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An Old Sailor's Yarns

N. (Nathaniel) Ames

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AN

OLD SAILOR'S YARNS.

BY

N. AMES.

AUTHOR OF "MARINER'S SKETCHES,"

&c. &c. &c.

Extremum hunc, Arethusa, mihi concede laborem.

Virgil.

NEW YORK:

GEORGE DEARBORN, 38 GOLD STREET.

MDCCCXXXV.

[Pg 2]

Entered according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1835, by
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[Pg 3]

William Van Norden, Print.

CONTENTS.

MARY BOWLINE

OLD CUFF

THE RIVALS

MORTON

PIRATE OF MASAFUERO

PREFACE.

[Pg 6] Mr. Buckingham, noticing the "Nautical Reminiscences" in the New England Magazine, says, no author ever stopped at the second book; and he very gravely proceeds to recommend that my number three should savor more of the style of Goldsmith or Washington Irving. I should have no objection whatever to writing like either of these distinguished authors, *if I could*; but as the case is, I must be content to write as well as I can. The whole article in Mr. B's magazine bore no faint resemblance to a dose of calomel and jalap, administered in a table-spoonful of molasses, in which the sweet and the nauseous are so equally balanced, that the patient is in doubt whether to spit or to swallow. I was, however, exceedingly flattered with the notice bestowed upon me by this literary cynic, as he was never before known to speak well, even moderately, of any author, except natives of Boston, or professors in Harvard University.

[Pg 7]

"Morton" is founded upon an old tradition, now forgotten, but well known when I first went to sea, of the exploits of some of our adventurous and somewhat lawless traders in the Pacific. A number of the crew of one of these smuggling vessels were taken in the act, and, after a hasty trial, ordered to be sent to the mines. The route to their place of condemnation and hopeless confinement lay near the coast. A large party of seamen landed from two or three ships that were in the neighborhood, waylaid the military escort, knocked most of them on the head, rescued the prisoners, and got safe off without loss. The story says nothing of female influence or assistance, but knowing it to be morally impossible to get through a story without the assistance of a lady, I pressed one into the service, and took other liberties with the original, till it became what peradventure the reader will find it. Many stories are told of the skirmishes, or as sailors call them, "scrammiges," between our "free-traders" and the guarda-costas in different parts of the Pacific. In particular, the ship D— —, of Boston, is said to have had a "regular-built fight" with a guarda-costa of forty-four guns, that retired from the action so miserably mauled, that it is doubtful to this day

whether she ever found her way back into port. An old sea-dog who was on board the D—, furnished me with many details of the proceedings of our merchantmen on the coasts of California, and Mexico, some thirty years since, but most of them have escaped my memory.

[Pg 8]

I have inadvertently, in one or two instances, called the inhabitants of Mexico, South Americans. The fact is, there is scarcely a perceptible shade of difference in manners between the Chilians, Peruvians, and Mexicans; there is none in their language, dress, or religion; and sailors, who pay but little regard to arbitrary divisions of continents, are in the habit of calling all the quondam possessions of his Most Catholic Majesty, that border upon the Pacific, by the general name of South America, upon the same principle, I presume, that they call the whole of that ocean the "*South Sea*," though they may be at that very moment anchored in Sitka, or cruizing in the chops of Behring's Straits.

"The Rivals," is built upon a strange story that was quite current among our men-of-war's-men some years ago, but I am unable to give any further account of the hero of *their* story than the reader will find in the conclusion of mine. There seems to be no doubt that the stranger was obliged to fly on account of a fatal duel; and sailors, who cannot conceive of a duel between two gentlemen, as they somewhat ironically call them, unless there is a woman in the case, have accordingly attached one to the quarrel that compelled the unfortunate officer to take shelter on board an American national vessel.

[Pg 9]

"Old Cuff" is a sketch from real life. He was a petty officer in the service at the same time with me, and notwithstanding his rambling life, was a man of good education and strong mind. His life was a striking illustration of the truth of the proposition that "there is no romance like the romance of real life." He proposed to me to take minutes of his adventures, which were extremely interesting, but before I could commence operations I was myself made a petty officer, and removed to a station in a part of the ship where I but seldom saw him, and the ship was soon after ordered home.

