was La Reine or The Queen which was painted on her stern where anyone might read it, among a crowd of glass dolphins and sea-horses carved there in a sort of semi-circle..

So much for La Reine. We have her yet in the house but many of her glass spars and ropes are now sadly shattered and broken - but I will not have her mended, and her figurehead, a gallant warrior in a cocked-hat, lies pitching head-foremost down into the trough of a calamitous sea under the bows - but I will not have him put on his legs again, till I get my own; for between him and me there is secret sympathy, and my sisters tell me, even yet, that he fell from his perch the very day I left home to go to sea on my FIRST VOYAGE.

I was then but a boy sad disappointments in several plans which I had sketched for my future life, the necessity of doing something for myself, united to a naturally roving disposition, had now conspired within me, to send me to sea as a sailor all my young mounting dreams of glory had left me; and at that early age, I was as unambitious as a man of sixty there is no misanthrope like a boy



disappointed; and such was I, with the warm soul of me flogged out by adversity. Talk not of the bitterness of middle-age and

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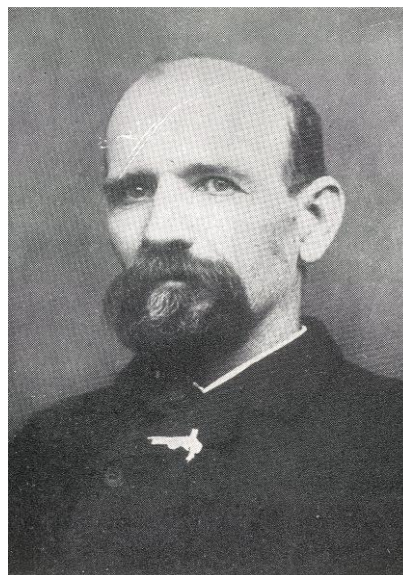
after life; a boy can feel all that, and much more, when upon his young soul the mildew has fallen; and the fruit, which with others is only blasted open after ripeness, with him is nipped in the first blossom and bud. And never again can such blights be made good; they strike too deep, and leave such a scar that the air of Paradise might not erase it. And it is a hard and cruel thing thus in early youth to taste beforehand the pangs which should be reserved for the stout time of manhood, when the gristle has become bone, and we stand up and fight out our lives; as a thing tried before and foreseen; for then we are veterans used to sieges and battles, and not green recruits, recoiling at the first shock of encounter

But these thoughts are bitter enough even now, for they have not yet gone quite away, and they must be uncongenial enough to the reader; so no more of that and let me go on with my story.

Joshua Slocum in ***Sailing Alone Around The World*** (1900).

On both sides of my family were sailors, and if any Slocum should be found not seafaring, he will show at least an inclination to whittle models of boats and contemplate voyages. My father was the sort of man who, if wrecked on a desolate island, would find his way home, if he had a jackknife and could find a tree

As for myself, the wonderful sea charmed me from the very first. At the age of eight I had already been afloat along with other boys in the bay, with chances greatly in favor of being drowned. When a lad I filled the important post of cook on a fishing-schooner but I was not long in the galley for the crew mutinied at the appearance of my first duff and 'chucked me out' before I had a chance to shine as a culinary artist. The next step toward a goal of happiness found me before the mast of a full-rigged ship bound on a foreign voyage. Thus I came "over the bows" and not through the cabin windows to the command of a ship.



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(Ps) Would you mind bringing me out a PRISMATIC COMPASS, and a pound of Raven mixture?

This letter marked an epoch for me; but I had little suspected the fact as I crumpled it into my pocket and stared languidly on the VOIE DOULOUREUSE which I nightly followed to the club. In Pall Mall there were no dignified greetings to be exchanged now with well groomed acquaintances Of course the club was a strange one, both of my own being closed for cleaning, a coincidence expressly planned by Providence for my inconvenience. The club which you are 'permitted to make use of' on these occasions always irritates with its strangeness and discomfort. The few occupants seem odd and oddly dressed, and you wonder how they got there. The particular weekly you want is not taken in; the dinner is execrable, and the ventilation a farce. All these evils oppressed me tonight. And yet I was puzzled to find that somewhere within me there was a faint lightening of the spirits: causeless, as far as I could discover. It could not be the Davies letter. Yachting in the Baltic at the end of September! The very idea made me shudder. Cowes, with a pheasant party and hotels handy, was all very well, but what kind of yacht was this? It must be a certain size to have got so far, but I thought I remembered enough of Davies means to know that he had no money to waste on luxuries ...



- - After the wreck of my present plans and the fiasco of my martyrdom, to be asked as consolation prize to spend October freezing in the Baltic with an eccentric nonentity who bored me!

