

***ALBERT
BIGELOW PAINE***



***THE SHIP-
DWELLERS***

Albert Bigelow Paine

The Ship-Dwellers

A Story of a Happy Cruise

EAN 8596547209461

DigiCat, 2022

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I

THE BOOK, AND THE DREAM

II

IN THE TRACK OF THE INNOCENTS

III

DAYS AT SEA

IV

WE BECOME HISTORY

V

INTRODUCING THE REPROBATES

VI

A LAND OF HEART'S DESIRE

VII

A DAY TO OURSELVES

VIII

OUT OF THE SUNRISE

IX

EARLY MEDITERRANEAN EXPERIENCES

X

THE DIVERTING STORY OF ALGIERS

XI

WE ENTER THE ORIENT

XII

WE TOUCH AT GENOA

XIII

MALTA, A LAND OF YESTERDAY

XIV

A SUNDAY AT SEA

XV

A PORT OF MISSING DREAMS

XVI

ATHENS THAT IS

XVII

INTO THE DARDANELLES

XVIII

A CITY OF ILLUSION

XIX

THE TURK AND SOME OF HIS PHASES

XX

ABDUL HAMID GOES TO PRAYER

XXI

LOOKING DOWN ON YILDIZ

XXII

EPHESUS: THE CITY THAT WAS

XXIII

INTO SYRIA

XXIV

THE HOUSE THAT CAIN BUILT

XXV

GOING DOWN TO DAMASCUS

XXVI

THE "PEARL OF THE EAST"

XXVII

FOOTPRINTS OF PAUL

XXVIII

DISCONTENTED PILGRIMS

XXIX

DAMASCUS, THE GARDEN BEAUTIFUL

XXX

WHERE PILGRIMS GATHER IN

XXXI

THE HOLY CITY

XXXII

THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

XXXIII

TWO HOLY MOUNTAINS

XXXIV

THE LITTLE TOWN OF THE MANGER

XXXV

THE SORROW OF THE CHOSEN—THE WAY OF THE CROSS

XXXVI

AT THE MOUTH OF THE NILE

XXXVII

THE SMILE OF THE SPHINX

XXXVIII

WAYS THAT ARE EGYPTIAN

XXXIX

WHERE HISTORY BEGAN

XL

KARNAK AND LUXOR

XLI

THE STILL VALLEY OF THE KINGS

XLII

THE HIGHWAY OF EGYPT

XLIII

OTHER WAYS THAT ARE EGYPTIAN

XLIV

SAKKARA AND THE SACRED BULLS

XLV

A VISIT WITH RAMESES II.

XLVI

THE LONG WAY HOME



I

[Table of Contents](#)

THE BOOK, AND THE DREAM

[Table of Contents](#)

It was a long time ago—far back in another century—that my father brought home from the village, one evening, a brand-new book. There were not so many books in those days, and this was a fine big one, with black and gilt covers, and such a lot of pictures!

I was at an age to claim things. I said the book was *my* book, and, later, petitioned my father to establish that claim. (I remember we were climbing through the bars at the time, having driven the cows to the further pasture.)

My father was kindly disposed, but conservative; that was his habit. He said that I might look at the book—that I might even read it, some day, when I was old enough, and I think he added that privately I might call it mine—a

privilege which provided as well for any claim I might have on the moon.

I don't think these permissions altogether satisfied me. I was already in the second reader, and the lust of individual ownership was upon me. Besides, this was a *New Pilgrim's Progress*. We had respect in our house for the old *Pilgrim's Progress*, and I had been encouraged to search its pages. I had read it, or read at it, for a good while, and my claim of ownership in that direction had never been disputed. Now, here was a brand-new one, and the pictures in it looked most attractive. I was especially enamoured of the frontispiece, "The Pilgrim's Vision," showing the "Innocents" on their way "abroad," standing on the deck of the *Quaker City* and gazing at Bible pictures in the sky.

I do not remember how the question of ownership settled itself. I do remember how the book that winter became the nucleus of our family circle, and how night after night my mother read aloud from it while the rest of us listened, and often the others laughed.