[Pg 12]

The reader need be neither a wizard nor a witch to perceive that "Mary Bowline" is a creation of my own brain, and is of course defective, and will disappoint. But if it is true that "Bacon, Butler, and Shakspeare have rendered it impossible for any one after them to be profound, witty, or sublime," it is equally true that Scott, Irving, and others have rendered it impossible for any one to be equally entertaining, interesting, or amusing. I hold, however, to another maxim, that "he is a benefactor to mankind who furnishes them with innocent materials for laughter and delight," a maxim that did not come exactly "ex cathedra," but is full as profound, and correct. If I have been so fortunate as to contribute to, or become the cause of innocent delight, I shall think that the "Forecastle Yarns" have not been written in vain.

It was objected to my two former works that they contained strictures, and remarks, upon what are commonly called orthodox principles. In the present volume, I have studiously endeavored to steer my footsteps clear of the tender toes of every religious sect except the Catholics; whom, in imitation of the Protestant clergy and laity all around me, I have handled without mittens whenever I could get a chance.

I cannot close without repeating that if I have succeeded in helping to make

"The wheels of life gae down hill screevin',
Wi' rattlin' glee," —

I shall feel more gratified than if I had squared the circle, or drawn up a tariff that, like Shakspeare's barber's chair, should fit all parties.

N. A.

[Pg 13] _Providence, October 1, 1833._

P. S. More than a year ago the following pages were written and prepared for the press, under the title of "Forecastle Yarns," but a gentleman connected with the New York Mirror took a fancy to that

title, and immediately appropriated it to himself with the most genteel indifference as to the prior right of another. In consequence, I have been obliged to adopt a new name. The "Pirate of Masafuero" was written after the above preface was prepared. "Old Cuff" has already been before the public in the columns of the first and only number of a new magazine [1] that expired for want of patronage, and support, having just survived long enough to give ample proofs that it deserved the patronage, and support, that were denied it. The very favorable notice that the Evening Star took of "Old Cuff," is proof positive that it is much higher than "fair to middling;" and if it is true that "the proof of the pudding is eating the bag," (and the reader will consider "Old Cuff" as the bag,) I think it follows that the pudding now set before him cannot be a bad one.

November, 1834.

[1] American Spectator and National Magazine. [Pg 15] [Pg 14]

MARY BOWLINE.

Contents

[Pg 17]

MARY BOWLINE

CHAPTER I.

"Nautaeque, per omne
Audaces mare qui currunt, hac mente laborum
Sese ferre, senes ut in otia tuta recedunt,
Aiunt."
Horace.

Captain Robert Bowline, a retired sea-captain, occupied a snug little farm in the town of B—, one of the many pleasant villages on the coast of New England. He had followed the sea for many years, acquired considerable property, married, and had a family. When he had attained his forty-fifth year, a relation of his wife died, leaving her heiress to a very handsome estate, part of which was the farm aforesaid. In consequence of this event he was easily persuaded by his wife, whom he tenderly loved, to retire to private life, and leave the "vexed ocean" to be ploughed by those who had their fortunes to make. They retired to their farm, when the first act of the old Triton was to pull down the antique house that had been erected "about the time of the old French war," and build another more [Pg 18] "ship-shape," and congenial to the taste of a sailor. The dwelling itself was not, indeed, externally different from any other of the snug-looking and rather handsome two-story houses of substantial farmers, &c. in New England; but its internal economy was

somewhat nautical, containing numerous "lockers" and "store-rooms." Its front gate-posts were composed of the two jaw-bones of an enormous whale; the fence was of a most fanciful Chinese pattern; and directly in front of the house was erected that never-failing ornament of a sailor's dwelling, a tall flag-staff, with cap, cross-trees, and topmast, complete; the last, always being kept "housed," except upon the 4th of July, 22d of February, &c. At the foot of the flag-staff, "hushed in grim repose," was an iron six-pounder, mounted upon a ship gun-carriage, ready for service, whenever any national holyday required its voice. The house fronted the sea; a most superb view of which it commanded, but was at the same time screened from its storms in great measure by being flanked by noble old elms, and a fine orchard, which almost entirely surrounded it; while in the rear the ground swelled into a thickly wooded hill of moderate height. The ground in front sloped gently down to the water's edge, at the distance of half a mile from the house, but to the left gradually rose into a high point, or headland, terminating in a rocky cliff that strode far out into the sea, and formed the harbor. [Pg 19]

