

Some Rambling Notes of an Idle Excursion eBook

Some Rambling Notes of an Idle Excursion by Mark Twain

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SOME RAMBLING NOTES OF AN IDLE EXCURSION

by Mark Twain

All the journeyings I had ever done had been purely in the way of business. The pleasant May weather suggested a novelty namely, a trip for pure recreation, the bread-and-butter element left out. The Reverend said he would go, too; a good man, one of the best of men, although a clergyman. By eleven at night we were in New Haven and on board the New York boat. We bought our tickets, and then went wandering around here and there, in the solid comfort of being free and idle, and of putting distance between ourselves and the mails and telegraphs.

After a while I went to my stateroom and undressed, but the night was too enticing for bed. We were moving down the bay now, and it was pleasant to stand at the window and take the cool night breeze and watch the gliding lights on shore. Presently, two elderly men sat down under that window and began a conversation. Their talk was properly no business of mine, yet I was feeling friendly toward the world and willing to be entertained. I soon gathered that they were brothers, that they were from a small Connecticut village, and that the matter in hand concerned the cemetery. Said one:

“Now, John, we talked it all over amongst ourselves, and this is what we’ve done. You see, everybody was a-movin’ from the old buryin’-ground, and our folks was ’most about left to theirselves, as you may say. They was crowded, too, as you know; lot wa’n’t big enough in the first place; and last year, when Seth’s wife died, we couldn’t hardly tuck her in. She sort o’ overlaid Deacon Shorb’s lot, and he soured on her, so to speak, and on the rest of us, too. So we talked it over, and I was for a lay out in the new simitery on the hill. They wa’n’t unwilling, if it was cheap. Well, the two best and biggest plots was No. 8 and No. 9—both of a size; nice comfortable room for twenty-six—twenty-six full-growns, that is; but you reckon in children and other shorts, and strike an everage, and I should say you might lay in thirty, or maybe thirty-two or three, pretty genteel—no crowdin’ to signify.”

“That’s a plenty, William. Which one did you buy?”

“Well, I’m a-comin’ to that, John. You see, No. 8 was thirteen dollars, No. 9 fourteen—”

“I see. So’s’t you took No. 8.”

“You wait. I took No. 9. And I’ll tell you for why. In the first place, Deacon Shorb wanted it. Well, after the way he’d gone on about Seth’s wife overlappin’ his prem’ses, I’d ‘a’ beat him out of that No. 9 if I’d ‘a’ had to stand two dollars extra, let alone one. That’s the way I felt about it. Says I, what’s a dollar, anyway? Life’s on’y a pilgrimage, says I; we ain’t here for good, and we can’t take it with us, says I. So I just dumped it

down, knowin' the Lord don't suffer a good deed to go for nothin', and cal'latin' to take it out o'

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somebody in the course o' trade. Then there was another reason, John. No. 9's a long way the handiest lot in the simitery, and the likeliest for situation. It lays right on top of a knoll in the dead center of the buryin' ground; and you can see Millport from there, and Tracy's, and Hopper Mount, and a raft o' farms, and so on. There ain't no better outlook from a buryin'-plot in the state. Si Higgins says so, and I reckon he ought to know. Well, and that ain't all. 'Course Shorb had to take No. 8; wa'n't no help for 't. Now, No. 8 jines onto No. 9, but it's on the slope of the hill, and every time it rains it 'll soak right down onto the Shorbs. Si Higgins says 't when the deacon's time comes, he better take out fire and marine insurance both on his remains."

Here there was the sound of a low, placid, duplicate chuckle of appreciation and satisfaction.

"Now, John, here's a little rough draft of the ground that I've made on a piece of paper. Up here in the left-hand corner we've bunched the departed; took them from the old graveyard and stowed them one alongside o' t'other, on a first-come-first-served plan, no partialities, with Gran'ther Jones for a starter, on'y because it happened so, and windin' up indiscriminate with Seth's twins. A little crowded towards the end of the lay-out, maybe, but we reckoned 'twa'n't best to scatter the twins. Well, next comes the livin'. Here, where it's marked A, we're goin' to put Mariar and her family, when they're called; B, that's for Brother Hosea and hisn; C, Calvin and tribe. What's left is these two lots here—just the gem of the whole patch for general style and outlook; they're for me and my folks, and you and yourn. Which of them would you rather be buried in?"

"I swan, you've took me mighty unexpected, William! It sort of started the shivers. Fact is, I was thinkin' so busy about makin' things comfortable for the others, I hadn't thought about being buried myself."

"Life's on'y a fleetin' show, John, as the sayin' is. We've all got to go, sooner or later. To go with a clean record's the main thing. Fact is, it's the on'y thing worth strivin' for, John."

"Yes, that's so, William, that's so; there ain't no getting around it. Which of these lots would you recommend?"

"Well, it depends, John. Are you particular about outlook?"

"I don't say I am, William, I don't say I ain't. Reely, I don't know. But mainly, I reckon, I'd set store by a south exposure."

"That's easy fixed, John. They're both south exposure. They take the sun, and the Shorbs get the shade."



“How about site, William?”

“D’s a sandy sile, E’s mostly loom.”

“You may gimme E, then; William; a sandy sile caves in, more or less, and costs for repairs.”

“All right, set your name down here, John, under E. Now, if you don’t mind payin’ me your share of the fourteen dollars, John, while we’re on the business, everything’s fixed.”

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After some Niggling and sharp bargaining the money was paid, and John bade his brother good night and took his leave. There was silence for some moments; then a soft chuckle welled up from the lonely William, and he muttered: "I declare for 't, if I haven't made a mistake! It's D that's mostly loom, not E. And John's booked for a sandy site after all."

There was another soft chuckle, and William departed to his rest also.

The next day, in New York, was a hot one. Still we managed to get more or less entertainment out of it. Toward the middle of the afternoon we arrived on board the stanch steamship Bermuda, with bag and baggage, and hunted for a shady place. It was blazing summer weather, until we were half-way down the harbor. Then I buttoned my coat closely; half an hour later I put on a spring overcoat and buttoned that. As we passed the light-ship I added an ulster and tied a handkerchief around the collar to hold it snug to my neck. So rapidly had the summer gone and winter come again?

By nightfall we were far out at sea, with no land in sight. No telegrams could come here, no letters, no news. This was an uplifting thought. It was still more uplifting to reflect that the millions of harassed people on shore behind us were suffering just as usual.

The next day brought us into the midst of the Atlantic solitudes—out of smoke-colored sounding into fathomless deep blue; no ships visible anywhere over the wide ocean; no company but Mother Carey's chickens wheeling, darting, skimming the waves in the sun. There were some seafaring men among the passengers, and conversation drifted into matter concerning ships and sailors. One said that "true as the needle to the pole" was a bad figure, since the needle seldom pointed to the pole. He said a ship's compass was not faithful to any particular point, but was the most fickle and treacherous of the servants of man. It was forever changing. It changed every day in the year; consequently the amount of the daily variation had to be ciphered out and allowance made for it, else the mariner would go utterly astray. Another said there was a vast fortune waiting for the genius who should invent a compass that would not be affected by the local influences of an iron ship. He said there was only one creature more fickle than a wooden ship's compass, and that was the compass of an iron ship. Then came reference to the well known fact that an experienced mariner can look at the compass of a new iron vessel, thousands of mile from her birthplace, and tell which way her head was pointing when she was in process of building.

Now an ancient whale-ship master fell to talking about the sort of crews they used to have in his early days. Said he:



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“Sometimes we’d have a batch of college students Queer lot. Ignorant? Why, they didn’t know the catheads from the main brace. But if you took them for fools you’d get bit, sure. They’d learn more in a month than another man would in a year. We had one, once, in the Mary Ann, that came aboard with gold spectacles on. And besides, he was rigged out from main truck to keelson in the nobbiest clothes that ever saw a fo’castle. He had a chestful, too: cloaks, and broadcloth coats, and velvet vests; everything swell, you know; and didn’t the saltwater fix them out for him? I guess not! Well, going to sea, the mate told him to go aloft and help shake out the foreto’gallants’l. Up he shins to the foretop, with his spectacles on, and in a minute down he comes again, looking insulted. Says the mate, ‘What did you come down for?’ Says the chap, ‘P’r’aps you didn’t notice that there ain’t any ladders above there.’ You see we hadn’t any shrouds above the foretop. The men bursted out in a laugh such as I guess you never heard the like of. Next night, which was dark and rainy, the mate ordered this chap to go aloft about something, and I’m dummed if he didn’t start up with an umbrella and a lantern! But no matter; he made a mighty good sailor before the voyage was done, and we had to hunt up something else to laugh at. Years afterwards, when I had forgot all about him, I comes into Boston, mate of a ship, and was loafing around town with the second mate, and it so happened that we stepped into the Revere House, thinking maybe we would chance the salt-horse in that big diningroom for a flyer, as the boys say. Some fellows were talking just at our elbow, and one says, ‘Yonder’s the new governor of Massachusetts—at that table over there with the ladies.’ We took a good look my mate and I, for we hadn’t either of us ever see a governor before. I looked and looked at that face and then all of a sudden it popped on me! But didn’t give any sign. Says I, ‘Mate, I’ve a notion to go over and shake hands with him.’ Says he ‘I think I see you doing it, Tom.’ Says I, ‘Mate I’m a-going to do it.’ Says he, ‘Oh, yes, I guess so. Maybe you don’t want to bet you will, Tom?’ Say I, ‘I don’t mind going a V on it, mate.’ Says he ‘Put it up.’ ‘Up she goes,’ says I, planking the cash. This surprised him. But he covered it, and say. pretty sarcastic, ‘Hadn’t you better take your grub with the governor and the ladies, Tom?’ Says I ‘Upon second thoughts, I will.’ Says he, ‘Well Tom, you aye a dum fool.’ Says I, ‘Maybe I am maybe I ain’t; but the main question is, do you wan to risk two and a half that I won’t do it?’ ‘Make it a V,’ says he. ‘Done,’ says I. I started, him a giggling and slapping his hand on his thigh, he felt so good. I went over there and leaned my knuckle: on the table a minute and looked the governor in the face, and says I, ‘Mr. Gardner, don’t you know me? He stared, and I stared, and he stared.