TO ME IT

WAS ALL TRUE, ALL ROMANCE—ALL POETRY

I did not laugh—not then. In the first place, I would not, in those days, laugh at any *Pilgrim's Progress*, especially at a new one, and then I had not arrived at the point of sophistication where a joke, a literary joke, registers. To me it was all true, all romance—all poetry—the story of those happy voyagers who sailed in a ship of dreams to lands beyond the sunrise, where men with turbans, long flowing garments and Bible whiskers rode on camels; where ruined columns rose in a desert that was once a city; where the Sphinx and the Pyramids looked out over the sands that had drifted about them long and long before the Wise Men of the East had seen the Star rise over Bethlehem.

In the big, bleak farm-house on the wide, bleak Illinois prairie I looked into the open fire and dreamed. Some day, somehow, I would see those distant lands. I would sail away on that ship with "Dan" and "Jack" and "The Doctor" to the Far East; I would visit Damascus and Jerusalem, and pitch

my camp on the borders of the Nile. Very likely I should decide to remain there and live happy ever after.

How the dreams of youth stretch down the years, and fade, and change! Only this one did not fade, and I thought it did not change. I learned to laugh with the others, by-and-by, but the romance and the poetry of the pilgrimage did not grow dim. The argonauts of the *Quaker City* sailed always in a halo of romance to harbors of the forgotten days. As often as I picked up the book the dream was fresh and new, though realization seemed ever further and still further ahead.

Then all at once, there, just within reach, it lay. There was no reason why, in some measure at least, I should not follow the track of those old first "Innocents Abroad." Of course, I was dreaming again—only, this time, perhaps, I could make the dream come true.

I began to read advertisements. I found that a good many ship-loads of "Pilgrims" had followed that first little band to the Orient—that the first "ocean picnic" steamer, which set sail in June forty-two years before, had started a fashion in sea excursioning which had changed only in details. Ocean picnics to the Mediterranean were made in winter now, and the vessels used for them were fully eight times as big as the old *Quaker City*, which had been a side-wheel steamer, and grand, no doubt, for her period, with a register proudly advertised at eighteen hundred tons! Itineraries, too, varied more or less, but Greece, Egypt, and the Holy Land were still names to conjure with. Advertisements of cruises were plentiful, and literature on the subject was luminous and exciting. A small table by my

bed became gorgeous with prospectuses in blue and gold and crimson sunset dyes. The Sphinx, the Pyramids, and prows of stately vessels looked out from many covers and became backgrounds for lofty, dark-blue camels and dusky men of fantastic dress. Often I woke in the night and lit my lamp and consulted these things. When I went to the city I made the lives of various agents miserable with my inquiries. It was hard—it was nerve-racking to decide. But on one of these occasions I overheard the casual remark that the S.S. *Grosser Kurfürst* would set out on her cruise to the Orient with two tons of dressed chicken and four thousand bottles of champagne.

I hesitated no longer. Dear me, my dream had changed, then, after all! Such things had not in the least concerned the boy who had looked into the open fire, and pictured a pilgrimage to Damascus and Jerusalem, and a camp on the borders of the Nile.

My remembrance of the next few days is hazy—that is, it is kaleidoscopic. I recall doing a good many things in a hurry and receiving a good deal of advice. Also the impression that everybody in the world except myself had been everywhere in the world, and that presently they were all going again, and that I should find them, no doubt, strewn all the way from Gibraltar to Jerusalem, when I had been persuading myself that in the places I had intended to visit I should meet only the fantastic stranger. Suddenly it was two days before sailing. Then it was the day before sailing. Then it was sailing day!

Perhaps it was the hurry and stress of those last days; perhaps it is the feeling natural to such a proximity. I do not

know. But I do know that during those final flying hours, when I was looking across the very threshold of realization, the old fascination faded, and if somebody had only suggested a good reason for my staying at home, I would have stayed there, and I would have given that person something valuable, besides. But nobody did it. Not a soul was thoughtful enough to hint that I was either needed or desired in my native land, and I was too modest to mention it myself.