The family of the old seaman, at the time he took possession of his "shore quarters," consisted of himself, wife, and daughter Mary—the rest of his children having died young. As we have no particular concern with the events of his life from that period to Mary's twenty-first year, we shall only observe that during that time he had the misfortune to lose his wife.

Mary Bowline was a young lady, confessedly of the greatest beauty in the little town of B—, and for many miles round; a trifle above the middle stature, sufficiently so to relieve her figure from the imputation of shortness; or, as she was a little inclined to be "fleshy," or "embonpoint," as our refined authors call it, from what is sometimes called "stubbidness;" her eyes were of deep celestial blue; her hair, a dark brown, and her complexion, notwithstanding her continual rambles along the beach in her girlish days, of exquisite purity. Her education, I grieve to say, had been most shamefully neglected; her mother, though a most exemplary woman, both as a Christian and a member of society, had never tied her up in a fashionable corset to improve her figure, nor sent her to a fashionable boarding school to improve her mind; the consequence was that she

knew nothing of the piano,—Virgil seems to have had the gift of prophecy with regard to this part of modern education, when he said or sang,

"Stridente stipula miserum disperdere carmen,"—

[Pg 20] and was equally ignorant of that sublime and useful art, working lace; she had no further idea of dancing than had been beat into her head, or rather heels, by the saltatory instructions of an itinerant dancing-master—I ask pardon, "professor"—who, with a bandy-legged dog at his heels, and a green baize bag under his arm, paid an annual visit to the town, to instruct its Thetises in the "poetry of motion;" an apt illustration of the

"*Bacchum in remotis*" choreas "*rupibus*

Vidi docentem

Nymphasque discentes,"

of Horace, with the alteration of a word; said fiddler having "for-sworn thin potations" very soon after the commencement of his capering career. In the "serene and silent art" she was, however, truly fortunate; the clergyman of the place, a most amiable and intelligent man, and, to the credit of his amphibious parishioners, loved and esteemed with the utmost fervor and unanimity, added to his other accomplishments no mean skill as a draughtsman; an art, that he had full leisure to practise; one of his parochial duties, that of visiting the sick, being a mere shadow; for your fisherman, with his wife and his little ones, is but seldom on the doctor's list, and when he "files off," generally does it without beat of drum or flap of banner. He was a constant visiter at the house of Captain Bowline, whither he was attracted by the fascination [Pg 21] of the seaman's stories of foreign parts. Charmed with the dawning beauty of the lovely little Mary, he readily undertook to give her better instruction than she could have obtained at the town school, to which he added drawing. Her mother had amply instructed her in the more useful and homely arts of cooking, sewing, knitting, &c. and she had even taught her to spin; for she lived before the establishment of any, or many, of those institutions for the increase of illegitimate children, ignorance, immorality, suicide, seduction, murder, &c.—I mean cotton factories. The comparatively affluent circumstances of her family had, however, rendered it unnecessary

for her to practise this last accomplishment. With all these charms in her own person, and right in her father's strong box, it is not to be wondered at that the lovely Mary Bowline had suitors in abundance; but the only one that seemed to have made any impression upon her light heart, was a young seaman by the name of Kelson, who had now attained his twenty-seventh year.

Thomas Kelson was the son of poor parents, indeed it would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, to have found a family in the whole town of B— — that could be called wealthy. He had followed the sea from early life, and had always returned home during the intervals of his voyages, at which times he had improved his education under the [Pg 22] instructions of the clergyman aforesaid. His acquaintance with Mary had passed by a very natural transition from intimacy to affection; he was the constant companion of her rambles, and when she chose an aquatic excursion his sail-boat was always ready. To her father his company was always acceptable; the old seaman had none of the pride of "monied aristocracy;" he saw no harm in his daughter placing her affections, and bestowing her hand and fortune, upon a young man who was fast rising to respectability and wealth, in precisely the same steps by which he had himself ascended, commencing as cabin-boy and ending as master and part owner; he lived on a part of the coast that lay entirely out of the track of "refinement," if indeed she had then begun her march.