Yet as I smoked my cigar in the ghastly splendor of the empty smoking room, the subject came up again. Was there anything in it? There were certainly no alternatives at hand. And to bury myself in the Baltic at this unearthly time of year had at least a smack of tragic thoroughness about it.

I pulled out the letter again, and ran down again its impulsive staccato sentences, affecting to ignore what a gust of fresh air, high spirits and good fellowship this flimsy bit of paper wafted into the jaded club room I fingered a few magazines, played a game of fifty with a friendly old fogey, too importunate to be worth the labor of resisting, and went back to my chambers to bed, ignorant that a friendly Providence had come to my rescue; and indeed, rather resenting any clumsy attempt at such friendliness.

That two days later I should be found pacing the deck of the

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Flensburg steamer with a ticket for Hamburg in my pocket may seem a strange result, yet not so strange if you have divined my state of mind I was armed with the conviction that I was doing an act of obscure penance, rumors of which might call attention to my lot and perhaps awaken remorse in the right quarter, while it left me free to enjoy myself unobtrusively in the remote event of enjoyment being possible.

The fact was that, at breakfast on the morning after the arrival of the letter I had still found that inexplicable lightening which I mentioned before, and strong enough now to warrant a revival of the pros and cons. An important pro which I had not thought of before was that after all it was a good-natured piece of unselfishness to join Davies; for he had spoken of the want of a pal, and seemed honestly to be in need of me. I almost clutched at this consideration

Jack London in *The Cruise of the Snark* (1906).

We talked about small boats, and the seaworthiness of small boats. We instanced Captain Slocum and his three years' voyage around the world in SPRAY.

We asserted that we were not afraid to go around the world in a small boat, say forty feet long. We asserted furthermore that we would like to do it. We asserted finally there was nothing in this world we'd like better than a chance to do it.

"Let's do it" we said in fun

Why not start at once? We'd never be younger, any of us So the trip was decided upon, and building of the SNARK began.

Our friends cannot understand why we made this voyage. They shudder and moan, and raise their hands. No amount of explanation can make them comprehend that we are moving along the line of least resistance; that it is easier for us to go down to the sea in a small ship than to remain on dry land, just as it is easier for them to remain on dry land than go down to sea in a small ship They make of their own bundle of desires, likes and dislikes a yardstick wherewith to measure the desires, likes and dislikes of all creatures. This is unfair. I tell them so They think I am crazy. In return, I am sympathetic.

The ultimate word is I LIKE. It lies beneath philosophy, and is twined about the heart of life. When philosophy has maundered ponderously for a month, telling the individual what he must do, the individual says in an instant "I LIKE" and does something else, and philosophy goes glimmering. It is I LIKE that makes a drunkard drink and a martyr wear a hair shirt; that makes one a reveler and another man an anchorite; that makes one man

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pursue fame, another gold, another love, and another God. Philosophy is very often a man's way of explaining his own I LIKE.

But to return to the SNARK, and why I, for me, want to journey in her around the world. The things I like constitute my set of values. The thing I like most of all is personal achievement - not achievement for the world's applause, but achievement for my own delight. It is the old "I did it! I did it! With my own hands I did it!"

Possibly the proudest achievement of my life, my moment of highest living, occurred when I was seventeen. I was in a three-masted schooner off the coast of Japan. We were in a typhoon. All hands had been on deck most of the night. I was called from my bunk at seven in the morning to take the wheel. Not a stitch of canvas was set. We were running before it under bare poles, yet the schooner fairly tore along. The seas were all of an eighth of a mile apart, and the wind snatched whitecaps from their summits, filling the air so thick with driving spray that it was impossible to see more than two waves at a time. The schooner was almost unmanageable, rolling her rail under to starboard and to port, veering, yawing anywhere between southeast and southwest, and threatening, when the huge seas lifted under her quarter, to broach to. Had she broached to, she would ultimately have been reported lost with all hands and no tidings.

I took the wheel, the sailing master watched me for a space. He was afraid of my youth, feared that I lacked the strength and nerve. But when he saw me successfully wrestle the schooner through several bouts, he went below to breakfast.



Fore and aft, all hands were below to breakfast. Had she broached to, not one of them would ever have reached the deck. For forty minutes I stood there alone at the wheel, in my grasp the wildly careening schooner and the lives of twenty-two men. Once we

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were pooped. I saw it coming, and half-drowned with the tons of water crushing me, I checked the schooner's rush to broach to. At the end of the hour, sweating and played out, I was relieved. But I had done it! With my own hands I had done my trick at the wheel and guided a hundred tons of wood and iron through a few million tons of wind and waves.