There had been rain, but it was bright enough that February morning of departure—just a bit squally along the west. What a gay crowd there was at the pier and on the vessel! I thought all of New York must be going. That was a mistake—they were mostly visitors, as I discovered later. It would average three visitors to one passenger, I should think. I had more than that—twice as many. I am not boasting—they came mainly to be sure that I got aboard and stayed there, and to see that I didn't lose most of my things. They knew me and what I would be likely to do, alone. They wanted to steer me to the right state-room and distribute my traps. Then they could put me in charge of Providence and the deck-steward, and wash their hands of me, and feel that whatever happened they had done their duty and were not to blame.

So I had six, as I say, and we worked our way through, among the passengers and visitors, who seemed all to be talking and laughing at once or pawing over mail and packages heaped upon the cabin table. I didn't feel like laughing and talking, and I wasn't interested in the mail. Almost everybody in the world that meant anything to me

was in my crowd, and they were going away, presently, to leave me on this big ship, among strangers, bound for the strange lands. My long dream of the Orient dwindled to a decrepit thing.

But presently we found my state-room, and it was gratifying. I was impressed with its regal furnishings. After all, there were compensations in a habitation like that. Besides, there were always the two tons of dressed chicken and those thousands of champagne. I became more cheerful.

Only, I wish the ship people wouldn't find it necessary to blow their whistle so loud and suddenly to send one's friends ashore. There is no chance to carry off somebody—somebody you would enjoy having along. They blow that thing until it shivers the very marrow of one's soul.

How the visitors do crowd ashore! A word—a last kiss—a "God bless you"—your own are gone presently—you are left merely standing there, abandoned, marooned, deserted—feeling somehow that it's all wrong, and that something ought to be done about it. Why don't those people hurry? You want to get away now; you want it over with.

A familiar figure fights its way up the gang-plank, breasting the shoreward tide. Your pulse jumps—they are going to take you home, after all. But no, he only comes to tell you that *your* six will be at a certain place near the end of the dock, where you can see them, and wave to them.

You push to the ship's side for a place at the rail. The last visitors are straggling off now, even to the final official. Then somewhere somebody does something that slackens the cables, the remaining gang-plank is dragged away. That

whistle again, and then a band—our band—turns loose a perfect storm of music.

We are going! We are going! We have dropped away from the pier and are gliding past the rows of upturned faces, the lines of frantic handkerchiefs. Yes, oh yes, we are going—there is no turning back now, no changing of one's mind again. All the cares of work, the claims of home—they cannot reach us any more. Those waiting at the pier's end to wave as we pass—whatever life holds for me is centred there, and I am leaving it all behind. There they are, now! Wave! Wave! Oh, I did not know it would be like this! I did not suppose that I might—need another handkerchief!

The smoke of a tug drifts between— I have lost them. No, there they are again, still waving. That white spot—that is a little furry coat—such a little furry coat and getting so far off, and so blurry. My glass—if I can only get hold of myself enough to see through it. Yes, there they are! Oh, those wretched boats to drift in and shut that baby figure away! Now they are gone, but I cannot find her again. The smoke, the mist, and a sudden drift of snow have swept between. I have lost the direction— I don't know where to look any more. It is all over—we are off—we are going out to sea!





Table of Contents

IN THE TRACK OF THE INNOCENTS

Table of Contents

We are through luncheon; we have left Sandy Hook, and the shores have dropped behind the western horizon. It was a noble luncheon we sat down to as we crossed the lower bay. One stopped at the serving-table to admire an exhibition like that. Banked up in splendid pyramids as for a World's Fair display, garnished and embroidered and fringed with every inviting trick of decoration, it was a spectacle to take one's breath and make him resolve to consume it all. One felt that he could recover a good deal on a luncheon like that, but I think the most of us recovered too much. I am sure, now, that I did—a good deal too much—and that my selections were not the best—not for the beginning of a strange, new life at sea.

Then there was Laura—Laura, age fourteen, whose place at the table is next to mine, and a rather sturdy young person; I think she also considered the bill of fare too casually. She ventured the information that this was her second voyage, that the first had been a short trip on a smaller vessel, and that she had been seasick. She did not intend to be seasick on a fine, big steamer like this, and I could tell by the liberality with which she stowed away the satisfying German provender that she had enjoyed an early and light breakfast, followed by brisk exercise in getting to the ship. The tables were gay with flowers; the company looked happy, handsome, and well-dressed; the music was

inspiring. Friends left behind seemed suddenly very far away. We had become a little world all to ourselves—most of us strangers to one another, but thrown in a narrow compass here and likely to remain associates for weeks, even months. What a big, jolly picnic it was, after all!

