

THE GOOD SHIP "MOHOCK"

W. CLARK RUSSELL

When I opened the parlor door the servant had answered the house bell, and the man was coming in. I felt, a curiosity, and glanced at him keenly as I stepped through the passage. He was a tall, thin, sinewy man, dressed in a sea-faring cap and monkey jacket. He wore a shawl round his neck after the fashion of longshoremen of the beach. I thought I caught the glint of earrings. His hair was long, curling and shining as with oil; he had a small yellow mustache, but despite this I guessed him a sailor, at least of the coastal type. I saw what I have described to you in just one quick narrow look, then entered the captain's little room which he called his study, and afterwards went to my bed room, where I remained till I was summoned to supper. It was then half-past nine and I guessed that the man had not long left by tasting the fumes of tobacco newly lighted; the captain did not smoke. He said not a word about this visitor, nor did I ask any questions.

To-night his spirits appeared to have improved. He filled a tumbler with brandy and water and drank with a face of gaiety.

"How do you like the notion of removing from this part of London?" said he.

"There are more fashionable quarters," I answered.

"But none so convenient to the seaman. This furniture would stock us a comfortable little inland cottage," said he, looking round the room with reluctance in each remove of his gaze as it travelled. "Much belonged to your mother. There is much of my finding, too."

"Do you mean to break up house?" "I don't think so. Whilst I remain a sailor I must be near the ships. When I die you'll live with your sister, I suppose?"

"No. We shouldn't get on. I might live near her."

"I'd like to see you mated before I go aloft," said he, leaning back in his chair and smiling at me with an expression that sweetened the frown out of his face till I found a real beauty then in his manly looks. "I wish your sister were as good-humored as you. She'll never forgive me for marrying your mother, and if I should prove a true father of you, and you a husband, settle you handsomely, how would it be with her then? Should I be justifying your mother and myself in her sight?"

His frown came back with the sarcasm in his speech. I looked at him suspiciously and said:

"Am I to go to New York to be married?"

"Perhaps," he answered, lancing his teeth with a silver toothpick.

"I shall have a great deal to say in that matter."

"Let the man come along and you shall be heard," said he, with a grin at my bridling figure and perhaps the general hot look of me, for I felt a heat in my cheeks, and I dare say my eyes weren't wanting in light.

They used to call me handsome, but at this time of day I can speak of that without emotion. My hair was very abundant, and of an extremely dark red. My eyes were large, a dark brown, soft, and eloquent. I was slightly above the middle height, and don't know that there was a fault in my shape if it were not for an over-moulded ripeness of bust. She whom I am describing lies dust in the grave of years: who describes her is another, bowed, wrinkled, deaf and nearly blind.

Until the ship sailed I was full of the business of making ready to go. It was a half-formed fancy in my head that Captain Sinclair knew of a man in New York who would offer for me when he saw me: or perhaps such a worthy was to make one of the passengers. Now I was as willing to marry as any healthy young woman of twenty-two could well be; but I myself, of my own discernment and love, must choose the man I was to live with till death. That was certain. Nothing, therefore, that Captain Sinclair had in contemplation could render me in the least uneasy. My will was of steel in this way; not the gods themselves could have strategized me into wedlock.

Two or three days before we sailed I picked up a maritime journal, Captain Sinclair was in the habit of reading, and carelessly turning it about I lighted upon this item of news:

"The fine clipper ship Mohock, 1,000 tons, Amelius Sinclair, Commander, sails from the Thames on Thursday for New York. She carries a full cargo and 98,000 pounds in gold. Amongst her passengers are Colonel Nathan P. Wills and lady; Monsignor Luard, the distinguished preacher, and Jonas R. Jackson, the well-known comedian, who is returning to his native country after fulfilling a series of successful engagements in Great Britain."

I clipped the paragraph and enclosed it to my sister in a letter of farewell.