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Then all of a sudden he sings out, 'Tom Bowling, by the holy poker! Ladies, it's old Tom Bowling, that you've heard me talk about—shipmate of mine in the Mary Ann.' He rose up and shook hands with me ever so hearty—I sort of glanced around and took a realizing sense of my mate's saucer eyes—and then says the governor, 'Plant yourself, Tom, plant yourself; you can't cat your anchor again till you've had a feed with me and the ladies!' I planted myself alongside the governor, and canted my eye around toward my mate. Well, sir, his dead-lights were bugged out like tompions; and his mouth stood that wide open that you could have laid a ham in it without him noticing it."

There was great applause at the conclusion of the old captain's story; then, after a moment's silence, a grave, pale young man said:

"Had you ever met the governor before?"

The old captain looked steadily at this inquirer awhile, and then got up and walked aft without making any reply. One passenger after another stole a furtive glance at the inquirer; but failed to make him out, and so gave him up. It took some little work to get the talk-machinery to running smoothly again after this derangement; but at length a conversation sprang up about that important and jealously guarded instrument, a ship's timekeeper, its exceeding delicate accuracy, and the wreck and destruction that have sometimes resulted from its varying a few seemingly trifling moments from the true time; then, in due course, my comrade, the Reverend, got off on a yarn, with a fair wind and everything drawing. It was a true story, too—about Captain Rounceville's shipwreck—true in every detail. It was to this effect:

Captain Rounceville's vessel was lost in mid-Atlantic, and likewise his wife and his two little children. Captain Rounceville and seven seamen escaped with life, but with little else. A small, rudely constructed raft was to be their home for eight days. They had neither provisions nor water. They had scarcely any clothing; no one had a coat but the captain. This coat was changing hands all the time, for the weather was very cold. Whenever a man became exhausted with the cold, they put the coat on him and laid him down between two shipmates until the garment and their bodies had warmed life into him again. Among the sailors was a Portuguese who knew no English. He seemed to have no thought of his own calamity, but was concerned only about the captain's bitter loss of wife and children. By day he would look his dumb compassion in the captain's face; and by night, in the darkness and the driving spray and rain, he would seek out the captain and try to comfort him with caressing pats on the shoulder. One day, when hunger and thirst were making their sure inroad; upon the men's strength and spirits, a floating barrel was seen at a distance. It seemed a great find, for doubtless it contained food of some sort. A brave fellow swam to it, and

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after long and exhausting effort got it to the raft. It was eagerly opened. It was a barrel of magnesia! On the fifth day an onion was spied. A sailor swam off and got it. Although perishing with hunger, he brought it in its integrity and put it into the captain's hand. The history of the sea teaches that among starving, shipwrecked men selfishness is rare, and a wonder-compelling magnanimity the rule. The onion was equally divided into eight parts, and eaten with deep thanksgivings. On the eighth day a distant ship was sighted. Attempts were made to hoist an oar, with Captain Rounceville's coat on it for a signal. There were many failures, for the men were but skeletons now, and strengthless. At last success was achieved, but the signal brought no help. The ship faded out of sight and left despair behind her. By and by another ship appeared, and passed so near that the castaways, every eye eloquent with gratitude, made ready to welcome the boat that would be sent to save them. But this ship also drove on, and left these men staring their unutterable surprise and dismay into each other's ashen faces. Late in the day, still another ship came up out of the distance, but the men noted with a pang that her course was one which would not bring her nearer. Their remnant of life was nearly spent; their lips and tongues were swollen, parched, cracked with eight days' thirst; their bodies starved; and here was their last chance gliding relentlessly from them; they would not be alive when the next sun rose. For a day or two past the men had lost their voices, but now Captain Rounceville whispered, "Let us pray." The Portuguese patted him on the shoulder in sign of deep approval. All knelt at the base of the oar that was waving the signal-coat aloft, and bowed their heads. The sea was tossing; the sun rested, a red, rayless disk, on the sea-line in the west. When the men presently raised their heads they would have roared a hallelujah if they had had a voice—the ship's sails lay wrinkled and flapping against her masts—she was going about! Here was rescue at last, and in the very last instant of time that was left for it. No, not rescue yet—only the imminent prospect of it. The red disk sank under the sea, and darkness blotted out the ship. By and by came a pleasant sound—oars moving in a boat's rowlocks. Nearer it came, and nearer—within thirty steps, but nothing visible. Then a deep voice: "Hol-lo!" The castaways could not answer; their swollen tongues refused voice. The boat skirted round and round the raft, started away—the agony of it!—returned, rested the oars, close at hand, listening, no doubt. The deep voice again: "Hol-lo! Where are ye, shipmates?" Captain Rounceville whispered to his men, saying: "Whisper your best, boys! now—all at once!" So they sent out an eightfold whisper in hoarse concert: "Here!", There was life in it if it succeeded; death if it failed. After that supreme moment Captain Rounceville was conscious of nothing until he came to himself on board the saving ship. Said the Reverend, concluding:

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“There was one little moment of time in which that raft could be visible from that ship, and only one. If that one little fleeting moment had passed unfruitful, those men’s doom was sealed. As close as that does God shave events foreordained from the beginning of the world. When the sun reached the water’s edge that day, the captain of that ship was sitting on deck reading his prayer-book. The book fell; he stooped to pick it up, and happened to glance at the sun. In that instant that far-off raft appeared for a second against the red disk, its needlelike oar and diminutive signal cut sharp and black against the bright surface, and in the next instant was thrust away into the dusk again. But that ship, that captain, and that pregnant instant had had their work appointed for them in the dawn of time and could not fail of the performance. The chronometer of God never errs!”

There was deep, thoughtful silence for some moments. Then the grave, pale young man said:

“What is the chronometer of God?”

II

At dinner, six o’clock, the same people assembled whom we had talked with on deck and seen at luncheon and breakfast this second day out, and at dinner the evening before. That is to say, three journeying ship-masters, a Boston merchant, and a returning Bermudian who had been absent from his Bermuda thirteen years; these sat on the starboard side. On the port side sat the Reverend in the seat of honor; the pale young man next to him; I next; next to me an aged Bermudian, returning to his sunny islands after an absence of twenty-seven years. Of course, our captain was at the head of the table, the purser at the foot of it. A small company, but small companies are pleasantest.

No racks upon the table; the sky cloudless, the sun brilliant, the blue sea scarcely ruffled; then what had become of the four married couples, the three bachelors, and the active and obliging doctor from the rural districts of Pennsylvania?—for all these were on deck when we sailed down New York harbor. This is the explanation. I quote from my note-book:

Thursday, 3.30 P.M. Under way, passing the Battery. The large party, of four married couples, three bachelors, and a cheery, exhilarating doctor from the wilds of Pennsylvania, are evidently traveling together. All but the doctor grouped in camp-chairs on deck. Passing principal fort. The doctor is one of those people who has an infallible preventive of seasickness; is flitting from friend to friend administering it and saying, “Don’t you be afraid; I know this medicine; absolutely infallible; prepared under my own supervision.” Takes a dose himself, intrepidly.

4.15 P.M. Two of those ladies have struck their colors, notwithstanding the "infallible." They have gone below. The other two begin to show distress.

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5 P.M. Exit one husband and one bachelor. These still had their infallible in cargo when they started, but arrived at the companionway without it.

5.10. Lady No. 3, two bachelors, and one married man have gone below with their own opinion of the infallible.

5.20. Passing Quarantine Hulk. The infallible has done the business for all the party except the Scotchman's wife and the author of that formidable remedy.

Nearing the Light-Ship. Exit the Scotchman's wife, head drooped on stewardess's shoulder.

Entering the open sea. Exit doctor!

The rout seems permanent; hence the smallness of the company at table since the voyage began. Our captain is a grave, handsome Hercules of thirty-five, with a brown hand of such majestic size that one cannot eat for admiring it and wondering if a single kid or calf could furnish material for gloving it.

Conversation not general; drones along between couples. One catches a sentence here and there. Like this, from Bermudian of thirteen years' absence: "It is the nature of women to ask trivial, irrelevant, and pursuing questions—questions that pursue you from a beginning in nothing to a run-to-cover in nowhere." Reply of Bermudian of twenty-seven years' absence: "Yes; and to think they have logical, analytical minds and argumentative ability. You see 'em begin to whet up whenever they smell argument in the air." Plainly these be philosophers.

