

TWO YEARS
BEFORE THE MAST:

OR,

A Sailor's Life at Sea.

BY

R. H. DANA, JUN.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE most fitting introduction to the British Nation of this "Robinson Crusoe at sea," is that by the talented editor of "The Knickerbocker," New York Monthly Magazine:—"We have," says he, "no hesitation in pronouncing this volume one of the most striking, and evidently faithful pictures of 'real life' at sea that has come under our observation. It is literally what it claims to be, a Voice from the Forecastle; and narrates, from the notes of a journal kept during the entire period, the events of two years spent as a common sailor before the mast, in the American merchant service. The writer is Mr. R. H. Dana, jun., of Boston, a son of the well-known author of 'The Buccaneers.' The voyage round Cape Horn, from Boston to the western coast of North America, was undertaken from a determination to dispel, if possible, by an entire change of life, and by a long absence from books and study, a complaint which had obliged him to give up his pursuits, and which no medical aid seemed likely to cure. From the moment of the change from the tight dress-coat, silk cap, and kid gloves, of an under-graduate of Cambridge, to the loose duck trousers, checked shirt, and tarpaulin hat of the regular Jack-tar, our young author seems to have determined to play, or rather *work* the part of a thorough sailor; and we cannot sufficiently admire the uncomplaining fortitude with which, for two long years, he bore the multifarious hardships of a common seaman's lot. For himself, great as was the change in his avocations, he never utters a murmur. Whether 'tarring down' the rigging,

cleaning Spanish hides, and carrying them on his head through the surf of a Californian coast, sending down a royal-yard, or furling a yard-arm [The editor must mean the jib.] off Cape Horn in a hurricane of hail and sleet,

‘ While the tough cordage creaks, and yelling loud,
The fierce north-wester’s in the frozen shroud;’

in short, whether in breeze, or gale, or storm, with dinner, such as it was, or without it, such as it might have been but for sad accidents, we find our author ever the same hard-working, all-enduring philosopher, with an eye to see and a heart to feel everybody’s discomforts and sufferings but his own. Aside from matters of various interest, we have ourselves risen from the discussion of this volume with a new sense of the sublime in nature—with a more enlarged conception of the vastness of the ‘grey and melancholy wastes’ of ocean which spread around earth’s isles and continents, upon which the early dawn breaks and daylight fades alike; where the almost living vessel, fleet-sailing, drops in the distant wave the Southern Cross, the Magellan Clouds, the wild and stormy Cape; where, unlike the travel of the land, which at the most conquers a narrow horizon after horizon, each succeeding night the homeward ship sinks some celestial constellation in the backward distance, raising another ‘landmark of the heavens’ in the onward waste of mingled sea and sky. Truly saith the Psalmist, ‘They who go down to the sea in ships, and do business in great waters, these see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the mighty deep.’”

THE AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

I AM unwilling to present this narrative to the public without a few words in explanation of my reasons for publishing it. Since Mr. Cooper's "Pilot" and "Red Rover," there have been so many stories of sea-life written, that I should really think it unjustifiable in me to add one to the number without being able to give reasons in some measure warranting me in so doing.

With the single exception, as I am quite confident, of Mr. Ames' entertaining, but hasty and desultory work, called "Mariner's Sketches," all the books professing to give life at sea have been written by persons who have gained their experience as naval officers, or passengers, and of these there are very few which are intended to be taken as narratives of facts.

Now, in the first place, the whole course of life, and daily duties, the discipline, habits, and customs of a man-of-war are very different from those of the merchant service; and in the next place, however entertaining and well-written these books may be, and however accurately they may give sea-life as it appears to their authors, it must still be plain to every one that a naval officer, who goes to sea as a gentleman, "with his gloves on" (as the phrase is), and who associates only with his fellow-officers, and hardly speaks to a sailor except through a boatswain's mate, must take a very different view of the whole matter from that which would be taken by a common sailor.

Besides the interest which every one must feel in exhibitions