Outside it was bleak and squally, but no matter. The air was fine and salt and invigorating. The old *Quaker City* had been held by storm at anchor in the lower bay. We were already down the Narrows and heading straight for the open sea. Land presently lost its detail and became a dark outline. That, too, sank lower and became grayer and fell back into the mist.

I remembered that certain travellers had displayed strong emotions on seeing their native land disappear. I had none—none of any consequence. I had symptoms, though, and I recognized them. Like Laura, aged fourteen, I had taken a shorter voyage on a poorer ship, and I had decided that this would be different. I had engaged a steamer-chair, and soon after luncheon I thought I would take a cigar and a book on Italy and come out here and sit in it—in the chair, of course—and smoke and think and look out to sea. But when I got to the door of my state-room and felt the great vessel take a slow, curious side-step and caught a faint whiff of linoleum and varnish from the newly renovated cabin, I decided to forego the cigar and guide-book and take a volume on mind cure instead.

It seems a good ship, though, and I feel that we shall all learn to be proud of her, in time. In a little prospectus pamphlet I have here I find some of her measurements and capacities, and I have been comparing them with those of

the *Quaker City*, the first steamer to set out on this Oriental cruise. If she were travelling along beside us to-day I suppose she would look like a private yacht. She must have had trouble with a sea like this. She was little more than two hundred feet long, I believe, and, as already mentioned, her tonnage was registered at eighteen hundred. The figures set down in the prospectus for this vessel are a good deal bigger than those, but they are still too modest. The figures quote her as being a trifle less than six hundred feet long, but I can see in both directions from where I sit, and I am satisfied that it would take me hours to get either to her bow or stern. I don't believe I could do it in that time. I am convinced that it is at least half a mile to my state-room.

The prospectus is correct, however, in one item. It says that the *Kurfürst* has a displacement of twenty-two thousand tons. That is handsome, and it is not too much; I realized that some moments ago. When I felt our noble vessel "sashay" in her slow majestic fashion toward Cuba, and then pause to revolve the matter a little, and after concluding to sink, suddenly set out in a long, slow, upward slide for the moon, I knew that her displacement was all that is claimed for it, and I prepared for the worst; so did Laura, and started for her state-room suddenly....

Later: I don't know how many of our party went down to dinner. I know one that did not go. The music is good, but I can hear it very well from where I am. No doubt the dinner is good, too, but I am satisfied to give it absent treatment.

There is a full-blown Scientist in the next room. She keeps saying "Mind is all. Mind is all. This is nothing. This is —this is just—" after which, the Earthquake.

What an amazing ocean it is to be able to toss this mighty ship about in such a way! I suppose there is no hope of her sinking. No hope!



SOMEBODY SENT ME A BASKET OF FRUIT

Somebody sent me a basket of fruit. I vaguely wonder what it is like, and if I shall ever know? I suppose there are men who could untie that paper and look at it. I could stand in awe of a man like that. I could—

However, it is no matter; there is no such man.

But it was bright next morning, though a heavy sea was still running. I was by no means perfectly happy, but I struggled on deck quite early, and found company. A stout youngish man was marching round and round vigorously as

if the number of laps he might achieve was vital. He fetched up suddenly as I stepped on deck. He spoke with quick energy.

"Look here," he said, earnestly, "perhaps you can tell me; it's important, and I want to know: is a seasick man better off if he walks or sits still? I'm seasick. I confess it, fully. My interior economy is all disqualified, and I want advice. Now tell me, *is* a seasick man better off when he walks or when he sits still?"

I gave it up, and the Diplomat (we learned later that he was connected with the consular service) passed to the next possible source of information. I heard him propounding his inquiries several times during the morning as new arrivals appeared on deck.

He was the most honest man on the ship. The rest of us did not confess that we were seasick. We had a bad cold or rheumatism or dyspepsia or locomotorataxia or pleurisy—all sorts of things—but we were not seasick. It was remarkable what a floating hospital of miscellaneous complaints the ship had become, and how suddenly they all disappeared that afternoon when the sea went down.