Twice since we left port our engines have stopped for a couple of minutes at a time. Now they stop again. Says the pale young man, meditatively, "There!—that engineer is sitting down to rest again."

Grave stare from the captain, whose mighty jaws cease to work, and whose harpooned potato stops in midair on its way to his open, paralyzed mouth. Presently he says in measured tones, "Is it your idea that the engineer of this ship propels her by a crank turned by his own hands?"

The pale young man studies over this a moment, then lifts up his guileless eyes, and says, "Don't he?"

Thus gently falls the death-blow to further conversation, and the dinner drags to its close in a reflective silence, disturbed by no sounds but the murmurous wash of the sea and the subdued clash of teeth.



After a smoke and a promenade on deck, where is no motion to discompose our steps, we think of a game of whist. We ask the brisk and capable stewardess from Ireland if there are any cards in the ship.

“Bless your soul, dear, indeed there is. Not a whole pack, true for ye, but not enough missing to signify.”

However, I happened by accident to bethink me of a new pack in a morocco case, in my trunk, which I had placed there by mistake, thinking it to be a flask of something. So a party of us conquered the tedium of the evening with a few games and were ready for bed at six bells, mariner’s time, the signal for putting out the lights.



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There was much chat in the smoking-cabin on the upper deck after luncheon to-day, mostly whaler yarns from those old sea-captains. Captain Tom Bowling was garrulous. He had that garrulous attention to minor detail which is born of secluded farm life or life at sea on long voyages, where there is little to do and time no object. He would sail along till he was right in the most exciting part of a yarn, and then say, "Well, as I was saying, the rudder was fouled, ship driving before the gale, head-on, straight for the iceberg, all hands holding their breath, turned to stone, top-hamper giving 'way, sails blown to ribbons, first one stick going, then another, boom! smash! crash! duck your head and stand from under! when up comes Johnny Rogers, capstan-bar in hand, eyes a-blazing, hair a-flying . . . no, 'twa'n't Johnny Rogers. . . lemme see . . . seems to me Johnny Rogers wa'n't along that voyage; he was along one voyage, I know that mighty well, but somehow it seems to me that he signed the articles for this voyage, but—but —whether he come along or not, or got left, or something happened—"

And so on and so on till the excitement all cooled down and nobody cared whether the ship struck the iceberg or not.

In the course of his talk he rambled into a criticism upon New England degrees of merit in ship building. Said he, "You get a vessel built away down Maine-way; Bath, for instance; what's the result? First thing you do, you want to heave her down for repairs—that's the result! Well, sir, she hain't been hove down a week till you can heave a dog through her seams. You send that vessel to sea, and what's the result? She wets her oakum the first trip! Leave it to any man if 'tain't so. Well, you let our folks build you a vessel—down New Bedford-way. What's the result? Well, sir, you might take that ship and heave her down, and keep her hove down six months, and she'll never shed a tear!"

Everybody, landsmen and all, recognized the descriptive neatness of that figure, and applauded, which greatly pleased the old man. A moment later, the meek eyes of the pale young fellow heretofore mentioned came up slowly, rested upon the old man's face a moment, and the meek mouth began to open.

"Shet your head!" shouted the old mariner.

It was a rather startling surprise to everybody, but it was effective in the matter of its purpose. So the conversation flowed on instead of perishing.

There was some talk about the perils of the sea, and a landsman delivered himself of the customary nonsense about the poor mariner wandering in far oceans, tempest-tossed, pursued by dangers, every storm-blast and thunderbolt in the home skies moving the friends by snug firesides to compassion for that poor mariner, and prayers for his succor. Captain Bowling put up with this for a while, and then burst out with a new view of the matter.



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“Come, belay there! I have read this kind of rot all my life in poetry and tales and such-like rubbish. Pity for the poor mariner! sympathy for the poor mariner! All right enough, but not in the way the poetry puts it. Pity for the mariner’s wife! all right again, but not in the way the poetry puts it. Look-a here! whose life’s the safest in the whole world The poor mariner’s. You look at the statistics, you’ll see. So don’t you fool away any sympathy on the poor mariner’s dangers and privations and sufferings. Leave that to the poetry muffs. Now you look at the other side a minute. Here is Captain Brace, forty years old, been at sea thirty. On his way now to take command of his ship and sail south from Bermuda. Next week he’ll be under way; easy times; comfortable quarters; passengers, sociable company; just enough to do to keep his mind healthy and not tire him; king over his ship, boss of everything and everybody; thirty years’ safety to learn him that his profession ain’t a dangerous one. Now you look back at his home. His wife’s a feeble woman; she’s a stranger in New York; shut up in blazing hot or freezing cold lodgings, according to the season; don’t know anybody hardly; no company but her lonesomeness and her thoughts; husband gone six months at a time. She has borne eight children; five of them she has buried without her husband ever setting eyes on them. She watches them all the long nights till they died—he comfortable on the sea; she followed them to the grave she heard the clods fall that broke her heart he comfortable on the sea; she mourned at home, weeks and weeks, missing them every day and every hour —he cheerful at sea, knowing nothing about it. Now look at it a minute —turn it over in your mind and size it: five children born, she among strangers, and him not by to hearten her; buried, and him not by to comfort her; think of that! Sympathy for the poor mariner’s perils is rot; give it to his wife’s hard lines, where it belongs! Poetry makes out that all the wife worries about is the dangers her husband’s running. She’s got substantialer things to worry over, I tell you. Poetry’s always pitying the poor mariner on account of his perils at sea; better a blamed sight pity him for the nights he can’t sleep for thinking of how he had to leave his wife in her very birth pains, lonesome and friendless, in the thick of disease and trouble and death. If there’s one thing that can make me madder than another, it’s this sappy, damned maritime poetry!”

Captain Brace was a patient, gentle, seldom speaking man, with a pathetic something in his bronzed face that had been a mystery up to this time, but stood interpreted now since we had heard his story. He had voyaged eighteen times to the Mediterranean, seven times to India, once to the arctic pole in a discovery-ship, and “between times” had visited all the remote seas and ocean corners of the globe. But he said that twelve years ago, on account of his family, he “settled down,” and ever since then had ceased to roam. And what do you suppose was this simple-hearted, lifelong wanderer’s idea of settling down and ceasing to roam? Why, the making of two five-month voyages a year between Surinam and Boston for sugar and molasses!



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Among other talk to-day, it came out that whale-ships carry no doctor. The captain adds the doctorship to his own duties. He not only gives medicines, but sets broken limbs after notions of his own, or saws them off and sears the stump when amputation seems best. The captain is provided with a medicine-chest, with the medicines numbered instead of named. A book of directions goes with this. It describes diseases and symptoms, and says, "Give a teaspoonful of No. 9 once an hour," or "Give ten grains of No. 12 every half-hour," *etc.* One of our sea-captains came across a skipper in the North Pacific who was in a state of great surprise and perplexity. Said he:

"There's something rotten about this medicine-chest business. One of my men was sick—nothing much the matter. I looked in the book: it said give him a teaspoonful of No. 15. I went to the medicine-chest, and I see I was out of No. 15. I judged I'd got to get up a combination somehow that would fill the bill; so I hove into the fellow half a teaspoonful of No. 8 and half a teaspoonful of No. 7, and I'll be hanged if it didn't kill him in fifteen minutes! There's something about this medicine-chest system that's too many for me!"

There was a good deal of pleasant gossip about old Captain "Hurricane" Jones, of the Pacific Ocean—peace to his ashes! Two or three of us present had known him; I particularly well, for I had made four sea-voyages with him. He was a very remarkable man. He was born in a ship; he picked up what little education he had among his shipmates; he began life in the forecabin, and climbed grade by grade to the captaincy. More than fifty years of his sixty-five were spent at sea. He had sailed all oceans, seen all lands, and borrowed a tint from all climates. When a man has been fifty years at sea he necessarily knows nothing of men, nothing of the world but its surface, nothing of the world's thought, nothing of the world's learning but it's a B C, and that blurred and distorted by the unfocused lenses of an untrained mind. Such a man is only a gray and bearded child. That is what old Hurricane Jones was—simply an innocent, lovable old infant. When his spirit was in repose he was as sweet and gentle as a girl; when his wrath was up he was a hurricane that made his nickname seem tamely descriptive. He was formidable in a fight, for he was of powerful build and dauntless courage. He was frescoed from head to heel with pictures and mottoes tattooed in red and blue India ink. I was with him one voyage when he got his last vacant space tattooed; this vacant space was around his left ankle. During three days he stumped about the ship with his ankle bare and swollen, and this legend gleaming red and angry out from a clouding of India ink: "Virtue is its own R'd." (There was a lack of room.) He was deeply and sincerely pious, and swore like a fishwoman. He considered swearing blameless, because sailors would not understand an order unilluminated

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by it. He was a profound biblical scholar—that is, he thought he was. He believed everything in the Bible, but he had his own methods of arriving at his beliefs. He was of the “advanced” school of thinkers, and applied natural laws to the interpretation of all miracles, somewhat on the plan of the people who make the six days of creation six geological epochs, and so forth. Without being aware of it, he was a rather severe satire on modern scientific religionists. Such a man as I have been describing is rabidly fond of disquisition and argument; one knows that without being told it.

