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BEING THE SAILOR-BOY CONFESSIONS AND REMINISCENCES OF THE FIRST
VOYAGE OF THE SON OF A GENTLEMAN, IN THE MERCHANT SERVICE.

BY HERMAN MELVILLE.



PARIS,

A. AND W. GALIGNANI AND C^o.
RUE VIVIENNE, N^o 18.

BAUDRY'S EUROPEAN LIBRARY,
QUAI MALAQUAIS, N^o 3.

—
1850.

Paris.—Printed by E. Brière, rue Sainte-Anne. 55.

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BY HERMAN MELVILLE.

TO MY YOUNGER BROTHER,
THOMAS MELVILLE,
NOW A SAILOR ON A VOYAGE TO CHINA,
THIS VOLUME IS INSCRIBED.

CHAPTER I.

How Wellingborough Redburn's taste for the sea was born and bred in him.

"WELLINGBOROUGH, as you are going to sea, suppose you take this shooting-jacket of mine along; it's just the thing—take it, it will save the expense of another. You see it's quite warm; fine long skirts, stout horn buttons, and plenty of pockets."

Out of the goodness and simplicity of his heart, thus spoke my elder brother to me, upon the eve of my departure for the seaport.

"And, Wellingborough," he added, "since we are both short of money, and you want an outfit, and I have none to give, you may as well take my fowling-piece along, and sell it in New York for what you can get. Nay, take it; it's of no use to me now; I can't find it in powder any more."

I was then but a boy. Some time previous my mother had removed from New York to a pleasant village on the Hudson River, where we lived in a small house, in a quiet way. Sad disappointments in several plans which I had sketched for my future life, the necessity of doing something for myself, united to a naturally roving disposition, had now conspired within me, to send me to sea as a sailor.

For months previous I had been poring over old New York papers, delightedly perusing the long columns of ship advertisements, all of which possessed a strange romantic charm to me. Over and over again I devoured such announcements as the following:—

FOR BREMEN. The coppered and copper-fastened brig *Leda*, having nearly completed her cargo, will sail for the above port on Tuesday, the twentieth of May. For freight or passage apply on board at Coenties Slip.

To my young inland imagination every word in an advertisement like this suggested volumes of thought.

A brig! The very word summoned up the idea of a black sea-worn craft, with high cozy bulwarks, and rakish masts and yards.

Coppered and copper-fastened! That fairly smelt of the salt water! How different such vessels must be from the wooden, one-masted, green-and-white-painted sloops, that glided up and down the river before our house on the bank.

Nearly completed her cargo! How momentous the announcement; suggesting ideas, too, of musty bales, and cases of silks and satins, and filling me with contempt for the vile deck-loads of hay and lumber, with which my river experience was familiar.

Will sail on Tuesday, the 20th of May— and the newspaper bore date the fifth of the month! Fifteen whole days beforehand, think of that; what an important voyage it must be, that the time of sailing was fixed upon so long beforehand; the river sloops were not used to make such prospective announcements.

For freight or passage apply on board! Think of going on board a coppered and copper-fastened brig, and taking passage for Bremen! And who could be going to Bremen? No one but foreigners, doubtless; men of dark complexions and jet-black whiskers, who talked French.

Coenties Slip. Plenty more brigs and any quantity of ships must be lying there. Coenties Slip must be somewhere near ranges of grim-looking warehouses, with rusty iron doors and shutters, and tiled roofs, and old anchors and chain-cable piled on the walk. Old-fashioned coffee-houses, also, much abound in that neighbourhood, with sun-burnt sea-captains going in and out, smoking cigars, and talking about Havanna, London, and Calcutta.

All these my imaginations were wonderfully