It was Lincoln's Birthday, and, inspired by the lively appearance of the deck, a kindly promoter of entertainment went among the passengers inviting them to take part in some sort of simple exercises for the evening. Our pleasure excursion seemed really to have begun now, and walking leisurely around the promenade-deck one could get a fair impression of our company and cast the horoscope. They were a fair average of Americans, on the whole, with a heavy percentage of foreign faces, mostly German.

Referring to the passenger-list, one discovered that we hailed from many States; but when I drifted into the German purlieus of that register and found such prefixes as Herr Regierungs-präsident a.D., and Frau Regierungs-präsident a.D., and looking further discovered Herr Kommerzienrat, Herr Oberpräsidialrat von, and a few more high-power explosives like that, I said, "This is not an excursion, after all; it is a court assembly." I did not know in the least what these titles meant, but I was uneasy. I had the feeling that the owner of any one of them could nod to the executioner and dismiss me permanently from the ship. The interpreter came along just then. He said:

"Do not excite yourself. They are not so dangerous as they look. It is only as one would say, 'Mr. and Mrs. Councilman of the third ward Jones, or Mr. Mayor of Oshkosh Smith, or Mrs. Commissioner of highways Brown.' It is pure decoration; nothing fatal will occur." I felt better then, and set out to identify some of the owners of this furniture. It was as the interpreter had said—there was no danger. A man with a six-story title could hardly be distinguished from the rest of his countrymen except when he tried to sign it. But a thing like that must be valuable in Germany; otherwise he would not go to the trouble and expense of lugging such a burden around on a trip like this, when one usually wants to travel light.

The ship gave us a surprise that night, and it was worth while. When we got to the dining-room we found it decorated with the interwoven colors of two nations; the tables likewise radiant, and there were menus with the picture of Abraham Lincoln outside. We were far out in the

blackness of the ocean now, but here was as brilliant a spot as you would find at Sherry's or Delmonico's, and a little company gathered from the world's end to do honor to the pioneer boy of Kentucky. I think many of us there had never observed Lincoln's Birthday before, and it was fitting enough that we should begin at such a time and place. I know we all rose and joined in *America* and the *Star-Spangled Banner* at the close, and we are not likely to forget that mid-ocean celebration of the birth of America's greatest, gentlest hero.



[Table of Contents](#)

DAYS AT SEA

[Table of Contents](#)

We have settled down into a pleasant routine of lazy life. Most of us are regularly on deck now, though one sees new faces daily.



THEY ARE AN ATTRACTIVE LOT—THE REPROBATES

We have taken up such amusements as please us—reading, games, gossip, diaries, picture-puzzles, and there are even one or two mild flirtations discoverable. In the "booze-bazaar" (the Diplomat's name for the smoking-room) the Reprobates find solace in pleasant mixtures and droll stories, while they win one another's money at diverting games. They are an attractive lot—the Reprobates. One can hardly tear himself away from them. Only the odors of the smoking-room are not quite attractive, as yet. I am no longer seasick—at least, not definitely so; but I still say "Mind is all" as I pass through the smoking-room.

We are getting well acquainted, too, for the brief period of time we have been together. It does not seem brief, however. That bleak day of departure in North River is already far back in the past—as far back as if it belonged to another period, which indeed it does. We are becoming acquainted, as I say. We are rapidly finding out one another's names; whether we are married, single, or

divorced—and why; what, if anything, we do when we are at home; how we happened to come on this trip; and a great deal of useful information—useful on a ship like this, where the voyage is to be a long one and associations more or less continuous. We form into little groups and discuss these things—our own affairs first—then presently we shift the personnel of our groups and discuss each other, and are happy and satisfied, and feel that the cruise is a success.

There are not many young people on the ship—a condition which would seem to have prevailed on these long ocean excursions since the first Oriental pilgrimage, forty-two years ago. I suppose the prospects of several months on one ship, with sight-seeing in Egypt and the Holy Land, do not look attractive enough to the average young person who is thinking of gayer things. One can be gay enough on shipboard, however, where there is a good band of music; a quarter-deck to dance on; nooks on the sun-deck to flirt in; promenades and shuffleboard, with full dress every night for dinner. No need to have an idle time on an excursion like this if one doesn't want it; which most of us do, however, because we are no longer entirely young, and just loaf around and talk of unimportant things and pretend to read up on the places we are going to see.