One trip the captain had a clergyman on board, but did not know he was a clergyman, since the passenger-list did not betray the fact. He took a great liking to this Reverend Mr. Peters, and talked with him a great deal; told him yarns, gave him toothsome scraps of personal history, and wove a glittering streak of profanity through his garrulous fabric that was refreshing to a spirit weary of the dull neutralities of undecorated speech. One day the captain said, “Peters, do you ever read the Bible?”

“Well—yes.”

“I judge it ain’t often, by the way you say it. Now, you tackle it in dead earnest once, and you’ll find it ’ll pay. Don’t you get discouraged, but hang right on. First, you won’t understand it; but by and by things will begin to clear up, and then you wouldn’t lay it down to eat.”

“Yes, I have heard that said.”

“And it’s so, too. There ain’t a book that begins with it. It lays over ’m all, Peters. There’s some pretty tough things in it—there ain’t any getting around that—but you stick to them and think them out, and when once you get on the inside everything’s plain as day.”

“The miracles, too, captain?”

“Yes, sir! the miracles, too. Every one of them. Now, there’s that business with the prophets of Baal; like enough that stumped you?”

“Well, I don’t know but—”

“Own up now; it stumped you. Well, I don’t wonder. You hadn’t had any experience in raveling such things out, and naturally it was too many for you. Would you like to have me explain that thing to you, and show you how to get at the meat of these matters?”

“Indeed, I would, captain, if you don’t mind.”



Then the captain proceeded as follows: “I’ll do it with pleasure. First, you see, I read and read, and thought and thought, till I got to understand what sort of people they were in the old Bible times, and then after that it was all clear and easy. Now this was the way I put it up, concerning Isaac—[This is the captain’s own mistake]—and the prophets of Baal. There was some mighty sharp men among the public characters of that old ancient day, and Isaac was one of them. Isaac had his failings —plenty of them, too; it ain’t for me to apologize for Isaac; he played it on the prophets of Baal, and like enough he was justifiable, considering the odds that was against him. No, all I say is, ’twa’n’t any miracle, and that I’ll show you so’s’t you can see it yourself.



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“Well, times had been getting rougher and rougher for prophets—that is, prophets of Isaac’s denomination. There was four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal in the community, and only one Presbyterian; that is, if Isaac was a Presbyterian, which I reckon he was, but it don’t say. Naturally, the prophets of Baal took all the trade. Isaac was pretty low-spirited, I reckon, but he was a good deal of a man, and no doubt he went a-prophesying around, letting on to be doing a land-office business, but ’twa’n’t any use; he couldn’t run any opposition to amount to anything. By and by things got desperate with him; he sets his head to work and thinks it all out, and then what does he do? Why, he begins to throw out hints that the other parties are this and that and t’other—nothing very definite, maybe, but just kind of undermining their reputation in a quiet way. This made talk, of course, and finally got to the king. The king asked Isaac what he meant by his talk. Says Isaac, ’Oh, nothing particular; only, can they pray-down fire from heaven on an altar? It ain’t much, maybe, your majesty, only can they do it? That’s the idea.’ So the king was a good deal disturbed, and he went to the prophets of Baal, and they said, pretty airy, that if he had an altar ready, they were ready; and they intimated he better get it insured, too.

“So next morning all the children of Israel and their parents and the other people gathered themselves together. Well, here was that great crowd of prophets of Baal packed together on one side, and Isaac walking up and down all alone on the other, putting up his job. When time was called, Isaac let on to be comfortable and indifferent; told the other team to take the first innings. So they went at it, the whole four hundred and fifty, praying around the altar, very hopeful, and doing their level best. They prayed an hour—two hours—three hours—and so on, plumb till noon. It wa’n’t any use; they hadn’t took a trick. Of course they felt kind of ashamed before all those people, and well they might. Now, what would a magnanimous man do? Keep still, wouldn’t he? Of course. What did Isaac do? He graveled the prophets of Baal every way he could think of. Says he, ’You don’t speak up loud enough; your god’s asleep, like enough, or maybe he’s taking a walk; you want to holler, you know’—or words to that effect; I don’t recollect the exact language. Mind, I don’t apologize for Isaac; he had his faults.

“Well, the prophets of Baal prayed along the best they knew how all the afternoon, and never raised, a spark. At last, about sundown, they were all tuckered out, and they owned up and quit.



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“What does Isaac do now? He steps up and says to some friends of his there, ‘Pour four barrels of water on the altar!’ Everybody was astonished; for the other side had prayed at it dry, you know, and got whitewashed. They poured it on. Says he, ‘Heave on four more barrels.’ Then he says, ‘Heave on four more.’ Twelve barrels, you see, altogether. The water ran all over the altar, and all down the sides, and filled up a trench around it that would hold a couple of hogsheads-’measures,’ it says; I reckon it means about a hogshead. Some of the people were going to put on their things and go, for they allowed he was crazy. They didn’t know Isaac. Isaac knelt down and began to pray; he strung along, and strung along, about the heathen in distant lands, and about the sister churches, and about the state and the country at large, and about those that’s in authority in the government, and all the usual program, you know, till everybody had got tired and gone to thinking about something else, and then, all of a sudden, when nobody was noticing, he outs with a match and rakes it on the under side of his leg, and pff! up the whole thing blazes like a house afire! Twelve barrels of water? Petroleum, sir, *Petroleum!* that’s what it was!”

“Petroleum, captain?”

“Yes, sir, the country was full of it. Isaac knew all about that. You read the Bible. Don’t you worry about the tough places. They ain’t tough when you come to think them out and throw light on them. There ain’t a thing in the Bible but what is true; all you want is to go prayerfully to work and cipher out how ’twas done.”

At eight o’clock on the third morning out from New York, land was sighted. Away across the sunny waves one saw a faint dark stripe stretched along under the horizon-or pretended to see it, for the credit of his eyesight. Even the Reverend said he saw it, a thing which was manifestly not so. But I never have seen any one who was morally strong enough to confess that he could not see land when others claimed that they could.

By and by the Bermuda Islands were easily visible. The principal one lay upon the water in the distance, a long, dull-colored body; scalloped with slight hills and valleys. We could not go straight at it, but had to travel all the way around it, sixteen miles from shore, because it is fenced with an invisible coral reef. At last we sighted buoys, bobbing here and there, and then we glided into a narrow channel among them, “raised the reef,” and came upon shoaling blue water that soon further shoaled into pale green, with a surface scarcely rippled. Now came the resurrection hour; the berths gave up their dead. Who are these pale specters in plug-hats and silken flounces that file up the companionway in melancholy procession and step upon the deck? These are they which took the infallible preventive of seasickness in New York harbor and then disappeared and were forgotten. Also there came two or three faces not seen before until this moment. One’s impulse is to ask, “Where did you come aboard?”

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We followed the narrow channel a long time, with land on both sides—low hills that might have been green and grassy, but had a faded look instead. However, the land-locked water was lovely, at any rate, with its glittering belts of blue and green where moderate soundings were, and its broad splotches of rich brown where the rocks lay near the surface. Everybody was feeling so well that even the grave, pale young man (who, by a sort of kindly common consent, had come latterly to be referred to as “The Ass”) received frequent and friendly notice—which was right enough, for there was no harm in him.

At last we steamed between two island points whose rocky jaws allowed only just enough room for the vessel’s body, and now before us loomed Hamilton on her clustered hillsides and summits, the whitest mass of terraced architecture that exists in the world, perhaps.

It was Sunday afternoon, and on the pier were gathered one or two hundred Bermudians, half of them black, half of them white, and all of them nobbily dressed, as the poet says.

Several boats came off to the ship, bringing citizens. One of these citizens was a faded, diminutive old gentleman, who approached our most ancient passenger with a childlike joy in his twinkling eyes, halted before him, folded his arms, and said, smiling with all his might and with all the simple delight that was in him, “You don’t know me, John! Come, out with it now; you know you don’t!”

The ancient passenger scanned him perplexedly, scanned the napless, threadbare costume of venerable fashion that had done Sunday service no man knows how many years, contemplated the marvelous stovepipe hat of still more ancient and venerable pattern, with its poor, pathetic old stiff brim canted up “gallusly” in the wrong places, and said, with a hesitation that indicated strong internal effort to “place” the gentle old apparition, “Why . . . let me see . . . plague on it . . . there’s something about you that . . . er . . . er . . . but I’ve been gone from Bermuda for twenty-seven years, and . . . hum, hum . . . I don’t seem to get at it, somehow, but there’s something about you that is just as familiar to me as—”

“Likely it might be his hat,” murmured the Ass, with innocent, sympathetic interest.

So the Reverend and I had at last arrived at Hamilton, the principal town in the Bermuda Islands. A wonderfully white town; white as snow itself. White as marble; white as flour. Yet looking like none of these, exactly. Never mind, we said; we shall hit upon a figure by and by that will describe this peculiar white.

It was a town that was compacted together upon the sides and tops of a cluster of small hills. Its outlying borders fringed off and thinned away among the cedar forests, and there was no woody distance of curving coast or leafy islet sleeping upon the dimpled,



painted sea, but was flecked with shining white points—half-concealed houses peeping out of the foliage. The architecture of the town was mainly Spanish, inherited from the colonists of two hundred and fifty years ago. Some ragged-topped cocoa-palms, glimpsed here and there, gave the land a tropical aspect.