Accordingly things were permitted to go on just as though consent had been asked and obtained; the young couple walked together, sat together, and Kelson being "free of the house," talked together upon almost every subject but love. Was there to be a fishing or sleighing party, or an excursion into the neighboring woods, Tom Kelson was invariably and by quiet agreement Mary Bowline's escort; was there a ball, no one, "louting low with cap in hand," solicited, or thought of soliciting, the honor of her company; that felicity was always supposed to be reserved for Tom Kelson; still, with all this constant and close intimacy, the young seaman had never talked of love, never offered himself as a husband, and Mary, the gay and light-hearted Mary, had never, as the [Pg 23] New England saying is, "thought a word about it." Had Kelson suddenly presented himself to her with "Mary, shall we be published next

Sunday?" she would have answered "Yes;" without the slightest hesitation; nor thought her assent worth the trouble of a blush or a simper; and such, I believe, will be found the case in most of our country courtships.

Captain Kelson, for he had attained that title some time previous, had been on *terra firma* some months; partly for want of a vessel, but chiefly in compliance with the earnest entreaties of the lovely Mary, who was terrified at the thought of his again encountering the frightful calamity that had so nearly proved fatal to him on his last voyage. On his return from St. Petersburg with a full cargo, he had experienced a tremendous gale near the Grand Banks, during which his vessel was struck by lightning and consumed. After undergoing most dreadful sufferings in their boats, the exhausted remnant of the crew were most providentially picked up and brought safe home. In consequence of losing his vessel, the owners had received him with coldness, as is invariably the case, as though a deep loaded brig, lying-to in a gale of wind, could dodge a flash of lightning! I have known many a good seaman kept "lying out" of a vessel for months, merely because the owners had thought proper to send him to sea in a *craft* whose bottom had "dropped out," as the sea [Pg 24] phrase is, as soon as she had encountered bad weather.

Captain Kelson had accordingly remained on shore from April, till September; the time when we have thought proper to commence our story; during which period he contrived to kill time quite agreeably in fishing, shooting, surveying the harbor, and last but not least, in paying continual attention to the fair Mary. He had one day made a visit to Captain Bowline's house, and had accompanied him in a ramble over part of his farm. During their "cruise," the old sailor had detailed his plans for the season, and gradually extending his views, announced certain arrangements and alterations as about to be carried into execution "when Mary gets married." When Mary gets married! the words passed like the shock of a galvanic battery through the mind of the younger seaman; he soon took leave, and as he strolled, unconscious of the direction his feet were taking without admitting his head into their counsels, down towards the narrow strip of white sand beach at the foot of the headland already mentioned, her father's words, the last that he distinctly heard or recollected, continued to sound in his ears—

"When Mary gets married! well, she must get married some time or other, and who will it be?" he said to himself, suddenly stopping short. "She seems to prefer me at present, but I know that when I am at sea she appears to favor Sam Ingraham, or Ben Bass, just as much. Yet why [Pg 25] should she be so anxious to have me stay on shore to avoid an accident that may not occur again in a century, if I should live so long, unless she does really prefer me to all others? I will certainly try to find out the state of her feelings towards me the first opportunity, and if she refuses me, I will never set foot in B— again."

With this chivalrous determination he visited his lovely and all unconscious mistress the next day, but the fair lady was busy ironing. — "I shall see her again this evening," thought he, as he turned slowly towards the town; and see her that evening he did. They rambled out towards the cape, or promontory, almost invariably the scene of their summer evening walks; for lovers, after one or two strolls over a particular portion of ground, regard it as almost sacred; there are a thousand sweet recollections connected with every step—here they have paused to admire some particular feature in the prospect—under that spreading tree they have stood together in silence, busy with their own peculiar thoughts; and this walk is seldom, if ever, changed—it is almost like inconstancy to each other to propose a different route.