We need to do that. What we don't know about history and geography on this ship would sink it. Most of us who have been to school, even if it is a good while ago, keep sort of mental pictures of the hemispheres, and preserve the sound of certain old familiar names. We live under the impression that this is knowledge, and it passes well enough for that until a time comes like this when particular places

on the map are to be visited and particular associations are to be recalled. Then, of course, we start in to classify and distinguish, and suddenly find that there is scarcely anything to classify and less still to distinguish. I am morally certain that there are not ten of us on this vessel who could tell with certainty the difference between Deucalion and Deuteronomy, or between the Pillars of Hercules and the Golden Horn. The brightest man on the ship this morning asked if Algiers was in Egypt or Spain, and a dashing high-school girl wanted to know if Greece were not a part of Asia Minor.

We shall all know better when we are through with this trip. We shall be wonders in the matter of knowledge, and we shall get it from first hands. We shall no longer confuse Upper and Lower Egypt, or a peristyle with a stadium. We are going to know about these things. That is why we are here.

In the matter of our amusements, picture-puzzles seem to be in the lead. They are fascinating things, once one gets the habit. They sell them on this ship, and nearly everybody has one or more. The tables in the forward cabin are full of them, and after dinner there is a group around each table pawing over the pieces in a rapt way or offering advice to whoever happens to be setting them. Certain of our middle-aged ladies in particular find comfort in the picture-puzzles, and sit all day in their steamer-chairs with the pieces on a large pasteboard cover, shifting and trying and fitting them into place. One wonders what blessing those old *Quaker City* pilgrims had that took the place of the fascinating picture-puzzle.

We are getting south now, and the weather is much warmer. The sun is bright, too, and a little rainbow travels with the ship, just over the port screw. When the water is fairly quiet the decks are really gay. New faces still appear, however. Every little while there is a fresh arrival, as it were; a fluttering out from some inner tangle of sea magic and darkness, just as a butterfly might emerge from a cocoon. Some of them do not stay. We run into a cross-sea or a swell, or something, and they disappear again, and their places at the table remain vacant. The Diplomat continues his fight and his inquiries. Every little while one may hear him ask: "Is it better for a seasick man to walk or to sit down?" The Diplomat never denies his condition. "Oh, Lord, I'm seasick!" he says. "I'd be sick on a duck-pond. I'd be sick if the ship were tied to the dock. I'd be sick if anybody told me I was on a ship. Say, what is a fellow like that to do, anyway? And here I am bound for Jerusalem!"

Down here the water is very blue. We might be sailing on a great tub of indigo. One imagines that to take up a glass of it would be to dip up pure ultra-marine. I mentioned this to the Diplomat.

"Yes," he said, "it is a cracker-jack of an ocean, but I don't care for it just now."

But what a lonely ocean it is! Not a vessel, not a sail, not a column of smoke on the horizon!

We are officially German on this ship, and the language prevails. Our passenger-list shows that we are fully half German, I believe, and of course all the officers and stewards are of that race. The consequence is that everybody on the ship, almost, speaks or tries to speak the

language. Persons one would never suspect of such a thing do it, and some of them pretty well, too. Even I got reckless and shameless, and from a long-buried past produced a few German remarks of my own. They were only about ten-carat assay, but they were accepted at par. I remember an old and very dear German man in America who once said to me, speaking of his crops, "Der early corn, he iss all right; aber der late corn, she's bad!"

My German is not as good as his English, but you'd think it was better, the serious way these stewards accept it. They recognize the quality—they have many cargoes of the same brand.

We have two exceedingly pretty girls on this ship—one of them as amiable, as gentle, as lovely in every way as she is pretty. The other—well, she is pretty enough in all conscience, and she may be amiable—I wouldn't want to be unfair in my estimate—but if she is, she has a genius for concealing it from the rest of the passengers. Her chief characteristic besides her comeliness seems to be a conviction that she has made a mistake in coming with such a crowd.