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There was an ample pier of heavy masonry; upon this, under shelter, were some thousands of barrels containing that product which has carried the fame of Bermuda to many lands, the potato. With here and there an onion. That last sentence is facetious; for they grow at least two onions in Bermuda to one potato. The onion is the pride and joy of Bermuda. It is her jewel, her gem of gems. In her conversation, her pulpit, her literature, it is her most frequent and eloquent figure. In Bermuda metaphor it stands for perfection—perfection absolute.

The Bermudian weeping over the departed exhausts praise when he says, “He was an onion!” The Bermudian extolling the living hero bankrupts applause when he says, “He is an onion!” The Bermudian setting his son upon the stage of life to dare and do for himself climaxes all counsel, supplication, admonition, comprehends all ambition, when he says, “Be an onion!”

When parallel with the pier, and ten or fifteen steps outside it, we anchored. It was Sunday, bright and sunny. The groups upon the pier—men, youths, and boys—were whites and blacks in about equal proportion. All were well and neatly dressed; many of them nattily, a few of them very stylishly. One would have to travel far before he would find another town of twelve thousand inhabitants that could represent itself so respectably, in the matter of clothes, on a freight-pier, without premeditation or effort. The women and young girls, black and white, who occasionally passed by, were nicely clad, and many were elegantly and fashionably so. The men did not affect summer clothing much, but the girls and women did, and their white garments were good to look at, after so many months of familiarity with somber colors.

Around one isolated potato-barrel stood four young gentlemen, two black, two white, becomingly dressed, each with the head of a slender cane pressed against his teeth, and each with a foot propped up on the barrel. Another young gentleman came up, looked longingly at the barrel, but saw no rest for his foot there, and turned pensively away to seek another barrel. He wandered here and there, but without result. Nobody sat upon a barrel, as is the custom of the idle in other lands, yet all the isolated barrels were humanly occupied. Whosoever had a foot to spare put it on a barrel, if all the places on it were not already taken. The habits of all peoples are determined by their circumstances. The Bermudians lean upon barrels because of the scarcity of lamp-posts.

Many citizens came on board and spoke eagerly to the officers—inquiring about the Turco-Russian war news, I supposed. However, by listening judiciously I found that this was not so. They said, “What is the price of onions?” or, “How’s onions?” Naturally enough this was their first interest; but they dropped into the war the moment it was satisfied.



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We went ashore and found a novelty of a pleasant nature: there were no hackmen, hacks, or omnibuses on the pier or about it anywhere, and nobody offered his services to us, or molested us in any way. I said it was like being in heaven. The Reverend rebukingly and rather pointedly advised me to make the most of it, then. We knew of a boarding-house, and what we needed now was somebody to pilot us to it. Presently a little barefooted colored boy came along, whose raggedness was conspicuously not Bermudian. His rear was so marvelously bepatched with colored squares and triangles that one was half persuaded he had got it out of an atlas. When the sun struck him right, he was as good to follow as a lightning-bug. We hired him and dropped into his wake. He piloted us through one picturesque street after another, and in due course deposited us where we belonged. He charged nothing for his map, and but a trifle for his services: so the Reverend doubled it. The little chap received the money with a beaming applause in his eye which plainly said, "This man's an onion!"

We had brought no letters of introduction; our names had been misspelled in the passenger-list; nobody knew whether we were honest folk or otherwise. So we were expecting to have a good private time in case there was nothing in our general aspect to close boarding-house doors against us. We had no trouble. Bermuda has had but little experience of rascals, and is not suspicious. We got large, cool, well-lighted rooms on a second floor, overlooking a bloomy display of flowers and flowering shrubscalia and annunciation lilies, lantanas, heliotrope, jasmine, roses, pinks, double geraniums, oleanders, pomegranates, blue morning-glories of a great size, and many plants that were unknown to me.

We took a long afternoon walk, and soon found out that that exceedingly white town was built of blocks of white coral. Bermuda is a coral island, with a six-inch crust of soil on top of it, and every man has a quarry on his own premises. Everywhere you go you see square recesses cut into the hillsides, with perpendicular walls unmarred by crack or crevice, and perhaps you fancy that a house grew out of the ground there, and has been removed in a single piece from the mold. If you do, you err. But the material for a house has been quarried there. They cut right down through the coral, to any depth that is convenient—ten to twenty feet—and take it out in great square blocks. This cutting is done with a chisel that has a handle twelve or fifteen feet long, and is used as one uses a crowbar when he is drilling a hole, or a dasher when he is churning. Thus soft is this stone. Then with a common handsaw they saw the great blocks into handsome, huge bricks that are two feet long, a foot wide, and about six inches thick. These stand loosely piled during a month to harden; then the work of building begins.

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The house is built of these blocks; it is roofed with broad coral slabs an inch thick, whose edges lap upon each other, so that the roof looks like a succession of shallow steps or terraces; the chimneys are built of the coral blocks, and sawed into graceful and picturesque patterns; the ground-floor veranda is paved with coral blocks; also the walk to the gate; the fence is built of coral blocks—built in massive panels, with broad capstones and heavy gate-posts, and the whole trimmed into easy lines and comely shape with the saw. Then they put a hard coat of whitewash, as thick as your thumb-nail, on the fence and all over the house, roof, chimneys, and all; the sun comes out and shines on this spectacle, and it is time for you to shut your unaccustomed eyes, lest they be put out. It is the whitest white you can conceive of, and the blindingest. A Bermuda house does not look like marble; it is a much intenser white than that; and, besides, there is a dainty, indefinable something else about its look that is not marble-like. We put in a great deal of solid talk and reflection over this matter of trying to find a figure that would describe the unique white of a Bermuda house, and we contrived to hit upon it at last. It is exactly the white of the icing of a cake, and has the same unemphasized and scarcely perceptible polish. The white of marble is modest and retiring compared with it.

After the house is cased in its hard scale of whitewash, not a crack, or sign of a seam, or joining of the blocks is detectable, from base-stone to chimney-top; the building looks as if it had been carved from a single block of stone, and the doors and windows sawed out afterward. A white marble house has a cold, tomb-like, unsociable look, and takes the conversation out of a body and depresses him. Not so with a Bermuda house. There is something exhilarating, even hilarious, about its vivid whiteness when the sun plays upon it. If it be of picturesque shape and graceful contour—and many of the Bermudian dwellings are—it will so fascinate you that you will keep your eyes on it until they ache. One of those clean-cut, fanciful chimneys—too pure and white for this world—with one side glowing in the sun and the other touched with a soft shadow, is an object that will charm one's gaze by the hour. I know of no other country that has chimneys worthy to be gazed at and gloated over. One of those snowy houses, half concealed and half glimpsed through green foliage, is a pretty thing to see; and if it takes one by surprise and suddenly, as he turns a sharp corner of a country road, it will wring an exclamation from him, sure.



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Wherever you go, in town or country, you find those snowy houses, and always with masses of bright-colored flowers about them, but with no vines climbing their walls; vines cannot take hold of the smooth, hard whitewash. Wherever you go, in the town or along the country roads, among little potato farms and patches or expensive country-seats, these stainless white dwellings, gleaming out from flowers and foliage, meet you at every turn. The least little bit of a cottage is as white and blemishless as the staliest mansion. Nowhere is there dirt or stench, puddle or hog-wallow, neglect, disorder, or lack of trimness and neatness. The roads, the streets, the dwellings, the people, the clothes—this neatness extends to everything that falls under the eye. It is the tidiest country in the world. And very much the tidiest, too.

Considering these things, the question came up, Where do the poor live? No answer was arrived at. Therefore, we agreed to leave this conundrum for future statesmen to wrangle over.

What a bright and startling spectacle one of those blazing white country palaces, with its brown-tinted window-caps and ledges, and green shutters, and its wealth of caressing flowers and foliage, would be in black London! And what a gleaming surprise it would be in nearly any American city one could mention, too!

Bermuda roads are made by cutting down a few inches into the solid white coral—or a good many feet, where a hill intrudes itself—and smoothing off the surface of the road-bed. It is a simple and easy process. The grain of the coral is coarse and porous; the road-bed has the look of being made of coarse white sugar. Its excessive cleanness and whiteness are a trouble in one way: the sun is reflected into your eyes with such energy as you walk along that you want to sneeze all the time. Old Captain Tom Bowling found another difficulty. He joined us in our walk, but kept wandering unrestfully to the roadside. Finally he explained. Said he, “Well, I chew, you know, and the road’s so plagued clean.”

We walked several miles that afternoon in the bewildering glare of the sun, the white roads, and the white buildings. Our eyes got to paining us a good deal. By and by a soothing, blessed twilight spread its cool balm around. We looked up in pleased surprise and saw that it proceeded from an intensely black negro who was going by. We answered his military salute in the grateful gloom of his near presence, and then passed on into the pitiless white glare again.

The colored women whom we met usually bowed and spoke; so did the children. The colored men commonly gave the military salute. They borrow this fashion from the soldiers, no doubt; England has kept a garrison here for generations. The younger men’s custom of carrying small canes is also borrowed from the soldiers, I suppose, who always carry a cane, in Bermuda as everywhere else in Britain’s broad dominions.