My luggage was sent to the ship on Wednesday, and on Thursday, at about eleven o'clock in the morning, I found alone on board the Mohock. I went the vessel a grand scene of confusion. The maindeck was littered with boxes, coils of rope, chests and bales of stuff

which yet remained to be stowed away somewhere. There was a great crowd of people. The Mohock was taking on some twenty steerage passengers, and some forty or fifty of their relations and friends were on board seeing them off. It was odd that I should have found time to notice a boy with a mild, freckled, maternal face sitting on the ledge of the hatch, nursing a silent, staring baby—a strange image of mute, innocent forlornness! Blue Peter was rippling at the fore royal masthead, and a number of sailors were winding round a capstan singing a song of melancholy melody as they stamped. The sun shone brightly. It was a spacious, gay morning, the wind a steady breeze that trembled harp-like off the tautresonant rigging. The clouds were going down the breeze like birds, and through the shrouds of adjacent ships I spied the canvas—now white, now red, the full bosom of the square sail, the lean pinions of the schooner—of scores of vessels in motion upon the river.

I had been introduced to the mate of the ship at my stepfather's house. He was a man named Gordon, about forty years old, of an antique pattern in his sea-faring looks and dress. His face was without hair save two dim streaks of iron grey eyebrow, and the skin was burnt and troubled by weather to the look and surface of red morocco. Though the month was the beginning of September, and a warm morning, this man standing in the gangway was dressed in stout pilot cloth, heavy square-toed boots, which sheathed the legs with leather to the knees, under the trousers a red flannel shirt, and a buckram collar.

He saluted me with a flourish of his round hat, and asked for the captain. I could give him no information. He said the ship waited for him, and he would be glad of a signal to start. "If only to clear the decks," he added, with a sour look at the jumble and muddle of people talking and crying, again and again straining one another in farewell. It was easy to see his sensibilities were salted hard as his meat he had fed for years.

He accompanied me to the companion hatch down which he bawled with the notes of wind for the stewardess. When she showed herself he called out, "Here's Miss Sinclair arrived; see to her, Mrs. Yorrick," and left me.

After the noise and hurry of the main-deck, this cuddy or saloon seemed quiet as a theatre when all the people have left. And yet there was plenty of passengers about, a dozen I daresay out of the sixteen, which I afterwards discovered formed our number. In those days of slow and tedious traveling passengers starting on a voyage, if their ship sailed from the London river, found it convenient and cheap to go on board in the docks. Moreover, the Mohock did not call at Plymouth this time. People sat at the long table, writing letters or chatting, and two men were drinking champagne. I caught the drawl of the American, and also noticed a Roman Catholic priest reading in a little book. Mrs. Yorrick led me to my cabin, where I found the luggage I immediately needed, and I stayed below for about an hour, putting away my things and making the berth comfortable. When I went on deck the first person I saw was Captain Sinclair. He talked near the wheel with one of the two Americans who had been drinking champagne in the cabin. I was surprised to find the ship in the middle of the river, towing down behind a little splashing tug, from whose lofty funnel, dogs eared at the top, broke such a long dark line of smoke that the leeward prospect was hidden by it.

The voyage had begun. The ship floated proudly under the red flag of England and the beautiful colors of America; the shores gloomy with buildings and chimneys and complicated with shipping hugging the wharves took a lofty romantic character merely from the stately slowness of their passing. The forecastle was full of passengers and sailors, and the quarterdeck was well covered with moving figures: whatever there was of glass or brass burnt heavily to the sun; the ruled shadows of the rigging crawled over the white planks with our passage; and the breast of the river was a wonder of life and color, with its hundred sail of all sorts coming and going walking the sliding measure of the minnet to the music of the wind.

My stepfather called me, and introduced his companion, Colonel Nathan P. Wills, a man with a forked beard and aquiline nose, and legs which began at the buttons above his coat tails. "A nice little stream this," said this gentleman. "Pity it hasn't got the breadth of some of our rivers."

"Even the breadth would do," said I. "Yes, I think the lake of Dogs lasts all the way to Gravesend," said Captain Sinclair.

A young lady—I judged her a bride, not so much by her cheeks as by the looks of her companion—came up to us with her arm in a young clergyman's.

"What is that ship?" said she, with a pretty smile.

"A convict hulk," answered Captain Sinclair.

"How sad!" she exclaimed. "Are those things hanging up in the strings, shirts?"

"Prisoner's linen," answered my stepfather, looking darkly at the hulk.