My delight was in that I had done it - not in the fact that twenty-two men knew I had done it. Within the year over half of them were dead and gone, yet my pride in the thing performed was not diminished by half. I am willing to confess, however, that I do like a small audience. But it must be a very small audience, composed of those who love me and whom I love. When I then accomplish a personal achievement, I have feeling that I am justifying their love for me. But this is quite apart from the delight of the achievement itself. This delight is peculiarly my own and does not depend on witnesses...

- - The achievement of a different feat is successful adjustment to a sternly exacting environment. The more difficult the feat, the greater the satisfaction in its accomplishment

- - The trip around the world means a big moment in living. Bear with me a moment and look at it. Here I am, a little animal called a man - a bit of vitalized matter, one hundred and sixty-five pounds of meat and blood, nerve, sinew, bones and brain - all of it soft and tender, susceptible to hurt, fallible and frail I put my head under water for five minutes, and I am drowned. I fall twenty feet through the air, and I am smashed. I am a creature of temperature. A few degrees one way and my fingers and ears and toes blacken and drop off. A few degrees the other way, and my skin blisters and shrivels away from the raw quivering flesh

- - About me the great natural forces - colossal menaces, Titans of destruction, unsentimental monsters that have less concern for me than I have for the grain of sand I crush under foot. They have no concern at all for me. They do not know me. They are unconscious, unmerciful, and immoral. They are the cyclones and tornadoes, lightening flashes and cloudbursts, tiderips and tidal waves, and undertows, and waterspouts, great whirls and sucks and eddies, earthquakes and volcanoes, surfs that thunder on rock-ribbed coasts and seas that leap aboard the largest crafts that float, crushing humans to pulp or licking them off into the sea and to death - and these insensate monsters do not know that tiny sensitive creature, all nerves and weaknesses, whom men call Jack London, and who himself thinks he is all right and quite a superior being.

In the maze and chaos of the conflict of the vast and draughty Titans, it is for me to thread my precarious way. The bit of life that is I, in so far as it succeeds in baffling them or in

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bitting them to its service, will imagine that it is god like. It is good to ride the tempest and feel god like. I dare to assert that for a finite speck of pulsating jelly to feel god like is a far more glorious feeling than for a god to feel god like.

Here is the sea, the wind, and the wave. Here are the seas, the winds and the waves of all the world. Here is the ferocious environment. And here is difficult adjustment, the achievement of which is delight to the small quivering vanity that is I. I like. I am so made. It is my own particular form of vanity, that it all.

Rockwell Kent in *Voyaging* (1924).

Here in this happiness the heart cries out in its own despair, speaks its own doom and banishment.

How unobserved and silently is the deep measure of the soul's endurance filled; it mounts the rim, trembles a moment there, then like a torrent overflows - the vast relief of action. This hour you are bound by the whole habit of your life and thought; the next by unerring impulse of soul you are free. How strong and swift is pride to clear itself, from misery or joy, from crowds, from ease, from failure, from success, from the recurrent brim-full, the too-much! Forever shall man seek the solitudes, and the most utter desolation of the wilderness to achieve through hardship the rebirth of his pride.



Within an hour of the thought I must go I had secured a clerk's berth on a freighter sailing for the farthest spot on the wild far southern end of South America, of all lands that one hears or

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reads of, the most afflicted and desolate. Because I loved the cold and desolation and the wilderness? It is hard to say.

Tales of adventure and shipwreck, of month-long battles with the wind and sea to round the Horn, of mountain seas a half-mile between their crests thundering eternally on granite shores, have woven about that region the Sailor's Graveyard the spirit-stirring glamour of the terrible.

And yet how little is known of that region. The clerk at the bookstore to whom I had applied for a map of Tierra del Fuego looked at me with superior disdain and said he'd never heard of it. No it is not to landsmen that one should turn for knowledge of the world, for after all their world is but those cluttered portions of the globe that obstruct like reefs the great broad highway of the sea. So in a little store near the waterfront I found at once what I had sought; and on charts of the seas learned, inversely as it were, and to the precise detail of contour that only the mariner's charts possess, what was not sea but land. And had the spirit of adventure not been stirred by the nomancy of Magellan, Tierra del Fuego and Cape Horn, there in cold print and naked portent appeared such names as Famine Reach, Desolation Bay, and the Last Hope Inlet; while suggestive of yet other terrors, stood warnings to the shipwrecked mariners against the savage natives of the coast. Here was indubitable confirmation of the glamorous worst that legend had related of that region; and as such it clinched my will to go.



[Alain Gerbault](#) in *Alone Around the World* (Mid to late 1920's).

"Adventure means risking something, and it is only when we are doing that we know really what a splendid thing life is and how splendidly it can be lived The man who never dares never does; the man who never risks, never wins. It is far better to venture and fail, than to lie on the hearth rug like a sleeping purring cat. Only fools laugh at failure; wise men laugh at the lazy and the too contented and those who are so timid that they dare undertake nothing".