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The country roads curve and wind hither and thither in the delightfulest way, unfolding pretty surprises at every turn: billowy masses of oleander that seem to float out from behind distant projections like the pink cloud-banks of sunset; sudden plunges among cottages and gardens, life and activity, followed by as sudden plunges into the somber twilight and stillness of the woods; flitting visions of white fortresses and beacon towers pictured against the sky on remote hilltops; glimpses of shining green sea caught for a moment through opening headlands, then lost again; more woods and solitude; and by and by another turn lays bare, without warning, the full sweep of the inland ocean, enriched with its bars of soft color and graced with its wandering sails.

Take any road you please, you may depend upon it you will not stay in it half a mile. Your road is everything that a road ought to be: it is bordered with trees, and with strange plants and flowers; it is shady and pleasant, or sunny and still pleasant; it carries you by the prettiest and peacefulest and most homelike of homes, and through stretches of forest that lie in a deep hush sometimes, and sometimes are alive with the music of birds; it curves always, which is a continual promise, whereas straight roads reveal everything at a glance and kill interest. Your road is all this, and yet you will not stay in it half a mile, for the reason that little seductive, mysterious roads are always branching out from it on either hand, and as these curve sharply also and hide what is beyond, you cannot resist the temptation to desert your own chosen road and explore them. You are usually paid for your trouble; consequently, your walk inland always turns out to be one of the most crooked, involved, purposeless, and interesting experiences a body can imagine. There is enough of variety. Sometimes you are in the level open, with marshes thick grown with flag-lances that are ten feet high on the one hand, and potato and onion orchards on the other; next, you are on a hilltop, with the ocean and the islands spread around you; presently the road winds through a deep cut, shut in by perpendicular walls thirty or forty feet high, marked with the oddest and abruptest stratum lines, suggestive of sudden and eccentric old upheavals, and garnished with here and there a clinging adventurous flower, and here and there a dangling vine; and by and by your way is along the sea edge, and you may look down a fathom or two through the transparent water and watch the diamond-like flash and play of the light upon the rocks and sands on the bottom until you are tired of it—if you are so constituted as to be able to get tired of it.

You may march the country roads in maiden meditation, fancy free, by field and farm, for no dog will plunge out at you from unsuspected gate, with breath-taking surprise of ferocious bark, notwithstanding it is a Christian land and a civilized. We saw upward of a million cats in Bermuda, but the people are very abstemious in the matter of dogs. Two or three nights we prowled the country far and wide, and never once were accosted by a dog. It is a great privilege to visit such a land. The cats were no offense when properly distributed, but when piled they obstructed travel.

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As we entered the edge of the town that Sunday afternoon, we stopped at a cottage to get a drink of water. The proprietor, a middle-aged man with a good face, asked us to sit down and rest. His dame brought chairs, and we grouped ourselves in the shade of the trees by the door. Mr. Smith—that was not his name, but it will answer—questioned us about ourselves and our country, and we answered him truthfully, as a general thing, and questioned him in return. It was all very simple and pleasant and sociable. Rural, too; for there was a pig and a small donkey and a hen anchored out, close at hand, by cords to their legs, on a spot that purported to be grassy. Presently, a woman passed along, and although she coldly said nothing she changed the drift of our talk. Said Smith:

“She didn’t look this way, you noticed? Well, she is our next neighbor on one side, and there’s another family that’s our next neighbors on the other side; but there’s a general coolness all around now, and we don’t speak. Yet these three families, one generation and another, have lived here side by side and been as friendly as weavers for a hundred and fifty years, till about a year ago.”

“Why, what calamity could have been powerful enough to break up so old a friendship?”

“Well, it was too bad, but it couldn’t be helped. It happened like this: About a year or more ago, the rats got to pestering my place a good deal, and I set up a steel trap in my back yard. Both of these neighbors run considerable to cats, and so I warned them about the trap, because their cats were pretty sociable around here nights, and they might get into trouble without my intending it. Well, they shut up their cats for a while, but you know how it is with people; they got careless, and sure enough one night the trap took Mrs. Jones’s principal tomcat into camp and finished him up. In the morning Mrs. Jones comes here with the corpse in her arms, and cries and takes on the same as if it was a child. It was a cat by the name of Yelverton—Hector G. Yelverton—a troublesome old rip, with no more principle than an Injun, though you couldn’t make her believe it. I said all a man could to comfort her, but no, nothing would do but I must pay for him. Finally, I said I warn’t investing in cats now as much as I was, and with that she walked off in a huff, carrying the remains with her. That closed our intercourse with the Joneses. Mrs. Jones joined another church and took her tribe with her. She said she would not hold fellowship with assassins. Well, by and by comes Mrs. Brown’s turn—she that went by here a minute ago. She had a disgraceful old yellow cat that she thought as much of as if he was twins, and one night he tried that trap on his neck, and it fitted him so, and was so sort of satisfactory, that he laid down and curled up and stayed with it. Such was the end of Sir John Baldwin.”

“Was that the name of the cat?”



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“The same. There’s cats around here with names that would surprise you. Maria” (to his wife), “what was that cat’s name that eat a keg of ratsbane by mistake over at Hooper’s, and started home and got struck by lightning and took the blind staggers and fell in the well and was ’most drowned before they could fish him out?”

“That was that colored Deacon Jackson’s cat. I only remember the last end of its name, which was Hold-The-Fort-For-I-Am-Coming Jackson.”

“Sho! that ain’t the one. That’s the one that eat up an entire box of Seidlitz powders, and then hadn’t any more judgment than to go and take a drink. He was considered to be a great loss, but I never could see it. Well, no matter about the names. Mrs. Brown wanted to be reasonable, but Mrs. Jones wouldn’t let her. She put her up to going to law for damages. So to law she went, and had the face to claim seven shillings and sixpence. It made a great stir. All the neighbors went to court. Everybody took sides. It got hotter and hotter, and broke up all the friendships for three hundred yards around friendships that had lasted for generations and generations.

“Well, I proved by eleven witnesses that the cat was of a low character and very ornery, and warn’t worth a canceled postage-stamp, anyway, taking the average of cats here; but I lost the case. What could I expect? The system is all wrong here, and is bound to make revolution and bloodshed some day. You see, they give the magistrate a poor little starvation salary, and then turn him loose on the public to gouge for fees and costs to live on. What is the natural result? Why, he never looks into the justice of a case—never once. All he looks at is which client has got the money. So this one piled the fees and costs and everything on to me. I could pay specie, don’t you see? and he knew mighty well that if he put the verdict on to Mrs. Brown, where it belonged, he’d have to take his swag in currency.”

“Currency? Why, has Bermuda a currency?”

“Yes—onions. And they were forty per cent. discount, too, then, because the season had been over as much as three months. So I lost my case. I had to pay for that cat. But the general trouble the case made was the worst thing about it. Broke up so much good feeling. The neighbors don’t speak to each other now. Mrs. Brown had named a child after me. But she changed its name right away. She is a Baptist. Well, in the course of baptizing it over again it got drowned. I was hoping we might get to be friendly again some time or other, but of course this drowning the child knocked that all out of the question. It would have saved a world of heartbreak and ill blood if she had named it dry.”

I knew by the sigh that this was honest. All this trouble and all this destruction of confidence in the purity of the bench on account of a seven-shilling lawsuit about a cat! Somehow, it seemed to “size” the country.



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At this point we observed that an English flag had just been placed at half-mast on a building a hundred yards away. I and my friends were busy in an instant trying to imagine whose death, among the island dignitaries, could command such a mark of respect as this. Then a shudder shook them and me at the same moment, and I knew that we had jumped to one and the same conclusion: "The governor has gone to England; it is for the British admiral!"

At this moment Mr. Smith noticed the flag. He said with emotion:

"That's on a boarding-house. I judge there's a boarder dead."

A dozen other flags within view went to half-mast.

"It's a boarder, sure," said Smith.

"But would they half-mast the flags here for a boarder, Mr. Smith?"

"Why, certainly they would, if he was dead."

That seemed to size the country again.

IV

The early twilight of a Sunday evening in Hamilton, Bermuda, is an alluring time. There is just enough of whispering breeze, fragrance of flowers, and sense of repose to raise one's thoughts heavenward; and just enough amateur piano music to keep him reminded of the other place. There are many venerable pianos in Hamilton, and they all play at twilight. Age enlarges and enriches the powers of some musical instruments—notably those of the violin—but it seems to set a piano's teeth on edge. Most of the music in vogue there is the same that those pianos prattled in their innocent infancy; and there is something very pathetic about it when they go over it now, in their asthmatic second childhood, dropping a note here and there where a tooth is gone.

We attended evening service at the stately Episcopal church on the hill, where five or six hundred people, half of them white and the other half black, according to the usual Bermudian proportions; and all well dressed—a thing which is also usual in Bermuda and to be confidently expected. There was good music, which we heard, and doubtless—a good sermon, but there was a wonderful deal of coughing, and so only the high parts of the argument carried over it. As we came out, after service, I overheard one young girl say to another:

"Why, you don't mean to say you pay duty on gloves and laces! I only pay postage; have them done up and sent in the Boston Advertiser."



There are those that believe that the most difficult thing to create is a woman who can comprehend that it is wrong to smuggle; and that an impossible thing to create is a woman who will not smuggle, whether or no, when she gets a chance. But these may be errors.

We went wandering off toward the country, and were soon far down in the lonely black depths of a road that was roofed over with the dense foliage of a double rank of great cedars. There was no sound of any kind there; it was perfectly still. And it was so dark that one could detect nothing but somber outlines. We strode farther and farther down this tunnel, cheering the way with chat.