"There may be eyes at those barren portholes watching us," said the clergyman. "What thoughts must visit them out of such a noble picture of liberty as this ship makes! There may be pure and honest fancies in some of the prisoners' minds; resolutions beautiful but hopeless, reminding one of the mournful wheeling of gold-fish in a crystal bowl."

They gazed awhile in silence, then walked off.

"Bound west for the moon, I reckon," said the Colonel. "The Falls, you bet, and a lecture and magic lantern show for the people of the parish they are missing skywards."

"He's a poetical person," said my stepfather. "Give me a file afore all the Bibles in the world," said Jack Sheppard to the Ordinary. That's the

philosophy yonder.

A gentleman with a comic face, blue with the razor, deep black eyes, habited in a cloak, and a sugar-loaf hat approached us. He was Mr. Jonas R. Jackson, the celebrated American comedian.

"Captain," said he, "do you expect to make a good run to Gravesend?" We all laughed.

"Jackson," cried the Colonel, "why didn't you take to the sea instead of the stage? Those be the boards for a real man," and he stamped his foot.

"I never could have borne to give it up," answered Mr. Jackson. "The ship sticks to the barnacle, but the devotion is the barnacle's. So it would have been with me. It would have broken my heart to be torn by disease or age from this noble profession of mohock 13 salt horse, and cold wet nights, and the workhouse always within hail of the flying jibboom end."

"I knew a man," continued Mr. Jackson, "who left the sea and started a school. He discovered that his house was three hundred and fifty feet above the level of the ocean, and he couldn't stand it. He took to his bed and died stone broke."

The luncheon bell rang, and we descended to the saloon.

CHAPTER II.

THE SCHOONER.

The Mohock arrived late in the evening off Gravesend, and slept all night abreast of that town at a mooring buoy. The remaining cabin passengers came on board, for we were to sail early in the morning. I walked the deck with Captain Sinclair and others, one of whom was Mrs. Wills, wife of the Colonel, an immensely stout, good-natured, rather vulgar woman, entirely shapeless in bulk, and crowned with a wig like a negro's head of hair, only that it was a sort of lilac. Her lips were like parings of tomato. I believe she had been on the stage, and I observed that at the dinner table she conversed with a certain off-hand freedom with Mr. Jackson, who looked a full perception of her past, whilst his manner and speech must have reassured her.

I was beginning to enjoy myself. This was a new scene of existence, and I liked it. There could be no more thorough change from the somewhat tedious insipid days of my life ashore. Those first hours of night; the silence and the mystery and uncertainty of darkness upon the breast of the streaming waters are one of the clearest of my memories. The lights of Gravesend sparkle windily upon the dusky low boom of the land; here and there a light forlornly works upon the flat, black level opposite; ships pass and pass—pale shapes of cloud; the spars of mohock 13 our own vessel soar starhigh, and the brilliant of the sky trembling in the squares of the rigging and gleaming in jewels at the yardarms, measure to the vision the promise of a spread of wing that makes a shroud of the slender hull of the clipper.

When I awoke in the morning, Gravesend was far astern, and the tide river lay in a bed of glittering light under the bows, with the soaring sun flashing over large spaces of clouds like banks of snow. The tug was running us through smooth water, and the reflection of a brassy, motionless cloud on the left went with us. A few pinnons of canvas glanced like marble between the masts, and to the jib-boom ends. It was a sweet air, and a glad picture to rise from one's bed to; a morning of silver clouds and sunshine on the sails. And it was very well till the afternoon; then a breeze sprang up, the tug had let go of us—the swell of the sea was to be felt like a pulse in the river's month. The ship was clothed to her trucks and leaved from the wind, and the white water from her bows rolled in a glittering race to her wake, dying out in a pale stream far astern in the diamond trembling of the wind-brashed waters.

I was suffering from headache and nausea, but hearing that the ship was royally clothed—the clergyman who had sighed at sight of the prison hulk came below with a face of delight to carry his wife on deck to view the picture—I stepped above and stood beside the wheel; but I was too sick for sentiment. I felt the vessel's stern heave and fall, and heard the sob and laugh of spinning waters under the counter; so I immediately returned below and for two days lay miserably ill, in which time I was frequently visited by my stepfather, who saw that the stewardess failed me in nothing.