GAVE HIM

THE "ICY MITT"

We can't domesticate that girl—she won't mix with us. The poor old Promoter, one of the kindest creatures alive, approached her with an invitation to read aloud a small selection for the little Lincoln memorial he was preparing. She declined chillily—gave him the "icy mitt," the Diplomat said.

"I nevah do anything on shipboahd," she declared, and ignored his apologies.

She spends most of her time disposed in a ravishing fashion in a steamer-chair, reading a novel or letting the volume drop listlessly at her side, with one of her dainty

fingers between the pages to mark the place, while her spirit lives in other worlds than ours. The Promoter says she is cold and frigidly beautiful—a winter landscape. But then the Promoter is a simple, forgiving soul. I think she is just flitter and frosting—just a Christmas-card. A ship like this is democratic—it has to be. We are all just people here.

It is also cosmopolitan—it has to be that, too, with a crowd like ours. This Sunday evening affords an example of what I mean. In the dining-room forward there are religious exercises—prayers and a song service under the direction of the Promoter—a repetition, no doubt, of the very excellent programme given this morning. Far aft, on the quarter-deck, a dance is in progress, under the direction, I believe, of our German contingent; while amidships, in the "booze-bazaar," the Reprobates and their Godless friends are engaged in revelry, probably under the direction of Satan. The ship is very long, and the entertainments do not conflict or compete. One may select whatever best accords with his taste and morals, or, if he likes variety, he may divide his time. Everything is running wide open as this luminous speck of life—a small, self-constituted world—goes throbbing through the dark.

IV

[Table of Contents](#)

WE BECOME HISTORY

[Table of Contents](#)

We had been four days at sea, boring our way into the sunrise at the rate of three hundred and sixty miles a day, when we met the "Great Sight"—the American fleet of sixteen ships of war returning from its cruise around the world.

It had been rumored among us when we left New York that there was a possibility of such a meeting. It was only a possibility, of course, for even a fleet is a mere speck on a wide waste of ocean, and with engines on both sides driving at full speed the chances of intersection were small.

So we went about figuring and speculating and worrying the officers, who were more anxious over the matter than we were, but conservative, nevertheless. We only learned, therefore, or rather we guessed, I think, that our Marconi flash was travelling out beyond the horizon, and the loneliest sea imaginable, trying to find an answering spark.

During the afternoon of the Sunday previously mentioned a sentence on the blackboard, the first official word, announced, with a German flavor, that it was "not quite impossible" that the meeting would occur next morning, and this we took to mean that wireless communication had been established, though we were not further informed.

There was a wild gale during the night and a heavy sea running at daybreak, but the sky was clear. A few stragglers were at early breakfast when, all at once, a roll of drums and a burst of martial music brought us to our feet.

We did not need any one to tell us what it meant. "The fleet!" came to every man's lips, and a moment later we were on deck. Not only those in the dining-room came. Sick or well, bundled together somehow, from every opening our

excursionists staggered forth, and, climbing to the sun-deck, looked out across the bridge to where the sunrise had just filled the morning sky. There they were—far, faint, and blurred at first, but presently outlined clear—stretched across the glowing east, lifting and tossing out of the morning, our sixteen noble vessels on their homeward way!

At that moment I think there was not one on our ship who did not feel that whatever might come, now, the cruise was a success. Foreign lands would bring us grand sights, no doubt, but nothing that could equal this. We realized that, fully, and whispered our good-fortune to one another as we gazed out upon that spectacle of a lifetime.

Viewed across our bow, the vessels appeared to form a continuous straight line, but they divided into two sections as they came on, eight vessels in each, and passed in column formation. In a little while we were close to them—they were just under our starboard bow—their upper decks black with men turned out in our honor. We waved to them and our band played, but we did not cheer. We were too much impressed to be noisy, nor could we have made our voices heard across that wild shouting sea. So we only looked, and waved, and perhaps wiped our eyes, and some of us tried to photograph them.

They passed in perfect formation. Heavy seas broke over them, and every billow seemed to sweep their decks, but their lines varied not a point and the separating distances remained unchanged. So perfect was the alignment that each column became a single vessel when they had left us behind.