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Presently the chat took this shape: “How insensibly the character of the people and of a government makes its impress upon a stranger, and gives him a sense of security or of insecurity without his taking deliberate thought upon the matter or asking anybody a question! We have been in this land half a day; we have seen none but honest faces; we have noted the British flag flying, which means efficient government and good order; so without inquiry we plunge unarmed and with perfect confidence into this dismal place, which in almost any other country would swarm with thugs and garroters—”

’Sh! What was that? Stealthy footsteps! Low voices! We gasp, we close up together, and wait. A vague shape glides out of the dusk and confronts us. A voice speaks—demands money!

“A shilling, gentlemen, if you please, to help build the new Methodist church.”

Blessed sound! Holy sound! We contribute with thankful avidity to the new Methodist church, and are happy to think how lucky it was that those little colored Sunday-school scholars did not seize upon everything we had with violence, before we recovered from our momentary helpless condition. By the light of cigars we write down the names of weightier philanthropists than ourselves on the contribution cards, and then pass on into the farther darkness, saying, What sort of a government do they call this, where they allow little black pious children, with contribution cards, to plunge out upon peaceable strangers in the dark and scare them to death?

We prowled on several hours, sometimes by the seaside, sometimes inland, and finally managed to get lost, which is a feat that requires talent in Bermuda. I had on new shoes. They were No. 7’s when I started, but were not more than 5’s now, and still diminishing. I walked two hours in those shoes after that, before we reached home. Doubtless I could have the reader’s sympathy for the asking. Many people have never had the headache or the toothache, and I am one of those myself; but every body has worn tight shoes for two or three hours, and known the luxury of taking them off in a retired place and seeing his feet swell up and obscure the firmament. Once when I was a callow, bashful cub, I took a plain, unsentimental country girl to a comedy one night. I had known her a day; she seemed divine; I wore my new boots. At the end of the first half-hour she said, “Why do you fidget so with your feet?” I said, “Did I?” Then I put my attention there and kept still. At the end of another half-hour she said, “Why do you say, ‘Yes, oh yes!’ and ‘Ha, ha, oh, certainly! very true!’ to everything I say, when half the time those are entirely irrelevant answers?” I blushed, and explained that I had been a little absent-minded. At the end of another half-hour she said, “Please, why do you grin so steadfastly at vacancy, and yet look so sad?” I explained that I always did that when I was reflecting.



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An hour passed, and then she turned and contemplated me with her earnest eyes and said, "Why do you cry all the time?" I explained that very funny comedies always made me cry. At last human nature surrendered, and I secretly slipped my boots off. This was a mistake. I was not able to get them on any more. It was a rainy night; there were no omnibuses going our way; and as I walked home, burning up with shame, with the girl on one arm and my boots under the other, I was an object worthy of some compassion—especially in those moments of martyrdom when I had to pass through the glare that fell upon the pavement from street-lamps. Finally, this child of the forest said, "Where are your boots?" and being taken unprepared, I put a fitting finish to the follies of the evening with the stupid remark, "The higher classes do not wear them to the theater."

The Reverend had been an army chaplain during the war, and while we were hunting for a road that would lead to Hamilton he told a story about two dying soldiers which interested me in spite of my feet. He said that in the Potomac hospitals rough pine coffins were furnished by government, but that it was not always possible to keep up with the demand; so, when a man died, if there was no coffin at hand he was buried without one. One night, late, two soldiers lay dying in a ward. A man came in with a coffin on his shoulder, and stood trying to make up his mind which of these two poor fellows would be likely to need it first. Both of them begged for it with their fading eyes—they were past talking. Then one of them protruded a wasted hand from his blankets and made a feeble beckoning sign with the fingers, to signify, "Be a good fellow; put it under my bed, please." The man did it, and left. The lucky soldier painfully turned himself in his bed until he faced the other warrior, raised himself partly on his elbow, and began to work up a mysterious expression of some kind in his face. Gradually, irksomely, but surely and steadily, it developed, and at last it took definite form as a pretty successful wink. The sufferer fell back exhausted with his labor, but bathed in glory. Now entered a personal friend of No. 2, the despoiled soldier. No. 2 pleaded with him with eloquent eyes, till presently he understood, and removed the coffin from under No. 1's bed and put it under No. 2's. No. 2 indicated his joy, and made some more signs; the friend understood again, and put his arm under No. 2's shoulders and lifted him partly up. Then the dying hero turned the dim exultation of his eye upon No. 1, and began a slow and labored work with his hands; gradually he lifted one hand up toward his face; it grew weak and dropped back again; once more he made the effort, but failed again. He took a rest; he gathered all the remnant of his strength, and this time he slowly but surely carried his thumb to the side of his nose, spread the gaunt fingers wide in triumph, and dropped back dead. That picture sticks by me yet. The "situation" is unique.



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The next morning, at what seemed a very early hour, the little white table-waiter appeared suddenly in my room and shot a single word out of himself "Breakfast!"

This was a remarkable boy in many ways. He was about eleven years old; he had alert, intent black eyes; he was quick of movement; there was no hesitation, no uncertainty about him anywhere; there was a military decision in his lip, his manner, his speech, that was an astonishing thing to see in a little chap like him; he wasted no words; his answers always came so quick and brief that they seemed to be part of the question that had been asked instead of a reply to it. When he stood at table with his fly-brush, rigid, erect, his face set in a cast-iron gravity, he was a statue till he detected a dawning want in somebody's eye; then he pounced down, supplied it, and was instantly a statue again. When he was sent to the kitchen for anything, he marched upright till he got to the door; he turned hand-springs the rest of the way.

"Breakfast!"

I thought I would make one more effort to get some conversation out of this being.

"Have you called the Reverend, or are—"

"Yes s'r!"

"Is it early, or is—"

"Eight-five."

"Do you have to do all the 'chores,' or is there somebody to give you a—"

"Colored girl."

"Is there only one parish in this island, or are there—"

"Eight!"

"Is the big church on the hill a parish church, or is it—"

"Chapel-of-ease!"

"Is taxation here classified into poll, parish, town, and—"

"Don't know!"

Before I could cudgel another question out of my head, he was below, hand-springing across the back yard. He had slid down the balusters, headfirst. I gave up trying to provoke a discussion with him. The essential element of discussion had been left out of



him; his answers were so final and exact that they did not leave a doubt to hang conversation on. I suspect that there is the making of a mighty man or a mighty rascal in this boy—according to circumstances—but they are going to apprentice him to a carpenter. It is the way the world uses its opportunities.

During this day and the next we took carriage drives about the island and over to the town of St. George's, fifteen or twenty miles away. Such hard, excellent roads to drive over are not to be found elsewhere out of Europe. An intelligent young colored man drove us, and acted as guide-book. In the edge of the town we saw five or six mountain-cabbage palms (atrocious name!) standing in a straight row, and equidistant from each other. These were not the largest or the tallest trees I have ever seen, but they were the stateliest, the most majestic. That row of them must be the nearest that nature has ever come to counterfeiting a colonnade. These trees are all the same height, say sixty feet; the trunks as

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gray as granite, with a very gradual and perfect taper; without sign of branch or knot or flaw; the surface not looking like bark, but like granite that has been dressed and not polished. Thus all the way up the diminishing shaft for fifty feet; then it begins to take the appearance of being closely wrapped, spool-fashion, with gray cord, or of having been turned in a lathe. Above this point there is an outward swell, and thence upward for six feet or more the cylinder is a bright, fresh green, and is formed of wrappings like those of an ear of green Indian corn. Then comes the great, spraying palm plume, also green. Other palm trees always lean out of the perpendicular, or have a curve in them. But the plumb-line could not detect a deflection in any individual of this stately row; they stand as straight as the colonnade of Baalbec; they have its great height, they have its gracefulness, they have its dignity; in moonlight or twilight, and shorn of their plumes, they would duplicate it.

The birds we came across in the country were singularly tame; even that wild creature, the quail, would pick around in the grass at ease while we inspected it and talked about it at leisure. A small bird of the canary species had to be stirred up with the butt-end of the whip before it would move, and then it moved only a couple of feet. It is said that even the suspicious flea is tame and sociable in Bermuda, and will allow himself to be caught and caressed without misgivings. This should be taken with allowance, for doubtless there is more or less brag about it. In San Francisco they used to claim that their native flea could kick a child over, as if it were a merit in a flea to be able to do that; as if the knowledge of it trumpeted abroad ought to entice immigration. Such a thing in nine cases out of ten would be almost sure to deter a thinking man from coming.

We saw no bugs or reptiles to speak of, and so I was thinking of saying in print, in a general way, that there were none at all; but one night after I had gone to bed, the Reverend came into my room carrying something, and asked, "Is this your boot?" I said it was, and he said he had met a spider going off with it. Next morning he stated that just at dawn the same spider raised his window and was coming in to get a shirt, but saw him and fled.

I inquired, "Did he get the shirt?"

"No."

"How did you know it was a shirt he was after?"

"I could see it in his eye."

We inquired around, but could hear of no Bermudian spider capable of doing these things. Citizens said that their largest spiders could not more than spread their legs over an ordinary saucer, and that they had always been considered honest. Here was

testimony of a clergyman against the testimony of mere worldlings—interested ones, too. On the whole, I judged it best to lock up my things.