When eventually I crawled upon deck on the arm of the stewardess, I emerged into a scene as full of freshness and glory to me as the world of the poet's youth was to him. A strong wind blew, yet the ship sailed steadily on her side; no land was in sight; the sea was a dark blue everywhere, glaucous in lines of melting heads of froth, and small white clouds were scaling off the sky, like a scattering of large blobs of foam up there. Close to was a black ship which we were slowly passing. She was sheathed with green metal, and plunged more than we did, and the water leapt in white flashes from her gaunt flanks and haunches. She heeled over till we could see her dark decks full of people, and the German flag flew at her gaff end. I watched her with delight; she was no beauty as a ship, yet she showed like a romance of nature in that setting of sea, with the full and milky bosoms of her canvas bowing to us, and the clouds of the horizon fanning betwixt the wings at her jibbooms.

Monsignor Luard came up and talked to me. He was a tall, gentlemanly man, with fine, dark speaking eyes, of French extraction; but he spoke English well, with an American accent. He was full of the old home, and he talked of the city of Canterbury with a countenance of ecstasy. The Reverend Mr. Macbride, the young married parson, drew near.

"I cannot behold such a cathedral without grudging it to you," says

Monsignor, smiling. "Those Becker was slain, and there those who are of Becker's faith should continue to worship."

"I don't quite see that," said Mr. Macbride, nervously.

Monsignor, looking down upon him, continued to smile. "The cathedral was built by the Papists, as you call us," said he.

"It was built by our forefathers," said Mr. Macbride, spunkily, "who reformed their faith and went on worshipping in the churches that belonged to them."

Monsignor Luard bowed and made no answer.

I thought whilst I listened to them, "I wonder if the husband my stepfather has in his eye for me is on board!" It was a silly thought, I had no earthly reason to conclude that the captain was taking me this voyage with the idea of getting me married. Still I cast my eyes about the deck. We were but sixteen in the cabin, not counting the surgeon and mates. I knew them all, that is by sight; half a score were visible whilst I stood talking with Monsignor. There were no men likely to make me a husband amongst us. Besides the people I have named I recollect a German Jew named Bergheim, another who was a civil engineer—I forget his name, and two or three ladies of no moment here.

"Did you ever cross the equator, Monsignor?" says Colonel Nathan Wills strolling up.

"Thrice," answered the other. "What was the longest time a ship was ever becalmed on the line?" asked the Colonel.

Monsignor shrugged.

Mr. Macbride exclaimed, "Would you say a week?"

My stepfather, hearing this, stepped from the binnacle and exclaimed, "The longest time I can't say. Twelve years ago I was becalmed for fifty days at one stretch."

"Fifty days!" burst out Mr. Macbride, shrivelling his lips as though whistling.

"Old Father Monimolok was in the right," said Monsignor Luard. "He boasted of having cut the line five times, and that's enough, says he, in a wise man's opinion. He considered you mad to cross the equator, unless you went purely to serve God. He has these words: 'I never found any manner of alteration in myself or anything else, that is, through crossing the equator.'"

"We owe the Flying Dutchman and the mermaid to the early wandering wanderers," said the Colonel.

"I remember," exclaimed my stepfather, "a passenger, a person of average intelligence, after crossing the equator expressing his astonishment at finding rainbows the same as in England."

"We don't cross the equator to get to America, I think," said Mr. Macbride, doubtfully.

Monsignor viewed him with silent surprise; my stepfather returned to the binnacle stand, and I went a little way forward leaving the parson to be answered by the Colonel.

I had now the spirits and the humor to enjoy the beauty of the ship, and walking up to the mate who stood in the swinging shadows of the main rigging with his hands behind him looking straight aloft, I pointed up and asked him what that sail was.

"The main royal," he answered, with an uneasy glance at the captain, for at sea the mate in charge has no business to talk with the passengers.

I stepped back and took in the whole shining frame of canvas that dwindled on high into the little sail the man had named; it swelled cloudlike from the yard as though rejoicing in its privacy of splendor. Of what is nobler than a ship in full sail clothed with the fire of the sun? I leaned over the side watching the passing frost-work of foam, more delicate and beautiful than the green lace of leaves against the sky. The ship carried studding sails, and the heeling canvas whitened the water as though it were the silver gleams cast by the wings of a swan. The life of glorious day was in the vessel—not in

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