They had reached the high bluff, and were seated, as usual, upon a solitary block of granite, which, had they lived in heathen times, they might have worshipped as the ancient and much respected god Terminus. Mary, who had hitherto had the conversation almost entirely to herself, [Pg 26] suddenly noticed her lover's abstraction.

"Why, what's the matter with you, Thomas?"

"Nothing; I was only thinking, Mary."

"Thinking, Mary! well, do speak to Mary once in a while. I believe," she continued, after a pause, and with a faltering voice and feeling of faintness that she could not account for, "I believe you are in love, Thomas." She had heard that day that Captain Kelson was making furious love to a sea-nymph in B—, the daughter of one of the richest inhabitants.

"So I am, sweet Mary, most desperately so."

"I know it, sir; I heard it all this morning; I wish you joy," gasped the poor girl.

"Heard of it all! good heavens, Mary, what do you mean? it is you, my own dearest girl, that I love; who else *could* you think of?" as he spoke he held both her hands in his and clasped them earnestly.

"I heard," faltered poor Mary, "I was told that—that it was—Jane Wilson, O, Thomas!" and sinking her glowing cheek upon his shoulder, she burst into tears.

Kelson, inexpressibly delighted by this unequivocal testimony of her love, prest her to his bosom, and hastened to explain to her that the sole object of his seeking an interview with her that evening, was to make known his affection; that his silence and reserve were owing to the deep interest he felt in the issue of that interview; that his visits [Pg 27] to Captain Wilson's were solely on business; that he scarcely saw his daughter Jane at any one of them; and a thousand other things. What a stupid, asinine creature is a lover, *before* the ice is broken, and what an eloquent, inspired animal, *after* the *explosion!* A lover may retire to his closet, and spoil a whole ream of paper with "raven locks," and "eyes' liquid azure," and "sweet girls," &c. Such an epicure creature as Natty Willis will befoul you a quire of foolscap before breakfast in that way—but let a stranger see the same lover in presence of his idol, and he would think that he was then to apologise for an assault and battery with intent, &c.

The walk home was the pleasantest they had ever enjoyed—both were too happy for conversation. They decided, however, before they parted, that it was altogether unnecessary to communicate to Captain Bowline what had taken place. "He has understood all along what was the state of your feelings," said Mary, "and I am sure has always regarded you with paternal kindness." [Pg 28]

CHAPTER II.

O! a most dainty man!

To see him walk before a lady and bear her fan!

Love's Labor Lost.

The next day, as the old seaman sat by a front window smoking his pipe after dinner, he suddenly started up with the exclamation of "Hey! what—what the devil have we here? Mary, love, hand me the glass—a mariner adrift on a grating, by the Lord Harry!"

The object that called forth this animadversion, and broke a delightful day-dream that Mary was indulging in, now appeared in sight, having hitherto been hidden by a thick clump of trees, that bounded the ocean prospect towards the right. It was a small sail-boat, with three men in her, that, at one moment directly before the wind, and the next, "all shaking," seemed rapidly approaching an extensive mud flat, that formed one side of the harbor, and towards which the flowing tide and fresh breeze seemed to be fast drifting her.

"There they are, hard and fast! and on their beam ends, too, by the piper," continued the veteran, and as he witnessed this last catastrophe, he sprang from his chair, forgetting in his charitable [Pg 29] intention of hurrying to their assistance, that they were more than half a mile off, and in full view of the town.

"There is a boat going to them, pa," said Mary, slightly blushing as she recognised at the mast head of a very handsome, fast sailing boat, a blue "burger," with a large white M. in it, the work of her own fair hands.

"Aye," said the veteran, reseating himself, "aye, there goes Tom Kelson in your namesake, Mary; they'll get off with a ducking, and it will serve them right. Yes," continued he, applying the glass to his eye, "there goes two of them ashore through the mud, like a couple of pup-seals."