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Here and there on the country roads we found lemon, papaw, orange, lime, and fig trees; also several sorts of palms, among them the cocoa, the date, and the palmetto. We saw some bamboos forty feet high, with stems as thick as a man's arm. Jungles of the mangrove tree stood up out of swamps; propped on their interlacing roots as upon a tangle of stilts. In drier places the noble tamarind sent down its grateful cloud of shade. Here and there the blossomy tamarisk adorned the roadside. There was a curious gnarled and twisted black tree, without a single leaf on it. It might have passed itself off for a dead apple tree but for the fact that it had a star-like, red-hot flower sprinkled sparsely over its person. It had the scattery red glow that a constellation might have when glimpsed through smoked glass. It is possible that our constellations have been so constructed as to be invisible through smoked glass; if this is so it is a great mistake.

We saw a tree that bears grapes, and just as calmly and unostentatiously as a vine would do it. We saw an India-rubber tree, but out of season, possibly, so there were no shoes on it, nor suspenders, nor anything that a person would properly expect to find there. This gave it an impressively fraudulent look. There was exactly one mahogany tree on the island. I know this to be reliable, because I saw a man who said he had counted it many a time and could not be mistaken. He was a man with a harelip and a pure heart, and everybody said he was as true as steel. Such men are all too few.

One's eye caught near and far the pink cloud of the oleander and the red blaze of the pomegranate blossom. In one piece of wild wood the morning-glory vines had wrapped the trees to their very tops, and decorated them all over with couples and clusters of great bluebells—a fine and striking spectacle, at a little distance. But the dull cedar is everywhere, and is the prevailing foliage. One does not appreciate how dull it is until the varnished, bright green attire of the infrequent lemon tree pleasantly intrudes its contrast. In one thing Bermuda is eminently tropical—was in May, at least—the unbrilliant, slightly faded, unrejoicing look of the landscape. For forests arrayed in a blemishless magnificence of glowing green foliage that seems to exult in its own existence and can move the beholder to an enthusiasm that will make him either shout or cry, one must go to countries that have malignant winters.

We saw scores of colored farmers digging their crops of potatoes and onions, their wives and children helping—entirely contented and comfortable, if looks go for anything. We never met a man, or woman, or child anywhere in this sunny island who seemed to be unprosperous, or discontented, or sorry about anything. This sort of monotony became very tiresome presently, and even something worse. The spectacle of an entire nation groveling in contentment is an infuriating thing.

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We felt the lack of something in this community—a vague, an indefinable, an elusive something, and yet a lack. But after considerable thought we made out what it was—tramps. Let them go there, right now, in a body. It is utterly virgin soil. Passage is cheap. Every true patriot in America will help buy tickets. Whole armies of these excellent beings can be spared from our midst and our polls; they will find a delicious climate and a green, kind-hearted people. There are potatoes and onions for all, and a generous welcome for the first batch that arrives, and elegant graves for the second.

It was the Early Rose potato the people were digging. Later in the year they have another crop, which they call the Garnet. We buy their potatoes (retail) at fifteen dollars a barrel; and those colored farmers buy ours for a song, and live on them. Havana might exchange cigars with Connecticut in the same advantageous way, if she thought of it.

We passed a roadside grocery with a sign up, “Potatoes Wanted.” An ignorant stranger, doubtless. He could not have gone thirty steps from his place without finding plenty of them.

In several fields the arrowroot crop was already sprouting. Bermuda used to make a vast annual profit out of this staple before firearms came into such general use.

The island is not large. Somewhere in the interior a man ahead of us had a very slow horse. I suggested that we had better go by him; but the driver said the man had but a little way to go. I waited to see, wondering how he could know. Presently the man did turn down another road. I asked, “How did you know he would?”

“Because I knew the man, and where he lived.”

I asked him, satirically, if he knew everybody in the island; he answered, very simply, that he did. This gives a body’s mind a good substantial grip on the dimensions of the place.

At the principal hotel at St. George’s, a young girl, with a sweet, serious face, said we could not be furnished with dinner, because we had not been expected, and no preparation had been made. Yet it was still an hour before dinner-time. We argued, she yielded not; we supplicated, she was serene. The hotel had not been expecting an inundation of two people, and so it seemed that we should have to go home dinnerless. I said we were not very hungry a fish would do. My little maid answered, it was not the market-day for fish. Things began to look serious; but presently the boarder who sustained the hotel came in, and when the case was laid before him he was cheerfully willing to divide. So we had much pleasant chat at table about St. George’s chief industry, the repairing of damaged ships; and in between we had a soup that had

something in it that seemed to taste like the hereafter, but it proved to be only pepper of a particularly vivacious kind. And we had an iron-clad chicken that was deliciously cooked, but not in the right way. Baking was



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not the thing to convince this sort. He ought to have been put through a quartz-mill until the “tuck” was taken out of him, and then boiled till we came again. We got a good deal of sport out of him, but not enough sustenance to leave the victory on our side. No matter; we had potatoes and a pie and a sociable good time. Then a ramble through the town, which is a quaint one, with interesting, crooked streets, and narrow, crooked lanes, with here and there a grain of dust. Here, as in Hamilton, the dwellings had Venetian blinds of a very sensible pattern. They were not double shutters, hinged at the sides, but a single broad shutter, hinged at the top; you push it outward, from the bottom, and fasten it at any angle required by the sun or desired by yourself.

All about the island one sees great white scars on the hill-slopes. These are dished spaces where the soil has been scraped off and the coral exposed and glazed with hard whitewash. Some of these are a quarter-acre in size. They catch and carry the rainfall to reservoirs; for the wells are few and poor, and there are no natural springs and no brooks.

They say that the Bermuda climate is mild and equable, with never any snow or ice, and that one may be very comfortable in spring clothing the year round, there. We had delightful and decided summer weather in May, with a flaming sun that permitted the thinnest of raiment, and yet there was a constant breeze; consequently we were never discomforted by heat. At four or five in the afternoon the mercury began to go down, and then it became necessary to change to thick garments. I went to St. George's in the morning clothed in the thinnest of linen, and reached home at five in the afternoon with two overcoats on. The nights are said to be always cool and bracing. We had mosquito-nets, and the Reverend said the mosquitoes persecuted him a good deal. I often heard him slapping and banging at these imaginary creatures with as much zeal as if they had been real. There are no mosquitoes in the Bermudas in May.

The poet Thomas Moore spent several months in Bermuda more than seventy years ago. He was sent out to be registrar of the admiralty. I am not quite clear as to the function of a registrar of the admiralty of Bermuda, but I think it is his duty to keep a record of all the admirals born there. I will inquire into this. There was not much doing in admirals, and Moore got tired and went away. A reverently preserved souvenir of him is still one of the treasures of the islands: I gathered the idea, vaguely, that it was a jug, but was persistently thwarted in the twenty-two efforts I made to visit it. However, it was no matter, for I found out afterward that it was only a chair.

There are several “sights” in the Bermudas, of course, but they are easily avoided. This is a great advantage—one cannot have it in Europe. Bermuda is the right country for a jaded man to “loaf” in. There are no harassments; the deep peace and quiet of the country sink into one's body and bones and give his conscience a rest, and chloroform the legion of invisible small devils that are always trying to whitewash his hair. A good

many Americans go there about the first of March and remain until the early spring weeks have finished their villainies at home.

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The Bermudians are hoping soon to have telegraphic communication with the world. But even after they shall have acquired this curse it will still be a good country to go to for a vacation, for there are charming little islets scattered about the inclosed sea where one could live secure from interruption. The telegraph-boy would have to come in a boat, and one could easily kill him while he was making his landing.

We had spent four days in Bermuda—three bright ones out of doors and one rainy one in the house, we being disappointed about getting a yacht for a sail; and now our furlough was ended, and we entered into the ship again and sailed homeward.

We made the run home to New York quarantine in three days and five hours, and could have gone right along up to the city if we had had a health permit. But health permits are not granted after seven in the evening, partly because a ship cannot be inspected and overhauled with exhaustive, thoroughness except in daylight, and partly because health-officers are liable to catch cold if they expose themselves to the night air. Still, you can buy a permit after hours for five dollars extra, and the officer will do the inspecting next week. Our ship and passengers lay under expense and in humiliating captivity all night, under the very nose of the little official reptile who is supposed to protect New York from pestilence by his vigilant “inspections.” This imposing rigor gave everybody a solemn and awful idea of the beneficent watchfulness of our government, and there were some who wondered if anything finer could be found in other countries.

In the morning we were all a-tiptoe to witness the intricate ceremony of inspecting the ship. But it was a disappointing thing. The health-officer’s tug ranged alongside for a moment, our purser handed the lawful three-dollar permit fee to the health-officer’s bootblack, who passed us a folded paper in a forked stick, and away we went. The entire “inspection” did not occupy thirteen seconds.

The health-officer’s place is worth a hundred thousand dollars a year to him. His system of inspection is perfect, and therefore cannot be improved on; but it seems to me that his system of collecting his fees might be amended. For a great ship to lie idle all night is a most costly loss of time; for her passengers to have to do the same thing works to them the same damage, with the addition of an amount of exasperation and bitterness of soul that the spectacle of that health-officer’s ashes on a shovel could hardly sweeten. Now why would it not be better and simpler to let the ships pass in unmolested, and the fees and permits be exchanged once a year by post.