Kelson managed his boat with great skill, so as to approach the wreck, on board which still appeared one person half overboard, and apparently almost exhausted by his violent struggles to disen-

cumber himself from the wet sail, and by anchoring immediately to windward, and carrying away cable, reached the boat and rescued the unfortunate man from a situation that was exceedingly uncomfortable if not dangerous. The other two, by dint of swimming, wading, and wallowing through the mud, reached the shore, which was about three hundred yards distant.

As soon as he had ascertained that the man on board the wreck was rescued, the old seaman, "on hospitable thoughts intent," hastened to the village to obtain intelligence and render assistance. It was [Pg 30] evening when he returned to his snug dwelling, and then he was accompanied by a tall, slight made, very fashionably dressed young man, whom he introduced to his daughter as Mr. Millinet, of New York.

Mr. Millinet, or as he usually designated himself, George Frederick Augustus Millinet, Esq., was a "dry goods merchant," *par excellence*, in Broadway, who having a little more cash on hand than he had ever possessed before, made an excursion to New England, with the charitable intention of civilizing and astonishing the natives. His debut was, however, rather unfortunate; B— — was his first "land-fall" after quitting the high road from New York, towards the east. Fancying that a sail-boat in a sea-way, was as easily managed as a Whitehall skiff, off the Battery; he had "put to sea," in company with two little amphibious urchins that he had hired for the occasion, and who desired no better sport. They immediately perceived the ignorance of their commander, and began to play tricks upon him, as man-of-war's men do upon an ignorant and tyrannical midshipman. These pranks had terminated more seriously than they expected, and, fearful of punishment, they had betaken themselves to the water and made their escape.

Mr. Millinet being somewhat annoyed by the sly jokes and grave humor of mine host, of the hotel, concerning his misfortune, and the giggling of the waiters and chamber-maids, gladly accepted Captain Bowline's [Pg 31] invitation, and was soon seated at his hospitable and well loaded table, for the old tar put no great faith in tea and bread and butter for supper. The knight of the yard-stick had, however, gulped down too much salt water, and been too seriously frightened to feel much appetite, and he retired to bed early. The

next morning he made his appearance at breakfast, over which the fair Mary was presiding, and which might have excited an appetite in the gastric region of the most confirmed dyspeptic. There were bass and tautaug fresh from the water; oysters in different forms, broiled, stewed, fried, &c.; a noble ham, into which the stout seaman plunged his flashing carving-knife, and hewed it in pieces, as Samuel did Agag, in the valley of Gilgal; there was broiled ham, beef steaks, mutton chop, eggs, cheese, butter, honey, hot cakes; a pile of pilot-bread-toast a foot high, ditto untoasted, coffee, tea, and chocolate. To all this good cheer, their fashionable visiter paid but small respect, and the old commander, having pressed him to make himself at home, and help himself, attacked his own breakfast with vigor, feeling at the same time no small contempt for a man whose stomach could be so effectually unhinged by a simple capsizes, and thorough ducking. The vender of tape and calico, seemed to feast his eyes, if not his appetite, by gazing on the lovely countenance of his young hostess; and after some slight hesitation, commenced talking to her of theatres, and balls, and assemblies, and fashionable intelligence in general; but [Pg 32] Balaam's ass, if she had marched into the room and commenced an oration in the original Hebrew, or Chaldee, or Syro-Phœnician, or whatever might have been *its* vernacular tongue in which she formerly addressed her master, could not have been more unintelligible. The old gentleman made an attempt to drive a conversation, and asked a few questions relative to foreign politics, the state of navigation, and commerce, in New York, &c.; but finding his auditor as ignorant as though he had proposed a case in middle latitude sailing, he dropped him altogether.

He remained in the family three or four days, during which, his attentions to Mary were incessant, but managed with such fashionable tact as not to be annoying. She was exceedingly amused by his consummate vanity and self-conceit; that seemed to make up the greater part of his character. His descriptions of society and manners in the commercial emporium, though not altogether intelligible to his fair auditor, were new and amusing, and in spite of the contagious effect of her father's contempt, and the troubled looks of poor Kelson, she could not help listening to him with complacency. It was evident to every body but Mary that the retailer of gingham was most seriously smitten with her, as much so, that is to say, as